

## Jewish Fiction: Gimpel The Fool

Although Gimpel appeared to be a fool, he was really a wise person. He shows the kindness of man. Gimpel's faith allowed him to deal with his misfortune. He showed he was a wise man by loving the children that were not his, being a believer in his religion and by not taking advice from the Devil.

Gimpel is the main character and the narrator of the story. Gimpel has the reputation for being a fool, who believes almost anything someone would tell him. An example of people making fun of him are "Gimpel, there is a fair in heaven; Gimpel, the rabbi gave birth to a calf in the seventh month; Gimpel, a cow flew over the roof and laid brass eggs. Gimpel, while you stand here scraping with your baker's shovel the Messiah has come. The death heaven arisen. What do you mean? Gimpel said. I heard no one blowing the ram's horn! The kid said. Are you deaf? And all began to cry, we heard it, we heard! Gimpel, your father and mother have stood up from the grave. They are looking for you" (Singer 79).

Through all of this Gimpel is still a good man at heart. There is a time where Elka's oldest son hit Gimpel. And Gimpel thinking this son of Elka was a little brother of hers (because that's what was told to him) does nothing. If it were me, I would have disciplined that child. I wanted to see that from Gimpel, but he never does a thing! He just takes what comes his way. Even after finding Elka in bed with another man, he separates from her for some time and through all that he sends her food and money. I felt bad for Gimpel. Here was a man that deep down inside is a good person. He sends food and money to a wife that cheats on him because he feels bad for not being with her. Personally it's stupid because how can you still want to support a person that would do you wrong. He raises all of Elka's children as his own despite his suspicions of her bearing a child seventeen weeks into their marriage. There are not many men I know that would put up with all of this and still be the person Gimpel is.

In its essence, the difference between Bashevis' work and the whole of the modern Yiddish literary corpus (apart from a few very narrow and marginal segments of it) reveals itself in one crucial aspect. Bashevis approached the act of literary creation with a base-experience of underlying awareness that falls under the sign of fatalism and nihilism. Human existence and, certainly, Jewish existence appeared to him suffused with evil and suffering, torn apart from within by internal conflicts that cannot be resolved, pervaded by an absurdity both comical and tragic. Moreover, he was convinced that any organized effort to correct and improve man's lot, any will to guide it towards some "salvation" according to an ideological-eschatological program, was doomed to failure. Not only would such efforts fail to right life's wrongs, they would even increase the suffering and evil to the point of holocaust.

Bashevis "understood" the twentieth century as an age in which a suffering humanity was forced to follow lethal ideological-eschatological agendas which gave birth to a murderousness unequalled in viciousness and horror by any evil known to man throughout all of history. He was opposed with all his heart (and even that without pathos and with the awareness that opposition itself was hopeless) to any eschatological human organization and especially Soviet and international Communism, and almost to the same degree any Jewish eschatological movement such as Zionism, national socialism (the Bund), etc. The only spiritual position that he accepted was passive-fatalistic. By adopting this stance a person might achieve a certain "saintliness," to the degree that he or she gives up from the very start any attempt to control his or her own destiny, let alone that of others, and this out of the awareness of the moral superiority of surrender over initiative or over the desire to steer the course of events in the "desired" direction.

Bashevis' "saint" is the "fool" who is not a fool at all. Gimpel the Fool, the hero of his early story of the same name, that, in its superb English translation by Saul Bellow, opened for Bashevis the door through which he could address the American and international audiences and capture their hearts, is in the framework of the Bashevian story-telling art, the most complete human being. He is not the fool that those who exploit him throughout his entire life believe him to be. He sees through their lies. He knows of their malice towards him. He knows that his wife is deceiving him and that his children are not of his seed. He knows full well that he has always been cheated and exploited in everything, yet he accepts this state of affairs in his awareness that any response on his part would only serve to increase the wickedness and suffering.

In the eyes of Bashevis, Gimpel is the archetypical Jew, just as he is the embodiment of the Yiddish language -- a language with no territory, no protection, no cultural-political alliances, no prestige and no army or any military terminology -- the language of the weak, the victims. It is as a representative of this Yiddish and its speakers that Bashevis trod the paths of the modern world of power-struggles and protest, the world of the demanders of rights and the "discrimination-gruntled." As such an emissary he reached Stockholm to receive the Nobel prize for literature and, likewise, he arrived in Israel for his famous conversation with Menachem Begin, in which he demonstrated to the prime-minister how ridiculous military pomp would be if it were carried out in Yiddish. Neither Begin nor the Israeli public caught on that, in his ironic-humorous way, Bashevis was expressing his reservations towards Israel as an authentic Jewish entity, as though he were saying: A real, authentic Jew who thinks and behaves as you do, my dear Israeli friends, is nothing but a joke, an incongruity, a Yeshiva-Boher brandishing a sword and clutching a general's staff as if it were a broom-stick.

By The story "Gimpel the Fool" was a wonderful and humorous story. This story presents a humorous psychological study as well as an analysis of the nature of reality. This kind of story can only be done by a "Jewish writer" (Kazin 353). Gimpel is a wise man because he is strong. Gimpel was able to

change his decision to urinate in the bread. However, knowing that he was close to actually doing it he decided he must leave the town. Gimpels power to reject the devils influences shows how he was a wise man.

I think his goodness and foolishness have a lot to do with his religious beliefs. It is a guide for how he should live his life. When he wants to do bad he always questions his conscious and refers to a rabbi or thinks of God and what is right and wrong. In one chapter he states "However, I resolved that I would always believe what I was told. What's the good of not believing? Today it's your wife you don't believe; tomorrow it's God himself you won't take stock in." This is said after Sabbath where he invokes the blessing of yet another illegitimate child with Elka. All of Frampol refreshed its spirits because of his trouble and grief. Their finally came a day when Gimpel has appeared to have had enough and with the influence of an evil spirit decides to urinate in the bread dough he is going to bake. While the bread is baking he has a dream of Elka. By this time Elka has passed away from breast cancer. In this dream Elka says "You fool!" Because I was false is everything false to?

I never deceived anyone but myself. I'm paying for it all Gimpel. They spare you nothing here" (104). Soon after he wakes up from this dream and wonders if by doing wrong is he going to ruin his chances of eternal life? I believe he wants to see Elka again in the afterlife. Why else would he dream about her like that? Soon after he takes the bread out of the oven and digs a hole and buries the bread. His conscious does not let him go through with the act that he wanted to commit. If it were not for his religious beliefs then he would have had no reason to stop the bread from baking with the urine in it. His religious beliefs keep him on a good path despite all that was done to him.

From being picked on to his wife's infidelity, I could never take so much abuse as he did. I don't think many others would have either. But what amazed me more was his persistent attitude of doing the right thing. Gimpel never draws the line and says enough is enough! I will never be treated like this again. Well he says it but never really means it. Instead he chooses to stay in the role that was cast upon him as a child until late in his life when he departs from Frampol. His love for Elka never dies either. Even after departing Frampol, he dreams about her and being with her. He never lets his heart and mind fill with anger or vengeance.

In conclusion Gimpel was a wise man; he looked and acted like a fool because of his innocence. He showed that his foolishness was intelligence. Because of his good heart he never let anyone suffer except himself. Gimpel could have given in to the taunting but he decided to ignore them. The rejection of the devil showed his beliefs in God and he had a good and understanding heart. Forgiving everyone for what they did to him was a wise thing to do. It does not matter much if you are a fool like Gimpel who forgives and forgets; it only means that people can pick on you and make fun of you. However, in God's view it is the best thing that you can do. Gimpel himself showed everyone that being a fool has its benefits.

#### Works Cited

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