

UNIVERSITY OF JYVÄSKYLÄ

**THE MASS MIGRATION OF
EAST EUROPEAN JEWRY TO
AMERICA IN ISAAC B. SINGER'S
NOVELS AND SHORT STORIES**

A Pro Gradu Thesis

by

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1997

**HUMANISTINEN TIEDEKUNTA
ENGLANNIN KIELEN LAITOS**

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Pro gradu -työ
Englantilainen filologia
Tammikuu 1997

78 sivua + 5 liitettä

Tutkielman tarkoituksena on selvittää Itä-Euroopan juutalaisten siirtolaisuutta Amerikkaan, lähinnä Yhdysvaltoihin, ja kuinka sitä ja siirtolaisten sopeutumista uuteen kulttuuriin kuvataan Isaac Bashevis Singerin (1904-1991) tuotannossa.

Vuosina 1880-1924 noin kaksi miljoonaa Itä-Euroopan juutalaista muutti Amerikkaan. Syitä siirtolaisuuteen olivat karkotus, uskonnolliset ja poliittiset vainot sekä taloudellinen tilanne, joillakin myös henkilökohtaiset syyt, kuten perheasiat. Tämä siirtolaisvirta tyrehtyi, kun viranomaiset alkoivat rajoittaa sekä (lähinnä Neuvostoliitossa) alkuperämaasta lähtemistä että Yhdysvaltoihin saapumista. Tutkielmassa selvitetään myös juutalaisten massamuuton erityispiirteitä, joita olivat perhekunnittain muuttaminen sekä muuton lopullisuus. Siirtolaismääriä havainnollistetaan kaavioin ja taulukoin, sekä selvitetään sitä miten juutalaiset sopeutuivat Yhdysvaltoihin. Samalla sivutaan myös kulttuureiden kohtaamisessa esiintyviä ongelmia.

Massojen liikehdintä aiheutti huolta sekä viranomaisissa että juutalaisten keskuudessa, mutta myöhemmin, toisen maailmansodan jälkeen osoittautui, että juutalaisten suurmuutto Yhdysvaltoihin olikin ollut Euroopan juutalaisen kulttuurin pelastus. Ilman tätä siirtolaisvirtaa suuri osa maailman juutalaiskulttuurista, ja samalla länsimaisesta kulttuurista, olisi tuhoutunut. Yksi tämän kulttuurin tärkeimpiä edustajia on Isaac B. Singer, joka itsekin muutti Yhdysvaltoihin vuonna 1935, ja joka on myöhemmin kuvannut useaan otteeseen siirtolaisten tuntoja omien kokemustensa pohjalta. Myös kaipuu kadonneeseen maailmaan on innoittanut Singeriä, hän kuvaa loistavasti juutalaisten elämää maalaiskylissä ja ghettoissa, lähinnä Varsovan ghetossa, jossa hän itsekin vietti suuren osan lapsuuttaan ja nuoruuttaan. Tutkielmassa perehdytään Singeriin henkilönä ja kirjailijana sekä esitellään hänen pääteemojaan, kärsimystä ja kuolemaa, sekä uskontoa. Singer pohtii usein vapaan tahdon ongelmaa - onko ihmisellä vapaa tahto, vai onko kaikki ennalta määrättyä.

Tutkielmassa on yhdistetty historian tutkimuksen, tilastotieteen sekä kirjallisuuden tutkimuksen metodeja ja siinä pyritään limittämään historia, tilastot ja kaunokirjallisuus kokonaisuudeksi, jonka avulla lukija saa havainnollisen kuvan tämän muuttoaallon suuruudesta, ja sen vaikutuksista sekä kansan että yksilön elämään.

Asiasanat: Americanization, Anti-Semitism, Assimilation, East European Jews, Hasidism, Immigration, Jewishness, Singer, Isaac B.

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ABBREVIATIONS

Abbreviations of the names of the novels and short stories by Isaac Bashevis Singer used in the text:

Certificate - *The Certificate* (1993)

Crown - *A Crown of Feathers and Other Stories* (1974)

Estate - *The Estate* (1969)

Friend - *A Friend of Kafka and Other Short Stories* (1972)

Love - *Love And Exile* (1984)

Magician - *The Magician of Lublin* (1960)

Meshugah - *Meshugah* (1994)

Methuselah - *The Death of Methuselah and Other Stories* (1988)

Penitent - *The Penitent* (1983)

Scum - *Scum* (1991)

Short - *Short Friday and Other Short Stories* (1967)

Shosha - *Shosha* (1978)

Slave - *The Slave* (1962)

INTRODUCTION

According to Walter Willcox's definition, the term immigration means an intentional change of residence, "with a plan to seek a livelihood in the new abode". The definition of immigrant has changed many times over the years in the United States. For a long time only the people arriving by sea were understood to be immigrants, which would exclude the people coming from Canada and Mexico. Before 1867 all alien steerage passengers entering the country were considered immigrants. Between 1868 and 1891 only the arriving travellers who declared their intent to remain in the United States were considered immigrants. Between 1892 and 1907 the immigrant would have to be an alien, officially admitted to the country, have his previous residence in a foreign country and he would have to declare intention of residing in the United States. (Willcox 1931:85-86.)

Between 1880 and 1924, about two million East European Jews - Russian, Polish, Rumanian - emigrated to America. This immigration wave subsided when the officials started to limit both the immigrants' arriving to America, and leaving the East European countries, the Stalinist Soviet Union, for example, became more restricted. Eastern Europe, except for the Soviet Union, was not socialist in that period as it was after the Second World War, but instead flooded by increasing nationalism. The Jews emigrated because of racial, religious and political persecution and economical reasons. Some of them also emigrated for personal reasons. They believed that in North America they could start a new life with more freedom and better income.

In searching for sources for my thesis it became clear to me that not many studies on this subject - the immigration of East European Jews into the United States - has been made. A most important source has been Julianna Puskás's (ed.) *Overseas Migration from East-Central and South-eastern Europe 1880-1940*. (1990), which led me to Walter Willcox's (ed.) *International Migrations, vol I & II* (first published in 1929 and 1931). Even though Willcox's works are comparatively old, they gave me important statistical background information needed for the thesis.

A special chilly feeling arises in the reader of these statistics when the reader realises the date of the publication. Little did Liebmann Hersch, the author of *International Migration of the Jews* (chapter XVI in Willcox's *International Migrations, volume II*), know when he in 1931 wrote that the mass migration of Jews has had numerous and far-reaching effects. He writes that the United States "contains [...] about 3,500,000 Jews, more than any other country in the world". In 1921 there were almost 2.8 million Jews in Poland, and over 2.5 million in the European Soviet Russia. (Hersch 1931:517.) Most were probably destroyed two decades later in the Nazi Holocaust and by Stalin's terror. Hersch also mentions that the number of Jews in Poland and Russia kept increasing by about 50,000 per decade (Hersch 1931:517). Most of them would become victims of the coming disaster. It is also interesting to read that with a net immigration of about 6,000 Jews into Palestine per year they "cannot overcome a numerical superiority of [the] 600,000 non-Jews in that country" (Hersch 1931:517-518). But as we know now, the number of Jews in Israel is and has been increasing much faster after the Second World War.

The present thesis is an attempt to combine methods of historical and literary research, and I have used both historical and statistical sources, and sources of literature. Another important source has been the fiction of Isaac Bashevis Singer; after all, his work and the special nostalgic atmosphere of his novels and short stories were the start for this thesis. Another spark for this thesis has been a research writing seminar a few years ago, where different American minority writers were studied and analysed, which led me understand the importance of different ethnical minority groups and their meaning for the American culture.

According to Liebmann Hersch, the Jews is the only people in the world that has gone through such a profound change under the influences of modern world migration. In the migration process the Jews have been transformed from a country folk into city people, from religious into secularized people. In addition to the ancient religious form of Jewish culture a new Jewish culture has begun to develop, Hersch wrote in the beginning of 1930s. (Hersch 1931:520.) We meet a product of this new culture in Isaac Bashevis Singer. If it

was not for Singer, and other writers like him - if there are any - we would not have the privilege of getting acquainted with the life of East European Jews as it was before the Second World War. And if the mass migration of about two million East European Jews to America had not taken place, who knows how many great artists and scientists the western culture would have lost. Jewish culture is also important among the many different minority cultures in the United States.

Isaac Singer is one of the East European Jewish immigrants. His novels and short stories draw a magnificent picture of Jewish life in Poland, both in the cities and in the countryside villages, thus showing us from what kind of circumstances the Jews emigrated, which helps us to understand the reasons to emigration. In the present thesis I will describe how Judaism and the American-Jewish immigration history are illustrated in Isaac Bashevis Singer's books. I will introduce the author, Isaac Bashevis Singer, and give some information about him, because in order to understand his work, it is essential for readers to know in what kind of environment he grew up and how he felt about the immigration. For this reason I will also discuss the main themes of his fiction, and give illuminating examples of his work.

Later in this thesis I will reveal some historical facts that led into Jewish mass migration to America. I will explain certain facts about American Jews: where the American Jews came from, how and why they came to America, how they settled, and what kind of problems they experienced. I am interested in the americanization process; how it happened, whether the Jews wanted to become Americans, whether the age of the immigrants had any effect, and what happened with the next generations. And again, I will try to illustrate this with examples from Singer's fiction.

1 EUROPEAN IMMIGRANTS IN THE UNITED STATES

Europeans started to immigrate to America already in the beginning of 17th century, but this immigration did not turn into a mass movement before the 1820s. The immigration waves followed one another decade after decade, until the government started to limit the number of arriving immigrants in 1920s. The peak years of immigration were in the beginning of 20th century. In the first immigration wave, between 1820-1880, most of the immigrants came from Western Europe: Great Britain, Ireland, Germany, and the Scandinavian countries. But the “American fever” was quickly spreading towards the East. In the beginning of 1880s, immigration from Eastern and Southern Europe began to grow rapidly. These newly arrived immigrants were called “new immigrants” to distinguish them from the “old immigrants” of Western Europe, and they were looked down on by the older settlers, who had already established themselves in the new country. But as the old immigrants had settled mainly on the countryside and become farmers, the new immigrants settled mostly in the cities. This was caused by the fact that the good farming land had already been taken over by the old immigrants, and also the industrial development gave the new immigrants an opportunity to become factory workers. (Kero 1991:262-263.) The East European Jews were clearly immigrants of the second immigration wave.

In the United States, most of the immigrants settled in the North, on the East Coast or in the Midwest, the Southern states were not so attractive to the immigrants, because it was more difficult to find a job there, and as mentioned before, the new immigrants mainly settled in the cities. In 1910, 64 per cent of country people had parents who had been born in the United States; in the smaller cities of 100,000 - 500,000 inhabitants, this percentage was 39 per cent, and in the big cities of over 500,000 inhabitants, less than 27 per cent of the population had parents that had been born in the USA. This means that over 73 per cent of the people in the big cities were first or second generation immigrants. (Kero 1991: 267; Kero 1976:notes.)

Immigration can be seen as a very important factor in the history of the United States. It is usually understood that the “best” people immigrated, the

bravest and strongest, the most impulsive and innovative. Of course not all of the immigrants were such, many of them also escaped the problems in the old country, they had to leave for one reason or another. Immigration has affected several fields of life in the United States. The politics is one of them. As we know, there are only two major political parties in the United States, the Democrats and the Republicans. Several smaller parties have existed, mainly Labor parties, but they have never gained much power. One reason for this can be that even though the United States is an industrial country, the industrial workers have not been homogenous enough to form a party. The immigrants may not have felt themselves to be American workers, but instead Italian, Irish, Polish or Finnish workers, and this has caused the lack of a strong Labor party, even though the labor unions and Socialist movements have been popular among the immigrants (Kero 1976:notes; Kero 1991:269-270.) The Socialist movement among the East European Jews will be discussed in chapter 7 of this work. Different ethnical minority groups have been, and still are, important in the political life United States, their support is seeked for in many different elections, and many times they play a big role in different political questions.

Another field of life, that the immigration has had an effect on, is the economical growth. Immigrants were usually in their best age when they came to the United States, and that means that they were a good source of labor that needed not to be educated. In order to take over the massive natural resources, the United States needed workers and thus immigrants; for example, mining industry used mostly European workers. Also the industrial growth was possible because of the immigrant workers. With the help of immigrants, the economical growth in the United States was probably much faster than what it might have been if it had been based on natural growth of population. For the immigrant this economical growth was also useful, he could find a job and earn many times more than in the Old World. Compared to the people in his old country, he had a high standard of living, but in America the immigrant was often on the lower ladder of society. He would have to do the work that the Americans did not want to do, and he was often paid less for the same job. (Kero 1976:notes; Kero 1991:269-270.)

The immigrants have formed many powerful minority groups in the United States, for example the Blacks, the Italian, Chinese and Mexican minorities and the American Jews. These groups are important to the American culture and their representatives have contributed a lot to the literature, arts and science of the United States. A famous representative of this culture is Isaac Bashevis Singer, who has often described the Jewish immigration history in his works. After the following, biographical section, more historical and statistical information will be given, accompanied by examples from Singer's fiction.

2 BACKGROUND INFORMATION ON I.B.SINGER

2.1 The early years

Isaac Bashevis Singer was born in Radzymin, Poland, on July 14, 1904, and he died on July 24, 1991 (Klinkowitz 1991). In his autobiographical collection *Love And Exile* (1984), Singer says that he was born in the village of Leoncin, and that the family moved to Radzymin when he was three years and five months old. (Singer 1984:xi.) Paul Kresh gives different information; he says that Singer was born on Bastille Day ('or November 21,' as he quotes Singer himself saying; 'I have two birthdays') in 1904. (Kresh 1979:16.) According to Knut Ahnlund, Singer was born in Leoncin, but the family moved to Radzymin in 1907, and he was registered there. The Singer family moved to Warsaw in 1908. (Ahnlund 1978:21, 197.)

Isaac Singer was born into a world of almost medieval Jewish orthodoxy, of which there are today only traces left in Israel and the United States (Alexander 1980:13), and this because of the immigration from eastern Europe. Singer's parents were total opposites of each other: his father was an emotional, plump, little man with no sense of material matters; his mother was a tall, skinny, intellectual woman who knew what to do and what to leave undone. Singer's elder brother Israel Joshua has written that their parents' marriage could have been happy, had he been the wife and she the husband. (Ahnlund 1978:21-22.) It is probably their strong mother who has been the model to the many masculine, or at least strong women in Isaac Singer's works, and their father to the many unpractical, holy men of the stories. At least the story of Yentl is based on its author's memories of his mother's learned debates with her father (Ahnlund 1978:92).

In 1917 Isaac Singer moved to Bilgoray with her mother, and the time he spent in that archaic village, which had almost no signs of modernity, has affected him a great deal. It was probably there that he found the archetype of a Jewish village so often described in his stories. But even in that small village, there were some followers of new ideologies: Bundists (early Jewish socialists), Zionists, enlighteners. Singer began to write Hebrew poems there,

and became interested in the philosopher Spinoza who had influence on him for years. (Alexander 1980:17.) Singer pondered especially the possibility of free will as opposed to Spinoza's world of laws, and his idea that everything has been decreed beforehand.

Bilgoray later became for Singer a symbol of the East European Jews' destroyed past after the final destruction of Jewish life by the Nazis. Enrolling in the Rabbinical Seminary was the price Singer had to pay for returning to the worldly life of Warsaw. But he hated the seminary, and left it after a year, and returned to Bilgoray, where he continued his work as a teacher of Hebrew. In 1923 Singer moved back to Warsaw and started working as a proof reader for *Literarische Bletter* (Literary Pages), and began translating modern fiction (Mann, Hamsun, Zweig) into Yiddish, and writing his own stories, first under pseudonym. (Alexander 1980:11, 18.)

Although Singer was a student at the Rabbinical Seminary in Warsaw, he chose not to become a rabbi like his father and grandfather before him, but instead to become a journalist for the Yiddish press in Poland after leaving his studies. In 1935 he emigrated from Poland to the United States and since then worked as a journalist and book reviewer for *the Jewish Daily Forward* in New York. (Singer 1983:cover, Klinkowitz 1991.)

2.2 Isaac Singer's emigration

Isaac Singer almost emigrated to Palestine in order to avoid military service in Poland. He already had an immigration certificate, but it was for a family, so that Singer should have married a certain young woman willing to emigrate with him. Singer had avoided to be drafted for the army earlier, because of his physical weakness. But in 1926, Poland was taken over by Pilsudski, who complained to the army officials because so many weak soldiers were taken into the army, and so Singer was saved from the army, and also avoided emigration at this point of his life. Besides, the immigrants that were wanted in Palestine were just the same strong ones that were also wanted for the army - Singer would not really have had anything to do in Palestine. (Ahnlund

1978:66-67.) In his autobiographical novel *The Certificate* (1993) Singer writes about the fictive marriage he would have to go through with a young woman called Minna, in order to obtain a certificate which would enable them to emigrate to Palestine. In his memoirs Singer tells almost the same story: he nearly emigrated to Palestine, but in 1926, not in 1922, and had plans of a fictive marriage with a young woman, Stefa, not Minna. The fiancé waiting for her in Palestine was called Mark, not Zbigniew as in the novel, but unlike Minna in the novel, Stefa was pregnant. The couple emigrated in neither case. (Singer 1984:112-115, 124; Singer 1993:31-32, 229-230.)

In his memoirs, *Love And Exile* (1984), Singer reveals that his elder brother, Joshua Singer, with his wife, Genia, and their son, Joseph, first went to America, where Joshua Singer worked for *The Forward*, the same Yiddish newspaper Isaac Singer later worked for (Singer 1984:183). So, it was Joshua Singer who acted as trail-blazer for Isaac Singer, and got him his first job in America. Actually, it was Joshua Singer who made it possible, in the first place, for Isaac Singer to emigrate to the United States. Also it was Joshua Singer who first sent the manuscript of *Yoshe Kalb* to Abe Cahan at the *Jewish Daily Forward* in 1932, beginning the long tradition of publishing the brothers Singer in serial form. (Kresh 1979:112) The *Forward* had kept the fine European tradition of publishing novels in serial form, which sometimes went on, issue after issue, for months and years. What was going to happen in the novel next was often unknown both to the reader and to the author himself. (Ahnlund 1978:7.) Books that have first been published in serial form tend to be long, but not boring, because the writer has to keep up the readers' interest. Good examples of this are the family-novels *The Family Moskat* (1950), *The Manor* (1967) and *The Estate* (1969).

Isaac Singer's emigration took place ten years after the mass migration of East European Jews to America had ended. By this time the restrictions on the borders had grown more strict, and immigrants were not admitted to America as freely as before, due to the financial depression and anti-communist - and anti-Semitic - climate of the time. Jews were blamed for sympathizing with the bolsheviks, anarchists, Stalinists, etc., which often was true.

Isaac Singer's brother, Joshua, sent for him an affidavit to America, so that he could get a visa (Singer 1984:189). Before admitting the visa, the American consul in Warsaw asked Singer all kinds of questions, for he did not believe that Singer would go to America to lecture about literature (which the affidavit sent by Joshua probably claimed he would do). But Singer managed to get a tourist visa to America. (Singer 1984:215.) In those times, mid-thirties, the borders were already closing for immigrants in America, especially for Jewish refugees of the coming persecution. In his memoirs Singer admits that since he didn't possess the courage to kill himself, his only chance to survive was to escape from Poland. "One didn't have to be particularly prescient to foresee the hell that was coming." (Singer 1984:185.)

When Singer arrived in the United States, writing in Yiddish seemed to have no future there, even though the language had seemed to be very much alive in Poland when he emigrated in 1935. He could not write anything in six, seven years. Singer himself has described this as becoming an impotent after being a great lover, but at the same time knowing that he will one day gain back his strength. (Ahnlund 1978:14; Alexander 1980:19.) At first, Singer had difficulties in getting his stories published. They were considered too negative, and the publishers blamed him for dragging his own people into the mud. In their opinion, the Jews were described in such way that the anti-Semites would have pleasure from these stories. Singer's stories became valued only after the Second World War, but then there was another problem: the Jews of America had their ancestors among the dead in Poland, and they had a strong nostalgia for the ghettos. The reading audience wanted that life to be described tenderly, without mocking the memory of the old Jewish world. (Ahnlund 1978:77-78.) Singer himself writes about this in his novel *Meshugah* (1994):

My descriptions of sex or the underworld brought protests from rabbis and community leaders, who claimed that I poured oil on the fire of anti-Semitism, embarrassed and dishonored the victims of Hitler. Why should the Gentile world know of Jewish thieves, crooks, pimps, prostitutes, when they had all been martyred? Why not write instead of righteous Jews, rabbis, Hasidim, scholars, pious women, virtuous maidens? (Meshugah 224)

For other great Jewish writers like Bellow, and Malamud, and for younger writers like Heller, Roth, Richler, Potok, etc. the European background and their parents' life in the ghettos is an important factor, an effective background, and a fruitful source of inspiration, hardly more. But Isaac Singer himself comes from this world, he is the last great spokesman of the lost culture of East European Jews. (Ahnlund 1978:18.) Singer is a product of the now already destroyed East-European Jewish community, and the most well-known contemporary chronicler of the Jewish past, although the central catastrophe of that past, the destruction of European Jewry, is never directly presented in his work. Singer himself has said that there is no need for novels about the Holocaust, since the memoir literature of actual survivors is more significant and authentic than any imaginary recreation. (Bilik 1988:427.)

In the introduction of Israel Joshua Singer's novel *The Brothers Ashkenazi* (1937) Irving Howe classifies both Singer brothers as serious writers - I. J. Singer a humanist, rationalist and socially concerned, and his brother, Isaac Bashevis Singer, the master of Yiddish prose who has taken a step further: cut himself off from the norm and style of Yiddish culture, representing both pre-Enlightenment sensibility and modernism. (Singer 1937:x.) Irving Howe also claims that the admirers of Isaac Bashevis Singer misunderstand him, according to him Isaac Singer is not that "delightfully perverse modern voice" his readers think he is. "Despite his canniness and charm, the younger Singer goes his own way, and it is not along [the] paths his admirers are likely to go." (Singer 1937:x.) With this Howe probably means Isaac Singer's tendency to return to the ancient, religious way of thinking in his writing.

2.3 Singer as a writer

In 1978, the Nobel Prize for Literature was awarded to Isaac Bashevis Singer "for his impassioned narrative art which, with roots in Polish-Jewish cultural tradition, brings human conditions to life". Singer, the most widely known and possibly the last of the great Yiddish-language novelists and short-story writers, himself supervised the translation of his works from Yiddish into English.

(Singer 1983:cover, Klinkowitz 1991.) Among others, Joseph Singer, Isaac Singer's nephew, has assisted him in translating his novels and short stories from Yiddish into English, for example *Shosha* (1978).

Singer has called himself an entertainer, and he was a story-teller, that did not care about the latest fashion of modern prose. He had read the great entertainers of 19th century: Tolstoy, Dickens, Gogol, Dostoyevski and Balzac, and decided to compete with them. Singers primary audience were the readers of the *Forward*, mostly simple immigrants, but he became popular among the English speaking readers as well, after Saul Bellow translated from Yiddish the tragicomical story *Gimpel the Fool* in 1953. Through this he reached even the learned readers, but he has always kept his original style - his stories are always simple and clear on the surface, but there are deeper meanings underneath. (Ahnlund 1978:9-10.)

Singer writes nostalgically about the lost world of Polish countryside, the *shtetlach*, the Jewish villages, and draws a vivid picture of Warsaw as it used to be before Second World War. In his novel *Meshugah* (1994) Isaac Singer brings up the destruction of the East European Jewish culture through a character lamenting over the vanished world and its rich culture: "Who will know a generation from now how the Jews of Eastern Europe lived, how they spoke, what they ate?" (Singer 1994:16). Singer also points out his own function as a writer through a character's words:

'If I told you what I've lived through, both during the war and here in America, you would understand. A whole world collapsed before my very eyes. But you, my favourite author, are bringing it to life again.' (Meshugah 31)

To which the protagonist, apparently Singer's alter ego, answers "I thank you a thousand times [...] but no writer can resurrect what the wicked have destroyed." (Singer 1994:31.) However, Singer has succeeded quite well in describing the Jewish lifestyle in Eastern Europe before the Second World War. He describes the most traditional Hasids as well as the assimilated, modern Jews with their worldly customs. Singer's novels and short stories are love stories, religious stories and philosophical works of art. Even when he

already was a world famous writer, Singer still had the ability to describe the frustration and constant misery of a beginning writer, for example in *Love And Exile* (1984). In Singer's opinion literature should be full of action without any clichés or sentimental brooding. He had heard much praise of Joyce, Kafka and Proust, but decided that he would not follow "the path of the so-called psychological school or the stream of consciousness". To this conclusion Singer comes in his novel *Meshugah*, as his alter ego, writer Aaron Greidinger puts it, after a day full of events - this was how literature should be: packed with action. (Singer 1994:33.)

Maurice Carr, son of Isaac Singer's sister, Hinde Esther, has said that Singer's talent started blossoming only after his brother Joshua's death in 1944. "It was as if some kind of clamp had been taken off him spiritually and he was free and [...] able to develop." Carr does not want to say that Isaac Singer did not love his brother, but that "there were all sorts of complex emotions and fears and jealousies and attachments and enslavements." (Kresh 1979:128.) In *Love and Exile* Singer says that he did not feel like showing his writings to Joshua (Singer 1984:279).

Singer frequently tells his stories through some other person - quotes him of her telling the story - and he himself acts in the frame stories as a passive listener, who only seldom asks the storyteller questions to make him continue, for example in *The Blizzard* (pp. 63-79), *Property* (pp.80-91), and *Lantuch* (pp.92-101), all in *A Crown of Feathers and Other Stories* (1974). In this storytelling form, Singer has written a whole novel *The Penitent* (1984). It may well be that Singer has heard the stories from others, but it is really he who gives them form and has put them down on paper. In Singer's stories, also the storytellers are briefly, but carefully described - so that his short stories really include two layers (at the least!): the story of the storytelling situation and the story in itself. People often came to visit Singer and told their stories - in hope that they would see them printed one day, and many times Singer has used this material for his short stories, and he even uses the storytellers in the frame stories (Ahlund 1978:103).

Isaac Singer writes about Jewish villages, the ghetto and the immigrants' life in America - things that are familiar to him, as he himself says:

"What did I know about universities or the army?" He felt that he, "a synagogue scholar, who hadn't so much as a crust of bread to his name", could not create a hero for a novel. (Singer 1993:153.) In his novel *The Certificate* (1993) Singer as his alter ego, the narrator and protagonist of the novel, Dovid Bendinger, expresses his opinion of the literature and its view of romantic love. He criticizes the writers who describe handsome heroes and calls for a hero who is "hungry, weary, has no place to sleep, and has no idea with whom he is in love." As the protagonist of so many of his stories, Singer himself resembles this type of anti-hero. According to him, a new literature without prescribed laws or rules of initiation must rise. There should be an "end to the distinction between literature and philosophy", the new literature "would present people with all their deeds, thoughts, caprices and insanities." In Singer's opinion, "literature has always studied character", but "it has almost always ignored modern man's characterlessness". (Singer 1993:168-169.) This is the very essence of Singer's production, his heroes are the anti-heroes of the flaneur-literature of the beginning of the century. They do not act, they rather wait that the fate turns and brings along something new to them, and if it does not - they accept even that. Occasionally the reader gets an urge to take the protagonist by the collar and shake a little more life into him, but in his weakness he is however very human and sympathetic, and the reader is soon filled with tenderness and pity for the character. Singer also has the capability of describing his characters' mind in not so many words, but still giving a vivid picture of how they feel and what they think.

2.4 The central themes

The most important themes in Isaac Singer's novels are death, suicide, the experience of dying, and what comes after it, and religion, abandonment of old traditions, and penitence, and also the fight between good and evil over a man's soul. In a way all these themes entwine together, for even questions of what comes after this life can be considered religious.

The young Isaac Singer came early from Cabala to Spinoza, the seventeenth century Jewish philosopher, whose world view was full of laws, and insentimentality, and there was no place for the free will - the very essence of Judaism. Singer's dialogue with Spinoza has had its effect on many of his stories. There is a constant battle between the belief in free will and the destiny; whether a man can choose his own destiny or that everything is decreed beforehand. Singer's world of demons seems to be a protest against Spinoza's world of laws. In the world of demons there is place for man's free will, freedom of choice. (Ahnlund 1978:35, 95-96.) Singer seems to think that as the protagonists of his stories are constantly fighting against the demons and evil spirits, they will not have time for empty philosophical ponderings. Even Singer himself sometimes falls into the hands of little demons who may, for example, change his briefcase, hide his notebook, blot out his memory, like in the short story *Schloimele* pp. 178-188, in *A Friend of Kafka and Other Stories* (1972), or in *The Briefcase*, pp.110-134, in *A Crown of Feathers and Other Stories* (1974).

2.4.1 Death and suffering

Death appears in many forms in Singer's novels. People commit suicides, or at least plan to do so, they die naturally, because they are so old, or because they are sick. They die in persecution and in giving birth. Whatever the cause of death, the question arises: is there a Paradise and a Gehenna, or just grave and worms, after life in this world? Singer's protagonists do not usually fear death, they take it as it comes, and even see it as a relief, even if they were not planning to commit suicide. This is how some of Singer's characters discuss death:

‘All the living want and ever hope to achieve the dead already have - complete peace, total independence.’ (Shosha 245)

‘It [death] is like a precious wine to be savored slowly. Those who commit suicide want to escape death once and for all. But those who aren't such cowards learn to enjoy its taste.’ (Shosha 245)

There is a deathwish in some of the characters' attitudes towards death, but then death is supposedly the end of the earthly worries, and in a difficult situation it could be a relief, a means of escaping the troubles.

'One second he was alive, the next he was dead. For all my grief, I envied him. To people like me, death is a long process. We begin dying just as we're starting to mature.' (Shosha 248)

'I envy my mother. She knows nothing anymore. If people knew how happy the dead are, they wouldn't struggle so hard to hold on to life.' (Love 207)

Singer occasionally sees the world as a combination of a slaughterhouse, a brothel, and an insane asylum (Singer 1984:299), but his books are not totally pessimistic. Usually the protagonist's belief in God, some sudden lucky strike from the Hand of Providence, turns the things to the right track. Even though the people often consider suicide, they usually find another way out of the situation, except in, for example, *The Magician of Lublin*, where Yasha's assistant Magda commits suicide (Singer 1960:195). According to the protagonist of *The Penitent* (1984), for a modern man, marriage is a form of suicide:

'For a false smile and for a wife that other men have already had for free, a husband pays not only with his freedom but often with his life and health as well.' (Penitent 137)

It may seem hypocritical that a woman should be a virgin while most of Singer's male characters carry on love affairs with several women at a time, for example *Scum* (1991), *The Magician of Lublin* (1960) and even beginning of *The Penitent*. But it is also a point of view of a character that returned to pious Jewishness after he was let down by the modern ways and betrayed by both his wife and his mistress.

Death awaits us all, and it is constantly around us. "What is life but a dance across the graves?" (Singer 1962:114). Many of Singer's questions have

to deal with suffering, of both humans and animals. Why do creatures suffer? Why do the stronger persecute the weaker? Why is it that might makes right?

‘I came to the conclusion that what people call life is death and what people call death is life.’ (Shosha 272)

says Haiml, one of the characters of the novel, meaning that betraying one’s ideals just to stay alive cannot be considered living, just surviving. In Singer’s opinion one way to withstand suffering seems to be playing dead. This occurs both in his novels and in his memoirs:

Each time that he was faced with an unendurable situation, he would imagine that he was no longer among the living, he was a ghost, a corpse, free of all hope, all need. (Estate 103)

I had to keep reminding myself that I was a corpse, freed of all human anxieties. I was dead, dead, dead! I didn’t dare to forget this for even a moment. (Love 195)

About killing in form of hunting, for example, Singer says that it is ”a horrid form of amusement! First they go to church and sing hymns to Jesus, then they chase after some starving fox.” (Singer 1984:268.) The theme of the horror of slaughter recurs in Singer’s writings again and again. It started in his first novel *Satan in Goray*, which was first serialized in *Globus* in 1934, and appeared in book form in 1935, issued by the Warsaw P.E.N. Club. (Kresh 1979:114, 117). *Satan in Goray* was a study of mass hysteria, and as such also a prophetic vision - it was the only novel Singer published in Poland before his emigration in 1935 and before the Nazis. (Ahnlund 1978:113.) In that time Hitler was becoming more and more powerful in Germany, and Singer may have had the Nazis in mind when he wrote the novel.

Even though some historians describe the leader (*hetman*) of Zaporogs, Bogdan Chmielnicki, as a vigorous and civilized leader (Lappalainen 1986:129), through Singer’s novels we get different information. He was vigorous enough, but as for his being civilized, one has to disagree with the historians. Chmielnicki and his cossacks killed about 100,000 Jews in pogroms in 1648, in most cruel fashion, on the area Singer often visited in his childhood.

The Slave (1962) is a story about the Chmielnicki's pogroms and how they affected the life of Jacob who became a slave to Polish peasants. Also *Satan in Goray*, which is a novel about the false messiah and his followers, deals with the aftermath of Chmielnicki's pogroms. (Ahnlund 1978:109-110.)

The theme of slavery appears in both *The Slave* and in *Shosha* (1979). In *The Slave* Jacob is a slave in many senses: first, he is a slave of Jan Bzik, a Polish farmer, and works for him as a herd. Then he falls in love with Jan Bzik's daughter, Wanda, and becomes a slave to love. Later Jacob is brought back to his hometown, and a slave to his people, the Jews, almost marries a widow. Then, he escapes from his hometown, and goes to get Wanda from her village. Later he and former Wanda, now Sarah, settle in a Jewish village. In the end of the novel it becomes clear that after all Jacob, as all people, is a slave of God. In *Shosha*, a character, Feitelzohn, says that all his foibles and aberrations stem from his urge to be absolutely free, and that this alleged freedom has transformed him into a slave (Singer 1979:20). In many novels and short stories the Singer characters are slaves entangled into their own lies to several women, and to their weaknesses and inabilities. Maybe the human mind is bound to become a manifold slave to everything that is around. Like Waclaw, the ferryman, says in *The Slave*:

‘don’t get attached to anything. You own a cow or a horse and you’re its slave. Marry and you’re the slave of your wife, her bastards, and her mother.’ (Slave 259)

Waclaw the ferryman can also be seen as a symbol of death. The ferryman's statements about the ferry going to the Other Side [capitals mine], and that some people had too much, while others had too little, and that he has seen everything, and that people come, people go, and that Everyone comes that way, over the river, can also be understood so that the ferryman takes people across the river from life to death, as in the myth of ferryman the death. However, in *The Slave* the ferryman is part of the story. (Singer 1962:256-257.) Later in the novel, when Jacob dies, he sees

those on the other side, who waited for Jacob like relatives waiting on the shore for the ship to anchor, called to him and stretched out their hands (Slave 309)

Jacob had left behind on the ship his dark cabin, his body, with its rags and refuse. The other voyagers would clean the cabin out, ie. wash the body. They must still continue the journey on the stormy seas of life, but Jacob had arrived to his final haven. (Singer 1962:309.)

The grave is a bed, he thought, a most comfortable bed. If men knew this, they would not be so fearful. (Slave 255)

2.4.2 Religion

Singer writes about Jews, and Judaism. Judaism is the oldest living Western religion, and it is the root of both Christianity and Islam, the other two monotheistic religions (Bamberger 1991). Singer writes about people who doubt the existence of God, about people who ask "why?", about non-believers, about people who do not even try to live by the old traditions. But Singer also writes about people who seek for, and find the answer, who regret their evil deeds and go back to the old traditions. Singer writes about penitents, about people who want to live by the Jewish law and all its amendments. And even as Singer is a representative of a monotheistic religion, his stories are full of imps, dybbuks, demons and hobgoblins.

Singer's novels trace the history of the Polish Jews from the anti-tsarist uprisings of 1863 to Second World War, and all the way to modern times. Singer identifies these years as encompassing the birth and death of modernism. He shows that the ideals of modernist reform have led only to disillusion and social upheavals of tragic consequence. (Klinkowitz 1991.) In Singer's novels, for example, in *The Magician of Lublin*, the protagonist first goes from ancient to modern thinking, from religion to science, but then, after finding out that modern life and the science cannot give the answers after all, he goes from modern back to the ancient. The same model appears in *The*

Estate, where a Jewish psychologist tries to find answers in science, but in the end takes his son to be raised among the *Hassidim* (Singer 1969:308).

‘Did you see the truth?’ he [the rabbi] asked.

‘Not completely. But I saw their lie,’ Ezriel replied. (Estate 308)

What can one do? How is one to live? Should one return to ancient faith? are the central questions in Singer’s novels. Special features of Judaism are the prohibition of images (serving idols), the observance of Sabbath, dietary laws (kosher food), the legislation that guarantees the support of the poor, and the protection of slaves and animals against cruelty (Bamberger 1991). Singer himself (according to his memoirs) has gone as far in his trying not to harm anyone as to become a vegetarian, which theme occurs several times in a number of novels by Singer. In his memoirs Singer tells that he had tried to explain to people that his vegetarianism was based on no religion but simply on the feeling that one creature lacked the right to rob another creature its life and devour it. (Singer 1984:235) Many of his characters are also vegetarians, like Jacob in *The Slave*:

He had not tasted meat in all the years of slavery and the idea of feeding on God’s creatures now repelled him [...] Jews treated animals as Cossacks treated Jews [...] Meat in his mouth gave him the fantasy he was devouring his own children. (Slave 119-120)

The Jews observe Sabbath by refraining from work and by attending a synagogue service. On Friday night the Sabbath begins at the sunset, with the woman of the household lighting a candle or a lamp, with a blessing (*kiddush*) over a cup of wine, and the blessing over children by parents. When the Sabbath ends on Saturday at the sunset, there is a similar ceremony, *havdalah*. (Bamberger 1991.) Singer mentions some of the problems of the strictest Sabbath observance: is an egg laid on Sabbath kosher? Can people keep on trying to put out a fire on Friday night even after the sunset? These questions may seem ridiculous to modern people, but they were important to the most

pious Jews of Poland in Singer's childhood, and probably still are to religious Jews, Hasids, for example.

2.4.2.1 Hasidic and Reform Jews

The *Hassidim*, the Hasidic Jews, play an important role in Isaac Bashevis Singer's novels. Hasidism is a pietistic movement within Judaism. It began in the Carpathian border provinces in the eighteenth century, among persecuted lower-class Jews as a protest to the elite of the wealthy and learned Jews, who dominated the Jewish community life. Inspired by the pietistic Christianity, Hasidism considered religious enthusiasm and devotion superior to study and intellectualism. The movement quickly spread through the depressed rural areas. (Blau 1991.)

Later, divisions appeared in the Hasidic movement, and leadership became vested in dynastic families (like in the Singer family). These groups differ in how they combine their emotional pietism with the intellectual emphasis, but they stand together against the reform Judaism. Most Hasidic groups today live in Israel and in the United States. (Blau 1991.) In his memoirs, Singer describes his younger brother Moishe, a typical Hasid:

He had isolated himself completely from the world. He hadn't an inkling about business or about any other worldly matters. He shouted during prayer, clapped his hands, sang the chants of Nachman the Bratzlav Rabbi, went into religious ecstasy. (Love 166-167)

The Hasids wear long gaberdines, prayer shawls (*tallith*) with fringes, earlocks, and a scullcap, or, the most pious, sometimes even two (Singer 1967:168). During morning prayers they wear phylacteries, or *tefillin*, on their forehead and left arm. Their doorposts are affixed with a *mezuzah*, a little box containing a parchment scroll inscribed with passages of the Torah that emphasize the unity of God. (Bamberger 1991.)

Reform Jews are modern Jews, who do observe the Sabbath and other Jewish holidays, but they are not as religious as the Hasids. Reform Jews cannot be recognized from their clothing or hair style, for they look like any modern men. Reform Jews are in between the Hasids, who (at least in Singer's novels) often saw the reform Jews as heretics and did not consider them as real Jews, and gentiles, who still consider the reform Jews representatives of an ancient religion with strange traditions. Isaac Singer's elder brother Israel Joshua was the prototype for the many reform Jews in his stories. According to him, they were the ones who disliked the orthodox Jews for their Oriental backwardness and for their refusal to join in the progressiveness of the European march of intellect. (Alexander 1980:15-16.) Singer shows the problem of the fall-between reform Jews in following:

‘She [Olga] is neither a Jew nor a Gentile. Like so many modern Jews, she has one desire: to forget her origin, to destroy her roots.’
(Estate 327)

The phrase ‘We are running away and Mount Sinai runs after us’ in *Shosha* (Singer 1979:255) shows how difficult it was, and that the gentiles would not let the Jews forget their origin, especially in Poland right before the Second World War. Here is a frightening, and maybe slightly exaggerated, example of a Hasidic character's opinion of assimilated ie. reform Jews:

‘The essence of Jewishness [...] is to be as distant from the Gentile as it's possible to get [...] It's just one step from assimilation to conversion, and sometimes no more than a generation or two from conversion to Nazism.’ (Penitent 91)

The protagonist in Singer's *The Penitent* (1983) describes a pious Hasidic woman, seeing her as the real woman, not as a whore he thought all women, even assimilated Jewesses were:

‘The mistress of the house had a wrinkled face. I gathered from her talk that she was barely past fifty. In America and even in Israel, I had seen [assimilated] women her age having illicit affairs [...] But this pious woman had long since accepted the onset of age as part of the honor of being a mother of grown

children, a mother-in-law, and a grandmother. Her eyes reflected the goodness of the true Jewish mother.' (Penitent 119)

Singer seems to have something against reform Judaism, or perhaps he criticizes those that criticize the reform Jews. Singer himself seems to have been spiritually Hasidic, having been brought up in a Hasidic family, even though he broke the rules of dressing, behaviour - for example with women - as Singer himself said "I always felt that two girls were better than one, and three were better than two" (Kresh 1979:95), and eating - vegetarianism was against Judaism for one needs not be more compassionate towards animals than God is. The Hasids considered vegetarianism "a worldly fad practiced by Gentiles and Jewish Gentiles." (Singer 1983:134.) Singer also wrote about forbidden subjects like sex and worldly philosophy. His message seems to be, that we should not discriminate, and that it is not important what man is outside but what he is inside.

2.4.2.2 Converts and Christians

Another important religious phenomenon in Singer's novels are the Jews that have converted into Christianity, but in *The Slave* (1962) there is, for a change, a Christian girl, Wanda, who wants to become a Jew. But, as Singer says in *The Slave* "The Christians burned gentiles who became Jews. Nor would the Jews accept the convert." (Singer 1962:137.) When Jacob took Christian Wanda, who was now, after she had converted to Judaism, called Sarah¹, to a Jewish village, Pilitz, she had to pretend to be mute, lest her Polish accent would have revealed her origin. (Singer 1962:156.) Mixed marriages were in the old days impossible, and even conversion to Judaism was forbidden by the law in Poland.

Not only did he dread the gentiles and their laws, but also the Jews who would expel him from the village if they learned his

¹ Like all converts, probably after Sarah who was the first convert, the wife of Abraham, the first Jew.

wife was a convert. Sarah's presence in Pilitz imperiled the town. If the Polish authorities learned that a Christian girl had been seduced into Judaism, there would be reprisals [...] and Jacob would be excommunicated. (Slave 156-157)

Sarah had a problem of "emigration", she did not belong to any group as a convert. "Though she had fled the peasants, she had not become one of the Jews of Pilitz." (Singer 1962:162-163). In a way it was also like death, she had lost her previous life and reincarnated in form of a mute Jewess, and she could never again become the Wanda she used to be in her own village. And when she in her pain, giving birth, becomes Wanda for the last time, she dies (Singer 1962:242-243).

Christians, or gentiles, are usually pictured as quite negative figures in Singer's novels, which, of course, should not surprise us, if we think about all the suffering the Christians have caused to the Jews during last centuries. But Singer also illuminates some prejudices that Christians have of Jews, like well poisoning and the using of Christian blood to make *matzoth* -bread. (Singer 1962:169.) One of the least violent conversations between a Jew and a Christian takes place in *The Slave* (1962), between Pilitzky, a nobleman, and Jacob. Pilitzky asked Jacob:

'What has he [God] chosen you for? To live in dark ghettos and wear yellow patches [...] All right, God loves you. What kind of love? - Your wives are raped and your children buried alive.'
(Slave 184-185)

The Christians considered the Jews infidels, murderers of Christ, almost animals:

It was a sin, they said, to maintain an infidel in a Christian village. He said that he was a Jew, but if that was so he had murdered Jesus Christ. (Slave 32)

'Although I had turned away from the Jewish path, I carried the diaspora with me.' (Shosha 246)

This passage clearly indicates the burden of being a Jew; even if you abandon your religion, you cannot abandon your race, which was a matter of life and death during the Second World War. Not all people escaped the persecution

even if they had a chance, they just could not believe what was going to happen. And the fatalists believed it all came from the Hand of Providence.

3 DIASPORA - CONTINUOUS EXILE

Diaspora, the continuous exile of the Jews, started in 70 A.D., when the Temple of Jerusalem was demolished² and the Jews were deported into exile, which still continues. The Jews have kept their identity as a people mainly because of their religion, traditional laws and their culture, and perhaps also because the persecutors of all times have treated them as a group, no matter how Russian, German or French they have become. (Kunnas 1994.)

Before the state of Israel was founded (1948) the Jews did not have a home country. Everywhere they went they were treated in a hostile manner. They were not allowed to make their living in farming, for example, and they could not be members of trade unions (Kunnas 1994). No wonder the Jews took up banking, which the church saw as a not suitable job for a good Christian. The Jews had to live in separate areas, Ghettos, and in Germany they were even blamed for spreading the "Black Death", the plague (Kunnas 1994). In Russia, Ukraine and Poland there has also been several bloody persecutions of Jews, Pogroms, during last centuries, which have caused the Jews to emigrate.

In the peak immigration years between 1901 and 1914, over 1.6 million Jews migrated overseas, most of them coming directly or indirectly from Eastern Europe. Ninety per cent of them went to North America, eighty-four per cent going to the United States and six per cent to Canada. Later, the First World War, restrictionist immigration policies, and inexorable barriers in Eastern Europe caused the Jewish mass migration, after a final spurt between the 1920 and 1924, to end. (Rischin 1987:17.)

According to Liebmann Hersch, before 1870 Jewish immigration into the United States was rare. For example, during the fifty years between 1820-1870 from the two empires, Russia and Austria-Hungary, about 15,000 immigrants came to the United States. Only a part of them were Jews, but during the next decade the number of immigrants from these countries increased to 125,000 and was about ten times larger than that of the preceding

² The laws governing the offering of sacrifice have not been practiced since then (Bamberger 1991).

decade, which implies that also the number of Jewish immigrants into the United States increased. Between 1881-1890 the number of immigrants from the Russian and Austro-Hungarian empires increased to 625,000. During the next decade, 1891-1900, the immigration from these countries increased further and was over 600,000 from Russia and about 600,000 from Austria-Hungary. According to Hersch, it is impossible to know the exact number of Jews that were among these immigrants, because the United States statistics did not distinguish the Jews from other immigrants before July 1, 1898, when the classification of immigrants "by race or people" started. (Hersch 1931:471-472.)

At least three-fourths of the Jewish immigrants into the United States came from Russia and Poland. Also many of the Jews coming to America from the United Kingdom, British America [Canada] or some other country, were originally from Russia or Poland. A great number of Jews also migrated to the United States from Rumania. Between years 1899-1924 their number exceeded 100,000. Of the total number of 133,577 immigrants from Rumania, 76.8 per cent were Jewish, nineteen-twentieths being permanent immigrants. (Hersch 1931:479-480.)

During the First World War (1914 - 1918) the Polish Jews, including the Singer family, were starving and freezing because they could not afford to buy food or fire wood. Besides, the Tsar's great-uncle Nikolai Nikolaievitch, the chief commander, had decreed that all Jews be driven from the regions behind the front, because they were considered German spies (Singer 1979:12). The refugees came to Warsaw, and from Warsaw people moved to the countryside, where the food was cheaper. By 1917 there were 343,400 Jews in the city 41 percent of the total population (Kresh 1979:65). This moving around may have made the moving into America even easier.

Usually the father, husband or adult sons were first ones to migrate. After they had earned and saved some money they sent it for the women, children and grand parents to follow them. (Gartner 1987:32.) This seems natural, for the men of the family were supposed to make the living those days, except for the most pious Jewish families, where the wife was the bread

winner, so that the husband could spend all his time to study the scriptures. Some men also sent money from America to their family, like Isaac Singer's brother Joshua to their father, in order to support the family back in the old country (Singer 1984:160).

The young men left for bigger villages, cities like Warsaw, some for the United States. The letters they sent home were many times illegible, the Yiddish mixed with the languages of the countries they were now living in. They sent home photographs in which the men wore top hats and the women fancy dresses like squires. (Singer 1974:104.) In a short story by Isaac Singer *The Son from America*, in *A Crown of Feathers* (1974), pp. 102-109, there is Samuel, the son of an elderly couple, who had gone to America forty years ago. People of the little Polish village said that he had become a millionaire there. Every month, the letter carrier brought a letter and a money order to the couple, but no one in the village could read the letters because they were all in English. (Singer 1974:102.) Later in the story, the son comes back from America to live with his parents, and finds out that none of the money has been used:

‘Why didn’t you spend it?’
 ‘On what? Thank God, we have everything.’
 ‘Why didn’t you travel somewhere?’
 ‘Where to? This is our home.’ (Crown 108)

And so on; the son suggests different ways to spend the money and the father says that neither he nor the community needs anything. In this small village money is worthless, there are not even thieves to take the money.

4 MASS MIGRATION TO THE WEST

4.1 Reasons to immigration

Towards the end of the nineteenth century the Jews of Russia became targets to more and more strict laws and orders. They could only settle to live inside the Ghetto area, the number of Jews in higher education was reduced and they became targets to violent local persecutions, Pogroms, which the authorities did not make an effort to prohibit. (The government rather had pogroms against the Jews, than protests against the government.) This led into mass migration of the Jews. (Hingley 1967:89.) Poland was not independent between 1795-1919, but a part of Russia that had received parts of Poland in three partitions in 1772, 1793, and 1795 (Mitchell 1975:xi).

In 1897, there were 5,215,000 Jews living in the Russian Empire, of which about 4.9 millions lived within the so called Hebrew Pale. The Pale was situated in the northwestern provinces of Russia, and the eastern provinces of Poland, and included the provinces of Lublin, Grodno, Minsk, Moghilev, Chernigov, Poltava, Kiev, Podolia and Volhynia, among others. The area was greatly overpopulated and the Jews moved to the outskirts of the Pale or emigrated. In Russia the Jews were mostly occupied in tailoring, shoemaking and carpentering. Many also worked in commerce as petty merchants or middlemen, the value of merchandise rarely exceeding a few rubles. (Obolensky-Ossinsky 1928:539-541.)

The Jews were violently urbanized, because they could not employ themselves in agriculture. Other restrictions were the denial of the right to free migration, and the Jews were barred from state service, from election to the local government, from teaching and law, and their number of students was limited to ten per cent of the number of all students. Even in military service they were treated by the officials as pariah. (Obolensky-Ossinsky 1928:542.)

According to statistics, during the five years before 1880, only about 200,000 immigrants came to the United States yearly. From 1880 on, the figures begin to grow, in 1880 there were 457,000 immigrants, next year 669,000 immigrants, and in 1882 already 789,000 immigrant arrivals. Of

course these numbers include other nationalities as well, but they also give a clear picture of how big an immigration wave is in question. The real peak immigration years were between the years 1905-1914, when about a million immigrants arrived to the United States yearly. During the First World War, the number of immigrants understandably went down, but after the war, there were still the peak years of 1921 with 805,000, and 1924 with 707,000 immigrant arrivals. The number of immigrants goes down to about 200,000 per year in 1925, after the immigration laws become stricter, and becomes even smaller, probably because of the financial depression, with 97,000 immigrants in 1931, followed by only 36,000 immigrants in 1932. The figures show also that only after the second World War the number of immigrants per year again exceed 100,000. (Figure 1. below, see also table 1. on page 79 of this work, and Mitchell 1983:91-93.)

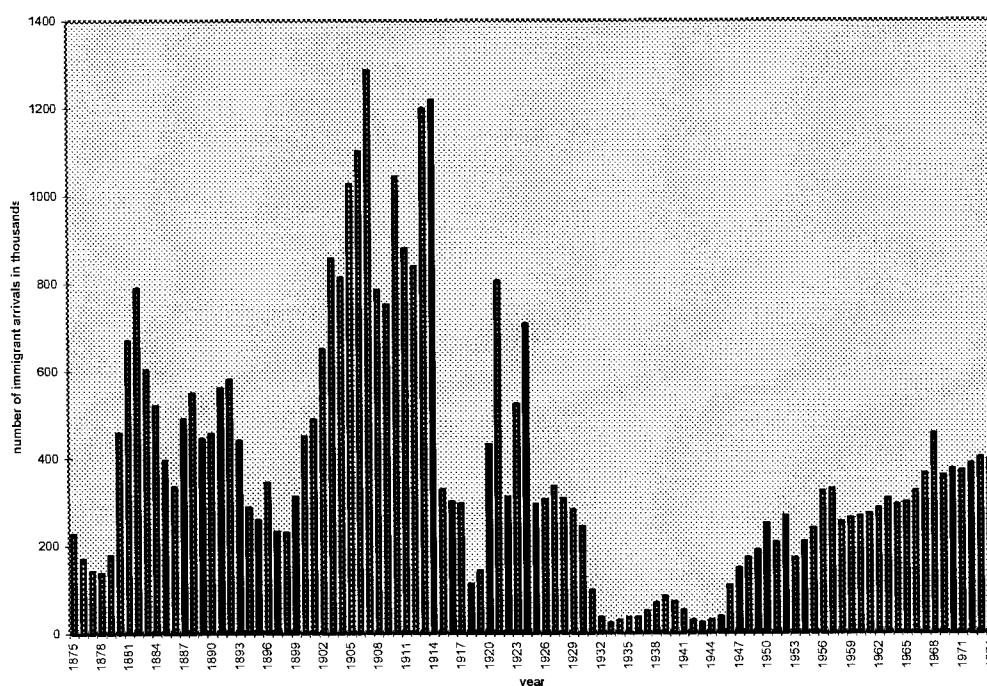


Figure 1. Immigrant arrivals to the United States 1875 - 1974 (in thousands)
(Mitchell 1983:91-93)

The United States started to restrict the coming of immigrants in the 1920s. During the First World War the flow of immigrants naturally ceased for a few

years, but immediately after the war the massive immigration began anew. Already in 1917 there had been a requirement for immigrants to be able to read, but that was not enough to stop the massive flow of immigrants. In the atmosphere of fear for communism and animosity towards aliens, serious debates went on over the restriction of immigration, and the first act concerning immigration quotas was issued in 1921. According to it, the quota would be three per cent of foreign born people living in the United States in 1910. (Otavan Suuri Maailemanhistoria 17, 1986:16-17.) For example, in 1922 the number of new Russian immigrants, that would be accepted, would be three per cent of the number of Russian born immigrants that lived in the United States in 1910. This regulation favored the immigrants from countries of "older" immigration: Scandinavia, England, Germany, because proportionally more immigrants had come from these countries before 1910, the mass migration from Eastern Europe had started later.

The National Origin Act made the restrictions even more strict in 1924. The quotas were now calculated with the help of the census of 1890 instead of that of 1910, which practically closed the doors for immigrants from Eastern Europe. At the same time, the total quota for immigrants was set to be 164,000 per year. As Coolidge put it "America must be kept American", which in this case meant white, anglosaxon and protestant. (Otavan Suuri Maailemanhistoria 17, 1986:16-17.)

In 1898-1899 the Jews made 28.5 per cent of the total of 123,000 immigrants from Russia and Austria-Hungary. For the next two years the percentage was 27 per cent. If the proportion of Jews had throughout the nineteenth century been same, then of the 1,625,000 immigrants from Russia and Austria-Hungary 440,000 were Jews. Of the 98,000 Jewish immigrants entering the United States in 1898-1900, 91 per cent were from these countries. If we take that the proportion of Jews has been same before, there would be at least 500,000 Jewish immigrants who entered the United States before 1899. According to Hersch, these estimates may be too low, because the proportion of Jews among immigrants from these countries was possibly greater. The proportion of especially German Jews had certainly been greater before than what it was toward the end of the century. (Hersch 1931:472-473.)

The peak years of Jewish immigration to the United States follow the pattern of immigration in general. The peak years of Jewish immigration seem to be 1904-1908, the greatest number of immigrants, 153,748, arriving in 1906. In Russia the granting of the constitution in 1905 was followed by pogroms which led into massive emigration of Jews (Hersch 1931:475). Other peak years were 1913 - 1914, right before the First World War. During and after the war the immigration rates went down, but they went up again in 1921, when 119,036 Jewish immigrants came to the United States. (Figure 2. below, and see also table 2. on page 80 of this work, and Willcox 1929:464.)

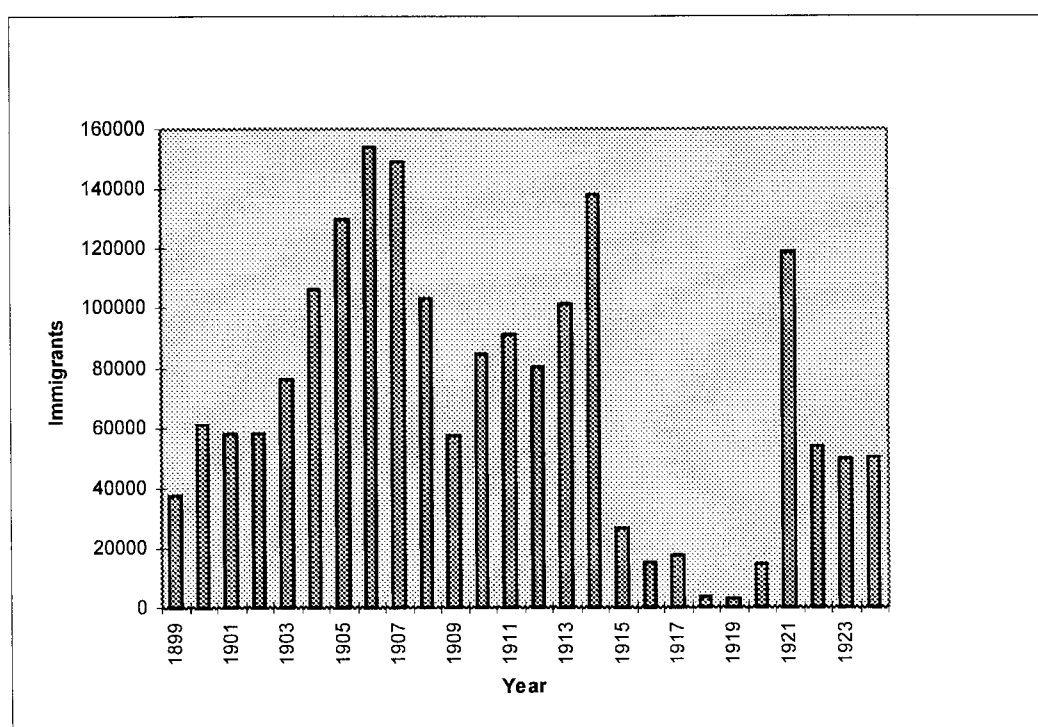


Figure 2. Jewish immigrant aliens admitted to the United States between 1899-1924 (Willcox 1929:464)

It is amazing that such a large majority of immigrants coming from the East European countries, for example Russia, Poland and Rumania, were Jewish. Of the total number of immigrants from these countries, only a small number is Russians, Poles or Rumanians. From Russia, for example, the majority of immigrants between years 1899-1924 were Jews, the two next largest groups being Poles and Finns. This is probably because Finland was a part of Russia

until 1917, and Poland - until 1919. People of Polish and Finnish origin lived in Russia even after that. In a way we can understand that the non-native people of the country wanted to emigrate. The natives probably had better life conditions in their own home country and they were not persecuted in any way, except maybe politically in Russia. (Figures 3.- 5. below, see also tables 3.- 5. on pages 81-83 of this work, and Willcox 1929:487-488.)

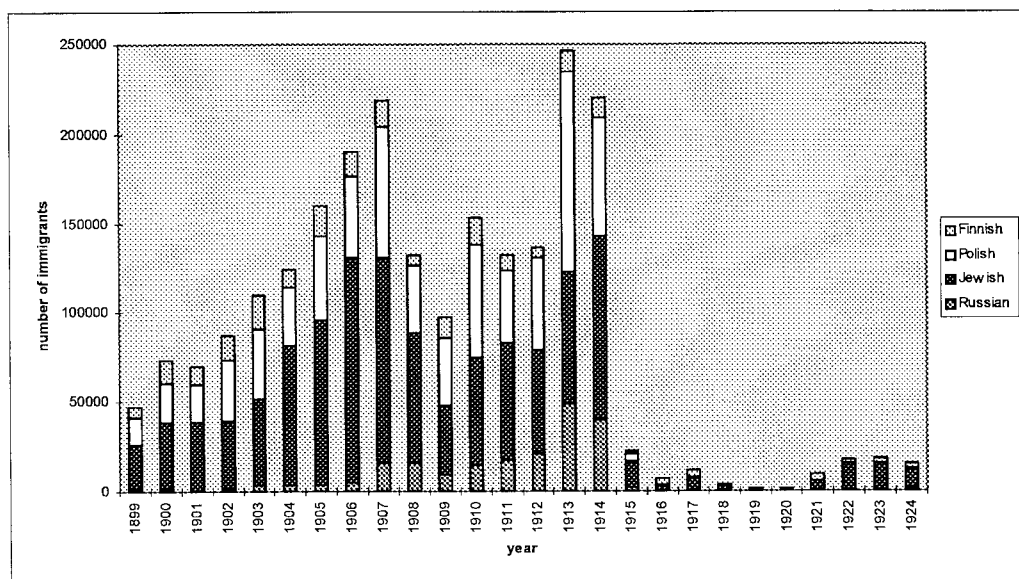


Figure 3. Immigrants from Russia, 1899-1924 (Willcox 1929:488)

According to Ralph Melville, over 2.5 million people of various nationalities emigrated from Russia to the United States at the peak of the emigration wave between 1900-1914, 40 per cent of which were Jews, 28 per cent - Poles, 11 per cent - Russians, 9 per cent - Lithuanians, 7 per cent - Finns, and 5 per cent - Germans (Melville 1990:133). These percentages may seem contradictory to the information given in previous section, and in table 3. on page 81 of this work. This is due to the fact that Poles and Finns emigrated in larger numbers in the beginning of the century, but later on their flow was exceeded by the flow of Lithuanians and Russians, the latter making a real spurt right before the First World War, in 1913 and 1914.

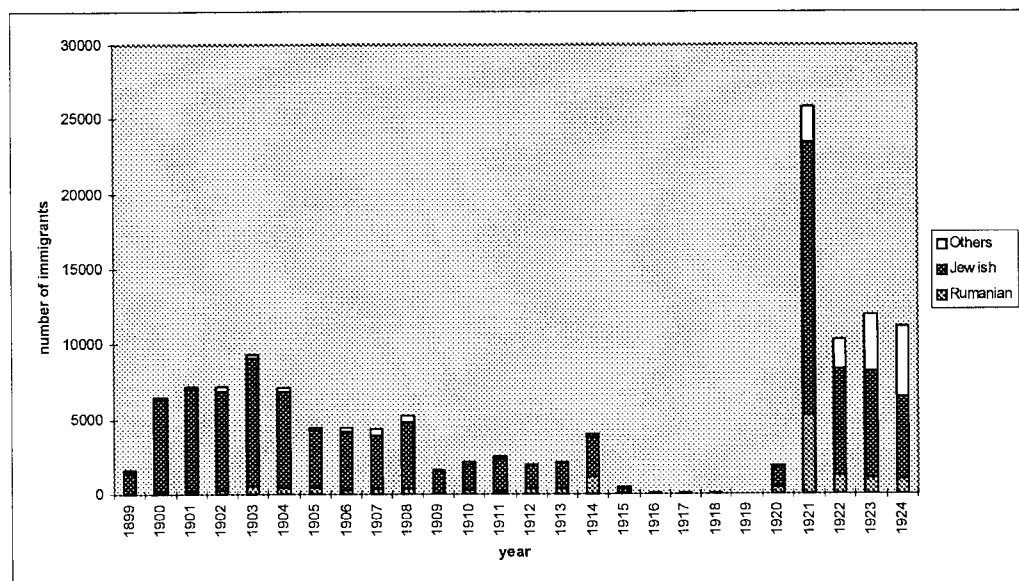


Figure 4. Immigrants from Rumania, 1899-1924 (Willcox 1929:487)

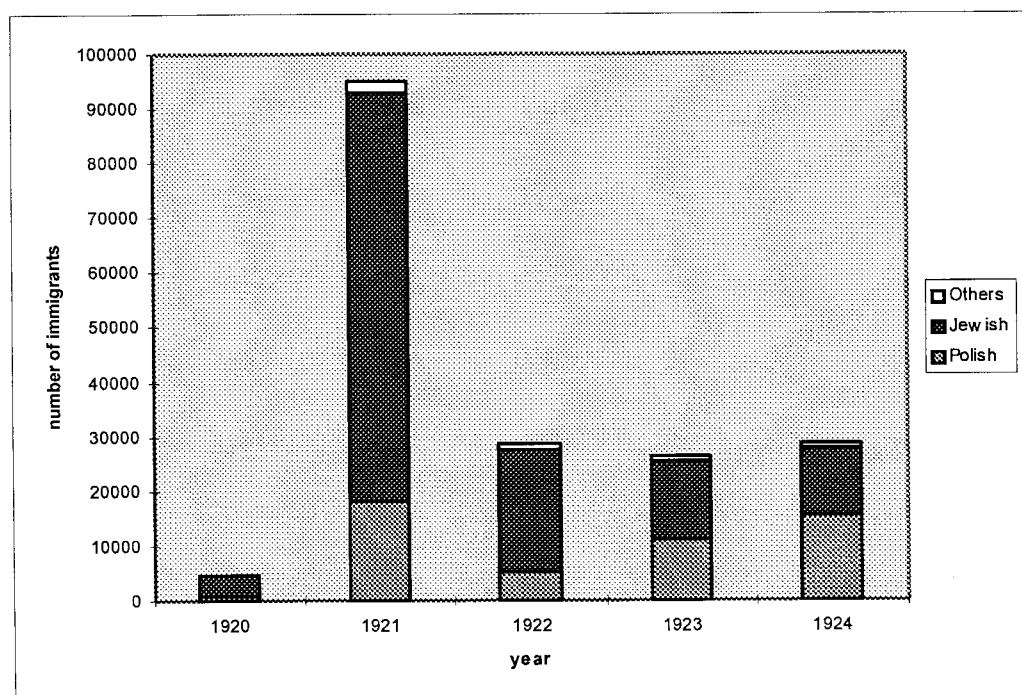


Figure 5. Immigrants from Poland, 1920-1924 (Willcox 1929:487)

Even though this great immigration wave took place between 1880-1924, these figures are based on statistics from 1899-1924, because the classification of immigrants by race or people started only in 1898. The immigrants from

Poland are pictured in a separate figure only from 1920, because Poland became independent in 1919, until that it was a part of Russia. These figures clearly illustrate how the Jews were the majority of immigrants from these countries, and if not always the majority, they still were a large group of immigrants from each of these countries.

The East European Jews also constituted a great part of immigrants to the United States. If we take, for example, year 1921, when 119,036 Jewish immigrants were admitted to the United States, and compare the statistics of immigrants from Russia, Rumania, and Poland, we can see that almost 100,000 of the about 120,000 newcomers were from these three countries. In 1921 the United States admitted 805,000 immigrants in general, so the East European Jews make a large proportion even in this comparison. The peak year of Jewish immigration to America was 1906 with 153,748 Jewish immigrants. Of them 129,106 came from Rumania and Russia, which at that point still contained Poland. In general there were 1,101,000 immigrant arrivals in the United States that year, the peak year of immigration into America being next year - in 1907, with 1,285,000 immigrant arrivals. (Mitchell 1983:91-93; Willcox 1929:464, 487-488; figures 1.- 5. above, and tables 1.- 5. on pages 79 - 83 of this work.)

The reasons for the beginning of emigration from Russia to America in 1891-1892 were the pogroms of the 1880s, after the assassination of Alexander II, the restriction of the number of Jewish students in the universities of Saint Petersburg and Moscow into only three per cent of students, and the expulsion of about 20,000 Jews from the Moscow area. The peak of 1905-1908 was caused by the pogroms of 1905-1906, linked with the increasing crises of state and society in Russia. The last peak of Jewish emigration from Russia may be a result of the Stolypin reforms, which released the peasants from the legal and economic chains binding them to their communities, and allowed them to emigrate. (Melville 1990:135, 142; Otavan Suuri Maailemanhistoria 15, 1986:243.) The Jews were virtually driven out to migrate from the Russia: they were deported from their homes, they were not allowed to settle in the growing cities, and they were prohibited to take part in the economical growth of

Russia. Also the long serving time (even twenty-five years) in the Russian army drove the young men from the country, about which also Singer writes:

‘When I was about to be drafted into military service, my father wanted me to maim myself: cut off a finger, or [something like that...] But [...] I told my father plainly that I would not make myself a cripple. ‘So what do you intend to do?’ he asked me. ‘Serve the czar and eat army rations?’ And I replied, ‘I will go to America.’” (Crown 183)

‘I would not serve the Polish Army, so we came to America in 1924, the very day before America closed its doors on free immigration.’ (Crown 213)

The Rumanian Jews did not have any rights and they were targets to many kinds of pressure and violence. The Rumanian Jews were driven to migration mostly by political reasons, the Russian Jews also by economical reasons. (Gartner 1987:27.)

Between 1881 and 1914, over 35 million Europeans crossed international boundaries, and nearly 23 million of them came to the United States. Jews travelled aboard the same ships and were subject to the same laws as gentile emigrants. However, the causes of their emigration were different. Most Gentiles who sought the free land of America were peasants who suffered from overpopulation and landlord oppression. There were also unemployed craftsmen, displaced by the industrial change. (Gartner 1987:26.) But because the Jews almost never were farmers, and rarely craftsmen, but instead usually shop-keepers, doctors, bankers or peddlers, the industrial revolution did not have a great effect on them. One-fifth of the Russian Jewry left the country in the ten years between 1904 and 1914; only the Irish emigrated at a higher rate (Gartner 1987:26).

Even though most East European Jews were merchants and tradesmen, mainly small shopkeepers and peddlers, most of the Jewish emigrants from Russia were small craftsmen and skilled workers who had been struggling for their economic existence in the cities and towns of the old country, unskilled workers and servants emigrated also in larger numbers. The tradesmen could probably also make a living in the old country, for their rate of emigration was

only 5.3 per cent of all the Russian Jewish emigrants. The rapid population growth had caused both unemployment and lack of farming land. The East European Jews were the poorest emigrants coming to America, even when compared with immigrants from Southern Europe. They had only about worth thirteen dollars of belongings when they arrived to America, while even the Russians had about nineteen dollars. In addition to these socio-economic reasons, the legal discrimination against ethnic and religious minorities in Russia motivated the Jews to emigrate. (Melville 1990:134-135, 138.)

The mass emigration of East European Jews began in 1881 when the pogroms and mob violence following the assassination of Alexander II were putting the very existence of the East European Jews in danger. At the same time the religious ties that had bound the Jewish community were unraveling. The threat to Jewish life was coming both from within and without. The massive flight to America, that began in the early 1880s, had in fact begun spiritually over a century earlier. The Enlightenment, Emancipation, and Western thought had reached the *shtetlach* of Eastern Europe, Russia and Poland, and the modern ideas had been circulating on the area since the eighteenth century, challenging orthodoxy and encouraging a belief in the possibilities of a new life. (Fine 1988:15-16.)

There was a law in Russia, according to which "no citizen could leave one country and become a citizen of another without the permission of the country left." Obolensky-Ossinsky claims that this rule "survived in Russia almost to the present day." [Which was in 1928, the year of publishing the Russian original of the article, only ten years after the bolshevik revolution. But this rule, or similar ones, have been enforced even during the Soviet time, until the 1990s]. If a citizen emigrated without permission, his property in Russia was sequestered, and when the Jews of Russia began to emigrate with the help of the Jewish Colonization Society [Association], the rules permitted the Jews to leave, but not to return. (Obolensky-Ossinsky 1928:521.)

In Russia the emigration was restricted, because the government wanted to keep an eye on the peasants, and secure the cheap labor of excess people. After the restrictions of migration were relaxed in the end of nineteenth century, larger groups of people began to emigrate from Russia, most of them

to Siberia. Russians moved to America in comparatively small numbers, but the minority people from western part of Russia, ie. Jews from Poland, emigrated in larger numbers. (Luntinen 1986:276-277.)

The mass migration was possible because of the ready availability of safe, scheduled mass transportation on land and sea, and the nearly untrammelled right to leave one country and enter another. This combination of circumstances had never existed before, and it has not occurred since. (Gartner 1987:28.) In the following extract Isaac Singer shows how the immigrants travelled to the new country:

‘This is our fifth day in New York. It's only two months since we said goodbye,[...] First the trip to Berlin, then on to Paris, to Cherbourg, and later by boat to America. Thirteen days on the ocean [...] Almost all [...] were seasick. For three days I was ill’
(Estate 59)

Many immigrants also emigrated for personal reasons, like Alexander Zipkin, a character in Singer's novel *The Estate* (Singer 1969:22), who fled from an unhappy marriage and an unhappy love-affair to begin a new life on the other side of the Ocean. To some of the pious Jews also religious reasons may have been the cause of immigration, they believed that the Hand of Providence is guiding them to move:

As the Talmud says: ‘To change one's place is to change one's luck’...The forces that moved the most distant stars and the tiniest microbes had ordered his departure. Like the patriarch Abraham, he had received the commandment: ‘Get thee out of thy country.’
(Estate 223)

‘I read about the emigration of the Jews in *The Israelite*. They are fleeing the Tsarist pogroms, but clearly it's all part of God's scheme.’ (Estate 289)

The hope for a better life drove girls into the hands of slave traders. In the old world a girl had to have a dowry to get a husband. As servants they had to work hard and could not have any fun even on Sabbath. There were rumours that life in America was easier, and that the status of women was higher there

than in the old world. (Singer 1991:142-143.) It may have been also that the girls who had been under influence of modern ideas wanted to have an industrious husband, but these good husband candidates all emigrated to America, the ones that were left were the pious yeshiva students, who did not appeal to the modern girls. That made even young women want to emigrate.

4.2 Why to America?

The United States of America became a substitute for a homeland to the Jewish emigrants. As they knew that they could not move to their traditional area in Palestine (because of the hostile regime there, and lack of economical growth), and as all other people were moving by masses to America where they had a chance to achieve a better life and future, and especially as they did not leave behind much more than bitter memories, the Jews were among the first ones to populate the United States.

The peak years of the Jewish mass migration lie between 1881 and 1914, when approximately two and a half million Jews crossed national borders. The Jewish emigrants sought liberation not only from autocracy, but also from poverty, mainly in liberal countries undergoing large-scale economic development, like the United States, for example. Statistically, *Eretz Israel* was not one of the most important lands of Jewish migration during this period, with only about forty-five thousand immigrants settling there permanently. Also, the proportion of Jews who left Israel was higher than for any other country, mainly because of the absence of large-scale economic development and a liberal regime, for which even Zionist fervour could not compensate, even though the Zionist ideology, the nationalism of the Jews, aims at the Jews moving back to their ancient homeland. Obviously the importance of *Eretz Israel* in Jewish migration has to be measured by other standards. (Gartner 1987:25-26.)

The reasons to Jewish migration to Palestine were and are religious and nationalistic. At first, it was only the old and pious Jews who went there to die, in order to be buried in the Holy Land. After 1880 the Zionist movement

encouraged young people to move to Palestine and to create a Hebrew center, and even a Hebrew state, there. However, immigration to Palestine was not very successful. To go into agriculture was new for the arriving young intellectuals. The ones who tried some other form of occupation in the cities were disappointed, and many left Palestine and had to return to their old countries broken both materially and morally. Their situation was not like that of other returning migrants who had made a fortune and become rich. They had brought all their savings into Palestine and left both their physical and moral force there. (Hersch 1931:512-515.)

The heterogenous and democratic public of the United States had long ago eliminated the vestiges of a state church tradition and proscribed corporate recognition for national or religious minorities. More recently, the rapid economic and social changes wrought by an industrializing America had disrupted an older localism and sense of community. This made it easier for the Jewish immigrant to settle in the new country, but here the immigrant could not rely upon the authoritarianism and traditionalism which in Europe had served him in maintaining his communal polity. Powerful assimilatory forces operated, moreover, on a personal plane. The expectations of self-advancement, free public education, and an open political system complemented a national ethos which frowned upon separatism. (Goren 1970:1-2.)

The United States of America, the melting pot of all peoples, allowed the Jews to live, and make a living, peacefully. Even though most of the Jewish immigrants arriving to America were penniless and quite unversed in English language, some of them made millions in a short time. People in the old country believed America to be a wonderland:

...women remained young in America. Sixty-four-year-old women carried on with young men while receiving alimony from their millionaire husbands; four hundred dollars a week...(Estate 135)

Even Sonya [...] had become rich in Columbus's country. Her husband, Yakiewicz, the former socialist, had opened a ladies' clothing factory. (Estate 135)

These success-stories are familiar to us from many immigrant novels and films. There is a story like this in Singer's *Shosha* (1979). A carpenter, Samuel Dreiman, went to America in the 1880s and became a builder in Detroit. Men came from all over the world to work for the Ford factories, Dreiman built the houses for them, and became a multimillionaire. (Singer 1979:50.) Similar stories, exaggerated, travelled back to Europe in letters to the relatives and neighbours in the villages, and encouraged even more people to emigrate.

But, as a character in Singer's short story *Lost* (in *A Crown of Feathers*, pp. 181-193) says, "In those times, to have a son in America was considered a blight on the family - like having a convert or a suicide." Maybe this was because the neighbours and the community would think that the son has committed a crime, is a radical, or that the family is so poor, that a supporter in America is needed and thus sent there. However, this character managed to get some money from his family, so that he could actually travel second class, unlike the other immigrants who travelled below deck and came to America penniless. (Singer 1974:183.)

'...It wasn't very comfortable, because we were travelling steerage. We didn't sleep in beds but bunks, like soldiers [...] I still shudder when I think of how much dirt and boorishness I encountered aboard ship. It was a nightmare...' (Estate 59)

In the short story *A Peephole in the Gate*, pp. 93-120 in *The Death of Methuselah and Other Stories* (1988) Singer writes about a young man who wants to emigrate to America for he cannot stand the disgrace of his bride betraying him. Many people from the neighbourhood had already emigrated and there were "agents who got you a ticket for the ship and allowed you to pay it out in installments after finding work in America." (Singer 1988:100.) The trip was horrible, he could not eat the non-kosher food, and besides, there were seasick people vomiting everywhere and he suffered also from heartache for his bride. But the people who travelled together became close, like a big family and called each other "ship brothers and ship sisters". The passengers could not eat the non-kosher food, only the potatoes in their skins and the brine of herring, and because the protagonist of the story had bought some kosher

salami and liverwurst in Hamburg and could treat his fellow passengers with them, he became very popular. (Singer 1988:101-102.) The journey to America was not so terrible for immigrants with money:

She could see the passengers on the decks below and they looked nervous and unkempt. There was kissing, crying, embracing [...] In first class, however [...] Ladies promenaded in expensive dresses and jewellery, fanning themselves as if at a ball. Men walked about in top hats, smoking cigars [...] the *Blücher* was like a hotel. (Estate 142)

...the ship's boarding was [...] pleasant. Clara occupied one of the most spacious cabins. It contained two beds and a sofa, and there was even a toilet. A mirror hung over the sink... (Estate 142)

Some of the Jewish immigrants went to South America. Singer tells about a Jewish immigrant who has come back from Argentina to Warsaw in his novel *Scum* (1991). He had done well in land business and could afford the trip. Actually, there was even a group of 2,000 people called Novyj Israil (New Israel) that emigrated from Russia to Uruguay in the years 1910-1912. (Melville 1990:140.) The Jewish immigration into Argentina began when the Jewish Colonization Association, founded by Baron de Hirsch, tried to establish Jewish agricultural colonies in Argentina in the end of the nineteenth century, but the Jews began to immigrate in larger numbers only in the beginning of the twentieth century. According to the statistics of the Jewish Colonization Association, between 1904-1924, nearly 120,000 of the about 3.5 million immigrants into Argentina were Jews. (Hersch 1931:509-510.)

4.3 The Jewish Immigrants

The composition of Jewish immigrants as a group is peculiar in several ways: number, sex, age and occupation. Between 1899-1924, 46 per cent of all Jewish immigrants were women, the proportion being more than one-third higher than among other groups of immigrants. After the First World War, between 1921-1924, the majority of Jewish immigrants were women. Only the Irish had a

larger proportion of women among their migrants, but when compared with the immigrants from Southern and Eastern Europe, the proportion of females is exceptional; it is two times greater than among the Italians, and more than three times greater than among the Russians and Rumanians. (Hersch 1931:482-484.) Immigration as a family makes the life in the new country easier, because the immigrant does not miss anyone back in the old country, but it also makes the assimilation to the new customs more difficult, and rare. As a family it is normal to keep the same traditions as in the old country, the family speaks their own language at home. The national identity of the immigrant stays strong, which can be considered both good and bad. Psychologically it is good, it also makes the personal identity stronger, and the immigrant does not feel himself to be rootless. But from the viewpoint of the local government and neighbours, a strong national identity can also be harmful: the immigrant is different and wants to stay that way, he does not want to adjust to the customs and traditions of the new country. Also, learning the new language is slower if the family speaks their native language at home.

When we look at the age of immigrants both before the First World War, 1899-1914, and after it, 1921-1924, we notice that during the former period, over 24 per cent of Jewish immigrants were under 14 years of age, the proportion among immigrants in general being about 12 per cent. After the First World war, the proportion of Jews under 16 years was about 30 per cent against the proportion of about 20 per cent among the immigrants' in general. Thus the Jews seem to have emigrated as families. Also the proportion of older people (over 45 years) was greater among Jewish immigrants, 5.8 per cent, than among immigrants in general, 5.2 per cent. (Hersch 1931:485.) As a curiosity, the proportion of immigrants that were over 45 years was high among the French, the Scotch, the English and the Rumanians - about 10 per cent, when it normally was about 5 per cent, and often under, among other nationalities (Hersch 1931:486). This could mean that they immigrated as families with grandparents, or that they immigrated generally older than other immigrants, maybe even that they lived longer, or that their middle-age was higher.

About one half of the Jewish immigrants did not have an occupation when they arrived in America, but then, about half of them were women and

not in their best age where working is concerned (Hersch 1931:488-490). Of those over 850,000 Jewish immigrants with occupation, that arrived between 1899-1914, over 570,000 were skilled laborers, the proportion of them being 68.2 per cent. Only about one per cent of Jewish immigrants were professionals, when their proportion among, for example, the English was over 9 per cent. Of other East European immigrants (Poles, Russians, Rumanians) about 95 per cent were people with miscellaneous occupations, in other words, unskilled laborers, when their proportion among the Jews was only 30 per cent. (Hersch 1931:491-494.)

Between 1899-1924 about 60 per cent of the occupied Jewish immigrants were working in industry, over 20 per cent in general labor and domestic service, and about 10 per cent of them worked in agriculture or as professionals. Of the immigrants in general, almost 50 per cent were engaged in general labor and domestic service, over 25 per cent in agriculture and about 20 per cent in industry. Only about 6 per cent of them had their occupation in commerce and transportation. The proportion of professionals was the same as among the Jews - about 2 per cent. (Hersch 1931:495.) Of the Jewish industrial immigrants, over 60 per cent worked in clothing industry, that is, they were tailors, seamstresses and dressmakers. Besides that, they worked in building and furniture industry (almost 15 per cent), metal and machine industry (over 9 per cent) and in food industry (over 7 per cent). (Hersch 1931:502.)

The permanence and the family character of the Jewish migration can be considered special when compared with other nationalities. This is probably due to the fact that there was not a Jewish state in the world at that time. Almost half of the world's 11.5 million Jews still lived in Tsarist Russia in 1910, just a few years before the great Jewish migration neared its close, but after the First World War, the United States for the first time became the home of the greatest number of Jews in the world. (Rischin 1987: 17-18.) Of the Jewish immigrants that came into the United States between 1908-1924 only 5.2 per cent (52,000) left their new home country, when the proportion for immigrants in general was 33.6 percent - 3,575,000 immigrants returned either to their original countries or emigrated further (Hersch 1931:476-477). Obolensky-Ossinsky agrees with Hersch in that the Jewish immigration into

America has a family character, and that it is practically permanent (Obolensky-Ossinsky 1928:531). Even if there were more (in number) immigrants of other nationalities in America, there is hardly a people other than the Jews, that has immigrated in such proportion, and besides kept their identity as a people.

5 PROBLEMS OF THE NEW COUNTRY

The Jews faced the same problems as the other immigrants when they first arrived to the new country: they could not speak or understand the language, they did not have money or a place to live in, they did not know anyone.

...Everything seemed strange. They passed a barbershop. Through the shop window could be seen men lying on chairs, wrapped in sheets like patients prepared for an operation [...] The carriage passed by factories in which both men and women were busy at machines, handling pieces of material. There was a [...] kind of chaos Clara had never witnessed. (Estate 147)

The Americans looked neither like squires nor like peasants [...] There was a boyish good nature in their eyes, a readiness to shake the hand of any stranger, a willing-ness to laugh, a desire to do a favour [...] To Clara, they were another race. Even the dogs they led seemed more civilized than the Russian hounds. (Estate 167)

The immigrant, unversed in English, could easily end up in equally poor conditions that he had left behind. The deteriorate tenement houses and almost inhumane working conditions in some factory hardly were the paradise the immigrants had come to America for.

‘...I don’t understand a word of English [...] They gave me an English reader, but Americans pronounce words differently. Even their mouths seem different from ours. Only God knows if I’ll ever learn this language.’ (Estate 60)

The most important thing for an immigrant was to learn the language. The factory workers did not earn much, but they did not have to speak so much English. In Argentina the Jewish women (except for the prostitutes) did not work at all, in New York they could work in a landsman’s factory. If they became servants, they would have to share the room with other girls, work the whole week and not earn much. (Singer 1991:199.)

‘New York is another world. It’s as if one were walking upside down. It’s not as pretty as Paris, far from it! Even ugly. [...] children play on the streets...’ (Estate 60)

‘We rented a room from a widow, who also gives us lunch. The Yiddish here is different from what we speak at home. It is mixed with English. The landlady is called the ‘Missus’, and the tenants, ‘boarders’.’ (Estate 60)

But there was no turning back; most of the Jewish immigrants did not have enough money to return to the old home country, and actually there was not even a real home country where they could return to. Immigration to America can also be understood as symbolizing death: you took a ship over a great water, to a strange country with strange customs, where the streets were supposed to be paved with gold like in Heaven. There was no chance to return to the life in the old country. It was a journey the immigrant only made once, with the exception of a few who returned, and probably felt as rootless visiting the old country as they felt in the new. Immigration to America differed from death in that letters could be sent over the Ocean:

‘...My dears, you needn’t worry about us, although it doesn’t seem as splendid here as the agent claimed. Many people are out of work. On a street [...] workers stand, waiting to be hired. One carries a saw, another the head of a sewing machine, or some other tool of his trade [...] the whole procedure resembles a slave auction...’ (Estate 61)

‘There are days when I’m ready to return to Europe. I only have to save enough for my fare...’ (Estate 63)

Singer tells in his short story *Burial at Sea*, pp. 25-35, in the short story collection *The Death of Methuselah And Other Stories* (1988) that the third class passengers were taken to Ellis Island and examined by a doctor. If they had weak eyes, or were otherwise ill, they were sent back. The officials spoke many languages, English, Yiddish, Russian, Polish and even Chinese. (Singer 1988:33.) For an immigrant with money and knowledge of English the arrival was different. They had to have some money with them, probably to show that

they could support themselves, and that they would not become a burden to the community, or turn to criminal ways:

‘We finally arrived in the land of ‘the streets paved with gold.’ As a rule, immigrants were taken to Ellis Island, but when I showed the money I had brought with me, I was allowed to enter without delay.’ (Crown 185)

‘...Finally we arrived in New York. Long before we reached the harbour, the Statue of Liberty came into view and everyone shouted: ‘Hurrah!’ The officials let us off quickly. Immigrants only have to show that they have five dollars or ten roubles...’ (Estate 60)

It was raining when they docked in New York. Clara, Louisa, and Felusia went through customs [...] and came out into a street paved with broad stones [...] The first-class passengers, who had been allowed to disembark before the others, got into hansom cabs, whose drivers wore oilcloth raincoats and wet top hats. (Estate 146)

The young ones were the quickest to adjust to the new conditions; they learned the language quickly and they were strong enough to work long hours and even to have two jobs, so that they could earn money and soon establish a company of their own, where they could employ cheap labour, other new comers, to work. (For example, Fine 1988:22-23.) These, usually clothing factories, were called sweatshops. The factories operated in deteriorated buildings, where the working conditions were miserable; the rooms were poorly illuminated, and not much attention was paid to the workers’ safety.

‘...Maybe you’ve heard of the Triangle Building fire? In a few minutes, tens of maybe hundreds of factory girls were burned to death there.’ (Crown 256)

A character in Singer’s short story *Fate*, pp.231-240 in *A Friend of Kafka* (1972), describes the life of an immigrant family. She was born in Europe and her parents spoke Yiddish. So did she, before she forgot most of it. They used to live on the East Side, where the family had an apartment of three

dark rooms, and a toilet in the hall, and where her mother kept boarders. The Father worked fifteen hours a day in a sweatshop, and sometimes he would sleep at the factory, because by the time he would get home, it would already be daybreak and a start of a new workday. His job was so heavy that he began to spit blood. (Singer 1972:231-232.) Many of the Jewish immigrants had optimistic thoughts of America, and about living there, but not all of them enjoyed their lives in the new home country:

‘One seldom sees a ragged or dirty or barefoot person here. Everyone eats white bread, even paupers, and no one is afraid of saying what he thinks. Women, too [...] Work isn’t considered demeaning. I’ll have to work in a factory or ‘shop’.’ (Estate 61)

This is the way the immigrants wrote back to their old country, but the reality of a worker’s life was often not so rosy:

‘Today from 6 a.m. until evening I stood at a machine making covers for boxes. I’ve always taken the side of the exploited but never imagined the hell that exists in every workshop or factory - the noise of the machines, the dust, the stink, the insults of the overseer [...] The feet ache, the eyes close, one’s head feels as if screws were being bored into it, and all this, six days out of the week, for the miserable wage of five dollars’ (Estate 62)

Even though there were ”older” Jewish immigrants (from Germany, for example) in America, they did not necessarily make the life easier for the new comers. The German Jews that had come earlier had already been americanized, their traditions, also religious, were western, which the religious leaders, rabbis, of the East European Jews felt was a threat to their Hasidic traditions. The social differences became emphasized, and also the generation gap had an extra meaning for the immigrants:

...Among the immigrants the father speaks one language and the son another. Often, the father himself has already half-forgotten his. (Love 261)

That most of the immigrants were men, caused some problems, too. There were not enough suitable girls for them to marry in the new country, so some men had made it their business to transport young girls, wife-candidates, across the ocean, and if they were not good for wives, they were for prostitution, anyway. (Singer 1960:121.)

People were looking for beautiful girls everywhere - in Argentina, in Brazil - wherever men travel without their families [...] As soon as a girl finds herself in a foreign country, without a passport, without a penny, rendered dumb, she will do whatever you want. (Scum 85)

Isaac Singer's novel *Scum* (1991) tells about trading Jewish girls into prostitution in South America. The protagonist of *Scum*, Max Barabander, tries to persuade a girl to go with him to South America by telling her that everything was more advanced there and a girl needed not to be afraid of a man. He tells that in his country there were more men than women and a woman was there treated with respect. He promises to take the girl across the border without a passport, and to the ship. He promises to take care of her, to take away her rags and dress her like a princess with a hat, a purse and a pretty cape. He tells about certain creams that would take off freckles, because she would have to have skin as white as milk, and tells her to lift her sleeve to have a look. (Singer 1991:91-92.) So the girls were sold like cattle to please the men, and probably some of the girls fell for these false promises. For this business the girls needed to be beautiful and from common families; girls who could not sign their names - radical girls, or the "shmintelligentsia" could send the slave traders to gallows (Singer 1991:87).

A girl was seduced and right away she became a prostitute. A girl who wasn't a virgin was in deep trouble. Today some girls sell themselves, others want to overthrow the Tsar. (Scum 211)

Maybe the last sentence of the citation above implies also the fact that some of the radical modern girls were not so careful about their reputation and whether they were virgins or not. The real radicals thought that the old moral rules were

old fashioned and dead, at least as soon as the revolution, that they were planning, would come. The laws of nature were the ones people should follow, and remaining a kosher virgin was definitely against the nature in these radical circles.

Even the climate in America was different from the East European, and that could also be a reason for homesickness:

He thought of the winters on the Radziwill estate, and the later ones in Kiev: the skating, the sleigh rides, the fur coats, the supper parties. Who in America could understand how gay it had been back there? (Estate 166)

Loneliness was also a problem to some immigrants, as Singer tells that it was for him:

[...] I had read [...] of the difficulties encountered by immigrants to America, but these hadn't been lone individuals. Whatever they went through they shared with fellow countrymen, relatives, co-workers in sweatshops, boarders with whom they shared a corner of a room or even a bed. Some arrived with wives and children at their sides [...] (Love 256)

Singer, in his short story *The Colony*, pp. 189-200 in *A Friend of Kafka* (1972), tells about one of the colonies Baron de Hirsch had built to take the Jews away from their insubstantial businesses and turn them into useful farmers. Singer claims that there is something biblical in the Jews' abandoning their traditions and forgetting their fathers. (Singer 1972:192.) In the same story an old man tells about the Jewish settlers' difficulties in South America. When they arrived, there was nothing there, you could not even buy a piece of bread. An epidemic broke out, and children and old people died. The baron sent delegates, agriculturalists that could not tell wheat from rye. The immigrants wanted to leave but they did not have the fare. They signed contracts and became debtors of the philanthropists, who were ashamed of Yiddish and spoke languages the immigrants did not know. Besides, the Spanish people in their neighbourhood hated them (Singer 1972:198.) It looks like the life of the

immigrants in South America was even more difficult than in the United States or in Canada.

6 ASSIMILATION OR TRADITION?

6.1 Assimilation

‘After a day’s hard work, she takes classes in English [...] She goes to all kinds of lectures [...]’ (Estate 63)

Learning the language was the first step of assimilation. The Jews’ own language, Yiddish, had travelled across the ocean, and many of the immigrants knew the languages of the countries they came from, Russian, Polish, Rumanian, etc., but knowing English was like a demonstration, that there is an American Jew, and that he feels at home. The Jewish immigrants had their own Yiddish theatre, press, fiction and poetry, but writing fiction in English was an act of assimilation. Having the leisure to write fiction, and write it in the language of his adopted land, meant, of course, that the immigrant author had achieved a measure of success in America. Many new American Jews made a self-conscious attempt to shed the remnants of Old World culture and absorb the values and habits of Christian America. They wanted to assimilate, to become americanized, and only the next generation became interested in Cultural Pluralism, where tradition, too, has its position. (Fine 1988:17.)

There are hundreds of objects here for which there are no words in Yiddish. They may not even have names in English [...] I get an occasional urge to write about America, but how can you describe character when everything around is rootless? (Love 261)

Before 1880 the United States government had accepted the immigrants’ speaking of their mother-tongues. This changed, maybe because of the origins of the immigrants changed; most of the immigrants before 1880 had been from northern Europe, but the 35 million immigrants who came to the United States after 1880 were mostly from southern and eastern Europe. According to Ofelia Garcia, ”they were considered racially inferior and thus race and ethnicity became the predominant factors in restricting the use of non-English languages in both public and private.” Before this, only the ethnic languages of the Native Americans and Africans had been considered inferior, other ethnic mother-

tongues had been accepted. There might have been also economical reasons for this. According to Garcia, the economy had in 1880 begun to provide fewer opportunities, and this "made it necessary to restrict linguistic rights as a means of limiting educational and economic benefits". These restrictions were directed toward racially distinct immigrants at a time of economic hardship, and during the first World War they were coupled with mistrust of the large German speaking minority, and probably also of the Yiddish speaking minority, which led to the Americanization movement and to the ban on use of non-English languages. "By 1923 there were thirty-four states that explicitly allowed only English as the medium of instruction in both public and private schools." (Garcia 1985:148.) This is not only a question of language, but it has to do with racism as well. Life was surely easiest for immigrants from English-speaking countries, Great Britain and Ireland, but certainly all West Europeans had it easier than the East European immigrants.

She [the daughter] was learning English rapidly and becoming Americanized. She was making every effort to rid herself of her Polish accent and even went so far as to mock her mother's halting English. (Estate 226)

According to linguists, there are two kinds of motivation to learn a new language: instrumental motivation and integrative motivation. Instrumental motivation means that a person wants to acquire something with the help of the new language, for example, he wants to learn enough to be able to act in official situations. People with integrative motivation want to integrate and to become a part of the new culture. Some linguists make a difference even between integrative and assimilative motivations. People with assimilative motivation want to be incorporated into the new community and be as similar to the members of it as possible. (Linnarud 1993:90-91.) Assimilative motivation is common among the immigrants, especially younger generation, they are more willing to start a new life. Older people are more prejudiced, and more afraid of making mistakes than younger people, so learning a new language is more difficult for an adult than for a youth. Older people often have only instrumental motivation in language learning or integrative, at the most.

Among the Jewish immigrants, the young reform Jews wanted to assimilate, but the older and the Hasids did not want to mix with the Gentiles.

‘My dear Papa and Mama, Forgive me for not writing in Yiddish. I tried, but somehow I’ve forgotten too much. I don’t remember all the letters [...]’ (Estate 59)

But even while the Jews wanted to assimilate, they created their own Yiddish art and entertainment in America. A character in Singer’s *Shosha* (1979) claims he knows the Yiddish theater in America like the back of his hand. The immigrants did not have much entertainment except the theater and the Yiddish paper. (Singer 1979:66.)

Most Jewish immigrants brought to America a tradition of communal life. This body of folkways and institutional experience, *kehillah*, nourished by ties of religion and language, and common life style, eased the immigrant’s adjustment to the alien environment. For the newly arrived, it provided the first familiar landmarks in a strange country. (Goren 1970:1.) It was quite easy to maintain the *kehillah* in America too, for most of the immigrants settled to live in the same neighbourhoods as the people from their village ”back home”, so they transported the East European Jewish village to America, to New York City, for example.

The Jewish immigrants amused themselves by attending the Yiddish theatre, lectures, discussions, celebrations [...] There were employment offices, tea parlours, and cellar restaurants where [...] musicians played. Fraternal societies held meetings. The stores remained open late [...] They all seemed part of one family. Each ship from Europe brought socialists, bearded and long-haired revolutionaries who made speeches about the struggle for freedom [...] Every home had a room or two rented out [...] (Estate 226)

But there were also many new things to see in the New World for the immigrant:

‘Many Germans as well as Jews who speak German live in this neighbourhood [...] (They are called ‘Yekies’ here.) [...] one sees in New York Negroes, all black, as well as Chinese, without

pigtails. One meets Spaniards, Italians, and even some Poles'
(Estate 60)

In Toronto, Canada, Spadina Avenue was the center of Yiddishism, and Singer says that he was again strolling on Krochmalna Street where he lived in his childhood in Warsaw:

the same shabby buildings, the same pushcarts and vendors of half-rotten fruit, the familiar smells of the sewer, soup kitchens, freshly baked bagels, smoke from the chimneys. (Love 317)

Bernard J. Bamberger in *Multimedia Encyclopedia* (1991) claims that by the eighteenth century, the Jewish community no longer provided its members with political status. He declares that wherever Jews received citizenship, the old Jewish community lost its authority, and that it never existed in the New World - in Russia it was dissolved by government order in 1844. (Bamberger 1991.) But living in a community, in a ghetto, continued till this century, and surely the religious leaders were still leaders of the community, at least to the uneducated people. The Jewish immigrants had brought the ghetto with them to America:

Yeshivas and cabarets, kosher restaurants and travel agencies, wedding halls and matrimonial bureaux abounded. Prostitutes hailed men to their rooms - sextons called them to a quorum in the synagogue. In the shops, the workers sang both liturgical and socialist songs. (Estate 226)

Preservation of religious traditions worried the religious leaders a great deal. Special guide booklets were published, and in them the immigrants were advised to maintain their religious traditions at whatever cost. They were warned against eating forbidden foods, neglecting their children and shaving beards. The booklets always emphasized the supremacy of eternal religious values over making money. Sabbath observance was seen as the main test of a Jew's fidelity. Besides, the Jews were advised not to emigrate at all, or at least not permanently. (Gartner 1987:33-34.)

‘I only want to bring you here, so that we’ll all be together. There are many synagogues and religious Jews with beards, although they all wear short cloaks’ (Estate 61)

In the new environment it was not so easy to find strictly kosher food, so some of the immigrants were afraid to eat, lest the food be unkosher.

‘The food wasn’t too good. Many ate nothing but potatoes in their skins, and herring, because the food was not kosher.’ (Estate 59-60)

In *Scum* (1991) the protagonist, Max; had almost forgotten Sabbath in Argentina. His wife and her servant used to iron the laundry on Saturdays, and he and his son would play billiards. (Singer 1991:125.) In a Christian (mostly Roman Catholic in South America) environment it may be difficult for a Jew to keep ones customs, and in modern world the keeping the Sabbath, or Sunday for Christians, as a day of rest and peace is not so common anymore.

In a short story by Singer, *A Wedding in Brownsville*, pp.161-173 in *Short Friday* (1967), the protagonist is tired of modern American Jewish celebrations: the Anglicized Yiddish and the Yiddishized English irritates him, and he thinks that the Jewish laws and customs are completely distorted; men who have no regard for Jewishness wear skullcaps, and the reverend rabbis and cantors ape the Christian ministers. He is ashamed in front of his Christian wife that American Judaism is such a mess. (Singer 1967:161-162.) It seems that Singer himself, writing about this subject, is not all satisfied with the assimilated Judaism.

One of the immigrants biggest problems was: should he be americanized, or should he live by the old Jewish traditions, and, in a way, stay outside of the American life style. This problem, ”this dual process - the struggle to maintain ethnic integrity and to achieve social accommodation”, is one of the basic problems of assimilation. (Goren 1970:3.) This same problem is quite central in Singers production, too.

‘[...]a letter full of despair, but don’t take it too seriously. Everyone feels that way at first. One is terribly nervous and

wanders around as if in a dream. At times, I imagine I'm still aboard ship. Everything shakes - the room, the street, the ground, the sky. But they say one grows accustomed to it.' (Estate 61)

6.2 Tradition: Hevra Kadisha - Burial Society

Arthur A. Goren discusses in his article one of the most important Jewish traditions, namely burial society, *Hevra Kadisha*. It was important for a Jew to be buried among his fellow Jews, on a Jewish cemetery, even if he had not been very religious. In Europe the Jewish community had a special society, *Hevra Kadisha*, for traditional burial. It was a religious charitable organization, which buried the dead with certain traditional rituals.

[...] he had passed away. The Burial-Society brethren came by, picked him up, lit candles by his head, opened the windows, intoned the prayer [...] Afterwards, they washed him on the ablution board, carried him on a stretcher to the cemetery [...] (Short 200)

The price for the burial was decided by the age of the dead - children's burials were cheaper - , by their wealth, by how much they had contributed to the community in their life time, and by the place of their grave - burial near a celebrity or a religious leader was more expensive. (Goren 1987:66-67.)

The Burial Society demanded an exorbitant fee for the plot, but Colonel Shachowsky warned them that he would have them sent to Siberia if they overcharged the widow. (Estate 11)

According to Singers novels and short stories, the *Hevra Kadisha* members seem to be quite strong and unsentimental people, sometimes even "properly drunk, as befitted a member of burial society", not believing in supernatural things. (Singer 1979:213, 237) In Singer's novel *Shosha* (1979) a man, who is a member of the burial society, said that they knew the truth about people. A woman could fix herself up for the outside world, cover everything

with rouge and powder and corsets, but when the burial society members stripped her for shrouds, the truth was there. (Singer 1979:174.)

‘Here the elders of the burial society are the real leaders. They refused to sell them [the pimps] plots in the cemetery [...so that] They had to establish their own cemetery.’ (Friend 193)

The local *Hevra Kadisha* had quite much influence in the Jewish community; everyone would need their services some day. If the customer had been unpopular in the community, a criminal or suicide case, for example, he might have been buried outside the cemetery fence, (for example in Singer 1967:25,70) without ceremonies, even abusing the corpse. Or if the customer had contributed meagerly to the community, the burial society would charge more for the burial from his relatives. On the other hand, the money collected was used for burying the poor people and supporting the widowed and orphans. (Goren 1987:67-68.) Some of the Jewish burial customs are described in the following:

Shaindel’s corpse [...] was kept in the poorhouse. She was laid out on the floor, with her feet towards the door. At her head [...] burned two candles [...] The women from the Burial Society sat on a bench and sewed a shroud [...] it was not cut with scissors but torn and basted with large stitches [...] they heated the water with which to purify the corpse [...] After the cleansing, Shaindel was placed on a stretcher, and four men carried her to the cemetery. (Estate 216)

‘Jews have to be buried all alike’ [...] shrouds had to be made of plain linen. Scissors couldn’t even be used, the linen had to be torn. The women didn’t sew it, they basted it. (Friend 173)

Jacob, enveloped in a prayer shawl, with shards on his eyes, and a stem of myrtle between his fingers, was buried near Sarah. (Slave 310)

In a Jewish funeral a friend or a relative - child, wife, husband - usually says the prayer *Kaddish* on the grave, to make sure that the soul is taken to Paradise. The prayer is very old and it was originally recited in the end of a sermon; it is

related in thought and language to the "Lord's Prayer" of Christians. (Bamberger 1991.)

The burials changed as the time went on in America. The Jews wanted to be buried among their relatives and other Jews, and the synagogues had their cemeteries, but in the end of the nineteenth century private, commercial undertakers started to compete with the *Hevra Kadishas*. Of course they were Jewish, too. They guaranteed the coffin would be manufactured by Jews, and that the driver of the cart would be Jewish, too. According to an announcement the ritual bathing of the corpse *tahara* would also be done in traditional way. Later also bigger companies, funeral homes, came to share the burial market. (Goren 1987:69-71.) The secular Jews were a problem, the socialists, for example, and the genteel husbands and wives. Some liberal rabbis allowed also the spouses to be buried on Jewish cemeteries, but also new cemeteries were founded, for example, *The Arbeiter Ring's* cemetery in 1892. (Goren 1987:70-74.)

‘[In America] Death has no special significance. Mortuaries stand between barbershops and restaurants. Cemeteries are not fenced in [...]’ (Estate 62)

The Jews have much more simple customs in burial, than Christians, and this causes a character in a Singer-story to convert:

‘I’m not a Jewess anymore [...] because the Jews shame the dead. The Christians dress the corpse in his finest. They place him in a coffin and cover him with flowers. The Jews wrap their dead in rags and throw them into a muddy hole.’ (Friend 176)

In America the Jewish burial customs have changed, and become more like their Christian equivalent. In the short story *The Last Gaze*, pp.220-232 in the short story collection *The Death of Methuselah and Other Stories* (1988) Singer describes a funeral:

A crowd had gathered in the chapel. The coffin rested in its appointed place amid the wreaths and flowers. The electric candles were lit [...] A rabbi in a tiny scullcap over a shock of

freshly pomaded hair spoke with customary words, booming the biblical phrases with the usual mournful intonations. (Methuselah 225)

Such passages, as below, create an extra sorrowful atmosphere in the story, but it also shows well how far away modern people have tried to push death and old customs. A question arises, what is the use of trying to imitate the old ways, if one has to do it with help of prayers read from paper. This might actually be the question Singer wanted to ask.

Everything had been prepared beforehand: the open grave, the artificial grass, which did not even pretend to create an illusion [...] Some man said Kaddish, reading the Aramaic words transliterated into English on a leaflet printed especially for such occasions. (Methuselah 227)

In Singer's *The Estate* (1969) there is also the problem of a son of a mixed marriage: the Jewish cemetery did not accept the child for burial because he had not been circumcised, and the Catholics did not want him because he had not been converted. In the end, a third church, the Evangelicals, accepted the corpse to be buried in their cemetery. (Singer 1969:169.)

It is interesting that the mass migration to America after all turned out to be lucky, even though the anti-assimilationists feared the americanization of the Jews, and the disappearing of Jewish culture shortly after the Jews' immigration to America. Nobody could expect that the Nazis would totally destroy the European Jewish culture. Now the main sources for the study of Jewish culture are found in America, where it had travelled with the immigrants from Europe. (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1987:83.)

7 RADICAL MOVEMENTS

The earlier arrived German Jews had already found their place in society, founded companies, where they employed East European Jews as cheap labour. But, for example, the Russian and Polish Jews had already in their old country been influenced by incipient socialism, and now in the new country saw the German Jews as typical capitalists, and as representatives of all bad that capitalism represents. (Fine 1988:22-23.)

In Vilna, Bialystok, Riga, Minsk, the Jewish intelligentsia and workers engaged in socialist activities [...] others were anarchists; [...] some spoke of forming a Jewish socialist party [...] (Estate 35)

In Singer's *Scum* the protagonist tells that in America, the socialists could feel free to demonstrate. On the first of May they carried red flags and strove for shorter working hours and better pay. (Singer 1991:31-32.)

‘There are good things here also. There’s a socialist paper, printed in German, although its socialism is diluted. Jews play an important role here, especially the German ones.’ (Estate 63)

However, the earlier arrived European Jews helped the newly arrived to settle. There were foundations like the Baron de Hirsch Institute of the Jewish Colonization Association in Canada, that welcomed the new immigrants, found them jobs and apartments, and taught English to both children and adults. (Gartner 1987:30.) The radical socialist Jews accused the philanthropists, though, for using charity and Americanization to silence social protest (Goren 1970:19).

‘[...] politics is an obsession here too, as it is in Russia. Famous socialists arrive from Germany, even the daughter of Karl Marx came on a visit from England. There’s a great concern about anarchists, particularly those who have been sentenced to hang [...]’ (Estate 64)

There were wild rumours in the old country about the colonies that were founded in America by the socialist and anarchist settlers from Europe. The colonies rarely succeeded, because "nobody wanted to work. They traded wives and went hungry. They ran like mice" (Singer 1969:92). But most of the leftists lived among people, limiting their political lives to meetings and gatherings.

‘There are many socialists and anarchists here. Their headquarters is in this neighbourhood.’ (Estate 155)

The East European Jews were enthusiastically taking part in American radical movements and labour unions. They had their own labour unions and fraternal orders, for example *The Arbeiter Ring* of New York, and their own influential press, *The Forward*, and even a political platform, the New York downtown *Socialist Party*. (Goren 1970:19.)

This cafeteria did its best business at night. It had become a gathering place for all kinds of leftists - Stalinists, Trotskyites, anarchists, various radicals and social rebels. Here, they discussed the latest issues of *The Daily Worker* and the Yiddish *Freiheit*, articles in *New Republic* and *The Nation*. (Love 286)

Singer often refers in his novels to radicals, socialists, and disillusioned Stalinists that have turned into Trotskyites. In *Shosha* (1978), there is a Stalinist girl, Dora, who tried to commit suicide after hearing the truth about the communist regime. Her comrades who had gone to Soviet Union had been imprisoned, shot, or sent up north to dig for gold, and accused of being Fascist traitors and spies. (Singer 1978:177.) Also in *The Estate* (1969) there is an imprisoned anarchist woman, Mirale, a revolutionary of the ‘Proletariat’ party (Singer 1969:35-36).

Girls with short hair and in leather jackets *à la* Cheka smoked, sipped black coffee, shouted the latest slogans from Moscow, cursed all the fascists, social democrats, Hearst, Leon Blum, Macdonald, Trotsky, Norman Thomas, Abe Cahan, even Roosevelt [...] (Love 286)

In fact, in *Love and Exile* Singer tells that he had one girlfriend, Sabina, who had not yet decided whether she was a Stalinist, a Trotskyite, or an anarchist; and another, Lena, who was a Stalinist turned into a Trotskyite, and who often quoted Marx, Lenin, Trotsky and Bukharin. (Singer 1984:170,190.) Paul Kresh tells that Singer had a girlfriend, Runya, who was the mother of Singer's only son, Israel, born in 1929. Kresh wonders if Runya and Sabina were the same person, but it was Lena (Singer did not always use the real names of the people he told about in his stories) who carried Singer a baby in his memoirs.

Singer lived for a while with Runya who was a fervent Communist, and Singer was afraid that he, too, would be arrested. And he was, Singer spent a day in jail with thieves and communists, and this experience has found its way to many of his novels. (Kresh 1979:102-103.) Singer describes the conditions of prison at least in *The Estate*, where Mirale is imprisoned for political reasons, and Lucian for murder.(Singer 1969: 104-109.)

Isaac Singer tells about the Yiddish newspaper *Forward* in his memoir *Love And Exile* (1984) that the Yiddishist movement in America had flourished in the period since the first World War. The *Forward* was the largest Yiddish newspaper in America, with about a quarter of a million readers, which was an enormous circulation for a Yiddish newspaper. "The editor of the *Forward*, Abe Cahan, who also wrote in English and was considered something of a classicist in American literature, ruled the paper with an iron hand." The *Forward* was closely connected with the Workmen's Circle and with many trade unions, and it had its own ten-storey building on East Broadway. (Singer 1984:92-93.)

Singer says that the *Forward*, a socialist newspaper, had expressed sympathy toward communism in the first years following the Revolution in Russia. But Abe Cahan had quickly realized that he had erred, and after that the *Forward* became sharply anti-Communist, actually the most important anti-Bolshevik newspaper in America. "The *Forward* writers, most of whom were experts on all the radical movements in Russia, uncovered Stalin's murders long before the democratic world became aware of them." (Singer 1984:93.) In

Singer's opinion, the Stalinists seemed to consider this one newspaper, *Forward*, and its writers the only major obstacle to the coming of the revolution (Kresh 1979:112).

8 ANTI-SEMITISM

Since the 1880s the protestant elite of America, especially the Nordic immigrants and the WASPs (the White Anglo Saxon Protestants), felt that the German Jews, and their economical success, were a threat to them. Status and social control became important in the industrializing country. One form of social control was so called "internal" discrimination which barred the Jews, not only from prestigious private clubs, resorts and universities, but also from middle-class housing, employment and educational institutions. (Stember 1966:12-13.)

Later, also "external" discrimination started to restrict the immigration. This was the beginning for the discrimination of the East European immigrants. The East European Jews were discriminated more than their Central European counterparts, because they were visibly different (the Hasidic Jews in their long gaberdines, beards and sidelocks) and the different looking immigrants were discriminated the most, even in the "melting pot". The Central European Jews were assimilated and blended more easily in the American society. Hostility towards the foreigners in general was basically the reason to the social conflicts of the 1920s in America, rather than the political anti-Semitism that was raising in Europe. (Stember 1966:12-13.) One of Singer's characters gives advice to a newly arrived:

‘There are Jew-haters here too. They call Jews sheeny, kike. But you give it back to them. When two people fight, others don't interfere. There is a saying: ‘Mind your own business!’’ (Estate 150)

The religion was probably not the reason to discrimination of the Jews, for it does not show, at least on reform Jews, and the Jews had in time learned to live as strangers among the other peoples and not to draw attention in possibly violent environment, with the Hasids as an exception. Singer writes also about the discrimination among the Jews, the refugees from Germany regarded the Yiddish speaking *Ostjuden* with disapproval. The German refugees

believed in assimilation - "the Jewish minority should blend into the majority, not saddle itself with the East European *Golus*." (Singer 1994:144.)

Later, after the Second World War, Judaism has become a part of the American culture, like Catholicism and Protestantism. "The climate in which they [the American Jews] live today is best described as one of 'asemitism' - an indifference to or unawareness of their identity", Morton Keller, a historian of American institutions, claims in Stember's report *Jews in the Mind of America* (1966). This is probably due to the secularism of the modern world, the religion is no longer a public issue. (Stember 1966:14-16.) People hardly come to think of other peoples' religion, not even their race, unless it is obvious, like, for example, dark skin.

However, we cannot say that anti-Semitism does not exist in America. Anti-Semitism is like the tide, it is low or high, from time to time, and from place to place. There are different answers to the question "what makes men hate Jews?" Some specialists have said that an anti-Semite is a certain kind of character, which sought a "scapegoat" for guilt and frustration. Others see anti-Semitism as a mode of stress in the social system, or as a way of preserving status boundaries. The researchers stress the distinctions between traditional, religious anti-Semitism and the modern, political form. (Stember 1966:11-12.) Still, it is surprising that more sympathy and desire to help has been expressed to the refugees of the communist countries than had ever been bestowed upon those who tried to escape the Nazi Holocaust (Stember 1966:9).

Singer has told in an interview that he has not suffered from anti-Semitism because he has mostly stayed among the Jews. He did not go out to the Polish area - to the University or the finer hotels. In America he kept to the simpler apartments and cafeterias, he lived on the West Side, not on the East. He wanted to be with the Jewish people and said that he was not precisely what one called "a mixer". (Ahnlund 1978:194-195.)

CONCLUSION

The East European Jews were driven to immigration to America by both persecution and the economical situation. Some also left for personal reasons. In the end of nineteenth century their destination of emigration was Northern America because of its strong economical growth, which offered a chance to even become rich. Also the liberal climate tempted the Jews living in authoritarian society. The immigration was relatively easy because of the developing transport over the Atlantic ocean and the minimal formalities on the borders.

In the peak immigration years of 1905-1914, almost all of the immigrants from the East European countries, for example Russia, Poland, Rumania, were Jewish. The native people did not emigrate to America in such large numbers, probably because their life in their own home country was easier than the persecuted Jews'. Many Jews were also politically active, and they had to leave to avoid prison and so that they could freely express their opinion.

The adaptation and assimilation was probably easier for the younger immigrants, and also if the whole family immigrated, it made the adjustment to new conditions easier. The Jews immigrated mostly as families, and they settled into the new country permanently. Also the developing Jewish communities in the big cities and the concentrations of Jewish settlements resembled the Jewish villages and ghettos of the old contry, which helped the Jews to adjust to the new country. On the other hand, the economical success and the great number of Jews felt like threat to the American population and a degree of discrimination existed. The Jews were also somewhat seclusive because of their religion and culture, and mixed marriages between Jews and Christians were not desirable to either groups.

The upper class of Jews consisted of the earlier immigrated, wealthy and Americanized German - or Central European - Jews, who wanted to isolate themselves from the later arrived East European Jews, among which different radical ideologies, like socialism, sprouted. These groups also differed in their religion. Thus the East European Jewry really consisted of two groups, the

Radicals and the Hasids. The German Jews were mostly reform Jews, not quite as "orthodox" as the East European Hasids. The socialists and other radicals were mostly atheists. The most important traditions, the observing of Sabbath, eating of more or less *kosher*-food, and burial according to Jewish customs were observed among both groups. That the Jews in such great number immigrated to America turned out to be lucky, because thus the Holocaust could not entirely destroy the European Jewish culture, which now survives among the Jews of America. The immigrants in general have also contributed a lot to the American culture, on fields of literature, arts, and science.

One of the famous East European Jewish immigrants, Isaac Bashevis Singer, has in his novels and short stories described the Jewish life back in the old country, and the adjustment to the new life in America. The old country is pictured tenderly, but not necessarily in a flattering way, of which Singer has been criticized. The reader gets a sad, and a little melancholy picture of the life in the lost time and place, the East European Jewish village or ghetto, but however the author brings a smile through tears on the readers face, when he describes the weaknessess and power of the forgotten people. He reveals as well the changes in the immigrant's inner self, the psychological problems of immigration.

Singer writes about the rootlessness, the lack of moral and character, and the difficulties of everyday life. The little people and their life, that he vividly describes, give a picture of the immigrants problems and difficulties of adjustment, and his writing helps the readers understand both where these people came from and what kind of life they lead in the new country. This helps us even understand some of the problems and feelings of refugees and immigrants of today. Singer's writing mirrors also the problems of modern man, he describes the cities and the loneliness of their inhabitants

The "exodus" of East European Jews, that started in the nineteenth century, has now drawn almost to a close, because immigration is not as easy anymore, because of all the restrictions. Both leaving the East European countries and getting in to America has become more difficult. But now, after the collapse of the Soviet empire and return of democracy to East European

countries, leaving from the countries behind the Iron Curtain has again become easier.

Later the Jews have moved more to Israel, which became independent in 1948, but the critical conditions in the country, the lack of space and unemployment still encourage the East European Jews to move to America, to seek a higher standard of living. "Since 1965, with the liberalization of American immigration laws, Soviet Jewry has settled in major American and Canadian cities, particularly New York. In the last eight years alone, more than ninety thousand Soviet Jews have arrived, half of them settling in New York City." (Kirshenblatt-Giblett 1987:85.) During the cold war, it was almost impossible for the Soviet Jews to emigrate, but now there is a new mass migration to the West, and to Israel, where the stream of Jewish emigrants is heading today. The problems are the same as they were in America in the turn of the century: new language, poverty, housing shortage and unemployment. Also the customs and traditions are different. The Jews of Eastern Europe have different traditions, (if any, after a generation of socialism), while the Israeli, except for the Orthodox Jews, are quite westernized.

One more problem in Israel are the Arabs, who feel the stream of Jews as a threat to them, and see it as a sign of Israel having established her position in the Middle East. Surrounded by enemies, the Jewish state is in constant danger of being wiped out, but the first time in history the Jews have a country of their own. Singer says about Israel through one of his characters:

'This is our land, this is our home. Here, maybe we'll have the privilege of dying if we're not driven into the sea.' (Shosha 275)

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APPENDIXES**Table 1. Immigrant arrivals to the United States 1875 - 1974 (in thousands)**

1875	227	1900	449	1925	294	1950	249
1876	170	1901	488	1926	304	1951	206
1877	142	1902	649	1927	335	1952	266
1878	138	1903	857	1928	307	1953	170
1879	178	1904	813	1929	280	1954	208
1880	457	1905	1,026	1930	242	1955	238
1881	669	1906	1,101	1931	97	1956	322
1882	789	1907	1,285	1932	36	1957	327
1883	603	1908	783	1933	23	1958	253
1884	519	1909	752	1934	29	1959	261
1885	395	1910	1,042	1935	35	1960	265
1886	334	1911	879	1936	36	1961	271
1887	490	1912	838	1937	50	1962	284
1888	547	1913	1,198	1938	68	1963	306
1889	444	1914	1,218	1939	83	1964	292
1890	455	1915	327	1940	71	1965	297
1891	560	1916	299	1941	52	1966	323
1892	580	1917	295	1942	29	1967	362
1893	440	1918	111	1943	24	1968	454
1894	286	1919	141	1944	29	1969	359
1895	259	1920	430	1945	38	1970	373
1896	343	1921	805	1946	109	1971	370
1897	231	1922	310	1947	147	1972	385
1898	229	1923	523	1948	171	1973	400
1899	312	1924	707	1949	188	1974	395

(Mitchell 1983: 91-93.)

Table 2. Jewish immigrant aliens admitted to the United States between 1899-1924

Year	Immigrants	Year	Immigrants
1899	37,415	1912	80,595
1900	60,764	1913	101,330
1901	58,098	1914	138,051
1902	57,668	1915	26,497
1903	76,203	1916	15,108
1904	106,236	1917	17,342
1905	129,910	1918	3,672
1906	153,748	1919	3,055
1907	149,182	1920	14,292
1908	103,387	1921	119,036
1909	57,551	1922	53,524
1910	84,260	1923	49,719
1911	91,223	1924	49,989

(Willcox 1929:464.)

Table 3. Immigrants from Russia, 1899-1924

Year	Total	Russian	Jews	Polish	Finnish
1899	60,982	1,657	24,275	15,517	6,048
1900	90,787	1,165	37,011	22,500	12,515
1901	85,257	655	37,660	21,475	9,966
1902	107,347	1,536	37,846	33,859	13,854
1903	136,093	3,565	47,689	39,548	18,776
1904	145,141	3,907	77,544	32,577	10,077
1905	184,897	3,278	92,388	47,224	16,671
1906	215,665	5,282	125,234	46,204	13,461
1907	258,943	16,085	114,932	73,122	14,311
1908	156,711	16,324	71,978	37,947	6,303
1909	120,460	9,099	39,150	37,770	11,202
1910	186,792	14,768	59,824	63,635	14,999
1911	158,721	17,581	65,472	40,193	8,942
1912	162,395	21,101	58,389	51,244	5,708
1913	291,040	48,472	74,033	112,345	11,156
1914	255,660	40,241	102,638	66,278	10,968
1915	26,187	2,030	14,496	4,486	1,650
1916	7,842	1,026	2,138	277	3,834
1917	12,716	1,006	6,801	360	3,745
1918	4,242	686	2,036	125	1,086
1919	1,403	370	503	54	243
1920	1,751	269	460	31	640
1921	10,193	793	4,661	209	3,424
1922	19,910	884	14,415	121	2,190
1923	21,151	1,060	14,264	195	2,692
1924	16,311	1,715	10,268	149	2,853

(Willcox 1929:488)

Table 4. Immigrants from Rumania, 1899-1924

Year	Total	Rumanian	Jews
1899	1,606	60	1,343
1900	6,459	214	6,183
1901	7,155	204	6,827
1902	7,196	267	6,589
1903	9,310	514	8,562
1904	7,087	426	6,446
1905	4,437	423	3,854
1906	4,476	297	3,872
1907	4,384	339	3,605
1908	5,228	333	4,455
1909	1,590	113	1,390
1910	2,145	267	1,701
1911	2,522	145	2,188
1912	1,997	346	1,512
1913	2,155	375	1,640
1914	4,032	1,182	2,646
1915	481	101	321
1916	90	15	55
1917	66	24	21
1918	59	50	1
1919	19	12	3
1920	1,890	487	1,304
1921	25,817	5,207	18,238
1922	10,287	1,213	7,107
1923	11,947	1,032	7,150
1924	11,142	960	5,535

(Willcox 1929:487.)

Table 5. Immigrants from Poland, 1920-1924

Year	Total	Polish	Jews
1920	4,813	849	3,793
1921	95,089	18,253	74,755
1922	28,635	5,242	22,373
1923	26,538	11,290	14,125
1924	28,806	15,687	12,185

(Willcox 1929:487.)