

Aron Geber\*  
Univerzitet u Novom Sadu  
Filozofski fakultet

UDC: 821.111(73)-31.09 Singer I. B.  
821.411.16(73)-31.09 Singer I. B  
DOI: 10.19090/gff.v50i2.2593  
[orcid.org/0009-0003-2467-2864](https://orcid.org/0009-0003-2467-2864)  
Originalni naučni rad

## LOST IN THE DIASPORA: ISAAC BASHEVIS SINGER'S *ENEMIES*, A *LOVE STORY* AND JEWISH IMMIGRATION\*\*

This paper explores Isaac Bashevis Singer's novel *Enemies, A Love Story* through Homi K Bhabha's theories such as "Third Space", mimicry and ambivalence. The novel portrays the fragmented identities of Holocaust survivors and their lives in the diaspora in post-World War II New York. Through the characters of Herman Broder, Masha, Yadwiga and Tamara, the novel demonstrates how trauma shapes personal as well as collective identities. The paper explores the ways mimicry functions as a survival technique and a source of inner conflict, which showcases the tension between assimilation and tradition. By interacting with Jewish history and tradition, Singer's characters struggle with a sense of belonging to a world that no longer reflects their past. At its core, the analysis demonstrates how *Enemies, A Love Story* gives a layered representation of life in a diaspora, where the search for identity develops in an ambiguous space between memory and modernity.

**Keywords:** Diaspora, Jewish identity, Holocaust, mimicry, Third Space

### INTRODUCTION

Isaac Bashevis Singer's novel *Enemies, A Love Story* gives a poignant exploration of identity, love, and cultural encounters within the context of Jewish immigration. Through Homi K. Bhabha's Third Space as the framework, this paper explores the intricate dynamics portrayed in Singer's novel and aims to present the complexities of diasporic experiences and their influence on the individuals and communities in the novel. The novel is an example of diasporic literature which continues to captivate scholars and readers alike, and continues to be relevant in understanding the nuances of cultural negotiation and hybridity.

---

\* agebern@gmail.com

\*\* The paper was presented at the 14<sup>th</sup> Vojvodinian Hungarian Academic Council, held in Subotica on April 13, 2024.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: BHABHA'S THIRD SPACE, MIMICRY, AND AMBIVALENCE

Homi K. Bhabha's Third Space, a concept rooted in postcolonial theory, offers a theoretical framework that is particularly apt for examining the experiences of individuals in the aftermath of historical trauma and cultural dislocation. This concept presupposes a dynamic, hybrid zone where cultural interactions take place, leading to the emergence of new identities and meanings. Applying Bhabha's ideas to *Enemies, A Love Story* allows us to unravel the connections between characters, their histories, and the cultural surrounding in which their stories unfold.

Another important idea in Bhabha's *The Location of Culture* is mimicry, which is defined as "almost the same but not quite" (Bhabha, 1994: 89). Although the Jewish experience was not that of a colonized nation in the traditional sense, Bhabha's notion of mimicry can still present the tensions between assimilation and difference that Jewish character's experience within dominant cultures. They often try to resemble members of the dominant culture but can never fully assimilate, which creates a feeling of anxiety. But it can also be a source of empowerment. Bhabha's concept of mimicry, where colonized individuals imitate the cultural practices of the colonizers, is evident in the main character's attempts to assimilate into American society. *Enemies* introduce a layer of subversion as the characters' adaptations are filled with ambivalence and resistance. The characters' mimicry becomes a form of negotiation, a survival strategy with which they try to preserve their identities and fight against cultural assimilation. However, as the critic Nagendra Bahadur Bhandari (2022) notes, using Bhabha's concepts outside the colonial context requires care, since the mimicry and the Third Space may manifest differently in diasporic or minority communities, highlighting both limitations and productive possibilities of the theory.

## HISTORICAL AND DIASPORIC CONTEXT

Singer's narrative unfolds against the backdrop of post-World War II America, where characters struggle with the trauma of the Holocaust and the challenges of assimilating into a new society. By occupying an in-between space of the New York melting pot, they experience an existence in the diaspora, forging hybrid identities that reflect the connection and interplay between past and present, homeland and the new host society.

Within this framework, scholars have explored the ways in which Singer's characters navigate the tensions between their Jewish heritage and the American society they inhabit, highlighting the fluidity and complexity of cultural identity in the diaspora. In *Enemies, A Love Story*, Singer intricately weaves together the lives of his characters, each grappling with their own complexities of identity and love within the diaspora. The central figures, Herman Broder, Yadviga, Masha, and Tamara, embody the multifaceted nature of diasporic existence as they live their lives trying to process past traumas, and make sense of their cultural heritage and of newfound relationships.

Central to the theme of hybrid identities is an examination of the characters' diverse backgrounds and their migration experiences. Herman Broder's journey from pre-war Poland, through the horrors of the Holocaust, to post-war America, exemplifies the complex layers of his identity. Each character in the novel, whether through personal or shared histories, brings a unique cultural baggage that contributes to the formation of hybrid identities within the Third Space.

#### TRAUMA, MEMORY, AND IDENTITY IN HERMAN BRODER

As survivors of the Holocaust, Herman and the other characters find themselves in a constant state of struggle with their past and the uncertain prospects of their future. Furthermore, characters like Herman live in constant fear for their lives because of the past trauma and unpredictable future. Herman Broder, the protagonist, plagued by the death of his wife and children, struggles to reconcile his past life in Poland with his present reality in America. "In his dreamy state, he wondered whether he was in America, in Tzivkev, or in a German camp" (Singer, 2012: 3). This confusion of the past and present illustrates how Herman's mind is unable to recognize the safety of America. His trauma is so intense that it collapses the boundaries between time and space. Singer uses this blurred landscape to show that Herman's identity is suspended between his homeland and the new world. He feels a sense of guilt because he survived the war, while so many others had perished. His identity is fragmented, torn between the memory of his deceased wife, his newfound love for Masha, and his sense of duty towards Yadviga. As much as Herman is relieved to have escaped Germany, his memories and feelings of guilt cannot leave him in peace. His guilt manifests as the fear that the Germans will catch him in his Brooklyn home. "The doors of the train opened and shut; Herman looked up each time. No doubt there were Nazis roaming about New York" (Singer, 2012: 4). Herman's trauma exists even in exile; wherever he

goes he projects Nazis onto the new environment, turning ordinary urban surroundings into a looming threat. He cannot fully inhabit the American space because his psyche remains dominated by the memory of the Holocaust.

### MIMICRY AND LIMITS OF ASSIMILATION

Herman's attempts at assimilation into American society embody the phenomenon of mimicry, as he adopts the cultural practices of his new surroundings. He becomes a ghost writer for Rabbi Milton Lampert, and he learns English. His job as a writer is merely a guise, however. As Janet Hadda writes in Singer's biography, Herman Broder "is sort of a ghost, haunted by the children he has lost" (Hadda, 2003: 170). The spiritual texts he writes for the rabbi convey the need for the American Jewish people to find their ground in their new homes. "Writing for Rabbi Lampert, Herman brings to life creations that are not authentically his own but that serve an important purpose to an American audience longing for spiritual substance" (Hadda, 2003: 170). As an immigrant Herman tries to fit in but the knowledge of what happened in the past haunts him. He observes the lively suburbs of New York, and feels like an outsider. In his eyes, the contrast between the horrors of the war and the freedom of America is irreconcilable, which makes his assimilation almost impossible. Furthermore, he has not become an American citizen yet, and deportation is looming. Herman's mimicry is full of resistance and ambivalence, and it shows an internal struggle to reconcile his desire to be accepted with the fractured sense of self he carries from the war. His experiences of loss make genuine assimilation impossible. Instead, they turn his imitation into a defensive strategy rather than a way to belong. He lives in constant fear of an uncertain future.

Would not the entire planet disintegrate sooner or later? Herman had read that the whole universe was expanding, and was actually in the process of exploding. A nocturnal melancholy descended from the heavens. The stars gleamed like memorial candles in some cosmic synagogue. (Singer, 2012: 124)

The tension between assimilation and resistance underlines the dynamic and transformative nature of hybrid identities. Instead of mocking those in power, Herman mocks himself because he is unable to transcend his past. For Herman this mimicry does not provide a cure to his suffering, because for him, suffering is what gives his life meaning. "Herman is obsessed with his own survival, but is perceptive and ironic about himself as he looks for surrogate haylofts in Brooklyn, Manhattan, the Bronx, and the Catskills" (Bilik, 1981: 94). The hayloft, where he

was hiding from the Nazis, is the reference point, which he keeps returning to, thus turning his life into a never-ending escape. Through Herman Broder's behavior, Singer represents not only an individual's psychological crisis but the historical condition of Jewish persecution. Herman's never-ending search for "surrogate haylofts" shows how centuries of flight become internalized, and turned the survival into a compulsive pattern. As several critics have observed, Singer often links modern Jewish identity to recurring cycles of exile and vulnerability (Hadda, 2003; Bilik, 1981), and Herman's behavior reflects this broader historical pattern. The irony that Herman is looking for other hiding places can be read as a form of resistance too. By mocking or distancing himself from his circumstances he retains his free will in a hostile world (Friedman–Friedman, 2023).

Herman feels a strong need to uphold his Jewish roots and tradition, which conveys a sense of meaning. Although Herman criticizes God for letting Jews suffer, he feels he is a part of this history, and his identity rests on his people's history. That is why he looks down on other Jews, who try to assimilate into American society. When he visited a resort full of Jews with Masha, "the vulgarity in this casino denied the sense of creation. It shamed the agony of the holocaust. Some of the guests were refugees from Nazi terror" (Singer, 2012: 97). How could they, thinks Herman, be so happy, after all the things they had been through. Of course, this belief reinforces his need to be an outsider. Herman refuses to assimilate and mimic the secular Americanized Jews, and instead tries to find refuge in the religion of his father, which he originally rebelled against. Towards the middle of the novel, when all the lies seem to catch up with Herman he tries to return to his roots and religion. "He sat over his Gemara, staring at the letters, at the words. These writings were home. On these pages dwelt his parents, his grandparents, all his ancestors" (Singer, 2012: 139). In spite of the new beginning in America, Herman could not leave his old faith behind, even if in his eyes God allowed terrible things to happen. Herman's anger at God becomes a psychological mechanism that lets him make sense of a meaningless world. When Herman blames God, he creates a narrative that preserves some form of order, in a world that has betrayed him. This tension between dependence on tradition and rage at divine abandonment causes his inability to assimilate or trust new forms of belonging. Herman desperately clings to his Jewish heritage and to the Yiddish language, while many Jews mimic American culture to fit in better. Herman refuses to do this and instead continues to exist in his state of paranoia that the Germans will catch him eventually. He relies on what Jewish people did to survive, to hide. "The Bible, the Talmud, and the Commentaries instruct the Jew in one strategy: flee from evil, hide from danger, avoid showdowns, give the angry

powers of the universe as wide a berth as possible” (Singer, 2012: 200). He cannot truly assimilate, nor build lasting relationships, because his entire being needs to flee from others, even if they share his fate and faith too.

Despite living in New York, America, Herman Broder is forever an exile, a refugee that still remains in Poland. He “lives in his dreams and waking fantasies only in Yiddish; and consequently, meets only speakers of Yiddish, émigrés like himself” (Fiedler, 1988: 9). Other races are only part of a background “on the periphery, intangible, almost invisible” (Fiedler, 1988: 9). When walking around the city of New York, Herman encounters people of different racial background, and observes them, however he fails to establish any sense of solidarity with them, showing that xenophobia can persist even after shared trauma. “In Europe Herman had never seen such wild faces as these... Many of them had dark eyes, low foreheads, and curly hair. There were Italians, Greeks, Puerto Ricans” (Singer, 2012: 15). People from all around the world live and thrive here but he cannot. When on a trip with Masha in a resort he sees “Indian dolls, gold-laced sandals with wooden soles, amber beads, Chinese earrings, Mexican bracelets” (Singer, 2012: 92). There is a richness abounding, however to Herman these are nothing more than white noise. The question of the other races as colonial subjects in America, who have in fact managed to integrate into American society, does not concern Singer. The past persists most clearly in the survivors themselves, who carry the trauma of their experiences into a new reality that is completely foreign compared to their past lives. Unlike other inhabitants of New York, including Jewish refugees who find ways to adapt and enjoy daily life, Herman is haunted by his loss, and he is unable to enjoy the present; therefore, his exile is not only geographical but also psychological. Although the city is full of life and diversity, Herman remains trapped in a private world of suspicion. As the critic Fiedler (1988) comments on Herman:

He is, in short, an *émigré* (something for which there is no exact word in our language): one whose identity is involved with a dead past rather than an unborn future; one who seeks not to lose but forever to cling to his status as an unreconstructed greenhorn, unassimilated, incapable of assimilation to American culture. (Fiedler, 1988: 9)

## LANGUAGE AND CULTURAL SURVIVAL

His home in his state as a refugee is the Yiddish language, the only aspect of himself towards which he still fosters some sense of belonging. The Yiddish language as a reference point plays an important role in the novel, in Herman's world perception. The language serves as a safe haven for him, which he can cling to, and also differentiate himself from the surrounding world. Being a writer, he perceives the world through the written word and it anchors him to its reality. Observing the world around him, "he saw a sign in Yiddish and, here and there, a synagogue, a yeshiva, a home for the aged" (Singer, 2012: 53). The Jewish culture is present in New York, alongside other cultures, and this presence is one of the few remaining things that Herman tries to find solace in. "On East Broadway, where Herman got off the bus, he glimpsed through a basement window a group of white-bearded men studying the Talmud" (Singer, 2012: 53). Theirs is a tradition that is constant, and Herman wants to believe that if he becomes like these old men, he can find reassurance. "He wants, like the old men, to be absorbed in tradition – in a sense, to become a living text himself. But he cannot shut out the silence or the doubt; he cannot participate in his tradition with good faith because he has lost his faith" (Chandler, 1988: 107). However, the Jews that did not experience the Holocaust live in a bubble in Herman's eyes, and he cannot feel closeness to them either. He did not observe the Jewish traditions and did not talk with his Jewish neighbors. His lack of participation in Jewish traditions and limited interaction with Jewish neighbors demonstrates his liminal position. He belongs neither to Orthodox nor secular Jews, and his "Third Space" is shrinking.

Herman fasted but did not go to the synagogue. He couldn't bring himself to be like one of those assimilated Jews who only prayed on the High Holy Days. He sometimes prayed to God when he was not fighting with Him, but to stand in a House of God with a holiday prayer book in his hands and praise Him according to the prescribed custom – this he couldn't do. (Singer, 2012: 120)

He uses Yiddish, but for Herman the language no longer offers a meaningful connection to the future. In America, the customs, religion, and language that once preserved Jewish identity cannot serve any longer as a safe point. "The language they speak is dying or dead, though they do not know it, being themselves a kind of living dead; either living European Jews who do not believe they are quite living, or dead ones unwilling to believe they are quite dead" (Fiedler, 1988: 10). For Herman, survival is not enough; the language must also be alive and vital. To assimilate into American society would mean the end of that

linguistic and cultural continuity, leading to the loss of a way of life as well as a symbolic “death” of one’s identity.

For those who live in a diaspora, language is a key element in preserving identity and culture. Although Herman Broder believes he is an expert in Yiddish and he thinks it grounds him in reality, as the novel progresses, he starts to lose his grip on this facet of his life. Words and language are used to tell a story, but his life is made of doubt and lies, which then corrupts the language itself. By writing speeches and texts for his employer, Rabbi Lampert, Herman compromises his own moral and spiritual integrity. Herman admits that “He was a fraud, a transgressor – a hypocrite, too. The sermons he wrote for Rabbi Lampert were a disgrace and a mockery” (Singer, 2012: 13). In this sense, Herman betrays his personal commitment to the Yiddish language and the values it represents, because the work he writes serves social appearances rather than genuine tradition. The Rabbi Lampert uses the sermons to promote himself, and not for the sake of the love of the written word and the Yiddish language. The critic Chandler notes “Herman sees the words he authors as mimicry, pretense, and deception. They no longer propagate a living faith, but only cosmetically create a semblance of life on the face of a moribund tradition” (Chandler, 1988: 109). Since the Holocaust had wiped out most of the pious Jews, any imitation of their tradition feels hollow to Herman. In this imitation, he experiences a sense of moral failure; he is failing both himself and the memory of those who perished. When visiting a party organized by the Rabbi, Herman feels ashamed that he, who is an adulterer and mocks God, is alive, while so many perished. He is experiencing survivor’s guilt, which largely shapes his self-perception. “How many times had he tried to spit in the face of worldliness, and each time been tricked away. Yet here he was on his way to a party. Half of his people had been tortured and murdered, and the other half were giving parties” (Singer, 2012: 173). His failure to reconcile his personal values with the demands of American Jewish society shows how Herman’s mimicry is both necessary for survival and yet fundamentally at odds with his sense of authentic identity.

#### WOMEN OF THE DIASPORA: YADWIGA, MASHA, AND TAMARA

Language is also an important element when it comes to Yadviga, Herman’s wife, who is a simple yet devoted housekeeper, and represents the innocence and naivety of those displaced by war and migration. Although she is not Jewish, her unwavering love for Herman, despite his ambivalence towards her, highlights the complexities of affection and obligation within these relationships.



“Yadwiga spoke a peasant Polish. Herman talked to her in Polish or sometimes in Yiddish, which she did not understand” (Singer, 2012: 8). Yadwiga only knows Polish, and Herman uses this to take advantage of her. According to Chandler, Herman’s power “resides in his knowledge of languages she does not know. His exercise of that power is essentially benevolent, if misguided, but his lies create a prison for her” (Chandler, 1988: 110). Herman owes his life to Yadwiga, and he knows that without her he could easily be even more defenseless, yet he feels she is weighing him down, and prevents him from enjoying his time with Masha. Herman takes advantage of Yadwiga’s ignorance of Yiddish and English to maintain his power over her. “Yadwiga could neither read nor write, but Herman would write letters for her to her mother and sister. When a reply came, written by the village teacher, Herman would read it to her” (Singer, 2012: 7). Even within the European diaspora, there were layers of power structures, and Herman’s was his knowledge of languages.

However, despite being in a disadvantaged position, Yadwiga is resilient. By the end of the novel, she converts to Judaism, is welcomed by the Jewish community and gives birth to Herman’s daughter. Her assimilation into the Jewish American community is a positive outcome.

Yadwiga’s pregnancy, which occurs despite Herman’s conscientious efforts to prevent it, underscores the regenerative power of life principle independent of language which will, it is suggested, produce a new language out of its own vitality when conventional and traditional systems of language fail. (Chandler, 1988: 111)

Masha, Herman’s mistress and survivor of the Holocaust, embodies the trauma and resilience of the Jewish diaspora. She shares Herman’s cynical and jaded view of Jews as God’s chosen people because they had learned nothing from their experience. “The worldly Jews who managed to escape had, with few exceptions, learned nothing from all the terror” (Singer, 2012: 36). Masha and Herman both battle with the ghosts of their past as well as the uncertainties of their future together. Masha’s vivacious personality is but a way to hide the horrors of her past, including her experiences of persecution, loss, and near-death during the Holocaust, which continue to shape her outlook on life. “Where was I five years ago at this time?” She searched her memory for a long while. Then she said, “Still among the dead” (Singer, 2012: 108).

In *Enemies*, Masha is the polar opposite of Yadwiga. Unlike Yadwiga, who is a simple peasant, Masha is erudite and speaks many languages, but cannot find her place. Just like Herman, she creates stories about her past to protect

herself in the present. “Masha had collected scores of adventures. Sometimes it seemed she must be making them up, [...] Masha boasted and confessed at the same time” (Singer, 2012: 36). She is like a ghost, who haunts and is haunted by the past, a past that only exists in stories. While Yadviga bears and gives birth to Herman’s child, Masha cannot do that, her pregnancy is in her head only. Despite their passionate relationship, Herman and Masha are unable to “create life” and their sterility is spiritual more than physical. Unlike Yadviga and later Tamara, they are both unable to leave their past behind and start all over, and Masha is unable to detach herself from her mother, Shifrah Puah, who is a pious woman of the older generation, unlike the more disillusioned young Jews of Masha’s time. Her life is made up of lies woven from words that she uses to escape her own guilt. “Like Herman, Masha lives by words; for her, words are also instruments of self-deception, of power over others, and of perversion. Through them she betrays herself, as Herman does himself” (Chandler, 1988: 111). The loss they experienced after the war makes them unable to find their place in New York, despite being intellectuals and physically healthy. Singer here portrays those Eastern European Jews that cannot assimilate due to the enormous burden they experienced. Masha and Herman seem to be hiding from the rest of the world in their little homes. In Ben Siegel’s words, they “appear only one desperate lunge from the nether world of demons and dementia. Suspended between horrific pasts and uncertain futures, they feel foreign amid postwar America’s social pressures, economic pace, and political liberty” (Siegel, 1978: 398). One needs to adapt to the American lifestyle and many immigrants from post-war Europe are unable to do so. Masha and her mother’s apartment is in a dilapidated building, a space almost resembling the dire conditions they survived in the concentration camps. “Shifrah Puah and Masha lived on the third floor of a house with a broken porch and a vacant ground floor, the windows of which were covered with boards and tin. A shaky stoop led to the entrance” (Singer, 2012: 26). They cynically accept their fate and refuse to change and use the opportunities provided for them in America. Though Rabbi Lampert appears as a caricature, he and many other Jews have built a good life for themselves and are willing to help generously, but Herman and Masha refuse his help.

As opposed to Masha and Herman, Tamara stands for a new beginning for Jewish immigrants in America. “As a mother Tamara represents continuation and survival; her identity as mother survives the death of her children” (Chandler, 1988: 114). Tamara, Herman’s estranged wife, presumed dead during the Holocaust, reappears in his life, which greatly challenges Herman’s sense of identity and belonging, not to mention his conscience. Her return complicates

Herman's relationships with Masha and Yadwiga, forcing him to confront the ghosts of his past and the consequences of his actions. Unlike Masha, Tamara does not go into excesses and does not let her pessimism about the human race discourage her from going on living. As Chandler (1988) puts it, "She does not dramatically "accept the universe," nor does she hide her head in the sand, but simply, in a spirit not unlike that of Beckett's heroes, "goes on" (Chandler, 1988: 116).

### HYBRID IDENTITIES AND DIASPORIC AMBIVALENCE

Herman's marriages to Yadwiga, Masha, and Tamara reveal a formation of his hybrid identity. Each partner reflects a distinct temporal and cultural facet of his life: Yadwiga represents his pre-war Polish past, Masha embodies the traumas of the Holocaust, and Tamara represents a future with a sense of optimism. Through these relationships, Herman confronts both his identity and the cultural contact with others. Yadwiga, a Polish Christian, wants to integrate into the Jewish community, and though she struggles with customs and language, she is accepted in the end: "Nowadays a Gentile converting to Judaism is no small matter" (Singer, 2012: 160). Despite these connections, Herman cannot reconcile his past with his present. At the novel's end, Tamara says "that Herman had either killed himself or was hiding somewhere in an American version of his Polish hayloft" (Singer, 2012: 226). His geographical, psychological, and cultural exile strands him in a cycle of memory and self-destruction, which represents the weight of history on identity. Ultimately, these marriages reveal how Herman's hybrid identity is formed through trauma and the impossibility of full assimilation. Ben Siegel writes:

These grim possibilities tempt him. Struggling to control memory, guilt, lust, Herman feels himself beyond society and no longer capable of living by its conventions. Yet despite thoughts of suicide and rejection, he nurtures a strong will to survive; for him, this means keeping something of himself hidden from everyone. Guile, secrecy, stealth, he is convinced, constitute nature's fundamental law. (Siegel, 1978: 403)

In Singer's view this inability to connect is part of the Jewish identity, and in Herman we see another iteration of the Wandering Jew. Running away and hiding is at the very core of his sense of identity and it creates an ambivalence towards others. This ambivalence manifests in Herman's relationships, his sense of belonging, and his decision-making processes, shaping his experiences and interactions throughout the narrative. According to Bilik (1981), wherever he goes

Herman “looks for surrogate haylofts” because that is the one constant reference point in his life. Not one identity, American or Polish, but the identity of one who is on the run.

Herman’s pessimism is in part a rationale for his own hedonistic behavior and in part sincere belief based on knowledge of the historical past and observation of human behavior. Thousands of years of Jewish history and its cycles of persecution and catastrophe are an integral part of the fictional world of *Enemies*. (Bilik, 1981: 94)

While Herman constantly looks down on other Jews who want to assimilate, even Yadwiga, who wants to convert to Judaism, Tamara manages to accept her past and move forward. She spent time in German concentration camps and Russian gulags, and through retelling her experience, she overcomes the horror. She assimilates all good and bad experiences into her Jewish identity. Even her traumatic experience of being shot becomes part of her new identity. This is why she states, “It was a German bullet, but after lying in a Jewish body for so many years, it has become Jewish” (Singer, 2012: 154). It reminds her of the life she lost and this gives her a sense of meaning. In the Russian labor camps, she also finds ways to make connections and form communities with other prisoners. In suffering, she finds her community, and quoting her uncle Reb Abraham Nissen: “The entire people should squat on low stools and read from the Book of Job” (Singer, 2012: 193). Tamara understands her place in the cycle of suffering for the Jewish people and embraces this identity.

By illuminating the complexities of identity formation in these contexts, Singer challenges essentialist notions of culture and belonging, offering a nuanced portrayal of diasporic life. Through nuanced characterizations and narrative depth, Singer invites readers to consider the ways in which ambivalence shapes diasporic experiences and informs decision-making processes. The characters in *Enemies*, are eternally in a diaspora, and it is often up to the individual to what extent they can assimilate. Whether Yadwiga, a Polish peasant far away from Poland, or Herman, Masha and Tamara, dislocated because of the Holocaust, are all forced to be in a diaspora. The life, which was once there, is lost forever, and homelessness becomes a new state of being. As Bilik puts it “For homelessness is the human condition and permanent homes are not needed. Diasporans do not yearn for a spatial homeland. They may, however, yearn for an irretrievable time before the Holocaust, which appears in retrospect innocent, even idyllic” (Bilik, 1981: 93). The novel portrays this ambivalence in assimilating into their new homes and

mourning the past, as they confront the aftermath of the Holocaust.

Through the exploration of ambivalence in colonial and postcolonial contexts, Singer highlights the complexities of diasporic existence, inviting readers to reflect on the ways in which individuals experience conflicting cultural influences and historical legacies in their daily lives. Singer offers a nuanced portrayal of the “American dream”, one that acknowledges the tensions and contradictions inherent in the search for identity and belonging in an ever-changing world. Through nuanced characterizations and narrative depth, Singer reveals the ways in which diaspora shapes individuals’ perceptions of themselves and their relationships with others in New York. Herman and Masha cannot find their place in America and are haunted by their ghosts. Tamara had an even worse fate, having lost her children, but she managed to find her footing. Yadviga, although Christian, converts to Judaism and this assimilates into her community. Singer invites readers to consider the ways in which migration and displacement inform the choices we make and the paths we ultimately take in life.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, *Enemies, A Love Story* stands as a testament to the resilience of the human spirit in the face of displacement and uncertainty. In his novel, Isaac Bashevis Singer masterfully captures the interplay of identity, love, and cultural encounters within the diaspora, offering a profound exploration of the human experience in the aftermath of migration and displacement. By synthesizing literary analysis with the theoretical insights of Homi K. Bhabha, this paper has sought to deepen our understanding of Singer’s novel and its enduring relevance in contemporary discourse on immigration, identity, and belonging. Through its exploration of love and loss within the diasporic tapestry of *Enemies, A Love Story*, this paper invites readers to reflect on the ways in which diaspora shapes our understanding of self and other in an increasingly interconnected world.

Aron Geber

IZGUBLJENI U DIJASPORI: JEVREJSKA IMIGRACIJA U *NEPRIJATELJIMA* ISAKA  
BAŠEVISA SINGERA

### *Rezime*

Cilj ovog rada je analiza romana *Neprijatelji* Isaka Baševisa Singera kroz teorije Homija K. Babhe, uključujući „Treći prostor“, mimikriju i ambivalenciju. Roman prikazuje fragmentisane identitete Jevreja koji su preživeli Holokaust i njihov život u dijaspori u

Njujorku posle Drugog svetskog rata. Kroz likove Hermana Brodera, Maše, Jadvice i Tamare, roman pokazuje kako trauma utiče na formiranje ličnih, kao i kolektivnih identiteta. Rad istražuje načine na koje mimikrija funkcioniše kao tehnika preživljavanja i izvor unutrašnjih konflikata, kao što i prikazuje tenziju između asimilacije i tradicije. Kroz interakciju sa jevrejskom istorijom i tradicijom, Singerovi likovi bore se sa osećajem pripadnosti u svetu koji više ne odražava njihovu istoriju i prošlost. Ovaj rad pokazuje kako roman *Neprijatelji* nudi slojevit predstavu života u dijaspori, gde se potraga za identitetom razvija u dvosmislenom prostoru između sećanja i moderniteta.

*Ključne reči:* Dijaspورا, jevrejski identitet, Holokaust, mimikrija, Treći prostor

## REFERENCES

- Bhabha, H. K. (1994). *The Location of Culture*. London: Routledge.
- Bhandari, N. B. (2022). Homi K. Bhabha's Third Space Theory and Cultural Identity Today: A Critical Review. *Prithvi Academic Journal*, 5, 171–181. <https://doi.org/10.3126/paj.v5i1.45049>
- Bilik, D. S. (1981). Singer's Diasporan Novel: *Enemies, A Love Story*. *Studies in American Jewish Literature* (1981–), 1, 90–100. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/41205544>
- Chandler, M. R. (1988). Death by the Word: Victims of Language in *Enemies, A Love Story*. *Studies in American Jewish Literature* (1981–), 7/1, 105–117. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/41205678>
- Fiedler, L. A. (1988). Isaac Bashevis Singer; or, the American-ness of the American Jewish Writer. *Caliban*, 25, 5–12. <https://doi.org/10.3406/calib.1988.1209>
- Friedman, L. W.–Friedman, H. H. (2023). Self-Deprecating Humor: A Survival Tool for the Jewish People?. Retrieved 13 Nov. 2025, from <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.4584589>
- Hadda, J. (2003). *Isaac Bashevis Singer: A Life*. Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press.
- Siegel, B. (1978). The Jew as Underground/Confidence Man: I. B. Singer's *Enemies, A Love Story*. *Studies in the Novel*, 10/4, 397–410. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/29531932>
- Singer, I. B. (2012). *Enemies, A Love Story*. London: Penguin Books.