

POSUDEK DIPLOMOVE PRÁCE

Title: The Brothers Isaac Bashevic Singer and Israel Joshua Singer: Analysis of Four Jewish-American Novels

Author: Lukáš Mandžikievič

Zadavající katedra: Katedra anglického jazyka.

Supervisor: Christopher Koy, M.A.

Summary

Mr. Mandžikievič analyzed American novels originally written in Yiddish by the Nobel Prize winning writer Isaac Bashevis Singer and his older brother Israel Joshua Singer.

1. The goal

The goal is to analyze the representation of America and American Jews in the fiction of these immigrant writers, and this entails issues such as post-Holocaust alienation (religious and cultural etc), assimilation, traditional vs. modern family relations, and to a limited extent in two novels, politics.

2. Structure

Foregrounding the thesis in the religious and historical origins of the writers is appropriate since I.B. Singer was trained to be a rabbi and assimilates various encounters the Jewish religion, both orthodox and reformed, into his fiction. Mr. Mandžikievič covers the thesis novel-by-novel rather than thematically, so some repetition ensues from this structure, particularly in the cases of *Mashugar* and *Enemies, A Love Story*. Mr. Mandžikievič includes biographical issues, something often frowned upon by critics, but in this case appropriate, given the fact that I.B.Singer himself was married to two women at the same time because he thought his Polish-Jewish wife and son had died in the Holocaust, linking, for one example, the fate of Herman Broder to his own autobiography. This and other issues are neatly packaged by Mr. Mandžikievič.

3. Literature

The four novels and the occasional (and actually here quite limited sources for) secondary literature seems appropriate, though it would surely have been useful to obtain more scholarship given the difficulty of (particularly I.B.Singer's) many long-forgotten Jewish traditions which even American Jews themselves today scarcely understand. Additionally, there is perhaps too much reliance on interviews I.B. Singer granted (writers are notorious for giving misleading information about their own writing). Yet the choice of novels is wonderful for the goals intended. (One novel by I.B.Singer set in America which was excluded, *Hudson on the Rocks*, was posthumously published, poorly translated and edited, and regarded as a horrible example of what happens to literature when an author has died).

4. Presentation and interpretation of data

In Mr. Mandžikievič's analysis, I.J.Singer's *The Family Carnovsky* and *The Penitent* might have included more issues pertaining to historical and contemporary politics: the former with pre-World War II U.S.-German relations, the latter with the Orthodox Jews in Israel and their apparent alienation from the rest of the Israeli population. Mr. Mandžikievič deals with such thematic issues as Jews arrive and encounter life in New York City, including in the case of *The Family Carnovsky* a mixed, Gentile-Jewish marriage, and why such a marriage is impossible in I.B. Singer's works.

5. Format and presentation

The format and settings follows the standard guidelines.

6. Language

As a rule, one must always applaud the option taken by those very few students who write their diploma work in English rather than in their Czech mother tongue. The language is quite above the standard required for this undergraduate degree program and is indeed quite excellent.

7. Level of difficulty

The level of difficulty is high. So many issue not only pertaining to religion (which Czechs have seemingly little formal knowledge of) but of quite esoteric Jewish traditions no longer practiced in Europe are part and parcel with asides in the novels of I.B. Singer make this topic quite challenging.

8. Contribution

Quite strong

Evaluation:

grade: 2

Question:

Could you say what the "message" is in the conclusion of I.B.Singer's *The Penitent* ? Does Singer suggest through the happy ending in the novel an answer to all the questions he has raised with regard to alienation and the negative influence of the modern life in America on Jews? Why or why not?

