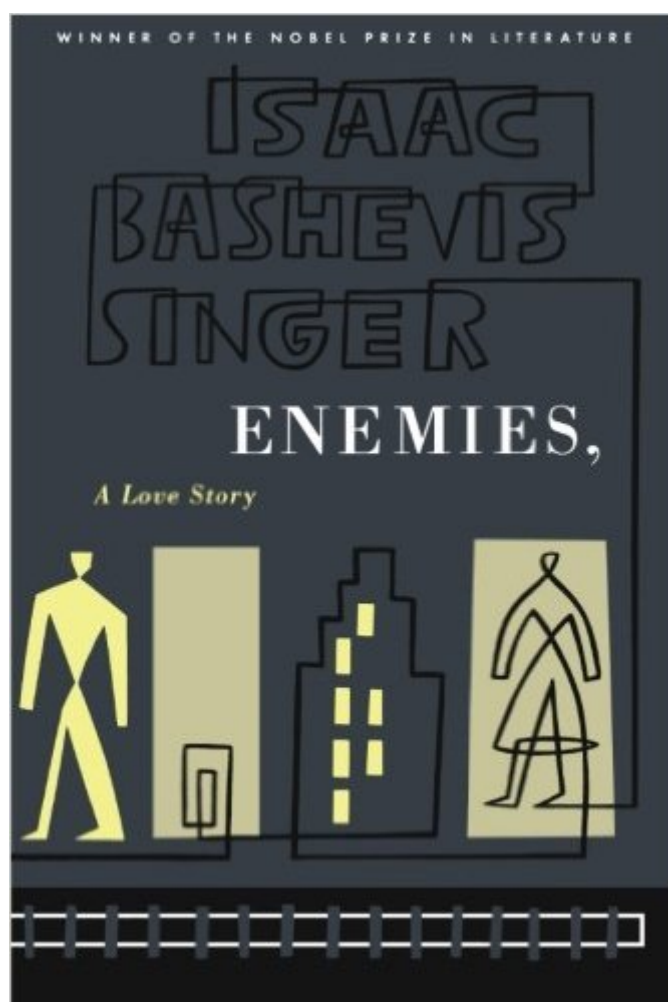


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Enemies, A Love Story



Synopsis

Almost before he knows it, Herman Broder, refugee and survivor of World War II, has three wives: Yadviga, the Polish peasant who hid him from the Nazis; Masha, his beautiful and neurotic true love; and Tamara, his first wife, miraculously returned from the dead. Astonished by each new complication, and yet resigned to a life of evasion, Herman navigates a crowded, Yiddish New York with a sense of perpetually impending doom.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Imagine being a Jew in Brooklyn, NY in 1949. Just about everyone you know has been through the Nazi camps. Just about everyone you know has lost husbands, wives, children, mothers, fathers, aunts, uncles, and sometimes all of the above. Just about everyone you know has survived years of awful, humiliating, degrading and terrifying experiences. How would you cope? How would you maintain your faith in God? How would you begin--not to mention maintain--a relationship based on love, one with hope for the future and the dream of children? This is the story of Herman Broder, a fortyish Polish expatriate. He was not a survivor of the camps. Instead, he escaped them by spending three years in a barn owned by the mother of his illiterate peasant servant, Yadviga, who hid and fed him. In helpless gratitude, and for no other reason, he married her after the war so that she could come to the U. S. Herman also has a mistress, Masha. Masha is married but is separated from her husband. Masha spent years in the camps. She is very beautiful. She smokes incessantly, speaks rapidly, is a bundle of nervous energy and she can't sleep. "If I do . . . then I'm back with

them immediately. They're dragging me, beating me, chasing me. They come running from all sides, like hounds after a hare." She lives in a cramped apartment with her mother whom she loves but whose strictly orthodox ways are a reminder to her every day of her wayward current life . . . and possibly also the life she led in the camps from which she escaped. Herman ekes out a living by ghost-writing for a showy rabbi, but tells Yadwiga that he sells books out of town so he can stay with Masha for days at a time.

Isaac Bashevis Singer was an idea novelist, in the way that Turgenev was. He fashioned his plots and characters around the questions he wanted to explore, and never let them get out of his control. But, like Turgenev, Singer was a great writer and never let his characters and plots become secondary. His writing is always entertaining as well as enlightening. *Enemies, A Love Story* is a case in point. Herman Broder is a Jewish man living in New York City in the late 1940's, having survived the Holocaust in Poland hiding from the Nazis. Now the war is over, but Herman is no more at liberty than he was then. Believing his first wife died in a concentration camp, Herman has married again; he also has a mistress; to both women he lies about his work, and to his boss he lies about his women. Then his first wife shows up alive, and now he has to lie to her too. Herman is always on the verge of running, he must relentlessly cover his tracks in case he has to escape again. This sounds like a comedy of errors, and Singer finds the humor in Herman's plight, but he never loses sight of the tragedy which produced Herman's obsession with escape. This is a man so damaged that he can't really live anymore, and that's the question Singer is exploring with *Enemies*: is it possible to be whole again after going through the Holocaust? And if not, is it possible to live with the pieces that are left? Consider Vladek Spiegelman in Art Spiegelman's *Maus*, also a Holocaust survivor who only made it through sheer luck and a relentless hoarding and parceling out of otherwise mundane and unimportant items; now, though he's wealthy and free to do as he pleases, he can't stop hoarding, just in case.

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