

The Little Shoemakers (1945)

[Short Friday (1945)]

Setting: shtetl, Yiddish pastoral

1. The Little Shoemakers & their Family Tree

Patriarch: Abba Shuster & his ancestral home

Est. after Chmielnicki

Dust used for ritual purposes

His philanthropy

His legendary grave

Eldest always took over.

Corporate essence

Same names get recycled

Feivl's sudden, comical death

Same scene in Moskat

Died in the line of duty;

was just chosen the new shames of tailor's shul

Abba, Feivl's eldest

Same physical features [71]

A perfect man

his CV: learned among the simple folk

his Biblical imagination: part of the Bible

normative messianic faith

even his cat has served the house for generations

Frampol = axis mundi

2. Abba & His 7 Sons

Gimpl's exemplary education

Husband/Wife: Pesha always defers to his judgment

Song of the 10 little boys

Refuses to build a new house = embodied Tradition

His love of the attic: the relics of the past

Life of perfect serenity

3. Gimpl Emigrates to America

Smitten w/Haskalah [77]

Everything Jewish = backward & ugly

Leave-taking @ RR: demonic locomotive

1st letters from America

Brings over all the brothers

Q: What are the engines of human behavior?

A: Hereditary traits / all in the family; carry-over from Naturalism

A: From Darwin & Freud

A: Sexual passion; Meshulam Mushkat needed to prove his manhood

Q: What provides continuity? Can anything act as a bulwark?

A: Not the natural but the ritual cycle.

A: Not historical determinism but mythic deep structures, paradigms.

A: The texts that Jews live by.

The Maharal of Prague posits the Torah and its acceptance by Israel as necessary, "otherwise the universe would revert to chaos." Jews, it can be said, would not exist were it not for this text through which they must communicate or be wiped out. Both Singer and his characters operate within this overarching culture. (Lane Silberstein)