The Museum of the Yiddish Theatre

Dr. Steven Lasky, O.D.
Founder and Director, Museum of the Yiddish Theatre
Archivist, Yiddish Theatrical Alliance

The Museum of the Yiddish Theatre (https://www.moyt.org) is a virtual, i.e. internet-only, museum devoted to honoring and preserving the history of the Yiddish theatre and Jewish culture. The museum is a branch of the larger virtual museum, The Museum of Family History (https://www.museumoffamilyhistory.com), which is dedicated to the history of the Jewish family and Jewish history in general.

The multimedia, interactive Museum of the Yiddish Theatre, unlike “brick-and-mortar” museums, is open twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week.

Recently the museum has instituted a “once-a-month” policy; it strives to publish a new exhibition on the first of every month. It should be noted that since the museum is virtual, there is no real restriction as to space, so all exhibits and exhibitions remain on the museum website, with rare exceptions.

The January 2022 exhibition, “New York City’s Yiddish Theatre and the Forward: How They Reviewed the Plays That Entertained the Mostly Jewish Public During the Great Depression, 1929-1941,” includes translations from Yiddish to English of theatre reviews of sixty Yiddish theatre plays written in the Depression Era by the Forverts (Jewish Forward) critics. These reviews give a great perspective as to the types of plays that were put on during this time, whether dramas, melodramas, comedies, or operettas. The reviews summarize each play.


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Maurice Schwartz and His Yiddish Art Theatre group, circa 1950s. Courtesy of the Yiddish Theatrical Alliance.
In this educational series, the Museum of the Yiddish Theatre strives to share with its followers an array of Yiddish plays — not the scripts of the plays themselves, but synopses, i.e., summaries of the actions of the plays, as well as other interesting information about the productions, such as the names of those in the cast, critics’ reviews of the production, still photographs from the show and the like. It is hoped that the valued museum “visitor,” will read each of the Museum’s presentations with care and use their imagination to optimal effect. They may like to imagine themselves as an attendee of a certain production; they might want to consider what was occurring in the world (or in their city) during that time, even what might have been going on within their own family the night of the performance. Perhaps, by participating in this experience, the visitor also might gain the desire to learn more about the playwright and their own life experience that might have influenced their writings or the subject matter of the play, such as the Russian Revolution, Jewish family life in Europe or in the United States, a religious theme, or simply the Jewish experience.

The February 2022 exhibition, “The Forward Vacation Follies,” will detail the productions given by the Hebrew Actors’ Union in New York City from 1931, at least until 1941, the proceeds going to a fund that would send hundreds of underprivileged children to a camp in the country for at least a week in the summer.

The Museum of the Yiddish Theatre also possesses a database of nearly 19,000 Yiddish theatre productions from the United States and Canada, which lists, when available, the play name, the date of its opening, the theatre, the actor’s name, the names of the author, composer and lyricist and much more. The museum is hoping that someone will come forth and volunteer to create a free, online searchable database of these productions, so that it could be made available to all who will be searching for information on Yiddish theatre in America.

Last but not least, the Museum of the Yiddish Theatre contains translations of more than 2,000 biographies and histories of Yiddish actors, actresses, et al. These biographies (and histories) originate in Zalmen Zylbercweig’s seven-volume (volume 7 remains unpublished in galley form) “Lexicon of the Yiddish Theatre.” This includes translations of every entry in its first volumes, most of the second, and much of what is contained in the remaining volumes. You can find links to these translations at https://www.museumoffamilyhistory.com/yt/lex-biography.htm.

On a personal level, it should be noted that most of the work that has been done to date for this Museum of the Yiddish Theatre has been done without funding and mostly by myself, Steven Lasky, as a labor of love. From its inception, my idea has been to create an interactive, multimedia, three-dimensional museum of Jewish history to date remained unfulfilled. To the best of my knowledge, this has never been done before. This dream has been my end-goal since I first began to publish my first website, my first museum of Jewish history, the “Museum of Family History,” (https://www.museumoffamilyhistory.com), in 2005. Yet hope springs eternal.

Credit must be given to various organizations, whose material has assisted me greatly in my work. Firstly, to the Forverts, for its wonderful publication that has been published since the end of...
the nineteenth century. Also, to the National Library of Israel, for without its publication of the extant issues of such Yiddish newspapers as the Forverts, the Jewish Morning Journal, and The Day (Der Tog), much of Jewish history would only be able to be seen on microfilm and thus be less available to myself and the general public as well. I recall the many, many times I trained in to Manhattan from Long Island, visited the Dorot Division of the New York Public Library, to carefully scan each edition of extant Forverts microfilm. If only I would have known about the NLI online Forverts editions then! Also, the digital collections of the Museum of the City of New York and the New York Public Library, among others, have been helpful in my work. I also wish to acknowledge the assistance of YIVO, which holds a wealth of material of value to those who wish to learn more about Jewish history. Most of all, I wish to thank the Yiddish Theatrical Alliance (of which I am the archivist), i.e. the mutual aid society for the Yiddish actors and actresses, for their immense collection of photographs, documents, etc.

Please do visit both of my online museums. You can literally spend days and days visiting them, and you can do so at your own pace from the comfort of your own home or office. I hope to write another article for this publication on my online Museum of Family History, so please stay tuned!

From the Editor

Dear Safranim,

Welcome to another issue of AJL News and Reviews that we hope you will find interesting and informative. In this issue, we are delighted to feature the rich collections of The Museum of Yiddish Theatre. If you are a fan of theatre, I think you will find much to enjoy.

As January was book “awards-season,” we are pleased to share the news on the Sydney Taylor Book Awards and we want to give a special shoutout to our AJL colleague, Susan Kusel, author of The Passover Guest (Neal Porter Books, Holiday House), illustrated by Sean Rubin, which was the 2022 Gold Medal winner in the picture book category!! We also want to acknowledge the STBA committee who worked very hard to review and evaluate the best of the best in Jewish writing.

If you are on Jewish twitter, you may know My Shul Called Life/@RogueShul as a sharply funny and insightful account...what you may not know is the two brilliant shul administrators behind this “rogue” account. This issue’s Seven Questions With...brings them to you and explores their success as social media influencers.

Did you know that AJL is playing an important role in the American Library Association? We recently hosted two AJL Presents events with candidates for ALA President. Read about them in the article by Sean Boyle, who also coordinated all the tech for both zoom events.

Who Knows Four? We are posing a few questions to AJL members, and kicking it off with Life Member Jonina Duker. I hope this new occasional feature will help us get to know each other better.

As always, we have an amazing selection of reviews of the latest in fiction and nonfiction for readers of all ages. Please join me in thanking our reviewers and our editors for their tireless efforts in making Reviews a robust resource for Jewish librarians, readers, and educators.

AJL editors met recently to discuss how to improve our publication going forward. You may notice a few changes in publication dates in our efforts to best work with our writers, editors, and organizational schedule. Starting immediately, look for News and Reviews as follows:

March/April
July/August
September/October
December/January

Purim is around the corner. I hope you all have a joyous celebration with friends and family.

Warm hamantaschen regards,

Sally

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

Chapter Chatter and Member News

FROM OUR CHAPTERS

Judaica Library Network of Metropolitan Chicago (JLNMC)

Judaica Library Network of Metropolitan Chicago has had a busy 2021 fall and winter, with a new look, exciting programs, and big plans for 2022!

A New Logo: We introduced a visual representation of our identity as Jewish librarians in Chicago, created by talented designer Eric Geist of Geist Creative. The logo is featured in all of our correspondence, as well as on our Facebook page.

Facebook Face lift: Check out our new Facebook page: https://www.facebook.com/JLNChicago. It includes our logo, description, and events information, plus a new cover photo collage showing members displaying their favorite, recent Jewish fiction and non-fiction books.

Meet Your Colleagues: The 2021/22 Board posted photos and interesting information about themselves. In 2022 we will

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DON'T LET QUARANTINE LOCK YOU DOWN!
More access to more information, right at your fingertips

In “normal” times, we would have returned to school and resumed library services following proven procedures: updating calendars, uploading summer acquisitions, restarting student and teacher directories and organizing library facilities. The sudden March closings led to virtual learning, and now to diverse school and learning strategies. “Quarantine” blocked access to familiar “routes” we all frequently used to bring learning, cultural and recreational reading resources to the community members we serve. Quite suddenly, those wanting access to these resources were and might still be unable to come to us.

These developments prompted us to consult librarians and regional administrators, to help the OPALS community adapt to these changing circumstances.

New experiences and technological outcomes have been released incrementally this past summer and will continue to be released throughout the fall.

This release consists of several documents which can be found on our help page:

- School library services guide: facts, challenges & procedures for “new normal”
- Services quarantine management utility instructions
- Opals self-service requests & management updates

Please visit opalsinfo.net/covidhelp

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**AJL Hosts Candidates for Presidency of American Library Association**

Sean Boyle, SSCPL President

Thanks to the hard work of Sally Stieglitz and Emily Bergman, AJL was able to hold AJL Presents events separately with Emily Drabinski and Kelvin Watson, the 2023-24 candidates for presidency of the American Library Association (ALA). Ms. Drabinski is currently interim chief librarian at The Graduate Center, City University of New York (CUNY). Mr. Watson is executive director of the Las Vegas-Clark County Library District.

It was an opportunity for AJL members to learn more about the ALA and for ALA members to hear from and then ask questions to two of ALA’s up-and-coming leaders. Sally Stieglitz, AJL Council member and editor of AJL News and Reviews, led the first session with Mr. Watson on January 6, 2022. Emily Bergman, former SSCPL President and VP and current ALA co-liaison, then conducted the second session with Ms. Drabinski on January 19, 2022. Recordings of both sessions are available for viewing and sharing from the AJL’s YouTube page.

Both candidates were asked the same prepared questions before allowing the Zoom audience to pose their own questions. Both were able to express their visions for ALA along with providing their presidential platforms. Ms. Drabinski wants to help library workers who feel that ALA does not serve their needs by better advertising what ALA does do well, and then modifying the work being done by ALA to make sure it is addressing their still outstanding concerns. Mr. Watson wants to use his years of leadership in helping libraries transform in their local communities to now help ALA ‘pivot’ when coming out of the pandemic, ensuring ALA stays relevant and meaningful to the library community.

Both candidates were asked questions about how AJL could address the microaggressions felt by AJL members and other Jewish librarians when trying to get ALA to resolve scheduling concerns (e.g., important ALA events held on Shabbat, Yom Kippur, and other holidays) and other exclusionary practices. You are encouraged to watch the videos to hear their frank answers and recommendations.

The candidates then answered all of the audience questions, and their love of librarianship was expressed in their answers to “What is your most rewarding experience as a Librarian?” with Ms. Drabinski ending her answer reflectively by stating, “there are also big picture moments you can see on my CV, but they are not the things most meaningful to me, personally.”

AJL leadership is thankful for this opportunity to speak with the ALA candidates and plans to make this a yearly event. All AJL members are encouraged to watch the videos of both candidates, and the ALA members are especially encouraged to share them with other folks they know in ALA.

The ballots for the 2022 ALA election will be emailed to ALA members on March 14, 2022. The election will close April 6, 2022.
**Remembering Dr. Maurice Tuchman (1936-2022)**

Ann Abrams, Librarian and TILLI Coordinator
Temple Israel, Boston

was very fortunate to work with Murray as a library assistant at Hebrew College, before I went to library school. Murray was the kind of supervisor and mentor everyone should have; he was kind, patient, and funny as well as highly intelligent, and knowledgeable about the Judaica Library world, and beyond.

After becoming a librarian, it was my privilege to be colleagues with Murray in the New England Chapter of AJL, which he initiated.

Zichrono livracha — May his memory be a blessing.

*Editor’s Note: Dr. Tuchman is survived by his wife, Helene, his children and grandchildren. An obituary honoring his memory may be found in the Mount Desert Islander, January 3, 2022.*

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**AJL Board 2022-2024 Slate**

**President**: Michelle Chesner

**VP/Pres Elect**: Sean Boyle

Sean Patrick Boyle is the Librarian at Congregation Keneseth Israel, in Allentown PA, and received his MLIS from the University of Pittsburgh. He is the current SSCPL Division President, was the Chair of the AJL Strategic Planning Committee, and is the Chair of the Advocacy Committee for AJL’s SSCPL division. He is a retired U.S. Naval Officer with over 23 years of service.

**Fundraising VP**: Jackie Ben-Efraim

Jackie Ben-Efraim is originally from Washington, D.C. where she volunteered in the school library in lieu of gym class. Jackie attended Columbia-JTS Joint program for undergraduate studies and also earned her library degree at Columbia University. During her studies, she interned at YIVO, organizing their clippings file which is similar to a collection at her current job.

In 2008 Jackie started work at American Jewish University as the Special Collections Librarian where she catalogs and mounts exhibits with materials in the Lowy-Winkler Family Rare Book Center in addition to overseeing digital collections.

Jackie has been an active member of AJL since her first day on the job at AJU. Jackie serves on the annual conference committee and manages ads in AJL’s publications. Currently she is the VP for Development.

**Membership VP**: Sharon Benamou

Institution and position in the institution: UCLA; Hebraica/Judaica and Music Catalog Librarian

Past position on AJL Board, Council or committee: RAS Vice President, RAS President, Local Conference Co-Chair, Education Committee, member, Vice President for Membership

Bio: Sharon Benamou is the Hebraica/Judaica and Music Catalog Librarian at UCLA. She has an MA in Musicology from UCLA and an MLIS from CSU San Jose. She is active in both AJL and the Music Library Association (MLA). In MLA she is the Jewish Music Interest Group coordinator

Plans if elected: If I am re-elected as Vice President for Membership I would like to improve the member experience on our online platforms, continue to build our membership and community.

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**Bibliography: Selected Holocaust Literature for Youth**

Heidi Rabinowitz, Chair, AJL Member Relations

You may have heard about the antisemitic school librarian in Washington DC who made third grade student reenact scenes from the Holocaust. In response to this shameful news, Chava Pinchuck and I updated our 2019 bibliography of Selected Holocaust Literature for Youth Recommended by the Sydney Taylor Book Award Committee.

We had originally compiled it in response to that Holocaust-denying principal in Florida. Here is the updated bibliography (which will also be in AJL’s Bibliography Bank). Please share it widely. I’ve already emailed it to the principal of the DC school and he actually wrote back to thank me. https://jewishlibraries.org/selected-holocaust-literature-for-youth

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Treasurer: Andrew Lillian

Andrew Lillian holds a BS in math and has worked as a data analyst for the past ten years. He is an enthusiast of Judaism and books, and is looking forward to working as the AJL treasurer. He is a father of three young children and an avid gamer of all kinds.

Secretary: Rivka Yerushalmi

Rivka Yerushalmi is the Information & Referral Center manager for the National Institute on Aging and the Alzheimer’s Disease Education and Referral (ADEAR) Center in Bethesda, Maryland. She served on AJL’s Sydney Taylor Book Award Committee from 2016 through 2020, and currently supports author visits to the Shalom School in Sacramento. She also established two children’s library collections in domestic violence shelters and continues to provide collection development services for these projects. Rivka received her MLS from the University of Maryland iSchool.

RAS Pres: Yermiyahu Ahron Taub

Yermiyahu Ahron Taub is a librarian, poet, writer, and Yiddish literary translator. He is the author of two books of fiction, Beloved Comrades: a Novel in Stories (2020) and Prodigal Children in the House of G-d: Stories (2018), and six volumes of poetry, including A Mouse Among Tottering Skyscrapers: Selected Yiddish Poems (2017). Yermiyahu’s most recent translation from the Yiddish is May God Avenge Their Blood: a Holocaust Memoir Triptych by Rachmil Bryks (2020). A longtime AJL member, Yermiyahu was the co-chairperson of “Yovel/Jubilee: 50 Years of AJL!”, the June 2015 conference celebrating the Association’s 50th Anniversary. He has served as Chairperson of the Fanny Goldstein Merit Award Committee and the RAS Cataloging Committee, and he was a founding member of the AJL Jewish Fiction Award Committee. Yermiyahu recently completed a term as President of the Association of Jewish Libraries/Capital Area Chapter (AJL/CAC). Please visit his website at https://yataubdotnet.wordpress.com

RAS VP: Eitan Kensky

Eitan Kensky is the Reinhard Family Curator of Judaica and Hebraica at Stanford Libraries. Before that, he spent an enriching three years at the Yiddish Book Center as the director of collections initiatives, working on translation projects and expanding digital collections. He holds a PhD in Jewish Literature from Harvard, following which he stayed at Harvard to teach Yiddish and Jewish Studies. For the last two years, Eitan has also served as the co-organizer and programmer of a retrospective Jewish Film Series called REWIND. He is currently finishing a term as AJL secretary.

SSCPL Pres: Rebecca Levitan

Rebecca Levitan holds a BA in History and Judaic Studies from Binghamton University, and an MLIS from the University of Pittsburgh. She is a full time generalist librarian, and the Children's Coordinator at the Pikesville Branch of the Baltimore County Public Library in Baltimore, MD. She is the immediate past chair of the Sydney Taylor Book Award and the Co-Editor for Children's and Young Adult reviews for the AJL News and Reviews periodical, the AJL Seals Manager and the president of the AJL Capital Area Chapter. As a mom of three young children she is passionate about quality Jewish literature. Rebecca is a voracious romance novel reader and is an avid knitter and can often be found working on a shawl that she will likely not wear because it is too warm in Baltimore most of the year.

SSCPL VP: Aviva Rosenberg

Aviva Rosenberg is the Youth Services Librarian at the Ridgefield Free Public Library in Ridgefield, NJ. She previously served as school media specialist at The Moriah School in Englewood, NJ, and Talmudical Academy in Baltimore, MD. She received her BA in History from Stern College and her MLS from Southern Connecticut State University. Aviva has been on the Sydney Taylor Book Award Committee since 2021. She lives in Passaic, NJ with her husband and 4 children, where she spends her non-reading time baking and providing reader’s advisory to strangers on the internet.

Immediate Past Pres*: Kathy Bloomfield

*Members of the board who will not be voted on
Dear Friends,

Today, I want to write about the extraordinary work the members of your AJL Board and Council are doing.

**AJL has established an Endowment!**

After 56 years, the Association of Jewish Libraries now has an Endowment, a sure sign of the long-term success of our organization, the leading authority on Judaic librarianship. Starting with an initial contribution from AJL’s reserve fund, and additional gifts from several members, we hope that this important account will continue to grow. The goal is for it to support our many book awards and our scholarships for library students, as well as providing for our members to attend in-person conferences.

If you are interested in giving additional financial support for this crucial fund, please contact Jerry Krautman, AJL Development Consultant, at ajldevelopmentconsultant@gmail.com for additional information.

**AJL has an updated Strategic Plan!**

Sean Patrick Boyle, SSCPL President, led an incredible group of AJL members to update our Strategic Plan through 2025. We have goals and objectives, responsible parties and working committees, all supporting AJL’s mission “to foster access to information and research in all forms of media relating to all things Jewish, and to promote Jewish literacy and scholarship, and provide a community for peer support and professional development.” Read the full plan here [https://jewishlibraries.org/2021-2025-strategic-plan/].

I want to thank Sean, Jackie Ben-Efraim, Rachel Greenblatt, Michelle Margolis, Makena Mezistrano, Joni Sussman, and Alba Toscano for their time and energy in creating this exceptional document.

**AJL has announced our Sydney Taylor Book and Manuscript Awards!**

Congratulations to our Sydney Taylor Book Award Winners, Honor Books and Notables.

Congratulations to our Body of Work Awardee.

Congratulations to our Manuscript Award Winner.

All of these winners were announced at the American Library Association-Youth Media Awards presentation on January 24, 2022. For the first time, the AJL President had the honor of announcing the Sydney Taylor Book Awards. You can read about all the winners elsewhere in this newsletter.

Thank you to the Sydney Taylor Book Award Committee: Martha Simpson (chair), Judy Ehrenstein, Toby Harris, Carla Kozak, Aviva Rosenberg, Talya Sokoll, Kay Weisman, and to the Sydney Taylor Manuscript Committee: Aileen Grossberg (Chair), Rebecca Fox, Ilka Gordon, Heather Matthews, Heidi Rabinowitz, Rachel Simon for reading all of these works and deliberating to choose the winners.

**AJL will have an in-person Conference this year!**

Planning is in high gear for our upcoming conference Together Again! in Philadelphia, June 27-30, 2022. We will be taking every precaution to keep ourselves and our guests healthy. Conference details and registration information are now online [https://jewishlibraries.org/2022-conference/]. I look forward to seeing you all at the Weitzman National Museum of American Jewish History in a few months.

As you can see, AJL’s leadership team has been busy making sure your AJL continues to be a vital resource to you and your community. Roundtables, AJL Presents, and other online gatherings will continue as we head into the future.

Once again, all of this happens due to the efforts of a strong group of committed volunteers. AJL is always looking for people 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.

Thank you for all your support. Stay healthy and see you in Philadelphia!

Kathy B.
Who Knows Four...AJL Life Member Jonina Duker

1. Tell us about your best experience in AJL?

Since I joined AJL in 2021 (Hebrew year 5781), I hope my best experiences are to come. Having said that, I enjoyed myself immensely moderating a panel discussion for the 2015 (5775) AJL Yovel / Jubilee conference in Silver Spring, Maryland. Peggy Pearlstein from the program committee knew I am a professional facilitator (among other things although those things do not include being a librarian!) and asked me to volunteer. What made it even more fun was playing Jewish geography: one of the panelists, Veronica Belling of the University of Cape Town Libraries, had spent part of her career cataloging 8,000 books and periodicals acquired from one of my uncle’s libraries.

2. Tell us about your favorite memory of Jewish libraries?

While at the time, it was truly a multiple-year ordeal, it’s now well over a decade later ... knowing that the synagogue library I set up is an essential, featured, and prominent part of that community. The large synagogue had planned a very large expansion. The library had been bookshelves tucked away in a very small chapel at the back of the building; the plan was for a large single-purpose room not far from the entrance, with a lockable office for a paid librarian, and a budget for books. Financial retrenchment meant those plans had to be discarded: pared down to only a shared multi-purpose meeting room, no office with or without a lock, no budget for a librarian nor for books. Around a dozen synagogue members including several professional librarians had turned down being the chair of the library committee believing that over time that would force the synagogue somehow to find more space and money. After a few years, the books had not even been unpacked. I agreed to take on being the library committee chair because I came to believe that a more modest library was better than no library at all. By the time I had paved the way including overcoming the entrenched resistance, setting up comprehensive policies, establishing robust procedures, and planning for eventualities many years out. Part of my success in countering that resistance – truly – came from using materials I found on the AJL website developed by the Cleveland chapter and asking questions on HaSafran (once I knew I didn’t have to be a librarian to join the listserv). Looking at how that beloved library functions today is a source of great satisfaction.

3. Hamentaschen: prune. apricot. mohn?

The toughest question of the four: mohn (poppy) with prune a close second.

4. What is your vision for the future of AJL?

As I wrote, I am not a librarian ... I am in alphabetical order ... a lifelong advocate, bibliophile, patron, reader, volunteer (since elementary school, really!). In adulthood, I added literacy tutor to the above list. Not a librarian, and a new member: given those two caveats, my vision is that the AJL gives even wider support to those AJL member-librarians who have been countering antisemitism (using the term historian Deborah E. Lipstadt prefers) including the modern version thinly disguised as anti-Zionism. I have circulated materials from those AJL members who develop bibliographies, and more from their postings on HaSafran to my county-wide public library system. AJL as “the leading authority on Judaic librarianship” is uniquely positioned to stand up against that oldest hatred. May AJL go from strength to strength.

Editor’s Note: Who Knows Four... is a new feature in AJL News and Reviews that lets members get to know each other better. Thank you to Jonina Duker for being our inaugural interviewee!

2022 Sydney Taylor Book Award Winners

Winners of the annual Sydney Taylor Book Award were announced on January 24 by the Association of Jewish Libraries in a livestream from the Youth Media Awards press conference at the American Library Association. Named in memory of Sydney Taylor, author of the classic All-of-a-Kind Family series, the award recognizes books for children and teens that exemplify high literary standards while authentically portraying the Jewish experience.

GOLD MEDALISTS

The Passover Guest by Susan Kusel, illustrated by Sean Rubin, published by Neal Porter Books, Holiday House, is the winner in the Picture Book category.

During the Great Depression, Muriel invites a ragged juggler to celebrate Passover with her family. When he arrives, they are stunned to discover a magnificent feast to share with their neighbors. Based on I. L. Peretz’s “The Magician” with illustrations influenced by Marc Chagall, Kusel’s debut picture book will resonate with readers young and old.

How to Find What You’re Not Looking For by Veera Hiranandani, published by Kokila, an imprint of Penguin Random House, is the winner in the Middle Grade category.

It’s 1967, and Ariel Goldberg is trying to cope with her older sister’s elopement with a man from India and estrangement from the family, the financial troubles of their family-owned bakery, and her own struggles at school. Narrated in the second person, Hiranandani perfectly captures this turbulent period in history through the lens of a sympathetic and compelling preteen Jewish girl.

The City Beautiful by Aden Polydoros, published by Inkyard Press, is the winner in the Young Adult category.

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Founded by Louis Littman in memory of his father to explore, explain, and perpetuate the Jewish heritage, the Littman Library of Jewish Civilization published its first book in 1965. The Littman E-Library was launched in March 2017. It gives readers access to the definitive scholarship and careful editing that characterize Littman books, but on a fully searchable digital platform.

Browse the latest published books in The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization here: www.liverpooluniversitypress.co.uk/r/littman

What are the benefits to your library?

- **Comprehensive**: Now a 151-volume digital library with over 46,000 pages of solid research in Jewish studies across a comprehensive range of subject areas including history, philosophy, religious studies, cultural studies, and sociology.

- **Wide-ranging**: The Littman E-Library draws on research from across the world, including much work originally published in languages other than English.

- **An invaluable resource**: Digitized for the first time, the Littman E-Library includes scholarship from 1965 to the present, with work from leading scholars known as experts in their fields, many of them recipients of distinguished awards.

- **Digitally preserved**: All content is digitally preserved in the CLOCKSS Archive.

**2022 Pricing: £6,000 / US $7,500**

One-off purchase includes immediate online access to 151 ebook volumes currently available plus five years’ worth of future content, with access in perpetuity and no online hosting fees.

To order, request a 30-day free trial of select content or if you have any queries, please contact Jessica Thompson at J.Thompson18@liverpool.ac.uk.

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The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization

*Rupture and Reconstruction* is a cogent analysis of Orthodoxy’s ‘swing to the right’: a rupture with existing attitudes and patterns of behaviour that has had major consequences for Jewish society and spirituality. This new edition deals with criticisms raised since the essay, long established as a classic in the field, was originally published.


*Reappraising the History of the Jews in the Netherlands* offers an indispensable survey from a contemporary viewpoint that reflects the new preoccupations of European historiography and allows the history of Dutch Jewry to be more integrated with that of other European Jewish histories.


Browse the latest published books in The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization here:

www.liverpooluniversitypress.co.uk/r/littman
Romanian immigrant Alter Rosen embraces his Jewish identity while trying to adapt to American life. When a friend is murdered, Alter is inhabited by a dybbuk and must find the killer before it consumes him. Masterfully combining fantasy, mystery, LGBTQ romance, and historical fiction, this gripping story is set against the sparkling and lurid façade of the 1893 Chicago World’s Fair.

**SILVER MEDALISTS**

Eight Sydney Taylor Honor Books were recognized for 2022.

For Picture Books, the Honor Books are *Dear Mr. Dickens* by Nancy Churnin, illustrated by Bethany Stancliffe, published by Albert Whitman & Company; *The Christmas Mitzvah* by Jeff Gottesfeld, illustrated by Michelle Laurentia Agatha, published by Creston Books; and *Nicky & Vera: A Quiet Hero of the Holocaust and the Children He Rescued* written and illustrated by Peter Sís, published by Norton Young Readers, an imprint of W.W. Norton & Company.

For Middle Grade, the Honor Books are *Linked* by Gordon Korman, published by Scholastic Press, an imprint of Scholastic; and *The Genius Under the Table: Growing Up Behind the Iron Curtain* written and illustrated by Eugene Yelchin, published by Candlewick Press.

For Young Adult, the Honor Books are *City Hero* by E. Lockhart, illustrated by Manuel Preitano, published by DC Comics; *The Summer of Lost Letters* by Hannah Reynolds, published by Razorbill, an imprint of Penguin Random House; and *The Last Words We Said* by Leah Scheier, published by Simon & Schuster Children's Publishing Division.

**NOTABLE BOOKS**

In addition to the medal winners, the Award Committee designated ten Notable Books of Jewish Content for 2022.


The Notable Middle Grade Books are *The Magical Imperfect* by Chris Baron, published by Feiwel and Friends, an imprint of Macmillan Publishing Company; *Sorry For Your Loss* by Joanne Levy, published by Orca Book Publishers; and *Benny Feldman’s All-Star Klezmer Band* by Allison and Wayne Marks, published by Green Bean Books.


More information about the Sydney Taylor Book Award, a complete listing of the award winners and notables, and seals for purchase can be found at www.sydneytaylorbookawards.org.

**BODY-OF-WORK AWARD**

The Sydney Taylor Body-of-Work Award, which recognizes an author or entity who has made a substantial contribution over time to the genre of Jewish children's literature, goes to Jane Yolen. Jane Yolen has published over 400 books for readers of all ages in a wide variety of genres. Dubbed “The Hans Christian Anderson of Children’s Literature” by Newsweek, her books have received much acclaim, including Sydney Taylor Honors for *Naming Liberty* in 2009 and *Miriam at the River* in 2021, and two Sydney Taylor Notables. Her middle grade novel *The Devil’s Arithmetic* won both the National Jewish Book Award and the 1988 Sydney Taylor Book Award.

**MANUSCRIPT AWARD**

The Sydney Taylor Manuscript Award was established to encourage the publication of outstanding new books in the genre of Jewish children's literature.

The 2022 winner for the Sydney Taylor Manuscript Award is Noah Weisz for *Echo of Light*, a middle grade novel that focuses on Gabby Moskowitz, a Latina girl adopted by a Jewish family as an infant, as she explores faith and identity in the summer after eighth grade. The book deals with issues of family relationships, death, friendship, peer pressure, and community.

Winning authors and illustrators will receive their awards at the annual conference of the Association of Jewish Libraries, to be held at the National Museum of American Jewish History in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, from June 26 to June 30, 2022. Gold and silver medalists will participate in a blog tour from February 7 to 11, 2022. For more information about the blog tour, please visit www.jewishlibraries.org. For an exclusive interview with Sydney Taylor Book Award Committee Chair, please visit The Book of Life podcast at www.bookoflifepodcast.com.

**EVENTS**

Sydney Taylor Award sponsor Jo Taylor Marshall will be honored at an “After Party” on Sunday January 30, 2022, at 12:30pm ET on Zoom. Members of the public may register for this free event HERE.

**COMMITTEES**

Members of the 2022 Sydney Taylor Book Award committee are Chair Martha Simpson, Stratford Library, Stratford, Connecticut; Judy Ehrenstein, Montgomery County Public Libraries, Bethesda, Maryland; Toby Harris, Temple Beth Am, Seattle, Washington; Carla Kozak, San Francisco Public Library, retired, San Francisco; and Silver medalists will participate in a blog tour from February 7 to 11, 2022. More information about the Sydney Taylor Book Award, a complete listing of the award winners and notables, and seals for purchase can be found at www.sydneytaylorbookawards.org.
California; Aviva Rosenberg, Ridgefield Free Public Library, Ridgefield, New Jersey; Talya Sokoll, Putnam Library at the Noble and Greenough School, Dedham, Massachusetts; and Kay Weisman, Booklist, Vancouver, British Columbia.

Members of the 2022 Sydney Taylor Manuscript Award committee are Chair Aileen Grossberg, Congregation Shomrei Emunah, Montclair, New Jersey; Rebecca Fox, New Canaan, Connecticut; Ilka Gordon, Beachwood, Ohio; Heather Matthews, Knoxville, Tennessee; Heidi Rabinowitz, Congregation B’nai Israel, Boca Raton, Florida; and Rachel Simon, Newton Free Library, Newton, Massachusetts.

For more information, contact:
Martha Simpson, Chair
Sydney Taylor Book Award Committee
Association of Jewish Libraries
www.sydneytaylorbookawards.org
sydneytaylorbookaward@jewishlibraries.org

Seven Questions with… RogueShul

Ellie Klein Goldman and Caroline Dorn are the co-creators of RogueShul, a parody twitter account that humorously mines the daily trials and tribulations of synagogue administrative staff. Goldman and Dorn met in 2015 at Temple Shalom of Newton, MA, where Goldman was the Director of Youth Engagement and Dorn was the Education and Marketing Manager. In 2018, they joined forces to create Rogue Shul, a then anonymous twitter account that now has over nine thousand followers. Dorn and Goldman are also the founders of Real Time Strategy, a consulting group which offers resources for synagogues and synagogue professionals.

AJL: Thank you for taking the time to chat with us at AJL News and Reviews! It’s clear that synagogue life is a goldmine for comedic material...how did you make the journey from sharing a few laughs at work to becoming a significant humorous Jewish voice on social media?

Goldman and Dorn: That journey was decidedly unplanned! The birth of RogueShul happened as a way to entertain ourselves and poke a little fun at the crazy and unique aspects of synagogue life. It turned out there was a whole community of amazing synagogue staff who could identify! We love the idea that none of us are struggling alone, and therefore none of us can experience joy and humor alone.

AJL: How and why did you decide to reveal yourselves as the RogueShul team? Did anyone you knew suspect that you were involved?

Goldman and Dorn: RogueShul started as snarky (but well intentioned) humor and evolved into a conversation among Jewish professionals about the power and challenge of working in spiritual communities. As RogueShul evolved, so did our own work in the field which led us to create Real Time Strategy Group, a consultancy focused on supporting synagogues and Jewish non-profit organizations. Publically melding RogueShul with our new work just made sense.

We were extremely secretive about our RogueShul identities, and only a handful of very close friends and family were in the know. For the most part, we were able to remain under the radar by participating in the “who is RogueShul” speculation and fun!

AJL: Do you have any funny insights on synagogue libraries and libraries? Because do we have material for you! It seems from a few of your tweets that you are familiar with the experience of the box of random discarded books left outside the library door.

Goldman and Dorn: Synagogue libraries are truly sacred ground in our experience. Beyond the incredible resources that they offer (fueled by the librarian who staffs them), the library walls are often the holding space for truly impactful Jewish moments. Those spaces over the years have seen countless families gather with their clergy prior to funeral services, raw pastoral conversations about divorce, depression, and spiritual doubt, quiet discovery as preschoolers stop in and look through the low shelves of Jewish children’s books, and the excited energy of new staff interviews and negotiations. It is so fitting that all those moments should be surrounded, protected, literally by our sacred texts and history.

Libraries are also often the protective hosts of synagogue secrets. The board meeting that went into executive session, the shul staffer who takes a moment for themselves in the midst of a hectic day, the parent who first shares the news of an impending divorce over coffee with the rabbi, surrounded by books. We appreciate our synagogue libraries for what they offer, what they

Continued on page 13
hold, and all of the human moments they have seen over the years.

**AJL:** On a more serious note, you often tweet about the differences between the roles and expertise of synagogue professionals and synagogue lay leaders and volunteers (all of whom we know are essential). In the world of synagogue libraries, professional librarians, whether employees or volunteers, sometimes have the experience of not feeling valued. How can these librarians communicate that they bring education and experience to the table and that they should be supported and respected as educators?

**Goldman and Dorn:** This is a fantastic question and an issue we, as a community, need to address broadly. Historically, librarians have shown up to welcome those seeking knowledge, with kindness and a respect for asking difficult questions. These actions are fundamental for us as Jews, and the fact that we have librarians in our midst to show us the way and guide us towards resources that may help us is a huge gift. To invite librarians to the room when discussing adult education classes, resources for youth, and beyond would be a wonderful start to supporting and including them in our staffing communities. Especially in the darkest days of the pandemic, and when much of our lives take place on a screen, librarians can be helpful in making sure everyone has the resources they need to feel connected.

**AJL:** Thank you both! Before we go, we never miss the opportunity to ask, what are you reading? Any favorite books you want to share, whether secular or Jewish books?

Goldman and Dorn: We are both big fans of “The Color of Love” by Marra Gad!

**AJL:** Any other favorites or recent reads?

**Goldman and Dorn:** As a Driven Leaf (Ellie) Peace Like a River (Ellie) ‘This Is How It Always Is’ - Laurie Gottlieb (Caroline) ‘Motherhood So White’ - Nefertiti Austin (Caroline) ‘Know My Name’ - Chanel Miller (Caroline)

**AJL:** Please take a moment to touch on shulsplainers and why they can’t have oneg cookies...does this mean, in effect, that no one gets cookies?

**Goldman and Dorn:** Shulsplainers are folks who know less than shul staffers about the work but insist on explaining it to them anyway. Luckily for us at RogueShul we haven’t had too many shulsplaining moments but unfortunately for our colleagues on the front lines, it happens more often than it should.

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Whistle is the origin story of a brand-new, authentically Jewish DC superhero. Willow Zimmerman, teenage activist, lover of dogs and Reuben sandwiches, lives in Down River, a rundown, historically Jewish section of Gotham City. The neighborhood is beset by unusual troubles: a violent villain called Killer Croc and the mysterious “greening” of buildings, where wild plant growth sprouts overnight, covering and filling them so that they are rendered uninhabitable.

Willow’s mother is a Jewish history and culture professor who is laid low by cancer. Willow struggles to pay the bills with a night job at an animal shelter. When old family friend E. Nigma shows up and offers to help with a glamorous job running illegal gambling events, Willow has to decide which right thing matters most - following the law or taking care of her family. A run in with Killer Croc leaves Willow with extraordinary senses of hearing and smell, plus the ability to communicate with dogs. As she grows into her superpowers, Willow and her canine companion, Lebowitz, take on the task of protecting her neighborhood and catching Poison Ivy, the villain who is “greening” its landmarks.

The inner city setting is well-depicted in the illustrations, and the action scenes have a real sense of urgency and movement. Attention to various characters’ “looks” (clothing and otherwise) enhance the presentation of their personalities and behavior. Willow’s divergent activities are portrayed in her changing wardrobe: her attempt to put together a suitable costume for Whistle is a delightfully amusing page.

The Jewishness of this story is on the surface and within its depths. Willow has big curly dark hair, she loves traditional Ashkenazi treats, and she quotes Talmud and other sources of inspiration that she has learned from her mother. An essential turning point takes place on a night when she visits a synagogue to contemplate the consequences of her choices. The bigger issues at play are essentially Jewish as well; Willow grapples with questions of family and community, harmful lies versus necessary deceptions, and atoning for mistakes.

Seth, the villain called Killer Croc, is a Jewish hero we can be genuinely proud of. Willow grapples with questions of family and community, harmful lies versus necessary deceptions, and atoning for mistakes. Willow has big curly dark hair, she loves traditional Ashkenazi treats, and she quotes Talmud and other sources of inspiration that she has learned from her mother. An essential turning point takes place on a night when she visits a synagogue to contemplate the consequences of her choices. The bigger issues at play are essentially Jewish as well; Willow grapples with questions of family and community, harmful lies versus necessary deceptions, and atoning for mistakes.

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Just as Ms. Marvel brought a Muslim superheroine into the mainstream, Whistle belongs in every school and public library — a Jewish hero we can be genuinely proud of.


Set during the Spanish Inquisition when King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella ruled Spain, Raquela’s family are conversos who must celebrate their Jewish heritage in secret. After secretly learning about the Passover Seder, Raquela wants to celebrate the holiday, but her parents tell her it would be too dangerous.

Raquela’s father is a very successful fisherman, who catches fish even when others come back with empty boats. Asked how he does that, he responds, “To catch a fish, you must think like a fish...because clever fish do not get caught.” When Passover arrives, Papá asks Mamá to bake matzah, and sets Raquela to gather Passover items – wine, an egg, parsley, etc. He then surprises them by taking them to his boat and sailing out to his special fishing spot. There they celebrate Passover, recounting the exodus of the Jewish people and praying for their own future freedom under a beautiful full moon.

The charming, earth-toned colored illustrations (which look digitally created) provide appropriate pictures for the feelings the family experiences: Dark in the cellar while celebrating Shabbat; bright and sunny on the beach; moonlit on Passover night.

The back of the book provides brief “Historical Notes” about Jewish life during the Spanish Inquisition, as well as an “About Passover” paragraph.

A beautiful Passover story for young people and their families, and a rare look at Jewish life during a terrible time in Jewish history. A great addition to the Passover shelf for home, school, synagogue, and public libraries.

Kathy Bloomfield, AJL – President, Seal Beach, CA


Absolutely charming in every way, this delightful memoir of the author’s youth in Leningrad during the Cold War era is an eye-opening lesson for young readers who have no idea what life was like under communist rule. Yelchin steers clear of the harsh tone of deprivation that he could have focused on.
and instead provides a loving portrait of his Jewish family, including a snarky Yiddish-spouting grandmother who lights up the narrative with each appearance. The author remembers very specific moments of his childhood that will astonish a modern reader. Some examples: he and his brother chewed one piece of Juicy Fruit gum given to them by an American tourist for more than three weeks, they listened to their first rock and roll record from a bootleg album etched into “old x-ray photography of someone’s broken leg,” and lived in a communal apartment with other families in a tiny room, where each apartment also housed a KGB spy.

His parents see a way out for their two boys through their “extraordinary talent,” but it seems that only Yelchin’s brother is on the right path, eventually becoming a world-class figure skater. But after an absurd attempt to follow Mikhail Baryshnikov into the Kirov ballet, Yelchin’s true talent for drawing is discovered and nourished. His family had never realized that he had been drawing under a massive table that was the makeshift “bedroom” where he slept, hidden by an oversized tablecloth each night.

Soviet antisemitism is highlighted throughout the book and is a subject of curiosity from young “Yevgeny” as he attempts to pry family secrets from the reluctant adults around him, who live in fear of government retribution for a past they refuse to discuss. Yelchin’s drawings throughout the book greatly enhance the narrative, adding humor, charm, and a wry absurdity to his memories of the entire bleak Soviet experience. This memoir stops just as the author leaves high school and readers don’t know how he managed to escape the oppression and make his way to the USA. A sequel would be wonderful and highly anticipated by Yelchin’s many fans and admirers.

Lisa Silverman, retired Director, Sperber Jewish Community Library, Los Angeles Curator, Jewish Journal Streaming Guide

[Editor’s Note: The Genius Under the Table: Growing Up Behind the Iron Curtain is a 2022 Sydney Taylor Book Award Honor Book in the Middle Grade category.]

Bible Stories & Midrash


The text and illustrations of Mrs. Noah’s Doves resemble more a fairytale, or folktale, than a midrash. A European influence comes across in all the illustrations. Noah and Mrs. Noah are dressed in elegant and layered clothes with repetitive decorative patterns. The animals are stylized and give the appearance of folk art. The illustrations are sumptuous, and the text is poetic, “But when the rains came, Small drips as perfect as pearls.” The bible story, as retold in the book, does not follow the story in the Book of Genesis as it describes Noah starting to build his boat after the rain begins. After sending out birds to the East, West, North and South, Mrs. Noah sends out two doves who return with the female carrying a twig with “red berries;” however, the Torah indicates, it was an olive leaf torn off from the branch or some same freshly plucked olive leaf, not a branch. A teacher or librarian in a Jewish school would need to clarify the biblical story versus this version. For a midrash on Noah, a better choice would be an older book, Why Noah Chose the Dove, by Isaac Bashevis Singer and illustrated by Eric Carle.

Ellen Share, Children’s Librarian, Washington Hebrew Congregation, Washington, D.C.

[Editor’s Note: Jane Yolen was awarded the 2022 Sydney Taylor Body-of-Work Award for her substantial contribution to Jewish children’s literature.]

Biography


The title of this book is sure to draw in many readers who are young builders themselves. In fact, Blumenthal focuses on the famous architect’s early years and shows how his playful ways, typical of many kids, led to his fanciful constructions. Like many artists, Gehry faced disapproval from his parents...
who couldn’t see how his dreamy approach to life could ever amount to anything. The fact that he was able to follow his dream will certainly resonate with any child whose imaginative yearnings don’t seem to match adult expectations. With a few pieces of wood from his grandmother’s stove or a lump of challah dough, Gehry could mold ordinary materials into extraordinary shapes, the forerunners of his curving, undulating buildings.

Jewish aspects of the story focus on his name change from the original Goldberg (something that he did in reaction to prejudice, though it “pained him to do it”), and the impact of his grandmother’s carp swimming in the bathtub. These fish, which were used for making gefilte fish, swam with a hypnotizing grace that forever influenced the curves and graceful fluidity of Gehry’s architecture. The author’s note also elaborates on Gehry’s early exposure to the Talmud and the word “why,” which paralleled his constant curiosity. Blumental’s figurative language combined with Brzozowska’s evocative paintings provide a lovely tribute to a remarkable man.

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Continued on page 17
Nazi abuse and experimentation begins to emerge. The spy story angle and the involvement of the CIA are based on true events; Project Bluebird was a postwar CIA initiative which can be researched by the reader to provide additional historical context after reading the book.

Different in tone and substance to much other young adult Holocaust literature, this compelling story with its fine writing and chilling history is filled with suspense and keeps the reader glued to the page as events unfold. Revenge, horror, and psychological manipulation are accompanied by hope, kindness, caring, and sacrifice, resulting in a multilayered story showing both the best and worst of human nature.

Readers should be aware of some disturbing subject matter, but those who read Bluebird will be rewarded with a story they will long remember.

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


This captivating Holocaust book, based on a true story, is told in an oral history format. Signs of Survival is an amazing story of the survival of two Czech sisters, Renee and Herta, in a concentration camp. Herta is deaf and totally dependent on Renee to help her survive by interpreting for her in sign language. Toward the end of the war, they were both sent to Bergen-Belsen, the same concentration camp where Anne Frank died.

For children interested in Anne Frank, they might want to read this book and learn about these two sisters, who unlike Anne Frank, did survive the war, came to the United States, and had children of their own. Like Anne, Renee had a desire to write and kept a toilet-paper diary in the camp.

Their suffering is also described in the book. Their parents were murdered in a concentration camp, and in the camp, the sisters endured illness, starvation, and abuse. Renee writes, after liberation, “I was put in the care of a Swedish doctor who decided to fatten me up, because at age eleven I weighed no more than a three-year-old child.” The book is a historical and a personal testimony of suffering, survival, and hope. Includes photographs.

Ellen Share,
Children’s Librarian, Washington Hebrew Congregation, Washington, D.C.


Readers will be thoroughly engaged in this exciting, yet fraught, historical fiction novel inspired by the true story of the Edelweiss Pirates, a rebel group of teenage resistance fighters in Nazi Germany. Kathy Kacer continues her skillful, sensitive and informative treatment of Holocaust themed works setting Under the Iron Bridge during several months leading up to Kristallnacht, the “night of broken glass,” as experienced through the perspective of 15-year-old Paul, who is pressured to, and much to his disgust, joins the Hitler Youth. Albeit reluctantly, and to protect his family, he joins up, but his hatred of Hitler and the Nazis increases, and is intensified by classmates informing on their parents to the Gestapo, and witnessing cruel antisemitic actions.

Paul stumbles across and joins the Edelweiss Pirates. This group of young people, aged between 14 and 17, male and female, who declare “Eternal War on the Hitler Youth,” meets illegally and takes life-threatening risks to resist and thwart the Nazis. Paul’s longtime friend, Analia, is Jewish, and he is haunted by the progression of her persecution. A climatic scene reveals Paul’s and his family’s bravery and righteousness as they risk their lives to save his friend.

The back matter includes an author’s note that explains the historical context and terms and provides details about the Edelweiss Pirates, and photographs, which are both heartbreaking and inspiring, including the fact that this group was recognized by Yad Vashem as “Righteous Among the Nations.” This well-written and accessible portrayal of a few months during a horrific time period provides a window into what life was like for teens struggling with frightening and tragic events. Paul’s moral journey and the brave actions of the Edelweiss Pirates reveal that in the face of overwhelming evil, there are those who will make courageous choices that are moral and just, despite the dangers that may be associated with those endeavors.

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

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Fiction - Middle Grade


Ash loves her school’s morning television show, but when she’s stuck behind the camera instead of anchoring, she decides to quit and do her own news program out of her basement. With permission from her Abba and Dad (and a great example of how kids can safely create social media content), she and her friends Maya and Brielle start the “Renegade Reporters.” The girls accidentally stumble on a really big lead. Van Ness Media, the company that provides educational technology to their school and the entire Baltimore City Public Schools seems to be tracking what kids are doing on their apps, but why? Using clever research and reporting, the girls manage to get to the bottom of Van Ness Media and their plans.

Of course, while the girls are doing this investigation, they still have to go to school and are celebrating the High Holidays. Ash and her family go to Rosh Hashanah Under the Stars, a real Baltimore event, and have a thoughtful ABC activity (going through the alphabet to come up with improvements for the New Year) and discussion about Yom Kippur.

*Renegade Reporters* is a fast paced, exciting read that keeps the pages turning while also imparting some subtle lessons about internet safety and being good neighborhood citizens. Readers familiar with the Baltimore area (such as this reviewer) will be delighted with the familiar landmarks.

*AfterMath* is directed at middle school students. The writing is smooth, the characters are relatable, and the novel ends on a positive note. But there is no significant Jewish content; the only references are to the family’s rabbi in their old home. There are no scenes showing the Holy Days, Shabbat, mourning traditions, or other Jewish rituals. Like several other books in recent years, including *Hush* (2011) and *Intentions* (2013), the topics presented here — and their treatment — demand sensitivity. It should be handled with caution.

Fred Isaac, Temple Sinai, Oakland, CA


Aviva, an Orthodox Jewish girl living with her mother in an apartment over the community mikveh, is struggling to reconcile the death of her father, and her mother’s resulting disconnect from the world. Aviva’s father died in an “accident” when she was six years old, and the trauma of that experience has never left her or her mother. Each finds methods of reconciling their pain and shock, but not necessarily in positive or healthy ways.

Aviva attends Beacon TDS (Torah Day School) an Orthodox girls’ day school, where she does well in school but has lately shown little interest in her studies and is often asked to “go for a walk” when she cannot sit still during class. She does, however, excel at machanayim (a game similar to Dodgeball) along with her former best friend, Kayla.

Following an unfortunate machanayim accident, prompted by Aviva’s anger towards Kayla, the school principal bans Aviva and Kayla from participating on the school’s machanayim team and sets them to work together on the sixth grade *Bas Mitzvah Bash* — a party neither of them wants to attend let alone organize.

Hovering over all of this is a *dybbuk* that only Aviva can see wreaking havoc at the mikveh, a series of antisemitic incidents.
taking place in the community, and the vandalizing of the synagogue by persons unknown.

These threads come together in a crescendo of activity and emotion that keeps the reader glued to the page to see what will happen next, where it will lead, and how it will be resolved. Despite feeling like nothing good can come from any of the events surrounding Aviva, as with any good middle grade read, everything is resolved positively and with a bright future predicted.

While set in an Orthodox community somewhere in the United States, this exciting and engaging story could be the tale of any middle schooler anywhere. Bullying, isolation, trauma, grief, and friendship are the major themes of this engaging and timely story, much of which is taken from today’s headlines. There is a glossary of terms in the back of the book defining many of the Yiddish and Hebrew words used throughout.

Kathy Bloomfield, 
AJL President, Seal Beach, CA


In a Texas town called Odessa, in 1928, eleven-year-old James couldn’t find purpose to his life. His family was rumored to be cursed, with his father killed by lightening and his mother in jail, and the school bully and his friends tormented James daily. James was raised by his grandparents, but the little advice they gave him about fitting in didn’t help. He found a friend in Paul, a Jewish immigrant from Odessa, Russia, who was also an outcast at school. James was especially close to his grandmother, his Abuela, and when she gave him something just before she died, telling him to keep it secret, he embarked on a mission to uncover a family secret. His grandfather, Pappy, needed his help at his diner, but he was never too busy to listen to James’s questions. Both Pappy and Abuela taught him to help others, leading him to discover his past and the sense of purpose he’d been seeking.

With a thick Texas accent and a spot-on eleven-year-old voice, James describes his school days dodging the bully, working at his Pappy’s diner, visiting his mom, and walking to a meteor crater with Paul. Paul’s explanations of Yiddish words, Jewish holidays, and his family’s escape from Russia help the reader understand the book’s rich Jewish content. James’s confusion as he learns the truth about his background will satisfy any reader’s quest for knowledge and adventure. The author skillfully depicts racism, and religious, educational, and financial discrimination. When James and Pappy rescue the bully from a fierce dust storm, the meaning of helping others tugs at one’s emotions. Despite the cartoonish cover art, this will be an appealing read for middle schoolers and the adults who read with them, especially boys, who will connect with the nearly all male characters. An author’s note explains her fascination with the history of Jews in Spain in medieval times, leading her to learn about conversos, Jews who converted to Christianity to escape persecution, but hid their secret, continued practice of Judaism. That, and prejudice in 1928 are major themes throughout this engaging story.

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


If you’re turning twelve or thirteen, or know someone who is, have we got a story for you – actually thirteen stories and a poem! This collection of short stories, each written by a well-known children’s, middle grade, or teen author, offers thirteen engaging tales focusing on B’nai Mitzvah. Most are humorous, at the beginning, but get more serious at the end to include a lesson to be learned, or a cautionary tale. Many focus on the celebratory party that has become a common practice for many Jewish families, and end with the thirteen-year-old coming to the realization that the party isn’t what’s important, it’s the love of friends and family and the learning that matters. All are written in the voice of the boy or girl about to become a Bar or Bat Mitzvah, moving from one set to the very current story entitled “Pandemic Bat Mitzvah” and even one taking place on the imaginary Planet Latke. Like Jews around the world, the stories are an eclectic bunch, highlighting a wide range of experiences and emotions surrounding B’nai Mitzvah – anxiety, doubt, self-discovery, ... whether celebrating with a 10-piece band or a single accordion player!

There’s something creative and entertaining in this collection for every reader, Jewish or not.

An introduction written by editor Jonathan Rosen at first attempts to elevate the book to address relationships among other countries and religions, briefly discussing the rise in the number...
of antisemitic attacks in the U.S., and suggesting that reading builds bridges. However, he concludes that the book won’t alleviate antisemitism, but will offer fun stories that help Jewish kids see themselves and their experiences in books, and perhaps, allow non-Jewish kids to see that Jewish kids aren’t so different from them.

A glossary at the end explains the Hebrew and Yiddish words used in various stories. The final pages of the book contain acknowledgments from the authors, for example, author Sarah Aronson’s “For my mom, for saving the pictures.” While the inclusion of the acknowledgments was entertaining and may give some insight into the individual authors, a short biography for each author would have been more revelatory.

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


In October 1942, ten-year-old Ukrainian Maria Fediuk and her Jewish friend, Nathan, believe they can escape Nazi invasion by volunteering themselves for work detail in Germany. Wanting to help save Nathan, whom Maria and her family have been hiding along with other local Jews, the two set off on their quest. They soon learn the work detail is nothing more than slave labor and they are segregated. Maria is assigned to work on an Austrian farm in the Reich where the owner’s daughter, Sophie, is an active, aggressive member of the League of German Girls. Maria, amid her own troubles, worries about Krystia, the older sister she left behind, and about Nathan.

Skrypuch struggles to make this narrative work by asking the reader to believe a ten-year-old can pass for a much older worker. Indeed, in the author’s note, she admits she based this story on a family member who was nineteen. The intent of this novel, however, is to demonstrate how many others, in addition to Jews, faced Nazi persecution during World War II.


In this sequel to Trapped in Hitler’s Web, Krystia joins Maria and chapters alternate in their narration. At the end of the war, the sisters find themselves in a Displaced Persons Camp in the American sector of Germany. They are forced onto a Soviet truck heading east into the Soviet zone when Sophie Huber, the former “Hitler Girl,” betrays them and tells the authorities they, too, were Hitler Girls. The three of them, along with some others, are imprisoned by the Soviets, who despite their various and tortuous means of interrogation, are not interested in learning the truth. The sisters separately devise escape plans and ultimately make their way back into the American sector and immigrate to Canada.

Fast-paced, this narrative does well to focus on what happened after the war, emphasizing new troubles and chaos for stateless refugees. It is difficult to discern Maria’s voice from Krystia’s and Maria appears to have the older voice although she is the younger sister. Back matter includes an author’s note and a map. Although the publisher promotes this book for Grade 3, the stark violence more appropriately categorizes this book for older readers.

Barbara Krasner,
former member, Sydney Taylor Book Award Committee,
New Jersey Director, Mercer County Holocaust, Genocide, & Human Rights Center, Somerset, NJ


In 1945, fourteen-year-old Romek Wajzman has just been liberated from Buchenwald, a deadly Nazi concentration camp. He and more than 470 other boys, including the intellectual Elie Wiesel, were called the Buchenwald Boys, transported to an orphans’ home in France. Romek stumbles through this post-liberation period not knowing if his family is still alive and if so, where they are.

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REVIEWS OF TITLES FOR CHILDREN AND TEENS

He learns his sister Leah is alive in Palestine but has no money to care for him. At the home, Romek finds a mentor in Professor Manfred, and friendship, even though some friends leave to join the Communists in the Soviet Union, and his best friend goes to America. Romek fears that without photographs he will no longer be able to remember his family’s faces, as he recalls his time in the ghetto, with the partisans, and in six camps. Romek tries to piece a life together for himself by learning French, enjoying jazz, and making connections. Although a rumor that a boy in Switzerland could be his brother Motel turns out to be false, the mother of two of his friends faints when she realizes Romek is her brother’s son. Romek immigrates to Canada in 1948, accompanied by the professor.

This coming-of-age narrative deftly weaves this survivor’s (who took the name Robbie Waisman) voice of innocence with the voice of experience. It addresses an often-overlooked period of history, post-liberation, which left many youngsters alone and struggling to find their way in the world that disposed of their families. It captures the chaos, confusion, and the feeling of disconnectedness in a manner that will resonate with middle-school readers. The book contains several photographs, an epilogue, timeline, and author’s note about the French orphan home.

Barbara Krasner,
former member, Sydney Taylor Book Award Committee,
New Jersey
Director, Mercer County Holocaust, Genocide, & Human Rights Center, Somerset, NJ

[Editor’s Note: Boy from Buchenwald: The True Story of a Holocaust Survivor is a 2022 Sydney Taylor Notable Book in the Young Adult category.]


Journey on the C&O Canal provides the reader with a window into American history during the early 1900s through the eyes of twelve-year-old Gabe Marks. Gabe has been sent from Fredericksburg to Cumberland, Maryland to live and work for a year to work with a pharmacist and study with the local Rabbi so he could train for his upcoming Bar Mitzvah. An opportunity arises when Mr. Brant, a frequent customer, stops into the pharmacy in need of more than just the usual liniments and supplies.

The Brants operate a barge on the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal that is pulled by mules that walk on a trail next to the boat. A mule has been injured and left with a veterinarian in Georgetown. The Brants cannot afford to hire another crew member and Gabe, who has some experience with animals, is recruited for duty to walk the mules, and tend to Rose, the injured mule, who is a favorite of Daisy, the Brant’s young daughter, and is a handful. A condition of his service, however, is that a young apprentice Rabbi accompany him on the journey to tend to his lessons, ensure Mrs. Brant prepares kosher food, and gets him to Georgetown in time to properly observe the Sabbath (referred to as “Shabbos”). Gabe is observant, and starts each day with morning prayers. The trip is exciting and exhausting, and Gabe rises to all the challenges presented, both physical and emotional. He encounters wild animals, backbreaking work, inclimate weather and responsibilities that require strength of will and body. He develops friendships, skills, learns about himself and discovers goals for the future.

The narrative is engaging and employs language to give the reader a sense of time and place, such as “mighty hard” and the language mules would respond to such as “gee-off” to get going, and gives interesting details about how the canal operates, the life of barge operators and their families, and the mules that pull the barges. An author’s note gives more facts about the Chesapeake & Ohio Canal and the Jewish communities in Cumberland, Maryland, and Washington, D.C. from which she incorporates actual personalities from the time period in the story. An added bonus is a recipe for “Boatman’s Bean Soup - the Kosher Version!” A bibliography contains the author’s research that is incorporated into the text that results in an authentic and fun adventure.

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

Fiction - Teen Readers


Many YA books deal with the Holocaust or its aftermath, but few look at the impact on the children or grandchildren of Germans. The Other Side focuses on the effect on a twelve-year-old Toronto boy of discovering that his beloved grandfather (his “Opa”), who is dying of pancreatic cancer, fought for the Wehrmacht in the last year of World War II.

The book interweaves that theme with several (in fact, too many) others—bystander complicity, antisemitic and anti-Black racism,
REVIEWS OF TITLES FOR CHILDREN AND TEENS

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sibling rivalry, and personal growth—

through a narrative that merges mystery

and sports.

Liam Reimold is a gifted soccer

player seven weeks away from his elite
tryout when his world comes crash-
ing down. He discovers the body of a

seventeen-year-old girl at the foot of

the broken staircase descending from

his grandfather’s lakeside house to the

beach. As he and his friend Alessia

investigate the girl’s mysterious death,
a distracted Liam loses his focus on soccer, to the point where his
coach pulls him from the team.

Liam’s feelings about his grandfather run deep: “He could have
chosen to fight with the Resistance,” he insists to Alessia, who is
Black. “He could have stood up against the Nazis. Instead, my
grandfather had a hand in killing six million Jews. My mom’s
Jewish. I’m Jewish.”

Camlot’s treatment of complex racial issues can be heavy-
handed. Opa’s German family’s admiration for Jewish artist
Kaethe Kollwitz and for Canadian Jewish athlete Irving “Toots”
Meretsky’s courage during the 1936 Olympics are clumsily invoked
to prove that not all Germans were Nazis. Similarly, Alessia’s pre-
occious wisdom (“Your grandfather wasn’t a Nazi, Liam. Jesus.
... Not every German was a Nazi. ... I know not every German is a Nazi because I know not every
white person is a racist”) sounds more like the author’s voice than
Alessia’s own, and the parallel between her campaign to introduce
more Black history books into the school library and defying Nazi
ideology is strained.

The bibliography will be useful to adults who want to learn more
about the 1936 Olympics and Kaethe Kollwitz, and to YA readers
interested in reading about Black history, especially in Canada.

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

Jones, Kimberly and Gilly Segal. Why We Fly. Naperville, IL:
Sourcebooks Fire, 2021. 320 pp. $17.99 (9781492678922)
HC; $10.99 (9781728255262) PBK. Gr. 9-12

Gilly Segal and Kimberly Jones, authors of the 2019 book
I’m Not Dying with You Tonight reunite for Why We Fly, a story of two friends on the cheer squad, and how their
senior year turned out entirely differently from expected. Leni
(Eleanor) and Nelly (Chanel) are best friends and teammates on
the cheer squad. Leni has been recovering from a head injury from
a cheer accident and while she’s in phys-
ical therapy she strikes up a friendship,
or maybe more, with the school’s star football player. Nelly, in the meantime,
is certain she’s going to become cheer
captain, and is feeling the pressure of getting good grades and applying to
college. Her coping mechanisms are less
than healthy (or legal) though. When

the cheer team takes a knee during a
football game following the example of
a famous school alumni, tensions run
high and opinions fly everywhere. Nelly is suspended for a week,
though none of the other cheer team members receive the same
punishment. Between that, and Leni being named captain, both
girls must come to terms with their friendship and what they feel
ey can do to fight for justice.

The casual Jewish representation in the book is more than just
a passing mention of a bat mitzvah. Leni attends Rosh Hashanah
services, and consults with her rabbi on how to approach this big
issue of kneeling at the pledge and how to work for social justice,

including attending his interfaith social justice group.

Why We Fly addresses some big issue topics like racism, parental
pressure to perform, drug use, and slut shaming, but handles them
all with intelligence and maturity. An important book in the wake
of social justice movements in the last few years, this is bound to
get readers thinking and talking about major issues.

[Editor’s Note: Why We Fly is a 2022 Sydney Taylor Book Award
Notable Book in the Young Adult book category.]

Lifecyle & Jewish Values

32 pp. $12.99 (9781945560545) HC. Preschool-K.

Hachai publishes children’s books
with laminated pages that last, have a similar structure of
rhyming text with simple, realistic
illustrations and a cheery moralistic

tone suited for observant families. The Traveling Smile is the author’s take
on the idea of how society can “pay it forward” with a good deed that in-
fluences others to also act accordingly.

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"Share a smile, happy and strong, and watch those smiles travel along!" is the refrain, as a little boy cheers up his various family members with a smile and they carry it forward to others in their community throughout the day until it eventually comes back to them when their Bubbie comes for a visit. Young children may enjoy the progress of the smile through careful examination of the serviceable illustrations. The general idea is not a new one and could be a bit syrupy, even for little ones.

Lisa Silverman, 
retired Director, Sperber Jewish Community Library, 
Los Angeles Curator, Jewish Journal Streaming Guide


There are not many picture books based on verses from Pirke Avot. This simple story, translated from Hebrew, is an example of what can be done to demonstrate the sages’ words.

Tuvia Dikman Oro has chosen Avot 1.6 as the theme. “Joshua ben Perahiah would say: Find yourself a teacher, choose a friend, and judge everyone with the scale weighted in their favor.” The story is simple. Duck and Hedgehog find that their bikes have flat tires. On their way to Mrs. Hoopoe’s bike shop they pass several of their neighbors, each too preoccupied with their own tasks to acknowledge the passers-by. Duck complains, but Hedgehog suggests there may be a reason for their unfriendliness. When Duck and Hedgehog arrive at the shop, they find the others, who apologize and explain their reasons.

The lessons of Pirke Avot are available to all of us, if we would listen. This story for preschoolers can be a reminder for all of us not to make assumptions about others. Because the verse is at the front rather than the back, young readers can engage with it as they read or hear the story. The illustrations are engaging and the text is well-chosen.

Fred Isaac, 
Temple Sinai, Oakland, CA


This charming book for young children is greatly enhanced by the inclusion of delightful, professional illustrations that are reminiscent of the work of Mary Engelbreit. A young girl knows she is “just one kid in a big world full of people,” but feels comfort in talking to Hashem throughout the day. As she experiences varying emotions, she thinks of Hashem and it helps her to talk about them, making her feel better. She sings from her siddur, waits patiently for “moshiach,” davens in her own way, and marvels at the omniscient presence of the Holy One. The upbeat, rhythmic text, which thankfully does not rhyme, ends with the words, “Okay, Hashem, talk to you later! Thanks for listening!” The author explains in her end notes that she hopes the “book will inspire your children to turn to Hashem and to establish a lifelong connection and conversation of their own.” This is a lovely way for the very young to learn how to make a loving connection to Jewish prayer and practice.

Lisa Silverman, 
retired Director, Sperber Jewish Community Library, 
Los Angeles Curator, Jewish Journal Streaming Guide


A young girl narrates about how her father has covered the mirrors, torn his shirt, and is not shaving. The girl and her father sit on low stools and she watches as a yahrzeit candle burns lower. Though she does not want to be around people, her father encourages her to be around people who are coming to visit for shiva saying “it’s not the time to be alone.” Eventually when she hears her Aunt, the girl comes down and visits with the people who have come over until her father can’t be found. She eventually finds him sitting on her bed, under the same blanket she had been using. They cry and comfort each other, and then the girl pulls her dad up saying “it’s not time to be alone.”

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The beautiful illustrations, which seem to be in colored pencil and watercolor, show the grief the family is feeling without weighing the book down with too many muted colors. Readers familiar with shiva customs will notice some errors in illustration. The dad goes out of the house to greet the visitors, and the yahrzeit candle is not in a glass jar. Presumably Aunt Sarah would also be sitting shiva for her sister along with the dad and daughter, but she seems to come later on and just be a visitor. Notwithstanding these inaccuracies, Sitting Shiva is a thoughtful and gentle introduction to shiva, grief, and mourning to even the littlest of readers.

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

Picture Books


Bubbe and her dog Bart love making Shabbat together each week in Bonnie Grubman’s zany new picture book, Bubbe and Bart’s Matzoh Ball Mayhem. The reader and listener will need to hold on tight as Bubbe’s pot of matzoh ball soup “made a k-knock ... THUMPITY went the matzoh balls, and foam began to rise. / The broth began to gurgle, and the balls increased in size.” Using fun rhyming couplets and enough onomatopoeic words to encourage great expression in even the most reluctant reader, Bubbe’s matzoh balls fly out of the pot into hungry Bart’s mouth. It’s not long before Bubbe and Bart employ an umbrella, baseball mitts, and a magic wand to corral Bart’s favorite food. This is slapstick mayhem at its best.

Illustrator Deborah Melmon’s gorgeous double-page spreads show a hip, high-top wearing grandma and her sidekick, Bart the dog, who prepare for Shabbat together. In the end, they welcome Bubbe’s family for a traditional Shabbat dinner. The inviting warmth of Shabbat at Bubbe’s house is evident. Traditional Ashkenazi foods like gefilte fish and babka are mentioned, and several Yiddish words are judiciously sprinkled throughout. A short glossary at the end makes this enchanting book accessible to all.

Rena Citrin, retired Library Director of Bernard Zell Anshe Emet Day School, Chicago, IL
Past member of the Sydney Taylor Book Award Committee


As the author notes, mazik is the Yiddish word for troublemaker. As drawn, the two maziks (a boy and a girl) have a child’s body with two pointy teeth jutting out of their mouth. They have impish ears and hairy arms and legs with sharp claws instead of fingers and toes. The book begins with the maziks waking up in a messy room. The first two-page spread shows the maziks eating breakfast at a messy kitchen table with food spilled on the table and splattered on the floor and on the kitchen cabinets. The book follows the maziks during the day as they go to school, play with typical children and destroy their house. They pull down the window curtains, take apart a train set and spread toys all over the room. The adult in the picture appears to be tearing her hair out, because of the rough playing and trouble making. The two page spreads show messes wherever the maziks go. “Is that what maziks do each day?” is the refrain that ends most pages. When night falls and it is time for the maziks to go to bed, their parents say “Sh’ma” with them and kiss them goodnight. The maziks end each day calmly and peacefully. Parental love at bedtime has turned the maziks into little angels. “That’s how maziks end their day.” The book is in rhyme and the wildly colorful illustrations bring excitement to the story.

Ilka Gordon, Beachwood, OH


Probably the most universally known song of the Jewish people is “Hava Nagila” and its simple dance, the hora, that accompanies it. They are culturally imprinted on the Jewish experience. The origin story of the song is eloquently recounted in Freda Lewkowicz’s picture book for all ages, I Am Hava: A Song’s Story of Love, Hope & Joy. Lewkowicz cleverly anthropomorphizes...
the song into a woman who soars above the page as she recounts her journey.

“Hava Nagila” began as a niggun, a wordless song, in a shtetl (a small Jewish town) in Ukraine, and moved with the people to the land of Israel where they sailed to escape persecution and hunger. Israeli musicologist Abraham Zvi Idelsohn was “dazzled” by the tune, and many attribute the words to his student, Moshe Nathanson. The song soon became an anthem for Jews everywhere, urging them to “Come and rejoice. Come and sing and be happy.” It was sung at times of joy and times of hardship. Many artists, Jewish and non-Jewish, have recorded the songs hundreds of times. The author adds her parents’ personal connection to the song when they found themselves in a Displaced Person Camp in Germany in 1948. “Hava Nagila ... symbolized hope and resilience” for the survivors as they rebuilt their lives after the Holocaust.

Indian-American artist Siona Benjamin’s illustrations are as stunning and lyrical as the song itself. Hava is portrayed as a beautiful woman wearing a blue sari and a tallit. Her skin is blue “because she is Jewish and she is universal.” Energy and hope feel inherent on each gorgeous two-page spread.

Gitty and Kvetch

Bernard Zell Anshe Emet Day School, Chicago, IL

“Mitzvah” is part of the “Lift-the-Flap” riddle series from Hachai Publishing, which includes several Jewish holiday-themed Guess Who? titles. The sturdy pages are laminated cardboard which should hold up for many readings. The rhymed text hints at the mitzvah that is.

Mitzvah Guess Who? is part of the “Lift-the-Flap” riddle series from Hachai Publishing, which includes several Jewish holiday-themed Guess Who? titles. The sturdy pages are laminated cardboard which should hold up for many readings. The rhymed text hints at the mitzvah that is.

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hiding inside the flap. The *mitzvot* are presented in English and both Sepharadi and Ashkenazi pronunciation where appropriate. The brightly colored illustrations feature many smiling children, including boys all wearing *kippot*. Some of the *mitzvot* included are "Shmiras/Shmirat Halashon, Guarding Speech, Guarding Your Health, Studying Torah and giving *tzedakah*." The format will delight children as they guess which *mitzvah* is hiding behind the flap.

Ilka Gordon, Beachwood, OH


Isaac and Teresa are friends and neighbors. As the winter holidays approach, they share treats and excitement, with Teresa getting ready for Christmas and Isaac preparing for Chanukah. Teresa’s house sparkles with red and green lights, and once Chanukah arrives, Isaac’s family places a *menorah* in their window, and their house glows with blue and white. However, a vandal shatters their window, casting darkness everywhere, as depicted in Zelinsky’s shift from the bright joyful illustrations to entirely dark tones. It takes courage over fear to light and display the *menorah* again, but when the family takes that brave step, their entire community supports them, following the lead of Teresa, who hangs a drawing of a *menorah* in her own window. Zelinsky’s palette shifts again to cheerful, colorful tones to accompany the kind and joyful spirit of a town that comes together to show their unity with Jewish members of the community. Wind has based his story on a real incident that took place in Billings, Montana in 1993. That event formed the basis for *The Christmas Menorahs: How a Town Fought Hate*, a nonfiction book by Janice Cohn. While her book was suitable for older picture book readers, Wind’s fictionalized story is perfect for a younger audience, providing just enough text to spark conversations. While the topic is sobering, he handles the serious topic skillfully, showing how even young children can follow their hearts and demonstrate kinship with those in need.

Gloria Koster, retired School Librarian, New Canaan, CT Public Schools member of the Children’s Book Committee of Bank Street College

[Editor’s Note: *Red and Green and Blue and White* is a 2022 Sydney Taylor Book Award Notable Picture Book.]

REVIEWS OF TITLES FOR ADULTS

EDITED BY DANIEL SCHEIDE AND LAURA SCHUTZMAN

Nonfiction


This enlightening book covers the role Jews played, as both victims and contributors, in the Protestant movement of 16th and 17th century Europe. Beginning with Martin Luther, the author provides background to this era, including the “Catholic Reformation” (formerly “Counterreformation”), the changes in a corrupt Church that took place even beforehand—e.g., Inquisition. Regions are explored where, following 1570, major rifts culminated in massacres, riots, and the Thirty Years’ War. Nations varied as far as treatment of the Jews, many of whom were caught in the crossfire—expelled, persecuted, segregated, or at best tolerated (especially for economic reasons). They were allowed back into Britain under Oliver Cromwell. Rabbis like Judah Loew of Prague maintained cordial and intellectual relations with Gentile hosts; some, in response, wrote devotional works of their own. The Christian quotations, while discomfiting to some readers, help to understand the mentality borne of inquiry, dissent, and hatred. Preachers might have damned or defended the Jews (usually with the aim of conversion), yet all shared, in addition to anti-papal authority, a focus on the Jewish roots of Christianity and the “Old Testament” (*sola scriptura*). Many clerics like Johannes Reuchlin dabbled in Kabbalah. Jewish apostates were a major presence as instructors of Hebrew and Bible. Some sects identified with the Jews, either because of marginalization or chauvinism, considering themselves “chosen” and even calling themselves the “New Israel.” In the author’s view, neither anti-Judaic sentiment nor religious paranoia gradually ended with secularization; it continued for three centuries through witch hunts, pogroms, and hostile

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legislation—all part of recent and tragic history. This book is essential for academic libraries with Jewish or European Studies collections.

Hallie Cantor,
Acquisitions Associate, Yeshiva University, NY


Haley (1847-1914), was mostly an autodidact, who briefly studied at the yeshiva in Volozhin and was later appointed gabbai. He was one of the earliest exponents of Orthodox Wissenschaft des Judenthums. His greatest political achievement was the formation of the Agudath Israel and Mo’etses Gedolaei Hatorah. This book examines the work Haley did concerning understanding the formation of the Talmud text and the editorial framework of the Talmudic teachers. Haley’s *Dorot Harishonim* has both elaborate detail and its share of nonsense. It combines his scholarship, political vision and agenda to defend his version of traditional, Orthodox Judaism. Bergmann gives the reader historical and conceptual context to Haley’s work.

This book is aimed at scholars of the history and conceptualization of the Talmud, and those who want to understand the connections within the “sea of Talmud.” It is well researched and written. Bergman was a student of David Weiss Halivni and freely uses more than 300 sources.

This book is recommended for experts in the field and academic libraries.

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


This is one of the countless Holocaust memoirs that have been published since early after the war ended and up to the present. Each is important in its own right as it describes a unique life: a life lived through tumultuous times, but thankfully, often with successful endings. It seems that many survivors strove for meaningful achievements in their new homelands, whether in the United States, South America, Israel, or elsewhere, and even more so for their offspring. This memoir is about the author’s parents who emigrated from Berlin in Nazi Germany in the nick of time, in 1938. They started their new lives in Hollywood where both were successful in their professional fields, Rudy as a gardener to many stars of the day and Eva as their masseuse. They developed many close relationships with important people in Hollywood, relationships that eventually had very difficult consequences on the family and their two sons. The book is replete with interesting photographs.

The book belongs in libraries that collect Holocaust memoirs, especially of those who came from Germany and those who made new lives in California.

Michlean Lowy Amir,
United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Archivist/Librarian, Retired


While the Soviet Union came to an end some thirty years ago, its reverberations continue to live on. Jewish emigres from the USSR, particularly Russia, have established strong communities in Israel and in the United States and memories and recollections of life in Soviet times continue to inform thinking about contemporary Russia.

Emil Draitser, born and raised in the USSR, who left the country for the United States in 1974, has been writing ever since about his Soviet experience in an array of fiction and non-fiction publications. While his latest book, *In the Jaws of the Crocodile* takes its title from Draitser’s time as a freelance writer for *Crocodile*, the pre-eminent satirical publication in the USSR, as well as other publications, the book provides a revealing and moving window into the life of Soviet Jews more generally post-WWII through 1974.

Draitser describes his experience growing up in Odessa, Ukraine, where Jewish students in the city’s schools were bullied and mocked, and vividly indicates the fear of Jewish families of their sons serving in the Soviet army, notorious for its brutal treatment of young Jewish soldiers. His description of the maneuvers...
necessary for even the most gifted Jewish students to gain a place in a Soviet post-secondary institution, be it university or technical training institute, is a revelation – reminding the contemporary reader of the severe limits imposed by the Soviet government on admission of Jewish students to higher education. Draitser reminds us that in the USSR, “Jew” was an ethnic/racial designation rather than an indicator of religious affiliation.

*In the Jaws* introduces the reader to those privileged spaces in Soviet publications devoted especially to satire (known by the French term *feuilletons*). It was there, where pointed criticism of the failures and sometimes absurdities of the Soviet system of central planning, mismanagement, and poor workmanship, petty and larger scale corruption could see the light of day.

Draitser dramatically shows the limits of the acceptable, how widely the window of breathing space could be opened. We learn the necessity of his taking on a pseudonym in order to be published, as the work of identifiably Jewish writers simply could not appear. We see, after a period of relative openness, the increase of Soviet censorship such that Draitser sees no point to his further writing, so diluted were the satirical contents.

A wonderful inducement to reading through the entire book are the many jokes (in translation) that Draitser shares from Soviet times, bitingly mocking the contradictions between the unending propagandistic visions of the Soviet utopia now unfolding, with the all-too-evident realities so far from the communist promise. Draitser also includes a number of his satirical pieces, written in the 1970s, providing the reader an unsurpassed look at the texture of Soviet life at that time.

*In the Jaws of the Crocodile* would be a wonderful addition to both research and synagogue/community center libraries. Librarians might want to consider having a book group read the book, with someone from a Soviet Jewish background leading the discussion, sharing stories of their family’s experience in the USSR.

Mindy C. Reiser, PhD.,
*Vice President, Jewish Study Center, Washington, D.C.*


As Annette Fromm explains in her introduction to Eliany’s new book *Jewish Folktales from Morocco,* the motif of the wise/fool or the prankster/buffoon is a common one in many cultures around the world. Within the Jewish milieu, the best known examples are the “wise-fools” of Chelm, among the Jews of Eastern Europe, and the goofy but wise Joha of the Mediterranean and Middle Eastern Jews. In Morocco, this figure finds expression in the sage/clown “Seha.” Seha appears in numerous guises ranging from Elijah the prophet, to an Amazigh *fsib* (sage), to a stumbling tailor or unlucky water carrier. Eliany draws upon the traditions and heritage of his paternal grandfather, paternal grandmother, and maternal grandmother and illustrates their differing understandings of the character. Each tale or anecdote is preceded by a short introduction which places the story in context. Tales from his paternal grandfather (the scholarly Rabbi Mordechay), portray Seha as a fictional popular Jewish folk hero. The rabbis invest Seha with the Jewish values that he himself held sacred, such as the performance of good deeds, sustaining the needs of the community, and the upholding of biblical ethics. From his paternal grandmother, Esther, Eliany receives an image of Seha as a comic character who crossed cultural boundaries and mixed self-valorizing humor with self-deprecating irony. Ignoring distinctions between rabbis and *jinn* (supernatural creatures), his grandmother shared, in her simpler expressions, the values of her husband Rabbi Mordechay. Her tales are founded in love and compassion. They seek redress for the distress of the poor in Morocco. Finally, Eliany’s maternal grandmother, Tany Khessous, took a rather different approach. Having grown up in poverty, she became the specialized seamstress for the governor of Marrakech. Her stories made Seha into a socioeconomic and political hero. As Eliany explains, “Her tales reflect awareness of the conditions within the Jewish community in Marrakech, as well as socio-political circumstances with the Moroccan community-at-large.”

In conclusion, Eliany expresses concern about the treatment visited upon Moroccans making aliyah. Eastern European ‘veterans’ pressed for a melting pot rather than consulting the Moroccans about “...strategies relating to assimilation and nation building”. Such attitudes produced friction and repression. Eliany is particularly worried about the loss of tales such as the superb ones presented in this volume. They are little documented, and their transmission relies mainly on oral tradition. It can only be hoped that similar stories will be preserved for future generations.

Reviewed by Randall C. and Anne-Marie Belinfante


This collection of essays by novelist Lucy Ellmann is, as the author readily admits on the first page, written in a spirit of complaint. She complains about things such as patriarchy, nuclear energy, crime fiction, and international tourism. Subjects vary from big (e.g., electricity, tourism) to specific cultural artifacts (e.g., Alfred Hitchcock’s film *Spellbound*). Her worldview is, broadly, feminist and environmentalist. She refers every now and then to a
supposedly prehistoric matriarchy that supposedly “invented” agriculture, astronomy, pottery, and medicine. This reader is unsure if this is a theory she seriously believes in or satirical hyperbole meant to mock certain forms of feminism. She mentions Fran Lebowitz a few times. This seems right. Ms. Ellmann is a less comical and somewhat politicized version of Lebowitz. These essays have virtually no Jewish content.

Shmuel Ben-Gad,
Gelman Library, George Washington University, Washington, D.C.


Rabbi Feder received rabbinic ordination from the Rabbinical Seminary of America (Choetz Chaim), and the content and structure of this book is heavily influenced by Rabbi Henoch Leibowitz, ztz”l, the Rosh Yeshiva from 1941 to 2008. Each “shmuz” — two for each of the weekly Torah portions — is presented in five steps. First the verse from the Torah is presented with a question from one of the Rishonim (11th to 15th century rabbinic commentators), both in Hebrew. There is a short summary of what happens in the parsha, and the English translation of the verse. Step one presents the question. In Step two, the commentator answers his own question. Step three is a question about the answer of the commentator. Step four is a “new insight,” or answer to the question posed in Step three. Finally, Step five is a “Lesson for Life” gleaned from these questions and answers. For Parshat Lech Lecha, the wording of the verse, “...they parted, one from his brother,” shows the long-term ramifications of choices.

The short discussions and clear format lend themselves to discussion in the classroom or at the Shabbat table, and the text is written simply with many current day references (Amazon Prime), which makes it accessible and relatable to most readers. While the “Index of Hebrew Names” in the back matter provides translations that seem self-evident (Moses: Moshe, Reuven: Reuben), the “Biographies of Commentators” could have used a short definition of the Rishonim (11th to 15th century commentators) and Acharonim (those from the 16th century to the present) and when someone is mentioned in a biography, a biography for that person would provide context for those unfamiliar with the commentators. For example, “the Chizkuni is quoted by the Ramban, Minchas Yeheudah, Maharsha and Maharal of Prague,” but there is only a biography for the Ramban. Several commentators mentioned in the text do not have biographies. Otherwise, an interesting and relevant book. It is an excellent addition to all Jewish libraries, especially home libraries.

Chava Pinchuck,
Ramat Beit Shemesh, Israel


There is a crack in everything,
That’s how the light gets in” — One of Leonard Cohen’s most iconic lines—is explained as being based on a creation myth by Isaac Luria, a sixteenth century kabbalistic master. That is just one of the many descriptions offered by the author, who provides sources for Cohen’s lyrics. One of the most popular singer-songwriters of modern times, Leonard Cohen has been the subject of innumerable books, articles and dissertations. While his music is viewed as secular, this book shows how religious ideas touched nearly all his major contributions. It examines the use of biblical and religious traditions and philosophies from both Christianity and Judaism.

While Freedman points out that Cohen was hesitant to attribute his music as having a spiritual purpose, sources of the lyrics provided in the book clearly demonstrate religious contexts. The musician/poet rarely talked about his own specific religious practices, but both Western religions and Zen Buddhism, (in which he became ordained as a Buddhist monk) played a role in his life. Rather, the author believes, Cohen saw religions as helping explain the human condition, and that reflected his outlook on life. After a general introduction of influences in Cohen’s life, which is a sort of light biographical sketch, the book goes into various specific texts of songs. Song by song, he finds the origins of the words, explains connotations, background, philosophies and stories. This book is for people who want to delve deeply into words of songs they may already know, admire and cherish.

Judith S. Pinnolis,
Berklee College of Music/Boston Conservatory at Berklee

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REVIEW OF TITLES FOR ADULTS


American Jews recall the Catskills and the Borscht Belt as the summer vacation region of the 20th century. For British Jews, the town of Bournemouth on the South coast served a similar function. This volume explores the history of Bournemouth and its place in the lives of British Jewry.

Pam Fox begins with a historical survey of the British Jewish community. She then turns to Bournemouth, beginning with its creation in the late 18th century. It was first known as a seaside health retreat, easily accessible from London. By 1900 it was seen as a place for Jews, with a growing number of hotels advertising in the Jewish Chronicle. For most of the 20th century, it remained a major site for summer vacation, holidays (especially the High Holy Days and Passover) and simchas. Fox divides the hotels into “major” (the “Big Eight”) and “minor” categories. She then explores differences over time – 1914-1945; 1945-1975 (the heyday of the town); and post-1975. Part two describes the services the hotels provided: food and catering (Kashrut); levels of religious observance; and the amenities the hotels provided (“Entertainment, Recreation and Relaxation”). Chapter nine discusses the relationship between the hotels and the town. Chapter ten summarizes the legacy of Jewish life in Bournemouth. The two appendices describe the providers (the Big Eight and the other hotels and guest houses) in more detail.

Pam Fox has created a wonderful overview of British Jewish leisure. The numerous photographs add to the informative text. Jews by the Seaside provides a useful contrast between American and British Jews over the past century. While not a vital purchase, it is a fine addition to libraries dealing with British Jewry, and those with an interest in comparative history.

Fred Isaac, Temple Sinai, Oakland, CA


The JPS Jewish Heritage Torah Commentary is a compendium of Jewish wisdom and Torah commentary gathered from sacred writings, revered Rabbis, and contemporary thinkers. As an excellent resource for educators, teachers, and parents, this commentary reflects Rabbi Garfinkel’s approach as an educator and includes thought-provoking questions in each parsha which encourages a further exploration of the text. Each parsha is introduced with a brief description of its content. In addition, the discussion of each parsha is found in a separate chapter divided into four sections with this division: “1. Tanot Yisrael commentaries focus on a relevant traditional interpretation. 2. Eretz Yisrael commentaries explain a connection between a verse and a concrete, geographical location in Israel. 3. Am Yisrael commentaries demonstrate the link between a verse and the Jewish people as an ethnoreligious group. 4. Mahshevet Yisrael commentaries project ideas and puzzles through the lens of a Jewish philosopher, a classical text or a modern thinker.”

In discussion of Eretz Yisrael in Be-har, various opinions of Rabbis are given on how to observe the Shemita (Sabbatical) year. A question for thought is included, “What lessons do you think the laws of the shemita year teach regarding our treatment of the environment?” It is recommended that you have a Chumash available in English and Hebrew where you can read the entire parsha and locate lines for further study. Notes of sources appear at the back of the book. A topical index in the Commentary to be able to locate various topics and names would have been a good addition. If you are looking for Mishnah and Gemara wisdom, a recommendation is Torah & Company by Judith Z. Abram which is also a good resource to use with youth.

Ellen Share, Washington Hebrew Congregation, Children’s Librarian, Washington, D.C.


Above Us Only Sky: The Diaries of Ilan and Asaf Ramon is a fascinating behind the scenes look at Israel’s first astronaut, Ilan Ramon, who tragically died in the spaceship Columbia, when it exploded on reentry. In this beautiful coffee table sized book, the reader gets to know Ilan Ramon, the driven man, the devoted father and the loving husband.

Ramon chronicles his four and a half years of training in the U.S. Some of the details are little
known by the public such as, that there was an Israeli backup astronaut in case Ramon was unable to make the flight. The chosen astronauts had bonding activities for example, wilderness training where they had to practice working as a team and had to help each other survive in the wilderness. The reader experiences Ilan’s excitement while waiting for takeoff and the disappointment when the flight was delayed. His emails to his wife and children from space are poignant. Emails which were marked, “not for the media” are love letters between Ilan and Rona, his wife. Ilan talks of his expectations when he returns to earth and how he hopes to make a difference for the country he loves, Israel. This reader was in tears when Ramon revealed his aspirations for the future and she knew there would not be a future for Ilan.

The full page color photographs of Ilan Ramon, his family, and the other Columbia crew members are breathtaking. Every Jew will feel a sense of pride when looking at the official NASA photographs with the Israeli flag sitting prominently on Ramon’s sleeve.

The second part of the book records Asaf, Ilan’s oldest son’s, diary. Asaf followed his father’s path and also trained as a fighter pilot. His diary entries express how much he missed his dad. Tragically, Asaf died in a training accident at age 21. Every reader will be touched by these two very special human beings who died very young and were not given the years to fulfill their potential.

Ilka Gordon, 
Cleveland, OH


The Prophetic Quest, a coffee table book, is a beautiful, in depth study of Jacob Landau’s (1917-2001) stained-glass windows which are installed in the Reform Temple Knesset Israel in Elkins Park, Pennsylvania. Tom Crane’s vivid photography captures the vibrant colors of these magnificent windows. The book begins with a trifold panoramic photograph of the Kneseth Israel sanctuary and the windows in situ.

The reader can experience the awe-inspiring feeling of sitting in the sanctuary surrounded by Landau’s brilliantly colored windows. Following the photo are five essays that discuss the history of the project and include biographical information about the artist. Each window is devoted to a biblical prophet, and symbolizes that prophet’s mission and prophecies. For example, on the window depicting Elijah, Landau has written a verse from Kings in Hebrew and English. The commentary, in a column beside the window, interprets the images frame by frame. Each section of the window is described in detail and includes black line drawings of the significant illustrations on the window. A chapter entitled “Reflections,” presents short, one page essays on viewers’ reactions to the windows. Most interesting are the window specifications including cost, technique, materials and dates.

An index of Biblical texts and images is found at the end of the book. In addition, a glossary which includes technical artistic terms that might not be familiar to every reader, such as, saddle bar, cartoon and soldered copper foil is included. The Prophetic Quest is an essential companion for anyone who takes a trip to Elkins Park to see these glorious windows.

Ilka Gordon, 
Beachwood, OH


This book has 14 articles written by expert linguists who examine Biblical Hebrew in ways only a linguist can understand. They apply modern (read English) linguistic theories to the structure of Biblical Hebrew. While the chapters are well written and include many bibliographic references, this book is hard for the general reader to understand. The contributors use a very scholarly method of transliteration of Hebrew and do not include the examples in Hebrew letters. They use the King James translation for the Biblical texts, which is strange for a group that is trying to apply modern conceptions of language to the Hebrew texts. The footnotes have abbreviations that are not explained.

When this reviewer was learning Tanakh in my university days, we studied Hebrew grammar and lexicography in order to understand the concepts of the narrative texts. The study of Hebrew was used to understand the messages of the texts. This book totally dismisses the concept of the message of the Bible. The authors examine verb usage, sentence structure, and numbers, yet this does not help one understand the Biblical text.

Since this audience for this book is small, it is an optional purchase for even the biggest academic libraries.

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

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Janusz Korczak is a well-known and highly revered educator who tended to orphans and poor children in Warsaw much before the Holocaust. During the horrific war years, he chose to perish with 'his children' though he was given the opportunity to save his life.

Little was known about Pani Stefa (Miss Stefa), Stefania Wilczynska, who was Korczak's right hand for many years. The Polish journalist Magdalena Kicinska took upon herself a project in recent years of thorough research in order to write about this extraordinary woman who joined Korczak's social experiment to 'raise a new child.' Tragically, Korczak, the children of the orphanage and Pani Stefa were deported from the Orphan's Home in Warsaw, probably on August 5th, 1942, to Treblinka and to their deaths.

This excellent, scholarly book belongs in any collection of educational publications especially if they include works about Korczak and his legacy as a master teacher.

Michlean Lowy Amir,
United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Archivist/Librarian, Retired


This tome consists of the proceedings of the 2019 Sommerhauser Symposium on Holocaust Education. The theme of the 2019 symposium was antisemitism and the first six studies focus on the interwar period. One particularly insightful essay discusses the failure of a number of German Jewish intellectuals associated with the prominent legal theorist, Carl Schmitt, to recognize the extent and depth of German antisemitism. Another strong essay examines the Hannah Arendt's weaknesses as a historian and her tendency to adopt anti-semitic stereotyping prevalent in Germany.

Two of the essays discuss present day antisemitism. R. Amy Elman explores the failure of many amongst the transnational elites to fully acknowledge and successfully combat the antisemitism in Europe in the interwar period. She then shows a similar weakness amongst today's European Union elites in their failure to confront antisemitism amongst Islamic militants in Europe. She also discusses Holocaust inversion which claims Israel treats Palestinian Arabs as National Socialist Germany treated the Jews. Thus antisemitism in the EU often cloaks itself as anti-racism or pro-human rights.

In his essay on the BDS (Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions) movement, Shlomo Abramovich examines how in the last ten years Israel has become more Zionist and more Jewish, seeing itself as representing all Jews and thus apt to consider the anti-Zionism of the BDS movement as a form of antisemitism.

Shmuel Ben-Gad,
Gelman Library, George Washington University, Washington, D.C.


This book, originally published in 2015 by Warszaw University Press, is a highly scholarly volume, the product of meticulous and painstaking research, for the most part conducted in archives in Israel. The subject is an interesting and important one—addressing the larger questions of the path of emigrants toward integration and assimilation in a new host culture through the medium of foreign language media in their native language. The host culture here is Israel and the emigrant community under study are Jews from Poland who have made aliya to Israel in different waves and under different circumstances in the period from 1948-1970.

Israel's multiple political parties engaged in contests for the newcomers' votes, were attuned to the important role media in the first language of the olim could play in gaining their political allegiance, and consequently undertook publication of foreign language newspapers - this volume exploring this effort with regard to the Polish language. The author is exquisitely aware of the multiple ironies here at play, calling on a native tongue, with its rich evocations of another life and time, now in the past, to ground the reader in their new reality with its very different concerns, ways of being and behaving.

Following an introduction and a very illuminating overview of "Foreign Languages in Israel," the author devotes the book's subsequent chapters to a deep dive into the specifics of Israeli political
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party Polish language newspaper production — their organization, content, staff, interplay with their readers and the sponsoring party. She concludes her study in 1970, a time when the earlier Polish olim had successfully acclimated to the larger Israeli culture, and the Polish language press, both supported by political parties or otherwise funded, was not seen as of social or political significance.

This is a volume whose natural home would be a research library. With its extensive bibliography and detailed footnotes, Polish Jews in Israel is an invaluable reference source. At times its format, with occasional pages a block of type unrelieved by paragraph indentation and footnotes sometimes taking up more than half a page, makes Polish Jews in Israel, a formidable reading endeavor. But for the student of the role of media in furthering emigre integration, and the singular history of Israel in this regard, this volume will be well worth the reading effort.

Mindy C. Reiser, Ph.D., Vice President, Jewish Study Center, Washington, D.C.


This lavishly photographed book details the process used by master luthier Amnon Weinstein in his “Violins of Hope” project, repairing and resurrecting violins which were damaged, lost, confiscated, or otherwise ruined in the Holocaust and the ghettos. The photographer, Daniel Levin, shows the many steps Amnon takes to identify and catalog each violin and how he diagnoses which repairs are needed on any given violin. The journeys these instruments have taken from the hands of their Jewish owners who were forced to part with them varies with each violin. Some of the instruments have detailed histories that come with them, others are unknown and Amnon labels these with whatever information he has, such as the date they arrived at his workshop, who gave/sent it to him, special markings, etc. As of the time of writing the book, Amnon has repaired eighty-six of these violins, many of which have been used in symphonies and orchestras around the world.

As detailed as well in the book, Amnon also collects portraits, photographs, and artwork related to famous violinists, and every week he attends a flea market in Dizengoff Square in Tel Aviv, looking for such photographs. He also collects any information regarding the Bielski family of Jewish partisans that fought the Nazis, as his wife is the daughter of Asael and Haya Bielski. An interview with his wife about her family history and how it ties into Amnon’s work is of interest and serves to illustrate the importance of Amnon’s project to both Jewish and world history. This book is recommended for academic and school libraries that are trying to increase their holdings on Holocaust related material, Jewish history, Jewish music, and other related topics.

Eli Lieberman, Assistant Librarian, HUC-JIR, NY


Zvi Preigerzon was born in Shepetovka, Ukraine in 1900. He trained as a mining engineer in Moscow, but his true passion was Hebrew and Yiddish writing and culture. When the Menorah Fades is a fictionalized account of daily life in the town of Hadiach, Ukraine. The Nazis destroyed this small Jewish community, but Priegerzon interviewed some of the survivors. His tales depict devout women visiting the grave of Schneur Zalman, the Alter Rebbe, who founded Chabad. They leave slips of paper with prayers and wishes, hoping for miracles. His text is peppered with Hebrew and Yiddish expressions and songs, Kabbalistic elements, and biblical references. He wrote the book secretly while imprisoned in Stalin’s gulag. It was later published in Israel under the pen name A. Tzfoni. The title refers to a menorah that burns perpetually at the Alter Rebbe’s grave. Readers interested in shtetl life and the history of Jews in Ukraine will find this book interesting.

Barbara Bibel, Congregation Netivot Shalom, Berkeley, CA


The subject of opium in the Holy Land might be uncomfortable, but this well-researched book documents the Levant as a major historical link for the smuggling of hashish, particularly between Lebanon and Egypt. Before 1948, lack of borders allowed for freedom of trade among Bedouin traders, who often stored hashish inside camels. After 1948, the Negev and Israeli towns became theaters of operation. Also discussed is the drug culture, which became somewhat romanticized. Hashish, ubiquitous in the Middle East since the medieval era, is the root

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word of “assassin,” implying a drug-induced violence, and rampant addiction reinforced stereotypes of Arabs as evil, cunning, and sensual. The tone veers sharply left-wing, and the author makes hashish the springboard for issues of racism and colonialism. The Ashkenazic Zionists eschewed consumption, which ran counter to their agenda and carried an association with “primitive” societies—not only Palestinians but Mizrahi Jews, who imported the custom from their host countries. Ironically many of them smoked out of idleness and frustration within the transit camps.

The Six-Day War enabled greater contact with dealers, resulting in lowered prices of hashish and wider availability. After 1967, Israel became a mecca for psychedelic seekers; the author mentions a hilarious B-movie about Americans hippies in the Galilee. He also covers governmental drug warfare, achieved partly with the aid of Egyptian and Israeli soldiers. The drift toward “Stoner Nation” has been abetted by a softening public opinion of drugs, particularly cannabis, which has mainstreamed in all walks of Israeli life. Informative, though (pun intended) sobering, this book is suited for academic libraries.

Hallie Cantor, Acquisitions Associate, Yeshiva University, NY


This fascinating book explores internal biblical theology that focuses on events that occurred around the destruction of the First Temple and the deportations of Jews into the neo-Babylonian diaspora. The author utilizes only those biblical sources (Kings, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Psalms and Lamentations) that directly address this historical era. Each of these sources span different genres despite the same chronological (609-538 BCE) and geographic (Israel, Babylonia and Egypt) frame. This allows Rom-Shiloni to uniquely draw out the voices and theologies of these writings. In particular she asks, what did the prophets, kings, historiographers, poets, and people say about (i) God, (ii) God’s role in the destruction and exile, (iii) divine justice and (iv) the implication of the national catastrophe for the relationship between God and his people.

The answers to these questions, drawn from a careful reading of the texts, reveal a multiplicity of perspectives and theologies, but nonetheless share a common theological conception: that of “God as king, as ruler of Israel and controller of his history, including the events of the present crisis.” These voices “reflect the passionate struggles of the various sixth century players to comprehend the meaning of the disaster for their relationship with God.”

The book is divided into two parts. The first part lays out the foundation of this methodological approach—a discussion of theodicy, theology, sources to be used, and root metaphor of God as King. The second part examines the texts themselves.

The book is well organized and Rom-Shiloni writes clearly and concisely and without unnecessary scholarly jargon. This book is highly recommended for those interested in Bible, Biblical theology, and Jewish destruction literature and would be appreciated by scholars and interested lay people alike.

David Tesler, Efrat, Israel


*Studies in Spirituality* is a compendium of short (4 or 5 page) comments on the Parashot. It is unlike Rabbi Sacks’ 5-volume collection of more formal Drashot. Instead of extended analysis of the Tanakh, he offers comments and insights on the spiritual aspects of the Parashot, usually focused on a single line or image in the portion. For example, the drash on Shemot is titled “Turning Curses into blessings;” here, as Moses meets God at the Burning Bush, Sacks reminds us that Jacob demands a blessing from the angel (Gen. 32.26). We should look for the positive, rather than dwell on the negative. In Emor (“Holy Times”), the rabbi discusses the many commentaries on the Festivals and Shabbat. We are, he asserts, both physical and spiritual beings; both regular and specific occasions of memory are necessary. Every chapter contains a mixture of simple images and connective jumps. It is a magic trick of sorts; only the great rabbis can successfully pull them off.

In her foreword, Israeli commentator Sivan Rahav Meir says that “the task he left us is not to purchase his books, but to adopt his path.” This compendium, pithy and almost complete (fittingly, it does not include V’zot HaBracha), is a final memento, and appropriate conclusion to Rabbi Sacks’ remarkable life and rabbinate. It should be considered by every library, especially those that use
The late Rabbi Sacks was finishing this volume when he passed away. Its appearance is a final blessing for us all.

Fred Isaac, Temple Sinai, Oakland, CA


While one can learn much about Mandatory Palestine from its photography, this book does not offer balance and the photographic perspective and narrative is a myopic one. As a positive, interesting background information about communities is presented, such as the fact that the American Colony neighborhood was founded in 1881 by a group of seventeen Christian people from Chicago and two British Citizens, who were joined five years later by a group of about a hundred Swedes, Swedish-Americans and Anglo-Americans.

However, this book title and the information on the publisher’s website are unfortunately misleading. While the publisher claims that this book draws upon “fresh approaches” in study of Mandatory Palestine, it is not comprehensive scholarship and any “Biblical lens” not to be inclusive of Judaic viewpoint. Reference to contributions of Jewish (and as the author states, generally Zionist) photographers is only found in the Chapter One (the Introduction) and although several are named, and the existence of more in general are noted, none of their works are included. More telling of the attitude of this volume, one “salient example of Jewish photography,” Tsadok Bassan, “… with which to consider assertions of local and indigenous photography... As a member of the Old Yishuv, born in Jerusalem to a third-generation family in Palestine, ... seems exceptional in the categorisation of localness in comparison to other Jewish photographers of the period, though, at the same time, is clearly not indigenous.” Chapter authors’ mislead readers by using current and perhaps even charged, distortions of history (words like indigenous, colonial, and nakba), rather than examining their topics with an historian’s, and unbiased, lens. The chapter entitled, “Resilient Resistance: Colonial Biblical, Archaeological and Ethnographical Imaginaries in the Work of Chalil Raad,” goes as far as referencing “an ethnic cleansing strategy of the conquering forces” as force the Raads into exile to Lebanon following the end of the British Mandate.

Moreover, an examination of some of the sources reveal discrepancies between how photographs and bibliography sources are interpreted in this book as compared to the original source descriptions. For example, some of the pictures are in the Library of Congress with descriptions that differ from the authors’ description in the book. The authors put captions on pictures that indicate Palestinian while the originals did not. The photography, modernity and biblical lens of this title omit evidence of the Jewish presence, at least in a positive context, during this period of history apart from accusations of mistreatment of and violence directed at the Arab communities in the text. While this book is aimed at scholars of the period, readers should be very careful about accepting any conclusions and analysis of the authors as this volume clearly has an agenda inconsistent with a balanced expose of not only the subject matter of the book, but the historical backdrop of the time period. This book is not recommended for a Jewish library, or any library that values accurate, inclusive and non-political treatment of historical subjects.

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


Jonathan Sarna’s place among American Jewish historians is secure. This selection from his writings over the past 40 years demonstrates his breadth of knowledge and his ability to synthesize varying topics.

The book is comprised of fifteen previously-published articles, primarily about American Jewry during the 19th century. Part one discusses the challenges — both general and specific — of becoming American, particularly before the wave of immigration from Eastern Europe. The essays include overviews of Jewish life in Cincinnati and Boston, as well as wide-ranging examinations of various aspects of Jewish acculturation. Part two analyzes Jewish writing during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The chapters cover the history of Jewish publishing from Isaac Leeser to the Schiff Classics, and the development of JTS as a center of scholarship under Schechter and his successors. In Part three, Sarna discusses inter-faith activities from a variety of perspectives. The topics include the challenges of Christian attempts to convert Jews, Jewish religious school texts by Rachel Peixotto, and responses to the argument that the US is a “Christian nation.”

Professor Sarna’s reputation as a pre-eminent scholar and analyst is in full view here. The writing is both detailed and expansive. His
REVIEWS OF TITLES FOR ADULTS

investigations go far beyond the obvious. This collection is worth having in all Judaica libraries.

Fred Isaac,
Temple Sinai, Oakland, CA


This book, one of twenty varied works (memoirs, poetry, fiction and drama) by the highly regarded, late Israeli author, Nava Semel, is the tale of the complicated life story of her grandparents. It covers an era of tumultuous Jewish life in Eastern Europe, specifically Romania, in what was then Palestine and became Israel, and in the United States. She questions whether the story of their lives can be described as a love story because of the many personal upheavals and long separation they lived through. It is well written and the complicated lives of these two people keep one interested and looking forward to reading about their separate fates.

It would be a good addition to any library with works by Israeli authors. In synagogue libraries, it might be a good discussion topic for a book group.

Michlean Lowy Amir,
Archivist/Librarian, Retired, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum


In 1994, Professor Haym Soloveitchik published one of the most widely read articles in the history of *Tradition: A Journal of Orthodox Jewish Thought*, published by the Rabbinical Council of America. In this magisterial piece, Soloveitchik describes the shift within Orthodox Jewish culture from a mimetic tradition (where tradition was learned and imbibed by imitation from those that taught and modeled it) to a text-based tradition (where tradition is learned from the proliferation of Jewish texts). Soloveitchik provides many examples of this shift such as the rules surrounding kitchen-based kashrut (kosher observance practices) and the shift within generally recognized adequate portion sizes for the fulfillment of certain halachic observances (such as size of matzah at the Passover seder). Several reasons are cited for this significant shift – chief among them the massive loss of Jews in the Holocaust (exemplars of the mimetic tradition), the impact of large scale migration from Eastern Europe to western countries, the loss of a sense of “religious cosmology,” and the acculturation of existing within a modern, rule-based society. These changes had far reaching implications for the orthodox community resulting in a greater legalistic stringency and a redistribution of religious authority away from families and communities towards prominent yeshivot and heads of yeshiva.

Littman Press has published this 1994 essay in this volume along with a new preface and afterword by the author as well as two published responses. The first was in response to Dr. Chavel and appeared three years after publication in Yeshiva University’s *Torah u’Maddah Journal*. The second response appeared in a special *Tradition* volume that celebrated the 25th anniversary of the publication of the original article and contains a seventeen point response to the new contributors and the changing landscape since publication.

Soloveitchik’s essay remains required reading for those interested in understanding Orthodox society and the demonstrable shifts it underwent in the 20th century.

David Tesler,
Efrat, Israel


The Erez series is a four-volume collection containing a wide range of Jewish thought. This book concentrates on the writings of the Talmudic sages.

The volume is divided into several sections. The first half of the book is a review of Torah. It contains quotes from each Parasha, with a short selection of related quotations from the Talmud, Midrash, Mechilta and elsewhere. Each section is four to six pages long. Part two is comments by the sages on *Shabbat* and the major festivals. Part three — “Stories from the Sages” — contains stories on the kings of Israel, continuing to the Roman rulers. It focuses on the acts of the Talmudic rabbis, both historical and aggadic. The section concludes with tales of “Virtue and Morality” attributed to the Sages, and their deaths. Part four contains quotations on a variety of issues. There are 23 topical sections here, including relations between husbands and wives; friendship; and prayer. Each

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REVIEWS OF TITLES FOR ADULTS

topic has a few instances of the virtue, with appropriate references. The final short portion discusses specific matters: prayer; courts, and family mitzvot.

Rabbi Steinsaltz, z”l, and his team have compiled a wealth of quotations from throughout the Talmuds, aggadic material, and other sources. The book is part Sefer ha-Aggadah, part commentary. It should be in every academic Judaica institution, from high school up. Larger synagogues should also seriously consider it, especially if they already have Nehama Liebowitz’s collection of commentaries.

Fred Isaac,
Temple Sinai, Oakland, CA


This book investigates Palestine-Israel as a settler colonial relation shifting ground to cover the many complexities informing that relationship. Todorova presents three case studies, the NGO Zochrot, the Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions (ICAHD), and Anarchists Against the Wall, to show how activists expand on their approaches through considerations of decolonial theories. The book also looks at how decolonial solidarity has shaped, and been influenced by, the writings of both Palestinian and Israeli theorists. With a broad international view to how some contemporary, powerful states have become oppositional to progressive civil society and grassroots transnational solidarity, Todorova concludes the book with a call for a practical reappraisal of how critical activism can reshape a violent settler colonial state without external intervention. Decolonial praxis may offer wider philosophical and practical alternatives to the current discussions surrounding the two or one state solutions given the complexities of people who now inhabit the area.

Highly recommended for academic and research institutions but is a good addition to any institution engaging with Decolonial theories.

Simone Clunie,
Cataloging & Systems Librarian, Langston Hughes Memorial Library, Lincoln University, PA

Fiction


Own voices in genre fiction are getting noticed and appreciated lately. Recently, The Matzoh Ball by Jean Meltzer (see AJL Reviews Sept/Oct 2021), introduced Jewish characters and experiences to mainstream romance fiction to great acclaim and excitement. In hard-boiled detective fiction, the long successful V.I. Warshawsky series by Sara Paretsky may not have previously been recognized as an “own voices” work of popular fiction, but it falls squarely in that category.

Like her heroine V.I., Sara Paretsky is Jewish and from the Midwest; the overt similarities end there, however. V.I. is a first generation daughter of an Italian Holocaust refugee and opera singer, Gabriella, who died when V.I. was a teen. V.I.’s connection with her beloved mother and her mother’s heritage is a thread throughout the series of books and references foods and music and cultural touchstones of Jewish Italian life.

In Overboard, V.I. is once again facing a series of social injustices that require her detective skills to unravel. This tikkun olam ethos drives most of the series and has a “ripped from the headlines” relevancy. While the plot revolves around unscrupulous movers and shakers in nursing homes and around unchecked police brutality, the Jewish elements include an aging synagogue congregation in a crumbling building that is targeted as a power play. Additionally, a Jewish family from V.I.’s childhood, who see her as a judgy meddler, plays a key part, as her investigations lead her into their shared history in South Chicago. Series regulars Max and Lottie, V.I.’s dear friends, are both former Kindertransport children and both physicians at a local hospital, Beth Israel.

For Jewish readers who want to see themselves, their lives, and their concerns reflected in contemporary detective fiction, Overboard and its predecessors fit the bill. Recommended for popular fiction collections for synagogues and for diverse representation in public libraries.

Sally Stieglitz,
Editor in Chief,
AJL News & Reviews,
Stony Brook, NY

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Leah Howard constantly works on her *middot* (character) to become a better person and be true to her identity now as an Orthodox Jew. As a newly observant and newly married Orthodox Jew, she struggles to fit into the ultra-Orthodox lifestyle of Boro Park, where she lives with her husband and his three children. (The two older are living away in a Yeshiva.) Zissele, the deceased wife of her now husband, Yaakov Lehman, had committed suicide following depression after the birth of their fifth child. The suicide was hidden from the community.

Leah's life with her husband gets complicated when it is discovered that Zissele's daughter, Shaindele, is defying the codes of the community and meeting a man in secret. Shaindele also suffers from guilt over her mother's death and concerns that she might suffer from depression like her mother. In having to face Shaindele's behavior, a series of crises ensue which completely force Leah to question the behavior and values of this ultra-Orthodox community where she finds herself living and aspiring to be accepted.

Leah Howard and Yaakov Lehman were introduced in Ragen's earlier novel, *An Unorthodox Match,* and while this book continues their story, it can be seen either as a sequel or stand-alone. This novel portrays characters with the utmost integrity and compassion and those who are totally depraved. While the ultra-Orthodox community might seem unique in its religious strictures and rules for living; the wide spectrum of human behavior can be found in all communities. The book lifts the spirit by portraying characters that strive to be guided by their yetzer tov. Hopefully, Ragen will write a sequel to this engaging book where we will further be able to follow the lives of Leah and Yaackov in their new community.

The book also contains a glossary with definitions of the Yiddish words. It is recommended as a good choice for a public library.

Ellen Share,
*Washington Hebrew Congregation,*
*Children's Librarian, Washington, D.C.*


*Moshkeleh the Thief* is a charming, poignant, and heartwarming story written by Sholom Aleichem and translated from Yiddish by master translator and novelist Curt Leviant. *Moshkeleh the Thief* was serialized in a Yiddish newspaper in 1903 and later issued as a book. Each short chapter ends with a cliffhanger. The reader can't wait to see what happens next. Most readers will want to read this short novel in one sitting. In Leviant's enlightening introduction he ponders the question, why wasn't this book part of the 28 volume Sholom Aleichem anthology? Leviant discovered this “lost, forgotten or neglected” work. The novel takes place in the Pale of Settlement. Moshkeleh is a horse thief and is therefore shunned by the community, but when someone is beaten or harassed by the gentiles they call Moshkeleh. Using his colossal strength, Moshkeleh is able to protect the people of Mazepevke.

Moshkeleh falls madly in love with Chaim Chosid's beautiful daughter Tsireleh, who has run away with the gentile, liquor tax collector, Maxim Tchubinski. Chaim Chosid begs Moshkeleh to get his daughter back. The ending is surprising and bittersweet. Sholom Aleichem's humor comes through in Curt Leviant's lyrical and delightful translation.

Ilka Gordon,
*Beachwood, OH*
The Bible is not for Children
Illustrations from the “OLD” Testament

ISBN: 978-0-9995958-8-6. 8 x 8 in., softcover, 86 pages with 38 full color illustrations. $20

“Witty poems and beautiful images bring alive grown-up parts of the Bible for the modern reader. A feast for eyes and mind.”
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Who killed Goliath? Read the book and make up your own mind.

Touching on Place

ISBN - 978-0-9995958-0-0, paperback, 6h x 9w in. 90 pages, 77 illustrations $20

Israel’s rich and varied history is revealed through original paintings and photographs of architectural elements with descriptions. Organized by region, this handbook lends insight into the beauty and complexity of this land. The artists, a longstanding husband and wife collaboration, recently exhibited at Cambridge University Museum of Classical Archaeology.

Mandalas • Coming Full Circle

ISBN: 978-0-9995958-9-3. softcover, 8 ½ x 8 ½ in., 40 pages. $20

Lifelong artist and teacher, Yonnah Ben Levy, presents her recent project combining art and poetry in this book containing 16 mandalas with accompanying poems. This series was painted over a year spent in Israel during the COVID virus as she depicted the succession of flowers and flowering trees seen in a nearby park, in her own garden, along the Mediterranean, or in Jerusalem. She has paired these paintings with poetry which she has written over the past 40 years in Israel and America.

Dekel Press is an imprint of Bezalel-Levy Editions

If ordered directly from our website, prices include shipping. Also available on Amazon
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.

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