

During the last several years, I frequently have to answer the question: Why do I do what I do? It isn't enough to provide just any answer, but a specific explanation is needed, as if the matter was somewhat suspect, and certainly ambiguous. A kind of bewilderment, tinted with slight sensationalism, accompanies me during my work, be it in Poland or abroad. None of my previous books caused this type of reaction.

Why the Jews? What came over you? There must be something to it. What exactly is behind it? Both in my country and abroad I am constantly exposed to a surprised reaction: someone from Poland, from a country they perceive to be more antisemitic than others, becomes involved in such issues. Initially, this causes suspicion, then admiration. Both reactions are, in my opinion, unnecessary. Such confrontations frequently become full of pain.

In fact, I am continuously forced to defend myself. I defend myself from the aggressiveness of one side and from the bitterness of the other; from the wrongdoers and those who were wronged; from those contaminated with antisemitic disease and from their victims. Poles are frequently of the opinion that the issue should be left alone. Jews tend to condemn anything Polish, and thus also blame me, since I am conveniently at hand, for all of Polish wrongdoing, whether deserved or undeserved. In such situations, I try to be on both sides of the fence at once, and at the same time I try not to lose my sense of balance, which can be difficult. I defend myself from those attacks and at the same time I also try to defend one side against the other. I attempt to defend whatever dignity possible in their mutual relations. In my opinion, a singular truth does not exist, regardless of the subject. The same is true also regarding to World War II. I try to avoid generalizations, as much as I avoid mutual accusations; I prefer to show separate, singular, individual fates. And similar truths. This is never easy.

My fascination with I.B. Singer, the writer, is also not easy to explain. Not just any writer, but specifically a Jewish writer of Polish origin, someone who until the very end remained true to his spiritual and geographic address, and thus also true to Poland, where he was born and grew up. This choice is my personal one, but I have to say that the aggressive objections it provokes are a shock to me. I try to find the reasons behind it.

When the question: "Why the Jews" is asked of me, I sometimes answer: "Simply because there are no more Jews in Poland". This is the truth. A paradoxical truth, but also the reason why I decided to recreate this nonexistent world. I am not sure you in America can really comprehend how very nonexistent. Despite a few synagogues, a Jewish theater and a Jewish newspaper.

Only here, on this continent I saw for the very first time a living Jewish community. Getting used to the idea that it is, in fact, a reality, took me a long time.

Agata Tuszynska

LANDSCAPES OF MEMORY
A proposal for a book about the life of
Isaac Bashevis Singer

My book is about Isaac Bashevis Singer, the recently deceased Jewish writer, and also about the world that shaped and molded him, about the world of his imagination. Singer was born in Poland and spent the initial 31 years of his life there, years he believed to be crucial in the life of any writer. It was through the reality of those years that he became who he became, and he kept returning to it in almost all of his stories.

I intend to show and define Singer's link to this Polish-Jewish heritage.

Yet, this will not be a biography of Singer, nor a philological analysis of his literary output, although my book will contain elements of both. I am proposing a kind of documentary prose, consisting of different styles: essay, journalistic report, interview, travel journal. Singer will serve as a guide within the lost world of Polish Jews.

Elements of his own biography and topography - both real and literary, fictional - will serve as a background, a locale for my story. Now Polish, and once Jewish towns of Radzymin, Bilgoraj, Piaski, Warsaw's Jewish quarter of Nalewki - these are the places I plan to populate with fictional heroes from Singer's books, as well as with real characters, with those who lived there many years ago. Their voices fill my own story; I meet them, look at them from different angles, I offer different variations of the same accounts. The same events, sights, streets and objects are presented from varying perspectives.

To the voices of Singer's characters I add other voices: we hear those, who were a witness to the pre-war, and sometimes even the wartime reality. Jewish voices are joined with Polish ones in the description of today's decorations and today's props of yesterday's life. The Jewish and Jewish-Polish presence, alive till 1939, now replaced by dead spaces.

I combine and scramble the order of events, the real and the fictitious, the past history with the present. I give them different lighting, different contours and different meaning.

My book is constructed of three different elements, three different building

blocks. The main one is a record of interviews I conducted with people in several countries. These conversations fall into two categories.

I spoke to those who lived in Poland before the war, in places defined by Singer's topography, who still remember that reality, the mutual Polish-Jewish contacts, the way of life, the conflicts. They belong to different circles, to different social stratas, from illiterate women at Lubartowska Street in Lublin to fully assimilated Warsaw attorneys. There are hardly any Jews left in Poland, and so I had to look for them elsewhere. In order to collect their memories and thus somehow return them to the Polish reality I spent a year in France, two months in Israel. I have now been in America for four months. I see this is as my duty.

Those stories are included in my text mostly in a fragmentary way, in an effort to expand and embellish the structures of Singer's world. Sometimes I step outside that world by adding war stories, but there always is a common element of the real and the fictitious. The experience I gained during my several years as a journalist helps me in handling those interviews which for me, someone living in Poland, can be very difficult. After all, most of those I spoke with were wronged both in Poland and by Poland. There is no way to avoid this problem, so painful and so very much present in the conscience of Polish Jews and Poles alike. The confrontation of individual opinions, contradictory points of view, creates the dynamics of my book and perhaps uncovers additional layers of truth. It helps me sketch the outline of a Jewish fate.

The other kind of conversations are my dialogues with people, who in various circumstances came in contact with Isaac Bashevis Singer. Those who knew him before the war in Warsaw or later, in New York, at the writers' club or the cafeteria. People who knew him professionally or just met him briefly. Their accounts form a portrait of a man, a thinker and an artist I consider so very important, mostly as a representative of the disappearing generation of Polish Jews.

Documents and written records provide another kind of fabric for my book. The narrative contains extensive materials on the history of Jews in Poland, sources from archives, genealogical discoveries relating the story of Singer's family; the story both typical and unique. In addition, I plan to use press archives to create two news stories covering the years Singer was born and died - 1904 and 1991.

The third element of the book is my journey following Singer's trail in Poland, a mirror, reflecting whatever still remains there. This contemporary scenery appears to me an integral part of the past world.

This is my general idea, a broad outline. It is impossible at this time to predict exactly the way it will develop. Despite that - I will try.

Dear Mr. Singer, here I am.

You didn't wait for me. You moved somewhere else, without leaving a forwarding address. Will I ever find it? Will we have a chance to talk? You once wrote in a letter to someone who never showed up for a meal of blinis: "God creates new blinis and new angels every day, so we still have a chance". Allow me to repeat your own words.

You are no longer visible. But we both know that this isn't the most important thing. Broadway is full of those who walked away, arm in arm with the live ones, and I will continue to wait for you.

You write that "world history was a book man could read only forward. He could never turn the pages of this world book backward. But everything that had ever been still existed. Yppe lived somewhere. The hens, geese, and ducks the butchers in Yanash's Court slaughtered each day still lived, clucked, quacked, and crowed on the other pages of the world book - the right-hand pages, since the world book was written in Yiddish, which reads from right to left."

This is my consolation, and I accept it.

You write that "there must be a place somewhere where everything is preserved, inscribed down to the smallest detail. Let us say that a fly has fallen into a spiderweb and the spider has sucked her dry. This is a fact of the universe and such a fact cannot be forgotten. If such a fact should be forgotten, it would create a blemish in the universe."

If this is the case, I won't get impatient. I will carefully watch for signs, search through the spaces of memory. I will attempt to find that place.

And then I will try to describe it for you. I know I will only be replicating our world, very much like anything else we are capable of writing. We, the readers of God's manuscript. Yet, perhaps you will find some surprises there. For me this is an adventure as remarkable as waking up every morning to read a new paragraph in God's book, to discover what has been destined for me.

An example: Yesterday, my beggar from the corner of Broadway and 106th, who always sat dejectedly, his foot encased in dirty cast and a yellow wellington, his hand outstretched, mumbling something under his breath - yesterday my beggar stood firmly on both feet and rhythmically moving his arms up and down, laboriously prepared for a flight. He kept moving his wings within his darned coat, the wind shining through it. Perhaps I won't see him tomorrow, perhaps he

You asked frequently: is there really something like a soul, and what happens to it after it departs the body? Do you know now? Perhaps I can learn this from you as well. For now, please join me in the landscapes of memory. Yours and mine.

PATCHES

I would like to tell the story of a lost, no longer existing world of Warsaw's Krochmalna Street, of pre-war Jewish towns: Radzymin, Piaski near Lublin, Bilgoraj. A story of Singer's universe. I want to hold his hand, that from many years ago, and the hands of his characters, attempt to recall again that scenery, smells, flavors. A journey into the spaces of memory; memory of witnesses and memory of stones.

I seek those, who still remember.

In today's Poland, there is no Jewish world. I describe the traces left behind, remnants, contours of emptiness and absence. The sets of the present become one of the mirrors, reflecting annihilated past; I fill this form with shards of memories. I collect them all over the world, in Israel, in France, in America, wherever the last live ones still remember the names of the dead.

I create Singer's family album from various materials, I paste it from scraps, glue it together from bits, recall from remnants.

It is easier to draw this book than to describe it. It is not a canvas, but rather a fabric sewn from various materials and wefts, woven with different threads, string and silk, yarn and human hair, knotted and tied. It is a collage made of all kinds of elements.

Not only the stitch and the pattern are diverse. So are different materials known to the sewing trade: canvas, wool, silk, linen, flannel; also scraps of Torah, its edges charred; shattered mirrors; fragments of old, fading photographs; bits of lettering and pieces of shoelace, found on the piles of Auschwitz.

And the patches, too. Yellow patches marked "Jude", with a star of David spread across it. It is from patches the Jewish memory is sewn together; they are that world's main building element. The world now lost, yet rediscovered again in fragments and bits, in ruins, in dumps, in burned-out nooks of memory. The patch becomes a mark; a humiliation; a sign of privilege; a sentence.

THE SOIL (Replicating the world)

A story about the source and about being removed from it. Reconstruction of specific places in the same universe which destroyed them. Roots, but roots cut off, no longer attached.

They show me a house near the main square in Lubartow, where the last Jew in town, Matys Zoberman, Berek's son, a shammash, is supposed to live. A storefront: "Dressmaking". Across the street, a playground and the grey structure of public washrooms. Later I will discover that this is where the old Jewish cemetery was once located.

The door is opened by a smallish, greige woman, tired hair, a perm, gold earrings, behind her on the wall, a cross. Mrs. Gdul. Matys Zoberman? Mr. Marian, you mean? You are too late, he died. Her grandson promises to get me Mr. Marian's photograph, a colored one, very lifelike, with him stretched out in an open coffin.

He didn't want to cause any trouble. Bury me and level the grave so there is no trace, he would say. He saw graves of his friends desecrated. It was he who buried them, he said the kaddish. He was the last one.

He would visit the cemeteries and cry for them. Either the headstones were broken, or someone would paint them over with red paint. He was afraid of that. On his last day, he kept asking: "don't bother with my grave, I don't want it remaining".

When the war ended, Matys Zoberman weighed 77 pounds. His parents perished in Treblinka; he managed to escape from the train. He returned to his village, Skoki, in the Radzymin region. But someone turned him in almost at once and he was taken to the Majdanek death camp, then on to Skarzysko and a few other camps in Germany. When he got stronger, he returned home once again. The Germans were gone by then. All in all, 32 Jews returned, those who were hidden by peasants, or fought with the partisans or survived in Russia. All of them came for a while and then left again. Only Matys stayed. He lived in Lubartow, in a home of a relative. Wherever he turned, they kept saying to him: run. And so he went to Tel Aviv, where he had family. He returned after a few months, could not get used to it. Yet they kept after him, so he tried for the second time, this time leaving for America, to stay with his cousin. But in America he could not sleep, and he returned, and did not travel anymore. Apparently there is no better place, he thought, and stayed for good.

For so many years he suffered. On January 15, 1991 we buried him in the Gdul family grave, he was friends with my mom, for me like a father he was.

The house they live in used to be a Jewish mill. Next to it was an oil mill, you can still see the marks. That's where Mr. Marian lived. We can only compare him to Christ, says Mrs. Ewa. He only wanted the best for others and not to trouble anyone. Bury me at the Jewish cemetery in Lublin and do level my grave to the

ground. He apologized for being alive; perhaps he learned that at the camps? He travelled frequently to Lublin, to the cemetery, to pray. He was a gravedigger and a mourner for his last remaining Jewish brethren.

The Torah, wrapped in oilcloth, was always on a little table in the room he rented from the Gduls, next to a wardrobe with an oval mirror and a chest of drawers. Mrs. Ewa, although she works at the court as a lawyer, had no idea what it is. It had little, protruding, wooden handles, she remembers. Only after Mr. Marian died they came from Lublin and took the Torah to a museum.

Mr. Marian had a separate entrance to his room. The Gdul's apartment he would enter from the yard. Anyway, he spent most of the time at their place. On the front of the building, by the main entrance, somebody with a nail scratched out a star of David. He went deep, so that Mrs. Gdul had to use a lot of paint to cover it, and she still didn't manage completely.

The senior judge at Mrs. Ewa's court would ask her: "that Zoberman, who is he to you?" "In my building - he would say - there is one Jew, but I wouldn't shake hands with him".

They didn't put up any funeral announcements, so that unwanted guests wouldn't show up. There were some gawkers anyway. Someone said a prayer in Yiddish. What's the difference in what language, it is the same plea to God.

He stayed with us. He is buried in our family grave, with the grandparents. There was always room for him in our home. The last Jewish shamash from Lubartow.

Where do the roads in my country, paved with headstones from Jewish cemeteries, lead to?

During the war the Germans frequently used tombstones for road paving; many were later stolen for building construction. In the town of Kock there is a man whose entire basement is built from Jewish matzevahs. He recently stopped bragging about it and refused to let me inside.

Around the city of Lublin, in small Jewish towns, traces remain, a sense of absence persists, an important element missing from pre-war reality. Old men at the main square in Kock, Lubartow, Goraj tell of belligerent Rajch, who had a beer bottling plant on Zamojska street, and how Grossman's wife shot herself after hopelessly falling in love with him. They talk of Josele the tailor, whose sewing machine sang hassidic songs. And of the Kurow rabbi's wife, whom the milkman, a goy, secretly loved; of Boim the baker, whose dark and rye breads they all bought eagerly.

Mr. Roman Kowal from Bilgoraj wants to record voices of the dead. He's not ready yet, hasn't got proper equipment, he has to wait until he retires. Only how is he going to understand Jewish voices? They always spoke in such a strange way.

When they were being escorted to Zwierzyniec in November of 42, a cuckoo started calling. It called for a long time, and they thought it signifies long life. Its call promised them many more years. They didn't know their time could be measured in minutes. They were shot on a sandy knoll near the train. A few managed to hide in villages. One even stayed there long after the war, because they were trying to get more money out of him. For three - perhaps even four - months he had no idea it was already over.

They say that in the barracks at the corner of Lubelska and Kosciuszko Streets, where the Jews from Bilgoraj were kept prior to being loaded on trains, in those barracks the floor was covered with torn up money. Apparently those who walked in there after saw it. I never met a witness to this scene, but many told that story. The floor was green with dollars, all of them destroyed, shredded. They wouldn't leave it for us.

They spoke awkwardly in their jargon, the kikes. Storekeepers, tavern owners, watchmakers. They shrieked: oy-vey and gevalt. Had a fondness for plush fabrics. Our washerwomen did their laundry in the river. You can't keep a secret from a priest, a doctor or a washerwoman. Clean they were not. Jewish sweat was not the same as ours. It smelled different, of garlic, onions.

I speak about Jews to children. In Piaski, they play at the old Jewish cemetery, now converted to a playground, but without a merry-go-round. They know little. They were a kind of people - the kids say - who didn't believe in our God. They spoke Polish in a funny way, and now they are gone. Interestingly, they had gold teeth. Plenty of gold teeth. They were a travelling people, but we don't really like them.

A coffinmakers shop. I speak to the owner, to strike up a conversation I pretend to be ordering an oak coffin. A Jew? Yeah, there was one here, but to admit it was indecent. At their cemetery people looked for valuables. What are you surprised at, lady, don't you know what a Jew always has on him? Gold!

In store windows hats, many hats. Jews could not appear bareheaded.

To preserve the mill, the house with a turret, the tsaddick from Kock, the sawmill and the memory of the Jewish print shop in Leczyca, where, if necessary, catholic prayer books would be printed.

"To preserve" may mean to tell one of many truths about the joint Polish-Jewish fate. The fate fused together, even if against the will, against the nature and expectations.

There is no duty to remember, as there is no duty to love. I want to recall that world because it was taken away from me.

In Piaski, when I ask who used to live there, I hear: "this was a Jewish town, and now it is a Polish town". Something in the voice of this woman, who is sweeping the

street in front of a little, old Jewish shop - even today it is a small shop selling paint, and to get in one has to descend the same stone stairs - something in her voice frightens me and makes me look with sorrow at red geraniums, as well in town's windows.

It was the fall when I visited the Lublin region for the first time, and I saw that world - its remnants - in the magnified dignity of death. Ochres, golden and reddish, little gardens, abloom with asters and sunflowers.

After the war, Jewish cemeteries were frequently ransacked in search of gold. Today, chickens wander through them, and bums drink vodka straight from the bottle.

The first bomb in Kock hit a pear tree, just by the rabbi's house. The rabbi and his family stood under that tree, all wrapped in feather bedquilts. They were torn to shreds. One of rabbi's hands hung on a fence nearby, you could tell by his ring, the one with a green stone.

The Kock synagogue didn't burn down in the same fire that torched the church. - Your God is kinder, the Poles would say. But soon after the Germans took the synagogue apart and killed all the Jews.

Mr. D. from Goraj shared a school desk with a Jew-girl, the printer's daughter. It used to embarrass him. But they lived well together, traded a bun for matzohs. Kids would tell the Jews: if you bring me some buttons I will defend you, I won't let anyone touch you. They sang nicely, counted well, folding and unfolding their fingers. In the movies most of the public was Jewish, munching on pumpkin seeds. A front seat was 40 groszy. A Jew would put a Jewess in his lap and pay for one seat only.

Antoni F. tells the story of how he sold a basket of wild strawberries to a Jew. The basket's bottom was stuffed with grass. He was afraid of punishment, but instead Szmul Zachalik gave him 20 groszy "for conning that old Jew". This is what they said before the war: a Jew had to cheat a goy, one Jew could con eight goyim, but a Greek could con eight Jews, and one Armenian - eight Greeks.

They were masters of salesmanship: "Lady, lady, I know you, what's your name, where are you from?"

For us, they were real, live people. We had fun together, at night everything was open to keep the business going. But for them to come back? No. We are already used to being without them.

To follow their traces, traces of shadows. To sew again into this Polish world, already healed, a yellow Jewish star - a patch.

Stefania Kwiecinska is 75 years old. She maintains the parish chronicle in Bilgoraj. She is the only shikseh from the town's main square; since childhood she

grew up with Jews.

On September 11, 1939 the town of Bilgoraj went up in flames. The first to go was the Jewish bathhouse. There were poor people and there were rich ones. There were shopkeepers, who sold dry goods and there were millionaires, who traded in lumber and made deals with the land magnate Zamoyski. There were even those who took over markets in Japan or made a fortune on lumber in Russia, and even further, in Persia and Mongolia.

Their shops were tiny, to get in you had to walk down the stairs. On the counter there was an iron kettle with coals, so the Jewish saleslady in a wig could keep her hands warm. They sold kerosene, candles, soap, haberdashery. There were also peddlers - "shmattas" - they would yell- "galoshes", who travelled through small villages to buy bones, from which they made glue. They would exchange combs or little enameled pots for rags.

A Jew wouldn't have breakfast until he made some money, so at school children didn't eat until noon, when their mothers would feed them soup with peas and noodles. On Sabbath they wouldn't even open a letter. They ate mostly fish; would you like a recipe for carp or for kugel? At home, orthodox Jewish women wore wigs the colour of faded hay. Educated girls would not allow their hair to be cut off, just trimmed.

They were born merchants, and a tightly knit people. They kept together. They had bathhouses, but weren't exactly clean; there was a saying "dirty Jew". But their matchmaker - he was a professional, for sure.

When the little ghetto was being liquidated, they took them up to the attic, the tailors, the furriers, the shoemakers and the watchmakers. Naked, they were forced to stand in a little window, high above. Then they were pushed down and a German fired at them from the ground. Down they fell, flying through the air like birds. Those who survived were taken later to Zwierzyniec and murdered there.

Sucia Waszul was killed together with her child. She couldn't walk anymore and lied down to rest by the roadside shrine of St. John. It is at that shrine that since czarist times local sieve makers, departing or returning, were greeted.

In Bilgoraj, before the war, at night, on the main street where people promenaded, you could smell the meadows.

Different fates, contrasting as black and white, as dark and light. And me, always searching, searching for some truth. I don't know myself - about him, about the world, about a place where everything still continues. I seek the truth about the man I know, the man I don't know, about Poland, about being a witness to the

Jewish life and to their annihilation. Questions, repeated, with no end: How did it happen? How could it happen? And the answers: individual ones, examples of singular fates as illustration. No generalizations about Polish anti-semitism. An attempt to define what it really is. Why is it that for all I speak with, Poland means so much pain.

Pain.

It remains a wound, no matter how directly or how more or less intentionally they display it. I believe that my book will be able to explain it through individual, specific life stories. It will illustrate the mechanisms of mutual relationships, impossibility of going back.

Memory is a wound for many. It is always a weight. Frequently it is also a permission to forget, because the price of remembering is too high. They want to be free of the past. Those who survived in Poland accuse: "We left because there was too much memory".

Most often the memories are a burden. I am the last one. Everyone died, I buried them. It is so hard to be the last one.

What you do is trying to read from ashes. They are sceptical. For whose benefit are you doing this?

The memory pained and crippled. Feeble. Barely a handful. Names escaped, birds flew away, contours got blurred, colors faded, lights went out. Weeds of different reality overgrew everything. What is the sense of digging inside the earth? What can you find there? What can be found in the mud of things forgotten? Mrs. S. says it hurts her. So difficult, so many years. Objects, pictures and utensils, growing from there. To name them, to transport them like exhibits of memory, from the Old Country to New York, Jerusalem, Paris...

How many did I speak to already? How many were moved, how many found in their awkward Polish the taste of something lost forever? How many cried? Pulled out old photographs? How many accused me, blamed for all the wrong Poles did to them? Almost every day I discover a new fate. New discovery, new element in my fabric.

Sometimes, when they hear Polish, they offer me a job. Housekeeping, domestic work. Why would a Pole visit a Jew abroad? Please, don't be offended. We now have very good relations, but to write a book... It's news to me. For whom, this book?

CEMETERIES

He - Singer - didn't have the strength to go to Poland. "For me, Poland is the burying ground of Jewish people. I couldn't deal with that journey through the valley of human tragedy... where everything that was my life is dead and buried. When I write today, I write about the past, and I know where I stand".

In Hebrew - homes of graves, homes of life, homes of eternity. In Yiddish - a good place, a holy place.

A knot, an ornament around an epitaph. Let his - or hers - soul be tied into the knot of life.

Silhouettes of people or angels, their faces covered.

An epitaph.

A cemetery - the only place, where Jews live in Poland today. A giant Jewish cemetery, where we place our stones out of respect for the dead.

Izbica - "I know that my saviour is alive, and on the day of judgment will rise from the earth. To the blessed memory of my dearest parents Miriam and Mendele Griner, my sisters Szajnda and Sura and all other murdered Jews, grateful to God for being saved..."

Graves, overgrown with grass. Like memory. Grass covers cemeteries. Jewish cemeteries in Poland become overgrown faster, easier, more completely than anything else, anywhere else. Matzevahs covered with moss, grass, weeds. They grow into the ground, return to earth. Memory overgrown with grass. Leaves, falling over the stones, in the rain, in autumn, in the storm. They grow in deeper and deeper. Irena, who spends most of her time at Jewish cemeteries says it is better this way, at least they will not be destroyed. They will grow into the earth, become overgrown, their place is there, in the belly of the earth.

Stone parks. Now they build stone parks out of them. From fragments, from remnants they build walls of memory, held together with concrete.

Cemeteries of memory. In Kazimierz, a little town on Vistula River, I played as a child on a large hill, not knowing I played at a cemetery. There were only remnants, tombstones grown into the earth, made of Polish sandstone, which used to be called "a stone of tears".

Every shortcut in an old Jewish town runs today through the old Jewish cemetery. A woman in Szczepieszyn, living next to the cemetery overgrown head high with burnweed and thistle says: "I am not afraid of ghosts, and my dogs will protect me from people. It is overgrown, because no one important, no tsaddik has been buried here. Who is going to take care of simple tailors and watchmakers?"

Nobody remembers them. Only the trees pray. But can the trees say the kaddish?

Andrzej and Irena at the Lublin cemetery, which dates back to the 16th century. They photograph headstones. They show me the damaged ones, those broken into pieces, nonexistent again. Tomb of a tsaddik, then three other important ones. A knoll, overgrown with weeds, thistle, wildflowers. The tsaddik's grave is black. Nearby I see many little pieces of paper, many of them torn, with Hebrew and Jewish pleas. The wind. The air is full of scraps, crumbs, ashes of letters. I try to read them. This is like a dream, a painting by Chagall. A large man enters the scene, dressed in a Jewish frock and a hat, with beard and sidelocks; he moves uphill to stop at the tsaddik's grave. Lolling rhythmically he begins his prayers, reading from a large prayerbook, leather-bound, with gold lettering on its spine.

When I return from Lublin to Warsaw a young man on the train will curse me out for reading a book by this filthy Jew, Singer. Don't we have enough of our own Polish writers?

When I relate this story to Professor R., he says that while we have to accept madness among some people, it is not a typical Polish characteristic, as it is commonly claimed. It happens. As always, the professor is full of majestic balance. But even he acknowledges that a Jewish cemetery is not the safest place for a young woman. "You should have someone to watch over you, and some mace.

Someone says: "our brethren Poles were bad, but Poland, our mother, was good".

To describe an emptiness, a shape of absence. Pictures, flavors, remnants, memories, seeds of memories. Sewing together memories of others; everyone gives a little - a chip, a glass bead, a seed, a stone. Not just the truth about them, not just their vision, but also mine, the vision of my country. What would it be like if they were still there? Graves become overgrown; in Poland, the last demons feeding on Jewish manuscripts are beginning to starve.

- I seek fire.
- You shall find it among ashes.

New York, winter 1992.