

Gimpel the fool by isaac bashevis singer: literary analysis

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Although Gimpel did not die a fool he lived his life primarily as a fool. Singers use of " Gimpel the Fool" demonstrated two lower levels of the human scale. The first is the cowards ability to justify to himself the reasoning behind his behavior. The second is the crowds ability to pick out the weakling and exploit him for their own amusement. Gimpel proved he was a fool by all that he did. He allowed himself to be cornered, prodded, and teased yet he never stood up for himself or what he knew to be the truth. He was forced into a life created for the merriment of the villagers and refused to live a life made by him (100). Further he was guilty of blindly loving a woman who would never treat him as a human being. Gimpel did not think of himself as a fool but every reaction betrayed his lie to himself. Gimpel did not make his own way through life and allowed others to persuade his every thoughts. When the voice of reason or logic presented itself, Gimpel chose to ignore common sense. Gimpel was a fool despite his self-denial.

As a necessity of his community Gimpel served the purpose of bread maker and as in all societies he served also as the scapegoat. Gimpel could have been an integral part of his society but instead he was untrue to himself and he was lost. The townspeople treated Gimpel much like the court jesters of the renaissance period, turning the baker into the village harlequin. Although the target of many pranks and antics, they were not directed at him for intentional harm. He was the target though due to his accessibility and convenience. Instead of seeking Gimpel out for his talents as the baker, Gimpels neighbors sought him out to entertain themselves by ridiculing his naïve nature. The baker was not naïve and when the towns people came with their lies and pranks, Gimpel knew what they were saying was not true

(99). The village jester chose to be laughed at as opposed to cause harm or offense. Possessing tact is an asset but Gimpel defined tact as having no opinion but what the villagers gave him. Gimpel seemed content living the life prepared for him by the villagers. Gimpel reacted to what was provided to him and never acted on his own. Throughout his life he was provided with numerous opportunities to evolve and rise above the taunting and the meaningless existence in which he was embroiled Gimpel became a product of his environment. A fool mocked by all.

Gimpel related to the reader his way of living in his society. " I had to believe . . . If I ever dared to say, Ah, youre kidding there was trouble" (99). All cultures and societies have their cruel side and people are expected to cope but all creatures of these societies have their limits. Limits of pain, pleasure, and tolerance. Unless a person is not aware he is the subject of ridicule he will break when his limits are pressed. Gimpel did not appear to have the limits, which inhabit human nature. Gimpel proved he was capable of emotion during the absence from his wife Gimpel " felt it all very bitterly. A longing took me, for her and for the child" (103). Gimpel loved his child as his own and loved his wife for that. The emotions Gimpel felt prove he was human. However, he was too half-witted to realize he was not feeling all the consciousness inherent to his relationship. Gimpel further experienced the human emotion of cowardice. By demonstrating his firm grasp of this base human emotion he often invited himself for further ridicule and gibes at the hands of his tormentors. Not once standing up for himself and becoming his own person created the imbecile, which Gimpel was.

The impelled lifestyle of Gimpel involved loving a woman who could never love him and who continuously mistreated him. Love may be blind but it is not dead. Love has a keen sense of awareness, which allows people to understand and desire one another. Elka had no love for Gimpel yet he convinced himself he loved Elka, despite her caustic words and devious nature. Even in her death when Elka asked for Gimpels forgiveness Elka does not feel remorse for Gimpels misconceptions but instead wants “ to go clean to my Maker” (106). On the evening of their union Elka did not even wish to consummate the ceremony, yet bore a child four months later. Elka performed her duties as Gimpels wife only by providing him with children. Unfortunately none of which belonged to him. Even a person secure in his relationship with a woman would have to doubt the validity of the alliance. Secure and blissfully ignorant Gimpel lived with Elka and her lies for twenty years.

There was a constant in Gimpels life other than the ugly banter and deceptions. The rabbi was someone Gimpel could go to when he needed help. The rabbi, considered the local fountain of wisdom, could be trusted for information and support. Even with the assistance provided by the rabbi, Gimpel could not pull free of his namesake. Gimpel refused to heed the advice of the rabbi even knowing the rabbi had never said an unkind word. When the rabbi told Gimpel to divorce his wife, Gimpel stayed with her despite all the shortcomings he had just described to the bishop (103). Any other citizen would have obeyed the rabbis word, but not Gimpel who lived his life in a fantasy world created by others minds.

A man who had designed his own life could not have fallen for the duplicity presented by his society. Through trickery and deceit the townspeople shaped Gimpel into a fool. A lack of fortitude and individual thought created a simpleton. His wife and the towns people took advantage of poor foolish Gimpel. While he might have gained wisdom towards the end of his life Gimpel lost the respect entitled to all human beings. Gimpel worked hard and acquired money and his own business but he could have gained more had he not chose to be the village jester.