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## Gimpel the Full

THIS ESSAY CONTINUES my reflection on the use of psychoanalytic theory and technique in literary analysis. Elsewhere, I have discussed both the validity of employing psychoanalytic methodology for literary elucidation and the important insights that can be gained from psychoanalytic thinking. Now, I take my argument further, showing how post-Freudian Self-Psychology, with its different view of development, yields a deeper, fuller, and more compassionate understanding of humanity than traditional Freudian psychoanalysis.<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, the theories of Self-Psychology, when exposed to interaction with literature, provide new and more resilient perceptions than the Freudian ideas that have counted—and been discounted—as psychoanalysis for literary application. Here, as in my previous work, my literary investigation proceeds along the same path as that of clinical inquiry: I ask the same sorts of questions and seek the same level of information from the literature as I would if I were conducting a clinical case.

I have chosen I. B. Singer's most famous story, "Gimpel the Fool,"<sup>2</sup> because it evokes particularly strong reactions to the protagonist's personality and concomitant behavior. Most literary critics have chosen to discuss Gimpel in terms of his relationship with the supernatural and with God rather than according to his relations with his fellow human beings. They tend to see him as a saint or a wise fool.<sup>3</sup> Gimpel's behavior, although it is out of keeping with his intellectual understanding, can thereby be explained as stemming from a higher moral or religious perception. Students, on the other hand, are more likely, in my experience, to dismiss Gimpel—or to commiserate strongly with him—as a masochist. In their view, he should know better than to let himself be so abused.

Interestingly, both groups focus on the same evidence in formulating their understanding of Gimpel. Chiefly, they cite the outrageous behavior of Gimpel's wife, Elka, and the merciless taunting Gimpel suffers at the hands of the men, women, and children of Frampol. The critics are fond of one particular quotation which provides the cornerstone of their spiritually oriented interpretations: ". . . I resolved that I would always believe what I was told. What's the good of *not* believing? Today it's your wife you don't believe; tomorrow it's God himself you won't take stock in" (p. 408). The students want to snatch Gimpel away from his anguish. They see no virtue—and certainly no beauty—in his suffering.

How can these disparate views refer to the same man?

Like Peretz's Bontshe, Gimpel's motivations are thus open to conflicting interpretations. Yet Gimpel is not at all like Bontshe, despite the accepted idea—evidently originating in the formulation of Howe and Greenberg—that, as a sainted fool, Gimpel "is the literary grandson of Peretz's Bontsh[e] Schweig, whose intolerable humbleness makes even the angels in heaven feel guilty and embarrassed—though Bontsh[e], while an epitome of the type, is also meant as a harsh thrust against it."<sup>4</sup>

Taken superficially, there is a resemblance between the two men, in that they must interact with a milieu that fails to cherish them. But here the resemblance ends, for, while Bontshe never learns from his trials—even when he reaches heaven—Gimpel has known from childhood that he is neither stupid nor a weakling, that there is an element of choice in his *naiveté*.

Both men are compliant, but Bontshe's compliance is hang-dog, a do-with-me-what-you-will passivity; Gimpel's is mixed with a sense of wonder about the world, an unwillingness to foreclose possibilities simply because of surface appearances.

Gimpel and Bontshe are fearful of angering others, but, whereas Bontshe is cringing and silent, Gimpel maintains the hope that, through his acceptance of the way others want to view him, he may achieve some longed-for rapport: "If I ever dared to say, 'Ah, you're kidding!' there was trouble. People got angry. . . . What was I to do? I believed them, and I hope at least that did them some good" (p. 402).

My own view is that Gimpel could not be further from Bontshe in his essential attitude towards life. Indeed, I suggest that, in keeping with the *tam* instead of *nar* of the Yiddish title,<sup>5</sup> Gimpel is not a suffering martyr—although he does experience intense pain—nor is he a man whose sights are turned away from the here and now—although the story does end with his rejection of material comforts in favor of a wanderer's existence. I will argue that Gimpel is a successful man whose subjective reality is undaunted by circumstances that would overwhelm a less daring person. In this sense, he is a true *tam*, a full and complete human being—if important criteria for wholeness include a large measure of love, respect, and financial comfort.

First, however, I want to detail my psychoanalytic approach, both theoretical and technical, since it is this which has led me to my interpretation. I am deeply indebted for this view to the writing of Heinz Kohut and his colleagues and successors, the formulators of Self-Psychology. Kohut once remarked that Freud had envisioned and described "Guilty Man," whereas his own view of humanity could be defined as "Tragic Man."<sup>6</sup> According to Freud, a human being is by nature awash with primitive and dangerous instinctual impulses, both libidinal and aggressive. These impulses strive for expression and must be released, because—according to Freud—the body is essentially a hydraulic system. Civilization depends on the channeling of these impulses into more socially useful behavior. The quintessential conflict occurs during what Freud termed the oedipal stage, in which the child must relinquish the desire to do away with the parent of the opposite sex and achieve sexual union with the same sex parent. Failure to negotiate this step, or the previous oral and anal stages, would lead to pathology.

While Kohut did not dispute Freud's developmental stages, he viewed them much more from the point of view of the interactions that take place during each one. He coined the term *selfobject* to refer to those who crucially influence the individual's first—and continuing—experience with the outside world. He distinguished between a general definition of the term, by which he meant "that dimension of our experience of another person that relates to this person's *functions* (emphasis mine) in shoring up our self," and a more specific use that refers to the original selfobjects, experienced at the beginning of development, when "cognitive indistinctiveness between self and selfobject may or may not exist."<sup>7</sup>

Kohut constructed a model in which the child had two essential psychological needs of the parenting figures: on the one hand, a *mirroring* need, and, on the other hand, an *idealizing* need. The former would be satisfied by the "gleam in the mother's eye," assuring the child of his/her unique and abiding value—thus leading to self-confidence, a sense of vitality and viability in the world. The latter would be satisfied by the reassurance that the child could, indeed, look up to an admired and beloved parent, who would also be available to provide calm and safety—thus leading to the development of goals and values, as well as the capacity for self-soothing.

Mirroring and idealization are the major selfobject needs of infancy and early development. Unlike the Freudian tendency to single out early development as ultimately determinative of future vicissitudes, Kohut realized that selfobject requirements and longings resonate long after childhood—in fact, forever:

Throughout his life a person will experience himself as a cohesive harmonious firm unit in time and space, connected with his past and pointing

meaningfully into a creative-productive future, [but] only as long as, at each stage in his life, he experiences certain representatives of his human surroundings as joyfully responding to him, as available to him as sources of idealized strength and calmness, as being silently present but in essence like him, and, at any rate, able to grasp his inner life more or less accurately so that their responses are attuned to his needs and allow him to grasp their inner life when he is in need of such sustenance.<sup>8</sup>

According to Kohut, it is the reaction of the parents, rather than the quantity of energy and how it is channeled, that decisively influences the outcome of each developmental stage. If the parents respond with understanding to the little boy's childish boasts that he is going to marry his mother, if they delight in his sense of his own power and attractiveness, and if they eschew fear, reproof, or, for that matter, seductiveness, then the oedipal stage will not be fraught with the immense guilty difficulties Freud expected (due, I suppose, to the attitudes towards exhibitionism and infantile sexuality that prevailed in his culture during his lifetime).

Where Freud saw psychopathology as stemming from the insufficient or unsuccessful integration of instincts, Kohut saw its roots in parental failure to meet mirroring and idealizing needs. While Freud centered on the simmering of repressed id impulses, which could lead to hysterical or obsessional reactions, Kohut focused on such signs of underlying malaise as empty depression and defensive grandiosity.

Both classical psychoanalysts and self-psychologists make use of the basic methods that were established by Freud: following free associations, analysis of transference manifestations, and analysis of dreams. Their goals, however, are by no means identical. Freudian analysts seek to uncover repressed conflicts over aggressive and libidinal impulses, bring them to light, and transform them into more effective and less conflictual behaviors. They wait for the emergence of a *transference neurosis* in which all conflicts are experienced in terms of the transference relationship with the analyst and may thus be resolved. Self-psychologists, following Kohut, have put more emphasis on resistance to selfobject longings. They pay careful attention to disruptions in the attunement of analyst and patient—the attunement which has made the first tentative emergence of the longings possible in the first place. They view the subsequent repair of these disruptions as essential for further development.

The developments in analytic approach between Freud and the self-psychologists led to a further refinement in understanding, concerning the inevitable involvement of the analyst as central to the analytic enterprise. That is, the analyst's own reactions, interventions, and interpretations of data are vital for the furtherance of treatment. Freud himself had eventually understood the existence of countertransference, but he, and subsequent theorists as well, had viewed it as regrettable, worthy of note only insofar as there was a need to conquer it. To Freud, counter-

transference was seen as an indication that the analyst was incompletely analyzed.

In contrast, some contemporary self-psychologists argue that psychoanalytic work is by nature *intersubjective*. That is, far from deprecating the presence of countertransference, these self-psychologists recognize it as essential for analytic work. The analyst is not, after all, a blank screen. Although the analyst must concentrate on understanding the patient's subjective world through empathy, or vicarious introspection, his or her subjective world must—and should—also enter into the interaction. Indeed, it is in this "intersubjective field" that much of the analytic action occurs.<sup>9</sup>

While the notion of intersubjectivity is immensely important in clinical practice, it is significant, as well, for the psychoanalytic understanding of literary texts. I have previously elaborated on the concept of text and analytic revelations as narratives. Together with other theorists who have discussed this point, I realize that no analysis will get at the whole truth, because truth is subjective and limited by what the analytic dyad—patient and analyst *together*—can comprehend. This should be no cause for despair, but rather a source of satisfaction at what the combination of forces can achieve, given the unique perceptions of every individual. Unfortunately, some theorists, who generally lack clinical experience, have not wanted to accept this fundamental principle.

My more limited, but more realistic, view has an important implication for literary analysis, as well as for clinical technique. It highlights the extent to which insight must come from experience, rather than from preconceived notions of what ought to be. In the instance of "Gimpel the Fool," both critics and students have sought to understand the protagonist in terms of how they themselves would like him to be. The critics, while probably more sophisticated, have created a distance between themselves and Gimpel, so as to appreciate him or explain their affinity for him. The students, whose reception is more immediate, cry out at Gimpel in order to assure themselves that they would never be caught in his painful position.

Psychoanalysis is first and foremost an investigation, an exploration into unique meaning. People, and literary characters, do not fit into categories based on another person's experience—and all the less so on theoretical assumptions. Their lives must be understood from the perspective of their subjective formulation of the world and its meaning for them. Thus, for example, any individual's dreams must be interpreted, not according to rigid one-to-one correspondences, as naive readers of Freud are wont to do, but rather according to individual meanings, which can only emerge through the kind of investigation that encourages their expression. The hope that Freud's formulations can remain true over time, space, and a vastly changing world is necessarily wrong—although, of course, understandable.

The implications of this more intricate view are as important for literature as for clinical work. Thus, analytic theory should not—and cannot—be “applied” to literature. Just as the understanding of a particular person is the result of a process, so, too, is psychoanalytic understanding of a particular work. The most glaring abuses of psychoanalytic thought as related to literary study are those in which the literary critic, who has no personal knowledge of the process, no experience of using him/herself as an instrument of investigation, simply culls theoretical ideas from Freud or another generally insightful thinker, and then hunts out what seem to be instances of their validity in a text.

At its worst, this approach can lead to such stupidities as the claim of an oedipal conflict—which is the classic triangular dynamic—in a clearly dyadic situation. A case of this in Singer scholarship concerns the assertion that the bad relationship between Herman Broder and Tamara in *Enemies: A Love Story* is based on oedipal conflict.<sup>10</sup> This may, indeed, be true, but in order to prove it, or even make an argument for it, there must be some evidence of a father figure.

Less serious distortions are those that, superficially, make sense, but that do not lead to a unified view of the character under investigation. Such analyses cannot be refuted, as far as they go, but they do not further understanding of the character and are ultimately circular arguments.

Psychoanalysis is a truly investigative science. The researcher develops a falsifiable hypothesis and tests it. Contrary to the critics who say that psychoanalytic theory can never be disproven, there is, indeed, a way of disproving psychoanalytic hypotheses. Clinically, this can happen when a patient does not confirm an insight.<sup>11</sup> In literature, the process of confirmation is, if anything, easier, rather than more difficult, because the text is limited, bounded. There will not be a sudden new memory, a forgotten scene, that emerges to modify the narrative. By the same token, evidence can never be consciously or unconsciously suppressed, as can sometimes occur in clinical case histories.

Of course, any analyst, literary or clinical, must proceed using some set of ideas. Otherwise, there would be no means of processing and organizing data. My point is simply that any investigative and interpretive principles must (1) result from a view that is based first of all on experience; (2) use secondary learning as corroborative rather than primary; and (3) lend themselves to testing within the intersubjective relationship.

In my clinical work, I have had the consistent experience that what makes people tick are other people. The British pediatrician and psychoanalyst, D. W. Winnicott, summed up the phenomenon when he said “There is no such thing as a baby . . . if you set out to describe a baby you will find you are describing a *baby and someone*. A baby cannot exist alone but is essentially part of a relationship.”<sup>12</sup> In my experience, as well,

people do not complain of penis envy, or the wish to marry the parent of the opposite sex while annihilating the other parent. They *do* consistently bring complaints about parental cruelty and neglect, about the need to conform to the parents' impossible expectations or prohibitions. They talk of siblings, grandparents, friends—and the lack of such figures in their lives. This is the backdrop against which my clinical work proceeds.

Pathology is likely to occur if the growing child does not receive enough responsiveness of the necessary sort, and it is likely to remain unless the problem is redressed through therapy. My purpose here, however, is not to discuss pathology but, rather, to show how Gimpel, through actions that might at first seem to be pathological, in fact manages to achieve just the kind of well-balanced existence that Kohut described.

The central fact of Gimpel's existence, around which all his experiences are organized, is his orphanhood. He has grown up unlike other boys, raised first by an aging grandfather, and then turned over to a baker as an apprentice. During the beginning of his relationship with his wife-to-be, Elka, he articulates his belief that he deserves special treatment because of his lack: "Don't be deceitful with me, for I'm an orphan" (p. 404); "I saw that I must speak bluntly and openly. 'Do you think this is the way to use an orphan?'" (p. 405).<sup>13</sup>

Gimpel longs for his parents. On one occasion, he chooses to be fooled because he has been told that the Messiah has come and his parents have returned from the dead. It is a particularly revealing example of his thinking: by allowing himself to succumb to gullibility, he can retain the hope of gaining, or regaining, an important bond: "To tell the truth, I knew very well that nothing of the sort had happened, but all the same, as folks were talking, I threw on my wool vest and went out. Maybe something had happened. What did I stand to lose by looking?" (p. 403). I mention this passage in particular because it highlights the extent to which the reader is an instrument of investigation. I had never noticed the Messiah episode as significant until the death of my father. The first time I read the story after that event in my own life, I had a sudden burst of empathy with Gimpel. It was clear to me: if there was any chance of seeing a beloved and deeply mourned parent, what small price to serve as the butt of some much less important person's joke. It was at this point that I began to see Gimpel's behavior within the context of a search for meaningful and warm connections.

Gimpel's absent parents, had they been present, might have afforded some protection from the jokes and pranks he has to endure during his early life. Because he is deprived, he turns to others in the hope that they will recognize his vulnerable position and therefore treat him with special tenderness—which they certainly do not; quite the contrary. Moreover, he would presumably look with gratitude and loyalty to someone who could

provide the longed-for strength and stability he failed to receive from his parents. In Kohut's terms, Gimpel's need for someone to provide an idealizing selfobject function is intense and pervasive.

And here is where Elka comes in, for, despite her cruel sexual treatment of him through her infidelities, she is a powerful presence in the community—and, rapidly, in Gimpel's life as well. This quality in Elka emerges on the very first day Gimpel meets her. The townspeople who escort Gimpel to visit Elka do not come near her, because they are afraid of her vicious tongue. Later, when Gimpel pleads with her to be mindful of the fact that he is an orphan, she answers: "I'm an orphan myself, . . . and whoever tries to twist you up, may the end of his nose take a twist. But don't let them think they can take advantage of me" (p. 404). Elka proves immediately that, although she is an orphan, she can take care of herself and Gimpel too. I suggest that this is the central bond tying Gimpel to Elka and that, with the feeling that she stands near him with her power and vitality, he is able to go out into the world and become a successful and respected adult.

This growth does not occur without some attendant pain and humiliation. When, just four months after the wedding, Elka gives birth to a son, Gimpel realizes that he has been duped by the citizens of Frampol.<sup>14</sup> However, although he feels stupid and used, he also recognizes that the occasion is one of honor for him, and he is able to name the new infant after his deceased father. Then, too, he soon develops a loving relationship with the child and so feels some fulfillment there as well.

With the passage of time, Gimpel's reliance on Elka's strength is solidified, and he is less fragile as a result. He no longer complains of being an orphan, instead referring with delight to his wife's expressive capacities: "She swore at me and cursed, and I couldn't get enough of her. What strength she had! One of her looks could rob you of the power of speech. And her orations! Pitch and sulphur, that's what they were full of, and yet somehow also full of charm. I adored her every word" (p. 406). Significantly, in light of subsequent events in the story, Gimpel gladly steals food from other people's pots left to warm in the bakery oven, in order to provide special treats for Elka. This is not traditionally saintly behavior, but it is the action of a man who loves his wife and wants to make her happy in the way most natural to him. It also exemplifies Gimpel's iconoclastic grasp of morality, in contrast with the traditional mores of Frampol society.

The major source of Gimpel's suffering occurs in the realm of sexuality, as Elka avoids him even on the few occasions he is able to come home from the bakery to spend the night. He manages to bear this burden, albeit unhappily, until the night he arrives unexpectedly and discovers another man in his bed. This is the last straw, and Gimpel goes to the rabbi for advice, only to learn that he must divorce Elka. There is no



choice for him but to stay away from her. The rabbi advises Gimpel to cut off ties with her child as well—thus revealing his knowledge that the baby had not been Gimpel's to begin with.

Gimpel reacts dramatically to the rabbi's order, and his response constitutes the turning point in his relationship with Elka. As soon as he is alone at night, Gimpel realizes that he cannot do without the company of Elka and her baby. First he forgives her for having been the naive object of seduction; then he allows the possibility that he had misperceived the whole incident. Mainly, he is distraught at the idea of disrupting his family existence. Although he tells the rabbi the very next day that he has been in error, it takes nine months until he is able to return to Elka. In the meantime, she has borne another child, thereby proving beyond any doubt that she is unfaithful. None of that matters; Gimpel will never leave Elka again, never question this aspect of their relationship. He has discovered that what she provides him is more important—and essential to his well-being—than what she consistently denies him.

Perhaps it is Gimpel's decision to overlook all of Elka's liaisons with other men, his resignation about her implicit rejection of him, that has caused some readers to view him as a masochist. And it is in this section of the story that the famous quotation about belief occurs. Certainly, if one thinks of Gimpel as choosing a relationship in which he will be bonded to his beloved primarily for the purpose of suffering pain, then he is a masochist in the classic sense of the word.<sup>15</sup> A self-psychological view of masochism might come closer to providing some insight into Gimpel's situation. Stolorow, Atwood and Brandchaft, for example, bring intriguing clinical data to bear on their theory that masochistic behavior becomes ingrained when the earliest ties to parental figures have required subjugation—thus, masochism is not related to guilt over sexual impulses or to blighted aggressive impulses. Rather, it stems from the deep need to maintain a bond, no matter at what price.<sup>16</sup>

Despite the undeniable fact that Gimpel suffers because of Elka, I do not consider his behavior self-punishing in the least, although he is unable to avoid pain. Rather, he has discovered that he needs Elka for her vitality and fearlessness, that being around her gives him a sense of worth, liveliness, and courage. The events of his first night home with Elka after their long separation are a case in point. Finding her in bed with his own apprentice, he confronts her, whereupon she threatens to throw him out. Gimpel's reaction is pronounced and significant: "I felt that something about me was deeply wrong, and I said, 'Don't make a scandal. All that's needed now is that people should accuse me of raising spooks and *dybbuks*.' For that was what she had meant. 'No one will touch bread of my baking'" (pp. 410–11).

Gimpel has two fears in mind, and they are connected. The surface worry is that his business will be ruined by accusations designed to play

on superstition. Here he would have something to lose because, as he mentions casually, ". . . I had a bakery of my own and in Frampol was considered to be something of a rich man" (p. 411).

This is not the deeper concern, however. After all, the townspeople of Frampol know enough about Gimpel's supposed weakness and peculiarity to shut him out of business at any time they wish; indeed, they could have prevented him from achieving success in the first place. Gimpel's underlying anxiety is that, without Elka, he will be unable to function as the successful man—including his role in business—that he has become since his marriage. He will be forced to realize that there is something wrong with him—and there *will* be something wrong, in his estimation, if he is unable to be with her. He will be bereft of the self-esteem and energy he derives from existing in her orbit, and therefore the threat to his business is real and directly related to whether or not she decides to condemn him.

Kohut distinguished between selfobject *functions* and the *people* who provide them. The distinction is important, because it implies that the functions may be internalized. There is no need in the end for the person to be present in order for the function to be felt, even though human beings need contact with others throughout life in order to reinforce and maintain earlier benefits. (The opposite effect is also, unfortunately, true, i.e., that failures in the selfobject realm are internalized and perpetuated.) This tenacity causes the work of psychotherapy to move so slowly. Therefore, too, the events that transpire in Gimpel's life after Elka's death—his continuing relationship to her—yield important information about his inner world.

As is so often the case during the period of mourning a loved one, Gimpel at first experiences some anger at Elka. This is a standard protest against a feeling of abandonment, and much has been written about the phenomenon.<sup>17</sup> At the moment of her death, his reaction reveals the extent to which he has relied on her to help him feel proud of his achievements and content with his life. Now, he is reminiscent of the poor orphan, who had needed to plead for decent treatment because there was no one to intercede for him. By dying, she has betrayed him: "I imagined that, dead as she was, she was saying, 'I deceived Gimpel. That was the meaning of my brief life'" (p. 411).

Later, Gimpel's anger at Elka for abandoning him spreads to a renewed resentment at the people of Frampol and their contemptible treatment of him. After a dream visit from the Spirit of Evil, Gimpel decides he is going to gain revenge on the town by urinating in the bread he will sell to them, thereby defiling them without their ever becoming aware of his trick. At the last moment, Elka appears to him in a dream, exhorting him not to go through with his scheme: "I said to her, 'It's all your fault,' and started to cry. 'You fool!' she said. 'You fool! Because I was false is everything false too? . . .'" (p. 412).

Elka has returned to Gimpel, through his dream state, to explain to him that there is neither need nor gain in seeing the world through the eyes of the average person, who perceives slights and proceeds to redress them, using methods as low and stupid as those of the perpetrator. She asks him to realize that his general perspective, which had set him apart from others, was in fact no less accurate than that of everyone else, even though he was alone in his view and they were united in theirs. Moreover, his outlook had allowed him to enjoy the love and respect that was available to him, as opposed to the others, who live in a world filled with vengeance and deception.

After he has had this encounter with his own anger and ambivalence, Gimpel gives away all his possessions and leaves Frampol. On one level, this act is a statement of penitence for his near sin. Here, Gimpel proves again the independence of his thinking; previously, he had stolen without compunction, because that act fit with his world-view, whereby he could stretch the rules of convention in order to treasure his beloved Elka. Now, however, he must pay for having been about to abandon his inner understanding of the world around him. That is, he had almost lost his long-held subjective view that he need not retaliate against petty and gratuitous cruelty.

On another level, Gimpel's ability to cut his ties with Frampol is an assertion of his ultimate faith in others. Rather than assuming that people will continue to make fun of him or see him as deranged because he has no home and no possessions, he can drift through the world, secure that he will be treated well. And he is treated well, finding continued respect for his point of view, now a full understanding that reality is entirely subjective: "Whatever doesn't really happen is dreamed at night. It happens to one if it doesn't happen to another, tomorrow if not today, or a century hence if not next year. What difference can it make?" (p. 413).

And throughout his wanderings, Gimpel is not alone, for he is accompanied by the continuing presence of Elka. No sooner does he close his eyes to sleep than he sees her, now transformed into a saintly beauty: "When I wake, I have forgotten it all. But while the dream lasts, I am comforted. She answers all my queries, and what comes out is that all is right. I weep and implore, 'Let me be with you.' And she consoles me and tells me to be patient" (p. 414).

Elka's ability to give Gimpel a sense that he is not alone in the world, that he is no longer as abandoned as an orphan, helps him to maintain his equilibrium even without the usual trappings of home and family, which the average person must have in order to feel located in the world. Gimpel does not need these anchors, because he has within him a source of stability and calm. He also carries within him the conviction in his own value system, and others are drawn to him because of that.

Gimpel longs to die so that he can once again be truly close to the object of his longing, closer than he can be through memory and internal

experience without external corroboration. In this, he is eminently human, recognizing his continuing need for the affection that he managed to wrest from what would have been an intolerable situation for a more conventionally oriented person. If Gimpel is saintly, it is not because he maintains a higher faith in God than anyone else. His relationship to God is formulaic and only occasional. If Gimpel is to be seen as larger than the average person, it is because of his unusual capacity to cut through the constraints that cause people to remain wary and mistrustful of one another. Gimpel *tam* is complete in the way that he loves, and, for this, his readers love him.

At the outset of this essay, I indicated that the insights of Self-Psychology provide a fuller and more compassionate view of human nature than are available from a Freudian perspective. These new concepts certainly yield a deeper understanding of Gimpel, whose transformation from humiliation to mature peace arises from the fulfillment of his most profound needs. That these needs—and their fulfillment—are not always obvious indicates the complexity of individual response, as well as the delicacy and wonderment of cure.

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#### NOTES

1. Janet Hadda, "Joseph: Ancestor of Psychoanalysis," *Conservative Judaism*: 37 (1984): 17–21; *Passionate Women, Passive Men: Suicide in Yiddish Literature* (Albany, 1988); "Warding Off Chaos: Repetition and Obsession in the Poetry of Glatshsteyn, Halpern, and Manger," *AJS Review* 13 (1988): 81–102.

2. I cite Saul Bellow's translation of Singer's story as it appears in Irving Howe and Eliezer Greenberg, eds., *A Treasury of Yiddish Stories* (New York, 1974), pp. 401–14. All further references to the story will appear in the body of the text. Further references to *A Treasury* . . . will appear as *Treasury*.

3. See, for example, Paul N. Siegel, "Gimpel and the Archetype of the Wise Fool" in *The Achievement of Isaac Bashevis Singer*, ed. Marcia Allentuck (Carbondale and Edwardsville, 1969), pp. 159–73; Irving Malin, *Isaac Bashevis Singer* (New York, 1972), pp. 70–72; Lawrence S. Friedman, *Understanding Isaac Bashevis Singer* (Columbia, S.C., 1988), pp. 189–92; Grace Farrell Lee, *From Exile to Redemption: The Fiction of Isaac Bashevis Singer* (Carbondale and Edwardsville, 1987) pp. 15–18. For a somewhat different, more complex, view, see Ruth R. Wisse's treatment of Gimpel in *The Schlemiel as Modern Hero* (Chicago, 1971). One critic, Gershon Sapozhnikov, approaches Gimpel from an ostensibly psychoanalytic perspective. However, his main point, that Gimpel introjected Elka's image and that she proceeded to function as the ideal mother in his erotically underdeveloped psychic organization is almost a caricature of psychoanalytic thinking. Nonetheless, despite this oversimplified and, I would argue, inaccurate view, Sapozhnikov deserves credit for pointing out the immense importance of family for Gimpel. See Gershon Sapozhnikov, *Yitskhok Bashevis-Zinger: Der kinstler fun zind un tshuve* (Published by the Argentinian Section of the International Jewish Cultural Congress, undated), p. 76.

4. *Treasury*, p. 41.

5. *Gimpel tam* first appeared in the *Yidisher kemfer*, No. 593 (Spring, 1945): 17–20. For the most accessible edition, see *Der Shpigl un andere destseylungen* (Jerusalem, 1975). On the significance of the name *tam*, see Chone Shmeruk's introduction to this volume, "The Use of Monologue as a Narrative Technique in the Stories of Isaac Bashevis Singer," pp. xxxiv–v.

6. See, for example, Heinz Kohut, *The Restoration of the Self* (New York, 1977), esp. pp. 206–7, 224–25.

7. Heinz Kohut, *How Does Analysis Cure*, edited by Arnold Goldberg, with the collaboration of Paul Stepansky (Chicago and London, 1984), p. 49. Further references to this text will be cited as *Cure*.

8. *Cure*, p. 52.

9. For a thorough explanation of intersubjectivity, see Robert D. Stolorow, Bernard Brandchaft and George E. Atwood, *Psychoanalytic Treatment: An Intersubjective Approach*, (Hillsdale, N.J., 1987).

10. Robert Forrey, "The Sorrows of Herman Broder: Singer's *Enemies*, A Love Story," *Studies in American Jewish Literature* 1 (1981): 103.

11. But what of the compliant patient, one may ask. This is indeed a knotty problem, but here, too, there is a way to find corroboration. The compliant patient will agree to the formulation as suggested by the analyst, but will be unable to elaborate, to bring further examples or deepening ideas to the original point. This will lead the aware analyst to begin investigating the importance of compliance to the patient.

12. D. W. Winnicott, "Further Thoughts on Babies as Persons" (1947), *The Child and the Outside World* (London, 1957), p. 137.

13. I am reminded here of the difference between Gimpel and Sholem-Aleykhem's Mottl, who is delighted to receive the special dispensations of being an orphan—even while his mother is still on the scene—and who considers himself anything but disadvantaged by his situation.

14. There is some indication that the whole wedding was arranged as a means to avert a dysentery epidemic. According to superstition, epidemics were the result of community sins and could be overcome by marrying two orphans at the gates of the cemetery, which is exactly what happens in the case of Gimpel and Elka.

15. For a more recent discussion of masochism as a classically viewed phenomenon, see Otto Kernberg, "Clinical Dimensions of Masochism," *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association* 36 (1988):1005–29.

16. Robert D. Stolorow, George E. Atwood, and Bernard Brandchaft, "Masochism and its Treatment," *Bulletin of the Menninger Clinic* 52 (1988): 504–9.

17. For a view that is psychoanalytic yet also rooted in ethological studies, see the work of John Bowlby, especially his article, "Processes of Mourning," *The International Journal of Psycho-Analysis* 42, Parts 4–5 (1961): 317–40.

