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**The Association of Jewish Libraries Announces  
the 2021 Winners of the Jewish Fiction Award**

Max Gross is the winner of the Association of Jewish Libraries (AJL) Jewish Fiction Award for his novel *The Lost Shtetl*, published by HarperVia, an imprint of HarperCollins Publishers. The award includes a \$1,000 cash prize and support to attend the 57th Annual Conference of the Association of Jewish Libraries, June 27–July 1, 2021. Two honor books were also recognized: *To Be a Man: Stories* by Nicole Krauss, published by Harper, an imprint of HarperCollins Publishers, and *Apeirogon: A Novel* by Colum McCann, published by Penguin Random House. The Committee reviewed over 70 works of fiction originally written in English with significant Jewish thematic content published in the United States in 2020. Thanks to all those who submitted entries for consideration. The wide array of books published in 2020 is a testament to the vibrant state of contemporary Jewish fiction.

In many ways Kreskol, the nominal *Lost Shtetl*, is a typical 19th century Polish village. It has the expected mix of competing synagogues and schools; happy and miserable families; and comfortable and poor inhabitants. What is surprising about Kreskol is that in Brigadoon style, it survived deep in the forests with no connection to the outside world. Set during the end of the 20th century, *Lost Shtetl* tells the story of a town neglected by time, unaware of the Holocaust or the creation of the state of Israel. When the Polish government “finds” Kreskol, there is massive culture shock on both sides. The Jewish villagers must decide how much to embrace the modern world and the Polish government has to decide how much they want to invest in this small contentious village. “An impressive debut novel, *The Lost Shtetl* is a thoroughly enjoyable story, with lots of humor, but also incredibly sophisticated, clever, poignant and thought provoking,” noted Laura Schutzman, Chair of the Award Committee.

The ten stories in *To Be a Man* by Nicole Krauss deal with the struggle to understand what it is to be a man and what it is to be a woman, and all of the tensions in the relationships between parents and children, lovers and friends, husbands and wives. All contemporary, they span the globe from Switzerland, Japan, and New York City to Tel Aviv, Los Angeles, and South America. “Each is impactful and memorable with fully developed characters, often wrestling with their Jewish identity, who stay with you long after the reading experience is over,” commented Rachel Kamin, member of the Award Committee.

*Apeirogon*, in telling the story of two fathers, an Israeli and a Palestinian united in grief after losing their daughters to the conflict, weaves together fiction and nonfiction, crossing centuries and continents, to create a multifaceted and multilayered exploration of history, art, politics, love,

loss, hope, and the power of storytelling. An apeirogon is a shape with an infinitely countable number of sides; *Apeirogon*, the novel, “evokes a mosaic with an infinitely countable number of pieces that have been assembled into a beautifully written, emotionally charged, and exceedingly relevant work of fiction,” remarked Paula Breger, member of the Award Committee. The intricacies and conflicting themes of *Aperigon* are sure to elicit much debate and discussion.

The AJL Jewish Fiction Award Committee members are Paula Breger, Beth Dwoskin, Rachel Kamin, Laura Schutzman, and Sheryl Stahl.

The Association of Jewish Libraries gratefully acknowledges the generous support of Dan Wyman Books for underwriting the Award. Submissions for the 2022 AJL Fiction Award (titles published in 2021) are now being accepted. For more information, please visit [www.jewishlibraries.org](http://www.jewishlibraries.org).

The Association of Jewish Libraries is an all-volunteer professional organization that promotes Jewish literacy through enhancement of libraries and library resources and through leadership for the profession and practitioners of Judaica librarianship. The Association fosters access to information, learning, teaching and research relating to Jews, Judaism, the Jewish experience and Israel.

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