Footprints: Jewish Books Through Time and Place

Michelle Margolis Chesner, Librarian for Jewish Studies, Columbia University; co-director for Footprints: Jewish Books Through Time and Place; Vice-President/President Elect, Association of Jewish Libraries

Mike Segal, a Jew living in Kleve, was understandably excited when he picked up his copy of Isaac Alfasi’s halakhic opus, printed in Krakow in 1597, and wrote this inscription. He wasn’t half as excited, though, as the librarian who picked it up nearly 250 years later! Historical tidbits such as these are scattered throughout libraries, some with more details, some with less. A book printed in what is known as the “hand-press period,” from the onset of movable type in the West through 1800, can include inscriptions, censors’ marks, bookplates, or other clues to the history of a book’s movement throughout the centuries. In the moment, it’s interesting, perhaps worth a tweet or a blog post — or even a quick email to a researcher working on the subject of an autograph — but then the book is reshelved, often with the contents unnoted elsewhere. Footprints: Jewish Books Through Time and Place is a digital project with the goal of aggregating this information as data, pulling it all together in order to allow scholars to trace the movements of copies of Jewish books around the globe. With the use of Footprints, we can reconstruct and analyze scattered libraries, examine the impact of censors on a community’s books, explore ownership of Jewish books by women, non-Jews and others not typically included in the study of the Jewish book, achieve new understandings of the role of booksellers and private collectors and add dozens of untold stories to the larger narrative arc of Jewish history.

Key to this project is collaboration. Footprints is co-directed by four individuals, each at a different institution: two historians, a Talmudist, and a librarian (sounds like the beginning of a joke!). Adam Shear (University of Pittsburgh), Joshua Teplitsky (Stony Brook University), Marjorie Lehman (Jewish Theological Seminary), and Michelle Margolis Chesner (Columbia University) have been working on the project since 2014, and have collected nearly 20,000 records relating to the movement of the Jewish book.

In turn, the co-directors collaborate with Columbia’s Center for Teaching and Learning for technical development, and...
AJL-Canada has metamorphosed into AJL-Canada! The AJL-Canada chapter promotes Canadian-Jewish literature, history, and scholarship, and provides a community for peer support and professional development.

Our executive members, led by chapter president Anna Skorupsky, have reached out to potential (and returning) members who teach and work in various settings from sea to sea: Jewish day schools, Holocaust libraries, community centres, synagogues, academic and public libraries. We also have a few authors who are members. We all share a passion for Jewish books and learning.

AJL-Canada will be presenting a virtual panel discussion in collaboration with AJL National: “Combating Antisemitism through Children’s Literature” on Monday, October 4, 2021, 12:30 p.m. EDT. This topic is a difficult one but essential for librarians, teachers, and readers to understand. Our panelists will approach the topic from the point of view of a researcher, an author, and an educator. Zoom links will be made available through Hasafran.

We invite you to join us! Data can be inputted manually, item by item, or as a batch upload via CSV (MARC fields conveniently map to many of our metadata fields. For more information or questions, please be in touch: footprints@columbia.edu

Our members include a number of wonderful authors! Here is the list of their 2021 publications (alphabetically, by author).

Anne Dublin, Jacob and the Mandolin Adventure (Second Story Press)
Kathy Kacer, Under the Iron Bridge (Second Story Press)
Joanne Levy, Sorry for Your Loss (Orca Books)
Ira Robinson, A Kabbalist in Montreal: The Life and Times of Rabbi Yudel Rosenberg (Touro University Press)

Finally, congratulations to Professor Ira Robinson on his retirement after forty-two distinguished years of teaching Jewish studies in the Department of Religions and Cultures, Concordia University, Montreal. He is past president of the Canadian Society for Jewish Studies, the Association for Canadian Jewish Studies, and the Jewish Public Library of Montreal. He is the 2013 winner of the Louis Rosenberg Canadian Jewish Studies Distinguished Service Award of the Association for Canadian Jewish Studies.

Stay tuned for more exciting news about the revitalized AJL-Canada chapter!
Seven Questions with... Award-Winning Fiction Writer Hilma Wolitzer

News and Reviews editor-in-chief Sally Stieglitz recently interviewed author Hilma Wolitzer, whose latest book, Today a Woman Went Mad in the Supermarket (Bloomsbury, August 2021), is already receiving substantial praise from peers (Elizabeth Strout, Lauren Groff, Tayari Jones, to name a few) and in reviews (NPR, The New York Times, Publishers Weekly, Booklist, TIME).

Wolitzer is the recipient of Guggenheim and National Endowment for the Arts fellowships, an American Academy of Arts and Letters Award in Literature, and a Barnes & Noble Writers for Writers Award. She has taught at The Iowa Writers’ Workshop, New York University, Columbia University, and The Bread Loaf Writers’ Conference. Wolitzer’s first published work, at 9, was a poem about winter in the Junior Inspector’s Club Journal, sponsored by the New York City Department of Sanitation. Her first published story appeared when she was thirty-six, which at that time was noted as a late-blooming achievement. Wolitzer, currently aged ninety-one, is still active and accomplished and still blooming.

AJL: Hilma, we have heard that you were named after a character in a book—please tell us a bit more about that—and did that set you on a literary path or speak to the home environment as a nurturing place for bookish pursuits?

HW: That rumor is true! My mother’s “cultured” cousin Lenore was reading a novel called The Octopus by Frank Norris when I was born, with a character named Hilma Tree, a voluptuous “dairy girl.” For some reason Lenore recommended that first name to my mother. Every time I saw that cousin, she asked if I hated her, and I always said yes. I don’t think it set me on a literary path.

AJL: Can you share your experiences with going to the public library as you were growing up? Any particular childhood books you recall being influential on your life or your writing?

HW: As for my childhood home, there weren’t too many books beside a home medical adviser and an ancient set of encyclopedias, but there was a wonderful tradition of storytelling. I remember lying under the kitchen table, listening to the grownups talking about their lives—reminiscing, laughing. That was the beginning.

AJL: Were there any favorite librarians or teachers while you were growing up that were influential on you as a reader or a writer?

HW: My parents took me to the public library as soon as I could read, and it became one of my favorite places—sacred, really, with all those gorgeous books and that reverent silence. In the fourth grade, my teacher, Mrs. Fredericks, told my mother that I “showed great promise.” Teachers were esteemed in our household, so when I began to write poems, my parents treated them with respect. Many years later, Mrs. Fredericks showed up at a reading I gave at a library in New Jersey. I thanked her for that early encouragement, for telling my mother that I showed great promise. She laughed and said, “Oh, honey, I told that to all the parents.”

AJL: You come from a first generation Jewish family and community and grew up during the 40s and 50s. To what extent were the arts encouraged (or discouraged) in that world? Did you see writing as a viable career or pursuit? Was this influenced more by being Jewish or by being a woman in those decades?

HW: Although my (awful) precocious poems were praised, I don’t think anyone (including me) thought I’d have a career as a writer. In those days, women were expected to grow up to be housewives and support their husbands’ careers, so I did that first. But those stories I overheard as a child—punctuated by melodic and mysterious Yiddish words, and filled with what I now consider the dark/light philosophy of Jewish life—deeply affected me and surely informed my writing.

AJL: As Jewish librarians, we take note of Jewish representation in literature. Do you write your characters as Jewish (as coming from a place of “write what you know”) and if so, how did you communicate that to your readers, if at all?

HW: I consider several of my main characters Jewish—especially in their humor and their compassion—even if they’re not directly defined as such. One protagonist, who appears in several stories, recalls listening to the grownups speaking in “code words in Yiddish and pig Latin.”

AJL: What role do libraries play, if any, in your work—do you ever need to do research or just find a quiet place to focus on writing?

HW: Before the onset of Covid-19, I was a frequent library patron. I belong to the New York Public Library and to a private one, where members can sit in sagging armchairs, surrounded by literary journals, and just read or daydream—the perfect environment for a writer. Now I download books on my iPad from Libby and SimplyE. What a blessing!

AJL: Your two daughters, Nancy Wolitzer and Meg Wolitzer, are in the arts as well—Nancy is a visual artist and Meg is an acclaimed novelist. What is it like as a creator to parent other creators? Do you feel that your work and success as a novelist influenced their creative paths?

HW: It’s thrilling to be Nancy’s and Meg’s mother, for the marvelous daughters they are, and for their prodigious talent. I believe their gifts are innate, but you’ll have to ask them about any influence I might have had on their creative lives.

Editor’s Note: Mrs. Fredericks was a great prognosticator. Thank you to Hilma Wolitzer for her time!
Making History Relatable to Today’s Readers

by Cambria Gordon

I grew up with a romantic view of Spain. I heard exotic stories of my cousin Tony, the bullfighter. I watched my grandfather step off the plane in Los Angeles, after having spent nine months outside Madrid filming a “paella western” called White Comanche. In my five-year-old mind, he looked like a movie star himself, with his dashing fedora and mustache. The movie featured William Shatner, long before he was Captain Kirk, and it’s famously listed in the Razzies as one of the most enjoyably bad movies ever made. Years later, when my mother remarried, my adoptive father was of Sephardic Jewish descent. My new grandmother and great-grandmother spoke Ladino and cooked fritadas and bourekas. Thus began my love affair with Spain.

Fast forward fifty years when my husband and I and youngest son were trying to decide where to go for our sabbatical year. There was no hesitation. Madrid, por supuesto!

What I didn’t know was that the experience would send me on a treasure hunt, leading me to write a historical fiction YA novel set in the 15th century. Nor could I have predicted that a theme would also emerge from the schools, work places, and streets of the 21st century.

On our first weekend road trip in Spain, we drove to Segovia. I noticed plaques on the ground, spelling out Sepharad, marking where Jews once lived. But other than those brass emblems, there was nothing else. Not a brick. Not a building. I asked myself: What happened to all the Jews of Spain? I dragged my family to every Jewish quarter I could find. I read all I could about the Inquisition, both non-fiction and fiction. In Toledo, I saw the synagogue that became a church. In Girona, I found an old mikveh or ritual bath, filled with murky water from the underground spring that still fed it. But it was in Extremadura, a dry region halfway to Portugal, that I discovered a treasure trove. Extremadura consists of many towns which held large Jewish populations during the middle ages. There, our guide, a Christian who had descended from Jews, showed us a doorway of a pharmacy. Across the top, in ancient stone, were etched some Hebrew letters: All Who Enter Here Are Just. In the 1400s, this had been the entrance to a synagogue in the town of Hervas! I couldn’t believe it. He also took us to a private home where the owner allowed us to go down to his cellar. It was a large underground room with a rounded ceiling. The house had once belonged to a Jewish family.

It was there that I began to imagine being a young converso woman, baptized on the outside and Jewish on the inside. What if there was a crypto-Jewish family who bottled wine in their cellar but also practiced their religion in secret? What if they had a 16-year-old daughter who fell in love with the wrong man and put herself and everyone she cared about at risk? What does it mean to be Spanish and Jewish, Muslim, or Christian? Which self-definition comes first?

When The Poetry of Secrets came out, it was marketed as a historical fiction forbidden love story with themes of oppression and identity. But it turns out there is a different way to think about identity. One even more salient today. True, one can look at identity through the good work of Black Lives Matter, #MeToo, Pride, the Anti-Defamation League or Stop AAPI Hate, all necessary movements for social change. But what happens when we look at identity through the lens of belonging? I believe that victims or discrimination all want the same thing, to be part of a society that accepts them, to have the security and support that comes from fitting in. When you think about it, it’s one of the simplest and most universal desires in the world. It’s the struggle of every teen in high school. Frankly, for us grown-ups, too. And it was my protagonist Isabel’s struggle as well.

Of course, Isabel wasn’t accepted by Christian society. She had to convert in order to do so, living a duality. And isn’t that just another form of belonging, albeit a twisted one? In order to fit in, you must live a lie. Lately, I’ve been asking myself, who are the modern-day cryptos among us? What are some things people may want to hide? Their sexual preference. Their politics. Their mental health. A teen who cuts is a crypto. A Black manager who tolerates a racist slur at a meeting is a crypto. A White female assistant who endures unwanted touching from a boss for fear she’ll lose her job is a crypto. An Asian student who has groceries delivered to avoid the fear of other shoppers during the pandemic? They are hiding in plain sight.

Everyone loses when someone doesn’t feel safe enough to speak their truth.

Historical fiction will always have a place on the shelf, for entertainment and education, and as cautionary tales of what not to repeat. But as librarians and authors, we need to talk about these historical stories in ways that resonate with the challenges people face today. Because maybe, just maybe, a reader who doesn’t feel like they belong, might at least feel heard.

Cambria Gordon is an award-winning author who splits her time between Los Angeles and Madrid.
AJL Moving Forward: The 2021 Digital Conference

Rachel Kamin, Conference Planning Committee

“This was the best online conference I attended this year!”
“Having attended other AJL Conferences, this year’s sessions were the BEST ever.” “The presenters were very knowledgeable and well prepared.” These are only a sampling of the positive feedback we’ve received from the more than 340 people who participated in the AJL 2021 Digital Conference, June 27-July 1. Zooming in from across the United States as well as Austria, Barbados, Canada, Ecuador, Germany, Hungary, Israel, the Netherlands, Russia, Serbia, South Africa, Spain, and the United Kingdom, attendees included longtime AJL members and newcomers, presenters and award-winners, sponsors and guests. And, a hundred percent of respondents said they would recommend the AJL conference to a friend or colleague. The Socio website and app will remain in place and conference registrants can continue to access the session recordings and handouts until it’s time for next year’s conference. Most of the content will be archived as part of the conference proceedings as well.

Thank you to the Conference Planning Committee - Rachel Ariel, Lenore Bell, Jackie Ben-Efraim, Emily Bergman, Sean Boyle, Kathy Bloomfield, Michelle Margolis Chesner, Marcie Eskin, Elana Gensler, Dina Herbert, Rachel Kamin, Jerry Krautman, Amalia Levi, Anna Levia, Rebecca Levitan, Heidi Rabinowitz, Gail Shirazi, and Lisa Silverman - whose time and attention to detail once again provided us with an entertaining, engaging, and educational digital conference. As one participant commented, “The committee, and all the people who organized the conference, were truly superb ... It was enriching, informative and above all, fun!”

Over 100 presenters shared their knowledge and expertise during 44 conference sessions over 5 days. Each session was expertly moderated by our extremely competent volunteers. Based on the ratings in Socio, every session was enthusiastically received by all of the attendees! “Very well thought out,” noted a participant who went on to say that the sessions ranged “from very detailed and focused on specific concerns to big picture theoretical, conceptual, and historical. There was something for everyone.” In fact, one attendee admitted that “even sessions that I did not think would be interesting turned out to be engaging and informative.”

After a year spent Zooming, the AJL21 AV team of Hosts and Co Hosts were highly proficient and ready to keep us smoothly “moving forward.” Our second digital conference would have been literally impossible without them. Thank you to: Laurie Adler, Barbara Bietz, Jackie Ben-Efraim, Sharon Benamou, Emily Bergman, Kathy Bloomfield, Sean Boyle, Michelle Chesner, Erika Dreifus, Susan Dubin, Jonina Duker, Alison Epstein, Vanessa Freedman, Annette Goldsmith, Haim Gottschalk, Aileen Grossberg, Toby Harris, Jacqueline Jules, Yedida Kanfer, Robbin Katzin, Joy Kingsolver, Sonia Kozlovsky, Jerry Krautman, Rachel Leket-Mor, Amalia Levi, Joyce Levine, Julie Koven-Levine, Rebecce Levitan, Joanne Levy, Elaine Mael, Ben Pastcan, Heidi Rabinowitz, Eva Radding, Aviva Rosenberg, Daniel Scheide, Esther Schnaidman, Sheryl Stahl, Sally Stieglitz, Daniel Stuhlman, and Aaron Taub. Show your appreciation for all of the people who put in countless hours of work and sweat to deliver an extraordinary conference by making a donation to AJL. Your gift is tax deductible.


Stay connected throughout the year through AJL’s extensive line-up of Virtual Roundtables for AJL members and AJL Presents Events (which are open to everyone) plus new AJL Classroom courses. And, save the date for the 2022 AJL Conference at the National Museum of American Jewish History in Philadelphia, June 26-30. More details coming soon!
AJL Conference
By Ryan Zohar

The tagline for this year’s Association for Jewish Libraries (AJL) Digital Conference was “Moving Forward.” This emphasis on the future comes at an especially momentous time, as libraries and archivists across the world are faced with pandemic-related challenges, maneuvering within often austere budgetary constraints while also developing exciting digital humanities projects in Jewish studies and bringing new pedagogical methods to the table in this time of heightened crisis. This emphasis in the conference’s programming also provided me with the opportunity to think more critically about my own future trajectory both within Jewish studies and library and information science.

Fortunate enough to attend the AJL with the support of the annual Student Scholarship, I looked forward to the conference as the chance to build upon the foundations of my studies in library school. While recent classes of mine served as a crash course in the different areas of librarianship, I felt I still did not have much exposure to the work of library professionals within the specific field of Jewish studies. Rarely do more general library school courses touch upon more subject-specific concerns like cataloging for non-Roman script materials, the intricacies of Hebrew incunabula, or complicated questions of provenance and dissemination related to Jewish books. I do not see this necessarily as a fault in a degree program which seeks to educate prospective library and information science professionals who themselves have a variety of subject specialties. Rather, this gap highlights the importance of communities like AJL not only for established professionals in a specialized field but for students who hope to make a home for themselves in this field as well. I am fortunate enough to be studying within a dual degree program (Library & Information Science and Near Eastern Studies), and while I see a clear intersection between my areas of interest, this is not always evident within a given course. The conference provided me with the opportunity to see projects, scholars, and debates which crosscut both librarianship in Jewish studies in ways that are not easily separable.

In a number of ways, the conference allowed me to dive deeper into more theoretical questions raised during my library education. When it comes to thinking critically about collection development, a number of lectures and presentations helped me interrogate what is usually considered ‘worthy’ of collecting and what often goes the wayside. Dr. Shalom Sabar’s Feinstein Lecture was an exciting foray into the world of Jewish ephemera. Even as he strongly made the case that the collection of these items was as important as the preservation of “precious works of art, rare manuscripts, and ‘officially’ printed books,” he did not shy away from the pressing ethical concerns of collecting items from *genizot*. In many ways, I see these questions animating my own thinking about collection development. Later in the conference, I was able to see the importance of these types of acquisitions for a major institution like the Library of Congress in Gail Shirazi’s update on new ephemera obtained by the Library.

Elsewhere I encountered issues, like tackling backlogs (Elizabeth Fedden) or romanizing bibliographic data (Kerstin Von Der Krone & Aaron Christianson), which were intensely familiar but approached in ways I had not yet considered. Often, just as illuminating as the presentations were the reactions and comments made by other attendees at the sessions who brought their own experiences to bear on these pressing issues.

As someone particularly interested in cataloging and metadata management, the “LC Cataloging Update: Israel and Judaica Section” session proved to be one of my favorites of the conference. Haim Gottschalk’s update on the cataloging of Hebrew incunabula allowed me to see what the practice of descriptive cataloging of rare materials looks like in action. While I do not, to date, have much experience in this particular area of cataloging, I now know that this is a skill I would like to develop. Additionally, I have spent a great deal of time in recent months trying to read up on the import of the new linked data environment for my particular area of Middle East and Jewish studies librarianship. Prior workshops conducted by AJL as well as the recent Cataloging Committee Meeting were immensely helpful in this respect. Still, Yisrael Meyerowitz’s presentation on the value of BIBFRAME and linked-data for the cataloging of rabbinic literature—and other “linkage”-oriented Jewish textual traditions—was one of the most helpful examples of linked data I have seen.

There are many more presentations I wish that I could mention. And, I hope to draw from each of them as I move forward into this field in whatever form that may take; I now know that there is an incredible variety of work being done at the intersection of Jewish academic study, Jewish communal life, and librarianship. Over the course of the conference, I forged connections with many new colleagues and received kind words of welcome or congratulations wherever I went. I am immensely grateful for the support of AJL and I cannot wait to become more engaged with the organization.

Ryan Zohar (NYU/LIU-Post) was the 2021 AJL Student Scholarship Winner. For more information on AJL Student Scholarships, please visit the AJL website.

President’s Award Winners!

Congratulations to Heidi Rabinowitz and Sheryl Stahl winners of the Inaugural President’s Award for service to AJL above and beyond all expectations!
Dear Friends,

L’Shana Tova! A Happy and Healthy New Year to all of you!

I trust you enjoyed our 2021 Virtual Conference. All the reviews claim it was a huge success. We consistently hear from our members, presenters, and guests that AJL’s online conferences are the best and most professional of all the conferences they attend. If you participated, thank you. Links to videos of all conference programs are available on the Socio app in case you missed something.

I want to remind you of a few items I spoke about at the Annual AJL Membership Meeting.

Your Board and Council now meets monthly, so a lot is getting done during the year. At our June meeting, we approved a BALANCED Budget for the 2021-22 Fiscal Year. In addition, the Board approved the establishment of an Endowment Committee to review the requirements necessary for the Board to put some of AJL’s reserve funds into an endowment to ensure our future.

Thanks to the efforts of Sharon Benamou and the Membership Committee, we have over 525 active AJL members. Our Membership year runs from October 1 through September 30, and we began an energetic membership campaign following the conference. This will culminate in our Second Annual Membership Gala on Sunday, October 17, 2021. If you enjoyed last year’s gala with Librarian of Congress Carla Hayden and Israel’s National Library Director Oren Weinberg, I assure you this year’s event, featuring The Safran Foer family, will be equally amazing.

During this stressful, unforgettable, and turbulent year, AJL developed a monthly program of Round Tables and AJL Presents events, to enable us to keep in touch with each other, share ideas, and help one another get through these trying times. Our Round Tables and AJL Presents events will continue during the coming year and beyond, even as we plan our next conference TOGETHER in Philadelphia in 2022.

Due to the hard work of our Vice President of Development Jackie Benefraim and our Development Associate Jerry Krautman, AJL is recognized both internally and externally as The Leading Authority on Judaic Librarianship, and an important and contributing member of the Jewish nonprofit world. Our Development Team has worked hard to educate the Board & Council about the relationship building necessary for an active Development program. One result of their efforts is a $25,000 grant to AJL from the Harris Foundation to develop the Jewish Libraries of the World portal on our website.

Thanks to another generous donation, our Webmaster Sheryl Stahl and her wonderful committee, upgraded our website to better reflect AJL’s mission. Check it out: / Our Strategic Planning Committee, led by SSCPL President Sean Boyle, is actively moving forward on developing a new and updated plan for the next 3 years.

Our Librarianship & Education Committee, chaired by Haim Gottschalk, is working on multiple initiatives to train Judaica librarians, beginning with classes offered at the “AJL Classroom” which you can find at our website: https://jewishlibraries.org/education/

Our Newsletter editor, Sally Stieglitz along with her team, has updated our quarterly AJL News & Reviews with timely, informative articles and current book reviews to support our members and enrich their jobs.

Our Public Relations/Communications Committee, under the direction of Paula Bregman, has been restructured and reactivated to make sure our internal and external communications are consistent, our branding is recognizable, and our information to members is timely.

This is just a short list of all that is happening at AJL! We are always looking for volunteers to serve on our many committees and to assist with the innumerable, ongoing tasks that help the organization run. We are also interested in new ideas for committees or programs that will support our members. Of course, if you suggest it, be prepared to lead the effort. If you are interested in getting more involved, please contact Heidi Rabinowitz, our Member Relations Chair at BookofLifePodcast@gmail.com.

Again, my family and I wish you and yours a happy, healthy, and fruitful New Year!

Kathy B.

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Dear Safranim,

I’m excited to share this fall issue of AJL News and Reviews with you; it’s a very bookish issue (for the People of the Book). We are delighted to have contributions from two authors, Leslie Kimmelman and Cambria Gordon, each of whom gives us a glimpse into her creative process. We also have a new Seven Questions With... feature with acclaimed fiction writer Hilma Wolitzer who has just published her latest book at the age of 91! Also in a bookish vein: a recap of the Jewish Fiction Awards Committee programs at the Virtual Conference and our singular resource for librarians and readers - the AJL Reviews.

I also want to take a moment to thank Rebecca Jefferson for her tireless contributions to AJL Reviews—she is stepping down as co-editor of Adult Reviews and will be greatly missed by us all.

Finally, I want to wish you all L’Shana Tova - may 5782 be sweet and joyous for us all!

Sally Stieglitz
Editor-in-Chief
Helpeth Needed: Eight Good Knights

By Leslie Kimmelman,
author of The Eight Knights of Hanukkah

Just what everyone needs, I thought when I first had the idea for The Eight Knights of Hanukkah, another Hanukkah picture book. Especially from me. I’d already written two Hanukkah stories, though the most recent had been almost twenty years earlier. But the idea persisted. That may have been because it was based on a pun. I belong to a very punny family, although I am definitely the weakest link.

I did a little research. Surely someone had already thought of the nights/knights wordplay, and then I could put the idea to rest. Surprisingly, I found that no one had. The idea still persisted, and the story began to take shape in my mind.

Growing up, Hanukkah celebrations in my family were never about the gifts. My sisters and I would get a book each (A book of my own! Be still my heart!), a pair of socks or stockings, and maybe another small tchotchke. It was more about the delicious food (it was always about the food in my house!); the candles (we bet on which one would last the longest); and about the friends we always invited to celebrate with us (frequently non-Jewish, our own version of outreach). Finally, every year our family would choose a worthy cause or two to donate to. When I had my own

(Continued on page 3)
family, I continued this tradition: a few small gifts for my children, and a few organizations we thought it was especially important to support. Our candles are few and small, I wanted to demonstrate to my kids, but they can shine a powerful light.

That’s the spirit I tried to imbue my developing manuscript with. Each of us has the ability to perform “deeds of stupendous bravery and awesome kindness.” It seemed to be the perfect time for the message. As I was writing, the country I loved felt terribly unkind, not to mention full of ferocious dragons; it was a challenge to stay hopeful. It was a challenge, as well, to feel motivated to try and improve things. I needed eight good knights! I needed a generous dose of chesed, lovingkindness. And I needed an infusion of Jewish humor. Who better to illustrate kindness, good deeds, laughter, and action rather than despair in the face of darkness, than a bunch of goodly knights? Male and female, of course—because I was also writing at a time when being a woman suddenly meant (or felt like it meant) being undervalued and unprotected. Anyway, why shouldn’t women have in on all the fun? When it comes to changing the world or at the very least filling it with small kindnesses, everybody counteth!

Obviously, I took some literary license. Historically, knights would have been anything but Jewish. During the Crusades, arguably the golden age of knighthood, knights were devout Christians whose primary aim, besides fighting, was to protect the holy places of Christianity and the pious who were on pilgrimage to visit those places. Nevertheless, I reasoned, the classic qualities of a knight were in perfect alignment with Jewish values: protection of the poor, sick, and powerless; personal honor; integrity, and so forth. I knew that it was also true that when kids think of knights, they don’t think in true historical terms. Eight chivalrous Jewish knights sounded just right.

I had no idea just how dark the world would look when The Eight Knights of Hanukkah finally was published. Who could have predicted the turn of events that came to define 2020? My hope is that in some small way, the book that I created along with the fantastically talented illustrator, Galia Bernstein, is like a Hanukkah candle: a small but powerful source of warmth, chesed, and hope—mixed in with some medieval merriment—in troubling times.

Leslie Kimmelman has long been associated with Sesame Workshop both as a writer and editor. She is the author of more than three dozen children’s books, including The Eight Knights of Hanukkah, The Little Red Hen and the Passover Matzah, and Write On, Irving Berlin!, which were Sydney Taylor Notable Books, and the Sydney Taylor Honor Book Everybody Says Shalom. She lives in the New York City area.

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**The Sydney Taylor Shmooze Mock Award Blog**

by Heidi Rabinowitz

The Sydney Taylor Shmooze is a mock award blog created in Spring 2020 by Susan Kusel, Chava Pinchuck, and Heidi Rabinowitz. A “mock award” does not make fun of the real award, rather, it celebrates it through imitation. The purpose of the Sydney Taylor Shmooze blog is to grow awareness of Jewish children’s books and of the award criteria and to help readers critically consider Jewish literature for youth. There are mock award blogs for the Newbery, the Caldecott, and other famous children’s book awards, and we were eager for the Sydney Taylor Book Award to be represented in the same way.

A great team of volunteer reviewers evaluates books according to the official award criteria, and publishes reviews year round at www.sydneytaylorshmooze.com. At the turn of the year, a popular vote is held to determine the winners of the Mock Sydney Taylor Book Award. Over one thousand votes were cast for the 2021 Mock Sydney Taylor Book Awards! The winners are listed below. It’s interesting to see how they compare to the selections of the Real Committee.

The blog is a project of the Association of Jewish Libraries but is completely separate from the Real Award Committee, whose current members are not allowed to participate on the mock award blog. Opinions about the books are entirely those of the reviewers, and inclusion on the Shmooze has no impact on the consideration of these titles by the Real committee. Reviewing for The Sydney Taylor Shmooze is good training for those who aspire to join the Sydney Taylor Book Award Committee, and you can apply at www.sydneytaylorshmooze.com/p/reviewers.html.

Listen to an episode of The Book of Life Podcast about The Sydney Taylor Shmooze to get all the background and hear advice for mock award bloggers at Calling Caldecott, Heavy Medal, and Guessing Giesel, at jewishbooks.blogspot.com/2021/01/the-sydney-taylor-shmooze.html.

**2021 Mock Sydney Taylor Book Award (including links to reviews)**

**PICTURE BOOKS**
Mock Winner: *The Ninth Night of Hanukkah* by Erica Perl
Mock Honor: *I Have a Jewish Name* by Rochel Vorst
Mock Notable: *Sadie’s Shabbat Stories* by Melissa Stoller

**MIDDLE GRADE BOOKS**
Mock Winner: *Fish Out of Water* by Joanne Levy
Mock Honor: *Turtle Boy* by M. Evan Wolkenstein
Mock Notable: *A Ceiling Made of Eggshells* by Gail Carson Levine

**YOUNG ADULT BOOKS**
Mock Winner: *The Assignment* by Liza Weimer
Mock Honor: *Today Tonight Tomorrow* by Rachel Lynn Solomon
Mock Notable: *Dancing at the Pity Party* by Tyler Feder
Meet Paula Breger!

I’m excited to be joining AJL as its public relations/communications chair. AJL does an amazing job of promoting Jewish literacy while building a global community for peer support and professional development. I look forward to expanding on its efforts by increasing reach and improving consistency and branding.

This work is a natural outgrowth of my role at Temple Emanu-El in Haverhill, Massachusetts, where I serve as communications director and webmaster (as well as being the long-time volunteer librarian and cofounder of its author series). I am also currently a member of the AJL Jewish Fiction Award Committee. Outside of serial volunteering, I’m a freelance copy editor (and former attorney and bookseller).

It will be a pleasure to get to know you all better in the coming months!

Paula Breger
AJL Public Relations/Communications Chair

Association of Jewish Libraries
Conference
SSCPL Division Meeting

Sunday, June 27, 2021 2-3:45 pm ET
Online Conference Minutes

Sean Boyle, SSCPL President, welcomed everybody and called the Schools, Synagogues, Centers, and Public Libraries meeting to order.

Announcements:
The ALA Schmooze and Nosh follows the AJL General Meeting. All are invited.
The AJL gala will be October 17, 2021

Strategic Planning Committee
Sean Boyle, committee Chair showed a matrix of AJL activities. Goals and objectives will go to the AJL Board.

Continuing Education
The next class will be on storytelling and will cost $75.

Roundtables
The roundtables will continue. So far, 19 recordings are behind the membership wall. The AJL Presents are available to everyone both live and the recordings. The next SSCPL roundtable will be summer reads. The next AJL Presents will be a map-a-thon event on 7/22. The August 10 AJL Presents event will be Books and books. August 29 will be a roundtable discussion of recent Jewish books for children. Combating Antisemitism Through Children’s Literature from the Ontario chapter will be October 4, 2021.

SSCPL officers
Emily Bergman is stepping down as SSCPL Vice President. She agreed to take this position when the elected President stepped down, and Sean Boyle, the elected Vice President agreed to be President. This was to be a year’s commitment for Emily, and Emily’s resignation and Rebecca Levitan’s appointment as SSCPL Vice President has been accepted by the AJL Board. Emily expressed her appreciation for this opportunity and everyone’s support.

Accreditation. Shaindy Kurzmann, Chair
Shaindy acknowledged the committee members, Arlene Ratzabi and Bruchie Weinstein. Shaindy also described the process of accreditation and the advantages of going through the process. The work of the committee was difficult during the pandemic. Three libraries received accreditation:
- The Hyman Schachtel Library of Congregation Beth Israel, Houston, TX - Judy Weidman, Temple Librarian and Archives.
- Renewal of Advanced Accreditation
- The Jack M. Barrack Hebrew Academy Library, Bryn Mawr, PA - Wendy Sittenfield, Director of Library & Media Services.
- Basic AND Advanced Accreditation
- The Rosenbaum Yeshiva of North Jersey Library, River Edge, NJ - Esther Schnaidman, Librarian. Basic AND Advanced Accreditation

A program about accreditation will be held at this conference on Tuesday at 2:45 pm.

Vice-President’s report. Emily Bergman
Emily is working within her role as Jewish Information chair of the Ethnic Materials Information Exchange Round Table to promote a project with Heidi Rabinowitz and Sadaf Sadique to create lists of children’s books from minority groups. She also continued to work on the Conference Committee and planning the Round Table discussions.

Advocacy Committee. Sean Boyle, Chair
Advocacy is continuing to be included in the strategic plan. The advocacy toolkit is being updated. A program on advocacy will be held at this conference on Monday at 11 am. Presentations about libraries will be given at several Jewish library education conferences, and the committee is looking to expand to other organizations with influence. Sean reminded the attendees we need to show the benefit to the larger community, and we need to advocate for ourselves.

Jewish Values Finder. Heather Lenson, Chair
The database description has been brought up-to-date, though there have been some challenges with the new platform. The committee is working to add new titles.

(Continued on page 11)
Publications. Laura Schutzman, Chair

The committee is updating the list of resources, both the publications and updating the old ones. They are working on the AJL Reviews index.

The fiction award presentations at this conference will be on Wednesday at 1 pm, recommended fiction on Wednesday at 2:45 pm, and a discussion of *The Lost Shtetl* on Tuesday at 7 pm.

Sydney Taylor Book Award: Rebecca Levitan, Chair

For the first time in 10 years, none of the winners are Holocaust books. The blog tour has been a success. The stickers for the award-winning books are available for sale. The committee is creating a database of winners and notables.

Sydney Taylor Manuscript Award: Aileen Grossberg, Chair

Aileen described the award. The committee evaluated seven manuscripts this year. This year’s winner is *Cats and Honeycake*. Aileen already has received inquiries for next year. The evaluation form is updated, especially to clarify what is Jewish content. In response to requests for information about good places to submit manuscripts, PJ Library is recommended. The committee is working to expand interest to reach writers.

Sean opened a discussion for topics for the 2022 conference, which will be held in Philadelphia at the National Museum of American Jewish History and the Wyndham Downtown Hotel, June 26-30, 2022.

- More related to teaching the Holocaust
- Books and teaching younger children
- Media literacy
- Round table time where types of libraries can meet
- Israel advocacy and dealing with anti-Israel
- Genealogical research
- Field trips

Sean opened the floor for a conversation about a future focus for SSCPL, but there were no suggestions.

Sean announced the General Membership meeting to follow. SSCPL member, Rachel Kamin, will be receiving the Fanny Goldstein Merit Award and give her acceptance presentation.
FOR YOU AND YOUR PATRONS

With texts and artwork from North Africa, Mexico, the US, and Europe, this READER’S GUIDE highlights notable and everyday awakenings of Jewish women of all ages, from the last two centuries.

Reflect on your own experiences as a woman or the women in your life as you engage with themes related to expanding gender roles, risk and discovery, and feelings of belonging or outsideriness in relation to oneself, to other women, and to other Jews.

DOWNLOAD THIS FREE READER’S GUIDE HERE: bit.ly/PosenRG1

Register for FREE here to enjoy all the reading selections in the WOMEN Reader’s Guide: bit.ly/PosenReg1

REVIEWS OF TITLES FOR CHILDREN AND TEENS

In the Spotlight

EDITED BY LISA SILVERMAN and ELLEN DRUCKER-ALBERT


Although Jim Crow in America and the Holocaust in Europe occupy different planes in the moral universe, many Jewish Americans have noted parallels between the Jewish and Black experiences. Among the most prominent of these Americans during the heyday of the civil rights movement was Rabbi Joachim Prinz, the brilliant and outspoken German rabbi who fled Berlin for America in 1937. As rabbi of Temple B’nai Abraham in Newark, New Jersey, and later president of the American Jewish Congress, Prinz championed civil rights for American Blacks when it was an unpopular cause, even among some of his congregants.

As Hitler and his Nazi cohorts rose to power in the 1930s, Prinz bravely railed against the Nuremberg laws from his pulpit, facing repeated imprisonment by the Gestapo for his audacity. With memories of Nazi outrages fresh in his mind, he was appalled by the anti-Black prejudices he encountered in the northern United States and by out-and-out segregation in the South.

As Audrey Ades explains in clear language for young readers, “Joachim spoke out about those injustices to anyone who would listen. In Germany, he had seen what could happen when people stood by when they saw others treated unfairly.”

The young Martin Luther King lived these injustices. Growing up in Atlanta, he saw how “[w]hite kids got new books. They got seats at the front of the bus, tables at restaurants, and houses in the pretty parts of town. Black kids did not.” He grew up to become a Christian minister who, like Prinz, refused to remain silent.

Ades details the friendship that developed between Prinz and King. Prinz’s supportive letters to King in prison and King’s ground-breaking address to Prinz’s congregation culminated in their speeches at the March on Washington in 1963. Chiara Fedele’s mixed digital media paintings, some evoking black-and-white period photos, capture the seriousness of this dramatic
Many books for young people have been written about the voyage of the MS St. Louis from Hamburg, Germany to Cuba and back to Europe in 1939. However, Barbara Krasner’s novel in free verse is an original telling of this heartrending story. Twelve-year-old Ruth Arons and her parents leave their home and family in Breslau for what they hope will be a safe haven in Cuba. Ruth makes friends with Wolfie Freund, a boy her age, and together they think up all kinds of mischief. Their carefree antics and the courteous treatment of the passengers are shown in stark contrast to what awaits them on their arrival in Havana harbor when they learn that their visas have been deemed invalid. Told from the first-person point of view and with touches of poignancy and wry humor, we see how the early relief the passengers felt on leaving Nazi Germany turns into grief and despair. After the passengers are turned away from Cuba, as well as from the United States (and Canada), they must return to Europe to an uncertain and frightening future.


Many books have been written about America’s Jewish and Black communities. The back matter (a timeline of King’s and Prinz’s lives, a glossary, and suggested readings) fleshes out the history for curious adults or older readers. We need more books at a middle school and YA level that explore the extensive collaboration between Jews and Blacks in the civil rights movement.

Marjorie Gann, retired teacher; co-author (with Janet Willen) of Five Thousand Years of Slavery and Speak a Word for Freedom: Women Against Slavery (Tundra/Penguin Random House) Toronto, Canada

Ades’ book is a timely corrective to the often strained relations between America’s Jewish and Black communities. The back matter (a timeline of King’s and Prinz’s lives, a glossary, and suggested readings) fleshes out the history for curious adults or older readers. We need more books at a middle school and YA level that explore the extensive collaboration between Jews and Blacks in the civil rights movement.

Barbara Krasner’s use of imagery is stunning. Metaphors such as, “All of us lined up on the deck, / ship-locked seagulls / yearning for flight” or similes such as, “I cling to Wolfie like salt on a pretzel” are powerful and moving. The rhythmic flow draws the reader inside the narrative. You will want to read this book in one sitting, never letting go until the very last words. In addition, the layout and design of 37 Days at Sea add depth to the emotional events. Some pages are filled with text; others are almost empty, with broken lines, large white spaces, and words scattered about. End matter includes a Timeline of Events and Further Information (films, oral testimonies, books). For additional poetic tellings of the Holocaust refugee story to Cuba, see Margarita Engle’s Tropical Secrets (Henry Holt, 2009), the 2010 Sydney Taylor Book Award winner (Teen), and Ruth Behar’s Letters from Cuba (Nancy Paulsen Books, 2020), Sydney Taylor Notable Book (Middle Grade) 2021.

Anne Dublin, retired teacher-librarian, Holy Blossom Temple, Author of Jacob and the Mandolin Adventure (Second Story Press), Toronto


This special picture book introduces young readers to someone new to them. Artist Ben Shahn, creative painter and activist, led a colorful life which unfolds chronologically in this gorgeously illustrated volume. The art mimics, but does not copy, Shahn’s strong, expressive style while direct text brings back to life a man born in the 19th century, famous in the 20th century, and still achingly relevant in the 21st. This moving biography shares Shahn’s experiences in the two countries where he lived. Forced to leave Czar dominated Lithuania, the family comes to the United States. They leave their shtetl by stagecoach, reach New York with trains under and over ground. They move from a close Jewish community to a neighborhood where classmates torment Shahn for being a Jew. His drawings often save him from a beating.

Shahn yearns to go to art school to learn typography because the English alphabet is new to him. But he must drop out of school to support his family. When he finds time to go at night he is discouraged. Shahn wants his art to tell stories; instructors want him to paint lovely landscapes. Shahn thinks these hide the sorrows of unjust city life. He becomes a representational painter, with art radiating his anger at unfairness. Shahn photographs victims of the Depression. Americans see how horrible conditions are, how much help is needed to find food and jobs. He paints gigantic murals revealing the immigrant experience. He draws to confront dramatic issues still painful today: poverty, hunger, immigration, civil rights, voting rights, workers’ rights, and the role of government to fix things. His career proves art is a bold tool of protest. Shahn was and is a painter for the people who live by the Jewish precept to pursue justice.

Ellen G. Cole, retired Librarian, Temple Isaiah, Los Angeles, CA

Continued on page 14
Bible Stories and Midrash


Bible stories move from learning to fun in a light-hearted collection of six familiar tales told anew to our next generation. This latest volume is an English translation of the 1994 Hebrew picture book. The new edition retains the signature art of the original now deceased illustrator. Author Meir Shalev chooses six stories (five from Genesis: Adam/Eve, Noah, Babel, Abraham/Sarah, and Joseph/Brothers; one from Exodus: Moses/River Basket), placing strong characters in tense situations mostly vis-à-vis God. The outcomes are sunny if not always actually happy. They introduce morals to young readers without preaching.

The six texts here are almost verbatim from the biblical text, but Shalev does some detail tweaking for clarity. For example, the dove, but not the raven, appears in the Flood story; the author then adds that the dove carrying an olive branch is a sign of peace, a later association not in Genesis. In the Abraham/Sarah story, the visitors reveal to the doubting couple that they are angels; this fact does not appear in the JPS translation of the *Tanach*. Moses’ mother and sister have names which do not actually appear in the specific *Tanach* verses telling this rescue tale. Tweaking considered, what stands out is the warm, connecting voice of the story teller. Each tale is an excellent choice to read aloud. The illustrations are special; each story has its own full or double page spread. The palette is vibrant; the characters are active and engaging. Stylized bodies and faces seem to come from the paintbrush of a fellow child. Paintings are engaging, spotlighting the crucial point. This is a witty, friendly, smile-inducing collection of Bible tales by award winners; author and illustrator have taken time out to play with their young readers.

Ellen G. Cole, retired Librarian, Temple Isaiah, Los Angeles, CA

Biography


*The Story of Stan Lee* is part of “A Biography for New Readers” series. Titles in the series include Frida Kahlo, Ruth Bader Ginsberg, Abraham Lincoln, and Anne Frank. This newest title follows the format of the other books in the series. The print is large and the chapters are short. Berrios includes a timeline of Lee’s life and important achievements, maps of his travels, and thought provoking questions for the reader to think about. In a two column blue box called “Myth & Fact,” Berrios states a myth in column one: for example, “Comic books aren’t educational” and debunks it in column two. The imaginative, vivid color illustrations greatly enhance the book; for example, the Lieber family tree is not drawn as a tree, but instead the illustration is a series of blue interconnected leaves. After the last chapter the reader is asked ten comprehension questions. A chapter on how Stan Lee helped shape our world today and a glossary are included at the end of the book. This well written, and interesting book is easy for children to understand. Those who read Marvel Comics or have seen the Marvel characters in the movies or on TV and are fans of The Incredible Hulk and Spider-Man will enjoy reading about the Jewish man who created them. The author, Frank Berrios, is a prolific writer and editor of children’s books.

Ilka Gordon, Beachwood, Ohio


In 1893, a glittering, impressive World’s Fair was held in Chicago, Illinois. The fair transformed Chicago from a rough frontier town into an important center for the arts and a vibrant showcase for progress. Hannah G. Solomon was appointed to organize a series of events for Jewish women to be held at the time of the fair. Hannah hoped that the fair would attract Jewish women from all over the world; the women, once acquainted, could join forces to “do good in the world.”

Hannah had been brought up to believe that fairness, freedom,
and respect were the birthright of all people. Her parents were community activists and had an open, welcoming home. They served as role-models for Hannah as she matured. When Hannah reached adulthood, she was disturbed by the suffering of the poverty-stricken, including many struggling Jewish immigrant families. Poverty and illness were pervasive and educational opportunity was rare. She was determined to do what she could to alleviate suffering and provide a path to success for as many people as possible. Her efforts led to her selection by the World’s Fair to organize outstanding women from all over the United States and to see if their combined efforts could help. Organized men’s groups objected but Hannah persevered, creatively using all the contacts she could muster, making lists, and writing letters in the hope that the Conference would result in ideas and programs which would improve the lot of poor women and help them become successful, productive members of society.

Hannah’s World’s Fair efforts led to the creation of the National Council for Jewish Women which focused its efforts on educational initiatives and helping the poor. Improved housing, the establishment of nursery schools, the building of playgrounds, and the providing of meals to school children so they could concentrate on learning were some of the results of Hannah’s devoted efforts and hard work. She joined with other women’s rights activists such as Jane Addams and Susan B. Anthony to become an effective champion of women’s rights including the right to vote.

Bonnie Lindauer tells Hannah’s story in an engaging way. Her descriptions, along with Sofia Moore’s beautiful, muted-color illustrations bring the era alive. The illustrations are integral to the story and are particularly effective in scenes of diverse women banding together in common cause in their efforts to improve the lot of all.

An author’s note tells more about Hannah as well about the history of Hull House, a settlement house for poor immigrant women founded by Jane Addams, where Hannah was a long-time, devoted volunteer. Also appended is a timeline, helpful in placing the events of Hannah’s life in historical perspective.


At the age of eleven, Vera Rubin was already an explorer of stars and planets, studying the heavens from her bedroom window and fashioning a home-made telescope to better observe the nighttime sky. In the 1940s it was unusual for a female college student to study science, but Vera refused to be discouraged and majored in astronomy at Vassar. As a young wife and mother, she continued to ponder the mysteries of the universe, studying the movement of galaxies, presenting her theories to an all-male gathering of astronomers who ridiculed her ideas. But Vera persisted with her research and went on to prove that stars at the edge of galaxies move faster than expected. Nickel’s lyrical writing and Sicuro’s majestic illustrations created in watercolor, ink, and charcoal pencil bring to life the story of a brilliant independent thinker who broke barriers. Vera Rubin became the first woman hired by the prestigious Carnegie Institution, confidently turning the only bathroom at the Palomar Observatory — a Men’s Room — into a Ladies Room. Her most notable discovery was the extent to which dark matter makes up much of the universe, a complicated topic handled so skillfully in this book that even the youngest readers will grasp the importance of her work. The spirit of feminism is woven throughout this biography without being heavy-handed, and while there is no specific Jewish content, the emphasis on study and the pursuit of knowledge speak to Jewish values.

Gloria Koster, school librarian (retired from New Canaan, CT Public Schools); children’s author; member of the Children’s Book Committee of Bank Street College of Education

Michal Hoschander Malen, retired librarian; current library volunteer in Efrat, Israel; editor of children’s and young adult book reviews for the Jewish Book Council

continued on page 16
**Board Books**


*Shabbat Shalom*, appropriate for ages 0-3, is a charming board book written in rhyme that depicts Friday night *Shabbat* rituals in a simple and engaging style. The book begins with the family rushing home to celebrate *Shabbat* and ends “till sleepyheads must go to bed.” Grandfather and grandmother are part of the family group. The family sits at a table laden with tempting *Shabbat* foods. In the illustrations, the men wear kippot and the women wear tichels (scarves) on their heads. The full page colorful illustrations bring out the joy of *Shabbat* rituals and portray the connection between generations. *Shabbat Shalom* would make a meaningful baby gift that would be read over and over.

*Ilka Gordon,* 
*Beachwood, Ohio*


In what is probably a first for a major publisher, this sparsely worded board book celebrates Orthodox Jewish practice. By using the common Yiddish word for “synagogue,” it seems targeted to the Jewish population, as compared to previous similar children’s titles which are often used to teach about various religions. Two sisters wake on a “Saturday” (the text does not mention the word “Shabbat”), and wear dresses as their mother does, saying, “A day of rest with which we’re blessed. We all get dressed.” Dad dresses in suit and tie with a kippah, and they all walk through the city to an impressive-looking shul. The bearded rabbi “greets all he meets” and the crowd is similarly dressed, with a variety of skin colors represented. There is a clearly defined women’s section in the balcony and men are seated in the main sanctuary, with the bima in the center. The final scene shows the whole family back at home eating a lovely *shabbat* lunch. The illustrations will appeal to little ones, but there is a missed opportunity in the odd representation of scrappy Hebrew letters on the ark curtain. It seems there wasn’t even an attempt to make them look real or even say anything meaningful. This would have been another way to share with children images of the language they will encounter in a synagogue.

*Lisa Silverman,*  
*retired Library Director, Sperber Jewish Community Library, Los Angeles; Co-Editor, Children’s and Teen Literature, AJL News and Reviews*


The team that brought us *Alligator Seder* offers another fun, rhyming board book featuring cute animals celebrating Jewish holidays. This time, readers travel to the Australian Outback as colorful kangaroos dip apples in honey, blow shofars, and share synagogue pews with frisky koala bears and wombats. They eat all sorts of traditional Ashkenazi foods (brisket, gefilte fish) and have a grand ‘ol time. Kids will learn the word “marsupial” along with all the holiday traditions through this upbeat tale.

*Lisa Silverman,*  
*retired Library Director, Sperber Jewish Community Library, Los Angeles; Co-Editor, Children’s and Teen Literature, AJL News and Reviews*


Uncle Max has arrived to celebrate Rosh Hashanah with the people he loves and even the dog is excited! Uncle Max, clad in his fun floral shirt and sideways baseball cap, joins the family to usher in the world’s birthday and says “L’hitra’ot, sun. See you next year!” as he and the kids watch the sun go down. Uncle Max has a silly side, dipping his glasses into the honey so as to make the whole world look sweet.

*Continued on page 16*
The family Uncle Max visits is diverse, consisting of a range of skin tones and kippot are worn by both male and female members. They celebrate with candle lighting, a festive meal, blessing both wine and grape juice, dipping challah and apples in honey, and going to synagogue to hear the sound of the shofar. The celebration continues with the birthday cake Uncle Max has brought and everybody sings “Yom Huledet Sameach!” to the world.

The text includes some hebrew lettering for the words wine and honey, but most of the hebrew terms are transliterated and translated at the bottom the pages, such as L ‘hitra’ot (see you later), Dvash (honey), Shofar (ram’s horn), Y om Huledet Sameach (happy birthday) and Shalom (bye). The dog’s “woof ” is also translated as “I’m hungry.”

The illustrations are bright, fun, colorful, and reflect the excitement for the holiday celebration. The children are amazed by the powerful BAAAAAAA of the shofar and exchange New Year wishes happily on the way home from synagogue. Uncle Max has clearly done his job, infusing his family’s Rosh Hashanah holiday with joy and delight.

Ellen Drucker-Albert,
Co-editor, Children’s and Teen Literature, AJL News and Reviews;
Manager, Adult & Information Services, Cold Spring Harbor Library & Environmental Center, Cold Spring Harbor, NY


A kippah-wearing badger sporting adorable birdie slippers learns about Hanukkah in this concept board book that features creative felt artwork. Counting and colors are explored simply as each night a different color and number of candles are lit. The art is truly a standout that almost begs to be touched. Badger’s hoopoe bird friend is super cute too. This is a lively, successful board book for toddlers who will learn holiday traditions along with other concepts.

Lisa Silverman,
retired Library Director, Sperber Jewish Community Library, Los Angeles
Co-Editor, Children’s and Teen Literature, AJL News and Reviews


After a brief explanation of the holiday of Hanukkah, simple text explains that torque makes the dreidel spin and that the spinning dreidel has angular momentum. “That means it spins and spins instead of falling over. The spinning dreidel hits tiny molecules in the air. That creates friction. The point of the dreidel rubs against the table. That creates friction, too. Friction slows the dreidel down. As the dreidel spins slower, it loses angular momentum. Gravity makes it tilt and wobble. Gravity pulls the dreidel down. Clunk!” The book continues with the rules of the game and other ways that families celebrate the holiday, ending with: “Not all Baby’s friends celebrate Hanukkah ...but they can spin the dreidel. Baby loves Hanukkah!” Adorable, vibrant cartoon illustrations feature round-faced and wide-eyed toddlers with various skin and hair colors though “Baby” is white and sports a blue kippah. Green energy, coding, quantum physics, and thermodynamics are just some of the topics addressed in this cute, accessible “Baby Loves Science” board book series that will also include Baby Love Electrical Engineering on Christmas! (8/24/2021) and Baby Loves Photosynthesis on St. Patrick’s Day! (1/25/2022). Here’s hoping that more Jewish holidays will be added in the future!

Rachel Kamin,
North Suburban Synagogue Beth El, Highland Park, IL

Fiction - Middle Grade

When seventh grader Shira Gordon’s best friend Cassie talks her into auditioning for the school musical, “Music Man,” she somehow must overcome her extreme shyness. She’s not just shy, she’s can-barely-speak-and-blushes-constantly, shy. She figures she can say no if she’s chosen for any part, or, at worst, blend into the ensemble, since she’s sure that will be the biggest part she might get. To her surprise...
and embarrassment, she lands first tenor in the Barbershop Quartet — a boy’s part for which she’ll have to wear a mustache. To make matters worse, she’s also asked to understudy the lead role, Marian the Librarian, held by an eighth grade “mean-girl” who takes acting and singing lessons. The girl lets everyone know how talented she is and that she simply will not be upstaged by anyone.

Shira meets Paul Garcia at her first ever Bar Mitzvah party. Enthusiastic and outgoing, Paul landed the lead playing Harold Hill, and he helps Shira become more confident with her newfound space in the spotlight. Middle school relationships and rivalries, crushes, budding romances, the usual drama, and a mysterious prankster who tries to derail Marian the Librarian’s success, all give this story a spot-on teenage voice. Anyone who has ever been a wallflower at a Bar Mitzvah party, had to overcome shyness, or dealt with an egotistical bully will identify with at least one of the cast members. Emotional upsets come and go quickly. Shira is teased mercilessly when the cast learns she has perfect pitch, but Cassie helps her shrug it off and it’s soon forgotten when a guest director arrives to steal the spotlight. Adult characters are well drawn, too, especially Shira’s mom, who is reliving her youthful theater years vicariously.

While there is not an abundant Jewish presence in the book, there are enough familiar Jewish scenes to give the story a place in secular libraries and in many Jewish libraries. A delightful romp in seventh grade, full of humor, music, and supportive friends and family, even for adults who enjoy reminiscing.

Debbie Colodny, 
Cook Memorial Public Library District, Libertyville, IL (retired); former owner Sefer, So Good, and former member Sydney Taylor Book Award Committee


(Parts of this review appeared on the Sydney Taylor Shmooze blog in April 2021.)

his book is a somewhat younger, and a bit shorter, middle grade version of the graphic novel, Gottika, published in 2014. Based on the Golem legend and set in a dystopian future, this is the story of Dany and his family and their life as Stoons in Gottika.

The Stoons are oppressed by the Gottikins. Made to wear red berets when they leave their homes, they are physically, verbally, and economically abused, kept under a strict curfew, and forced to live in a walled off part of the city (the favela). There are many obvious parallels to Jewish life in Prague, Italian ghettos, Nazi Germany, and many other anti-semitic environs. This is a wild story filled with deceit, betrayal, mystery, and redemption. There are a few graphic novel style illustrations throughout the book.

When “the Troubles” come, Dany’s father, Reb Judah, returns to his magician roots and creates a man out of clay — a Gol. As in the Golem legend, the Gol protects the Scoons. A vast web of secrets and lies is uncovered which brings the story to a satisfying conclusion.

Throughout the story, there are constant references to Jewish tradition: Jewish prayers (“Who by Stone...Who by Fire”), Jewish ritual (“a week of mourning”), Torah teachings (“Tikkun Olam/repairing the world”), and much more. However, the future setting reflects some interesting modifications to those traditions, the result of being handed down over generations. While well-researched and clearly presented, it may be difficult for a child unfamiliar with these traditions to discern exactly what is being talked about. Nevertheless, this is a very engaging, exciting, and entertaining read for young Fantasy and Sci-Fi fans.

Kathy Bloomfield, 
AJL President-SSC Division, Seal Beach, CA


Twelve-year-old Lara Finkel wants to be a detective in the vein of her favorite literary detective, Georgia Ketteridge (think Nancy Drew). She names her one-woman detective agency FIASCCO which stands for Finkel Investigation Agency Solving Consequential Crimes Only. Of course, the name of Lara’s company foreshadows the drama to come.

Lara advertises her new business, but can’t find any customers in need of her sleuthing skills. It soon becomes clear that her own family is full of mysteries that need to be solved. The Finkels are a busy nuclear Jewish family with four children. Three are neurodiverse as well as the dad who has ADHD. Lara and her younger brother Benny are on the autism spectrum. Eleven-year-old sister Caroline is an accomplished artist who uses a tablet for her computer-generated speech. Only high school age brother Noah is neuro-typical, and he is harboring his own secret from the family.

There are lots of layers to this realistic fiction novel. Lara sets out to find out who Caroline is texting so furiously and why she is...
REVIEWS OF TITLES FOR CHILDREN AND TEENS

getting in trouble at school, why is Dad acting so peculiarly lately, and why Noah is disappearing all the time. Lara soon learns that solving mysteries has boundaries that should not be crossed. Her unwelcome intrusion in the lives of others causes hurt feelings and embarrassment.

The Finkels are identifiably and positively Jewish. *Ina* is from Israel, the family has *Shabbat* dinners, and the High Holidays are referenced. Particularly unique is the introduction of Sephardic cultural practices and some Ladino language in the course of family life.

Author Sarah Kapit masterfully depicts the challenges facing young people on the autism spectrum. Her compassionate characterizations of Lara and her family make *The Many Mysteries of the Finkel Family* an important addition to any collection that strives to include diverse stories. Her previous novel for the same age set, *Get a Grip, Vivy Cohen!*, expertly tackles autism through the lens of sports.

*Rena Citrin,*

*retired Library Director of Bernard Zell Anshe Emet Day School, Chicago; past member of the Sydney Taylor Book Award Committee*


Evie’s family owns and lives across the street from the local Jewish funeral home. Although she’s only twelve, Evie helps out at the funeral home making sure the pews are dusted and handing out tissues to mourners. She understands the importance of the work her parents do, and is determined to become a funeral director as an adult even though kids at school call her “corpse girl” and say she smells like death. One day her parents ask her to help with a boy named Oren whose parents were killed in a car accident. Try as she might to employ whatever comforting words she can, Oren is refusing to speak. After the *Shiva*, Evie’s parents and Oren’s uncle Jared (who now has custody of him) decide that since Oren is new to town, and Jared has to return to work, Oren will hang out at Evie’s for the summer. Determined to help him cope, Evie tries to get Oren to come out of his shell of grief. Through texts and gestures they find things to do like gardening, going to the movies, and quilling, an art form using rolled and shaped paper. Oren is convinced that the more he knows about the funeral home and what happens to the dead, the more it will help his grief process, so the two of them make sneak visits to the funeral home where Evie shows him the chapel, the caskets, the room where the *tabara* is performed, as well as the burial shrouds. Though she was adamant about not wanting to have any friends, over the summer Oren begins to work through his grief and a deep friendship is formed.

Levy notes that she drew on her real life experience of her father being a funeral director and that background rings true through this story. All the aspects of death and dying are handled sensitively and accurately, explaining the Jewish traditions very carefully and clearly. The funeral process is demystified while Evie shows Oren around the funeral home and the utmost respect is given to the deceased. Though this may be a difficult read for some, the care in discussing death and dying, family, friendships, and survivors’ guilt results in a touching story that is a delight to cry through.

*Rebecca Levitan,*

*Librarian II, Baltimore County Public Library, Pikesville Branch*


Batatrice (Bea) Gelman’s summer at Camp Shalom is not turning out the way she planned. Her “BFF” has gone to horse camp instead of coming along. Her long-time crush seems to be more interested in the one girl painfully shy Bea has become friends with. A pair of mean girls in her cabin are on a mission to humiliate her, and every time she gets embarrassed, she breaks out in hives. Bea is ready to give up on her dad’s advice to “look for the silver lining” for good.

At the infirmary, Bea meets the camp director’s son, Harry. He is friendly and funny, and he both offers support and calls Bea out when she tries to run away from her problems. Harry is living with a very serious illness, and his attitude inspires Bea to cultivate some “ometz lev” (courage) of her own.

Jewish content is naturally woven throughout the book. Most of the story takes place at a Jewish summer camp, where everyone says *hamotzi* over meals and attends weekly *Shabbat* services. Bea looks forward to her Bat Mitzvah, but complains about having to attend Hebrew school in addition to regular school because she “can only handle so much school, no matter how interesting the topics might be.”

Some facets of this explicitly Jewish setting might be unfamiliar

Continued on page 20
to some readers, who will appreciate the way Levy deftly provides explanations without slowing the scene with awkward text. For example, the fact of Camp Shalom’s kosher mess hall is noted when Bea reminds a fellow camper of why there is no cheese to put on the hot dogs at lunch.

The setting gives a Jewish context to the action, but the challenges Bea faces will be familiar to readers of all backgrounds. She must deal with bullies, clear up misunderstandings with friends, and overcome her shyness and self-consciousness. She is a realistic and relatable eleven-year-old girl who learns and grows in a delightful coming-of-age tale.

Beth Gallego, Children’s Librarian, Los Angeles Public Library, Los Angeles, CA


Paris Secrets is the third book in the Jake McGreevy series. Jake and his best friend, Ben Meyers, fly to Paris to enter a teen baking contest sponsored by Le Cordon Bleu cooking school. Jake has also found a family photo, taken in Paris in 1940, among his late mother’s belongings and is determined to find out what this picture meant to his mother and why she kept it. Jake and Ben find a woman they call Bubbe, who has the identical photograph. Surprisingly, Bubbe is Jake’s grandmother, Miriam’s, sister. Jake and Ben listen raptly as Bubbe tells the boys how during the Holocaust she was separated from her sisters and was sent to safety by her mother Dahlia who was working for the Resistance. On the back of each photograph Dahlia had written, “Our favorite place has a great treasure.” The boys, along with new friends they have made in Paris, search for the treasure. Holocaust history and the tragic losses of Jake’s family are background for the book, but the Holocaust information is not graphic and is not too explicit for a middle school student to handle. The Holocaust information is tempered by Jake’s clumsy, slapstick antics during the baking contest. Paris Secrets is an exciting page turner and an entertaining, enjoyable book to read. The characters are varied and complex. After many twists, turns and red herrings, the mystery comes to a surprise conclusion. The short author’s note and a section titled “Separating Fact From Fiction” presents more information about the Holocaust.

Ilka Gordon, Beachwood, OH


The title of this book contains a double meaning, as the word “drawn” pertains to both migrants who hope to cross into new lands and the author’s ink and watercolor illustrations that accompany his text throughout twelve heartbreaking personal stories. Butler employs the techniques of a war zone reporter, and while he primarily focuses on the human suffering and destruction in the embattled Middle East, he also delves into economic migration and urbanization in other parts of the world. He introduces us to Tajiks who spend six months a year in Russia, accepting their deplorable living conditions in order to provide for families at home. When he is denied access to the Rohingya Camps in Myanmar he instead lives among the lesser known Arkanese people, nomads who travel from place to place, looking for places to dig for oil.

In Serbia he witnesses the ever-present cold that prompts refugees to burn whatever materials they can find in order to stay warm. Wherever Butler goes he befriends people, some of whom are initially reluctant to have him draw their portraits but many of whom prove eager to share their tragic circumstances. At a field hospital in Syria where a boy has recently lost his mother, his brother, and his leg, an onlooker says “these are the sorts of scenes the world should see.” While this collection is not for the faint of heart, it is remarkable to observe the generosity of spirit and the human resilience on display in the most desperate situations. People yearn to return home, even when that home is no longer safe or has been destroyed. Jewish readers should know that Butler visits both Gaza and the West Bank and is unsparing toward Israel in his reporting of restrictions placed upon Palestinians. While his focus is understandably on modern-day migrants, Jews have been displaced so many times throughout history and have faced atrocities comparable to the ones described here. Should Butler’s book be included in a unit of study on migration, one would hope that a balanced set of resources be provided and historical perspective included.

Gloria Koster, School Librarian (retired from New Canaan, CT Public Schools); children’s author; member of the Children’s Book Committee of Bank Street College of Education

Continued on page 21

High school senior Eran Sharon was a toddler when he and his *Eema* moved to Texas. He knows his parents left Israel for New York before he was born, but nothing else about his father. His mother refuses to speak of him, leaving Eran wondering what happened, who the man was, and what they might share.

When Eran organizes a peaceful protest against a new police traffic stop initiative, it is disrupted by counter-protestors. Video of Eran’s mother pulling him away from the scene goes viral. A reporter calls with questions about Eran’s father, an alleged terrorist responsible for a bombing in New York fifteen years earlier.

Eran struggles to come to terms with his new understanding of his father while also being thrust into the public eye. Friends, neighbors, and total strangers seem to want to hold him and his mother responsible for a tragedy they had no part in. He faces anti-Semitic and anti-immigration rhetoric in scenes that could be drawn from current news stories, down to the man in a Trump hat shouting, “Anchor baby!”

Eran identifies strongly as a cultural rather than religious Jew. He connects his Judaism to his commitment to social justice, explaining to a more traditionally observant friend, “Judaism is protest!” He recalls their confirmation class, asking, “Remember Rabbi Cassel telling us it was impossible to be a good Jew without questioning authority?”

Intercut with Eran’s narrative are chapters from the perspective of classmate and new friend Jade. She helps him cope with the upheaval while simultaneously trying to answer questions about her own family history.

This secondary story occasionally throws off the pacing, but it provides a valuable outside perspective of the events Eran relates. A Black girl in a Baptist family, Jade examines how to be an ally even when loved ones are on the other side. Her experiences parallel Eran’s; they are both trying to figure out who they are, how the past has shaped them, and what kind of person they want to be going forward.

What Makes Us is a powerful and timely exploration of identity, family, and truth.

Beth Gallego, Children’s Librarian, Los Angeles Public Library, Los Angeles, CA


Tally (Talia) and Max are twin high school seniors embarking on a two week trip to Israel during their winter break. Max has been withdrawn and depressed since he survived a car accident that killed the driver. Tally is determined that this trip will help draw him out of that shell and he’ll apply to college with her like they had always planned. Trying to soldier through the anxiety that constantly plagues her, Tally does her best to make sure Max is enjoying the trip, while trying to navigate making new friends, figuring out liking, or not liking, the trip madrich (counselor), and seeing many of the highlights of a tour of Israel.

Although this novel has been the subject of hateful and anti-Zionist trolling on online book review sites, it’s actually a rather inoffensive Young Adult book that deals with grief, anxiety, and sexuality. Tally approaches the state of Israel with a skeptic’s eye saying “Israel is the only place in the world with a Jewish majority. Some believe this is important to give a voice in the global and political sphere to a whole group of people who have historically been persecuted. For some, it comes down to safety. But the truth is, many people don’t have such kind feelings toward Israel. And I get it.” She regards most of the historical sites with an academic view of the history and a clearly progressive eye to Jewish observance.

Set against the backdrop of an amazing high school trip, Once More with Chutzpah is an important addition to the spectrum of Jewish representations and stories.

Rebecca Levitan, Librarian II, Baltimore County Public Library, Pikesville Branch


It’s the summer before seventeen-year-old Abby Schoenberg’s senior year in high school. Her boyfriend Matt has just broken off their relationship, leaving Abby both hurt and at loose ends. Suddenly, a package arrives -- a box of letters belonging to her beloved, and recently deceased, O’ma (grandmother), setting the course for Abby’s summer adventures. Among the box’s contents are old love letters to O’ma from a mysterious “Edward” at
REVIEWS OF TITLES FOR CHILDREN AND TEENS

“Golden Doors” on Nantucket Island, a posh summer vacation spot off the Massachusetts coast.

"O’ma never spoke much about her past. All Abby’s family knows is that she arrived in America at age four from Nazi Germany as a refugee and was sheltered by a Jewish family in New York. With an unplanned summer before her, Abby finds a summer job on Nantucket, where she tracks down the now aging Edward Barbanel, whose family took in O’ma in 1938. She infiltrates Golden Doors, the family mansion, and in the course of her snooping has a fateful run-in with Noah, the handsome young scion of the Barbanel family. What ensues is a contest of wills between two stubborn young people — Abby, determined to learn when and why her grandmother and his grandfather broke up, and Noah, equally determined to protect his family from whatever Abby unearths.

But The Summer of Lost Letters isn’t just a mystery — it’s a summer romance novel, so Noah and Abby’s conflicting interests brush up against their powerful attraction to each other. Serious themes (family loyalty, Auschwitz) recede while summer parties with too much booze, skimpy red bikinis, and frivolous chatter about sex often take over: “I wouldn’t mind a summer fling.” … “Don’t worry, you can always make out with randos at beach parties.”

Perhaps some teenage readers will identify with Abby’s non-stop patter and overheated passion (“I ran with a low-key artsy/nerdy crowd”; “Noah was undeniably hot”), but thoughtful young readers deserve fewer clichés, and the book’s serious concerns about Jewish identity sit uneasily against a backdrop of summer escapism. An author’s note offers helpful background on the history of Sephardic Jewish settlement in New York and New England.

Marjorie Gann, Retired teacher, co-author (with Janet Willen) of Five Thousand Years of Slavery and Speak a Word for Freedom: Women Against Slavery
Toronto, Canada


While researching Hannah Senesh for a play she was writing, the author noticed a slim volume written in Yiddish script. Intrigued, she began reading “Women in the Ghettos,” a memoir compiled by unknown Jewish women — fearless “ghetto girls” — who fought the Nazis.

Batalion’s text, adapted from the more comprehensive adult book of the same title, describes the lives of fourteen of the twenty women in the adult version. Based on primary and secondary sources, it chronicles the heroic, critical roles the women played in their teens and early twenties. Because it was normal for women to be out doing errands during the day, it was easier for them to carry out their resistance, particularly those who didn’t look “too Jewish” and could pass as Christians. They

An unabashed love letter to fandom in all forms, Zoe Rosenthal is Not Lawful Good is the story of Zoe, a high school senior and secret fan of the sci-fi show Bleeders. When Zoe sneaks off with her “Christmakkah” money to DragonCon to see the premiere of Season 2 of Bleeders she falls into a friend group with other “Bloodygits” (as the fandom calls themselves). The group gels quickly and agrees to go to the next con together to support their show. Zoe, however, continues to keep her fandom a secret from her “Social Justice Warrior” boyfriend Simon, with whom she has plans to attend college together and who also vehemently disapproves of Bleeders (and possibly fun in all forms). Even though Zoe wants Simon to only see her “best” self, she’s further entrenched in trying to create grassroots support for Bleeders ultimately leading her to make the choice between Simon and his plans, or her own enjoyment and desires.

Though Zoe Rosenthal only has one or two mentions of anything related to Judaism, it’s a delightful read about finding your people, the power of fandom, embracing your joy, and creating your own path.

Rebecca Levitan, Librarian II, Baltimore County Public Library, Pikesville Branch

Holocaust and World War II


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Batalion’s text, adapted from the more comprehensive adult book of the same title, describes the lives of fourteen of the twenty women in the adult version. Based on primary and secondary sources, it chronicles the heroic, critical roles the women played in their teens and early twenties. Because it was normal for women to be out doing errands during the day, it was easier for them to carry out their resistance, particularly those who didn’t look “too Jewish” and could pass as Christians. They
were couriers and smugglers of food, medicine, weapons, IDs, information, and people in and out of the ghettos. They gathered intelligence, helped organize uprisings, participated in acts of sabotage, and paid off guards. They escaped the ghetto via sewers, built underground bunkers, bombed German trains, distracted Nazi guards with whiskey, and then killed them. Many women were killed for their resistance.

The book begins with a map and a helpful list of “who’s who,” giving each woman’s name, and in many cases, the location and the name of the underground group with which they were affiliated. An eight-page insert of mostly black-and-white photos connects the reader to the women. The final chapters discuss the lives of several of the women who survived the war, including their experiences of PTSD. The Epilogue describes the author’s trip to meet the children of several of the women. Backmatter includes an Author’s Note about her research methods, glossary, source notes, and suggested books for further reading, all at appropriate youth levels.

The level of scholarship in this book is outstanding. It is clear that the author was committed to bringing each of these women’s stories the attention it’s due. A simpler narrative with fewer subjects might have been advisable for younger readers unfamiliar with this aspect of the Holocaust. The book would make an excellent family book club or congregational read when paired with the adult version. For adults uninterested in the minutia of each resistance act, simply reading this adapted version would be fulfilling.

Debbie Colodny,
Cook Memorial Public Library District, Libertyville, IL (retired)
Former owner Sefer, So Good, and
Former member Sydney Taylor Book Award Committee


His short non-fiction book gives a detailed account of the plans made by a small group of German officers and civilians to assassinate Hitler, and what subsequently happened to the men and their families after the attempt failed. This account is based primarily on the diary of Christa von Hofacker, the daughter of one of the men who developed the plan named “Operation Valkyrie,” also known as the 20 July Plot. In the book’s Introduction, the author states that the diary was not Holocaust related, not about the military defeat of Germany, but rather a reminder “that there had been steadfast German resistance to the [Nazi] regime.”

To make clear that people both inside and outside the Nazi regime wanted Hitler dead, the book describes several attempts to assassinate Hitler during the war, all of which failed due to timing or defective equipment. The book then focuses on the 20 July Plot which almost succeeded. This attempt (fictionalized in the movie, Valkyrie) involved a German officer leaving a bomb-filled briefcase inside of the war room of Hitler’s bunker (the Wolf’s Lair). The bomb detonated, leaving one person dead and several injured - including Hitler.

Once it was certain that Hitler had survived, efforts were made by all conspirators to step away from the plot, but Hitler immediately began a search for everyone involved. Almost all the planners were discovered, put on “trial,” and executed. Their families — wives and children — were also rounded up and sent to prison or concentration camps. Many of the children were sent to the country, given new names, and separated from siblings in an effort to “re-educate” them. How the children survived is part miracle, part caring adults.

A Timeline, List of involved families, Resource Guide, Author’s and Research Notes, Bibliography, and Index are included in the back of the book.

While not a Holocaust book per se, like Someone Named Eva by Joan M. Wolf, Ensnared in the Wolf’s Lair gives a brutal and terrifying picture of the lengths Hitler would go to avenge himself and his closest allies. Literally doing everything possible to “erase” the families and their gene pools from the earth.

This is an excellent addition to a World War II collection, and an outstanding reference resource on life in Nazi Germany under Hitler.

Kathy Bloomfield
AJL President, Seal Beach, CA


Told in simple, understandable language, this is the story of Hédi and her dog Bodri, a gentle memoir that does not shy away from the basic facts of the Holocaust, while also not being frank and grotesque. Hédi and Bodri like to play with Marika and her dog Bandri. All is well until Hitler comes to power and Jewish Hédi and non-Jewish Marika are told they can no longer play together. Hédi’s family is sent from their homes, the abandoned dogs watching them as they leave on trains. Her parents disappear and Hédi and her sister Livia are cold and frightened as

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behind barbed wire. Bodri waits and waits as the leaves change until he is reunited with Hédi. She tells him about all the evil Hitler has done and how she and Livia have survived and will tell everyone what happened so it does not happen again.

Wirsén’s watercolor and ink illustrations beautifully accompany the story. Staying light and cheerful for most of the story, dark blues, purples, and browns are only used to highlight the appearance of Hitler and the Nazis, and though soldiers and barbed wire are depicted, the artwork is not too terrifying. A note at the end explains that some events were changed to make the story more clear and universal.

In the myriad of Holocaust stories out there, especially ones that involve an animal, this one stands out in its honesty and simplicity. A true story that is told from the human perspective, while still caring for the pet, is an excellent introduction to survivor’s stories.

Rebecca Levitan, Librarian II, Baltimore County Public Library, Pikesville Branch


Jakob and his guardian, Herr Engel, are taking care of twelve Lipizzaner stallions for the Spanish Riding School in Vienna, Austria. As this story opens, Jakob, a young Jewish boy, is hiding in a stable in Austria. A group of Nazis is combing the farm looking for him, and they almost do. Fortunately, they are called away on an urgent mission before they reach Jakob’s hiding place. Unfortunately, the frustrated commanding officer — in a rage — shoots Jakob’s horse before they leave. There is a visceral response of fear, shock, anger, and sadness while reading these frightening and tragic incidents.

Following this turn of events, Herr Engel decides that the stallions must be returned to Vienna for their protection. However, the only way to reach Vienna is by riding through forests, over mountains, and across battlefields, while keeping themselves and the horses hidden. Jakob, Herr Engel, and Kizzy (an orphaned Roma girl also in hiding) bravely, and ultimately successfully, attempt this journey. Through all the hardships and surprises, the horses, Jakob and Kizzy are saved.

The Nazis wanted to breed the perfect war horse, so they set their sights on the Lipizzaner Stallions housed at the Spanish Riding School in Vienna, Austria. There are numerous accounts and a Disney movie (Miracle of the White Stallions), based on this same story. General Patton appears in this book as the savior of the horses — this is a fact, although somewhat modified.

This retelling is pure fiction, but exciting and engaging. Young readers will find themselves caring deeply for the characters — including the horses — all of which are well fleshed out with interesting back stories. The book brings to mind The Winter Horses by Phillip Kerr, but instead of Przewalski’s Horses, this tale is concerned with saving Lipizzaner Stallions from the Nazis.

A unique addition to the Holocaust bookshelf, this will be a must-read for any horse lover.


The prolific and powerful Kathy Kacer has written about many aspects of World War II. This book, the fourth in her series highlighting the heroism of young people in the dark days of World War II, describes the Jews’ escape from Denmark and the people who made it possible.

Sixteen-year-old Henny Sinding has grown up on the water. Her father operates a supply boat, the Gerda III, that serves the Danish islands from their home in Copenhagen. In the summer of 1943, however, the Nazis tighten their hold on the country. Henny’s friend Lukas has joined the Resistance, and Henny accompanies him on several missions around the city, without telling her parents.

On Rosh Hashanah, the enemy begins to round up the Jews of Denmark. In response, Henny becomes a savior, ferrying her Jewish neighbors — and later many others — across the Oresund to safety in Sweden. The story includes the two young men who serve as Gerda’s crew and volunteer to help Henny on her mission. The climax of the novel is their first perilous late-night trip, including an encounter with a pair of Nazi soldiers at the pier.

This book is similar to Lois Lowry’s Number the Stars, the 1989 Sydney Taylor Award winner, told from the rescuer’s perspective. Kacer’s story is based on the exploits of the real Henny (and her boat — which is now at Mystic Seaport in Connecticut), who took about 300 people to Sweden on 20 journeys. Her saga should resonate with this generation of middle school readers. The language is appropriate for middle-school, and the danger is clear but not too frightening.

Fred Isaac, Temple Sinai, Oakland, CA

Continued on page 25
Welcome to this charming picture book about the diversity in Israel! A young girl with red eyeglasses and black braids acts like a tour guide as she describes the people of modern Israel—Jews, Christians, Muslims; Arab and “European” Israelis, Beta Israel, and Bedouins. These people live in various landscapes of the country: the Negev desert, kibbutzim, and cities such as Jerusalem and Tel Aviv. Our guide tells the reader of some of the occupations that people follow, such as farming, high-tech, and the arts. Adding a touch of whimsy, she mentions the many cats in Jerusalem and how people take care of them.

The design of this book is well suited for different ages. One can read two short rhyming stanzas on the left-hand side of the double spread and/or peruse the easily digestible informative paragraph on the right side. The colorful illustrations, created digitally with Photoshop, are filled with the hustle and bustle of the cities, or the peaceful quiet of the desert or the kibbutz. The last illustration in this book is a repetition of the cover, where one can view the various people standing side by side who live and work in modern-day Israel. Finally, the end papers—white sketches on a blue background—repeat the motifs presented inside the book. For another “tour” of Israel, see Leslie A. Kimmelman’s Everybody Says Shalom (Random House, 2015).

The poetic text shows the mother cherishing her newborn, “Your ten tiny fingers that hold mine so tight, Your sweet-smelling hair and your breath soft and light.” The vinyl-coated laminated pages are durable and will resist tears and stains. The illustrations show the men and boys wearing kippot and tzitzit as is seen in Orthodox homes. There are a few words in Yiddish which add to the poetry and beauty of the text. These words are translated opposite the title page, but they will be familiar to many Jewish families.

Ellen Share, Washington Hebrew Congregation, Washington, D.C.


Prolific author Helaine Becker has teamed up with award-winning illustrator, Omer Hoffmann, to produce a fast-paced, humorous fictional account of how the iconic British meal, fish and chips, was created. Here’s the story: Joseph Malin loves his grandmother’s fried fish. It’s so good he thinks he might be able to make some money from it—money that his immigrant Jewish family desperately needs. He takes the fried fish into the marketplace of nineteenth-century London’s East End. Before long, people are flocking from far and wide to try this delicious fish. Competition arises when Annette, the greengrocer across the street, sees an opportunity to sell her own family’s favorite, Belgian-style fried potatoes. The conflict and ultimate resolution between Joseph and Annette demonstrate how inventions are often the result of accidents but, even more importantly, this story shows the value of cooperation.

The comic-like illustrations—pencils used for line art and textures; digital coloring — are amusing and capture the atmosphere of the lively marketplace. (Young readers will enjoy looking for a white goose in most of the illustrations.) An interesting note within the text is that fish cooked this way still tastes good when eaten cold on the Sabbath. An author’s note traces the origin of this fried fish recipe to the Spanish Jews fleeing from the Inquisition. A tasty addition is the author’s family recipe for “Fried Fish in the Jewish Tradition.”

Anne Dublin, Retired teacher-librarian, Holy Blossom Temple, Author of Jacob and the Mandolin Adventure (Second Story Press), Toronto

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The author of this self-published children’s book is an educator who says the book “deals with the meaning of life and how recent events, such as social unrest and the pandemic, can be reconciled through the Jewish paradigm.” It is a father’s attempt to convey values to children within rhyming couplets such as: “Oh, you must be careful with the words that you speak. Words have power! They make us strong or weak.” He has illustrated it nicely with dreamy computer-generated illustrations, some more successful than others. With didactic, but earnest rhymes, “Yes, love and hate cannot mix, Tikkun Olam — that’s the power to fix,” this book will appeal more to parents than small children, but the final message of family togetherness is lovely.

Lisa Silverman,
Retired Library Director, Sperber Jewish Community Library, Los Angeles Co-Editor, Children’s and Teen Literature, AJL News and Reviews

The story is pleasant and the energy of the children is fun, but it seems that the author is trying to fit so much into one story that it feels a bit disjointed. For instance, there is an entire page at the end about how to sing and sign the Shema, but this was taught and mentioned for only a sentence or two in the entire book, with no accompanying illustration. The idea of an elderly Russian immigrant who helps out and knows a lot about Jewish ritual is also not explored, nor is the meaning of Adon Olam, which is mentioned as Josh’s sister’s favorite song. There is a tacked-on glossary where these things are explained, but it feels a bit late for the typical reader. Also, the frantic pace of the two siblings racing around the shul on Shabbat interrupting people feels a bit strange, even though the sense of belonging and comfort the children have within their community is conveyed well. The illustrations are cartoon-like, featuring wide-eyed children (all males wearing kippot) who look more appealing than the depictions of the elderly members of the congregation.

Lisa Silverman,
Retired Library Director, Sperber Jewish Community Library, Los Angeles Co-Editor, Children’s and Teen Literature, AJL News and Reviews


T his reboot of Emily Sper’s 2006 book, The Kids’ Fun Book of Jewish Time, colorfully and engagingly presents the concept of the Judaic lunar calendar and is replete with information about the days of the week, the Jewish calendar, seasons, holidays, observances, counting, the Hebrew alphabet and quotes from Hebrew text. The bold text includes the Hebrew terms with both transliterations and translations that will allow a reader to share the abundant information in the text easily. The amount of information contained in this picture book is staggering! Hebrew is introduced, including the pronunciation of the letters and vowels, and the letters’ relationship to numbers. Days of the week and the months of the year are explained. The holidays in relation to the Hebrew calendar are examined both in terms of significance of when they occur as well as the unique observances and history for each. The counting concept in the text includes days, months, and the Days of the Omer and the significance of particular days within that period.

All About Jewish Time is a different reading experience than the...
Klezmer!

The illustrations are bold and graphic and were designed by the author using Adobe Illustrator and beautifully support the text. Although this is a picture book, the information is appropriate for children of all ages, and even beyond.

The author includes the quote from Kokelet “To everything there is a season, and a time for every experience under heaven, ” and “Teach us to count our days so we may gain a heart of wisdom (Psalm 90),” this delightful book shows us how we can accomplish both!

Ellen Drucker-Albert
Co-editor, Children’s and Teen Literature, AJL News and Reviews; Manager, Adult & Information Services, Cold Spring Harbor Library & Environmental Center, Cold Spring Harbor, NY


From the first page to the last, this picture book jumps out at the reader with the joy of making. The plot is straightforward. A young clarinetist travels to visit her grandparents in New York City’s Lower East Side. When she arrives, she joins them and several other musicians as they exuberantly play klezmer tunes. The message: “This sound is alive / with soul, / with joy, / with life ....”

As a read-aloud, Klezmer! might be problematic, for the rhythm and rhyme are uneven. However, the colorful illustrations along with photos combined in varied collage layouts enhance the text. The end matter includes an article, “About Klezmer Music,” as well as a QR code where one can listen to Yale Strom and the band, Hot Pastrami, perform the Yiddish classic, “Alle Brider.” To complement this picture book, see Allison and Wayne Marks’ rollicking novel, Benny Feldman’s All-Star Klezmer Band (Green Bean, 2020).

Anne Dublin,
Retired teacher-librarian, Holy Blossom Temple, Author of Jacob and the Mandolin Adventure (Second Story Press), Toronto


Growing up in the cosmopolitan city of Venice in the late 1500s, young Judah is filled with curiosity about the world around him. One day, observing the comings and goings in his bustling city, he has a chance encounter with the painter Tintoretto, who shows him his studio. Unlike his friends, Judah is keen to learn about the lives of Venetians outside the Jewish ghetto, setting the pattern for the man he will become — the worldly Rabbi Judah Aryeh, also known as Rabbi Leon of Modena. Tintoretto would also be unconventional: “He ignored the rules of perspective and natural color to create as much emotion as he could,” defying the norms of his time.

Shoshana Weiss also builds her speculative story around the painter and the rabbi’s shared nonconformity. There is no real evidence for the “encounters” between them; the scene in which Tintoretto consults with the rabbi about the accuracy of his painting of the Last Supper is based only on a story the author heard from a docent at the Museo Hebraico di Venezia and on happenstance: the two lived not far from each other in Venice. Though an author’s note provides biographical information on both men and an honest account of the hardships of life for Venetian Jews, Weiss goes further: “It is nice to think that perhaps these two men ignored society’s rules at that time and forged a friendship based on a shared outlook. The true story is lost to history, but for now we can imagine what could have been.” Applying a twentieth-century human rights gloss to a sixteenth-century culture steeped in Christian triumphalism is questionable, and may leave the young reader with a distorted picture of Christian-Jewish relations of the time.

Jennifer Kirkham’s cheerful, digitally-rendered narrative paintings illustrate the story closely. They capture the lively scenes in Venice’s open-air marketplace and the feel of walking the pavements that border Venice’s canals. But the cartoon-like expressions on people’s faces (U-shaped smiles and vertical-slit eyes) and the beautifully-textured flat surfaces of buildings and clothing evoke a fairy-tale atmosphere, rather than the more serious truth: that a friendship between representatives of two alienated communities was atypical for that time in history.

Marjorie Gann,
Retired teacher, co-author (with Janet Willen) of Five Thousand Years of Slavery and Speak a Word for Freedom: Women Against Slavery (Tundra/Penguin Random House) Toronto, Canada

Continued on page 27
Breskin Zalben reminds young readers that America is a land made up of immigrants. Jewish protagonist Evie Gold watches a new family move into her neighborhood and introduces herself to their son, Bimi Said, who seems to be about her age. Evie, whose father wears a kippah, remembers that her own grandparents had once been immigrants and she welcomes Bimi warmly. The fact that she and her family are Jewish and Bimi and his family are Muslim does not stand in her way. She is not concerned that the new family’s skin tone is different from hers; all she sees is a family who needs to forge new relationships and make new friends.

Like Evie, other neighbors rally around bringing Bimi and his family useful items which will help them settle comfortably into their new life as they had been required to leave their previous home abruptly with little time to pack. Lamps, a table, quilts, and other home goods are donated, notably including a welcome mat and extra chairs as the neighbors are sure Bimi’s family will become part of the community and will, in their turn, host others. Evie gives Bimi her teddy bear so he will feel comforted in his unfamiliar surroundings. The welcoming neighbors are a diverse group; only Mrs. Monroe seems hesitant and uncomfortable with the new arrivals. Evie’s parents remark that she must have forgotten her own immigrant background. But when her grocery bag rips and the children run to help, Mrs. Monroe warms up and joins the crowd of neighbors gathered around the table to welcome the Said family.

Richly colored illustrations in deep, glowing tones provide additional warmth and eye-appeal to the story. The diversity of the group, an essential component of the story, is gently emphasized in the illustrations, making an important albeit quiet statement. Facial expressions convey character and a sense of good-natured warmth pervades each page.

A Bear for Bimi is an outstanding addition to both classroom and home libraries and will encourage discussion about kindness, sharing, diversity, and expanding one’s world.

Michal Hoschander Malen, Retired librarian; Current library volunteer in Efrat, Israel; Editor of children’s and young adult book reviews for the Jewish Book Council
Nonfiction


Two children, Sophie and Thomas, investigate the origins, holy books, important personalities and places, beliefs and practices of Jews, Christians, and Muslims. This review will only examine the information on Judaism which is interspersed throughout the book.

The book is poorly written and edited. There are many awkward phrases and disjointed discussions of concepts in addition to incorrect information. The ideas are important, but the explanations are badly executed, and the reader may not fully understand the Jewish position or practice. A glaring example is on page 35 in a discussion of tefillin. Jews do not wear “a tefillin” and they are not “hung” on the forehead and the arm. It is important to use the proper terminology with regard to rituals. Rabbis are not appointed by God as suggested on page 38. The text states that the Jewish religion is passed down “from mother to son” and dismisses daughters, when actually any child of a Jewish mother is Jewish. The discussion of preparing Jewish boys for Bar Mitzvah also omits mention of girls and Bat Mitzvah celebrations. The section of Jewish marriage explains the breaking of a glass (which doesn’t need to be a wine glass as stated; anything glass will suffice) states that this custom represents the fragility of marriage, but in actuality it is to remind us of the destruction of the Holy Temple. There are many more problems within the explanations and definitions.

The term “believers” is used throughout the text when referring to those who follow the customs of their religion. It is an awkward term which comes across as being condescending and trite in this examination of three major religions.

The inaccuracies and lack of good editing make this work unacceptable for all public and private libraries. The cartoon-like illustrations are cute and lively showing children discovering their religion. There are also various terms and definitions spread throughout the text in addition to a glossary at the end which also includes inaccuracies.

Some paragraphs include a discussion of a specific custom or practice of all three religions, and it is not clear to which tradition the reference is being made. This simplistic study of religions is inadequate. The original publication was in French, and perhaps the translation is one of the problems with the textual inaccuracies.

Rachel Glasser, Retired Librarian, Teaneck, NJ

Shabbat And Holidays


At Hanukkah time, many educators of small children are generally on the lookout for the type of explanatory book about the holiday that is simple enough for young listeners but also has nice large and historically accurate illustrations that would work nicely for a good storytime session. This excellent “Big Golden Book” does just that and is also a good choice for a holiday gift. The appealing family depicted on the cover consists of a “Disneyesque” looking mom and dad, big sister, baby brother, and grandma, all gathered around a lit chanukiah with lots of blue and white Jewish symbols in the forefront. The opening page features the bright-eyed family again and simply states: “Tonight we celebrate Hanukkah, the Festival of Lights. We light the menorah.” As mom reads the kids a bedtime story, the narration continues: “We celebrate Hanukkah for eight nights. But why?” And thus begins the retelling of the story of Hanukkah, and King Antiochus, who “did not like the Jewish people because they did not dress, eat, or pray the same way he did.” All in all, this fine addition to the Big Golden Book series is a good choice for young children as an introduction to the holiday of Hanukkah. The large, bright, cheery illustrations, along with the simplicity of the text add to the appeal.

Lisa Silverman, Retired Library Director, Sperber Jewish Community Library, Los Angeles Co-Editor, Children’s and Teen Literature, AJL News and Reviews


In a new book from the author who gave us some beloved Hanukkah titles, we get a trickster tale that entertains, but doesn’t measure up to the standard of his other works. Kimmel’s three different-colored latkes each brags that they are the most special. A clever cat is called in to judge the dispute with predictable results — none of the latkes live to tell who

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was actually the superior treat. The latkes and the cat have personalities expressed as much through the illustrations as the text. The setting with its Hanukkah decorations will look like home to a lot of kids. This is an easy and amusing title suitable for reading aloud, but one cannot help but notice the unsuccessful elements of the story. Actual gold and yellow potatoes are the same thing, and red-skinned potatoes have white flesh: one wonders how these retained their colors after cooking, and why more distinct varieties of vegetable weren’t used. The yellow latke, which is fried in schmaltz, is subsequently dipped in sour cream, a kosher faux pas. And skeptical children will wonder why these latkes were dumb enough to offer themselves to the cat for tasting to begin with.

Aviva Rosenberg,  
Children’s Librarian, Ridgefield Public Library, Ridgefield, NJ


Maddie has recently moved to Israel with her family and is excited to celebrate the unique Ethiopian Jewish holiday of Sigd with her new friend Orly while still observing the traditional Thanksgiving with her own family traditions. Certain ingredients needed for her pumpkin pie are nearly impossible to find in Israel, and Maddie approaches her Jewish neighbors who have moved from other countries including India, Ukraine, and Mexico for appropriate substitutions while using pictures to cross the language barrier and thereby creating an international celebration of neighbors. Maddie is introduced to the kess, the Ethiopian rabbi, and feels welcomed and involved with her new friend and community.

Sigd celebrates the day God first spoke to Moses and is marked today by fasting, reciting psalms, and reading from the Torah followed by a festive meal with singing and dancing on the 24th day of the Hebrew month of Marcheshvan. It was declared an official Israeli holiday in 2008 and is an opportunity to show gratitude and think about the good things in our lives, similar to Thanksgiving.

The bright simple illustrations portray dark skin individuals for the Ethiopian Jews in both modern and traditional dress. The story is upbeat and inclusive. Children can identify with the ideas of moving to a new community far from familiar life and loved ones as well as new customs and foods.

Rachel Glasser,  
Retired Librarian, Teaneck, NJ


Sarah Siegel, the girl with the “super-nose” (she can smell an etrog buried in a pile of lemons from blocks away), is back in another delightful story in this new easy chapter book series from Apples and Honey Press. The first book, Once Upon an Apple Cake, was a National Jewish Book Award finalist centered on Rosh Hashanah. This one tackles the holiday of Sukkot.

Saralee’s quirky family still runs the Siegel House restaurant in an imaginary small town consisting mainly of Jewish people. The holidays are always a big deal and Saralee’s grandfather Zaide challenges her to come up with an exceptional new dish to serve in the restaurant’s sukkah. The difference between this second book of the series and the first is that this relies heavily on magical realism. Saralee creates an enchanted soup from starlight that tastes wonderfully different to each person, but she learns quickly that magic cannot always be controlled as one wishes. But just like the restaurant patrons, young readers will eat this up happily. The business rivalry between Siegel House and Perfection on a Platter is again a theme here, as is the friendship between Saralee and Harold, her best friend and fellow restaurateur. Sukkot traditions are introduced seamlessly into the plot and the illustrations are perfect for this type of series chapter book. Let’s hope the author has another holiday in mind for a third book about this fun Jewish family starring Saralee and her fabulous sniffer.

Lisa Silverman,  
Retired Library Director, Sperber Jewish Community Library, Los Angeles 
Co-Editor, Children’s and Teen Literature, AJL News and Reviews


The meaning and significance of the story of Passover is explained through the framework of “The Four Questions” (which appear in Hebrew calligraphy and in English translation) traditionally asked by the youngest child at the Seder. Exquisitely detailed paintings by Ori Sherman, set against a black background, depict richly

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colored scenes of anthropomorphized lions reading the Haggadah, monkeys drinking wine, elephants eating matzah, and whales serving the meal. Readers will pour over these bizarre and interesting illustrations, turning the book upside down to focus on the split-frame pictures from a different perspective.

This reprint is almost identical to the 1989 original published by Dial. The text is still long and dense, though more aesthetically pleasing with a larger, more spaced out font and more white space. Adults may appreciate the new appended note by Ori Z. Soltes, a professor at Georgetown University, but the extremely sophisticated vocabulary and academic references make it completely inaccessible to children. More of an art book than a Passover picture book, this is nonetheless a unique offering that can now be enjoyed by a new generation of readers. Pair with Koren’s pop-up edition of The Bird’s Head Haggada for a stylish gift for older children who find the Afikomen.

Rachel Kamin,
North Suburban Synagogue Beth El,
Highland Park, IL


In this sweet, rhyming tale, Ben is tasked with fetching an egg from the chicken pen for his mother who is busy in the kitchen. In attempting to fulfill this request, Ben learns through his efforts on Sunday morning, and on every subsequent morning until Friday, the various ways an egg can break — by playing, holding it too tightly, running, or trying to peek inside. Each day he returns home without an egg and sadly reports his failure to his mother. He fears she’ll be angry, but instead she comforts him and points out that each day he’s learning. Finally on Friday morning, Ben is successful in his task and he and his mother enjoy Shabbat with a challah glistening with the wash from Ben’s egg.

This tidy story is surprisingly packed with important themes that should spark thought and discussion, such as Ben’s eagerness to help, his persistence, his learning from his mistakes, his mother’s compassion, patience and forgiveness, and their well-earned Shabbat. The language, word choice, repetition and rhymes are catchy and satisfying. The illustrations are straightforward and enduring, clearly rendering the daily events in graphic novel style panels and speech bubbles, and an assortment of adorably colorful chickens is a visual delight. This mother/daughter duo has created a charming celebration of Shabbat for young readers.


Jane Yolen has taken the Rosh Hashanah tradition of eating a new fruit on the second night of Rosh Hashanah and creates a tale of young Becca, who adamantly, and rather impolitely, refuses to try any new foods. Written in the poetic style of rhythmic quatrains with a second line of mostly repeats, we are introduced to Becca, who, when encouraged to try new foods, will respond with a firm “No!” “Yuck!” “Ick!” or “Never!” Her parents try to encourage her by example, her Papa suggesting he may shave his mustache (to which she also objects) and her Mama taking up a new hobby of knitting. Becca refuses anything that tastes like meat, smelly fish, Bubble’s brisket, chicken soup, kugel, and honey cake. However, for some unexplained reason (even though she had previously rejected “things green, never green. Not a lettuce leaf or bean. Especially if they’re new”) she decides to eat “[t]he biggest green bean ever seen.” Becca even asks for another one and states “[a]nd next year my New Year’s wish, New Year’s wish, New Year’s wish will be to try gefilte fish!”

The illustrations are colorful and cartoonish, and red-haired, rosy-cheeked Becca is joined, and her expressions mimicked by her Mama. Foods depicted in the text and illustrations are traditional Ashkanazi fare, but apples only appear on a salad and honey is absent. Oddly, both Shabbat meals depicted show lit candles on the table, which is an error, if the second meal is a Shabbat lunch. Back matter contains a note about the Rosh Hashanah holiday, explaining the traditional greeting, significance of some of the holiday’s foods, notes that a special prayer book is used and the shofar is sounded. The text itself does not contain much substance relating to Rosh Hashanah, but young children may identify with Becca as a reluctant eater who eventually decides to try something new.

Ellen Drucker-Albert
Co-editor, Children’s and Teen Literature, AJL News and Reviews;
Manager, Adult & Information Services,
Cold Spring Harbor Library & Environmental Center,
Cold Spring Harbor, NY

Martha McMahon
Sinai Akiba Academy, Los Angeles, CA

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Yuval Harari
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WSUPRESS.Wayne.EDU

Using archival resources as well as many interviews, Dr. Anthony, director of the Visiting Scholars program at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, sets clearly the historical background to her work. She describes vividly the life of Jewish survivors in the years immediately after the Holocaust. Many of them lived in Vienna in hiding during the Holocaust, and many returned from camps, from hiding in forests and from countries to which they had escaped before the outbreak of the World War II. Anthony attempts to explain who all those who returned were and why and how they managed, or did not, to reestablish their lives in this Austrian city. She delves into the many challenges they faced and how and why many succeeded and others immigrated.

This scholarly work belongs in academic libraries.


*Hebrew Infusion* won the 2020 National Jewish Book Award in Education and Jewish Identity. This fascinating book is a sociolinguistic study of the usage and influence of Hebrew language in Jewish summer camps from the 1940s until today. The authors’ meticulous research includes interviews with campers, former campers, administrators and educators. Archival photographs of campers holding or reading signs in Hebrew block letters or Hebrew script illustrate some of the pedagogical methods. An entire chapter is devoted to camp Massad, and its dedicated founders, Sholomo and Rivka Shulsinger, whose vision and accomplishments were the inspiration for many Hebrew language-rich camps today.

Two types of Hebrew language practices in the camps are presented here: immersion and infusion. In immersion summer camps, campers and staff speak Hebrew exclusively and campers are given prizes if they speak only Hebrew amongst themselves. Camp Massad and Camp Ramah exemplify this practice. However, most camps today provide Hebrew infusion. Infusion takes many forms. In Hebrew language-rich summer camps, such as Moshava and Ramah, announcements are made in Hebrew. Many summer camps have their own specialized vocabulary which the authors call Camp Hebraized Hebrew (CHE) and Hebrew loanwords, such as madrich (counselor), tzrif (bunk). A few camps add English plurals to Hebrew words, such as brachot instead of *braches* (blessings) and chugs instead of *chugim* (clubs). Some educators believe that CHE is detrimental to the Hebrew language proficiency of the campers, while others believe that any Hebrew words introduced in summer camp will foster a love of Hebrew and a connection to Israel.

Copious notes on each chapter, references and an index are found at the end of the book. Anyone who has fond memories of summer camp will love this book and feel nostalgic about the engaging descriptions of life at summer camp.

Ilka Gordon, former Camp Massad camper, Beachwood, OH


*Mussar* teaches us how to integrate useful ethical concepts into our daily life. This book on the subject contains commentaries on each *Torah* portion written by 55 individuals (mostly rabbis). Each chapter is well edited to form a coherent whole. An ethical concept (middah) is discussed for each *parasha* (weekly Torah portion) and the author shows the ways in which the narrative illustrates the concept. The author also provides questions for the reader to think about the concept further and how to practice it. Another middah is presented that connects the reader to other parts of the *Torah* and to other ethical concepts. Every chapter is footnoted and has notes to refer the reader to texts in the Talmud, Bible, later rabbinic writings and modern thinkers.

This book particularly encourages the reader to think about key ethical concepts such as *zvelek* (justice), *emet* (truth), *savlanut* (patience), and *hakarat hatov* (acknowledging the good) through the lens of Torah. Since there are 39 concepts and 54 Torah portions overall, some concepts are found in multiple chapters. The Mussar concepts are presented here: immersion and infusion. In immersion summer camps, campers and staff speak Hebrew exclusively and campers...
discussed here additionally provide insights into the development of the human spirit over time, and they offer readers ways to connect to the *Torah* on a personal ethical and behavioral level, to cultivate their own character, and to improve their life.

Even though this is a CCAR publication, Jews of all affiliations and non-Jews will find this book meaningful. The book is written for everyone who wants to integrate ethical and moral concepts into their understanding of the weekly *Torah* portions. This book is highly recommended for personal, synagogue, and academic libraries.

Daniel D. Stuhlman, Temple Sholom Library, Chicago, IL


Rabbi Yechiel Mikhel Epstein’s *Arukh HaShulhan* was a major Jewish code of law reworking the *Shulhan Arukh*. Epstein (1829–1908) composed this work while serving as a congregational rabbi in the regional center of Novogrudok, Belorussia. Covering all sections of Jewish law, it was published serially between 1884–1907.

Michael J. Broyde and Shlomo C. Pill examine the methodology behind Epstein’s halachic analysis. Broyde, a former long-time pulpit rabbi and Director of the Beth Din of America is currently Professor of Law at Emory University and Director of its Center for the Study of Law and Religion. Pill is a Senior Lecturer at the Center.

The first chapter of the book traces the history of the codification of Jewish law from the period of the Talmud up to the eighteenth century. The authors explore next why Epstein and Rabbi Israel Meir Kagan, the author of the *Mishneh Berurah*, writing in the same period as Epstein, felt the need to compose new major codes of Jewish law. In the third chapter they compare the methodology of the two works.

The middle chapters of the book provide a broad overview of ten legal and halachic principles Epstein applied in reaching decisions, with individual chapters providing a deep examination of how each principle is applied. The final section of the book provides a close examination of 204 individual decisions in Epstein’s *Orach Chaim* section of the *Arukh HaShulhan*, dealing with daily and holiday halacha.

Broyde and Pill argue that Epstein was committed to reaching new decisions based on a fresh reading of Talmudic discussions, but he also deferred to the consensus of classic rabbinic authority and contemporary practice. Influenced by Kabbalistic practices and local *minhag*, he encouraged heightened religious piety but felt that law was practiced by real people, and he regularly considered social, economic, and societal difficulties, at times ruling leniently.

This book will be of interest to yeshiva and academic libraries and law collections.

Harvey Sukenic, Hebrew College Library, Newton Centre, MA


Rabbi Shai Cherry is a former academic, now serving a congregation near Philadelphia. His book, *Coherent Judaism*, is an attempt to resolve contradictions he sees between Jewish history, theology, and halakhah.

The volume is divided into three books. Book One examines six distinct periods of Jewish theological understanding from the biblical period through to modern day. Cherry begins with Biblical Judaism, which he divides into Priestly and Mosaic religion. He then examines “Rabbinic religiosity” and the “Medieval Centrifuge,” followed by the “Modern Mix” of the 19th century (including Mendelssohn, Hasidism, and Hermann Cohen); the section concludes with Covenantal Judaism in our own time (focusing on Kaplan, Heschel, and Tamar Ross). Book Two considers the story of Creation from four perspectives. These are also arranged somewhat historically; they include Rabbinic theology; mysticism; and “Nature Read in Truth and Awe” – beginning with Darwin. The author finishes with the views of several contemporary writers, most prominently Hans Jonas, Arthur Green and Bradley Artson. In the four chapters of Book Three, Cherry uses the constructs he has developed to elaborate his own theological concepts. His re-formulation includes historical analysis, biblical and contemporary context, and the social/sociological relevance of halakhah in our time. In his conclusion, the author proposes his own unification of the various strains of thought and halakhah, using kashrut and food as the direct examples of his analysis.

Rabbi Cherry has taken on a daunting task and made a serious argument for re-thinking Jewish law and practice in contemporary society. Despite utilizing a wide range of sources, most of which are relatively accessible, the text is not impossibly dense. *Coherent Judaism* should be considered by all seminaries and graduate-level libraries. It should elicit useful discussions among rabbis and scholars, and their students.

Fred Isaac, Temple Sinai, Oakland, CA

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REVIEWS OF TITLES FOR ADULTS


This book explores ways in which future generations, following the more direct testimonial experiences of Holocaust survivors, can maintain active engagement with Holocaust histories. Costello calls for an in-depth gendered analysis of the manner in which the Holocaust has been memorialized and invites the use of rhetoric and performative considerations. Divided into five major chapters, the book draws on theorists like Sara Ahmed, Marianne Hirsh, Gloria Anzaldúa and many others, and suggests that the performative nature of enacting public memory in Holocaust Studies can benefit from widening the historic use of diaries, letters, memoirs, and photographs. Given the influences of digital technology and media, Costello suggests the inclusion and analysis of visual cultural material like films, digital archives, and YouTube clips for building affect; emotional connections for continued generational engagement with the Holocaust. As public memory in the United States is currently being affected by “memory laws,” anti-Semitism, Holocaust denial, and American white nationalism, this book is an insightful analysis directed at Holocaust Studies, but it could also be extended to other fields as a way to widen analysis of how memory and history are made and performed.

Highly recommended for academic libraries.

**Simone Clunie,**  
*Langston Hughes Memorial Library, Lincoln University, PA*


Bialik is often referred to as Israel’s “National Poet” in recognition of his status as one of the pioneers of modern Hebrew poetry and for the general high esteem in which he is held in Israel.

This book not only provides an account of Bialik’s life and poetic achievements, it also covers his accomplishments as a publisher, editor of anthologies, and translator. In addition to writing poems for adults, Bialik additionally composed poems and songs for children to help facilitate their learning of Hebrew; for example, the popular short song, *NadNed* (seesaw) which even appears today in children’s music videos. Peretz’s biography provides insights into the character of a man who was modest by nature, even though he knew many of the important figures in Palestine up to his death in 1934 and was awarded honorary degrees from American Jewish institutions. Adults would enjoy this book, but it would also be a good choice to assign to teenagers in the classroom. At seventy-nine pages in length, it’s a short narrative, and it could lead to stimulating discussions about famous Jewish figures and aspects of modern Jewish history.

**Ellen Share,**  
*Potomac, Maryland*


In a sea of literature about the great twelfth-century Jewish sage and philosopher, one could do no better than to turn to Moshe Halbertal’s single volume work on Maimonides. Halbertal frames his book around Maimonides’ attempt to transform Jewish thought in two significant ways. The first attempt was to create a systematic, unambiguous and comprehensive compilation (or Code) of Jewish law. Prior to Maimonides, Jewish law resided in the vast compendiums of the Mishna and the Talmud, which were full of discussions, disagreements and debates. Maimonides took the unprecedented step of codifying Jewish law by stripping out the Mishnaic and Talmudic minority opinions and unresolved disputes and setting forth black letter Jewish law.

The second attempt was in the realm of Jewish philosophy and had three primary components. The first was the struggle against prevalent anthropomorphism. The second was a shift away from the then conventional view of God manipulating the world through the regular use of miracles and the like towards a more natural and causal order at the center of the workings of the universe. Finally, the third component was a fundamental shift in viewing what discipline and thought was “within accepted tradition” and what was considered “outside of tradition.” For example, science and philosophy was considered outside the realm of religion and Jewish tradition. For Maimonides, when proven true, a scientific or philosophical principle necessitated a reinterpretation...
of religious tradition. These three components created a profound confrontation with the Jewish philosophical status quo, even though Maimonides’ thought never alone carried the day.

The book opens with a biographical survey of Maimonides’ life. Chapters 2 and 3 discuss Maimonides’ Commentary on the Mishna and the Book of Commandments. The next three chapters revolve around the Mishna Torah, and the final two Chapters deal with the Guide of the Perplexed. This book is written for the interested general reader as well as the scholar, and this translation from the original Hebrew should be the first book on Maimonides to which an English reader turns.

David Tesler,
Yonkers, NY


Jews were famously and favorably embedded in the Iberian Peninsula from 771 until 1492, when the Spanish Roman Catholic initiation of a Santo Oficio de la Inquisición (Holy Office of the Inquisition) and the issuance of the Alhambra Decree, resulted in their expulsion from Spain. Those Jews who elected to remain were forced to convert to Catholicism. Of those who converted, many maintained their traditional Jewish heritage in secret. The tale of secret or “Crypto-Jews” is taken up by the author, a cultural anthropologist and a long-time researcher of Jewish studies with a particular reference to the Sephardic Jews who migrated to North Africa, the Ottoman Empire, and South America.

In this book, Hart brings to the fore families whose ancestors were conversos, crypto-Jews, or New Christians, and whose descendants somehow retained a semblance of their Hebrew origins. Hart examines the biographical accounts of these families tracing their ancestry to Spain. The story covers families, not only in South and Central America, but also in Southwestern United States. This is an intriguing tale of a somewhat hidden history of a major segment of western Jews.

Sanford R. Silverburg,
Catawba College, Salisbury, NC


Most people would define kabbalah as “Jewish mysticism,” but how accurate is that definition? When was the Western Christian concept of mysticism first imposed onto Jewish thought? How did gatekeepers define what counts as authentic kabbalah? What religious, nationalistic, and cultural biases are used to define these categories? Boaz Huss’ Mystifying Kabbalah tackles these questions in a thorough and readable fashion. He compellingly navigates the connections between academia, Zionism, and the religious world to demonstrate that the assumptions that we rely on to think about kabbalah are not as strongly supported as one might have thought. He explores New Age and occult streams of kabbalah and examines why they have been largely ignored by the scholarly world. Also of importance, is the interplay between the academics and the communities they study. Highly recommended for academic libraries.

Daniel Scheide
Florida Atlantic University


Diane Gensler is an English and special education teacher. This memoir tells the story of her first job, teaching at a Catholic school in Baltimore, MD. As the only Jew on the staff, she navigates foreign territory and receives a rather chilly reception from her colleagues. She is nevertheless enthusiastic about teaching her students and encouraging them to read, write, and appreciate literature. Attending daily church services and participating in the celebration of Christian holidays present dilemmas. She also encounters antisemitism and ignorance as the students and their families demonstrate their unfamiliarity with Judaism. That is also true of Ms. Gensler’s lack of knowledge about the Catholic church. She does not seem to make any effort to learn about it despite her discomfort with her need to participate in religious activities. The school curriculum does not appear to have any lessons about other religions either. This is a somewhat interesting slice of life that will appeal to those interested in teaching

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and interfaith relations.

Barbara Bibel,
Congregation Netivot Shalom, Berkeley, CA


The concept of nostalgia is very relevant to Jewish life. Yearning for the past and connection are key concepts upon which the Jewish religion is based. While most people think of the synagogue as the central location for Jews to connect to their Judaism, and as a place in which to express their nostalgia, this book considers four areas of religious practice that one would not necessarily think of lending themselves to religious nostalgia: genealogy, synagogues as historical sites, teaching nostalgia to children, and food as nostalgia.

Interest in Jewish genealogy, and the importance of knowing who and where we came from, became more apparent in the aftermath of the Holocaust, but alongside the broader interest in genealogical research that developed in the 1970s, the Jewish Genealogy movement developed into a nostalgia for the past. For the past fifty years, the field has grown from professionals with extensive educational backgrounds to the lay person using a database to find out their personal histories. The farther removed Jews are from the immigrant grounds to the lay person using a database to find out their personal roots.

The synagogue as a place for historical reflection has become an important part of the creation of Jewish nostalgia. Creating museums of the past allows the modern observer to feel nostalgia for the Jewish community of a bygone era. Refurbishing and renovating these structures enables visitors to feel as if they were there themselves. The intersection between when a synagogue stops being a living, breathing entity and becomes a museum is a point of contention that Gross attempts to reconcile in her book.

Teaching children about the past is always an important part of connecting them to their elders. Gross looks at the ways literature and dolls connect children to the past and teach children about nostalgia, through whimsical tales and real-life models of Jewish immigrants. Finally, Gross demonstrates how the Jewish deli has become one of the quintessential images of Jewish nostalgia and how the revival of the deli is a way for “kosher style” food to relate to the modern world.

This book is highly recommended to academic libraries, especially ones with an extensive Judaica collection.

Laura Schutzman,
AJL Jewish Fiction Award Committee Chair; AJL Publications Chair; Hebrew Academy of Nassau County, Uniondale, NY


Hoffman’s thesis, which he argues relentlessly throughout the 285 pages of this second edition, is that all Broadway musicals are racist. This updated version of the book includes a chapter on the newer musicals “Hamilton” and “The Book of Mormon,” both of which, the author maintains, are blatantly racist due to their historical settings and focus. Beloved classic musicals such as, “Oklahoma,” “Annie Get Your Gun,” “The Music Man,” “Show Boat,” and “A Chorus Line,” among others, were the first to come under Hoffman’s scrutiny and, with his particular lens on the subject, he claimed that their exclusive focus on white identity and settings means that they are by definition racist.

An interesting part of the book and the only reference to anything Jewish, aside from the Jewish librettists and musicians who created most of the musicals, is the backstory of “West Side Story.” First known as “East Side Story,” this musical was originally about Jews and Catholics. Aside from this, The Great White Way has almost no Jewish content. Overall, Hoffman, basing his work on theories posited by the political activist, Angela Davis, fails to consider how the effects of Jewish immigration and assimilation might have played a part in the Jewish composers’ supposedly all “white” creations. In this respect, his book may hold interest for scholars studying how Jews are perceived and/or treated by scholars of critical race theory. But since it does not deal with Jewish themes, history or values, it is not recommended for Judaica libraries.

Ilka Gordon,
Beachwood, OH


Rabbi Dr. Strickman offers a clear, beautiful, and accurate second edition translation of Ibn Ezra’s Yesod Morah, with learned annotations. This is an essential classic by the polymath, poet, mathematician, Bible commentator par excellence, and sublime philosopher, and Strickman renders it in an outstanding manner. While Ibn Ezra’s philosophical ideas are scattered throughout his biblical commentaries and works of science, the philosophic substance is focused in his Sefer Yesod...
This book, salvage poetics refers to the concept or practice of taking an original artifact from pre-Holocaust Eastern Europe—a literary work, a photograph, or an illustration—and framing it to “create an accessible description of a lost culture.” Of course, Fiddler on the Roof is the paradigm for this practice, but Sheila Jelen considers several older examples of it in literature, anthropology, and photography. The author looks at her subject through the lens of ethnography—a controversial field with differing definitions. She examines early post-Holocaust works, mostly forgotten in the twenty-first century, that were the first attempts to explain and describe the destroyed Jewish world to Jews who had never seen it.

For textual works, she analyzes the books of Maurice Samuels, The Earth is the Lord’s by Abraham Heschel, Life is with People by Zborowski and Herzog, The Golden Tradition by Lucy Dawidowitz, and Howe and Greenberg’s Treasury of Yiddish Stories. She then moves to seminal visual collections: Image Before my Eyes by Dobroszycki and Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, Roman Vishniac’s A Vanished World, They Called Me Mayer July by Kirshenblatt and Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, and Polyn: Jewish Life in the Old Country by Alter Kaczyne. In the latter part of the twentieth century, all these books sold well and became staples in libraries and on coffee tables. The author points out that the trajectory moved from text to image—for American Jews, the photographs of Vishniac and Kaczyne came to define their understanding of pre-Holocaust life, and the word shtetl symbolized the life of their ancestors.

This is a thorough academic work with a fresh approach to our understanding of pre-war Europe. It contains a number of images, beautifully reproduced in color and black-and-white. For academic collections of Jewish history and ethnography.

**Beth Dwoskin,**
*Cataloger, Proquest (retired)*


In this book, salvage poetics refers to the concept or practice of taking an original artifact from pre-Holocaust Eastern Europe—a literary work, a photograph, or an illustration—and framing it to “create an accessible description of a lost culture.” Of course, Fiddler on the Roof is the paradigm for this practice, but Sheila Jelen considers several older examples of it in literature, anthropology, and photography. The author looks at her subject through the lens of ethnography—a controversial field with differing definitions. She examines early post-Holocaust works, mostly forgotten in the twenty-first century, that were the first attempts to explain and describe the destroyed Jewish world to Jews who had never seen it.

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This is a thorough academic work with a fresh approach to our understanding of pre-war Europe. It contains a number of images, beautifully reproduced in color and black-and-white. For academic collections of Jewish history and ethnography.

**David B Levy,**
*Lander College for Women, NYC*


Jewish intellectual tradition has produced unprecedented achievements and contributions to Jewish and non-Jewish culture throughout millennia. This rich and thoughtful book identifies the key principles inherent in this tradition and seeks to “demonstrate how applying them judiciously” can benefit society at large. The first section presents an overview of post-Biblical scholarly production, particularly in Medieval Spain, Europe, and the modern United States and Israel. Developments in classical learning and their impact on Jewish religious life are explored, including: Talmud, Commentaries, Responsa, Codes, Philosophy, Biblical Exegesis, and Mysticism, and contributions by Jewish thinkers, both secular and traditional, to the sciences, arts, and literature. The authors propose four principles that propel these thinkers to excellence: respect for tradition while encouraging independent thinking; a system of precise logical reasoning in pursuit of the truth; universal education continuing through adulthood; and living a purposeful life. Section two of the book discusses each of these principles in detail and how they can be adapted universally.

The authors exquisitely cover two thousand years of scholarship and achievement in multiple genres and fields. Endnotes provide guides to further sources and information. Highly recommended for academic libraries and adult readers in synagogue libraries.

**Diane Mizrachi, PhD,**
*Charles E. Young Research Library, University of California Los Angeles*


This book analyzes the ways in which Maimonides ended each book of his legal code, the Mishneh Torah (MT), with a moral or philosophical reflection. While the content of the MT is halakhic, the concluding sermonettes are ethical and philosophical. By treating these sermonettes to an in-depth study, the authors reveal how they can enhance our understanding of the MT.

In 1947, Jewish Holocaust survivors were gathered in DP camps in Germany and Austria. They could not return to their former homes and had no prospect of emigrating anywhere else. Post-war Canada was willing to grant immigrants access only on the basis of family reunification, but later realized that Canada's economy needed revitalization with the help of immigrant labor. The first requests were for lumberjacks, miners, agricultural workers, and domestics. Different industries could apply for workers, but all these schemes blatantly discriminated against Jews.

Then the Jewish Labor Committee, the Jewish clothing manufacturers and unions, and the Canadian Jewish Congress decided that the needle trades, centered in Toronto, Montreal and Winnipeg, could use Jewish labor. They convinced the government to allow them to send a committee of five men to the numerous DP camps and to recruit 2,000 tailors/seamstresses and their families. After they qualified as skilled garment workers, the DPs would have to pass immigration, security, and health screenings among other restrictions, many designed to keep Jews out. In fact, the Canadian government even required that 50% of those chosen would be non-Jews. With this clock tick. While the MT and the Guide for the Perplexed provide evidence of Maimonides' great faithfulness to halakhah, Kellner and Gillis demonstrate that the reflective endings of MT reveal his understanding of Judaism as an ever-expanding intellectual horizon upon which halakhah was the means not the end in itself.

Highly recommended for all libraries

David B Levy, Lander College for Women, NYC


The Tailor Project remains the focus, and each chapter is eminently readable. The authors bring us a little-known episode in the history of Jewish immigration that ultimately influenced the whole of Canadian immigration policy towards minority and racial groups. This book belongs in every library for its historical value in describing the post-war rescue and for its amazing tales of survivors who lost everything yet were able to reconstitute their lives in Canada.

Marlene Schiffman, Judaica Cataloger, Mendel Gottesman Library of Yeshiva University, NY


During the Syrian civil war, the Israeli army (IDF) launched “Operation Good Neighbor” through which over 1,000 Syrian children were treated in Israeli hospitals. Israel was the first country to provide aid and search and rescue teams to earthquake-stricken Haiti in 2010. Dozens of Israeli NGOs have been working throughout the African continent to help alleviate poverty, disease, water shortages, energy needs, and poaching since the 1950s. These are just a few examples of the short stories and brief narratives presented in this book that demonstrate the humanitarian activism that permeates in Israeli culture. Chapter 6, titled “Humanities in Arms,” explores the unrivaled

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REVIEWS OF TITLES FOR ADULTS

Diane Mizrachi, PhD, Charles E. Young Research Library, University of California Los Angeles


Talia Lavin, a Jewish journalist from an Orthodox background, decided to catfish Nazis on the internet. Even before starting this project, her journalism and her Twitter profile made her a frequent target of right-wing activists. Lavin created fake social media personalities to engage with white supremacists and anti-Semites to learn more about their motivations and goals. A very quick and compelling read, Culture Warlords reveals a great deal about the hidden subcultures of hate that lurk under the surface.

Daniel Scheide, Florida Atlantic University


The authors trace the Gluskin family who originated in Eastern Europe and Russia and took their name from the town of Hlusk/Glusk where Jews settled in the 17th century. The family lived under the czars, the Communists, World War II, and the post-war period during which some escaped to the West. Many were adherents of Habad and tried to maintain a Jewish lifestyle and send their sons to the Tomche Temimim Yeshivas.

In Czarist Russia, the boys were under constant threat of being drafted into the army where their religious life would end. After the Revolution, they might be arrested by the KGB for the crime of spreading Judaism or opposing the Communist government. The

Yeshiva was forced to move many times and to go underground. Some of its rabbis were sent to Siberia for lengthy prison terms. During the Siege of Leningrad, many died of starvation or were drafted into the Soviet Army and sent to the front.

During the Communist period, food was scarce and poverty was rampant. The authors do not neglect the noble women of the family who married and bore children into horrific circumstances. Some family members had academic careers but were held back by antisemitism in publishing their research and attending conferences in the West. Throughout their tribulations, the family produced many luminaries, too many to mention individually, whose names are well-known to specialists in their fields as well as many simple, ordinary people who are remembered for their steadfastness and kindness.

One of the highlights of the book is the episode of the evacuation of Lubavitch families to Poland and then to Paris after the war. It identifies the Gluskin operatives who facilitated the escape, how transports were arranged, how money was raised and surreptitiously transferred. It also touches on the role of Samarkand where Judaism was kept alive under duress by those who fled to the interior.

The genealogical information that takes us back some thirteen generations is very impressive. The voluminous amount of painstaking research that went into this account includes primary sources in Russian, Yiddish, Hebrew and English. The account would have benefited from an index and genealogical tables since the various generations are related in prose lists. An editor might have avoided repetitions, typographical and grammatical errors. All in all, this family account connects personalities to the larger course of Jewish history in Eastern Europe and the history of the Habad movement. Gluskin Family History would be a worthwhile addition to the reference shelf of libraries collecting genealogical resources.

Marlene Schiffman, Judaica Cataloger, Mendel Gottesman Library of Yeshiva University, NY
REVIEWS OF TITLES FOR ADULTS


The tales told by Hasidic rebbe Nachman of Braslav (1772-1810) have captured the imagination of many Jews. Professor Lewis (Duke Kunshan University in China) explores the tales and teachings of R. Nachman in the context of both Jewish literature of Eastern Europe and the intellectual and literary nature and development of Hasidism. He considers, for example, the responses of various Jews (including Nachman) and Jewish movements to the attempted forced modernization and integration of the Jews to the Russian empire by Czar Alexander I and to the alternative “negotiated emancipation” offered by Napoleon. Dr. Lewis argues that Nachman was very much aware of, and concerned about, the uncertainties confronting Jewry in a time of great changes. These are deep matters, and his analysis of Nachman reflects this, trying to avoid potentially misleading simplifications such as, for example, deciding whether or not Nachman was a literary modernist.

Shmuel Ben-Gad,
Gelman Library, George Washington University


While there are shelves filled with books on fundraising for non-profit groups, this addition to the genre by well-known Israeli fundraiser, Sagi Melamed, puts his valuable experience into words. Much of *Mindful Fundraising* can be found in other places. Yet, its twelve chapters also contain numerous stories about the author’s personal experiences in several organizations, including occasional mis-steps and errors. While he is proud of his success, Melamed is also honest about the problems with his chosen field, and the many difficulties fundraisers themselves face. He notes the time needed to do it right. He acknowledges the disappointment, the ethical issues, and the confusion inherent in fundraising. His hands-on experience and willingness to tell the story in both detail and broad perspective is what makes this a valuable volume.

Melamed’s style is serious but easy to follow. The book is as much about public relations as about its specific topic. His ultimate point is that acquiring gifts from donors is the financial reward of building relationships, and that it relies on the perception of an organization by its donors. From this perspective, the book should be considered by all libraries. It can be used by everyone; leaders (Rabbis, Executive Directors, Presidents), staff members, and laypeople who have been asked to publicize their institutions.

Fred Isaac,
Temple Sinai, Oakland, CA


For four years, beginning with the nation’s entry into the Second World War, over 105,000 Jews of Romania were conscripted into labor and internment camps, probably the most notorious being Transnistria. Vividly detailed and researched, with accompanying photos, this book contrasts these ordeals, borne partly of historic anti-Semitism and racist ideology, with the Nazi plan of complete exploitation and annihilation. When his nation formally joined the Axis powers, dictator Ion Antonescu hoped to placate the Nazis by hastening the Jews’ extermination through hard labor. Yet the labor itself was not intended as a tool for mass murder; rather, in the author’s words, “to satisfy the economic needs of the Romanian state and military.” The Jewish population, who comprised much of the prewar intelligentsia and commercial classes, were critically needed to build or repair infrastructure. Working conditions, often managed by corrupt or inept officials, ranged from mediocre to miserable, and many perished under starvation, disease, brutality, and work accidents.

Nevertheless, unlike in neighboring Hungary, many lives were spared from the death camps. When the tide of war turned and the Romanian government realized German defeat, forced labor became a lifeline. Survivors lived to see the ouster of Antonescu and the arrival of Soviet troops. Most subsequently emigrated to Israel. The author offers insight into “a unique case within the larger phenomenon of forced labor in Europe during the Holocaust.” However, in the end, this informative book proves that not all the horrors of those years took place inside ghettos and concentration camps. Highly recommended for academic libraries with Holocaust or European history collections.

Hallie Cantor
Acquisitions, Associate, Yeshiva University, NY

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In 2009, Moss, her husband Alan Rabinowitz, and her son Ezra hiked the entire Israel Trail, from the trailhead in the north at Kibbutz Dan, to the trail end in Eilat, to raise money for ALS research, the horrible disease to which Alan’s mother Lee had succumbed. While the word “journey” has become cliché, the family’s adventure was one of physical, emotional and spiritual growth. The title refers to the “trail angels”—those along the route or nearby who provided food, lodging and transportation, and tahina, one of the main foods, along with nuts and tuna, that they ate while hiking the trail. While there are many high points of achieving goals (they raised $40,000 for ALS research, walked many kilometers per day), Moss includes the not so pleasant aspects, including family tension and squabbles, stolen food caches, and physical aches and injuries. Many of the lessons learned illustrate common sense that may not be so common: investing in proper (often expensive) gear, knowing when to rest, and savoring the moment. Moss’ account of the journey makes evident that not only physical stamina was required, but mental fortitude as well.

She succeeds where others have failed with a chronicle in non-chronological order by structuring her book around the lessons she learned. The map included at the beginning of the books makes it easy to “follow the trail” and put the narrative in context. The breathtaking color photos of points along the trail enhance the text. Very highly recommended for fans of Cheryl Strayed’s *Wild: From Lost to Found on the Pacific Crest Trail* (Alfred A. Knopf, 2019), lovers of the outdoors and hiking, and lovers of the natural beauty of Israel.

Chava Pinchuck, Ramat Beit Shemesh, Israel

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One may not immediately associate the study of kabbalah with North America but there is a wealth of material just waiting to be explored further as this volume clearly demonstrates. The papers collected here are wide-ranging and of excellent quality. We begin with colonial America where Protestant leaders had a surprising interest in the Zohar. The 19th century sees various Esoteric groups finding an interest in Jewish texts. The early 20th century sees rationalist Jewish thinkers grapple with the question of where kabbalah fits into their conceptions of Judaism. The counterculture renewes interest in the field as the works of Allen Ginsberg, Shlomo Carlebach, and Aryeh Kaplan demonstrate. We also see the role kabbalah has in contemporary Jewish denominations, both liberal and Orthodox. Essential for academic libraries.

Daniel Scheide, Florida Atlantic University.

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**REVIEWS OF TITLES FOR ADULTS**


*Mishkan Haseder* is a new Haggadah published by the Reform movement. The design follows the layout of *Mishkan T’filah* and *Mishkan HaNefesh* (a Reform siddur and High Holiday machzor). This new Haggadah includes the traditional liturgical text in Hebrew as well as the transliteration. Rabbis Janet and Sheldon Marder have written a fresh and modern translation of the traditional Hebrew. An interesting example of their singular translation is their paraphrase of the first question of the Four Questions which they translate as “Why is this night so unlike other nights—unique in many ways?” On the facing pages of the Haggadah, the editors have paired poems and short philosophical thoughts with the liturgical text. Some of the well-known poets and personalities they quote are Ruth Bader Ginsburg, Marge Piercy, Grace Paley, Emma Lazarus, and Debbie Friedman.

The *Haggadah* is intended to be used at the Seder, because it includes guidance and directions for performing the various rituals. In places, the traditional text has been expanded: for example, a paragraph from Song of Songs that describes flowering vineyards and pomegranates is added to the Karpas (greens) ritual. Most interesting and enlightening are the comments found at the bottom of each page (separated from the traditional text by a line) from the early sages, the Talmud, and the Bible which give the historical background of the various *Seder* rituals and practices. Any student of Jewish history whether traditionally Reform, Conservative or Orthodox will gain much insight from these comments.

*Mishkan Haseder* is an excellent resource that should be read in advance of the *Seder* because it contains too much information to absorb in one sitting. The poetry and commentary need to be read and reread in order to receive the most benefit and in order to appreciate and enjoy its unique connection to Passover. The book is greatly enhanced by the many imaginative and colorful abstract illustrations, commissioned especially for this Haggadah, and created by the well-respected artist Tobi Kahn.

Ilka Gordon, Beachwood, OH


In her innovative book, Professor Reed delves into a previously understudied set of Aramaic Jewish texts from the early Hellenistic period (ca. 333-167 BCE) to describe the evolution of a number of new concepts among Jews of the period. She observes that the recent publication of a corpus of early Aramaic texts found among the Dead Sea Scrolls has presented new opportunities for scholarship.

Reed observes that prior to the conquest of Alexander the Great and the intrusion of Hellenistic culture one can find little written evidence of what she refers to as transmundane powers (i.e., powers reaching beyond or existing outside the physical or visible world) in the traditional biblical texts. Around the beginning of the third century BCE there appears to have been an explosion of interest in and evolution of traditions about angels and demons. These concepts emerged in conjunction with ideologies focusing on “wisdom” or “knowledge.” Reed sees these changes as intimately bound up in changes in scribal practices and in the intellectual and cultural climate of the Second Temple period. Whereas scribes had previously been responsible for merely recording the ideas of others, they now became innovators.

Reed stresses the importance of a synchronic approach to this research, eschewing comparisons with the past or that which was to follow. She asserts that the terms “post-biblical” or “intertextual” are only of value if the focus is specifically on the “Bible.” Additionally, she highlights the influence of Near East traditions in the Jewish literature of this period.

Drawing from both primary and secondary sources, she cites supportive insights and arguments that she has encountered in the scholarship of others. A multilayered work with extensive footnotes and bibliography, her book is an important contribution to our understanding of the Second Temple period.

Randall C. and Anne-Marie Belinfante, AJL members


While Rabbi Yudel Rosenberg may not be a household name, his literary creations are. The famous legends of the Maharal of Prague and the golem come from his Sefer Nifla’ot Maharal mi-Prag im ha-Golem, a great work of either folklore, literature, or forgery, depending on one’s perspective. But if one approaches
**REVIEWS OF TITLES FOR ADULTS**

**A Kabbalista in Montreal** by Daniel Scheide, Florida Atlantic University

This biography expecting the legendary golem to be the focus, they have so much more in store for them. Rosenberg moved from Poland to Canada in 1913 and his impassioned defense of Orthodoxy and entanglement in the politics of kashrut often distracted him from his literary and Talmudic pursuits. He was also a practitioner of homeopathic medicine, a field that fell from respectability during his lifetime. Above all, was his dedication to the translation of the Zohar into Hebrew, a task that took him several decades. His wide-ranging interests and concerns make his biography a great read. Highly recommended.

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**Jews in Southern Tuscany During the Holocaust: Ambiguous Refuge** by Judith Roumani, Florida Atlantic University

This is a microhistory of the fate of Italian Jews in the province of Grosseto in southern Tuscany when faced by the extremes of Italian fascism during the Holocaust. To the east of the province in the village of Pitigliano, the Jewish population was protected by local farmers and survived the terror of the time, while in the western region of the province, Jews were subject to betrayal. Dr. Roumani is not only the director and founder of the Jewish Institute of Pitigliano, but she is also a member of a prominent Sephardic family. With her background, she brings to light with vivid expression the complex social condition of the region’s Jews through an examination of archival documents, published memoirs, and scholarly works from Italian sources not readily known to western researchers. So little is recognized of Italian Jewry, that this segment, situated in the trauma of World War II, is worthy of wide attention.

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**The Cruelty is the Point: The Past, Present, and Future of Trump’s America** by Adam Serwer, Catawba College, Salisbury, NC

As the son of immigrants, he was one of the most thoughtful essayists of the Trump era. While this is a general examination of Donald Trump’s ideology and policies, nearly half the book addresses specifically Jewish concerns. The anti-immigrant zeal of Trump advisor Stephen Miller is framed against the story of his immigrant family fleeing Eastern Europe. Serwer explores the divide between the largely liberal American Jewish community and the small, but vocal group of right-wing Jews and the philo-semites they cling to. And anti-Semitism on both the right and left looms large throughout each essay. An important and engrossing book. Highly recommended.

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**There Was a Fire: Jews, Music and the American Dream** by Ben Sidran, Florida Atlantic University

This is an updated edition of a book that was first published in 2012. In this book, Sidran tells the story of something that happened generations ago, the creation of American music in the twentieth century. Sidran’s informal, engaging style makes it easy to read this thorough, in-depth history straight through. The author often pauses to explain in musical terms why a particular piece of style is significant and/or “Jewish.” These explanations are rudimentary enough for the non-musician to understand, and they are very enlightening. Along with many familiar and less well-known anecdotes, Sidran uses telling quotes from important figures to advance his narrative.

Sidran relates every facet of the close interaction between Jews and African-Americans in creating American music. But this critical aspect of American Jewish music is the most difficult part to describe. Sidran ventures into the well-known story that American Jews tell themselves about their passion for social justice, but he also acknowledges that many important Jews in the business were trying to make and sell good music rather than change the world. In any case, African-Americans often tell a very different version of this story.

In addition to correcting some errors from the first edition, this book has two additions that lengthen it: 15 pages of stock black-and-white photographs of many of the major players mentioned in the book, and an epilogue written during the middle of the pandemic year, which looks at American music through the lens of social media and the disintegration of the music business at the hands of streaming services. Libraries that have the first edition, or the books by Andrea Most and Jeffrey Melnick, as well as some of the others that are listed in the bibliography, may not need to purchase this new edition.

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**Continued on page 44**

For the past 40 years, Danny Siegel has been inspired by mitzvah work around the world. For 25 years (1982–2008), he multiplied his effort and publicized it through his Ziv Tzedakah Fund, and thereby encouraged others to join the work. This anthology of his writings continues his legacy.

Radiance is divided into two sections: “Prose” and “Poetry.” The “Prose” section has five parts. They include selections from his many short books about his work; Drashot on several Torah portions; “Portraits of Mitzvah Heroes” taken from his extensive travels; stories of how he has been affected by others; and selections from the annual Ziv Tzedakah Fund reports from the beginning to its close. Each section ends with an essay written by Danny for this volume, bringing readers up to date on his thinking. The “Poetry” portion contains selections from his twelve volumes of verse and midrash; beginning with Soulstoned (1969) and continuing through From the Heart (2012) these short statements express the author’s visceral connection to the work he has done.

Danny Siegel is a magician and this book is a collection of his best tricks. Open it to any page and smile or weep. Read any essay or piece of poetry and recognize humanity at its most open-hearted. This volume should be in every library and many personal collections. Rabbis can mine its contents for sermons. Students, synagogues and schools can find ideas for individual and community projects. Foundation professionals can find inspiration. This reviewer only wishes it was available in hardcover.

Fred Isaac, Temple Sinai, Oakland, CA


This book presents a challenge to those institutions and individual scholars who deny or minimize the Jewish people’s ownership rights over Mandatory Palestine in international law. The author, an emeritus professor of law, Ariel University, insists upon the vital importance of decisions made during and after the First World War. The defeated Ottoman Empire renounced its rights to most of the areas of the Middle East which it had ruled in favor of the allies who had defeated them. Thus, the Balfour Declaration, the San Remo Resolution, and the Mandate for Palestine created a new political and legal reality in the Middle East, creating new Arab states in Lebanon, Syria, and Mesopotamia and a Jewish national home in Palestine. Sion explores this history closely (including Britain’s failure to live up to the requirements of the mandate it held over Palestine) and reads the documents closely. This is an important contribution to the research and debate concerning international law, the State of Israel, and the Land of Israel.

Shmuel Ben-Gad, Gelman Library, George Washington University


While some of the essays gathered here are revised and updated versions of work that Haym Soloveitchik previously published over five decades, some are new. The first part focuses on the radical pietist ascetic movement of Hasidei Ashkenaz and on its main literary output, Sefer Hasidim. Soloveitchik shows how this movement gave rise to an ascetic doctrine of penance, humility, and introspection. Yet, he argues that the Hasidei Ashkenaz was a break-off from the elite masters of pilpul of the rabbinic elite that characterized the Tosafists in France in the school of Ramerupt Dampierre, and in Germany in centers like Bonn, Mainz, Speyer, and Regensburg.

Part II re-evaluates the work of Rabbi Avraham David of Posquieres (Ravad). Soloveitchik expands the portrait of the Ravad beyond his most well-known commentary on Maimonides’ Mishneh Torah, and he claims that the Ravad’s Talmud commentary was just as important if not more so. Also added here is a new study that shows the controversy between Ravad and Rabbi Zerahyah ha-Levi of Lunnel, a member of the Jewish aristocracy of Languedoc.

In presenting new perspectives on medieval Jewish thought, these collected essays further underline Soloveitchik’s well-deserved reputation as an adept, learned and gifted intellectual historian. Highly recommended for all libraries.

David B Levy, Lander College for Women, NYC

Continued on page 45
Bauer was born in 1903 in an atheist-Jewish family, and became a master of law at the Heidelberg University at the young age of 24. Three years later, he became an auxiliary judge in Stuttgart. In 1933, Bauer was under arrest at the Heuberg concentration camp due to his Jewishness and social-democratic political beliefs. After his release, he emigrated to Denmark and later to Sweden. Once the war was over and the Federal Republic of Germany was established in 1949, Bauer returned to Germany. He became director of the district courts and in 1956, he was appointed the district attorney in Hessen, Frankfurt. In 1957, after receiving a tip about the whereabouts of Adolph Eichmann in Argentina, Bauer contacted the Israeli Mossad, who with this lead, were able to capture the notorious Nazi and bring him to trial in Israel.

Bauer was the initiator of several trials against former Nazi criminals, among these, The Auschwitz Trial (1963-1965). He is the man who confronted the Germans with their history, and because of this, many politicians were against him and he received many threats from citizens. Bauer died suddenly in 1968.

His contributions as a prosecutor were mostly ignored and only after Germany’s reunification in 1990 were his achievements recognized. The Fritz-Bauer Institute was established in 1995 with the objective of research and documentation on the history of mass atrocities, mainly the Holocaust, and their ramifications up to now. This book is an important contribution as there aren’t many relevant materials available in the English language. Copious notes, bibliography, index and photographs are included.

Recommended for all libraries

Sonia Smith,
Montreal, Canada


Bauer was disillusioned quickly, seeing it as an excuse for Jews to imitate the worst impulses of the non-Jewish world. This volume collects translations of excerpts of Tamares’ autobiography, sermons, and jeremiads on the evils of patriotism and war. His literary style is uneven, but his enthusiasm for his subject permeates each page. His work was obscure during his lifetime, but represents a point of view that would greatly appeal to the great audience of 21st century Jews equally disaffected with nationalism and violence.

Daniel Scheide,
Florida Atlantic University


In 2019, Tuvia Tenenbom spent several months traveling through the United Kingdom researching anti-Semitism and hearing a lot about Brexit as well. Starting in Ireland, he spoke with a variety of people. Though he asked directly about anti-Semitism and about Jeremy Corbyn and the Labour Party’s anti-Semitism, most people skirted the question or claimed that there was no anti-Semitism. Palestinian flags are everywhere, and many interviewees assert that the Irish feel a bond with the Palestinians, as both are oppressed people. His next stop was Scotland, where he experienced much of the same. Of particular interest to him was the “Inheritance of Abraham” document issued by the Church of Scotland, an anti-Israel/pro-Palestinian declaration, which members of the clergy would not discuss on the record. There are Palestinian flags in Scotland, too, and Tenenbom talks with people from the Glasgow Palestine Human Rights Campaign.

On to England, where in Gateshead, home of a famous yeshiva, people do admit there is anti-Semitism, and the local Jewish book store keeps its shutters closed to avoid attacks. Tenenbom notes that neither the current chief rabbi, Ephraim Mirvis, nor the former chief rabbi, Lord Jonathan Sacks, will meet with him. While in London, he follows the Brexit story, visiting Parliament several times and meeting Jeremy Corbyn, though a promised interview never materializes. He finds the people of Wales warm, touchy, and nationalistic. Tenenbom also writes about his culinary experiences and his visits to the theater.

This is the fifth book on the subject; Tenenbom has visited Germany (I Sleep in Hitler’s Room, 2016 and Hello Refugees!, 2017), the United States (The Lies They Tell, 2017) and Israel (Catch the Jew!, 2015). For those who enjoyed his previous books, it is more of the same. His observations are amusing, and he exposes
REVIEWS OF TITLES FOR ADULTS

hypocrisy and contradiction handily. While Brexit features more prominently than anti-Semitism, people’s willingness to discuss the former and not the latter is also telling.

Chava Pinchuck, Ramat Beit Shemesh, Israel


A page-burner tale of the civil rights movement as it was reflected in Birmingham, Alabama (1963-1965), opprobriously referred to as Bombingham because of the opposition demonstrated by right-wing (Ku Klux Klansmen) activists. The author, Thorne, was a member of the Birmingham Police Department for more than two decades and reveals the inner workings of Alabama government, state and local authorities with names and organizations, along with business operatives and religious communities (Christian and Jewish). The experience, it will be shown, was treated to an extensive response by the federal government’s judicial arm. Important contributions are made by the journalistic coverage of Birmingham’s major news outlets.

This is a magnificent social history of a major southern city that emerged from a sleepy farm center to an urban metropolis largely supported by a prominent steel industry. The inter-racial conflict made national news as violence spread to other Alabama cities such as Selma and Montgomery. The Jewish component is characterized by the influential role of local attorneys, businessmen, and religious leaders. Here is a story for Jewish social history and its presence in the midst of a strong southern, Protestant setting contributing to qualitatively improved race relations in Alabama and the South.

Sanford R. Silverburg, Catawba College, Salisbury, NC

Fiction


Anna is a college student spending a semester in the Soviet Union in the hopes of improving her Russian language skills. It is 1980, and Leonid Brezhnev is General Secretary of the Communist Party. As the daughter of Jewish-Russian immigrants with some knowledge of the history and culture of Russia, she is still taken aback by the meager food available to citizens and the secrecy that envelops every encounter. She makes friends with several Soviet Jews, who fear being refuseniks if they apply to leave the country. Her schedule of classes and meeting friends is set against the background of Anna’s family history. Told in alternating chapters, the reader learns of the pervading sadness of her ancestry: her grandmother, Sara, was shipped to America after her mother (Anna’s great-grandmother) was raped and drowned during a pogrom. Sara’s father, who had previously left for America to make his fortune there, had already remarried.

Grandmother Sara marries young to get out of her father’s house, and she and her husband, Leon, return to Russia in 1931, hoping to escape the depression in America. Anna’s mother and aunt, who were young girls, contract whooping cough, and the claimed to be wrapped with a racist world view. Additionally, events along America’s southern border are characterized as an internal crisis posed by a perceived threat by Mexico and Central American countries whose migrants, it was argued, carry diseases. In the second part, the influence of the historical record is portrayed with Chinese immigration and the effect of Tsarist Russian attacks on its Jewish population that led to that group’s travel to the American shores. There is also a discussion of the role of the Ku Klux Klan and the emergent anti-Black and anti-Jewish racism. Part three places Trump’s ideology in the context of opposition to “globalism.” Identity politics serves as the basis for analysis of the administration’s politics in part four. The last part examines American democracy, much of it comprises anti-Trump fulminations, following the conclusion of the Trump presidency.

Sanford R. Silverburg, Catawba College, Salisbury, NC

The editors, all members of German academic institutions, have collected 14 authors to trace the historical roots of events during the early part of the Donald Trump presidency and examine that administration’s policy on race, racism, and ethno-nationalism. The book is divided into five parts. Initially, the focus is on the administration’s foreign policies,
family is so dejected by their living conditions— no consumer goods in the stores, cramped multi-family apartments with shared kitchens and disgusting bathrooms, that they return to the United States in less than a year. They are lucky to have “escaped,” as Stalin brings down the iron curtain shortly thereafter. By coincidence, Anna’s friend Iosif’s Uncle Victor was friends with Leon, and Iosif has some of his letters and journals that help Anna learn about her family.

Bordetsky-Williams has crafted a compelling read with interesting characters and a strong sense of place and time. The alternate chapters work well, as both Anna’s semester and her grandmother’s story are equally engaging and highlight “the unending sorrow everywhere— so much terror passed down from one generation to the next.” Recommended for all Jewish libraries, and for book clubs.

Chava Pinchuck,
Ramat Beit Shemesh, Israel


When a young Jewish mother is trapped in a low-paying dead-end job, the opportunity to earn enough money to fund a college education by becoming a gestational carrier for a gay couple seems like a win-win. Not only would Maggie be able to get back on track despite self-sabotaging choices made as a teenager, but she will be able to help create a lovely family. Over the objections of her erstwhile partner Nick, who expressed homophobic misgivings, Maggie carries twins for couple Chip and Donovan, each twin ostensibly the biological child of one of the fathers and the same egg donor. Maggie’s commitment to the surrogacy causes a temporary split from Nick due to his intolerance, later recanted through multiple expressions of regret and apology to Maggie, Chip, and Donovan.

Fast forward ten years, Chip and Donovan are living happily ever after with adorable “twiblings” Kai and Teddy when a genealogy test (implausibly, from a narrative standpoint) undertaken for an elementary school project reveals that young Kai is not biologically related to Chip, Donovan, or even his twibling. This sets in motion a sequence of questions for that family as to whether they were given the wrong baby at the hospital or whether the wrong embryo was implanted. Instead, a medically rare event known as superfetation, had caused Maggie to conceive a child with Nick while already pregnant as a gestational carrier. This leads to a Solomon-like question of who the rightful parents are and, of course, what is in the best interest of 10-year-old Kai.

Although there is significant Jewish content threaded through the storyline, there is disappointingly inadequate discussion of Judaism’s values with respect to the book’s key themes. Notably, Maggie muses on how she inadvertently deprived Kai of his religious heritage, and she worries whether he has been baptized or whether he was circumcised. However, despite the author’s decision to leave out some of the richer areas for discussion for Jewish readers, as a book club pick, this title is right on target. There is no question that there is more than sufficient material to discuss to spark meaningful conversation, whether in general or with a Jewish lens.

Overall, despite some implausible plot points, *He Gets That From Me* is a thought provoking novel that will resonate with many readers and which advances Jewish representation in mainstream literature.

Sally Stiegloitz,
Editor-in-Chief, *AJL News and Reviews*


Meiselman is anticipating a big day at the New Niles Public Library. As the Events Coordinator and “number two” to director Ethel, he is planning a confrontation. Izzy Shekenberg, who attended the same local high school as him, is now a best-selling author who will speak at the library. His book, *The Sad Rebbe*, “exposes” Rabbi J, one of their high school teachers, and Meiselman hopes to take him to task. But before the big event, he has other challenges: a wife who wants to take him to task. But before the big event, he has other challenges: a wife whom he is trying to impregnate; a highly successful older brother water company executive, whose achievements shadow anything he does, and a Holocaust survivor neighbor who makes noise in her garden early in the morning, whom he later finds dead in her house. Meiselman often fantasizes about Ethel, and when he sees a pink-haired young woman studying in the library, she becomes his new object of desire. Ethel is bed-ridden with a back problem, and Meiselman is excited to host the program. He is jubilant when he and Shekenberg banter, but is reduced to tears when Ethel’s resignation is announced and another colleague is appointed director. He is looking forward to discussing all of this when he returns to therapy with his psychiatrist.

The schlimazel is prevalent in Jewish fiction and Meiselman has an interesting combination of relationships that bring out his “schlimazeliness.” The reader never learns his first name, and rooting for the White Sox and living near his parents add more to an already busy mix. Meiselman and his wife’s Orthodoxy is limited
to going to synagogue on the Sabbath, pledging charity to “atone for sins,” and separating when she is menstruating. His observance of kashrut is sketchy, and other practices, like blessings before and after food, could have been woven in easily. Most of the action and dialog takes place in Meiselman’s mind and imagination. Those who like character-driven Jewish fiction will enjoy this one; those who prefer more action can pass. 

Chava Pinchuck, 
Ramat Beit Shemesh, Israel


Rachel Rubenstein-Goldblatt is keeping secrets. The thirty-something daughter of high achieving parents (mom is a medical doctor and dad is a prominent rabbi) struggles to make a life for herself as she deals with a chronic illness. Her disease robs her of time, a social life, and work opportunities. It also comes with a steady stream of misunderstanding and condescension that has compelled Rachel to conceal it from all but a few close family members and friends.

Rachel is also quite secretive about her career—writing best-selling Christmas themed romance books under a pseudonym. Rachel keeps this to herself based on both her discomfort as a nice Jewish girl loving all things Christmas (she has an impressive collection of Santa figurines) and her concerns about hurting her parents and damaging their reputation in their Conservadox community. Enter Jacob Greenberg, Rachel's erstwhile Camp Ahava crush/nemesis. Twelve-year-old Jacob and Rachel shared a summer romance filled with camp pranks and misunderstandings that left both with hurt feelings and confusion. And they have not spoken since. That is until Jacob, now a wealthy and influential event entrepreneur (think Coachella), comes to New York to launch a Hanukkah themed extravaganza, The Matzoh Ball!

In the tradition of comic romance books (chick lit), there are a series of “meet cute” misunderstandings and heartfelt resolutions to all of Rachel’s and Jake’s many, many issues.

Jewish content includes the refreshing portrayal of modern Jewish life in an “own voices” novel. Rachel and her family, to varying degrees, observe kashrut and celebrate Shabbat. Yiddish and Hebrew abound, with a sprinkling of explanations for some phrases...others left to be understood through context. Jewish characters run the gamut of non-observant to orthodox, all represented as validly Jewish and respectfully included. Cultural Jewish experiences such as summer camp and The December Dilemma are woven throughout. Quite meaningfully, the book addresses the shadow of the Shoah on contemporary American Jewish life, both through the voice of a survivor and through the subtle ways that subsequent generations have been impacted. Overall, an enjoyable romantic novel that will appeal to readers who want a balance of humor, pathos, and relatability. Recommended for synagogue and public libraries.

Sally Stieglitz, 
Editor-in-Chief, AJL News and Reviews


In this riveting book of historical fiction, Judy Petsonk chronicles the tension and acrimony, infighting and distress between the Hasmonean dynastic kings who also claimed the role of High Priests and the Pharisees as they contend with each other over who should rule Judea. Personages such as Shimon ben Shetakh (and his fictional wife Sarah and other invented characters), Alexander Janneus, Judah ben Tabbai, John Hyrcanus I and II, Queen Salome, and others. Many of the details used to create the narrative come from the Talmud, the works of Josephus and elsewhere in the Jewish textual tradition. Petsonk provides references to these sources at the end of the narrative, which is quite helpful for those who may not be well-versed in these legends, tales, and history. She succeeds masterfully at taking what may have been rather dry history for some into a very well executed tale.

The narrative chronicles political murder, revenge, scholarship, and conversations referring to how one is to understand certain regulations in the Jewish tradition. The main narrative concerns the fierce rivalry between Alexander Janneus and Shimon ben Shetakh and their struggles against each other. Woven into this narrative are Shimon’s relationship with his family and best friend from whom he seeks counsel throughout the book. Many references both to historical events and people serve the reader in creating the events and places vividly, with many episodes illustrating both public and private arguments and discussions which may have only been hinted at in the textual sources.

This book is recommended for all levels of Jewish libraries, especially libraries which collect historical fiction. The narrative can supplement teaching about this time as well, and to help generate greater interest in other works of scholarship as well as fiction about this time and other periods in Jewish history.

Eli Lieberman, 
Assistant Librarian, HUC-JIR NY

Continued on page 49

In the mid-14th century Hungarian town of Trnava, the Jews live in a stable, if not necessarily easy, relationship with their non-Jewish neighbors. The Jewish community is led and protected by the Rabbi who is part of the sect of Solomon: Jews who follow the ways of King Solomon and who can perform magic and small miracles. His three daughters are all gifted with different powers: Hannah can make plants grow under any condition; Sarah can create fire; and Levana can read the stars. But the equilibrium of the town is thrown off with the arrival of the Black Mist, which creeps through Hungary, killing people as it goes.

When Sarah, a trained midwife and healer, is recruited to nurse the queen, she and the prince fall in love, leading to disaster. The family must flee Trnava and go into hiding. We watch the family struggle to stay connected to each other, their Jewish heritage, and to find suitable matches for the daughters.

Recommended for larger fiction collections.

Sheryl Stahl,
*Director, Frances-Henry Library, Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, Los Angeles*


Avrom Sutzkever was arguably the greatest of all Yiddish poets. Before World War II began, he was already making a name for himself, and the poems he wrote while resisting Nazis in the Vilna Ghetto were so successful that he was personally rescued by an airlift provided by the Soviet Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee. After the war, he was the backbone of the Yiddish literary world in Israel, establishing it as a center for Yiddish culture that replaced the destroyed capitals of Jewish Europe. In all the years before and after his death in 2010, most of the literary world’s attention was focused on his poetry. But during his life in Israel, Sutzkever wrote prose poetry, a form that was not too familiar to English readers before the late twentieth century.

This book gathers work from four of Sutzkever’s prose collections: *Green Aquarium, Messiah’s Diary, Where the Stars Spend the Night*, and *The Prophecy of the Inner Eye*. None of this material is conventional narratives. They are more like vignettes of memory—Sutzkever’s memories of his life before and during the Holocaust, told not descriptively but impressionistically and metaphorically. This is dense, powerful prose, filled with allusions to life in the Vilna ghetto, the wintry Ponary Forest, and the constant presence of death, stars, ghosts, and remembrance. There is a magical realism element to this very sophisticated writing and the translation is inspired. An essential addition to collections of Yiddish in translation.

Beth Dwoskin,
*Cataloger, Proquest (retired)*


This fascinating novel is an exploration of Jewish life in San Francisco during the second half of the 19th century. Some of the issues raised continue to be with us. Emma Wolf was a well-respected writer but interestingly, the JPS had no interest in publishing her book. Finally, in 1900, a non-Jewish publisher offered it to readers. The novel explores, for instance, the complications that result from “mixed marriages.” The main protagonist in the book does not feel connected at all to Old-World Judaism but the female character, who also is not religious at one point states that “Every one of us carries the blood, the history of all of us in his veins, no matter how different we may appear.”

A lengthy, in-depth introduction by editors Cantalupo and Kahan dives extensively into an explanation and an evaluation of this work. It is a rare look at the unique life of Jews in the West and should be in every Jewish library, including synagogue and school libraries, and definitely scholarly ones. It could also be an interesting book group discussion read.

Michlean Lowy Amir,
*United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Archivist/Librarian, Retired*
The AJL Newsletter (Irene Levin-Wixman z”l, founding editor) was published in print from 1979 to 2010 by the Association of Jewish Libraries to inform members about AJL activities and issues related to Judaica libraries. From January 2011 through August 2019 it was split into two separate electronic publications — the AJL News and the AJL Reviews. As of September 2019 it is published digitally as AJL News and Reviews. Receipt of this publication is one of the benefits of membership. Please see the AJL website at http://www.jewishlibraries.org for membership rates.