

Fresh Lit: Recent and Forthcoming Adult Jewish Fiction

A Presentation by the AJL Jewish Fiction Award Committee

Tuesday, June 30, 2:00pm EDT

Rosalind Reisner, 2020 Chair; Laura Schutzman, 2021 Chair; Rachel Kamin, Merrily Hart, Sheryl Stahl

****Titles highlighted in the presentation**

2020 AJL JEWISH FICTION AWARD WINNER

*****On Division* by Goldie Goldbloom (Farrar Straus & Giroux, 2019)**

A Chasidic grandmother in Brooklyn with a surprise pregnancy finds her life upended as she copes with new emotions in this insightful, heartfelt tale. Read-Alikes: *Disobedience* by Naomi Alderman; *The Immortalists* by Chloe Benjamin; *Hush* by Eishes Chayil; *I Am Forbidden* by Anouk Markovits; *An Unorthodox Match* by Naomi Ragen

2020 AJL JEWISH FICTION AWARD HONOR BOOK

*****The Flight Portfolio* by Julie Orringer (Knopf/Doubleday, 2019)**

Based on the life of Varian Fry, who rescued famous artists and philosophers from Nazism, Orringer tells a story of dangerous escapes and volatile personalities. (Fry was the first non-Jew to be honored at Yad Vashem.) Read-Alikes: *Stolen Beauty* by Laurie Lico Albanese; *The Bridal Chair* by Gloria Goldreich; *The Nightingale* by Kristin Hannah; *A Quiet American: The Secret War of Varian Fry* by Andy Marino; *Warlight* by Michael Ondaatje; *Lisette's List* by Susan Vreeland

NEW BOOKS BY FAVORITES AUTHORS

*****An Unorthodox Match* by Naomi Ragen (Macmillan/St. Martin's, 2019)**

Talmud scholar and widower Yakov needs help caring for his young children while Leah, a convert to Orthodox Judaism, struggles to feel anchored in the community. With her usual insight, Ragen examines the mores of the community that keep them apart. Readalikes: *The Ladies' Auxiliary* by Tova Mirvis; *The Romance Reader* by Pearl Abraham; *The Convert* by Stefan Hertmans.

*****The World That We Knew* by Alice Hoffman (Simon & Schuster, 2019)**

A female golem helps a young women in the French Resistance in this Holocaust story with a dose of magical realism. For fans of Hoffman's novels, this is a keeper. Read-Alikes: *All the Light We*

Cannot See by Anthony Doerr; *The Sisters of the Winter Wood* by Rena Rossner; *Anna and the Swallow Man* by Gavriel Savit; *The Golem and the Jinni* by Helene Wecker; *The Book of Splendor* by Frances Sherwood.

*****Big Summer* by Jennifer Weiner (Atria Books, 2020)**

When a friend she has not spoken to in six years asks her to be her maid of honor, Daphne Berg, a plus-size Instagram influencer, confronts the dynamics of friendship and forgiveness during the increasingly disastrous wedding on Cape Cod. Read-Alikes: *Followers* by Megan Angelo; *Summer of '69* by Elin Hilderbrand; *If You Don't Have Anything Nice to Say* by Leila Sales; *We are Gathered* by Jamie Weisman.

*****Mrs. Everything* by Jennifer Weiner (Atria, 2019)**

Two sisters struggle to find their places, be true to themselves, and adapt to rapid changes over the course of their lives, from 1950s Detroit to the present, against the background of the Vietnam War, Woodstock, and the women's movement. Read-Alikes: *The Immortalists* by Chloe Benjamin; *Lucky Us* by Amy Bloom; *Nirvana Is Here* by Aaron Hamburger; *Three Daughters* by Letty Cottin Pogrebin

CONTEMPORARY FICTION: NOVELS

*****Fleishman is in Trouble* by Taffy Brodesser-Akner (Random House 2019)**

Toby Fleishman thought he knew what to expect when he and his wife separated: joint custody of the kids, some residual bitterness, occasional tension in their co-parenting. He could not have predicted that one day, in the middle of his summer of sexual emancipation, Rachel would just drop off the kids and not return. Read-Alikes: *The Middlesteins* by Jamie Attenberg; *Where'd You Go, Bernadette* by Maria Semple; *Lake Success* by Gary Shteyngart; *This Is Where I Leave You* and *One Last Thing Before I Go* by Jonathan Tropper

*****Apeirogon* by Colum McCann (Random House, 2020)**

Apeirogon (a geometric shape with an infinite number of sides) takes its inspiration from the real-life friendship between a Palestinian, Bassam Aramin, and an Israeli, Rami Elhanan. The men are brought together through grief: Rami's 13-year-old daughter was killed by a Palestinian suicide bomber and Bassam's 10-year-old daughter was killed by a bullet fired by an IDF soldier. Told through 1,001 chapters (some as short as 1 word or 1 sentence) that includes fiction and non-fiction narratives. (Optioned by Steven Spielberg). Readalikes: *Sadness is a White Bird* by Moriel Rothman-Zecher; *To the End of the Land* by David Grossman.

***The Hotel Neversink* by Adam O'Fallon Price (Tin House Books, 2019)**

A generational saga that chronicles the legacy of the Sikorskys across four generations as they grapple with the aftermath of a dark secret along with the declining grandeur of the family's Catskill hotel, once the star of the Borscht Belt circuit.

***The Imperfects* by Amy Meyerson (Park Row Books, 2020)**

A family saga about siblings, family secrets and the unraveling of the real historical mystery of the Florentine diamond, a Habsburg treasure. After Helen Auerbach's sudden death, her children argue over the diamond and search to uncover their matriarch's past, her narrow escape from the Holocaust and her connection to the diamond.

***The Kosher Delhi* by Ivan Wainwright (Red Door, 2020)**

Vik, a 20-year-old boy of Jewish/Indian heritage meets Yvonne, a Scottish activist and hedonist who strives for social justice. Set in the early 1990s, the story follows Vik and Yvonne from Leeds to London to New York as their relationship becomes strained by the bigotry and homophobia they encounter. Is Vik going to stand up for his beliefs?

***Anna's Dance: A Balkan Odyssey* by Michele Levy (Black Rose Writing, 2020)**

In 1968 twenty-three-year-old Anna Rossi, who questions everything about her life, from her mostly Jewish heritage to her fear of intimacy, goes off to Europe for a summer with a childhood friend. When her friend abandons her in Italy, Anna makes the rash decision to travel on with strangers. Her journey takes a perilous turn, leading her into conflict in Eastern Europe and the heart of the Balkans.

***The Rabbi Finds Her Way: a Pearl Ross-Levy Novel* by Robert Schoen and Catherine diCuir (Stone Bridge Press, 2019)**

Pearl Ross is excited to get her first full time rabbinic job in her hometown of Oakland, California. She is quickly drawn into congregational life: tutoring precocious bat mitzvah students, counseling a congregant who feels guilt at inadvertently causing his father's death, visiting a Jewish prisoner, and still managing to fall in love and marry the man of her dreams. The first novel in a projected series.

CONTEMPORARY FICTION: SHORT STORIES

*****Adults and Other Children* by Miriam Cohen (Ig Publishing, 2020)**

Sometimes shocking and distasteful, occasionally insightful, the author's linked stories focus on the development of four different girls as they become women.

*****Maggie Brown and Others* by Peter Orner (Little, Brown, 2019)**

The author's characters come to life at critical moments that will stay with you long after you close the covers of the book. His Jewish individuals inhabit Chicago, Ann Arbor, Fall River, San Francisco.

**** *Beloved Comrades: A Novel in Stories* by Yermiyahu Ahron Taub (Anaphora Literary Press, 2020)**

Linked stories reveal the lives of three generations throughout the life and death of a small American Orthodox synagogue, investigating faith, tradition, family, sexuality, love and friendship.

***You Are Not What We Expected* by Sidura Ludwig (Anansi, 2020)**

This collection of linked stories is a portrait of a Jewish community, the secular and religious families who inhabit it, and the tensions that exist there.

***Fly Already* by Etgar Keret (Penguin Publishing, 2019) Translation**

The literary critic Clive James called Israeli author Etgar Keret "one of the most important writers alive." Winner of the 2019 Sapir Prize, Israel's most prestigious literary award, *Fly Already* is a collection of subversive, hilarious, and heart-breaking short stories.

HISTORICAL FICTION: SPLIT SCREEN

*****The Book of V.* by Anna Solomon (Henry Holt, May, 2020)**

Solomon re-writes the story of Esther and Vashti from three interwoven perspectives and time periods. Esther and Vashti make common cause against male domination; a 1970s political wife makes a fateful decision to disobey her husband; and in contemporary Brooklyn a second wife copes with her conflicting ambitions and desires. A brainy and highly discussable book. Readalikes: *The Dovekeepers* by Alice Hoffman; *In the Image* by Dara Horn

*****The Book of Lost Names* by Kristin Harmel (Gallery Books, 2020)**

Eva, a young woman with a talent for forgery helps hundreds of Jewish children flee the Nazis. In modern-day Florida, Eva sees a picture of a book that brings back memories from that time and the true names of the children who were saved. Readalikes: *Sarah's Key* by Tatiana de Rosnay; *The Lost Girls of Paris* by Pam Jenoff; *Where To Find Me* by Alba Arikha

***The Song of the Jade Lily* by Kirsty Manning (Wm. Morrow, 2019)**

In 1939 Shanghai two young girls, Jewish refugee Romy and the beautiful Chinese Li become friends in the deepening shadows of World War II. In 2016, Alexandra, visiting her grandparents in Australia, learns fragments of the secrets of Romy's life and travels to Shanghai to learn more.

***In Another Time* by Jillian Cantor (HarperCollins, 2019)**

A sweeping historical novel that spans Germany, England, and the U.S. and follows a young couple torn apart by circumstance leading up to World War II, and the family secret that may prove to be the means of survival. Set in two time periods: 1931 Germany and 1946 Berlin.

***The Disharmony of Silence* by Linda Rosen (Black Rose Writing, 2020)**

In 1915, Rebecca Roth cuts off all ties with her friends the Pearls; even marriage between their children doesn't bring peace to the families. In 2010, descendant Carolyn Lee, cleaning up after her mother's death, finds an unusual brooch that matches one in a painting. The family secrets she unravels bring up the old emotions for all concerned.

HISTORICAL FICTION--HOLOCAUST AND POST WWII

*****Exile Music* by Jennifer Steil (Viking, May, 2020)**

An idyllic life in 1930s pre-war Vienna is interrupted by the Anschluss. Orly Zingel and her family frantically try to obtain visas while her brother joins the Resistance in France. They are resettled in La Paz, Bolivia, where Orly tries to find a way forward in a strange culture. Readalikes: *When I Lived in Modern Times* by Linda Grant; *Lost in Translation: A Life in a New Language* by Eva Hoffman; *Where To Find Me* by Alba Arikha.

*****Hannah's War* by Jan Eliasberg (Little, Brown, 2020)**

In the Los Alamos laboratories, the brilliant Dr. Hannah Weiss, a refugee from Nazi Germany, is working with Robert Oppenheimer on the Manhattan Project. Major Jack Delany, charged with finding a spy in the laboratories, focuses on Hannah. Readalikes: *Los Alamos* by Joseph Kanon; *The Alice Network* by Kate Quinn.

***The Yellow Bird Sings* by Jennifer Rosner (Flatiron, 2020)**

In Poland, as World War II rages, Roza hides with her young daughter Shira, a musical prodigy, whose slightest sound may cost them their lives. To keep Shira still, Roza tells her stories about the yellow bird until reality forces her to make choices for survival.

***Annelies* by David Gillham (Penguin Random House/Viking Press, 2019)**

Gillham imagines that Anne Frank survived the war and returned to her father's new house and new wife in Amsterdam. Anne struggles to come to terms with freedom, a stepmother she dislikes, and survivor's guilt.

***The Wartime Sisters* by Lynda Cohen Loigman (St. Martin's, 2019)**

Two Jewish sisters in Boston during World War II make very different life choices as they navigate their fraught but loving relationship. Read-Alikes: *The Lost Family* by Jenna Blum; *The Button Man* by Andrew Gross; *Lilac Girls* by Martha Hall Kelly; *As Close to Us as Breathing* by Elizabeth Poliner

***Wunderland* by Jennifer Cody Epstein (Crown, 2019)**

In New York, in 1989, Ava receives a packet containing the ashes and letters of her deceased mother. So begins her exploration into her mother's past in Germany, the betrayals and struggles during World War II that Ava never knew.

***Cesare: A Novel of War-torn Berlin* by Jerome Charyn (Bellevue Literary Press, 2020)**

In Nazi Germany, half-Jewish orphan Erik Holderman grows up to become an enforcer for German military intelligence. Kirkus called it "an edgy, hallucinatory full-throttle fable" that combines real and fictional characters in a setting reminiscent of *Cabaret*.

***The Light After the War* by Anita Abriel (Atria, 2020)**

Inspired by the true story of two Jewish friends who survived the Holocaust, this sweeping novel of love and friendship spans World War II from Budapest to Austria and postwar years from Naples to Caracas.

***Last Impressions* by Joseph Kertes (Penguin Canada, 2020)**

His father's health is failing and Ben is desperate to understand the long-buried secrets of his past. The compelling story, with interesting, well-developed characters, weaves in and out of contemporary Toronto and Hungary during and after World War II. For readers who enjoyed *Memento Park* by Mark Sarvas, last year's AJL Fiction Award winner.

***The Collaborator* by Diane Armstrong (HQ Fiction, 2020)**

Based on a true story and set in Budapest during World War II, this is the story of three women linked by a secret that threatens to destroy their lives. A mystery filled with heroism, vengeance, passion, and betrayal.

***Daughter of the Reich* by Louise Fein (HarperCollins, 2020)**

As the dutiful daughter of a high-ranking Nazi officer, Hetty Heinrich is keen to play her part in the glorious new Reich. But she never imagines that all she believes and knows about her world will come into stark conflict when she encounters Walter, a Jewish friend from the past, who stirs up dangerous feelings. Confused and conflicted, Hetty doesn't know whom she can trust and where she can turn to, especially when she discovers that someone has been watching her.

HISTORICAL FICTION

*****Florence Adler Swims Forever* by Rachel Beanland (Simon & Schuster, 2020)**

Over the course of the summer of 1934, beginning with a shocking tragedy, three generations of the Adler family grapple with heartbreak, romance, and the weight of family secrets. Set in Atlantic City. Readalikes: *As Close to Us as Breathing* by Elizabeth Poliner; *Wartime Sisters* by Lynda Cohen Loigman; *The Boston Girl* by Anita Diamant.

*****The Third Daughter* by Talia Carner (HarperCollins/William Morrow, 2019)**

Although it begins like a tale from Sholom Aleichem, the novel soon transforms into the grim story of how 14-year old Batya was kidnapped from Russia and sold into sexual slavery in Buenos Aires. Based on the true story of how a Jewish group called the Zvi Migdal orchestrated the slave trade of over 140,000 (mostly Jewish) women and girls between the 1870s and the 1930s. Read-Alikes: *The Singing Fire* by Lilian Nattel; *After Anatevka* by Alexandra Silber; *The Little Bride* by Anna Solomon;; *Bodies and Souls: The Tragic Plight of Three Jewish Women Forced into Prostitution in the Americas* by Isabel Vincent

*****A Bend in the Stars* by Rachel Barenbaum (2019)**

An unusual novel that combines science and romance just before the onset of World War I in Russia. A brilliant young woman doctor and her brother race against Einstein to solve one of the universe's great mysteries. Read-Alikes: *Gateway to the Moon* by Mary Morri;; *The Invisible Bridge* by Julie Orringer; *House of Gold* by Natasha Solomons

***Beyond the Ghetto Gates* by Michelle Cameron (She Writes, 2020)**

Against the backdrop of Napoleon's eighteenth-century invasion of Italy, Cameron weaves a tale of a young Jewish woman torn between her filial duty and her passion for a young Catholic soldier in a town torn by nationalism, religion, and bigotry.

***The Nesting Dolls* by Alina Adams (HarperCollins, 2020)**

A story that spans nearly a century, from 1930s Siberia to contemporary Brighton Beach, centering on three generations of women in one Russian family, each striving to break free of fate and history, each yearning for love and personal fulfillment, and how the consequences of their choices ripple through time. Readalikes: *House of Gold* by Natasha Solomons; *Leah's Journey* by Gloria Goldreich

***Mountains of Full Moons* by Irene Kessler (She Writes, 2020)**

Thirteen-year-old Elisha lives in a village near Shechem in Canaan in ancient Israel. She wants to be like other girls but is unmarried, speaks to an angel, and composes and sings her own songs, much to the dismay of her parents. When she tells the village women to stand up for themselves, she is banished by the men.

***The Last Bathing Beauty* by Amy Susan Nathan (Amazon, 2020)**

In 1951, Betty Stern, a former beauty queen faces the secrets of her past, for herself and for the sake of her family's future in a novel about fate, choices, and second chances. Read-Alikes: *The Inn at Lake Devine* by Elinor Lipman; *As Close to Us As Breathing* by Elizabeth Poliner; *The Hotel Neversink* by Adam O'Fallon Price; *The Magnificent Esme Wells* by Adrienne Sharp

***Farewell, Mama Odessa* by Emil Draitser (Northwestern Univ. Press, 2020)**

An autobiographical novel whose intertwined stories follow a variety of people: dissidents, victims of ethnic discrimination and black marketeers among them, as they bid farewell to their beloved hometown of Odessa, Ukraine and make their way to the West. At the book's center is Boris, a young writer thwarted by state censorship and anti-Semitism.

GENRE FICTION

***The Order* by Daniel Silva (HarperCollins, 7/2020) THRILLER**

Another swiftly-paced thriller starring Gabriel Allon who is called to the Vatican after the dying Pope Paul VII leaves a message for him about a conspiracy within a shadowy Catholic society.

***The Adventure of the Peculiar Protocols: Adapted from the Journals of John H. Watson, M.D.* by Nicholas Meyer (St. Martin's, 2019) MYSTERY**

Narrated by Dr. Watson in 1905, he and Sherlock Holmes try to figure out who created *The Protocols of the Learned Elders of Zion*, why they were created, and if Theodor Herzl was assassinated.

***The History of Soul 2065* by Barbara Krasnoff (Mythic Delirium Press, 2019) FANTASY**

Just before World War I, two young Jewish girls--one from Russia, the other from Germany--meet in a magical forest glade. They are immediately drawn to each other and swear an oath to meet again. Though war and an ocean will separate the two for the rest of their lives, the promise they made to each other continues through the intertwined lives of their descendants.

***Revenge of the Elders of Zion* by Dan Sofer (Dan Sofer, 2020) COMEDY/THRILLER**

When David Zelig is cheated out of his family's business by an anti-Semitic executive, he comes up with a scheme. He and his friends will form the Elders of Zion based on the fake group to combat anti-Semitism. It goes smoothly for about ten minutes until they inadvertently get caught up with a Muslim terrorist group. But things don't really spiral out of control until the Knights Templar, the CIA, and the FBI come into the picture; not to mention Faberge eggs, Jesus's foreskin, and true love.

COMING SOON...

***The Paris Children: A Novel of World War II* by Gloria Goldreich (Sourcebooks, 9/2020)**

Madeleine Levy, granddaughter of Alfred Dreyfus takes on the task of saving orphaned children as World War II comes to Paris. With her Resistance boyfriend Claude, they fight to save as many as they can.

***To Be a Man: Short Stories* by Nicole Krauss (HarperCollins, 11/2020)**

Krauss plumbs the depths of what it is to be a man and what it is to be a woman in our time. The stories move across the globe from Switzerland, Japan, and New York City to Tel Aviv, Los Angeles, and South America,

***The Orchard* by David Hopen (Simon & Schuster, 11/2020)**

Raised in ultra-Orthodox Brooklyn, Ari Eden experiences culture shock when his family moves to bright, jangly Miami and he's sent to an upscale Jewish academy loaded with rich, sybaritic kids. Classy Noah befriends him, but their entire in-crowd soon starts pushing all sorts of boundaries. (50,000 first copy printing)

***Eli's Promise* by Ronald Balson (St. Martin's, 9/2020)**

A "fixer" in a Polish town during World War II, his betrayal of a Jewish family, and a search for justice 25 years later.

***The Lost Shtetl* by Martin Gross (HarperVia 10/2020)**

For decades, the tiny Jewish shtetl of Kreskol existed in happy isolation, virtually untouched and unchanged. Spared by the Holocaust and the Cold War, its residents enjoyed remarkable peace. Kreskol missed out on cars, electricity, the internet, and indoor plumbing. But when a marriage dispute spins out of control, the whole town comes crashing into the twenty-first century.

***This Magnificent Dappled Sea* by David Biro (Lake Union, 10/2020)**

In a Northern Italian village, nine-year-old Luca Taviano is diagnosed with leukemia. His only hope for survival is a bone marrow transplant. A match turns up with Joseph Neiman, a rabbi in Brooklyn, New York, who is suffering from a crisis of faith. As Luca's young nurse, Nina Vocelli, risks her career and races against time to help save the boy, she uncovers terrible secrets from World War II that reveal how a Catholic child could have Jewish genes.

***The Lines Between Us* by Rebecca D'Harlingue (SheWrites, 9/2020)**

In 1992 Missouri, Rachel finds a packet of letters that sheds light on her ancestors' lives in 1661 Madrid. The letters tell the story of Ana and Juliana. Rachel seeks to understand her connection to the writings—hoping that in finding those answers, she will somehow heal the wounds caused by her mother's lifelong reticence.

STAYING ON TOP OF NEW JEWISH FICTION

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