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Gimpel the Fool, by Isaac Bashevis Singer Isaac Bashevis Singer's first collection of stories, Gimpel the Fool, is a landmark work that has attracted international acclaim since it was first published in 1957. In Saul Bellow's masterly translation, the title story follows the exploits of Gimpel, an ingenuous baker who is universally deceived but who declines to retaliate against his tormentors. Gimpel and the protagonists of the other stories in this volume all inhabit the distinctive pre-World War II ghettos of Poland and, beyond that, the larger world created by Singer's unforgettable prose. Published by Macmillan. Warianty tego produktu Gimpel, El Tonto / Gimpel the Fool (Singer Isaac Bashevis) (Paperback) FSG Classics Author: Isaac Bashevis Singer; Translated by Saul Bellow; Introduction by Allegra Goodman Isaac Bashevis Singer's first collection of stories, Gimpel the Fool, is a landmark work that has attracted international acclaim since it was first published in 1957. In Saul Bellow's masterly translation, the title story follows the exploits of Gimpel, an ingenuous baker who is universally deceived but who declines to retaliate against his tormentors. Gimpel and the protagonists of the other stories in this volume all inhabit the distinctive pre-World War II ghettos of Poland and, beyond that, the larger world created by Singer's unforgettable prose. Imprint Publisher Farrar, Straus and Giroux "Extraordinarily beautiful... It's the integrity of the human imagination that Singer conveys so beautifully." —Alfred Kazin, *The New Leader* "Singer is a genius. He has total command of his imagined world." —Irving Howe, *The New Republic* "A peerless storyteller, Singer restores the sheer enchantment with story, with outcome, with what-happens-next that has been denied most readers since their adolescence." —David Boroff, *Saturday Review* Isaac Bashevis Singer's first collection of stories, "Gimpel the Fool," is a landmark work that has attracted international acclaim since it was first published in 1957. In Saul Bellow's masterly translation, the title story follows the exploits of Gimpel, an ingenuous baker who is universally deceived but who declines to retaliate against his tormentors. Gimpel and the protagonists of the other stories in this volume all inhabit the distinctive pre-World War II ghettos of Poland and, beyond that, the larger world created by Singer's unforgettable prose." Widely regarded as Isaac Bashevis Singer's masterpiece as well as one of his most frequently anthologized stories, the Yiddish version of "Gimpel the Fool" appeared in the *Jewish Daily Forward* (1953) before SAUL BELLOW translated it into English for publication in the *Partisan Review* (1957). Although set in Singer's native Poland, "Gimpel the Fool" continues to enjoy international success because of Reb Gimpel, its universally sympathetic character. Readers have not only seen Gimpel as the cuckolded husband whose wife makes him into a fool but also as an innocent and childlike naïf whose quest for truth makes him into an Everyman; a little man, or a schlemiel; a scapegoat, a shaman, a trickster, and the archetypal figure of "the wandering Jew" (Siegel 170). The devout Gimpel questions and confronts his faith in God and finds that, in the long run, it sustains him. The story opens as Gimpel, the first-person narrator, explains that ever since childhood he has been the butt of the town jokes, when he was called "imbecile, donkey, flax-head, dope, glump, ninny, and fool. The last name stuck" (26). The town of Frampol looks to Reb Gimpel for entertainment, telling him outrageous lies and playing humiliating tricks on him. Stung too often, he at one point resolves to believe nothing that the townspeople tell him, but that technique serves only to confuse him. When Gimpel seeks advice from the rabbi, the one sane voice in his life, the rabbi responds, "Better to be a fool all your days than for one hour to be evil. You are not a fool. They are the fools" (27). Gimpel continues to be fooled until he actually marries Elke, the pregnant town prostitute: "I realized I was going to be rooked," he tells us, but "what did I stand to lose?" (28). Isaac Bashevis Singer/Chuck Fishman He stands to lose a great deal, of course, as he loves not wisely but too well: Despite Elke's giving him "bloody wounds," he "adored her every word" (30). When her baby is born, the townsfolk make fun of Gimpel, but he loves the child "madly, and he loved me too" (29). Gimpel loves children and animals— and Elke— with little or no reservation. He is the town baker, and his association with bread, the source of human sustenance, aligns him with life, spirituality, and optimism; even when he discovers a man in bed with his wife, his anger is short-lived ("You can't live without errors" [31]), and he withdraws his request for a divorce. In denial of his wife's infidelity—even after discovering his apprentice in her bed—he lives equably with her for 20 years. In the critic and scholar Alfred Kazin's words, even after learning of Elke's adultery, he "ignores his own dignity for the sake of others" (61). It is only with her deathbed confession that he is not the father of any of their children that Gimpel succumbs to the Evil Spirit, who urges him to take revenge on the entire town that has conspired against him. Persuaded that there is no God and no afterlife, he agrees to contaminate all his bread with buckets of urine so that the townsfolk of Frampol will eat "filth" (34). Just in time, Elke appears to him in a dream: "You fool! Because I was false is everything false too? . . . I'm paying for it all, Gimpel. They spare you nothing here" (34). Realizing the irretrievable act he nearly committed, the baker believes that God is helping him, and he buries the ruined bread in the frozen earth. When people ask where he is going, he replies, "Into the world." Gimpel wanders for the rest of his life, exchanging stories and concluding that truth is as strange as, if not stranger than, fiction: "I understood that there were really no lies. Whatever doesn't really happen is dreamed at night. It happens to one if it doesn't happen to another, tomorrow if not today, or a century hence if not next year" (35). And so he becomes a storyteller, still longing for the time he can rejoin Elke and living with the belief that "the world is entirely an imaginary world, but it is only once removed from the true world" (35). Indeed, at the end he becomes a prophet, a visionary, "a shaman of sorts, someone who mediates between worlds" (Drunker 35). Living to a ripe white-haired old age, Gimpel has gained infinite wisdom and has eluded evil with his belief in goodness still intact. BIBLIOGRAPHY Allentuck, Marcia, ed. *The Achievement of Isaac Bashevis Singer*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1969. Buber, Martin. "The Master of Prayer." In *The Tales of Rabbi Nachman*, retold by Martin Buber. New York: Horizon Press, 1956. Clasby, Nancy Tenfolde. "Gimpel's Wisdom: I. B. Singer's Vision of the 'True World.'" *Studies in American Jewish Literature* 15 (1996): 90-98. 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