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Traditional Values in Chaim Potok's Fiction

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Abstract

The aim of the thesis is to refer to the ways of interpreting traditional values in Chaim Potok's fiction. The main focus is to illustrate the importance of the values and tradition as such given by the example in characters of the novels: *The Chosen*, *The Promise*, *My Name Is Asher Lev*, *The Gift of Asher Lev*, and *In the Beginning*. Potok placed the novels in American society of Jewish immigrants and we have the importance of tradition for their lives and the role of tradition in forming a Jew as a human in view. The specific theme, very frequent in Jewish-American literature, is the clash between tradition and American society. The thesis illustrates the different ways of dealing with the struggle by usage of the characters comparison.

Key words

History of Jews, tradition, Jewish-American literature, Chaim Potok, traditional values, the clash between cultures, balancing cultures, leaving tradition

Souhrn

Cílem této práce je poukázat na způsob pojetí tradičních hodnot v dílech Chaima Potoka. Hlavním úkolem je vysvětlit nejen význam těchto hodnot a tradice samotné jako celku, ale také tyto hodnoty ilustrovat na specifických příkladech, postavách knih *Vyvolení*, *Slib*, *Jmenuji se Ašer Lev*, *Dar Ašera Leva* a *Na počátku*. Potok zasazuje svá díla do amerického kontextu židovských emigrantů. Na jednotlivých postavách a jejich životech tak sledujeme význam tradice pro jejich životy a jakým způsobem tato tradice žida formuje jako člověka. Zvláštním tématem, velice častým mezi americkými židovskými autory, je pak střet jejich tradice s tradicí americkou. Porovnáním přístupu postav k tomuto střetu pak ilustruje způsoby, jakými se židé mohou s touto situací vypořádat.

Klíčová slova

Historie židů, tradice, americká židovská literatura, Chaim Potok, tradiční hodnoty, střet kultur, balancování kultur, opouštění tradice

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1. Introduction

Jewish tradition is one of the oldest in the world. It has been formed for thousands years in many various places and times Jews have been living in because of the exile. History of the nation is full of violence, persecutions and misunderstanding. On the other hand, there are moments which are important not only in the lives of Jews but also Christians and Muslims, the members of the religions which rose from Judaism. History of Jews is full of the people who influenced not just their tradition but some of them deserved the world appreciation. A question which remains is whether a Jew is able to maintain his identity in the present society. In the world which tortured and condemned Jews for centuries and today is hospitable to them.

In 1948, a state of Israel was established and most of the Jews moved in the country which offered them peace. Also in Israel Jews have problems because of the religion. America offers its area and the biggest amount of Jews live their lives there. The fact is that Jews are the minority which separate itself from the society and stay somewhere on the edge of the society. The Orthodox Jews refuse the assimilation just for the fact that they do not want to surrender tradition which has formed not just their ancestors but also those generations. The thesis focuses on those Jews, the Orthodox (or Ultra-orthodox) who are trying to find a place for their religion on the American territory.

The theoretical part of the thesis explains the term tradition and points out to the fact that Jewish tradition is not just about the celebrations of the festivals but it is a way of life which requires the whole person. In tradition the history is included also today and is based on some basic and unchangeable ideas.

In the practical part tradition is illustrated directly on the fiction by Chaim Potok who deals with the question of Jewish tradition and mainly with the clash between the traditional and secular societies in the United States. The practical part of the thesis deals with the way tradition forms a Jew and his identity and also the balancing those two absolutely different worlds, whether there is a possibility to balance them or it is necessary to leave one world for another.

The novels were chosen for the uniqueness of the main characters, young boys who are aware of the world they were raised in and start to think about the world which is around. It influences them whether they want or not. All of the characters try to

balance those worlds and the task of the thesis is also to find out whether the balancing is possible or not and what it brings to their lives.

2. A meaning of the Jewishness

Jews live in various countries and are a numerically insignificant minority in all of them. (De Lange, 2004, 1) “They belong to many different ethnic and linguistic groupings, and many different cultural backgrounds. Even within a single country these differences divide the Jewish communities from one another. What binds them all together?” (De Lange, 2004, 1)

A question in dispute is what it means to be a Jew, whether a Jew is a member of a race, a nation, or simply of Judaism.¹ The simplest explanation is that a Jew is a person who was born to a Jewish mother or went through the formal process of conversion to Judaism. Some consider Jews from two points of view. There is a tendency to separate Jewishness, an ethnic and cultural identity, from Judaism, a religion.² (Albanese, 2007, 45) Albanese states three reasons why Jews are a people (Jewishness). Jews viewed themselves as the inheritors of a common history and it had been one of suffering. From earliest times, the ancestors of the Jews had borne years of war and insecurity, and their history and suffering were bound to their sense of having been chosen by their God for special tasks. Their covenant with Him, they believe, marked them off from other nations. (Albanese, 2007, 45) There are also some who consider Jews to be united by a common religion. There is Jewish religion which is strong cement binding them to other Jews but Jewish religion does not unite Jewish people. De Lange states that in fact the religion divides them today, as much as it divides Jews from non-Jews. “They practice the Jewish religion because they are Jews, not the way around.” (De Lange, 2004, 1)

When considering Jews being observant, Čejka distinguishes two groups of them. The **Orthodox** Jews are those who are trying to connect the religious and ritual

¹ the religion of Jews

² In Czech if you write *Žid* (a Jew written with a capital letter) it means a member of an ethnic group by contrast *žid* (a Jew written with small letter at the beginning) is used in a meaning of a member of religion. (Spiegel, 2007, 8)

life with the secular way of living and by contrast there are the **Ultra-orthodox** who do not agree with many aspects of a modern life. (Čejka, 2009, 75) They are more traditional and maintain that only complete separation from secular society can assure Jewish survival. (Dosick, 2007, 61)

The mixed marriages and Jews being scattered into many countries caused that there is a number of interpretations of Judaism, known as branches, wings, or movements. (Dosick, 2007, 61) For the purpose of the thesis the Orthodox Judaism and Hasidism are important. **Orthodox Judaism** has been mainstream Judaism throughout the centuries. Everyday life and behaviour are guided by the law of the Torah and the commandments which they strictly observe. (Dosick, 2007, 61) **Hasidism** represents an ultra-orthodox wing of Judaism. Hasidim live separated from a non-Jewish world and hesitate on a strict obedience to the law of the Torah. (Partridge, 2006, 275, 6) In the 18th century, the promoter Ba'al Shem Tov considered prayer and belief in miracles the main principles of Judaism. A rabbi has almost absolute power and control over his followers. He is called the *tzaddik* ("equitable") and is the middleman between Hasidim and God. (Čejka, 2009, 98)

Not only the observance and interpretations of Judaism make differences between Jews but also a different interior-ethnic and cultural origin³ matter. **Sephardic Jews** lived in Spain and Portugal from the Middle Ages until the persecution and mass expulsion from those countries in the 15th century. (<http://www.britannica.com>) They speak the Jewish dialect called Ladino, a blend of medieval Spanish with Hebrew, Arabic, and other elements. (Albanese, 2007, 41) **Ashkenazim** are the orthodox Jews from Eastern Europe (especially Germany, France, Italy, and Poland). Their language is Yiddish which is a mixture of Hebrew, German and dialects. (Cronin and Berger, 2009, 16) They migrated eastward after the Crusades (11th – 13th century) and after the 17th century persecutions in Eastern Europe. (<http://www.britannica.com>)

³ The divergence between the countries of origin has brought certain cultural, social, ritual, and other dissimilarities. In today's society, Ashkenazim are more secularized and modern; Zionism has its origin in Ashkenazim milieu. Today, Ashkenazim constitute more than 80 percent of all Jews in the world. (Čejka, 2009, 81)

3. Jewish tradition

Konopniciki tries to summarize the criteria which determine Jewish identity by stating that religion, history, culture, and daily life experiences play a role. (Konopniciki in Ben-Rafael, Gergely, and Gorny; 2006, 74) De Lange adds that the Jewish past as a whole is in a sense a part and parcel of inner experience and an identity of every single Jew. And since Jews everywhere share the sense of their history; they are somehow part of the same huge family. (De Lange, 2004, 2) As one Jewish legend says, the souls of all Jews who would ever live were present at Sinai - Jews consider their common history as the one of the most important things which forms Jewish tradition.

Putík and Pavlát explain that Judaism means more than just the regular prayers, the celebrations of the festivals or the observance to the special food regulations. It is a way of life which includes all human behaviour from one's birth to death, Judaism is more than just the religious discipline. (Putík and Pavlát in Pavlát, 1997, 111)

The basic element of Judaism is the idea of monotheism which is expressed by the Hebrew Bible⁴. According to a covenant between Jewish people and God, Jews' purpose is to fulfil God's will and disseminate it to all nations. A part of the service is also the observance of the religious regulations, the commandments (*mitzvot*⁵ in Hebrew). It is not just about some ceremonial occasions or formal rituals. Many of the commandments have become a part of general ethic and morality. In Judaism, the life lived according to the commandments is a virtue and reward which one deserves only when he obeys the law with love and inner seriousness. (Putík and Pavlát in Pavlát, 1997, 111 - 112)

Judaism has always been more concerned with people's relation to God and responds to God's word and will than with the belief in Him. "How does man serve God? By imitating His ways even to death." (Hertzberg, 1961, 66) Hertzberg also

⁴ History begins with the Bible and her religiously-literal legacy. The Hebrew Bible represents not just a literary anthology of the faith and culture of the ancient Israel. It also represents the fundamental document of Judaism and by Jews is considered including the science which God gave to Jewish nation and which the nation constantly studies. (Fishbane, 2003, 34)

⁵ Along with ethical commands, God gave ritual law, the instrumentality by which the ethical *mitzvot* are remembered and observed, and which serve to order, rhythm, and enrich everyday existence by raising ordinary acts to the level of holiness. (Dosick, 2007, 5) The *mitzvot* is a collection of rules which dictates Jews what they should and should not do (248 of the *mitzvot* are positive and 365 negative).

quotes Rabbi Israel Baal-Shem Tov's words, from his 'testament', which can stand as a summary of the views of Judaism. He states that "a man who makes efforts to cleave to God has no time to think of unimportant matters; when he constantly serves the Creator, he has no time to be vain." (Hertzberg, 1961, 69)

Most fervent prayers and one of the Judaism's hopes is the coming of the Messiah who should lead Jews back to the Promised Land, Land of Israel to "the time when there will be eternal reward for everyone who has ever lived, and when all the ills and evils will be gone, replaced by complete peace and perfection. The time is called messiah age and it is an ultimate goal and reward for all the people." (Dosick, 2007, 43)

4. Jews in the United States

The history of Jews is one of the suffering which in the late 19th century led to their immigration to the USA. The intolerance against Jews grew again in these times, not just in Europe but also in Russia. The migration was caused mainly by mass killing of Jews. (Sadek in Pavlát, 1997, 30 - 31)

In 1939 when the World War II began and Adolph Hitler declared that Jewish race would be annihilated; his words were not considered to be a factual program for killing of European Jewry. Finally, millions of Jews lost their lives just for the fact they were Jews. (Kárný in Pavlát, 1997, 55) The annihilation of the majority of European Jews and the discrimination of them climaxed the urgency in historical Palestine. As the result, in the 1948, the state of Israel was established. These main countries of immigration, the United States and Israel have welcomed large numbers of Jewish immigrants from many countries.

In 1492, the first Jews migrated to the USA. The Catholic monarchs ruling in Spain gave them three options: to convert to Catholicism, to practice their religion clandestinely, or to leave the land. Thus the huge immigration waves which took place in the 19th and 20th century are more important for the thesis and lives of all Jews living in the USA.

With the Christian persecutions of Jews in Western Europe during the Crusades and the plague of the 14th century, Jews moved from central and southern Europe into

Eastern Europe to live in small villages, called *shtetls*⁶ in Hebrew. (Cronin and Berger, 2009, 13) From the 1880s, these medieval, orthodox, and mostly Hasidic Jews were coming to America. Many of them have been dislocated by *pogroms*.⁷ Jews from Eastern Europe, mostly orthodox Yiddish-speaking ones, arrived and the immigration lasted until the discriminatory Johnson Act of 1924 effectively stopped the flood. (Cronin and Berger, 2009, 13)

De Lange regards American Judaism “as dynamic, as varied and as unique as American Jewry. Its variety reflects the different waves of immigration and their experiences of adapting themselves to a free and open society.” (De Lange, 2004, 13)

Although Jews view themselves as one of the oldest people, a majority of them today consider themselves being newcomers to the places they live in because relatively few of them live where their grandparents were born. The story of the Jewish people over the past two centuries (or more) has been a story of dramatic displacements. (De Lange, 2004, 6)

Approximately eighty-five percent of Jews settled in the US, where they have constituted one of the largest immigrant groups. (De Lange, 2004, 7) “This inflow has had a marked effect on the character of the Jewish communities within the various countries.” (De Lange, 2004, 9) “Today, immigration continues on a relatively small scale, mainly from the Russia and Israel, helping to compensate for the very low birthrate of the native Jewish population.” (De Lange, 2004, 12)

Today, Judaism in the USA as well as in Israel is divided into four major religious movements represented by synagogue membership. A far larger percentage of Jews (nearing one-half, at any given time) identify themselves as Jewish though they belong to no movement. Some of these Jews do join synagogues from time to time, but others prefer to remaining ‘secular’ for the ideological reasons. (<http://www.rossel.net>)

⁶ Jewish centres in a non-Jewish environment, the Jews in the *shtetl* lived in full consciousness of their Jewishness. Even when they were poor, they lived crammed into narrow rooms, had hardly anything to wear, and often had to be hungry, they were proud of their Jewishness, and they felt at home there. (Haumann, 2002, 58)

⁷ A Yiddish word meaning an organized massacre. (Kent, 2007, 116)

5. Jewish literature in the USA

Jewish-American literature has become the inseparable component of the national literature of the USA and has enriched also the world literary context. (Kolář, 1998, 133)

A special label Jewish-American literature, written with a hyphen, forces some to ask the question why it is used and what the meaning is. Some can say Jews must have always something special. They have to call themselves 'the chosen people', they have to be separated by the others everywhere and every time. Jews know they are special but that is also the reason why they feel themselves as the outsiders, also in the USA, although the country has been tolerant and hospitable, Jews have had a feeling of divergence. That is why they have been refusing the full integration into society. (Ulmanová, 2002, 13 - 14) They belong neither to Hebrew nor to Yiddish literature, and as a minority they are back from the major American literature.

Another question is what the criteria for identifying Jewish literature are, whether it is Jewish language, religious affiliation of an author, or religious sensibility. Some critics have insisted that the text by Jewish writer needs to be written in Jewish language such as Yiddish, Hebrew, and Ladino. To name a few obvious candidates, where would one place Franz Kafka, Elie Wiesel, Saul Bellow? (Wirth-Nesher, 1994, 4) Jews are scattered around the world and live in various cultures, speak and write in various languages but what remains is a sense of Jewishness. Some have claimed that Jewishness is measured by religiosity, and some have suggested that Jewish literature "is marked by a profound consciousness of Jewish history." (Wirth-Nesher, 1994, 4) The question what is Jewish literature and who is Jewish author is the matter in dispute. For the purpose of the thesis the term Jewish writer⁸ is used in a meaning of a person who was born as a Jew and writes about Jewish issues as history, tradition.

⁸ Jewish-American writer "is of Jewish origin, resident in America, aligned or not aligned with Jewish religious life in North America, and generally acculturated as a Jewish person. [...] these writers reflect a wide variety of attitudes toward Jewish religion, ritual, and culture. What they hold in common is their shared sense of their Jewish and American heritages." (Cronin and Berger, 2009, 8)

The first Jewish writings in America are sermons, orations, poems, and novels that Jews of the Sephardic and German waves of immigration wrote between the 17th and 19th century. (Kramer in Kramer and Wirth-Nesher, 2003, 15 - 16) “The literature of East European Jewish immigrants⁹ from this period registers both the uncertainties of the dominant culture and their own ambivalent responses to assimilation.” (Wald in Kramer and Wirth-Nesher, 2003, 51)

The number of novels by Jewish-Americans began to increase in the two final decades of the 19th century. Jewish leaders began calling for a Jewish presence in American literature. Jewish writers had to adapt Yiddish genres to American ones and their novels had to be in English. Abraham Cahan’s *Yekl: A Tale of the New York Ghetto (1896)* is considered to be the first novella written by Eastern European Jewish immigrant in English. Thus the usage of English language was regarded the act of assimilation, (Kent, 2007, 128) it would be misleading to talk about American Jewry as entirely monolingual.¹⁰

The author who was writing in Yiddish language also in the United States was Sholem Aleichem. (Ulmanová, 2002, 12) In his prose he reflects the *shtetl* in the beginning of its decline which was caused by the huge migration wave from Russia to the United States in 1880s. The later Jewish-American literature was formed especially in the 1930s and 1940s. The most popular genre was a short story and the most important writers were for example Jerome Weidman, Meyer Libben, Paul Goodman, Michael Seide, and Ethel Rosenberg. What those authors had in common was the fact that all of them were born in New York and their work has a value of a historical document. (Ulmanová, 2002, 13)

Jewish-American literature made people aware of itself in the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s. The decades were thus called “The Jewish decades of American literature.” Bernard Malamud, Philip Roth and Saul Bellow have started to publish their work and

⁹ They wrote essays, tracts and short stories, novels, plays, poetry, and autobiographies, some of which they published in English, many of which filled the pages of the Yiddish publications that served the emigrant Jewish community. (Wald in Kramer and Wirth-Nesher, 2003, 51)

¹⁰ “Reading Jewish American literature with an awareness of multilingualism means that the historical, social, cultural, thematic, and poetic questions that Jews regularly bring to artistic works will foreground issues of language.” (Kent, 2007, 111) Yiddish is not used just in a form of a word or phrase but rather with an ironic undertone which undermines the texts and then transforms them with the use of Talmudic structure of arguments and typical Jewish sad and wise humour. (Ulmanová, 2002, 15)

became honored very soon. These writers were somehow influenced by the 'Old World' and the immigrant Jewish culture in the United States. They were writing in English,¹¹ and living and publishing their novels in the USA. "Much of the literature of this period contains lovingly crafted and memorable depictions of immigrant grandparents, birth families, religious education, and synagogue membership."(Cronin and Berger, 2009, 21) The main themes¹² continue to appear in the work of Herman Wouk, Chaim Potok, Bernard Malamud, and Philip Roth, all literary artists who were writing during and after World War II.

The theme of the Holocaust started to be frequent in a second half of the 1960s. The authors could hardly find the ability to express the inexpressible and they thought the most suitable way was through a silence. The exception was Saul Bellow's *Victim* (1947), other Jewish-American authors started to write about the Holocaust after the Europeans. These authors were focused on Jewish mind and have created Jewish characters influenced by the history of Jews and their culture, philosophy and tradition yet living in the United States. (Ulmanová, 2002, 78) New writing styles were represented by the religious themes. The characters can prove that their life is led by Jewish values; and according to the religious laws life has an enormous value although it means a detachment from major part of society. These characters come from the pen of writers educated in Judaism; the writers who do not hesitate to quote from the Torah and the Talmud and whose leader is Chaim Potok. (Ulmanová, 2002, 80)

6. Traditional values in Chaim Potok's fiction

Chaim Potok won an important place among the 20th century Jewish-American writers because of his stimulating treatment of what he called 'core conflicts' in a meaning of "conflicts between characters related to their deepest convictions and commitments." (Young in Cronin and Berger, 2009, 238 - 239) He has begun "a systematic exploration and a sequence of interwoven novels dealing with Jewish-American cultural confrontation." (Kremer, 1989, 232) Potok's expressions of Jewish theology, liturgy, history and scholarship as well as the seemingly disparate expressions of Jewish

¹¹ With the exception of Isaac Bashevis Singer who was writing in the Yiddish also in the United States.

¹² Modernity, World War II, and the Holocaust.

tradition (Orthodox, Hasidic, and more liberal ones) represent something new in American literature. (Kremer, 1989, 232) Kolář believes Potok is a pioneer of the literature which is focused on Jewish spiritual life and parts of Jewish history. He is considered to be a representative of the part of Jewish-American literature which gives a view of Judaism 'from inside.' (Kolář, 1998, 105)

In comparison with Philip Roth and Saul Bellow's characters with assimilation tendencies in American society, Potok's characters are deeply buried into the Jewish lives. The characters are incorporated with Jewish theology and liturgy. They take Judaism and tension between the Talmudic study and personal experience very seriously. (Kolář, 1998, 105) Kremer adds that "instead of concentrating on the Jew as traveller to America, or European immigrant, Potok examines his Jewish characters as religious questers, skeptics, visionaries, and mentor." (Kremer, 1989, 232)

The Chosen, Potok's first work published in 1967, tells a story of a friendship of two boys from absolutely different worlds and book also examines tension that arises as their cultures collide with each other and with modern American society. It unfolds during the Allied offensive in World War II. *The Chosen* deals not only with the clash between tradition and modernity but also with the American Jewish community's response to the Holocaust. The final part is concerned with the Zionist movement to create a Jewish state in Palestine. In the story, the act of chosenness¹³ could be in a meaning of chosenness one's way of living.

The Promise (1969), a sequel to *The Chosen*, is set in 1950s in New York after World War II when European survivors of the Holocaust came to America. The main characters are adults now and are going the way they have chosen. Chaim Potok explains that "in *The Promise* the confrontation is between a fundamentalist religion and another gift to us from our general civilization." A methodology called scientific text criticism¹⁴. (<http://www.laiserra.edu>) In traditional world the sacred texts are considered in a value of a gift given Jews by God and they touch and tamper with those

¹³ The original meaning of the chosenness is explained in the first part of the thesis, in the history.

¹⁴ A methodology that uses all the modern findings of archaeology, philology, ancient languages, and the new things that we know about the cultures of the ancient world and their interactions to explore the development of ancient texts. It brings all this powerful instrumentality to bear upon the central and sacred texts of the western tradition. (<http://www.laiserra.edu>)

texts at their great peril. (<http://www.laiserra.edu>) But what one can do when he believes the method and sees truths in analysing those texts with the usage of it? Does he throw out truths in order to maintain his uniqueness, his allegiance to his particular core and is that the price that is being exacted from Jews? Tension Reuven experiences is the one felt by many people, the core-core confrontation of ideas. (<http://www.laiserra.edu>)

My Name Is Asher Lev (1972) is situated in Brooklyn, New York and also in Europe in 1940s, before World War II. What makes the character of Asher unique is that the problem he deals with is not intellectual, but the esthetical one. In Jewish tradition there is no painter engaged in modern art, the painter who is an orthodox Jew who could express himself with respect to Jewish law. Portraying is forbidden and some of the feelings are inexpressible in Jewish art¹⁵. That is the reason why Asher differs in opinion with the community. “You are entering the world of the goyim¹⁶, Asher Lev. Do you know that?” (Potok, 1972, 170¹⁷) The painting of the *Brooklyn Crucifixion* which should express the pain and suffering of Asher’s mother has become the biggest problem for the community and his family. Asher has used the Christian symbol which is a taboo for all Jews¹⁸. He admits: “I am an observant Jew. Yes, of course, observant Jews do not paint crucifixions. As a matter of fact, observant Jews do not paint at all – in the way that I am painting.” (M, 1972, 9)

The Gift of Asher Lev (1990), a sequel to *My Name Is Asher Lev*, takes place in France and New York after almost twenty years of Asher’s exile. Asher is a grown man, a father and a very famous artist now, an orthodox Jew who observes the *mitzvot*. The only exception is painting and the world he is surrounded by, the secular one.

In the beginning (1975) is set in 1930s, in the decade preceding World War II, in times called The Great Depression. The main character chooses to use the scientifically

¹⁵ Chaim Potok explains here are no Jewish motifs in western art. “All the motifs in Western art are either pagan, that is to say, Greek, Roman, African, or Egyptian, or they’re Christian, or they’re empty of salvationist tones altogether and are landscapes, still lifes and so on. Secular in nature.” (<http://www.laiserra.edu>)

¹⁶ Goy (plural goyim) is a Hebrew word for a non-Jew.

¹⁷ Thereafter quoted in the text as M.

¹⁸ Christians consider Jews as killers of Jesus; because of the crucifixion a lot of Jewish blood has been shed.

textual criticism to Bible which is forbidden in Judaism. Moreover, this method includes the features of anti-Semitism which could the strong anti-Semitism of the time just strengthen.

6.1. The milieu

The major characters, the immigrants, are those who were born as the first generation of Jews in the United States. All their ancestors have come to America from Europe because of several reasons. It is not only American society what has affected characters' personalities, opinions, and beliefs but also the past of their parents and leaders of the communities. Asher and Danny¹⁹, both born in a Hasidic community, are raised in stories of the community's arrival, stories about the great Rebbes.

David Lurie (*In the Beginning*) is raised in the stories of the Jews living in Europe, mostly in Poland. Most of his parent's relatives live there, in the times of pogroms. David listens to the stories of the arrival of his family, of the death of Ruth's first husband, and about the future his father's organization wants to organize those Jews, in the USA.

History plays an important role in Jewish life. The history of a family and community is such an important thing that has a straight impact on the characters.

David Malter once explained that "it was really in Poland, or, more accurately, in the Slavic countries of eastern Europe, that Danny's soul had been born." (Potok, 1967, 94²⁰) Danny is a son of the great Rebbe of a Hasidic community which roots can be dated into the 18th century in Poland. According to tradition Danny is still in touch with his ancestors from Eastern Europe. Danny, being proud of his father, the great *tzaddik*, tells Reuven a story of the arrival of the community to the USA after the First World War. Reb Saunders inherited the position of rabbinic leadership automatically after his father's death and remained the rabbi throughout the years of Russia participation in the war. Once he announced to his people they were done with Russia and would travel to

¹⁹ Main characters of *The Chosen*, *The Promise*, *My Name Is Asher Lev*, and *The Gift of Asher Lev*.

²⁰ Thereafter quoted in the text as C.

America to rebuild their community there. Reuven is surprised by the community's decision to follow Reb:

'They all followed him?' I asked. 'Just like that?'
'Of course. They would have followed him anywhere.'
'I don't understand that. I didn't know a rabbi had that kind of power.'
'He's more than a rabbi,' Danny said. 'He's a tzaddik.' (C, 1967, 110 -112)

The *tzaddik*, the righteous one, is the most important person in lives of Hasidim; he is a leader of the community. Each Hasidic community has its own *tzaddik* whom they blindly follow. His people would go to him with all the problems they have, and he would give them advice. As David Malter (Reuven's father) once explained:

The Hasidim believed that the tzaddik was a superhuman link between themselves and God. Every act of his and every word he spoke was holy. Even the food he touched became holy. (C, 1967, 101)

Also Asher's community has its own Rebbe, as the Hasidic one. The Rebbe once said to Asher: "'Asher Lev, in the name of my father and my father's father before him, in the name of the sacred Rebbes who speak through me and act through me, I give you my blessing.'" (Potok, 1990, 242²¹) He is connected with the past of his ancestors, the great Rebbes before him. History is considered as a common feature which influences the whole life of every single Jew. Asher Lev pointed to the fact that his father "was able to trace his family line down through the centuries to the time of the Black Death in 1347" (M, 1972, 9) and his mother "back to the Rebbe of Berdichev, one of the saintliest of Hasidic leaders" (M, 1972, 11). He adds the story of his grandfather's life and as he became a member of the Russian Hasidic sect led by the Rebbe. His grandfather was the first of their family who joined the Hasidic community since that time it has been obvious where they belong. "Why did he travel so much? I once asked. To bring the Master of the Universe onto the world, my father replied." (M, 1972, 10) He also started the history of emissaries in the Lev's family. History connects Jews together; this is the example which stands for it.

²¹ Thereafter quoted in the text as G.

When pointing to the milieu characters live in, Reuven gives a description of the Brooklyn Hasidic community life he has been surrounded by:

Danny's block was heavily populated by the followers of his father, Russian Hasidic Jews in somber garb, whose habits and frames of reference were born on the soil of the land they had abandoned. [...] A block away lived another Hasidic sect, Jews from southern Poland. [...] (C, 1967, 3)

Each community has its own rabbi, the leader and dynastic rules who “could trace his family's position of rabbinic leadership back to the time of the Ba'al Shem Tov, the eighteenth century founder of Hasidism, whom they all regarded as a God-invested personality.” (C, 1967, 3) Each of the sects Danny and Reuven were surrounded by has its own synagogue, customs, and own fierce loyalties.

In *The Chosen*, the milieu of the time even causes the clash between two traditions. The fight illustrates the importance of the milieu not just for the story but also for the lives of Jews. Second World War affected lives of many people all over the world but Jews have been the special exception. A great atrocity committed against them did not allow sleeping also the Jews living outside the United States. Despite of the absence of American Jews in the horror, they painfully experienced the suffering of their associates. Reuven is of the opinion that “America hadn't cared enough, either. No one had cared enough. The world closed its doors, and six million Jews were slaughtered.” (C, 1967, 186)

The divergent opinions to the question of the Jewish future after WWII caused a conflict between the communities. The conservatives, represented by David Malter, are open to the world and as the solution to the mass killing during WWII they consider the establishment of the independent Jewish state. It could guarantee peace and an opportunity to save Jewish tradition. Their intention is rather political than religious. Malter lives just by the question of the future life of Jews.

He was reading everything he could find that told of the destruction of European Jewry. He talked of nothing else but European Jewry and the responsibility American Jews now carried. Occasionally he spoke of the importance of Palestine as a Jewish homeland [...] (C, 1967, 186)

In his speech, in a sense of Zionism, he claims that what Jews have left is the American Jewry. Some wait for God to send the Messiah but there is no time for waiting. He thinks that all they have to do is to make their own Messiah and rebuild the American Jewry for whom Palestine must become a homeland. “‘We have suffered enough! How long must we wait for the Messiah?’” (C, 1967, 186)

Those who wait for the Messiah are the Hasidim who believe they carry a weight of a sorrow of the Holocaust victims and devote themselves to the prayer. They regard the establishment of the Jewish state a sin made by goyim. The state cannot be established by ordinary people because tradition precisely says that Palestine, the Land of God, is the land which God gave to the chosen nation and God is the one who will lead them to the land again through the arrival of the Messiah. Reuven ignites anger in Reb Saunders when saying that some said, Palestine should become a Jewish homeland and not only a place where pious Jews should go to die. The reaction of Reb Saunders was “as though someone had thrown a match onto a pile of straw.” (C, 1967, 187)

‘Who are these people?’ he shouted in Yiddish, and the words went through me like knives. ‘Apikorsim! Goyim! [...] They will build for us a Jewish land? They will bring Torah into this land? [...] When the Messiah comes, we will have Eretz Yisroel, a Holy Land, not a land contaminated by Jewish goyim!’ [...] Why do you think I brought my people from Russia to America and not to Eretz Yisroel? Because it is better to live in a land of true goyim than to live in a land of Jewish goyim! [...] True Jews do not say such a thing!’
There was a long silence. Reb Saunders sat in his chair, breathing hard and trembling with rage. (C, 1967, 187 - 188)

In comparison with *The Chosen* in a story of Asher Lev tradition is empowered by the consequences of the historical events of that time: “‘Reb Yudel Krinsky said Stalin killed tens of millions of people.’ ‘Yes’, my father said.” (M, 1972, 69) Asher’s father, who is the servant to tradition, an emissary to the Rebbe, rescues many Russian Jews to help to solve the problem in Russia. “He seemed more connected to the Jews of Russia than to the Jews of our own street.” (M, 1972, 53) In the USA and Europe he leads the establishment of Jewish *yeshivas*. Those schools should raise the future successors of tradition who can save it to the future. “Our Crown Heights Ladover community grew quickly during those years. Almost every Shabbos, I saw new faces in the synagogues.” (M, 1972, 53)

The outcomes of his work, Asher can appreciate when visiting Europe:

'How many students do you have?'
'One hundred and eight.'
'How many students did you have five years ago?'
'Seventeen' [...] 'Your father did it. It was creation of nothing.'
[...] 'Your father did it all, 'the man said. 'He is a remarkable person, your father.' (M, 1972, 275)

David grew up in Bronx, New York, in an Orthodox Jewish family, Polish immigrants. Throughout his childhood, David is haunted by his importance against the goyim in his neighbourhood and those in Poland whose pogroms had so angered his father, Max Lurie. David lives in between two words, the new American which helped his family to survive and will help the other relatives, who stayed in Europe and experienced horrors of pogroms, to survive. He lived in the milieu where the senior members in the heavy accents of their European lands of origin felt that, at least for them, the immigrant's dream had been realized. They had been right to abandon the blight of Europe and gamble on golden America. (Potok, 1975, 5²²)

The milieu has its power not just in forming lives of Jews. It is something which everybody is surrounded by and what has strong and direct impact on all the people. The environment, the people, and the time some live in are the basis of his life and cannot be forgiven.

6.2. The themes

One of the main themes of Jewish-American literature is the way how the Jewish immigrants in the United States deals with the new country they live in. Like other immigrant groups, they have to adapt to new circumstances and the demands of a cultural and social 'melting pot' which "offers very distinct possibilities and even pressures to maintain their own distinctive identity and way of life." The responses to the pressures have ranged widely, from total assimilation and abandonment of Jewish identity to the maintenance of a very traditional and separate existence at the other. (De

²² Thereafter quoted in the text as B.

Lange, 2004, 11) Hasidim are those who separate themselves from the world which is around them. It is normal that in some Hasidic sects secular literature is forbidden and those communities live shut off from the rest of the world. “Anything that was not Jewish and Hasidic was forbidden. Their lives became frozen.” (C, 1967, 101) The study of the Talmud and other sacred texts is as important as it has been before the time of the founder of Hasidism, Ba’al Shem Tov. (C, 1967, 101)

6.2.1. Depicting tradition through dreams, memories, and stories

A return to the past in novels by Jewish-American authors is according to Kolář associated with finding and strengthening of one’s ethnic identity. (Kolář, 1998, 43) The historical moments are very often reconstructed by memories which help authors to be more convincing. (Kolář, 1998, 61) Moreover, the memories are the components of the searching for one’s identity and are too vivid to be forgotten. They are a heritage of Jews. (Kolář, 1998, 75)

“Her eyes were mirrors of the memories of all her own waiting – for my father, for me. The past had suddenly been returned to her by her grandchild. (G, 1990, 115)

The stories about the arrival of the community are told and considered to be a part of the family’s identity. For example, Asher’s father was once talking about the times when the Rebbe’s father brought him and his brother, Yitzchok, and Asher’s mother to America. He was fourteen and could remember the journey.

[...] He stopped and closed his eyes. Then he said, his eyes still closed, ‘Sing zemiros with me, Asher. You, too, Rivkeh. Sing zemiros with me.’ (M, 1972, 105)

In David’s case, he very often listens to stories about his mother’s life in Poland, about her family which stayed there. David father’s organization tries to transfer them to the United States. In Poland, the pogroms took place and many Jews were killed. David’s father, Max, is constantly trying to help them to survive. Once he was there too, fighting with Polish goyim. Max pointed out to the history of the members of community in his speech:

We have learned never to forget the harm our enemies inflict upon us. We have learned that when we work together we can defeat our enemies. We will not stand by with our arms folded when our enemies attack us; nor will we do as some of our families did almost three hundred years ago in Tulchin when they decided not to attack the Poles. (B, 1975, 63)

Some of the memories are so hard to forget that when one tries to free himself of them, they can very easily appear in his dreams. Asher's wife, Devorah, experienced horrors in her childhood. She cannot forget them and in dreams she recalls them.

“Are you all right, Dev?”
“Bad dreams. Sealed apartments.”
“Can I get you something?”
“A new childhood, perhaps.”
“Not even the Rebbe can make such a miracle.” (G, 1990, 125)

Devorah, very often woke up by bad dreams thinking about God; whether He has a plan. That is what she used to think about when she was in the sealed apartment in Paris, living for two years absolutely separated from the world and waiting for the end of the war when she would find out where her parents were and what had happened to them.

“‘Sometimes I would lie awake at night and try to guess what the plan was.’” (G, 1990, 18) Asher, her husband who loves her so much, very often dreams about Devorah's life and especially the one she lived in Paris in the apartment because “it happens on occasion when you are married a long time: you dream the nightmares of the person you love.” (G, 1990, 59)

The most frequent are memories which are based on a principle of association when one moment from American present associates the moment from the past. (Kolář, 1998, 72) Devorah heard her daughter sing so beautifully that it associated her father who was killed in WWII. Once, he taught her a Christian song for the case she would ever have to hide from the Nazi.

I heard him tell my mother he would go to his death proudly as a Jew, but he wanted his children to survive the war and build a future. Well, he

died. How old was I when he taught it to me? Three or four. More than forty-five years ago. I still remember it.” (G, 1990, 83)

In spite of the significant time and spatial detachment, the terrifying memories about the Holocaust are obsessive and significantly affect the present of the characters who survived a terror of the concentration camps. Those characters are the immigrants who are trying to deal with their past in America. They try to forget the past or they struggle to understand and integrate it to the present. (Kolář, 1998, 52) Lev’s house once visited people who talked about a film on Holocaust. Devorah wanted to see it but Asher doubted because he knows what happens when she see such a movie. “If I let them do that, they remain the masters and I remain defeated. They dictated my life to me for two years. If you don’t want to, I’ll go alone,” (G, 1990, 148) Devorah responded. Her bad memories came again and Asher wishes they had not seen the movie.

“You protect me too much, Asher. Do you want me to hide from the world? I was hidden long enough.” [...] “To remember is not a punishment, Asher. To remember is a victory against the sitra achra, against Hitler, may his name be erased. [...]” (G, 1990, 149)

Asher woke in the middle of the night and felt her beside him, trambling, and her skin hot and dry. They have to sleep with the lights on but it does not help her to sleep calmly. (G, 1990, 150)

The example from the story of *The Promise* could be Rav Kalman who had been a teacher in one of the great *yeshivoth* in Europe before the WWII and spent years in a concentration camp in Poland. Reuven said about his teacher of the Talmud interpretation that he seemed to radiate darkness. He was angry, impatient and very often sarcastic. (Potok²³, 1969, 117)

He rarely sat still behind his desk. He paced. [...] Sometimes he would stop at the windows and incline his head and close his eyes for a moment, as if he were listening to an invisible voice – and I would see him nod his head. Then he would turn and continue his pacing. (P, 1969, 118)

²³ Thereafter quoted in the text as P.

The memories can have a traumatizing effect which prevents the characters from integrating to American society (Kolář, 1998, 129) as Rav Kalman who lives in the East European world still in America and once “talked about Hollywood as the symbol of American values; he ranted against a new instrument of horror called television; there was little about America he seemed to like.” (P, 1969, 119)

On the other hand, there Asher’s wife, Devorah, who is trying to forget her terrible childhood through the stories she writes for children.

“I had the idea that it might be wonderful if we could find a world where we could hold on forever to the good feelings we get from a story or a song, keep those feelings inside ourselves forever instead of having them only for fleeting moments. (G, 1990, 102)

6.2.2. Tradition forming Jewish identity

Everybody grows up in a particular world: a family, community, small town, or a church and receives tradition, customs, and thoughts of the world which means everything for him, it is his basis. But suddenly one reaches the age when he starts to think about the world he lives in and the world which is around it. This world has an enormous power and influences everyone’s life although some of the ideas of this world can seem alien for him. (<http://www.laiserra.edu>) Most of people start mixing those two worlds in an amount which suits them. For a person living the whole life in secular society it is not such a problem to mix this world with another. But there are also some who are deeply religious and obey the law of the religion, as Jews do. Judaism has its strict rules and Jews have to consider many aspects before mixing the worlds. The example could be the ultra-orthodox Jews who live in the community absolutely separated from the others, in their town within a town. Those Jews have to consider the possible consequences of mixing the worlds which could influence not just a life of one person but the community’s life. The question is whether there is a possibility to balance the worlds or the final solution would be leaving one for the other.

The biggest gift a father could give a child though the study of sacred texts, history of Jews and the storytelling about the ancestors, is tradition.

'The Rebbe is sending me to Europe to build centres for Torah. Our people in Russia are starving for worlds from the outside. The Rebbe is sending me to Europe to make passageways for them. This is more important than anything else. These are Jewish lives, Asher. Nothing is more important in the eyes of the Master of the Universe than a Jewish life.' (M, 1972, 99)

Asher and Danny, both raised in tradition and faith in strict obedience to the law, live very close to the centre of the community, the *tzaddik*, who is the connection between Jews and God and his mission in a life is to help the Messiah to come. The Rebbe has an enormous power over his followers. Asher's mother once asked him whether he wanted his father to say no to the Rebbe. His father was travelling a lot and Asher and his mother were suffering because of this fact but Asher has simply answered the question: "'No, Mama.'" (M, 1972, 67, 68)

Asher and Danny live as close to them as possible. Asher is a son of the Rebbe's right arm and Danny is his son and successor. He has to take his father's place; there is no other choice for him because it is an inherited position. Although he does not want to be a rabbi, he knows he will be. He will be like God for the people from the community.

'I have no choice,' he said again. 'It's like a dynasty. If the son doesn't take the father's place, the dynasty falls apart. The people expect me to become their rabbi. My family has been their rabbi for six generations now. I can't just walk out on them.' (C, 1967, 80)

Absolutely separated from the rest of the world, Danny and Asher, live their lives filled only by tradition. Anything else has its importance. Reb Saunders uses the traditional way of his family to raise his son and Reuven does not understand why he had never seen Reb Saunders talking to Danny except the moments when they argued over the Talmud. "There was never any simple, intimate, human kind of conversation between him and his son." (C, 1967, 184) Danny explains that his father

believes in silence. When I was ten or eleven years old, I complained to him about something, and he told me to close my mouth and look into my soul. He told me to stop running to him every time I had a problem. I should look into my own soul for the answer, he said. We just don't talk, Reuven.' (C, 1967, 161)

Reb has an explanation for his behaviour and a special kind of education he uses to raise his son. His son is a genius with an enormous memory. When Reb saw him, four years old, reading a book, he was frightened because he seemed not to read the story but swallowing it.

He was a mind in a body without a soul. [...]A mind like this I need for a son? A heart I need for a son, a soul I need for a son, compassion I want from my son, righteousness, mercy, strength to suffer and carry pain, that I want from my son, not a mind without a soul!" (C, 1967, 262)

Reb's father also never talked to him, except the studies. He taught him by silence to look into himself, to find his own strength. He said that words were cruel, played tricks, and distorted what was in the heart, concealed the heart, and the heart spoke through silence. "One learns of the pain of others by suffering one's own pain, he would say, by turning inside oneself, by finding one's own soul." For years, Reb was frightened by his father's silence but he always trusted him and never hated him. After years he told his son that a *tzaddik* must know of pain for his people because he must carry their pain from them and suffer for his them. He must carry their pain on his shoulders, always, even when he dances or sings. (C, 1967, 262 - 4)

Tradition does not form only those who grew up in the Hasidic sect but also those from less orthodox milieu. David Malter nurtured his son to the obedience to law and traditions of the religion although in a way adapted to the modern times. They study history and sacred texts like the ultra-orthodox does with the difference in Malter's approach to the interpretation of the texts and present society. A description of Reuven's rooms tells a lot about his attitudes and the way he was raised. On the wall over his bed there were maps of the North African, Sicilian, and Italian campaigns, maps of Europe, and pictures of Roosevelt from a New York Times Sunday magazine, and Albert Einstein from Junior Scholastic. (C, 1967, 91)

David Lurie was growing up in an Orthodox Jewish family of Polish immigrants. David's earliest memories involve meetings of the Am Kedoshim Society, founded by his father. David is growing up in the presence of the members of the association and the stories about Europe. David's father thinks that from goyim, Jews

must draw culture to enrich the roots of Orthodoxy. The only thing Max believes is that the tradition must be preserved. In his thoughts he is very similar to David Malter who is also trying to preserve tradition in a way the ultra-orthodox do not believe in.

David is a character on which Potok exemplifies the confrontation of Orthodox Judaism with anti-Semitism and secular culture. It is through him that Potok presents a reconciliation of the demands of Orthodoxy with those of modern gentile culture.

6.2.3. Balancing tradition and secular society

The main principle of Judaism is tradition and the obedience to the law of the Torah. Throughout the history there have been several attempts to change a perception of tradition and Jews have been adjusting it to times they have lived in. What could happen when those rules come into the clash with the new tolerant society which offers so much? Some do not care about secular society and what has a meaning is only the fact that the country allows living their life in a way they want. Some can forget about their religious heritage and the only thing they want is to be an American, a person who does not have problems because of his faith. There are also people who are somewhere in between those two groups of Jews and try to balance their religious lives with the secular ones. All of the Jews live in novels by Chaim Potok.

The main characters are those who meet secular society in a time of their puberty and have to decide how to connect those two worlds. From his childhood, Asher has felt how important painting for his life is. In secret, he leaves the community and visits museums of art. The disagreement of the community is not a barrier in discovering the world of art. As the Rebbe determines Jacob Kahn his teacher of art, Asher discovers all the opportunities secular world offers and the beauty of the world of art. The fact is that the only person who understands Asher is the Rebbe. He admits that a life should be lived for the sake of heaven and it does not mean whether one is a doctor or shoemaker. The person has to be good and live for the sake of heaven; that is all. (M, 1972, 168)

Asher does not reject tradition; he has balanced the two worlds, traditional and secular one until the deciding moment in his life made by the community. The decision is made by the painting Asher has made, the *Brooklyn Crucifixion*. It arouses excitement

in both of the worlds. In the traditional world the painting leads to Asher's expulsion from the community and country. The painting should express a suffering his mother was experienced in years of Aryeh's travelling. Asher asks the questions:

What did she think of as she stood by the window? Of the phone call that had informed my father of her brother's death? Would she wait now in dread all the rest of her life, now for me, now for my father, now for us both? [...] And I could understand her torment now; I could see her waiting endlessly with the fear that someone she loved would be brought to her dead. I could feel her anguish. (M, 1972, 284)

Asher paints his mother for "all the torment of your past and future years, my mama. For all the anguish this picture of pain will cause you." (M, 1972, 286)

The term integration is more suitable than assimilation in many cases. Those who try to integrate themselves to the major and multicultural society hold the ethnical peculiarity although the ethnical integrity can be meant negatively in a meaning of separatism, minority isolationism, and total adaptability. (Kolář, 1998, 80) Danny Saunders grown up in this kind of milieu, absolutely separated from the others. He is enchanted by a study of secular literature, especially by Freud, and decides to leave the core of tradition, the community. He refuses the position of his father and decides to study a secular subject. Danny, raised in an environment based on tradition which educated him to the faith and devotion to tradition, stays the ultra-orthodox Jew. He cannot leave one world for another one and that is why he tries to balance those two worlds. Reuven thinks he is doing very well in his studies, with his phenomenon memory which was the subject of many conversations "and the non-Jewish students treated him as some kind of holy man." (P, 1969, 78) He was interested then only in his studies. "All he needs was a place to eat, sleep, and study." (P, 1969, 79)

Although Reuven is a person who grew up somewhere in between the two worlds, he gets into the conflict with the old tradition. During the studies he meets Rav Kalman, the ultra-orthodox Jew whose sense of tradition and strict obedience to the law is strengthened by the fact that he was physically present in horrors of the Holocaust. Tradition should be followed in a spirit of the past which Reuven himself breaks. During the analysis of the sacred texts he uses the scientific, modern method in the old

tradition forbidden. All his life he has balanced between the two worlds, now to become a rabbi, he has to prefer one to another. His open relationship to the secular world is according to Rav Kalman something which could prevent him from getting the rabbinate. “The body is made unclean by contact with the smallest of things that is unclean,” (P, 1969, 121) Rav Kalman said. According to Rav Kalman, everything in America is thought to be Jewish, but Jews are travelling to synagogue in cars, they eat ham, pray three times a year but are members of a synagogue. Everybody is considered to be a Jew, “everything in America calls itself Judaism.” (P, 1969, 121)

David studies the Torah, the first five books of Moses, with Mr. Shmuel Bader in a way he had never been taught Bible. For his teachers, the words of the Bible were simply there. “Our task was to understand, to memorize, and to give back what we had learned. When Mr. Bader was done with that page it quivered and resonated with life. (B, 1975, 280) In the mists of dark rumors of Jewish deaths in Adolph Hitler’s Germany, David’s time is occupied with intense study of the strange books given to him by a neighbor, Mrs. Horowitz. The books, which belonged to her father, are in German. They are works of biblical criticism that study not a seamless Torah with one divine author but rather a collection of writings from many sources.

After completing his undergraduate work at the *yeshiva*, he chooses secular Bible study at the University of Chicago and his younger brother, Alex, wants to go study modern literature. Both of the boys deviate from tradition. Max, their father, fears that his sons are becoming traitors to Orthodoxy. David tries to balance two worlds, the traditional one and the secular in which he studies a way of biblical criticism which is forbidden for orthodox Jews but he fails.

6.2.4. The father-son conflict

For Jews a family is a guarantee of a discipline and cohesion and offers the enormous background; for a child it is a point in a world of chaos. On the other hand, it could be a barrier which one could be restricted by in tasting typical American joys. That is the reason why the younger ones very often rebel. (Ulmanová, 2002, 14) Kolář specifies the relationships in the family by pointing at one between a father and son. The father is a

kind of person which very often represents tradition and its values. He is not able to understand his son anymore, and vice versa. The father is evidently the character that is closely connected with the old world, Europe, and to tradition. (Kolář, 1998, 52)

The best relationship between the father and his son is in the one of Reuven's family. One supports and teaches the other and there is no such a situation which could get them into a conflict. By contrast, the fathers of high positions in the community have problems with understanding the deviation of tradition which their sons experience. Asher Lev meets the misunderstanding of his father at the age of four when he starts to paint and a distance between them is throughout the years of his painting deeper and deeper.

'Please don't be angry at me, Papa. I can't help it.' [...]
'An animal can't help it', my father said. 'A human being can always help it.'
'I can't help it, Papa.'
'A man has a will', my father said. [...] 'The Ribbono Shel Olom gave every man a will. Every man is responsible for what he does, because he has a will and by that will he directs his life. There is no such thing as a man who can't help it. Only a sick man can't help it.' [...] (M, 1972, 154)

As the distance is deepening, Asher sees his father as a different person. He had his own dream and needed all his strength for it. "He would fight interference. It was clear enough that he now regarded me as a serious interference." (M, 1972, 159)

Aryeh, Asher's father, is trying to understand his adult son, a famous artist, but in vain. He was trying to talk about it with his son but lack of understanding from the both sides had stopped the conversation and the gap between them was bigger again.

"You admire Picasso?"
"Do we admire Maimonides? It'll take the world of art three hundreds years to absorb the work of Picasso."
He was shocked. "You compare Picasso to Maimonides?"
"Niceness and greatness are two different qualities."
"Not in Yiddishkeit, Asher. Not among Hasidim. What a person does is what he is." [...] "What a strange world you are in, Asher." (G, 1990, 40)

When Asher sees love his father feels for Avrumel (Asher's son) he start to wonder where love was when he was growing up. He was thinking about the possible reasons why their relationship was rather cold than full of love. On the other hand, Asher loved him, but never showed him his love and he does not know why.

Danny Saunders' relationship with his father was granted by the way Reb Saunders raised him. The silence between them was something which reinforced and at the same time weakened their relationship. There was no love showed by Reb Saunders to his son. He displays love only through the study of sacred texts and the education in silence.

'What can I do?' he asked himself softly. 'I can no longer speak to my own son. The Master of the Universe gave me a brilliant son, a phenomenon. And I cannot speak to him.' [...] 'The pain of raising children,' he said quietly. 'So many troubles. So many troubles. (C, 1967, 159)

David's father is a representative of the orthodoxy which is strict in the observance to the law of the Torah, but on the other hand, which wants to help survive many Jews in Europe. They are not waiting for the Messiah to come and help them. Max is not a passive victim. In his homeland he had organized the Lemburg Jews to defend themselves, and when he saw that the situation there was hopeless, he led a group which immigrated to the United States. Tradition is on the first place, in his life. When his sons decide to deviate tradition because of the studies, he considers them as traitors of tradition.

In spite of tension between generations which could result even in a rebellion against the father, a result is never only a negative presentation of the father even a full sever of the family bond. (Ulmanová, 2002, 45)

6.2.5. Leaving tradition

Ulmanová states that the characters not fully assimilated do not renounce their Jewish heritage. (Ulmanová, 2002, 78) It is a case of Potok's characters that after balancing the

two worlds choose one of them, the secular. They stay being observant Orthodox Jews with the difference of a place and way of living adjusted to present society.

Danny, Asher and David are the characters who leave tradition. Each of them has different reasons for doing it and each is leaving tradition in a different way. Danny leaves the community when his father allows him to do that. He agrees with his leaving and the studies he wants to begin with. He can renounce his future position because thanks to the education he will be *tzaddik* in a soul. He has to admit that they live in America, not in Europe anymore and America is an open world when some can study and read book he wants.

I knew already when he was a boy that I could not prevent his mind from going to the world for knowledge. [...] But I had to prevent it from driving him away completely from the Master of the Universe. And I had to make certain his soul would be the soul of a *tzaddik* no matter what he did with his life.' (C, 1967, 265)

During the Service, Reb Saunders announced to the congregation his son wants to study psychology and is leaving the community. The announcement was greeted with shock. Reb explained it is his son's wish and he, as his proud father, respects it; also because of the fact that Danny wants to remain an observer of the Commandments. (C, 1967, 269)

Danny, the ultra-orthodox Jew living in secular world, deviates from tradition just by his study. It can be said that he did not leave tradition but only its core as Asher who did not do it voluntarily. Thus he has tried to balance the worlds, his art decided between them. The Rebbe, the only person who understands his passion for painting asks him to leave, not just the community, but the United States. "Go to the yeshiva in Paris. You did not grow up there. People will not be so angry in Paris. There are no memories in Paris of Asher Lev." (M, 1972, 318)

I do not hold with those who believe that all painting and sculpture is from the *sitra achra*. I believe such gifts are from the Master of the Universe. But they have to be used wisely, Asher. What you have done has caused harm. People are angry. (M, 1972, 318)

His exile has lasted for more than 20 years. Asher is an Orthodox Jew living in a world of art. He meets Jews who still do not understand his work and doubt about his faith very often.

'You pray like a true Ladover.'

'Why not? I am a Ladover.'

'I must say to you I never imagined that a man who paints the kind of pictures you do would pray in such a way. It is a perplexity to me.' (G, 1990, 47, 48)

Asher gives tradition a big gift, his son Avrumel who together with Asher's father follows the Rebbe with his mission. That is a way they will continue tradition, a dynasty. The question which still remains is whether Asher surrenders his family for tradition to redress some of his acts which hurt his family and community and help to deviate him from the core of tradition.

David decides himself to leave the core of the tradition. "You have your roots in this world. Others with roots elsewhere are not able to make such a decision." (B, 1975, 391) said him the Rebbe. David has to decide which world he will prefer.

I will go whenever the truth leads me. It is secular scholarship, Rebbe, it is not the scholarship of tradition. In secular scholarship there are no boundaries and no permanently fixed views. (B, 1975, 391)

I do not envy a Jew who goes into Bible today. Goyim will be suspicious of you and Jews will be uneasy in your presence. Everyone will be wondering what sacred truths of their childhood you are destroying. (B, 1975, 392)

David decides to take his ordination test and then begin graduate studies for a doctorate in Oriental studies. He will be going for a doctorate in Bible, study the Torah with goyim. "You were never satisfied with answers people gave you. I knew, I knew. But it hurts." (B, 1975, 395)

7. Conclusion

The core of every single Jew's life is tradition. It is a way of living, the path which has been already chosen. Each of the Jews has to consider the extent of tradition's influence to his life. In theoretical part of the thesis a term tradition is explained with the usage of the explanation of a Jew and distinction between Jews illustrated from several points of view. The distinction leads to history of Jews which is specified on the American history of Jews.

The thesis deals with traditional values in Chaim Potok's fiction which requires the explanation of the term Jewish-American literature and writer. The part states the beginning and emergence of Jewish literature in the USA and leads specifically to Chaim Potok.

In Chaim Potok's fiction all kinds of movements of Judaism are illustrated with the regard to the way they deal with between the worlds. The examples, given by the main characters, have their own worlds. Firstly the world they were raised in and then secular one, America, which influences them. All of them try to find out what weight in their lives has each of them. They try to balance those worlds and what one has in view is their attempt to deal with the problem. Whether it is Danny who was raised in ultra-orthodox world for which the secular one is forbidden, and who wants to balance between two absolutely different worlds, and succeed; Reuven who was balancing two worlds from his childhood and he has to decide which world is needed to prefer for succeeding in the position of a rabbi; Asher who is deeply religious but painting, something forbidden and condemned, is his passion; or David who deals with the question whether to refuse the truths he believe in because they are forbidden by tradition. All of them reaches the clash between those two worlds and try to decide between them because it is thought there is no way how to balance them. Tradition which has formed their identity is now a barrier to a free life, full of the truths they believe in. They have come into the conflict with tradition which is represented by their communities and families.

Leaving one world for another one can have several consequences. The most frequently depicted in Jewish-American literature is that the one who leaves tradition becomes a person without a soul, or the punishment is waiting for him. Danny leaves

just the core of tradition represented by the community, he refuses to become the *tzaddik*, but he succeeds in balancing the worlds and is not a person who is not satisfied with his decision. Asher leaves tradition on the Rebbe's order; he creates his own world filled by art and artists. He deals with the problem that he is not happy in neither of the worlds. He is in a way the only one who is a person 'without a soul.' Also the theme of punishment is opened in his story. Reuven is the only one who was raised somewhere in between the worlds and his secularity leads to a problem with more orthodox ones. However, he stays devoted to his truths and interpretation of tradition.

Chaim Potok handles all sorts of persons, all kinds of milieu that forms them, all sorts of problem they have to deal with. The conclusion which is merged is that tradition is something unimaginable, something that leads the lives of Jews from the moment of their birth to the death. It depends on a personality and the way they were raised how they will deal with the clash between tradition and modernity. What is obvious is the fact that tradition stays in hearts of Jews although they leave tradition or better to say, its core.

Resumé

Exil, do něhož byli Židé před několika sty lety vyhnáni, zapříčinil jejich roztroušení po celém světě. V každé ze zemí, kde se usadili, tvoří minoritní skupinu a setkávají se s otázkou, jak svoji tradici skloubit s životem v sekundární společnosti. Otázka židovství je stále na místě. Je člověk, který se vzdal tradice a dodržování příkazů tohoto náboženství stále ještě Židem? Objevuje se nespočetné množství názorů na to, kdo je to vlastně Žid, co člověka Židem činí. Nejjednodušší odpovědí se pak zdá ta, která Žida definuje jako potomka židovské matky (v reformním Judaismu může být Židem i potomek židovského otce), nebo člověka, který prošel procesem konverze. Někteří si pokládají otázku proč je člověk, který k židovskému náboženství konvertoval měřen stejnou měrou jako člověk, jež je Židem původem a jeho rod sahá až do daleké minulosti, kterou Židé považují za svoji nedílnou součást. Židé se ke konvertovaným Židům staví velmi pozitivně a to z toho důvodu, že oni sami si vybrali tuto víru a prošli všemi částmi konverze, která je seznamuje nejen s historií tohoto národa a náboženství, ale i s tradicí jako celku a jejího významu v životě Žida. Objevují se pak i tací, kteří dělají rozdíl mezi Židy, zda-li mají být posuzováni jako členi Judaismu, židovského náboženství, nebo členi rasy, národa. Samu rasu Židé nevidí v pozitivním slova smyslu, a to díky událostem 2.světové války, za níž byly miliony Židů vyvražděny jen proto, že jsou Židy, tedy z důvodu rasového, protože sám Adolf Hitler považoval Židy pouze za rasu, kterou je nutno vyhladit.

Co tedy znamená být Židem? Pro mnohé je základem fakt narození židovské matce, ke kterému dodávají další fakty jako například, že Židé jsou lidé spojeni historií jim společnou, dodržováním stejných tradic, které upravují svaté knihy Judaismu. Výklad tohoto termínu, Žid, se mění společně s pojetím židovské tradice. Ta, formována už po tisíce let je striktně dodržována příslušníky tohoto náboženství. Dalo by se říci, že s postupem času tradice rozděluje věřící do dvou hlavních skupin. První skupinou jsou silně věřící, ortodoxní až ultra-ortodoxní Židé, ti, kteří věří, že tradice byla již ustanovena a její dodržování je přesně dáno několik tisíc let starým zákonem. Druhou skupinu pak tvoří „méně ortodoxní,“ kteří tradici přizpůsobují své době. Některá

z pravidel považují pro svou dobu za již zastaralé, proto tato ustanovení upravují, nebo dokonce úplně zavrhnou.

Hovoří-li se o tradici, nesmí být opomenuty momenty židovské historie, které ji formovaly a ideje, ve které tato tradice věří. Proto nelze opomenout například myšlenka monoteizmu, která ve své době budila velký rozruch. Židé věří v jednoho Boha, který je nepředstavitelný, jeho moc je nezměřitelná, a se kterým mají Židé, jakožto vyvolený národ smlouvu, lépe řečeno úmluvu. Bůh vyvolil Židy národem, který má naplňovat jeho vůli a šířit ji dále. Jako odměnu stanovil jim Zemi zaslíbenou, území dnešního Izraele, a slíbil příchod Mesiáše, který je po letech exilu, pronásledování a vyvražďování, opět zavede do Země zaslíbené a nastolí čas, kdy všichni lidé na Zemi budou žít v míru a dokonalosti. Tato éra je pak odměnou za život zcela zaslíbený Bohu.

Jak již bylo řečeno, dějiny Židů jsou plné pronásledování, vražd, utiskování, nepochopení a vyhoštění. Již od dávných časů nebyli Židé považováni za rovné ostatnímu obyvatelstvu a to v kterékoli zemi. V 19. století situace vyústila až emigraci, převážně do Spojených států. Po pogromech na židovském obyvatelstvu Východní Evropy, Židé utíkali za lepším životem a to do země, která slibovala mnohé, především však svobodu. Vzdali se své minulosti spojené s Evropou pro záchranu nejen sebe samých, ale i tradice. Během tohoto století Židé přicházeli do Ameriky v několika velmi silných a početných migračních vlnách. Každá z nich byla specifická díky faktu, že každá nesla jinou tradici z jiného území. Tak se Židé začali v Americe potýkat s problémem, jak lze zachovat vlastní tradici na zcela novém území, které nejenže na jedné straně vyzývá k asimilaci, ale na straně druhé mísí také kultury čistě židovské. Střetává se tak nejen kultura tradiční s kulturou novou, americkou, ale i s rozdílnými kulturami židovskými. Tento střet kultur se pak stává velmi častým tématem amerických židovských spisovatelů. Ať už oni sami pocházejí z první, druhé nebo dokonce třetí generace židovských emigrantů, toto téma je pro ně aktuálním i po staletích, kdy první vlny emigrantů překročily oceán. I v dnešní době se mnoho Židů potýká s tímto problémem.

Sám Chaim Potok se dívá na židovství takřikajíc zevnitř. Věnuje se Židům ortodoxním, těm, kteří vyrůstají v komunitách, ať částečně nebo zcela uzavřených okolnímu světu. Specifický druh postav jeho děl jsou pak mladí chlapci, věřící Židé,

kteří se dostávají do věku, kdy začínají přemýšlet nejen o tom malém světě, ve kterém žijí, ale i o tom, který ho obklopuje. Amerika je země neomezených možností, nabízí mnohé a tito chlapci si tohoto faktu nemohou nepovšimnout. Začínají pronikat do onoho světa, nechávají se jím ovlivňovat, i přes fakt, že je pro ně světem zakázaným.

Pro analýzu pak byla vybrána právě ta díla, která spojují hlavní hrdinové, tito mladíci, kteří se začínají bouřit tradici, ve které vyrůstali. Zvažují jaký význam pro ně oba světy mají a hlavně, zda-li se tyto světy dají skloubit. Chaim Potok se věnuje nejen uvažování těchto mladíků, ale snaží se nastínit význam tradice pro ortodoxního Žida a způsob, jakým dokáže formovat jeho identitu. Dostává pak své čtenáře do prostředí až exotického, ortodoxního, světa uzavřeného před zraky ostatních. Na životě postav pak vysvětluje samotný pojem tradice, jaké má formy a jaké jsou možné způsoby jejího dodržování. Ať už jde o Židy původem z Východní Evropy, příslušníky Chasidismu, nebo o ty, kteří se nebojí nechat se ovlivnit prostředím americkým. Skrze postavy Dannyho a Reuvena (Vyvolení, Slib), Ašera (Jmenují se Ašer Lev, Dar Ašera Leva) a Davida (Na počátku) tak sledujeme nelehký boj těchto mladíků s vlastní rodinou, komunitou a především tradicí. Každý z nich nahlíží na tradici z jiného pohledu, každý byl vychováván v jiném prostředí a každý vidí svět sekulární jinými očima. Ať už je to Danny, syn Rebbeho, prostředníka mezi Židy a Bohem, který je v čele komunity Chasidů; Reuven, syn ortodoxního Žida, sionisty, který ho vychovával v úctě k oběma světům; Ašera, jehož otec je pravou rukou samotného Rebbeho, nebo David, který vyrůstal v nenávisti k nežidům, gojiům, v tradici přizpůsobované masakrům v Evropě, které jeho otec musel řešit s pomocí své organizace.

Všechny tyto chlapce ovlivnilo prostředí, ve kterém žili a hodnoty, které jejich komunita nebo rodiče uznávali. Oni sami ale začali toužit po něčem jiném, novém. Pro Dannyho a Ašera byl vstup do sekundárního světa něčím nevídaným a zároveň také porušením zákazu. Oni sami se rozhodují, který svět zvolit, pokud se nedá žít někde mezi nimi. Ocítají se mezi dvěma světy, uvědomují si hodnoty jich obou a otázkou zůstává, zda-li si lze zvolit jeden, ten pravý. Zda-li lze opustit komunitu, své blízké, takřkajíc stfēt své tradice pro svět, který neznají, ale který jim dle jejich názoru nabízí mnohé. Po snaze balancovat tyto světy, oba chlapci své komunity opouští a pokouší se žít ve světě novém. Zůstávají však oba ortodoxními a tradice má v jejich životě stále velkou váhu. Je to něco, co se nedá jen tak hodit za hlavu.

Naproti tomu Reuven je mladík, který žil odmalička mezi dvěma světy. Je věřícím Židem, jedná a žije podle zákona, ale dokáže se orientovat i ve světě druhém, ryze americkém. On sám se dostává do sporu s tradicí při studiu svatých textů. Dostává se tak do střetu s tou tradicí, která svět sekundární neuznává a jediné, co považuje za platné jsou zákony, několik let tisíc staré, obsahující zákony i pro studium těchto textů.

David vyrůstal ve světě plném hrůzy, odmalička trpěl nemocí, která ho omezovala celý život, žil v historkách o hrůzných událostech dějících se v Evropě a byl vychováván k nenávisti k sekulárnímu světu a jeho členům, gojiům. On sám si pak začal tvořit svůj svět, svět, který se přibližoval tomu světskému čím dál tím více, až se on sám rozhodl pro odchod z komunity a studium sekundárního předmětu, stejně jako jeho bratr. David se nechtěl pokoušet balancovat tyto dva světy, možná právě pro to, že jeho nejbližšími byl tento svět nenáviděn, odsuzován a oni proti němu vytrvale bojovali.

Tato práce se tak zabývá životem a postoji těchto postav, způsobem jakým se dokáží vyrovnat s tradicí starou a tou pro ně zcela novou a mnohdy neznámou. Tradice formovala jejich názory, ideje a identitu, je tím jediným co pro ně váhu, až do střetu s tradicí novou, která jim nabízí studium, po kterém touží nebo svět umění, který tak milují. Ukazuje i způsob zobrazování historie a dějinných událostí té doby skrze vzpomínky, sny a příběhy, jim velmi často vyprávěné. Je to způsob, který je opět něčím specifickým pro americké židovské autory a dává silnější pocit autenticity. Ukazuje i stránky člověka, které nedají zapomenout hrůzným událostem a mnohdy nedovolí člověku spát, natož žít nový život v nové společnosti.

Důležitou otázkou ale zůstává, zda-li tito mladíci jsou schopni oprostít se od tradice, která až donedávna tvořila jejich svět. Dostávají se do konfliktu nejen se sebou samými, ale i s rodinou a komunitou. Nejdůležitější postavou v rodině již po staletí býval otec, který své děti, společně s matkou, vychovával v úctě k tradici a jejím zákonům. Otec, který je v zastoupení první generace Židů emigrantů, který žil v Evropě, v místě, kde byla tradice středem bodem, neměnnou součástí jejich životů a který musí čelit novým skutečnostem nové země a rozhodnout, jak chce své děti v této společnosti vychovávat a zda-li je vůbec možné, to co si přivezl ze starého světa, jen tak přesunout do světa nového. Mladí synové, kteří jsou pak zástupci první generace Židů narozených na území Spojených států, ale Evropu nepoznali. Poznávají ji jen prostřednictvím vzpomínek strašících a tento svět je jim jistým způsobem cizí. Uvědomují si, že žijí jinde,

na území, které je možno poznat a nechat se jím vézt. Pak se jejich otci stávají především zarputilými pokračovateli tradice staré a zároveň překážkou ke světu novému. Mladíci se tak bouří a jejich vztah s otci se mění. Jsou si vzájemně vzdálenější a vzdálenější a jeden nedokáže pochopit myšlenky a pohnutky toho druhého. Toto téma, konfliktu mezi otcem a synem, je velmi častým u židovských autorů a je metaforou boje mezi tradicí a sekularitou.

Protože nahlížíme na tradici skrze ortodoxní část židovstva, je jasné, že opouštění tradice není nic lehkého a z podstaty mění člověka, jeho názory na svět a požadavky, které od světa, kde žije má. Právě proto docházíme k závěru, prostřednictvím této práce, že pokud člověk nebalancuje tyto dva světy již od svého dětství a nebalancuje je ve všech aspektech života, nepodaří se mu je skloubit. Člověk, který žije ve světě jednom, tak specifickém, nemůže tento svět jen tak zahodit a rozhodnout se pro svět druhý. Nikdy nezapomene na svoje kořeny a nemůže se jich jen tak lehce vzdát.

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