CHAPTER 5

NARRATIVE TECHNIQUE

I

In this Chapter, an attempt has been made to analyse the various techniques used to portray the main thematic concerns of Singer's novels. Singer is basically a fine story-teller and he tries to tell it in a manner that has a great appeal. While telling a story he has a tendency to exploit all the strategies available to him. However, he utilizes mainly two modes of narration: one, the mimetic mode and second, is the fantastic mode. The first mode has been employed extensively in his saga novels The Family Moskat, The Manor and The Estate and other short novels such as The Magician of Lublin, The Penitent, Enemies: A Love Story, Shosha, The Slave and others. It is in Satan in Goray that Singer puts to use the blending of mimetic and the fantastic modes. It is not that Singer employs the strategies, devices and technique to project the theme. On the contrary, they emerge from the thematic concerns that he deals with. Mark Schorer's remarks about technique also express the same view: "Technique is the means by which the writer's experience which is his subject-matter, compels him to attend to it, technique is the only means he has of discovering, exploring, developing his subject, of conveying its meaning and finally of evaluating it".1

Technique thus would include the point of view, the treatment of time, the use of supernatural element and several other strategies like the contrastive characterization, certain recurring events and their patterns, foreshadowing, confessions, the importance of the sense of place and certain devices of diverse analysis. The mimetic mode tries to capture the social reality - th
relationship and the change the society undergoes with certain trend-setting political, social or economic events. Singer, through his major novels makes serious attempts to study the factors that cause the disintegration of the Jewish society in Poland and thereby leads to a loss of identity. This he achieves by juxtaposing the minority culture of the Jews with the megaculture of the Gentiles, and showing how the minority culture is threatened by the major one.

Singer presents all the issues with utmost neutrality. Whether these issues are related to anti-semitism, the discrepancy inherent in Judaism and its beliefs, assimilation or to the relevance of Hassidic faith. Barring Shosha and The Penitent most of Singer's narrators are omniscient ones. They try to project the views of the major characters and the minor ones too. They also take in to consideration the view of the Gentiles and of those who have already assimilated. Thus, these views present different point of views and provide opportunities to look at these issues from different angles. Such different point of views enable the reader to assess the issues in more objective manner. This is one of the features of the modern novels.

Multiplicity in point of view presents the multi-dimensional reality. The narrator continues to register the impressions and views expressed by different characters and allows the reader to form their own opinions. The most striking aspect of the theme is the rejection of the traditional way of life and adoption of modernity. In The Manor and The Estate Singer presents the issue from the point of view of Wallenberg a convert who considers it a healthy sign for the Jews in particular and the society in general. During his talk with Ezriel, Wallenberg observes:

I'm no longer a Jew. I've been baptized. But blood is thicker than water and I can't stand seeing the Jews suffer. How can one move
into someone else’s home, live there in total isolation and expect not to suffer by it? When you despise your host’s god as a tin image, his wine as forbidden, condemn his daughter as unclean, aren’t you asking to be treated as an unwelcome outsider?

[The Manor, p 41]

Similar views are expressed by Aaron Asher a youngman senior to Ezriel in age in whom Ezriel finds a kindred soul during his first visit to the Count of Marshinov. On asked as to what solution he would suggest to bring about a change in the Jewish society, Aaron comes forward with the following views:

Our education methods must be reformed. The Jews must master German as well as Russian and Polish. The children must be taught trades, the long caftans abolished and beards shaved off or trimmed. Perhaps somewhere - Palestine or the Crimea - land can be obtained for colonies...

[The Manor, p 73]

But equally interesting are the views of Calman, the common man who thinks that one should continue to be a decent Jew rather than undergo a change for material comforts:

What made Wallenberg become a convert? His father was a decent Jew, a teacher. It was worldly knowledge that started everything. Don’t be angry, Ezriel. I want you to follow in the footsteps of your father. He will have salvation. He will come to the other world - may he live to be a hundred and twenty - with a sackful of Torah...

[The Manor, p 105]

The issue of Zionism is also seen from different vantage points. Some believe that Zionism is something that would not solve the problem of the Jews. Most of the religious leaders feel that it would be something contrary to the covenant with God, for it is God's promise that the period of the exile of the Jews would end only with the advent of the Messiah hence any attempt made by human beings to achieve would not yield the desired results.

Asa during his talk with his grandfather Dan discusses the issue of Zionism.
He tells him that Jews, like other people, were asking the nations of the world to return the Holy land to them. Asa further adds that they were justified in their demand. But Rabbi Dan is not convinced. He tells him: "If they had no further belief in the Bible, then why should they have any longing for the Biblical land of the Jews? Why not some other country? Any country?...

[The Family Moskat, p 254]

Even Ezriel and his son Joziek have a discussion about going to Palestine and working there. Ezriel tries to dissuade him from going away, for the situations there would not be different from that of Poland. But Joziek is adamant. The following conversation presents their views that underlines the difference:

"'What actually do you expect me to do?' he (Ezriel) asked.
'The Turks are no better than the Poles or the Russians. Don't be fooled'.
'I know, Papa. But it's our country, our earth'.
'How is it ours? Because Jews lived there two thousand years ago?
Do you know how many nations have perished and assimilated since that time?... What will you do there? Drain the swamps and catch malaria? Is this why you graduated from gymnasium?'
'Papa. I can't stay here anymore. I hate this city..." [The Estate, p 57]

Love for one's own land and to make attempt to regain it is also one of the signs of becoming aware acutely of one's ethnic identity. Like Joziek, Koppel's daughter Shosha is to be married to a person working for certain construction work in the Holyland. Shosha also takes pride in her new venture, for she believes Palestine to be her motherland. The conversation that takes place between Shosha and Koppel gives an indication of the changed attitude toward Palestine among the youth:

'And what'll you do there in Palestine?'
'We'll work'.
'You can work here, too'.
'But Palestine is our own country'. [The Family Moskat, p 484]
Another narrative strategy that Singer employs to organise the theme of search for identity is the treatment of time. David Leon Higdon, in his book *Time and English Fiction*, stresses the importance of the strategy of time thus:

As authors carve forms with beginnings, middles and endings from time, time assumes a variety of 'Shapes' - shapes which are adjunct to meaning in the work. These demarcations of 'time-shapes' are not innumerable, but rather group themselves in four large categories which, for purpose of discussion I have called 'process', 'retrospection', 'barrier' and 'poly-temporal' times. By defining these terms and by illustrating these concepts, I wish to suggest the use of time scheme as a critical tool in the understanding of fictional structure ...

The time schemes outlined by Higdon are useful in analysing Singer's major novels. The four specific time shapes, he discusses, are 'process' that is linear development, 'retrospection', where 'before' and 'after' are constantly juxtaposed, 'barrier', where a time limit is imposed because the result of an event precedes its causes and denouement and 'poly-temporal', where past, present and future are mingled with no concern for causality. Generally all novels utilise these time shapes but one of them occupies a dominant place.

The dominant time shape used in most of the Singer's novels is 'process time' which stresses a process and its underlying causality. It usually indicates a straight line moving from one point to another. It is the process of 'becoming' that becomes significant. David Leon Higdon explains what he means by 'becoming':

It entails a constant becoming as characters gradually move from one condition to another. The novelist using the process time shape keeps his reader aware that time is passing in order that he may underline the evolving inner and outer lives of his characters. The line inscribed by process time always moves between fixed points - the condition in which we first encounter the character and the condition which the character achieves by the conclusion of the work ...
The novels that fall under this time shape are *The Family Moskat*, *The Manor*, *The Estate*, *The Magician od Lublin*, *Shosha*, *The Slave* and *Satan in Goray*. while *Enemies: A Love Story* and *The Penitent* have 'retrospective' and 'barrier' time shapes respectively. The process time shape highlights the deviation the major characters undergo causing a loss of identity and then regaining it after some struggle. Asa Heshel, the protagonist in *The Family Moskat*, leaves the rabbinical family of Tereshpol Minor and comes down to Warsaw. He aims at having a university education and also to carry out an experiment to achieve happiness. He carries with him a copy of Spinoza's work that guides him in his approach to life. Though he belongs to a renowned family of the rabbis, Asa moves away from the traditional ways of the Jewish life. The main objectives of his life is to live an independent life that an intellectual can enjoy without undertaking any responsibilities. He passes through a couple of love affairs, has a broken marriage, and undergoes both physical and mental suffering by participating in the war. He shirks responsibility and avoids being tied to a place or a person. He does not succeed in attaining happiness. On the contrary, he is responsible for causing pain to others. Asa knows that the pious Jews who serve others are the ones who have been responsible for keeping Judaism alive. He appreciates the real worth of a pious Jew when he visits the ailing Abram Shapiro and finds his son-in-law Avigdor looking after him. Asa also appreciates him for his gesture and his regular visits to the prayer house. When Miss Barbara Fishelzohn, Asa's beloved, describes Avigdor a little curious fellow, Asa tells her about the worth of such a person. His views express clearly the importance of such people: "He's not so curious at all, ... People like him are the backbone of the Jews ... It's these little nobodies who for two thousand years have carried all of Jewry on their back - ..." [*The Family Moskat*, p 553]
The change that is visible in Asa Heshel towards the end of the novel is the courage to face the holocaust and to be with the members of the family in Warsaw. All his life he had been a deserter. When the war starts, Barbara, his beloved suggests that they should escape to some safe place. She tries her best to persuade him to do so. But she cannot influence his decision. He decides to live in Warsaw in the company of his kith and kin. This irresistible pull for the proximity of his relatives is a sign that the process of returning to his own roots has already begun, though belated as it may be. This process of 'becoming' is very much convincing in case of Calman, the leader of the Jewish society, in Jampol in The Manor and The Estate. Calman who lived as a pious Jew in the Sands, the outskirts of Jampol, becomes an important person in the town after having obtained a lease on the manor. The changed position compels him to be a worldly man. He does not find time for his regular prayers. In order to look after the business, he has to live away from the family. He is more and more engrossed in material advancement leaving him spiritually discontent. The temptation that he falls victim to is Clara, a widowed daughter of Kaminer. He marries her and then realizes that he has committed a folly. Clara is a worldly woman for whom traditional Jewish life is burdensome. She is given to enjoyment of physical pleasures. She gives birth to a male child, and for a while there is some hope and joy for Calman but it does not last long. In order to keep his married life intact he deviates from the traditional Jewish life. He has to drink wine in the company of his wife's friend. He has also to spend money lavishly to satisfy Clara's whims. The increase in the volume of business adds to his worries. A sense of guilt constantly disturbs him. His son Sasha also is not a source of happiness for him. Clara's love relationship with Sasha's tutor Zipkin shocks him much. He decides to bring an end to this life of misery. The sense of shame and guilt overwhelms him. The pain he suffers from is described as follows: "'Father in heaven, what kind of filth am I walking in?...' How can
this have happened? I am after all the son of God-fearing people. He was unclean. His home was a bowdy house". [The Manor, p 279].

Calman gathers courage and orders Zipkin to leave his house. He also decides to live apart. When his son Sasha asks him where he was going away, Calman replies: "Back to the Jews". [The Manor, p 283]. Calman is a different person. He returns to the fold of his own Jewish life with a change. He devotes much of his time to the service of the sick and the disabled and helps them in all possible manner.

The vicissitudes that Ezriel passes through are not less significant. Being the son of a rabbi Ezriel also moves away from the traditional Jewish life showing preference for secular knowledge. He begins with a sense of doubt towards the traditional Jewish life and its rituals. He feels strongly for all his Jewish brethren and hence decides to bring about a change in their life-style and standard of living. The first time when he leaves for Warsaw to purchase books, his desire to be an instrument of change for the Jewish society is clearly stated in the following words:

The fanaticism of Polish Jews is too preposterous for words. While the rest of Europe is learning, creating, making progress, they remained bogged in ignorance... I must help these people emerge from darkness... Ezriel scooped up a handful of snow, moulded it into a hardball, and hurled it at the twilight sky. [The Manor, p 39].

Change is seen in dress and in trimming off his beard and side locks. With sincere efforts he earns a degree in medical science and becomes a physician specialised in mental maladies. The material advancement does not bring him any peace. Rather it further deviates him from the righteous path. He falls in love with a convert and lives with her. What brings about a turning point in his life is the
strong feeling of anti-semitism that does not allow him to lead a respectable life. In spite of his education and modern ways Ezriel is not acceptable to the Gentile world. Moreover when he takes stock of his situation, it dawns upon him that he has not gained much in exchange of his traditional way of life. What worries him most is the fate of his youngest son Misha and his faulty upbringing at the hands of Olga, his beloved. He also feels within him a strong desire to visit Palestine where his eldest son Joziek has already settled. He also feels frustrated over his daughter’s involvement with subversive activities. Ezriel decides to change his way of life. The time shape of process indicates clearly what he was and what he has become. The loss of identity causes him excruciating pain and suffering. He decides to return to his traditional way of living though it has in it some contradictions.

Yasha Mazur in The Magician of Lublin entertains the spectators through his stunts and feats. But he has also given up the righteous path of a pious Jew. He is entangled in a couple of love-affairs which keep him feel as if he were walking on a tight rope. The infatuation that he has developed for Emilia is very powerful and he finds it difficult to come out of it. For the sake of Emilia he even makes an attempt to break open the Safe of Zaruski, a rich miser, but with all his knowledge and confidence he fails to do so. The lock does not yield to his expertise. Yasha later realizes that it was due to some dybbuk that had come in his way of success. With Magda’s act of suicide Yasha is compelled to think about his life and his achievements. It becomes clear to him that by renouncing his Jewish life he has reduced himself to the state of an Ofal, someone not acceptable to Emilia. Emilia wants him to convert to Christianity. She also wants him to raise a handsome amount so that they can leave Poland and settle down in some other European country. Yasha who always dreamt of doing something impossible realizes his limitations. He always dreamt
that: "he even led the Jew out of exile, gave them back the land of Israel, 
rebuilt the temple of Jerusalem ..." [The Magician of Lublin, p 54].

Yasha, to atone for the sin he had committed, the sufferings that he had caused 
Magda, and other creatures of his magic show, decides to return to home. He 
engages himself in an act of penance and tries to be a new man - Yasha, the 
penitent, is now Reb Jacob, the penitent who devotes his time to the studies of 
scriptures and tries to control his desires by avoiding direct contact with the 
world. He prefers a tomb-like well for his residence and attempts at forging a 
new personality - like the phoenix bird taking a new life from its ashes. Yasha's 
life also is a process of 'becoming' - the linear movement which shows a 
considerable changes in him. Though the newly carved state is not completely 
free from temptation in the form of thoughts and memories, for Yasha, refraining 
from them is not a small achievement. It is a kind of restraint that he 
imposes upon his tendency of self-indulgence. The man who had been 
indifferent to the pain he caused to other people, undergoes a change. He is 
now sensitive enough to visualise the problem of causing pain to others. 
Even remaining enclosed in the self-created structure, Yasha is vulnerable to 
physical suffering and illness. He catches cold. His voice becomes hoarse. He 
continues to cough at night and causes a great anxiety to his wife Esther. She 
implores him to leave the self-imposed imprisonment and come out so that his 
health could be taken care of. Yasha does not relent. He tells her: "A beast must 
be kept in a cage". When she remarks: "You are killing yourself". Yasha's reply 
is: "Better myself than others". [The Magician of Lublin, p 195]. This 
realization itself is an evidence that Yasha is no longer than the old self. He 
has attained an awareness that teaches him how to be a pious Jew, how to be a 
good human being.
In Jacob's case in The Slave the process of 'becoming' goes a step ahead. Jacob in the state of captivity at Jan Bzik's place is more concerned about losing his Jewish identity in absence of ritual garment, prayershawl, phylacteries and visits to synagogue and prayer house. Moreover, he is in a remote place surrounded by semi-civilized pagans. On the top of it he finds an irresistible temptations in the form of Wanda, Jan Bzik's widowed daughter. He considers his infatuation for her to be the work of Satan. Jacob experiences warring emotions within. He at all costs wants to keep himself away from Wanda but ultimately he gives in. Wanda embraces Judaism and becomes Sarah. After Sarah's death he brings up his son and fulfills his obligations as a father. Living amidst the pagans gives Yasha an opportunity to look at his own Jewish society more objectively. What pains him most is that the Jews of his home town devote much time and attention to their duties to God but neglect their duties towards human beings. Jacob learns new meanings of the words slavery, exile and duties to God. It becomes clear to him that man endowed with free will creates with his own hands the state of slavery and captivity. He can come out of them through aiming his wild desires and rendering service to his fellow men. Jacob, a teacher of Torah and other scriptures, raises himself to the level of sainthood. The insights he gains makes him humbler. He continues to live like an ordinary man, amidst the sick and the forlorn and tries to serve them with best of his abilities.

He had lived here for four years now and did not know whether his wife and children were still alive. He was without prayershawl and phylacteries, fringed garment or holy book. Circumcision was the only sign on his body that he was a Jew. [The Slave, p 13].

The prayer he recited daily: "Thou has not made me a slave" puzzles him. He
thinks about his state of slavery and finds that it is God who is responsible for that state and not he. But when he falls in love with Wanda, it becomes clear to him that the bond between him and Wanda is a new kind of slavery, a creation of his own efforts. Jacob realizes yet another meaning of the words "Thou has not made me a slave" when Sarah's identity is explored and he is excommunicated from Pilitz. He is in chains. His mind is busy thinking about the ancient patriarchs mentioned in the scriptures whose behaviour could provide him guidance. Suddenly it flashes upon his mind that "sometimes chains be broken". [The Slave, p 233]. He experiences within him a great amount of energy released. He gives a push to horse and uses force to unsettle the other horseman. He wins his freedom and disappears into the fields. During his talk with the ferryman Waclaw, Jacob explains to him the meaning of freedom and asserts that he does not want to bind himself in any desires. Jacob tells him that the sense of responsibility always accompanies the idea of freedom. To support his view he says: "Somebody must plow and sow and reap". [The Slave, p 241].

For Jacob the true meaning of religion is not the relationship between man and God but between man and his fellowmen. This is what he does whenever he visits different towns and stays in poor houses. The following description supports the view: "In whatever town Jacob found himself, he always went to the poor house to help the old and the sick, to wash them, rub them with turpentine, bring them fresh straw ..." [The Slave, p 276].

Thus the linear time shape underlines the change that Jacob undergoes. Within the framework of Judaism he performs his duties, regains his Jewish identity and conveys that the concept of Jewish identity is not limited to narrow confines of one particular religion, tribe but it transcends and assumes a universal dimension. In Shosha, the protagonist Aaron Greidinger passes through the
similar stages as other protagonists do. Aaron hails from the family of rabbis and is fully well-versed in scriptures. By profession he is a writer and tries to create a place for himself in the literary circles of Warsaw. Being away from his family and living alone in the city, he has moved away from the traditional Jewish life. Like other protagonists, Aaron is also entangled in a few love affairs which make him more and more restless.

In the early pages of the novel one finds Aaron struggling with different ideas. He feels an extra responsibility on his shoulders to immortalize the Jewish life facing destruction at the hands of the Nazis. For Aaron, it is not possible to return to the religious ways of Judaism but as a writer he has to identify himself with the tradition that can give his writing some meaning. In the initial stage he fails to do that. His play for Betty Slonim fails. The failure pushes him in great despair. There comes a revival in him only when he meets his childhood playmate Shosha. This meeting proves to be a turning point in his writing. Shosha represents the Jewish past, the tradition to which he belonged. Singer treats Shosha's character on two levels. On the one hand she is a person who has remained almost unchanged for more than two decades. Except a few minor changes in her, Shosha has remained intact and unchanged. The unchanged aspect of her life is described as follows: "Shosha had neither grown nor aged. I gaped at this mystery. After a while, I did observe a slight change in her face and in her height. She had grown perhaps childish fascination .... " [Shosha, p 74].

This aspect is referred to again which suggests that Shosha has been able to withstand the ravages of time without being affected. The description says: "Whenever I was with her, I asked myself. How can this be? How can it be explained? Had Shosha found a magical way to stop the advance of time? Was
this the secret of love or the power of retrogression? ..." [Shosha, p 87].

Shosha can be taken as a symbol that stands for the Jewish tradition that had remained unchanged in Poland. It was awaiting some creative energy that could grasp it, represent it, and modify it in view of the changing times. Such an interpretation is presented by Robert Alter:

The pursuit of the past is translated into a central principle of plot in Greidinger's relationship with Shosha. She was his intimate childhood friend in the poor and pious Jewish neighbourhood of Krochmalna street... She seems to be him the embodiment of arrested or perhaps perpetuated, childhood... Now, all of this verges on allegory, and that is a basic problem of the novel. Shosha's very name fits into the design; it suggests the Hebrew word for rose, the rose that does not wither, that is beyond the ravages of time. To possess this fragile flower, Greidinger is prepared to sever his social connections with the world of Yiddish writers to neglect his material well-being, even to sacrifice his life...4

After having met her, Aaron experiences a surprising change within him. He devotes himself to writing seriously which brings him both money and fame. His biographical sketch about the false messiah Sabbatai Zevi is an indirect comment on Hitler's appearance with Nazism. Aaron stands for an epoch making writer on whose shoulders lie the responsibilities of capturing the essence of the Polish Jewry, interpreting it and modifying it in new light.

In Satan in Goray, the whole society of Jews believing in the advent of Sabbatai Zevi acts a character. It is not a question of a few persons who are influenced by the frenzy. It is almost the whole sect that acts in an unbelievable manner. What fascinates the Jews is the news that Sabbatai Zevi, the Messiah would be instrumental in bringing an end of the days of exile and would lead them to the Holy land. The sense of expectancy and excitement goes on mounting up. People continue to expect some miracles to take place, for they have heard about such miracles taking place in other parts of Poland and other European countries. The most astonishing thing that the Jews do is to expedite the advent
of the Messiah. Though Sabbatai Zevi does not put his foot in Goray, the whole town is taken by an unprecedented frenzy. They are guided by messengers from different parts of Poland and other countries. Their religious leader Reb Gedaliya, a ritual slaughterer advises them to throw away all moral restraints to the winds and indulge in all kinds of sexual perversity. The more the sins, the surer and the sooner would be the arrival of the Messiah. Reb Gedaliya even exploits Rechele’s prophesies to his own advantage. He, on the one hand, satisfies her sexual desires and on the other, raises her to the status of a great prophetess through whom the God speaks. He uses her as a tool to mint money. People prefer the easier way of attaining redemption though reckless indulgence in the pious way of observing all the Commandments. Singer suggests that the fate of Goray is inextricably connected with that of Rechele. Rechele is possessed by the Satan who impregnates her. Similarly, Satan also walks openly in the streets of Goray. From the pious and God-fearing society it gradually turns into a society of revelers who indulge shamelessly in orgies.

The author indicates the process of ‘becoming’ and it is indicated through the linear movement. The whole Sabbatai Zevi sect is depossessed of Satan by the efforts of Reb Mordecai Joseph. He sets free not only Rechele but also the town of Goray. It gradually returns to normalcy after getting disillusioned of the powerful hysterical frenzy.

The time shape employed in Enemies: A Love Story is also the process time. There is a linear movement but it does not show the process of ‘becoming’. Herman Broder, who has been the survivor of holocaust, cannot live a normal life even when he is in America. The way he hides himself in hayloft and lives there under the constant fear of being found out has created in him a sense of abnormalcy. The nightmarish experiences of Poland continue to haunt him. He
is alive but does not live a normal life. His mind is constantly engaged in thinking about moves and countermoves to face the Nazi soldiers. The hiding experience has become a part of his being and hence he avoids meeting people and developing new contacts. The only contact that he has with the world is through three women: Yadwiga, Tamara and Masha. The only person with whom he has to have contact is his master Rabbi Lampert.

Herman writes lectures for him. He prepares short speeches and sometimes writes articles too. Herman is a ghost writer. He does not get credit for his writing. He is paid for his work. His polish maid servant Yadwiga is his legal wife. He is obliged to her for his life but he finds a suitable partner in Masha whom he met in Nazi camp. She is married but shows eagerness to leave him for Herman. Before Herman can keep a balance between these two women, his first wife Tamara whom he believed to be dead reappears. His life gets more and more complicated.

Being a person with a philosophic bent of mind and a follower of Schopenhaur, Herman doesn't want to bring up children into the world. The life doesn't go ahead as he wishes. Yadwiga is pregnant. Masha also complains of being pregnant. Masha's pregnancy proves to be a false one. Tamara assures Herman all kind of support - moral as well as financial. Leaving Yadwiga into Tamara's caring hands, Herman desires to start a new life with Masha. But Masha, after her mother's death decides not to go with him. Herman is left alone. He doesn't know what to do. He disappears and is heard no more. Herman does not go to any synagogue or prayer house to pray. Yet he feels fascinated by the pious Jews. He also tries his best to help those with whom he is in contact. To that extent, Herman is noble and sincere. There are a number of passages which show Herman allowing all freedom to Yadwiga to lead a
real Jewish life. He devotes a lot of time and spends a good amount of money on Masha. The act of disappearance brings an end to his 'fake' life and provides him an opportunity to begin his life anew as he had desired long back in Poland. Singer concludes the novel on an ambivalent note.

In The Penitent the story is told by Joseph Shapiro, the protagonist. The time utilized here is 'retrospection' one. The emphasis is here on 'being' and not 'becoming'. Throwing light on this time shape Higdon says:

Here clearly are two points of view, two points in time and at least three states of being. We have an individual proceeding through life at some point stopping to survey his past and attempt to make some sense of it. Much more than simple flash back or juxtaposition is involved ... In other words, rather than emphasizing the process of becoming, retrospective time consists of three large time blocks, a 'then' a 'now' and an 'in between' ... its most sophisticated level retrospective time provides the structural framework for confessions ...

The narrator Joseph happens to meet the author whom he has adored in his past. The author has come to visit the Waiting wall, a place of pilgrimage in Jerusalem. The narrator recognizes the author but the author fails to recognize his fan who must have met him or attended his lecture sessions. The narrator, a little man in long gaberdine and a velvet hat shakes hands with the author. Introducing himself he says, "The last time you saw me I was clean, shaven. Now I'm a Jew like a Jew should be, thank God". [The Penitent, p 5]. The author uses words 'baal tshuvah' - a penitent for him. The narrator points out the special meaning attached to the words "one who returns". Joseph wants to tell him the story of his life for the author once wrote that he was interested in listening to stories. Joseph makes it clear what he is now: "At my age I became a yeshive student here. We study the Gemara, the Tosaphot, other commentaries. Only now when I'm studying the Torah, do I see what I've been all these years ..." [The Penitent, p 6]. The author invites him to his hotel and
Joseph in two sittings narrates the major events of his past. Like Camus' *The Fall* and Dostoevsky's *Notes From The Underground*, Singer's *The Penitent* is a confessional novel. Here the central character is more concerned with self-discovery and self-analysis. Joseph Shapiro feels a strong urge to confess and the author is a passive listener to a great extent. Peter M Axthelm in *The Modern Confessional Novel* refers to the Confessional hero as follows: "The Confessional novel, ... presents a hero, at some point in life, examining his past as well as his innermost thoughts, in an effort to achieve some form of perception ... "

Joseph tells the author that he is a descendant of a family of rabbis. He lived a happy life in Warsaw. He was a member of a group which worked for Zionism. His father had a dry-fruit store. The disruption in his life was due to the Nazi attack on Poland in 1939. Along with other Jews he also fled to Russia and was there till 1945. He then managed to reach Lublin where he met Celia, his beloved. She also belonged to a Hassidic family. Though she was fascinated by communism, Celia liked Yiddish literature, and art. Joseph narrates how they got a visa for America, and settled down there. Then he refers to his days of success in business. He tells us how he entered estate business and became rich. Celia who in the initial period worked hard, later on devoted her time to studies.

Further, Joseph tells the author how he, like his friends, visited whores. He adds why he found whores repugnant. He needs some 'decent' woman and comes across one named Liza. The narrator's tone is ironic and when he has already passed through that phase, finds no difference between the whores and the so-called 'decent' woman. She is a divorcee and has a daughter of a marriageable age. What brings about a turning point in Joseph's life is the shock both Liza and Celia give him by having sexual relations with other persons. Liza not only
extracts as much money as she needs, but also exploits some other person. This knowledge produces a strong sense of disgust in him. Joseph is deceived in his wife Celia. When he arrives home late from Liza's place Celia's professor leaves home from the back door of the apartment. The shock terribly stirs him and he decides to extricate himself from the mire like situation. Joseph describes his shame and mental agony in the following words:

I experienced the shame that in Gehenna ... That might I drained the cup of misery to its very dregs. as the phrase goes and I knew what I must do; put an end to the kind of life I'd been leading, sever, once and for all, my ties with everything and everybody in my environment. I had been dealt a blow that I could not ignore ... [The Penitent, pp 33-34].

Joseph decides to leave New York and even America. But he does not know where to go. The decision that he has already taken is to be a Jew, to adhere to the commandments, to believe in the Torah and the Gemara. But the real problem is how to have faith that can bring about a transformation in him and turn him into a pious Jew. His life in America is something that has taken him away from the righteous path. He resort to ignoble means to amass wealth. He knows that his life is false and corrupt. He is both a liar and a lecher. To bring about a transformation, and to regain faith are the most important tasks before him. He aspires to be a Talmud Jew. Joseph defines the Talmud Jew as under:

The Talmud Jew doesn't kill. He doesn't take part in wild orgies ... He doesn't carry a gun. He doesn't scheme to come to your home when you are away and sleep with your wife ... This Talmud Jew doesn't deal violently with any race, class or group. All he wants is to earn a living and raise his children and children's children to follow in the ways of the Torah and the Shulhan Arukh ... [The Penitent, pp 45-46].

Joseph then describes in detail his struggle to gain faith. There are temptations which create problems for him. Even in Israel, he does not find Tel Aviv to be a suitable place for him. The place that assists him in regaining his faith is
Sandzer study house in Jerusalem. It is there he does not suffer from the feeling of alienation. On the contrary, the Jews welcome him as one of them. They don't have any greed for wealth. What they desire is to be closely associated with the experiential aspect of Judaism. Joseph's decision to devote himself wholly to the ideals of Judaism is a conviction that is the outcome of his regaining faith. In the words of Joseph:

> If millions of Germans sacrificed themselves for the idol Hitler, and so many millions of Russians and Jews sacrificed themselves for the idol Stalin. I'm ready to sacrifice myself - or at least to suffer - for the idol in whose name we received the Ten Commandments and the whole Torah ... [The Penitent, p 150].

The discussion of time shapes with reference to Singer's major characters and the transformation in their lives shows how majority of them firmly decide to leave the secular lives and return to their traditional Jewish life or to associate themselves with their living tradition.

II

Singer employs the fantastic mode in his first novel Satan in Goray. It seems to be an experimental novel in which he tries to conflate two modes - the realistic and the fantastic one. Since the fantastic mode is pre-dominant, Satan in Goray is discussed here. There, Singer employs the supernatural element in such a manner that the improbable story appears credible. He employs the grotesque element as well.

Some critics like Irving Howe appreciate Singer's handling of the supernatural elements, while others criticize him for bringing in supernatural elements for the sake of sensationalism. But for Singer the supernatural element is spiritual
stenography through which he can effectively portray the predicament of human beings. Nile Wachtel quotes Singer in support of her argument about the use of supernatural: "The demons and satan represent to me in a sense, the ways of the world. Instead of saying this is the way things happen, I will say, this is the way demons behave. Demons symbolize the world for me and by that I mean human beings and human behaviour".

For Singer the use of the supernatural is one of the strategies to reveal the presence of evil in the world. It is also employed to represent the evil intentions, impulses that a man has within him. They are given some names and thus their modes of operation are shown. These supernatural beings try to take possession of a man. There ensues a struggle between the Good and the Evil, and the evil has an easy victory if the man is away from his God and his pious ways. As Ben Siegel rightly points out "his demonology enables Singer to expose the demons driving us all. His devils and imps symbolize those erratic, wayward and diabolic impulses that deter men from their father's piety and morality".

Singer uses the grotesque imagery to show the presence of abnormal in some of his characters. These characters are deliberately presented as caricatures that catch our attention immediately. Sometimes Singer uses the mirror images to make the character aware of the streak of ugliness that he has within him.

Singer's use of the supernatural is convincing because it shows psychological disorders. In addition, Singer believes that the witches, the ghosts and the dybbuks affect the characters. He says: "We are surrounded by secrets and entities of which we have no inkling. These things may all exist, just as electricity existed before Franklin discovered it. We also see sparks but we..."
ignore them".9

Some scholars feel that there are greater points of resemblance between Singer's works and the works of Hawthorne, in their use of supernatural. Singer, like Hawthorne assiduously creates the setting in which the supernatural elements can easily make their presence felt. However, one can also find a basic difference in their handling of the demons and satans. Elaine Gottlieb points out the subtle difference as follows:

one cannot infer from Singer as from Hawthorne that man must live with evil, that it is part of his nature, that perfection occurs only in death. What Singer implies is that man must always be on his guard against the evil that tries to dominate him. Man's imperfection does not obsess Singer, he and his characters accept it as a kind of divine joke ...

If Satan in Goray is analysed in the light of these views, one finds that Singer builds up the fantastic story by exploiting people's belief in ghosts and witches. The novel's setting also plays an important role. It is placed in the seventeenth century Poland when people felt the supernatural a part of their day to day world. The town of Goray is a remote one with no strong connections with the outside world.

Singer successfully shows how rumours spread like wild fire and create a world of expectancy and excitement. The people of Goray are convinced that their the days of exile would end soon and that they would be able to return to the Holy land. For Sabbatai Zevi, the Messiah has been creating miracles in distant places. Over and above this after the Chmelnicki massacre, the town of Goray is believed to be a haunted one and people avoid coming to it. Right from the opening pages of the novel people's belief in ghosts and witches is hinted at: "The peasants in the surrounding villages had been too terrified
People believe in the miraculous acts of the Messiah due to the ascendancy of the Cabbalistic sect of Judaism. The Cabbalistic texts fully support the miracles and consider the act of sexual union as something holy. Reb Gedaliya, the new Cabbalistic leader of Goray invites Rechele to join him in such a union. He says: "Rechele, it is midnight. The heavens are parting. The Divine Parent are coupling face to face. Rechele, be of Good cheer. This is the hour of union". [Satan in Goray, p 166].

Since their faith in Talmudic sect had not yielded the desired results, the Jews had become desperate. In spite of their faith and piety, redemption had not come. So they turn to the Cabbalistic sect which promises immediate results.

After the massacre, even Rabbi Benish Askenazi's faith is shaken. During his stay in Lublin, he sees people become more and more worldly. People's sufferings disturb him. Though he tries to restore normalcy, he cannot do it. Even in his family his son Levi and his wife Nechele show interest in the Cabbalistic sect. In fact, Nechele tries to win favour of some witches. Her association with the supernatural world is suggested thus:

Of Nechele, it was said that she had bewitched her husband, causing him to remain in love with her and follow her false ways. Ozer's wife swore that Nechele went out to gather herbs every Sabbath one. Some one also once met her going to see the witch Kunnigunde, who lived beyond the town, near the Gentile cemetery. [Satan in Goray, Pp 24-25]

Like the Rabbis family, the Reb Eleazer's family is also terribly affected by the massacre. He is the leader of the Jewish community. He has been a wealthy
man but after the massacre he is reduced to utter poverty. His daughter Rechele is also not normal. She is lame, not perfect in body. But at the relative's place she has had some hallucination which makes her abnormal. Singer describes those scenes which are responsible for the horror-stricken mental state of Rechele.

The impressionistic young mind of Rechele has developed claustrophobia. It is due to the presence of abnormal people around her in the house in which she lives, particularly the old mother-in-law of her uncle Reb Zeydel Ber who is described as: "a woman nearly ninety, deaf, with a waxen, shriveled face full of moles and chumps of yellowish hair ... " [Satan in Goray, p 58].

It was through this old lady that Rechele had become aware of the presence of ghosts. She would tell Rechele: "that there were graves in the yard where ghosts flew about ceaselessly, seeking bodies to enter ... " [Satan in Goray, p 60].

The old lady would also tell her stories "of wild beasts and goblins; of robbers that lived in caves with witches; of man eaters that roasted children on spits; and of a wild one-eyed monster that stalked about with a fir tree in its hard looking for a lost princess. Sometimes from her sleep Granny would cry out wildly and incoherently ... " [Satan in Goray, pp 61-62].

These tales about of ghosts and witches create in Rechele's mind a kind of fear from which she cannot easily come out. On the contrary she starts feeling the presence of the evil spirits in the home. Singer describes the details so minutely that a sense of horror is created. Rechele's mind obsessed with ghosts is presented as follows: "Rechele was well aware that the room was crowded
with evil things. The brooms and mops stirred; long shadows swept along and the walls like apparitions from another world ... " [Satan in Goray, p 64].

The descriptions of the presence of the horrible reaches their climactic state when Rechele receives the last blow from the supernatural that renders her abnormal for the rest of her life. Singer continues to build the tension that tells about his success handling of the fantastic mode. The final blow comes in the form of a hallucination based on the belief with the night of Yom Kippur, a part of the Jewish psyche:

The night before Yom Kippur is a frightening time. Often on that night, lords would fall upon Jewish homes and ravish the young un-protected girls ... Moreover, it was common knowledge that on this, the holiest of nights, when the awe-some prayer of Kol Nidre was chanted, the air was full of those ghosts that could find no resting place in the Hereafter ... Now Rechele was alone in the house on the night before Yom Kippur, and only a few hours previously a corpse had been taken away ... she fell asleep and in her dreams Granny came to her - her clothes in tatters, disheveled and haggard the kerchief about her head was soaked with blood. "Rechele! Rechele!" She creamed and rubbed the girl's face with a straw whisk. Rechele's whole body shuddered. She awoke, drenched with sweat ... Late that night, when uncle came home, he found Rechele lying with her knees pulled to her chest, her eyes glazed and her teeth clenched ... At length Rechele began to groan, but from that evening on she was never the same. [Satan in Goray, pp 67-68].

This girl Rechele who is physically deformed and mentally disturbed becomes instrumental in creating religious frenzy in which almost the whole town of Goray is engulfed. Rechele, when she grows up into a youngwomen, has a powerful sexual appeal, but she remains unmarried because of her father's indifference to marriage proposal. Unfortunately, the husband she gets is Reb Itche Mates who is impotent and cannot satisfy her sexual needs. Singer makes this lady a prophetess whose abnormal behaviour is taken to be of great importance. He shows her body being possessed by both good and evil
spirits. It is she who declares Reb Gedaliya, the slaughterer to be a holy man and forcasts the redemption to come on the New Year's Day. Reb Gedaliya exploits her for his own selfish motives. She is elevated to the position of a prophetess and in her name and holy powers credulous people are victimised.

The presence of the supernatural is also projected convincingly in the incident in which the Rabbi Benish Akenazi moves out of his house to check the activities of the Cabbalistic sect at Reb Eleazar's house. Men and women have gathered there for a dancing performance. The Rabbi and his beadle leave the house. On the way, the Rabbi is carried away by a powerful wind and is not allowed to reach his destination. Singer describes the whole incident in such a vivid manner that one suspects a hand of the supernatural in it. The people feel the presence of "the others". The following is the description:

But all at once a great hoarse wind rushed upon him, thrusting him back several steps and began to drive him down hill from behind... Rabbi Benish realized that evil was abroad and tried to return to his house. But at that moment his eyes were filled as with sand... Suddenly the storm bore him aloft for a short distance, as on wings and then cast him down with such violence that in the turmoil he could hear his bones shatter... [Satan in Goray, p 103].

After the news that Sabbatai Zevi has converted himself to Islam, people's hopes of redemption are shattered. There is a change in Rechele's behaviour, too. Her body is now taken possession by a Satan who does not allow Reb Gedaliya to sleep with her. She is in a mood of despair, and the prophecies that she could make, are no more heard. On the contrary, she admits to Reb Gedaliya that "Samael had come to her at night and had violated her. A destroyer demon given in her womb". [Satan in Goray, p 200].

The last two chapters of the novel are very important. The first one is entitled: The Dybbuk of Goray and the second one is The Death of Rechele. Both these
chapters describe in detail how the dybbuk had entered Rechele's body and refused to leave her. Reb Mordecai Joseph uses the prescribed rituals to exorcise it. Before leaving Rechele, the dybbuk exceedingly torments her. With great effort, Reb Mordecai Joseph succeeds in driving the dybbuk out. But in the process, Rechele meets her death.

Singer employs a different kind of language to perform the ritual. The process of exorcism also has touches of fantasy in it. Here is one illustration:

"And Now did the dybbuk scream ever more loudly and he confessed his sins with a fearful lamentation and groaning: And the woman lifted a heavy stone and smote her breast: And the marvel was that her limbs were not broken nor her frame shattered for so heavy was the stone that three strong men could not move it from its place". [Satan in Goray, p 208].

Singer makes the readers witness the process of exorcism with all paraphernalia and incantations. The description runs thus:

He (Reb Mordecai Joseph) bade a censer be fetched and onycha and wax and incense and other spiced and glowing coals: And he bade black candles be lighted and they brought the board of purification and he enveloped himself in a white robe and another ten men put on prayer shawls and phylacteries and the chanter took a ram's horn in his hand: And he opened the doors of the Holy Ark and he drew out thence a Torah scroll and he cried: Be Quick and fly of I shall excommunicate thee and drive thee off by force: ...

[Satan in Goray, p 218].

Singer concludes the novel with a moral which gives this fantastic and realistic mode of narration the touch of a fable. The moral of the story is "Let us not attempt to force the Lord to end our pain within the world: The Messiah will in their clothes and elflocks in their hair; often their skins were covered with rashes and boils, they ate field rodents and the rotting carasses of fowls. Some of them could scarcely speak Polish grunted like animals, made signs with
their hands, screamed and laughed madly". [The Slave, p 15]. The description lays emphasis on uncleanness, and sub-human existence. The element of animality that can put Jacob in a different situation is indirectly suggested as well.

The Slave has a number of references to evil spirits which sometimes spoil the crops in the fields or harass human being, but the presence of a Jew amidst them is not less dangerous to the pagans. Along with the evil spirits, Jacob is also mentioned and thus the distance between the Jew and the Gentile is underlined. The spirits mentioned are Dizwosina, Skrzots. The Dizwosina would usually behave in a secretive manner. It would try to please the girls by braiding their hair and dancing with them. But it would also in the process make them filthy. Skrzots would be more dangerous. It was heard that one of the Skrzots had fastened its teeth on a virgin's breasts and drunk her blood. The people around Jacob feared him and looked at him with a sense of misgiving: "It was a sin, they said to maintain an infidel in a Christian village. Who knew where this man come from or what his intentions were? He said that he was a Jew, but if that was so he had murdered Jesus Christ. Why, then, should he be given asylum?" [The Slave, pp 36-37].

Jacob's fascination for Wanda is also taken as a trick of Satan. Wanda takes care of him and yet he feels that she is someone who would defile him and his Jewish identity. Gradually his passion for her becomes intense and difficult to control. At times, he feels he should go down to the valley and have her. But he controls his passion. He says: "I'm damned already". [The Slave, p 39]. He was sure it is Satan speaking through him.

When Sarah is about to deliver a child, Jacob to ward off evil spirits, places
a knife and a holy book close to her pillows. He also uses some amulet so that evil spirits could be kept away from Sarah. To quote Jacob's belief in evil spirits: "Jacob had also acquired a talisman from a scribe which had the power to keep off Ygereth, the queen of the demons. Machlath, her attendant as well as the lilthies who resembled humans but had bat wings, ate fire and lived in shadows of the moon and tree trunks". [The Slave, p 199].

In The Magician of Lublin, the grotesque is introduced to indicate the presence of evil. At the same time it also serves another purpose. Its presence makes Yasha Mazur aware of the evil. There are a few instances where Singer employs them to externalize the confused state of Yasha's mind and to warn him in advance to enable him to leave the risky path that he had taken to and to return to his Jewish mode of living. One such picture of grotesque comes before Yasha in the form of a beggar who is deformed, ugly and disgusting to look at. Yasha happens to meet him when he is seriously thinking of giving up his frivolous ways and taking up life of a pious Jew. His mind is in turmoil. The deformity of the beggar disturbs him considerably and makes him aware of his own deformity. Singer's device here is that of the 'double' which is commonly found in confessional novels. The description of the beggar is very precise:

Just then Yasha saw a cripple approaching. He was a small man and his head, cocked to one side, appeared to be trying to tear itself loose from his neck. So also with his gnarled hands - they seemed about to crack from his wrists even while he was collecting alms. Apparently his legs had only one goal to grow more twisted... Each finger was bent in a different direction, plucking it seemed an unseen fruit from an unseen tree... A twisted tongue trailed from his twisted mouth, issuing between twisted teeth... Another magician! he thought and felt a revulsion, an urge to flee... He wanted to run but his own feet began to tremble and twitch as if imitating the cripples". [The Magician of Lublin, p 129].

On Bolesc street, Yasha meets another grotesque creature which makes him aware of his ugliness. He is represented as under: "A tall laborer wearing a
cheeked jacket, blue cap, and low boots approached. He had a narrow, sunken face which had been half-eaten away and in place of a nose, a black plaster on a string". [The Magician of Lublin, p 170].

There is yet another creature that disturbs Yasha terribly. Yasha is completely lost in pain. He has consumed drink. The catastrophe has struck him. He is thinking of committing suicide. He is about to leave the hotel when he happens to see a giant person before him. The appearance of the giant makes him feel that there is a close resemblance between them. Yasha imagines that the man must have undergone a tragedy similar to the one which had suffered from. Again it is through grotesque that Yasha becomes aware of his own pain and the pain of others. The grotesque in the hotel is represented effectively: "The giant across the way from him laughed and Yasha saw a set of broken teeth. It was as if he and Yasha were involved in some great joke together. How can a man like that live? ... Perhaps what I'm going through now has already happened to him. Saliva dropped from the giant's mouth ..." [The Magician of Lublin, p 174].

Maximillian Novak analyzes Singer's use of grotesque and conclude: "Singer is a novelist and short story writer, not a philosopher and that the grotesque is a literary tool which he uses at his best, to lend significance to the world of his fiction and even in his slightest efforts, to provide a kind of excitement that few modern writers can match."12

III

The device of contrastive characterization has been employed to project the theme of search for identity. In the saga novels Singer has created host of
characters. The protagonists stand for the major aspects of the theme while the minor ones represent a minor aspect which helps in a better understanding of all the dimensions of the it. Since Singer's novels deal with the world of the Polish Jews, it is brought into sharp relief by the presentation of the Gentile world, around them. Then within the Jewish world also there are groups which have either similarities or dissimilarities. In the saga novels the impact of Enlightenment, Emancipation and other socio-economic conditions are the major agents of change - either for good or bad. For the Gentile societies in which there exists a clear division between the feudal lords and the peasants, the haves and the have-nots. In The Manor and The Estate, one strand of the saga is completely devoted to the deterioration and degeneration that takes place in the life of Count of Jampolsky and his son Lucian, his daughter Felinia and others. After the failure of the insurrection of the Polish lords to liberate Poland from the hands of Russian Czar, their property is confiscated and most of the insurrectionists are arrested and sent to Siberia. The Count of Jampolsky, after having returned from Siberia, is a different person. He is so affected by the theories of Darwinism that he leads a life of physical pleasures. He is so disoriented that he openly lives with a maid servant named Antosia. His son Lucian, who had also participated in the revolt, escapes. Singer provides a detailed description of his life before he marries Miriam Lieba, the daughter of Caiman. After his marriage, his life in Paris is also described. Like his father he has degenerated into a life of despair and desperation.

Lucian in spite of his romantic marriage with Miriam Lieba, cannot live a normal happy life. A similar picture of the Gentile world giving prominence to the life of the feudal lords is found in The Slave. Singer presents a vivid picture of the Lord Pilitzky and the lady Pilitzky. The Cossacks' attack nearly destroys his property. His castle, his manor house and farms are nearly destroyed.
When life becomes normal after the departure of the Cossacks, Lord Pilitzky and Lady Pilitzky start their life anew. Lord Pilitzky being a Catholic, has strong aversion for Protestants and Jews. He believes that there could be no peace and progress in Poland till all the Protestants and Jews are killed. Singer draws a fine picture of the Lord Pilitzky and his wife, their fascination for Jacob and his wife Sarah, their support to them after Gershon, the Jew is asked to leave. The most touching scene in The Slave is when Lord Pilitzky himself comes to Jacob's house and asks him to flee Pilitz before he could be excommunicated for his crime of marrying a gentile woman. Singer presents Lord Pilitzky with all his strength and weaknesses:

"Pilitzky took him by the arm and led him outside".
"Look, you'd better leave town," he said conspiratorially.
"The priests will burn you. And they'll be right to do it".
"How can I run away at such a time?"
"She'll be dead shortly. I pity you, Jew. That's why I'm warning you". [The Slave, p 219].

In other novels, there is no such major scope for Singer to present the Gentile society. In The Family Moskat, Shosha, and The Magician of Lublin there are a few instances when some minor characters represent the general attitude of hatred for the Jew. They express the views that the Jews are responsible for their problems and that the Jews should either be sent away to Palestine or be allowed to perish at the hands of the pogromists or the Nazis. But in the Jewish world, one discerns three major categories. In Linda Metzger's words they are:

"God-chooser. he directs his energy toward living consistently within His Laws ... the God-denier. he has already submitted to the forces of evil by embracing satan: ... the doubter, he ruminates at length about God's existence but utilizes his drives in resolving his conflict and arrives ultimately at complete faith in or denial of Him ... "

Among the God-choosers are the rabbis of different Hassidism courts. Take,
for example, the rabbi of Marshinov, the rabbi of Tereshpol Minor. Jochanan, Moishe Gabriel, Fishel Kutner, Esther and the like. All these characters show complete faith in God and His mercy. They continue to worship Him even amidst odds and hardships. Even in the face of pogroms, massacres, Holocaust, they continue to worship Him, not holding Him responsible for the evil that exists in the world. In fact, they blame the human beings who fail to surrender themselves completely to the will of the God. For them, whether pogroms or Holocaust or any kind of persecution is a symbol of the birth-pangs of the Messiah and hence even amidst the most terrible times they want to stick to the righteous path and be pious Jews. Jochanan, the rabbi of Marshinov, analyses the causes of man's suffering in the world and finally affirms:

A man is born to serve. If he does not serve God, he serves man. 'The fool hath said in his heart there is no God'. Since a wicked man does not believe in the creator, his brain is only concerned with admiring flesh and blood. He extols one man because he is rich, another because he is comely, a third one because he is shrewd, a fourth powerful. Those who think only of material things are jealous. Jealousy brings anguish and anguish leads to conflict ... [The Estate, p 74]

The whole passage delineates the gradual deterioration that takes place in man's life if he gives up the righteous path. Once the path of God is forsaken, there is always a crisis of identity. Moishe, Aaron's brother in Shosha is also unperturbed with the news that Hitler will completely annihilate the Jews. For him, Hitler is a symbol of evil and every human being has a potential for becoming a Hitler. Once one leaves God and moves away from Him he so degenerates that he can be as threatening as Hitler was. Moishe tries to convince him how evil is so close to human beings. One has to be cautious about the evil in disguise. Referring to evil persons he says:

Their aim is to erase the Thou shalt not from the Ten Commandments. They scheme to put honest men in prison and thieves to be their judges. Whole communities degenerate ... One sheep can make the whole herd leprous. One spark of fire can burn a mansion. Hitler -
his name should be blotted out - is not the only villain. There are
Hitlers in every city, in every community. If we forget the Lord for
a second, we are immediately on the side of defilement.
[Shosha, p 182].

There are also a few characters who deny the existence of God and play into the
hands of Satan. They do not feel the pangs of conscience. They feel that what
they do is right and there is hardly any purpose of life except that of enjoying
maximum of pleasure. In this category fall characters like Zipkin, Clara,
Stepha, Abram, Hadassah, Leah, Koppel and others. These characters are there
to show how disoriented people behave. They are modernized ones. They are
guided either by political ideologies or by whims and fancies of their hearts.

The third category is that of the doubters who continue to doubt the omnipotence
and mercy of God. They play into the hands of Satan or Evil. But they face
certain crisis in their lives which makes them bring about a change in their lives. What sets them apart is their voice of conscience which they cannot
ignore. They listen to it and though they are not fully convinced at time about
the contradictions inherent in their religious preachings, they try to restore
their faith assiduously or they eschew harming others. Such people are more
worried about their relationship with mankind rather than observance of rituals
and rites. Under this category fall most of the protagonists of Singer's novels. In The Manor and The Estate, one comes across Calman, Ezriel and
Zadok. In The Family Moskat, is Asa Heshel, though not fully convinced, he
is the person who comes back to the fold of family. Yasha Mazur in The
Magician of Lublin. Aaron in Shosha, Jacob in The Slave, Joseph Shapiro
in The Penitent and Herman Broder in Enemies: A Love Story. Barring Asa
Heshel and Herman Broder, rest of the protagonists evince a clear tendency to
go back to their original faith, original way of life of their community or
culture because only amidst it they feel they have some meaning to their
existence or they have an identity, a sense of belongingness or rootedness. Their reasons for a change are either due to some powerful external factors or some internal convictions. Some of them show a tendency to atone for the wrongs they have committed. One can easily discern a symmetry or a pattern in their dreams, visions and visits to either synagogues or study-house. It is one of the significant narrative devices that is a common factor that binds the protagonists together and creates a structural design in each of the major novels.

For Ezriel and Calman the turning point is partly due to their visit to the Hassidic court of Marshinov. Both of them experience a kind of mental peace there and eventually their sense of alienation gets lessened. Moreover their faith in Judaism and Jewish community gets strengthened. Similarly in Yasha's case, it is shown that he visits the synagogues three times. The first time, he is compelled by nature that is due to heavy rains, he has to take shelter there. Being in the synagogue, he has a feeling that he belongs to a tradition which has maintained its identity for two thousand years. The Second time also he seeks shelter in a synagogue in Warsaw to escape arrest at the hands of a night watchman. This visit also stirs in him a sense of awareness about the Jewish heritage. It is during the third visit that he decides to atone for the sins he has committed. In addition to this he also has a few visions in which he happens to see his parents and grandparents scolding him for defiling Judaism and his own life. They warn him not to convert himself for the sake of a woman and lose his identity. Yasha recalls the promise he had given his father on his death bed. The incident makes it clear that it is not that an individual life is important, but it is his identification with the community, tradition that gives an individual's life a relevance. The following passage highlights this idea:

Again he (Yasha) felt shame, not because he had been clumsy, but because he had betrayed his fraternity, befouled it, stood ready to cast it aside what's the matter with me? After all, I'm descended from generations of God-fearing Jews. My great-
grandfather was a martyr for the holy name. He remembered his father, who, on his death bed, had summoned Yasha to his side and said, 'Promise me that you will remain a Jew'. And he had taken his Yasha's hand and held it until he entered his death throes". [The Magician of Lublin, p 125].

The protagonist Joseph Shapiro also listens to a voice which is representative of the generations of the Jews. The voice asks him to keep himself away from elements that have defiled him:

Flee from this abomination! Run from the culture of Hitler and Stalin! Escape from a civilization that is a slaughter house and brothel! Flee from women who live like whores and demand to be loved and honored ... What's happened to you? What kind of mud have you fallen into? ... [The Penitent, p 63].

In Shosha, Aaron also listens to a similar voice and then his father's voice is also heard. This happens when Sam Dreiman offers him to take to USA, provided he allows him to stay with him and Slonm Betty. The holocaust is imminent and if Aaron does not leave Warsaw in time he would be killed. But Aaron smells a fraud in it and therefore he turns down the proposal. Here also one can discern a pattern similar to the one seen earlier in it. The following description from Shosha is similar in tone to the passages mentioned above from The Penitent:

'Run!' a voice cried within me. 'You'll sink into a slime from which you'll never be able to get out. They'll drag you into the abyss!' It was my father's voice. In the light of dawn I saw his high brow and piercing eyes. Don't shame me, your mother and your holy ancestors! All your deeds are noted in heaven. Then the voice began to abuse me. Heathen! Betrayer of Israel! [Shosha, p 146]

Descriptions of festivals and religious ceremonies also provide yet another kind of structural pattern. They also occupy an important place in Singer's novels. They provide opportunities to the members to gather together and experience a strong fellow-feeling. These festivals have their roots in their cultural past and are part of their historical consciousness. These are certain
occasions on which people commemorate certain historical events with great sense of seriousness and solemnity. Besides these, there are also many day-to-day rituals which the Jews are required to perform. Their day begins with prayers, followed by a number of benedictions to be said before taking meals and performing other activities. The observance of Sabbath is also an important duty for the Jews. They would not transact any business on that day. Visiting ritual bath is obligatory for all. In matters of food also they have to follow certain dietary rules. Only the meat had from the ritual slaughterer is Kosher. In kitchen, also the milk food or dairy food has to be cooked in different utensils. Visiting synagogue, reading in the study house and praying together are also part of the daily obligations. Women have to cover their heads with bonnets. After marriage, they are expected to get their hair shorn. They are also supposed to look after the business and provide ample time to their spouse to study Torah and Talmud and their commentaries. There are rigid rules about menstrual period. For arranging marriages they need a matchmaker. He would charge his fees and settle engagements. Dowries are to be paid by the parents of the daughters to the parents of the bridegrooms in the form of expenditure for maintenance for a particular period. To know whether a person is dead or not, a feather is put to the nose of the person about to die. After death, the person's legs are put in the direction of the door and shards are put on his/her eyes. There is a wealth of such information that we gather about the Jews and their traditional life. It speaks a lot about the well-knit society of the Jews and their identity. There are references to the celebrations of Rosh Hashana, the New Year Day of the Jews, the Day of Atonement, the festival of Hanukkah, the Passover etc. The Manor, The Estate and The Family Moskat, Enemies: A Love Story, The Magician of Lublin, Shosha and The Penitent abound in references to these festivals. These festivals are observed even when the Jews are facing crisis or even when the holocaust is imminent. In The
Family Moskat towards the end of the novel, the Jews do not fail to celebrate the festival of Passover, with traditional zeal and enthusiasm. They are indifferent to the external factors that can affect their daily lives. The following description speaks about the Jews' enthusiasm:

The Bailodrevna Chassidim had rented a bakery on Krochmalna Street where they would be able to have their Passover matzos prepared in the strict ritual manner... Everything was done according to the very latter of the ritual. The rabbi himself watched as Annsel's wife heated the oven in the kitchen... But here, in Warsaw Jewishness still had its old-fashioned charm... [The Family Moskat, p 598].

The prayers that the Jews chant and sing have a typical effect on the minds of the Jews. The Yom Kippur chant is known as Kol Nidre and it continues to haunt the chanter as well as the listener. Though there are a few references to this chant in the novels discussed it has a special mention in Satan in Goray where the twelve-year old lonely Rechele listens to it and gets affected by it. She is all alone in her home. Granny is no longer there. Kol Nidre is chanted and she feels the sense of fear in her mind. She identifies the sound of muttering to that of chanting of Kol Nidre. Leslie Field the renowned critic admits that it is difficult to forget the mystical chanting of Yom Kippur. He being an insider knows what the chant means and how it affects the psyche of the Jews. In one of his unmailed fictionalized letter entitled "Dear Betty or Yom Kippur - Plus - Two - Days of Reflection" Leslie takes to task the person who without having any understanding of Judaism talks about it in a ninety minute cassette. He admits: 'I don't recognize my Jewish life, my faith in anything...'. Leslie Field asks the person in an enraged tone: "Does Cohen (the fictionalized name given to the man who speaks through the cassette) have any notion at all of what it is to be a Jew? Does he really know, has he really felt our long history - which goes back many years before the birth of Jesus? Does he know what a Jew feels about Abraham, Isaac, Jacob?..."
These lines clearly indicate how these chanting are deep-rooted in the minds of the Jews and how relevant they are for their identity. One of the striking strategies that highlights the theme of identity is the description of certain places which recur in the novels. Barry Lopez, in his article "A Literature of Place", talks about the importance of the sense of place for a creative writer: "It is my belief that a human imagination is shaped by the architectures it encounters at an early age. The visual landscape, of course or the depth, elevator and hues of a cityscape play a part here as does the way sunlight everywhere etches lines to accentuate forms ..." 

Singer also like an accomplished painter evokes a "sense of place". This sense is not just limited to a geographical description of a place but it has cultural connotations as well. Most of Singer's novels and short stories abound in descriptions of certain streets, certain sections of the city of Warsaw where the Jews are predominant, the river Vistula, Saxony Garden etc. These descriptions highlight the traditional way of the Jews which sets them apart from the Gentile world. Living for more than over five decades in America Singer has not been able to forget Poland, especially Warsaw its Krochmalna Street and other places. The following description of Jewish section of Warsaw street in The Family Moskat throws light on the ways of Jewish life and speaks about their identity:

The carriage turned into Gzybov Place and abruptly everything changed. The side walks were crowded with gaberdined Jews wearing small cloth caps and bewigged women with shawl over their heads. Even the smell were different now. There was a whiff of the market place in the air - spoiled fruits, lemons and a mixture of something sweetish and tarry, which could not be given a name and which impinged on the sense only when we returned to the scene after a longish absence ... A boy with a cap pulled low over his eyes was selling New Year calendars, shouting at the top of his voice. A ragged youth with a pair of frightened eyes and disheveled earlocks stood near a box of prayer shawls, phylacteries, prayer books, tin Channukah candle sticks and amulets for pregnant women ... [The Family Moskat, pp 13-14]
Michael J Bandler’s article Voices From The Region says how a mature writer can recreate a world that he has already been lost. In the words of Bandler: "the gifted writer can bring it all together - nature, place, society - with the wisp of nostalgia that always accompanies memory ..." 

For Singer recreating the world which had been an indivisible part of his personality is one of the aims of his creative writing. Aaron visits the Krochmalna Street and tries to store up everything in his memory so that it could be made immortal through his writing. During his visit of the Krochmalna Street Aaron's sensitive mind takes note of minute details and all its cumulative impact on him: 

We came out onto Gnoyna Street and my nostrils were assailed by the familiar odor of soap, oil and horse manure. In this neighborhood were the Cheders, study houses and Hassidic prayer houses where I had learned Torah. We reached Krochmalna Street and the stench I recalled from my childhood struck me first - a blend of burned oil, rotten fruit and chimney smoke ... There was a ritual bath in the courtyard. ... [Shosha, pp 68-69].

Aaron very fondly shows Betty Slonim everything that was a part of his childhood - The Cheder, Yeshiva the house of the rabbi, the place associated with the people of the underworld. Being a Jew, Betty is so fascinated by the sights that she expresses the desire to carry them to America. In the words of Betty: "If all this could only be transported to America!" [Shosha, p 70].

Thus, the description of the place is one of the narrative strategies through which Singer highlights the identity of the Jews. Even the beautiful descriptions of landscapes that one comes across in the novels are related with the deeply rooted cultural images in the mind of the Jews. The following illustrations from The Slave and In My Father's Court exemplify it:
He threw open the barn door and saw the mountains stretching into the distance. Some of the peaks, their slopes overgrown with forests, seemed close at hand. Giants with green beards. Mist rising from the woods like tenuous curls made Jacob think of Samson. ... [The Slave, p 11].

The air smelled of earth, of grass, of the smoke of locomotives and of something more that intoxicated me and made my head real. There was a strange stillness here and everything murmured, rustled, chirped. ... I looked up at the sky, saw the sun, the clouds and the suddenly I understood more clearly the meaning of the words of Genesis. This, then, was the world God had created: the earth, the heavens, the waters above that are separated by the firmament from waters below". [In My Father's Court, p 153].

In the first illustration the green trees look like bearded men - the Jews, while the second one, brings to mind the meaning of genesis and the presence of God. There is yet another aspect which is related to the sense of place. The East-European streets have taken so deep a possession of Herman Broder's being in Enemies: A Love Story that he continues to search for them in New York, too. Or sometimes he shows preference for those streets which remind him of them. Singer's description refers to the Jewish craving deep-rooted in him:

Herman's office was in a building on twenty-third street near Fourth Avenue ... but today he chose Mermaid Avenue. This street had an Eastern European flavour. Last year's posters announcing cantors and rabbis and the prices of synagogue pews for the High Holy days still hung on the walls. From the restaurants and cafeteries came the smells of chicken soup, kasha, chopped liver ...
[Enemies: A Love Story, p 19].

Warsaw and its streets are so ingrained in the minds of the protagonists that even after a relapse of several years they can feel the presence of the city even with the fragrance and typical sounds. In Scum, the hero Max Barabander returns to Warsaw after many years. Even through sitting in the coach, the city of Warsaw becomes alive in his mind:
Every city has its own smell. His nose remembered the odor of Warsaw from the past as a mixture of likes, sewage, tar, winds sweeping in from the Praga forests and a something that had no name. As for the noise the trolleys clanged differently over the cobble stone. A din still arose from the market place and from the voice of cheder boys who were reciting the Pentateuch aloud...

Thus, Singer effectively uses the sense of place and connects it with the theme. While reading the novels it becomes clear that there are certain words and terms which have been frequently used. There are also a few proverbs and saying that are strikingly similar to certain expressions and saying in Indian languages. We gain a clear idea about them when we go for the discourse analysis of the major texts. Here an attempt is made to highlight those lexical and stylistic features which have a clear bearing on the identity theme.

One of the discoursal features in the use of a large number of lexical items which reflect the Jewish culture rites and rituals and celebrations of festivals. Some of the major lexical items have been glossed as follows:

**Rosh Hashanah**

: The Jewish New Year, a solemn occasion celebrated on the first or second of Tishri (usually late September or early October).

**Hanukkah/Chanukkah**

: A Jewish festival beginning on the 25th of the month of Kislev and lasting eight days. It is also called, 'Feast of Lights' or Feast of Dedication.

**Yom Kippur**

: The holiest Jewish holiday, celebrated on the ten day of Tishri, on which fasting and prayer for the atonement of sins are prescribed. Also, *Day of*
Pentecost: a Jewish festival Shavuot, commemorating the revelation of the Law on Mount Sinai and celebration of the Wheat festival in ancient times observed on the sixth and seventh of Sivan. Also called Feast of Weeks.

Purim: A holiday in the month of Adar, celebrating the deliverance of the Jews from the threatened massacre by Haman.

Passover: First of the three festivals of pilgrimage to Jerusalem, it begins on Nisan 15. The traditional interpretation of the Hebrew name is from the root passover but some modern scholars take it from the root 'dance' or 'leap' connecting it with an ancient spring festival.

Benediction: Formulas of praise and thanks established and regulated according to Talmudic tradition by men of the great synagogue. Recitation of benedictions constitute a great part of the prayer service, whether at the synagogue or in individual prayer ...

Midrash: The finding of new meaning, in addition to the literal one, in the scriptures. Talmudic tradition has formulated certain rules to deduce such hidden and new meanings.

Mishnah: Legal codification containing the care of the oral
Law. It was compiled by R Judah Ha-Nasi on the basis of the previous collections and arranged logically.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Seder</td>
<td>Ceremony observed in the Jewish have on the first night of Passover when the Haggdah is recited. The structure of the ritual is based on the Mishnah.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tabernacle</td>
<td>The portable sanctuary set up by Moses in the wilderness according to Divine Instructions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Temple</td>
<td>The central edifice for Divine worship in Israel until 70 CE situated in Mt. Moriah in Jerusalem. The first temple, built by Solomon, was a shrine for the Ark.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yeshiva</td>
<td>Jewish traditional school devoted primarily to the study of the Talmud and rabbinic literature.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cheder</td>
<td>A traditional Jewish school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dybbuk</td>
<td>In Kabbalistic folklore the soul of a sinner which after his death transmigrates into the body of a living person. The dybbuk can be expelled by conjuring the Divine name.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kaddish</td>
<td>A prayer in praise of God said in daily synagogue services and by mourners after the death of a close.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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relative.

Mezuzah

: A parchment scroll containing scriptural texts which is placed in a case and fixed to the door post by Jewish families as a sign of their faith.

Schlemiel

: A chiksy person, a pitiful bungler, fool.

Shtetl

: A Jewish community in an East European town or village.

Schnorrer

: A Jewish beggar who believes he has a legitimate share in the rich man's wealth. He demands charity as his divine right ...

One of the stylistic features of Singer's narrative is his typical use of dramatic monologue. The omniscient narrator describes the mental state of a character and the suddenly unobtrusively there is a shift to the first person narration. Through this strategy Singer tries to reveal the individuality of the character.

The following is an illustration wherein Singer lends an authentic touch to the character of Ezriel through juxtaposing two point of view:

All the boys except Ezriel had formed a group. He had remained an outsider. Even the teacher had been suspicious of him. The boys had ridiculed him, called him names, hit him, and at the same time had tried to woo his friendship ... It must be something in me, he thought. But what - my face, my eyes? Do I seem crazy? He pitied Shaindel ... [The Manor, p 61].

Another recurring feature of Singer's style is the use of the language for cursing
some one or remembering some one with respect and reverence. Whenever there are references to people who have been evil-doers, the language of curse is used. When parents, holy men and other good people are referred to, typical expression is used. Singer even in translation tries to retain them for they are closely connected with the Jewish culture. The following illustration shows how curse is uttered. In a letter written from Lublin to Rabbi Benish Askenazi, the writer of the letter writes: "Sabbatai Zevi is his name, may he be erased from the book of life". [Satan in Goray, p 86].

In the similar vein Chmelnicki is also referred to: "for the wounds we got at the hands of the murderer Chmelmicki (may his name perish!)." [Satan in Goray, p 86].

The words of praise are added as: "Jacob, the son of the holy Rabbi Nachum (blessed be the memory of the righteous)" [Satan in Goray, p 92].

As one comes across literal translations of certain Hindi or Urdu phrases, sayings and proverbs in Salman Rushdie's Midnight's Children and Haroun and Other Stories, Singer's novels also have many such striking sayings and proverbs. Singer in one of the interviews with Harold Flender admits frankly the problems of translation. In order to maintain the flavour of original Yiddish language, Singer deliberately uses the literal translation because he is aware of the limitations of the process of translations. He observes,

as far as translation is concerned, naturally even the writer loses in translation, particularly poets and humorists. Also writers whose writing is tightly connected to folklore are a heavy loser. But then lately I have assisted in translating of my works and knowing the problem, I take care that I don't lose too much ...

The following are a few illustrations in which one finds the echoes of the thoughts
similar to those occur in Indian scriptures, especially the Gita.

Yasha Mazur talks to one of his old friends Schmul. When the latter expresses his fear of death. Yasha philosophizes and tells him: "Only the body dies. The soul lives on. The body is like a garment. When a garment becomes soiled or threadbare, it is cast aside". [The Magician of Lublin, p 194].

In one of the parties hosted by Wallenberg Ezriel clad in modern dress feels awkward. He also cannot speak French fluently. In spite of all his efforts to know the worldliness, he cannot master it. Suddenly he is reminded of a hymn sung during the Pentecost which states: "if all people were writers, all sky parchment and are forests pens, it would still be impossible to write out all the secrets contained in the Torah". [The Manor, p 367].

The transitoriness of life, imminence of death, nature of death and a mood of resignation, on suffering some loss, are expressed through the following saying and expressions which bear close resemblance to Indian approach to life as well. The following are the illustrations:

"An old garment tears. The soul needs new clothing". [The Manor, p 164].

"I'm an old man already with one foot in the grave". [The Estate, p 124].

"This world is nothing more than an inn. We are all guests". [The Estate, p 286].

"The Lord hath given, and the Lord hath taken away". [The Estate, p 125].

A person who converts or embraces other religion is an alien for the Jewish society. When Miriam Lieba, Calman's daughter elopes with Lucian, it is a great shock to the family as well as Calman. She is compared to "a fingernail disposed of to hair trimmed off for ever." [The Manor, p 225].
On another occasion her separation is expressed in a telling manner: "She was a branch that had been torn from the tree". [The Manor, p 322].

The novels have numerous examples of sayings and expressions which deal with day to day life and practical wisdom. Some specimens are:

"The truth will out as they say, like oil on the water". [The Estate, p 231].
"She is prepared to wash your feet and drink the water". [The Estate, p 16].
"What's mine is mine, and what's yours is mine, too". [The Estate, p 229].
"Everyone knew that walls had ears". [The Manor, p 90].
"He who lives without reckoning dies without grace". [The Manor, p 20].

The novels are full of many Biblical and Talmudic quotes that express universal truths and words of wisdom. The following illustrations are very striking:

"Many waters cannot quench love, neither can the floods drown it." [The Estate, p 40].
"It is better to throw oneself into a lime Kiln than to shame someone before others." [The Manor, p 158].
"One sick sheep was sufficient to infect an entire flock." [The Manor, p 232].
"You cannot make silk purse out of a sow's ear". [The Manor, p 71].

Some of the expressions and quotes not only embellish the narrative but also make them precise and effective. Their appeal is due to the brevity in expression. Below are given a few illustrations:

"These honours aren't worth a pinch of snuff".
"Lust boiled within him as in his youth".
"Dreams attacked her like locusts".
"Dreams attacked her like locusts".

"In business, one cannot afford a tender conscience".

Thus it becomes evident that Singer effectively uses the narrative strategies and projects the theme of identity convincingly. These strategies deal with different aspects of the theme and explore it in many interesting ways.

References


3. Ibid; p 6.


