Blewish: Inspired by True Events

By Ezra Edmond

In November of 2019, I was leaving a fantastic weekend at an animation convention. Being in the company of other creative people, at a gathering where stories are brought to life, left me feeling more inspired than ever. Recently I had felt a little “creatively dry,” but now I felt recharged, inspired, and ready to start something new. To make more time for writing, I switched my daily commute from car to train—because if I didn’t have to concentrate on driving, I could spend the time writing instead. My only problem was that I didn’t know what I wanted my next story to be about.

I did know that I wanted the story to be personal, authentic, and genuine to me. I reflected on various events and past moments in my life, but the thought of sharing any personal story made me very nervous. The “right” story didn’t seem to emerge until one day, while browsing in a bookstore, I overheard a mother of biracial Jewish children lamenting the lack of work available that her children could identify with. Her kids reminded me of myself, and hearing her remarks immediately brought back memories of my own childhood, when such representation did not exist.

I remembered being a young child and having my identity constantly questioned by those around me. When I went to a synagogue, people would always ask me if I was Jewish because they had never seen a Black Jew before. Going to school and not fitting in with the majority of other Black children because I didn’t fit in with expected cultural norms.

I was unaware of many other Black Jews when I was a child, and those I had heard of had either converted to Judaism or were Ethiopian, neither of which reflected my own identity or experience. I frequently felt like I was the only person on the planet who could possibly understand what it was like to be me. There was virtually no representation of my identity anywhere I looked, and now after seeing these kids in the bookstore, and putting my life into perspective, I realized for the first time that I wished there had been.

Continued on page 2
I knew right away that I wanted to tell a story about being Blewish, based on a friend having once referred to me as such back in High School. I also wanted the story to be animated - seen from the perspective of a child, without being too long or overly serious. One that kids, families, and adults alike could watch and connect with - even if they themselves are not Blewish. Something I wish I had seen as a child.

Assuming that no one else would want to pay to tell a story like this, I paid for it myself with my savings. With the help of a fantastic team of animators, storyboard artists, designers, and friends - we brought Blewish to life. But every day I was worried. Was I telling the right story? Would anyone be able to relate to it? Would anyone care? What if no one responds to this story, proving that I am the only person like me out there? I was so nervous, I didn’t even tell my family about it until it was completed!

But in 2021, once I began to share Blewish with the world, the real magic began. It took on a life of its own, was even accepted at a few amazing festivals - and not just Jewish ones! Different people from a variety of backgrounds and identities appeared to be moved by the message. People started reaching out after festivals to schedule screenings, Q&As and presentations at schools and synagogues, and because Zoom had become so popular, I was able to interact with people all over the world, including kids who looked and identified the same way as me, talk with them, share our stories, and bond. I’ve made connections with Black Jews my age and older. I’ve made new friends and had meaningful conversations with old ones. My worries finally calmed, and I felt proud to have pushed myself to tell my story, my way.

Telling an honest and personal story introduced me to a whole new world that I had no idea existed. It also made me appreciate the importance and value of positive representation. Most importantly, I learned that you don’t need someone else or a large budget to create representation for yourself. A simple drawing, a thoughtful word, or intentionally sharing your experiences in an authentic way all make a difference—and that, in my opinion, is the point of storytelling. To connect with and learn from one another, and to let those around us know that they, too, are not alone. I’m not quite sure what my next project will be yet, but I’m already getting excited at the possibilities.

Learn more about Blewish at http://blewishshortfilm.com/ Blewish Official Instagram: @blewishshortfilm

Editor’s Note: Blewish, written and directed by Ezra Edmond, had its world premiere at the 2021 Chicago International Children’s Film Festival and was also an official selection of the 2021 Cucalorus Film Festival. Ezra Edmond’s debut picture book, My Friend LeVar, will be published by Charlesbridge in summer 2023.

New Exhibit Opens Highlighting Jewish History on Long Island

On October 3rd the Jewish Historical Society of Long Island opened its doors to the public for an exhibit that tells the story about Jewish businesses in Nassau and Suffolk counties over the past three centuries. It is located within the Holocaust Memorial and Tolerance Center at 100 Crescent Beach Road in Glen Cove, NY.

Titled “Earning A Living: 300 Years of Jewish Businesses on Long Island,” the exhibit profiles over sixty businesses including farmers, manufacturers, and retailers. More than one hundred artifacts are on display that help tell the story of how Jewish Long Islanders financially supported their families in a variety of ways. One example is Louis Cohn’s sewing machine from 1910 that has been used by four generations of the Cohn family at the Amityville Men’s Shop, a tailor and clothier that has been in business for over 110 years. Another is a stock certificate for ownership of shares in Rothman Pickle Products, an enterprise started by Joseph and Katie Rothman in East Northport in 1914.

Interesting personalities and uncommon ways of earning a living are also showcased including Harry Brause, a liquor store owner in Glen Cove beginning in 1912 who became a bootlegger during prohibition. A Roosevelt Raceway program from 1954 helps tell the story of George Morton Levy who was born in Seaford in 1888, was an attorney in Freeport, and became the founder of the harness racing track in 1940. Levy also facilitated the land transaction that brought the retailer Fortunoff from Brooklyn to open their flagship store in Westbury. A photograph of the ribbon cutting at the opening of Fortunoff in 1964 hangs in the exhibit.

“Long Island is the fourth largest Jewish community in the United States today yet has been overlooked for its historical
significance in the American Jewish landscape,” said Brad Kolodny, president of Jewish Historical Society of Long Island and curator of the exhibit. “Most people are aware of the Jewish population growth in Nassau and Suffolk counties after World War II, but our history goes back much further than that.”

Further back indeed. At the entrance to the exhibit a storyboard mentions Nathan Simson as the first Jew to live on Long Island. He was a shopkeeper in Brookhaven in 1705. Another pre-Revolutionary War Jewish Long Islander was Aaron Isaacs who moved to East Hampton in 1750 and is buried there in the South End Cemetery. Isaacs was a merchant who owned part of a wharf in Sag Harbor and made trips across the Long Island Sound to Connecticut.

“We are thrilled to partner with Jewish Historical Society of Long Island to bring the largely unknown history of our local Jewish community to the forefront,” said Andrea Bolender, Chair of the Board at the Holocaust Memorial and Tolerance Center. “An essential part of our mission is education, and we know this exhibit will enhance the experience for visitors to our center.”

At the exhibit, visitors will find not only objects, photographs, and documents pertaining to Long Island Jewish businesses but also QR codes that can be scanned throughout, allowing for a more immersive and interactive experience. One example is the story of Betty Robbins, the first female cantor in the history of the Jewish people who was hired by Temple Avodah in Oceanside in 1955. Upon scanning the QR code on their mobile device, a visitor will be able to hear Cantor Robbins chant a portion of the Rosh Hashanah service from 1955.

Admission to the exhibit is free and is covered under the suggested donation of $10 to enter the Holocaust Memorial and Tolerance Center. Hours are Monday through Friday, 10am — 4:30pm, Saturday and Sunday 12pm—4pm.

Editor’s Note: This article was contributed by Brad Kolodny, president, Jewish Historical Society of Long Island

Seven Questions with... Novelist Ellen Feldman

AJL News and Reviews Editor in Chief Sally Stiegitz spoke with novelist Ellen Feldman, a 2009 Guggenheim fellow and the author of The Living and The Lost, Paris Never Leaves You, Terrible Virtue, The Unwriting, Next to Love, Scottsboro (shortlisted for the Orange Prize), The Boy Who Loved Anne Frank (translated into nine languages), and Lucy, The Living and The Lost (St. Martin’s Griffin, 2021) explores love and identity in post-World War II Berlin when a young German Jewish woman returns to Allied Occupied Berlin from America and was called an “exquisite piece of historical fiction” by Publishers Weekly.

AJL: Thank you for taking the time to chat with us! As a novelist who writes historical fiction, you have what appears to be the wonderful benefit of having earned both a BA and an MA in modern history from Bryn Mawr College. How did this field of study influence you as a writer? And how does studying history and incorporating history into fiction diverge?

EF: First a caveat, please. I’m always reluctant to call my novels historical fiction. For one thing, no writer likes to be pigeonholed into a particular genre. For another, my subject matter is, for the most part, the second half of the twentieth century. I consider that period my century, partly because it’s the era in which I grew up, partly because I believe our memories go back further in time than our individual existence, thanks to the stories of parents and other relatives who shape our world view. My uncle’s service in the Army Medical Corps during WWII and my mother’s worries about him were formative. As for the difference between studying history and incorporating it into fiction, as Camus says, “fiction is the lie that tells us the truth.” I do exhaustive research, but I also take the liberty of imagining myself into the mindset of the period and even the minds of real historical characters, as in my novels Lucy, Scottsboro, and Terrible Virtue.

AJL: Historical fiction always seems to be a substantial undertaking of both creative writing and factual research; what role have libraries and archives played in your work, if any?

Continued on page 4
EF: Libraries and archives are essential to my work. I researched *The Living and the Lost* as I do most of my books. I begin with general histories, move on to personal memoirs, delve into newspaper and magazine articles of the era, and explore archives. If there are people living who have relevant knowledge or experience, I try to interview them. In this case, I spoke to a German-American woman, who had lived in Occupied Berlin as a child, and also relied on a friend who was born in Germany, speaks the language, and knows the customs. Sometimes the research is so much fun that it’s hard to say enough and get on with the writing. Perhaps most exciting of all are the surprise discoveries along the way. In researching *The Living and the Lost* I made two that shaped the characters and changed the plot considerably. One had to do with my alma mater Bryn Mawr College, the other with the Ritchie Boys.

AJL: Do you feel your Jewish identity has informed you as a writer, including when you are writing about non-Jewish subjects?

EF: I am so glad you asked this question. My Jewish identity inspired and shaped *The Living and the Lost*, *Paris Never Leaves You*, and *The Boy Who Loved Anne Frank*, but I find even when I’m writing about characters who are not Jewish and issues that are not especially germane to the Jewish experience, I come to them with a Jewish mindset. This was true, for example, in *Next To Love*, which had only one minor character who was Jewish, but nonetheless explored some aspects of American anti-Semitism.

AJL: You do many author events with the reading public. What experiences have either surprised or moved you?

EF: Perhaps the most surprising and moving experiences occurred during my book tour for *The Boy Who Loved Anne Frank*. Invariably, people would come up to me after the talk and explain that they never knew they were Jewish until a Holocaust survivor parent or grandparent who’d been hiding the fact confessed in later years. The most dramatic example of this was the husband who traveled with his gentle wife to Hungary on their 35th wedding anniversary, took her to a concentration camp, and told her, finally, that he was Jewish and had been interned there.

AJL: As a publication that reviews Jewish books, *AJL News and Reviews* sees a significant quantity of publications, especially for children, on Anne Frank. Why do you think (if you think this at all), that there is such widespread interest in her story?

EF: Scores of journals by people who went into hiding have survived, many of them children, many of whom did not live. Certainly Anne’s talent was extraordinary and her perceptions were remarkable for a girl her age, but even an extraordinary thirteen-to-fifteen-year-old is an unlikely voice for six million dead. It is just that unlikelihood, however, that makes Anne’s diary such an overwhelmingly human document. She was not an historian putting the events of the day in perspective, or a philosopher trying to make sense of the senseless, or a journalist probing the behind-the-scenes maneuvering of an order gone mad. She was a girl, on her way to becoming a woman, trying to survive the events, and ultimately failing, and as such she has put a human face, a youthful, hauntingly questioning face, on six million faces erased from the twentieth century.

There is, unfortunately, another reason Anne’s diary has captured the world’s imagination. The entry in the diary that serves as a coda for the play, the movie, and many readers of the book is, “I still believe, in spite of everything, that people are good at heart.” But Anne also wrote, “There’s a destructive urge in people, the urge to rage, murder, and kill.” The second statement did not find its way into the play or the movie, but the first has been quoted so often it has lost its meaning, if it ever had one, and has become nothing more than a facile comfort for our own fears. The Anne we choose to espouse is hopeful. The message we insist on taking away is uplifting. The glasses we look through are rosy, because, as Bruno Bettelheim has written, “If all men are good at heart, there never really was an Auschwitz; nor is there any possibility that it may recur.” Our need for a happy Anne, despite her profoundly unhappy ending, runs so deep that when preview audiences saw the last scenes of the original cut of the movie, which showed Anne in Auschwitz, they scrawled outrage on their opinion cards. That was not the Anne they knew or wanted to know.

AJL: As librarians, we are always curious about favorite books. Can you share some insights into what you like to read and why? Is it historical fiction or a completely different genre or a mix?

EF: My reading matter is a definite mix. I am especially fond of nineteenth century British fiction like *Middlemarch* and anything by Trollope. Lately I have been reading more recent English writers like Elizabeth Jane Howard’s wonderful *Cazalet Chronicles* and Elizabeth Taylor’s books. Two intriguing novels I have read recently are *The Netanyahu* by Joshua Cohen and *Mercury Movies Presents* by Anthony Marra, both very funny books that address serious issues. As for nonfiction, thanks to an advanced reader’s copy I got my hands on, I can report that Stacy Schiff’s *The Revolutionary*, a biography of Samuel Adams is a stunning portrait of a little-known founding father and a crash course in the American Revolution, which is not, I believe, sufficiently understood in our anti-historical country. One of the best nonfiction books I’ve read in recent years is *The Splendid and the Vile* by Erik Larsen, which helped keep me sane during the lockdown. If the Brits could survive the Blitz, surely we would come through covid.

AJL: What are you working on now, if we may ask? We are always looking forward to new books!

EF: I am currently at work on a book about American women in the 1950s. It was inspired by the experiences of my mother and some of her contemporaries, but recent events that have turned the clock back on social issues in general and for women in particular made me realize how crucial and timely it is.

AJL: Thank you for sharing your time and insights with our readers. We are looking forward to reading your upcoming book!
Who Knows Four? Sean Boyle

Tell us about your funniest experience in AJL?

In order to protect the guilty, I am not really able to answer this question. I will say it involved a penguin, a ninja, and a rabbi. Or was it a penguin who thought it was a ninja rabbi... actually, it might’ve been a rabbi who... never mind, I’ve said too much!

Do you have a favorite Jewish book?

I have several. _The Chosen_, by Chaim Potok is way much better than the movie and is a Classic for many reasons. One I found amazing was _The Orchard_, by Yochi Brandes. Another one that just blows me away every time I read from it is _Birthright_, by Erika Dreifus.

Let’s get real on latkes...applesauce, sour cream, or something else?

100% Team Applesauce, but I’m accepting of the misguided sour cream folks. Never ketchup!

What is your vision for the future of AJL?

It is continuing to support and enhance the amazing work already being done by AJL and our members: offering more peer-led educational opportunities to get the “best practices” out to everyone; ensuring everyone has access to up to date, tailored to our unique libraries, resources; and strengthening ties with current outside organizations, as well as finding new, that can offer resources to help make our libraries even more impactful to our communities.

Sean Boyle, AJL Vice President and President-Elect, is Librarian at Congregation Keneseth Israel in Allentown, Pennsylvania.

Member News

A JL member Arielle Sokol, a former librarian in the Near East Division, Area Programs in the Graduate Library at the University of Michigan was interred Friday, October 21, 2022 at Rose Hill Cemetery in Denver, after having died in her sleep the previous Saturday night. Arielle could sing soprano, alto and tenor and played piano, flute, piccolo, recorders, violin, melodica and more. She spoke eight languages and was starting to learn Italian.

Arielle had traveled to Vilna to learn more Yiddish after beginning Yiddish at the University of Denver. She had been an intern at the Yiddish Book Center twice acting as zamler, book schlepper and book sorter before the center had a real library. It was a formative place that combined her interests in books, Yiddish, the Holocaust, and music.

Arielle had been an Assistant to the Director of InterHarmony, InterHarmony School of Music and Music Festival. She was a graduate of the University of Denver and the University of Michigan and had worn many hats in her career including historian, archivist, computer expert, and teacher. She was a lifelong instrumentalist and vocalist who had performed with groups throughout the United States and abroad including the Ann Arbor Cantata Singers, Comic Opera Guild, Aspen Choral Society, and Symphony in the Valley. She also worked as accompanist and vocal coach at both the middle and high school levels. She spent a lot of time arranging, performing, and engineering multilayered audio files. She was passionate about a wide variety of academic and creative pursuits.

In lieu of flowers, the family suggests donations to the Yiddish Book Center in Amherst Massachusetts.

Joseph Fitzgerald at Wisdom Tales has acquired world rights to _A Ring for a King_ by Martha Seif Simpson and illustrated by Yael Bernhard. Publication is expected in Winter 2025. _A Ring for a King_ is a picture book about a kitchen boy who, when dismissed from his position, has a chance at redemption if he solves a riddle posed by King Solomon.

David Levy gave a paper by zoom presentation for ATLA on censorship of Hebraica.

Association of Jewish Libraries Statement on Censorship and Banning Books

“Where they burn books, they will, in the end, burn human beings too.” (1822)

—from _Almansor_ by Heinrich Heine (1797—1856)

The Association of Jewish Libraries (AJL), the leading authority on Judaic librarianship, is deeply concerned about the rise in book challenges and book removals from libraries across the country.

Book bans result in the suppression of history and distortion of readers’ understanding of the world around them. Recent book challenges, aggressive in nature and frequently based on false characterizations of the books in question, are designed to limit learning to a narrow worldview. Books serve as mirrors that validate readers’ experiences and as windows that allow them to learn about the many cultures, religions, and identities that make up the American story and our global community.* Removing books compromises the need all readers have to see themselves reflected in literature and to learn about the world in which we live.

Jewish books have been the target of bans at various times in
Barbara Young Leff Mentorship Fund

Barbara Young Leff was 89 when she passed away on March 23, 2022. She loved her family, Judaic librarianship, and the Association of Judaic Libraries.

She received her Master of Science in Library Science from the University of Southern California in 1979 and her Librarian Teacher Certificate from the Bureau of Jewish Education in Los Angeles in 1974. Professionally she was the Library Director for Stephen S. Wise Temple in Los Angeles from 1969 to 1996. Concurrently she was an instructor of various courses in Judaica Librarianship at Hebrew Union College.

Her son Steve Leff recalled, “During those years, under her guidance, the Stephen S. Wise Temple library quickly grew from those few bookshelves in Hershenson Hall to fill an entire classroom in the Hebrew School (room 4), and before I knew it, Mom was working with architects to design a free-standing brick and mortar building on the SSWT campus, right next to the pool, to house and expand the Temple’s collection of Jewish books and Judaica. When completed, the facility was considered a model for Jewish Libraries.”

Barbara was President of AJL from 1980 to 1982. She was active as the Chair of Proceeding, Library Education, and National Convention Committees. She was an instructor or co-instructor of Continuing Education Unit courses at national AJL conventions from 1987 to 2003.

She was also President of the Association of Jewish Libraries of Southern California from 1973 to 1975 and a Director and Secretary from 2006 to 2016. She lent her experience to the Librarian Certification Committee, and the Dorothy Schroeder Scholarship Fund Committee. She was also First Vice President in charge of Programs and the Workshop and Seminar Leader.

Barbara made a provision in her will for AJL to “use the funds for quality Judaic library education with a focus on the Synagogue, School, and Center Division (SSC).”

AJL Vice President Sean Boyle had recently developed the Association of Jewish Libraries Developing Leaders Academy (AJL DLA). It is an innovative, immersive professional development experience designed to strengthen and support Judaic librarians in Jewish libraries worldwide. It will create a professional community and assure that all Judaic organizations have solid and effective Jewish library programs led by librarians who are leaders in their organizations, communities, and professional associations in the coming decades.

AJL Development Vice President Jackie Ben-Efriam and Development Consultant Jerry Krautman presented the opportunity of endowing the Developing Leaders Academy to Steve and his wife, Cheryl Leff. They agreed that the (AJL DLA) fit instructions in Barbara’s bequest. They made an additional donation to AJL in order to bring Barbara’s gift to the level of a named endowment, establishing Barbara Young Leff Mentorship Fund.

For information about putting AJL in your will or the work of our AJL Endowment Fund, please get in touch with Jackie Ben-Efriam at ajladmanager@gmail.com.
Americans and the Holocaust Traveling Exhibit
by Sherry Mahnken, Research Librarian, Curtis Laws Wilson Library, Missouri University of Science and Technology

The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM) originally opened its special exhibition Americans and the Holocaust in April 2018. The exhibition reveals the amount of information available to Americans about Nazi Germany and its treatment of Jews during the 1930s and 1940s. It looks at how Americans’ responses to that information were shaped by their own fears and concerns, including the Great Depression, racism and antisemitism, xenophobia, and isolationism. The exhibition also highlights individuals and groups who acted even though rescue never became a priority for either the U.S. government or most citizens.

In partnership with the American Library Association, the USHMM created the Americans and the Holocaust traveling exhibition to share this history with Americans across the nation. The 1,100-square-foot exhibit consists of eighteen panels; four films, one displayed on a monitor on the introductory panel and the rest on free-standing kiosks; and one touchscreen interactive map on a fourth kiosk.

Located in Rolla, Missouri, the Curtis Laws Wilson Library at the Missouri University of Science and Technology (Missouri S&T) is one of only fifty libraries in the United States selected to host the traveling exhibition. We were scheduled to receive the exhibition in 2020, but COVID-19 caused a pause in the tour, which led to our host period being shifted to September 13-October 25, 2022. Although we were disappointed by the postponement, it worked to our benefit, because the delay gave us the opportunity to tie our exhibit into The U.S. and the Holocaust, the recent Ken Burns documentary based in part on the USHMM’s original exhibition.

During our host period, the library presented a variety of related programming, including talks by several speakers on topics covered in the exhibition. In “The American Friends Service Committee and the Holocaust in France,” Missouri S&T Professor Dr. Shannon Fogg discussed her research into the AFSC’s work to help French Jews, including its fundraising and publicity campaigns in the United States. Missouri S&T’s Dr. John McManus, a noted military historian, spoke about his book Hell Before Their Very Eyes, which details the experiences of American soldiers who liberated concentration camps at Ohrdruf, Buchenwald, and Dachau in April 1945. The highlight of our program series was a talk by survivor Rachel Miller, who shared her experiences as a hidden child in France during the Holocaust.

The library also hosted a series of programs with a focus on the arts. In a reading co-sponsored by the Missouri S&T Center for Arts and Innovation, poet Marilyn Kallet performed selections from her most recent book, Even When We Sleep, along with other poems addressing antisemitism. Participants in “The Memory Project: Connecting Art and History” used historical photographs to create portraits of Holocaust victims, survivors, and rescuers in a hands-on art workshop developed by artist Roz Jacobs in memory of her uncle, Kalman, who died in the Holocaust. Accompanied by guest cellist Shannon Merciel, the Rolla Choral Arts Society Community Choir gave a concert consisting of selected movements from the “Holocaust Cantata - Songs from the Camps” by Donald McCollough and Michael Horvit.

In addition to the main exhibition, the Missouri S&T Archives and State Historical Society of Missouri - Rolla Research Office created a complementary exhibit and sponsored two additional lectures for Archives Month. The exhibit, “Rabbi Isserman Sounds a Warning: Missourians and the Holocaust,” examined the responses of six Missourians to the rise of Nazism and the atrocities of the Holocaust. Its genesis was the discovery in our recently digitized student newspaper of an article from 1934 reporting on Rabbi Ferdinand Isserman’s talk to the campus about his 1933 trip to Nazi Germany. In the additional programs, Missouri S&T Professor Dr. Petra DeWitt discussed “The German American Bund in Missouri,” while emeritus Professor Dr. Larry Gragg spoke about the anti-Nazi efforts of American Jewish gangsters like Meyer Lansky and Bugsy Siegel in “Gangsters vs. Nazis.”

We estimate about 2,500 people viewed the Americans and the Holocaust exhibition at our library, including over 450 eighth graders and high school students participating in guided tours by librarians and volunteer docents. Some of those students were also able to meet Holocaust survivor Erika Schwartz and hear her story during their visit. We are greatly indebted to Mrs. Schwartz for contacting us to volunteer her time in support of the exhibition.

The response to the exhibition and the accompanying programming from both the campus and the general public was overwhelmingly positive. Visitors frequently commented on how much they learned and expressed their appreciation to the library for giving...
them the opportunity to see such an informative and meaningful exhibition. We are grateful to USHMM and ALA for selecting us to host the exhibit and providing support for our programming.

For those interested in learning more about the exhibition’s contents, an accompanying book is available. Americans and the Holocaust: A Reader collects primary sources like news articles, government reports, and other documents that examine the American response to Nazism and genocide.

Americans and the Holocaust: A Traveling Exhibition for Libraries is an educational initiative of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum and the American Library Association.

Americans and the Holocaust was made possible by the generous support of lead sponsor Jeannie & Jonathan Lavine. Additional major funding was provided by the Bildners — Joan & Allen z’l, Elisa Spungen & Rob, Nancy & Jim; and Jane and Daniel Och. The Museum’s exhibitions are also supported by the Lester Robbins and Sheila Johnson Robbins Traveling and Special Exhibitions Fund, established in 1990.

---

**A Delicious Conversation with Chef Michael W. Twitty**

AJL had the honor of hosting Michael W. Twitty for a virtual Membership Gala on October 23. Mr. Twitty is a culinary historian, chef, and author of the book Kosershoul: the Faith and Food Journey of an African American Jew (2022) as well as the James Beard Award-winning book The Cooking Gene: A Journey Through African American Culinary History in the Old South (2017).

Mr. Twitty spoke about food as a Jewish and African signifier, and its connection to hope, survival and evolution. In Kosershoul, he writes, “‘Black or Jewish or Black and Jewish means food is a love language. That love isn’t just invested in satiety, and it is more than anchored in survival. There are indeed signifiers of trauma and patinaed historical memories. And yet there is joy. For us, ‘my soul looks back and wonders how I got over’ braids well with ‘they tried to kill us, we won, let’s eat.’”

The event’s wide-ranging conversation touched upon the role food plays in family, cultural transmission, and hospitality. Mr. Twitty described the sometimes-unexpected connections he’s encountered among peoples, customs, and foods that he’s encountered in his work. Seamlessly combining deep scholarship and lived experience, Mr. Twitty’s words inspired one attendee to write, “Lately, I’ve been so overwhelmed with anger about racism and homophobia in the Jewish community, it was so encouraging to hear Michael W. Twitty [speak] about culinary traditions, but touching on so many other topics in so many beautiful ways. I had no idea how much I needed to hear this.”

Amanda (Miryem-Khaye) Seigel, Librarian III - Instruction and Outreach, Dorot Jewish Division, The New York Public Library

---

**From the President’s Desk**

DECEMBER 2022

Dear Colleagues,

It is hard to believe that we’re headed toward the end of 2022! It has been a very busy year in AJL, and I am grateful for the many volunteers — on the Board, the Council, and on so many different committees to keep our organization going. It is wonderful to see the recognition our organization has been receiving, as we are invited to speak at events, organize panels, and discuss Judaic knowledge across the globe.

December is also the time of our annual membership drive. In just the last few months, generous donors have stepped up to support our organization — including an anonymous pledge to endow the operations of Judaica Librarianship; a gift from our beloved (and missed!) past president Barbara Leff and her family that will support mentorship of SSCPL librarians; and continued support of the Donna and Richard Harris Portal to Jewish Libraries, Archives, and Collections Around the World. Please consider including AJL in your end-of-year giving, and reach out to our Development Chair Jackie Benefraim (ajladmanager@gmail.com) or Development Consultant Jerry Krautman (ajldevelopmentconsultant@gmail.com) to see how you can make an impactful and long-lasting gift to keep AJL going well into the future.

Plans are underway for our 2023 Annual Conference, which will be held virtually, entitled “A World of Possibilities.” The Call for Proposals has already been posted, and we look forward to taking advantage of the virtual format to bring together colleagues from around the world to discuss our shared challenges, successes, and advice. I look forward to seeing you at one of our many virtual events, and of course, at the conference this summer!

My best,

Michelle
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 December/January issue, we are delighted to feature articles on the recent AJL Membership Gala: A Delicious Conversation with Chef Michael Twitty, a new Seven Questions with...novelist Ellen Feldman, and an article by director and writer Ezra Edmond on his short film, Blewish.

We are also happy to share news about the Barbara Young Leff Mentorship Fund, a fun Who Knows Four? With AJL President Elect Sean Boyle, and an excellent article on Missouri S&T’s experience hosting the USHMM traveling exhibit, Americans and the Holocaust.

I want to thank all of our contributors, reviewers, and editors, who make this publication possible and wish you all a happy secular New Year!

Warmly,

Sally

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

REVIEWS OF TITLES FOR CHILDREN AND TEENS

IN THE SPOTLIGHT

EDITED BY ELLEN DRUCKER-ALBERT AND REBECCA LEVITAN


In this middle-grade novel, Epstein explores what it means to lose a friend in a traumatic way and come out on the other side. The main character is Daisy, an eleven-year-old girl who’s about to enter middle school and is on the cusp of adolescence. Without her best friend, Daisy must learn how to navigate the tortuous path through various stages of grief - disbelief, guilt, anger, and finally acceptance. Epstein depicts Daisy’s grief and healing in sensitive, beautifully crafted prose: “The hole in her heart felt raw - a painful, throbbing wound in her chest - as if something had torn inside of her.” However, Daisy has the loving support of her parents, her aunt, two new friends, and her dog Chewbacca (“Chewie”). Each character is fully fleshed out in a believable way. In addition, Daisy lives near a nature preserve on Long Island Sound, New York. The sensory delights of this “oasis” are a constant background to the human adventures occurring within the preserve, including the search for magic and fairies.

Jewish content is ever-present but never intrusive. Because this novel extends over a period of almost one year, we see how Daisy experiences Hebrew school, the High Holidays, Hanukkah, food (matzo balls, chicken soup, gefilte fish, latkes), the mi shebeireach (healing) prayer, and finally, tikkan olam (repairing the world). At the end of the novel, one can only sigh with satisfaction and, perhaps, with a tear in one’s eye. However, this novel is not all doom and gloom, grief and mourning. The reader is treated to some humorous dialogue and events to ease the tension; to feel that things might eventually come back to “normal.” One final note:

Repairing the World treats girls “liking” girls in a casual, non-judgmental way, as well as two friends talking about their growing breasts. If the reader doesn’t mind these topics, then this novel is a highly rewarding journey from grief to growth. For another engaging middle-grade novel about death, grief, family, and friendship, see Joanne Levy’s Sorry for Your Loss (Orca).

Anne Dublin,
Retired teacher-librarian, Holy Blossom Temple, Toronto Executive member, AJL-Canada


For a school assignment, 13-year-old Aimee writes a letter to her grandmother, asking for details of what her life was like growing up in Ukraine during the war years. Little did Aimee know, her grandmother had quite an incredible early life during which she and her younger sister, Frina, escaped the Nazis, while in plain sight. Unfortunately, her ordeal was mixed with so much loss and pain, she never shared any of her experiences with her family before this time. Now, at last, she realized the time has come to share her story. The answer to Aimee’s question eventually becomes this beautiful book, told in free verse.

Born in Ukraine in 1927, Zhanna, was a precocious youngster. Very early on, both she and her younger sister Frina were recognized as piano prodigies and studied with the top music teachers. In 1941, during the death march, she and Frina became the sole survivors of Drobitsky Yar during which 16,000 Jews were murdered, including her loving parents and grandparents. Once orphaned, the girls had to rely on their own wits and the kindness of Gentile neighbors who risked their lives to assist them. At an

Continued on page 10
orphanage, they were able to create new Gentile identities. Their impressive musical talent was quickly discovered by Nazi officers who put them in a troupe of performers entertaining Germans throughout the country.

Told in the author’s creative style along with Zhanna’s own words, her story explains how their incredible music, courage, and good fortune saved and sustained these young sisters throughout the war and how they were able to reclaim their Jewish identities after the war. What makes this book extra satisfying is all of the additional back matter. There are many photographs, first-hand accounts, back stories, links to comprehensive interviews with Zhanna, and explanations of some of the more creative free verse forms, such as shape poems and reverse poems which are sprinkled throughout the book. The lyrical voice is the perfect choice for conveying this fascinating and music-centered story, told in a most creative way. If any middle-grade memoir deserves 5/5 stars, this is the one.

Esther Schnайдman,
Rosenbaum Yeshiva of North Jersey, Teaneck, NJ


This story-within-a-story brings us into the dark period of persecution and ultimate liberation of Soviet Jewry. In this historical graphic novel, the author has adapted a story told to her by Rabbi Rafael Grossman to create a narrative worthy of being shared now in this global time of threatened democracy.

In the broadest sense, this is the story of the post-Holocaust survival of the Jewish people portrayed as scattered crumbs of challah settling the land of Israel. In a closer story, the life of the main character, Zev, flashes before his eyes as he is dying due to injury while on IDF reserve duty. Then the book zooms in to his memory of his family’s rescue from a life of religious persecution.

In the 1960s, Rabbi Grossman had gone on missions to the Soviet Union, taking great risks to support the Jewish population. On one journey he found a young boy, Zev, who was being kept safe in total seclusion by his parents to protect him from vicious antisemitism and allow him to live a semblance of a Jewish life. Through the Rabbi’s efforts, the family was able to emigrate to Israel to embrace a full Jewish experience in freedom.

The illustrator, a native of Ukraine, brings her memories of the dismal atmosphere of that period as well as the joyous beauty of Israel to life in her powerful art. Accompanying critical back matter enlarges our knowledge of this piece of history.

This dynamic book highlights the success of activism in liberating Soviet Jewry. During this challenging time in Ukraine, we are given this reminder that seemingly insurmountable odds can be overcome. Appropriate on different levels for young audiences through adult, multiple readings will be rewarded with deeper insights into this compelling narrative. One is left with the gift of Zev’s grateful dying thought, “he remembers being alive was like being in heaven,” a reminder that freedom is a gift.

Suzanne Grossman, MLS
Librarian, Retired, Morris Public Schools, NJ

BIography


On September 19, 1940, gentleman farmer and Polish Cavalry Reserve Officer Witold Pilecki, now of the Polish resistance forces, allows himself to be arrested on orders to go to the newly opened concentration camp named Auschwitz to start an underground resistance and collect proof of Nazi criminal activity. Pilecki was successful in creating an underground resistance and was able to document and smuggle out proof that the Nazis were exterminating Jews by early 1941 and was requesting the Allies to bomb and destroy Auschwitz. His request was denied and after several more reports and requests for Polish resistance forces to attack the camp gates and fences while his forces caused a rebellion inside were also denied. Pilecki escaped on April 26, 1943. Pilecki thought speaking to resistance leadership himself would convince them to attack and destroy the camp. His request was denied again, and he was then given a unit in the armed resistance and eventually participated in the Warsaw Uprising before being captured by the Nazis and sent to a POW Camp.

This is a Young Adult (YA) adaptation of Fairweather’s award winning book, The Volunteer (Custom House, 2019), and is filled throughout with black and white photographs, prisoner drawn artwork, maps, and other illustrations. Fairweather includes in the end a short biography, entitled “Characters,” “Select Bibliography,” and “Endnotes.” Fairweather, in adapting The Volunteer for a YA audience, took out many of the more graphic details of the atrocities and consolidated some events while leaving in large unabridged sections of his text. Unfortunately, there is a distinct feeling of a break between the fast paced and extremely detailed sections directly taken from The Volunteer and his sanitized sections between them. High schools may be better served with purchasing

Continued on page 11
Eva’s family experienced Antisemitism. the only Jewish family in the community, a farm in Transylvania before the war. As a year-old Eva is talking to them. Eva and the first person with a conversational Davidson skillfully crafts Eva’s story in Kor, Grading, back Covid-19 work Crick partner without understanding of DNA and RNA. brought the world crucial under of “always looking closer” that on her persistence and strategy Gerin, Lisa. Rosalind Looked Closer: An Unsung Hero of Molecular Science. Illustrated by Chiara Fedele. Minneapolis: Beaming Books, 2022. 32 pp. $19.99 (9781506470658) HC. Gr. 1-3. This picture book biography of British Jewish scientist Rosalind Franklin focuses on her persistence and strategy of “always looking closer” that brought the world crucial understanding of DNA and RNA.

Her most important photograph, Photo 51, was shared without her permission by her lab partner with scientists Watson and Crick. While the book covers this theft of intellectual property, we do not see her reaction. After she died at the age of 37, Watson and Crick went on to receive the Nobel Prize for their work based on her efforts, but Gerin received no credit. Glossed over but crucial to World War II was her work on making safer gas masks. Her work on RNA, an important foundation of developing successful Covid-19 vaccines, was mentioned only in the back matter.

Taking place partly under the shadow of World War II, the book does not focus on antisemitism nor any elements of Judaism. There is an accompanying timeline, glossary, bibliography, and back matter with more information. The digital artwork brings us into the atmosphere of the time period. The target audience is not clear with complex scientific information geared to upper grades, but a text aimed at younger readers.

Suzanne Grossman, MLS Librarian, retired, Morris Public Schools. NJ


In this memoir for middle grade readers, Eva Mozes Kor has recounted her experiences to author Danica Davidson. Davidson skillfully crafts Eva’s story in the first person with a conversational style that allows readers to feel as if ten-year-old Eva is talking to them. Eva and her identical twin sister, Miriam, lived on a farm in Transylvania before the war. As the only Jewish family in the community, Eva’s family experienced Antisemitism. When the Germans invaded Hungary in 1944, Eva’s family was transported to Auschwitz. Eva and Miriam, separated from their family, became subjects in Dr. Mengele’s cruel experiments. Eva vowed to protect her sister and ensure their survival. She successfully fulfilled this vow.

After the war, the twins learned that their parents and sisters had been murdered by the Nazis. After living with an aunt for a short time, the girls emigrated to Israel. The book also describes Eva’s life as an adult who married, moved to the United States, had children, and became involved in Holocaust education. Eva started a museum, CANDLES (Children of Auschwitz Nazi Deadly Lab Experiments Survivors) and located 122 twins who had survived Mengele’s experiments.

Although Eva conveys many brutal, harsh events, the book is hopeful. Readers know that Eva survives and the book ends with her forgiveness of the Nazis. Eva states that “forgiveness is about personal healing.” Although only ten-years-old when she arrived at Auschwitz, Eva demonstrated incredible courage, determination, and resourcefulness. Her story will inspire readers. The back matter includes an afterword by Davidson explaining the creation of the book. Eva died unexpectedly in 2019 before the book was published. She was scheduled to speak at the 75th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz. The speech Eva wrote for the occasion is reprinted in the book. There is also a timeline of Holocaust events and a glossary.

Evelyn B. Freeman, Professor Emerita, The Ohio State University, Columbus, OH


This memoir, adapted from Levi’s adult book Una bambina e basta, is smoothly and accessibly translated from Italian by Notini. It tells the story of Levi’s life in Italy between 1938 and 1945 for a young middle-grade audience, with Mason’s interspersed black-and-white illustrations adding appeal. Levi is six when the story begins, and her misunderstandings of the worsening situation for Jews under Mussolini (when her father loses his job: “I can’t understand this. You can’t forget a job late one afternoon under a beach umbrella”) add a layer of humor that make this book stand out among the many middle-grade Holocaust books available. Levi recounts her experiences as her family moves from place to place, and eventually she and her sisters go into hiding at a convent school.

Continued on page 12
Throughout the book lives up to its title: though the dangers she hid from were extraordinary, they’re seen through the eyes of an ordinary child, concerned with what desserts are available and how she gets along with her classmates, driving home the point that a situation like hers could happen to anyone. Occasional asides within the text give information that the adult Levi learned later, and she addresses young American readers directly in an appended “letter from the other side of the ocean,” in which she gives further context, acknowledges the ways she was relatively fortunate, and encourages them to “fight against racism with all the strength of your young age.” Photos are also appended.

Shoshana Flax,
The Horn Book, Inc., Boston, MA


It’s My Whole Life introduces readers to artist Charlotte Salomon, a Jewish woman and artist who lived from 1917 until she was killed in Auschwitz in 1943. This slim volume gives an overview of her life including growing up, losing her mother to suicide, her stepmother being introduced to her life, Charlotte’s relationships, her art education, and her time hiding from the Nazis. The author spends a fair amount of time discussing Charlotte’s relationship with her abusive grandfather, who told her about relative after relative who had died by suicide, shaking her fragile mental health. Following his death, and with the Nazis closing in, Charlotte frantically created piece after piece of artwork detailing her life, and the Nazis rise to power. These paintings were given to a friend for safekeeping, and ultimately become the illustrations illuminating this book.

Extensive back matter includes an author’s note, a family tree, a map detailing Charlotte’s journey between 1938 and 1943, a timeline, notes, a bibliography, additional resources, and an index. Though most Holocaust biographies are difficult and distressing by right of being during the Holocaust, It’s My Whole Life has an added layer of difficulty due to the discussion of mental illness and suicide. Salomon was a fascinating figure, and we are lucky that her artwork was saved, even if she was not.

Rebecca Levitan,
Co-editor, Children’s and Teen Literature, AJL News and Reviews President, AJL SSCPL Division Librarian III, Baltimore County Public Library, Pikesville Branch


A harried mom and her two young children prepare for a Shabbat gathering by making cholent, cleaning the house, going to the market, picking up flowers, and setting the table. Parents can relate to the depiction of children eagerly trying to help (along with a house cat and a family of birds outside) but generally making a bit of a mess and just acting like kids do. The illustrations are appealing and colorful. By Shabbat evening, everything is prepped, and numerous (multicultural) friends and family appear, including quite a few more children. The last page shows the mom, dad, kids, cat, and birds all ready to call it a night: “Shabbat is here. We’ve done our best. We’ve helped a lot. It’s time to rest. Shabbat Shalom!” A fun and age-appropriate Shabbat board book that young children will surely enjoy.

Lisa Silverman,
Retired director, Sperber Jewish Community Library Curator, Jewish Journal Streaming Guide


This unique and creative board book meant for the youngest children also serves as a clever art lesson that will encourage parents to try some hands-on projects with their toddlers. The concept is simple: each Hanukkah night is represented by a different colored candle and a different artistic technique that can be successfully imitated by children. The final pages provide the simple instructions. A child can “use an eyedropper to drip paint” to make a drip picture, or a comb or plastic fork to make a scrape painting. Other techniques include stamp, crisscross, sponge, spatter, doodle, and brush. The black background emphasizes the bright colors and will surely attract babies and toddlers to this lovely book.

Lisa Silverman,
Retired director, Sperber Jewish Community Library Curator, Jewish Journal Streaming Guide

HOLOCAUST & WORLD WAR II

Continued on page 13

The Oswego camp for refugees is a little-known story of World War II. The prolific Norman Finkelstein’s latest book describes the camp, its inhabitants, and its importance.

In 1944, the Allies liberated a detention camp in Italy. The inmates came from all over Europe. Most, though not all of them, were Jewish; they included dozens of children and many families who had escaped the Nazis but had been unable to leave Europe. Among the prisoners, the Allies chose almost 1000 people and brought them to the United States. They were America’s only wartime refugees and were refused immigrant status. They were housed at Fort Ontario, near Rochester, New York, for the remainder of the war. The adults were not permitted to get local jobs, though the children were allowed to go to school on the base. Finkelstein describes both the confusion and relief of the newcomers and explores their activities over the year and a half they were at the Fort.

The volume contains numerous photographs showing the residents, a timeline, notes, and bibliography. There are also over a dozen short profiles, telling the stories of individuals (mostly children) and families. The refugees’ confused status was an issue during the war, but most of them were re-classified as immigrants after the war.

This book for middle-school children provides information that has been overlooked by many historians. The story of the camp has not been widely covered, either in the adult literature or in children’s books. One juvenile novel, Miriam Bat-Ami’s *Two Suns in the Sky* (STBA Notable, 1999), describes a teen relationship at the camp. Because Finkelstein describes it fully and succinctly, this is a useful addition to synagogue, school, and public libraries.

Fred Isaac, Oakland, CA


Ruby and her cousin Sarah are the same age, and for the longest time they were best friends; nowadays though, Ruby is starting to feel like Sarah is too perfect. Especially because her grandmother Yvette seems to favor Sarah, since both of Sarah’s parents are Jewish, while only Ruby’s dad is Jewish. When Ruby and Sarah find an old box in their grand- ma’s basement, they’re sternly warned not to open it, but when it’s accidentally opened after the girls have a fight, Sarah starts to act differently than before, and Ruby is convinced that there was a Dybbuk in the box. Ruby tries her hardest to figure out how to free Sarah from the Dybbuk, since no one else believes her that Sarah is not acting out. Will she ultimately succeed? Or will the Dybbuk get its revenge?

While this book does highlight the “Jewish enough” discussion that happens with some patrilineal Jews, it’s refreshing to see that Ruby herself feels wholly Jewish, and it’s the words of inconsiderate (and at times, antisemitic) adults that are at the heart of the issue.

While Panitch points out, in the author’s note at the end, that a Dybbuk box is a modern invention and not part of original folklore, it still helps the plot along successfully. Grandma Yvette is a difficult character, it’s somewhat difficult to discern what era she’s

Continued on page 14

In the midst of preparations for her bat mitzvah, Naomi Teitelbaum receives an unmarked gift of a clay figure with instructions to sign her name to a slip of paper and insert it into the figure. With encouragement from her friends Eitan and Becca, she animates the clay figure. While at first the golem — as Eitan’s research tells them this figure should be called — seems harmless, the three friends grow increasingly worried as it grows ever larger with every task Naomi gives it. On top of that, the golem’s magical influence seems to make Naomi more vulnerable to demons and able to see ghosts.

In an attempt to put distance between herself and these magical disturbances, Naomi instructs the golem to fix homelessness, gun violence, and climate change. But these simple instructions end up wreaking havoc in Los Angeles, and the three friends set out to stop the golem from destroying the world in its attempt to fix it. Along the way, they encounter the kind and friendly ghost of a rabbi, a Chabad family who welcomes them in, a malicious dybbuk, and more demons trying to entrap them. By the end of their adventure, the three friends have learned valuable lessons about their obligations in *tikkun olam*.

Captivating from start to finish, this book weaves Jewish folklore with contemporary storytelling for a vivid depiction of growing up and learning responsibility. Despite its clear lessons about *tikkun olam* and taking responsibility, the book never descends into didacticism. The three main characters’ friendship feels real throughout, complete with arguments and fights along with collaboration. Pre-teens will find much to identify with in this coming-of-age story and will learn about the rich heritage of Jewish folklore along the way.

---

**Fiction - Teen Readers**


Shani is on her way to an internship after her first semester at college when she runs into May, literally; her mother hits May with her car on a snowy evening in Washington, D.C. (May is fine.) Shani is dropped off at a modern boarding house in D.C. run by Beatrice, a 96-year-old firecracker and friend of Shani’s grandmother. Her month-long paleoichthyology internship at the Museum of Natural History starts the next day and Shani is ready to focus only on fossils. She was dumped by her first girlfriend days before and refuses to stay home for the “holidays” with her single mother in Queens. Shani’s mom wants to spend time together but Shani hates Hanukkah (which is over anyway) and is avoiding her mother.

Shani takes on a dog walking gig and bumps into May again; it’s her father’s dog. The two hate each other at first even with plenty in common. May is also on break from her first semester and is unhappy to stay with her father. Shani is trying not to fall for May after her unfortunate break up. Shani’s also not sure if May is queer and she hasn’t even come out to her mother. But then the two are snowed in together on Christmas Eve of all days and everything changes. The crush is two sided which excites and scares Shani. Once they admit feelings and start texting during the daytime, Shani takes a similar path as she did with her college girlfriend becoming consumed. Shani finds mentorship both personally and professionally from Mandira, a queer, Hindu, older postdoc supervising her internship.

Shani has several hilarious rants on Hanukkah and the over-commercialization of the holiday. Judaism is implied and talked about but less of a central feature. The story involves a description of past sexual assault while Shani is drunk which might trigger some readers. Overall, an adorable and affirming story about finding yourself in that murky time between teen years and adult years and a fun story for teens who love and hate Hallmark Christmas movies.

---


This gem of a historical fiction novel is a rarity in so many ways. It is one of the few books focused on Ethel Rosenberg, written for a Young Adult audience. Many present-day teenage readers may not be familiar with the Rosenberg story. Through her brilliantly crafted poems, Krasner employs an
accessible format and does a fine job in relaying one of the most complicated and heart wrenching episodes in American history. The book is divided into 4 parts, beginning in 1925, until her execution in June 1953.

The majority of the poems are told in first person, chronicling her life beginning when Ethel Greenglass was a youngster growing up in New York’s Lower East Side. Through the poems, the readers get a close look into her life as the only daughter of Jewish immigrants, the friction between her and her mother, as Ethel resents all the domestic work while Ethel would rather be advancing in her schooling. How frustrated she feels when her aptitude for academics and singing is mocked, and her dream of college is cut short because of her mother’s insistence that she must work. During this period, Ethel writes about her interest in workers’ rights and her delusionism of the government, not an unpopular feeling at the time. The reader follows her and Julius’s involvement in worker strikes and the Communist party. Ethel explains the unfolding of world events and how this affected Julius’s involvement in the party. She conveys her deep love and commitment to Julius and their two young sons. Ethel writes a lot about her love for her much younger brother, David, who Ethel calls Dovey. Ironically, it is Dovey who ends up lying in the espionage trial which sends both Rosenbergs to the electric chair. She takes us through the trial up until the day she is put to death.

The back matter includes a lengthy epilogue which picks up the story about the sons after the Rosenbergs’ deaths. There is a very helpful timeline which further explains the progression of the story and many source notes.

Esther Schnaidman,
Rosenbaum Yeshiva of North Jersey, Teaneck, NJ


Mateo Matisse lives in the Brooklyn neighborhood of Little Madrigal, where the blended community of pirates, Santeros, and Sephardim from the Caribbean Island of San Madrigal fled after it sank into the sea. On his way to a music gig at the start of the annual Grande Fete, Mateo witnesses a murder committed by the teenage daughter of the community rabbi. He is immediately plunged into a complex world of politics and folklore come to life, as he and Chela (the rabbi’s daughter) struggle to understand what’s happening and save their community from the same forces that sank the island sixteen years ago.

Ballad and Dagger gets off to a slow start as it attempts to set the story both in location and world history. The modern-day mythology of the lost island is fascinating, as is the partially blended culture created by three dominant groups living more or less in harmony, apart from the rest of the world. Madrigaleno children learn elements of all three cultures in Sunday school growing up, and community gatherings open with greetings in all the relevant languages. Current questions of colonialism, colorism, and more are threads throughout the narrative, but there is no shortage of action and supernatural drama.

Seeing a Jewish community acknowledged and incorporated into a New World culture is exciting, and the community rabbi is a very positive character. Ladino is one of the three main languages spoken in Little Madrigal, and its presence in the book is a satisfying touch. That being said, the point-of-view character is from a Santero family and Santeria takes precedence throughout the book as the lore from which the conflict stems. Judaism is not explored as thoroughly and can at times feel like an insertion rather than an integral part of the story. The question of how monsters and spirits relate to Jewish beliefs is somewhat sidestepped. But overall this is a captivating fantasy (with a romantic element!) that ends on a cliffhanger; readers will wait with bated breath for the sequel.

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


Sixteen-year-old Lucy Clark was sent to a boarding school in Texas after the death of her guardian grandmother who watched her as her parents constantly traveled for their jobs. But now she is being suspended over “the incident” and is being sent to intern in NYC. She will stay with her mother’s cousin and take care of Edith, an elderly woman who is suspected of suffering from dementia. Shortly after meeting Edith, she confesses to Lucy that someone is trying to murder her, and it will be Lucy’s job to help solve who it is.

Even though the police do not believe someone is trying to kill Edith and blame it on her dementia, Lucy finds her extremely lucid and readily agrees to help find the killer. With the help of Edith’s friends and neighbors, Lucy begins to explore and investigate potential suspects. In between the searches there are elaborate

Continued on page 16
cakes, tea parties, and daily working in gardens.

Lucy develops as she learns to be part of her found family and can finally grieve the loss of her grandmother and better understand her relationship with her absent parents. She is also able to find herself by working in the gardens and learning to embrace life from Edith and her childhood friend, Mimsy.

Gardens and working in gardens play so much of a role in the story that each chapter heading, and section pages' borders are illustrations of flowers. Rabb used Chanticleer Garden, on the outskirts of Philadelphia, as the model for the main garden in the story. Rabb also based the amazing meal eaten in the “Sea Change” chapter on her two most favorite restaurants, Buvette in the West Village and Curtis Duffy’s Grace restaurant in Chicago.

Although Lucy and everyone in her found family are Jewish, the only reference is when Edith hosts the Passover Seder for her friends, neighbors, and potential murder suspects. Lucy Clark Will Not Apologize is a cute coming of age, budding romance novel set in a murder mystery.

Sean Patrick Boyle, Librarian, Congregation Kneseth Israel, Allentown, PA Vice President, President-elect, Association of Jewish Libraries


Barrett Bloom comes to college hoping for a fresh start after a bad few years of high school. A loner with no friends, Barrett broke a cheating scandal involving the popular tennis team, further ostracizing her. She has a poor prom experience and first sexual encounter with a terrible bullying episode after. The first day of college, September 21, is supposed to be a fresh start but it goes terribly: she is humiliated in physics by Miles, she messes up an interview for the school paper, and it’s September 21 again. And it keeps happening. It turns out Miles from physics is also stuck in the same September 21 loop. What ensues is a sweet story of the two trying hard to make up for past mistakes and doubts.

Barrett is raised by a single Jewish mother. (The mother is now dating a lovely woman; a proposal timeline gets mixed into the time loop.) Miles is the son of a Japanese physics professor and a Jewish history professor. Their Judaism is not central but a connection between the two lost young adults. One particularly sweet scene is, after Barrett worrying she’ll be stuck in Wednesday and can never go to Hillel and meet other Jews on campus, Miles creates a Shabbat dinner for them. They both feel a little ostracized by the community and not being Jewish enough. The story includes timely topics like a cheating scandal overlooked by school administrators; sexual revenge (“you ruined my brother’s life; I’ll ruin yours” is what Barrett’s prom date tells her after telling the school they had sex); a high school principal not believing Barrett’s hurt feelings after bullying; drug abuse and relapse after treatment. The time loop trope is a little confusing at first and might annoy some but the story ultimately tells the reader what to really look for in friendship, family and love.

Dina Herbert, AJL Past President, Alexandria, VA

FOLKTALES


This particular lighthearted tale with its important lessons of perspective and gratitude is fun and funny, but it is hardly a Jewish story for the intended audience. The story is set in a secular elementary school. It starts with a complaint about tumult in the lunchroom. This introduces the story’s assumed one major Jewish character, an assumption based on her name, Ms. Mensch. Illustrations reveal assumed minor Jewish characters in the crowd, students wearing yarmulkas.

The plot of the book is a version of a classic Yiddish folktale, It Could Always Be Worse, by Margot Zemach. The problem is that the readers who read this new vignette are too young to realize the unspoken, unpictured Jewish tie-in. This connection is in the end notes which few read, especially young readers. Thus, readers here directly absorb an ethnic free madcap romp that adds to the mayhem in their lunchroom then subtracts the tumult until they are back where they started, all through the orders of Principal Mensch.

The ending shows children satisfied with the exact same situation that started them complaining. Once their point of view changes, they are grateful for what they have. The principal is warm, wise and an incessant nosher; this word is not used in the book but delivered through many illustrations. The solution and the moral are not identified as Jewish values. It is wonderful that authors and publishers seek tales which laud our literary heritage, but readers in K-2 are not into cultural legacies, they are into stories; they absorb the words and pictures in front of them, which here, fail to be Jewish.

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

Continued on page 17
Jewish legends are a wonderful source of stories for young children. This book tells a traditional legend that should resonate.

The story tells about Baltosar, the town’s rich man, who is stingy with himself and with the rest of the world. It also describes the local shoemaker, Yosef, who works hard all week, and then prepares for Shabbat by asking the merchants, “Do you have anything magnificent today?” so he can greet the Sabbath bride. One night, Baltosar dreams of his great wealth running away from him. So he buys a large diamond and prepares to run away. But the diamond falls into the river, where it is eaten by a fish. Yosef buys the fish for Shabbat, and discovers the riches hidden inside.

This is a wonderful tale for preschoolers and early grades. The illustrations are clear, though the depictions are a bit broad. The story raises important questions for young children, including “Who is rich?” and “What do you want for Shabbat?” Regrettably, it ends abruptly; there is nothing about Baltosar’s future, or what Yosef does with his new wealth. Nor does it point to larger issues, including tzedakah and the importance of community. Even so, it should be considered for all libraries serving small children.

Fred Isaac, Oakland, CA

GOD AND PRAYER


Illustrations with pastel colors portray happy children rising in the morning and reciting the Modeh Ani prayer. The laminated pages make the book sturdy and stain resistant. The gently rhyming text and pictures are from an Orthodox perspective so readers will see a little girl washing her hands in a bowl, and a boy putting on his tzitzit. The transliteration of the Modeh Ani is the Ashkenazi pronunciation and there is a brief glossary at the beginning of the book, a note to parents and teachers at the end, and the full text of the Modeh Ani prayer in Hebrew, English, and transliterated. Hello Morning is a good way to introduce the morning prayer and the middot of gratitude.


PICTURE BOOKS


His beautifully illustrated story weaves together themes of home, hope and the strength of family heritage passed through generations. Tia Fortuna grew up in Cuba and lives in Miami where her home, the Seaway, is now being torn down, forcing her to move once again. Her niece, Estrella, has loved regularly visiting her aunt at the Seaway and is upset by the impending move. As Tia Fortuna comforts Estrella with the story of their family with powerful and lyrical description, we learn that the family are Sephardic Jews who went from Spain to Turkey to Cuba to Miami and “come from people who found hope wherever they went.” Tia Fortuna cherishes her memories of her Cuban home and has held on to some precious mementos symbolizing her Judeo-Spanish heritage, including her “lucky-eye bracelets,” a mezuzah, and a key to her Cuban home. When Tia Fortuna moves her new community, she meets a diverse group of residents with whom she makes fast friends and the story comes full circle, as she passes on the key to the Seaway to Estrella. Spanish words and phrases are sprinkled poetically throughout the text and a glossary is included in the back matter, as well as a historical explanation of the events involved in the family’s migratory history and the author’s personal family story that inspired the book. The lush, detailed illustrations create a gorgeous backdrop to this multi-cultural tale.

Martha McMahon, Sinai Akiba Academy, Los Angeles, CA


Rivka and her fashionable grandmother are united in their upbeat view on life: there are no failures, just opportunities for persistence and progress. Her grandmother is not

Continued on page 18
The “cooking kind of Bubbe” but when a new baby arrives providing more time for the two to share, they begin weekly challah baking adventure. Not being experienced bakers, the less than perfect results are greeted as challenges. Rivka tells of their baking efforts in a lively conversational first person from their first flat underbaked creation to their second burnt effort, (which Grandpa declares crunchy), to their final irresistible masterpiece. The joys of squishing, squeezing, stretching, and braiding energetically move the culinary fun along.

While the baking always takes place on Fridays there is no mention of Shabbat. The minimal Jewish content is limited to the focus on baking challah and referring to the grandmother as Bubbe.

The prolific award-winning animator Sarah Lynne Reul’s graphic art adds a cozy exuberant atmosphere to this relatable tale. It’s perfect for large group reading or while waiting for your own challah dough to rise. You don’t have a recipe? No worries, an easy to follow one is provided. And remember, “practice makes progress!”

Suzanne Grossman, MLS
Librarian, retired, Morris Public Schools. N.J.

While serving as a Yiddish primer, this story aims to provide comfort to children who have experienced the death of a loved one. For Gracie, the loss of her Zayde is felt most acutely by the personality change in her Bubbe. The grieving grandmother has lost her own zest for life, turning down her granddaughter’s requests to do yoga, sing, draw, or even go to Gracie’s soccer game. But when the child shows curiosity about some Yiddish words, the warm, colorful language becomes Bubbe’s lifeline. Teaching the little girl, the words and expressions that she used to share with her husband gives her a newfound purpose and her gradual return to her generous, playful self. A glossary is included with a pronunciation guide, that will enable young readers to enjoy the humor inherent in Yiddish words. Illustrations depict a diverse community that exists outside Gracie’s Jewish home.

Gloria Koster,
Retired School Librarian — New Canaan, CT. Public Schools Member of the Children’s Book Committee of Bank Street College


In this attractive, oversized picture book, Chanukah rituals and traditions are described and illustrated in brief text and richly colored pictures of eight different family celebrations. The families are noticeably diverse — a grandma, grandpa, son and mom; a girl and her dad; a modern looking couple with a baby; a more religious family with boys and dad wearing kippot and mom’s hair covered with a headscarf; a young, bi-racial couple; children, some of color, listening to a bearded, black hat and coated rabbi telling the story of Chanukah; a boy who uses a wheelchair; a girl and boy pictured with a skyline typical of Israel behind them, with fireworks bursting overhead. Diversity is further underscored when the telling of the Chanukah story prompts a boy to ask why King Antiochus forced the Jewish people to give up their religion and a girl posits that perhaps the king was scared because “people can be scared when they see differences in others that they don’t understand.” Songs and prayers, candle lighting at sundown, traditional foods, playing dreidel, sharing, donating, gifts and parties, family and friendship are all concepts touched upon in the text and pictures. The menorah, chanukiah, is explained in the front, inside cover.

Debbie Colodny,
Cook Memorial Public Library District, Libertyville, IL. (retired)

A boy and his dragon go to visit a friend’s house for Hanukkah. After putting on kippah they eat latkes, spin dreidels, and eat gelt after watching their friend light the menorah. Since this title is written for an emergent reader, the sentences are kept simple, and have the “Common Sight Words” listed along with a “Picture Glossary” at the front of the book. There are “Word Work” and “Activity” pages at the end, but there is an error in the Word Work section. They have six words with pictures from the “Picture Glossary,” but have Hanukkah as one of the words and the picture associated with it Hanukkah is the picture for friend(s). But compared to Hillert’s *Happy Hanukkah, Dear Dragon*, where none of the objects were identified in the text, all are at least named in Conn’s book. Since there are a mixture of Yiddish and Hebrew words, it is interesting that Conn selects kippah over the more familiar to secular audiences’ yarmulke.

The new *Dear Dragon Developing Reader* series is based on Margaret Hillert’s *Dear Dragon* series books and adapted for emergent readers. David Schimmell also illustrated many of Hillert’s *Dear Dragon* books, including *Happy Hanukkah, Dear Dragon*, where many of the engaging cartoon-like color illustrations are repeated for *Let’s Celebrate Hanukkah, Dear Dragon*.

Sean Patrick Boyle, Librarian, Congregation Keneseth Israel, Allentown, PA
Vice President, President-elect, Association of Jewish Libraries


Avital’s mother will be on a business trip during Chanukah, and Avital is very sad. Ruby, her cousin, decides that she will help to cheer Avital by having a treasure hunt for her each night of Chanukah. She comes up with a rhyme for each night of Chanukah which is a clue for Avital to help her find where her surprise is hidden. On the last night of Chanukah, she has a very special surprise for Avital! The pictures show a diversity of people with a variety of skin tones. In an illustration of Avital’s house, the outside of the house has a string of blue lights and a Magen David over the front door which is not a usual decoration of a Jewish home at Chanukah. An explanation of playing dreidel and historical notes on Chanukah are given at the end. The story is engaging, but the illustrations are simply cutey. There are other books in the *Ruby Celebrates!* Series that introduce young readers to Jewish holidays.

**REVIEWS OF TITLES FOR CHILDREN AND TEENS**


The PAW Patrol friends are preparing to celebrate Hanukkah by learning how to count from one to ten utilizing dreidels, latkes, gelt, and other fun holiday items. This sturdy board book follows the ever popular characters of Marshall, Skye, Rubble, and other pup heroes and friends on their counting adventures with bright, colorful illustrations in a jovial, mischievous, and delightful atmosphere. Although there is no information about the basic celebration of Hanukkah, the counting highlights some of the customs and certainly the fun of the celebration.

Rachel Glasser, Retired Librarian, Yavneh Academy, Paramus, NJ


Rosh Hashanah is a time of beginnings, contemplation, and growth as we reflect on the past year and look forward to the celebrations ahead. How should we measure time — through events, what we have learned, relationships developed, accomplishments and goals reached, or perhaps the holidays celebrated.

This simple text is highlighted by the extensive, colorful, and expressive illustrations which create scenarios of personal and public experiences and thoughts. The story includes diverse characters and family groups with great sensitivity.

The pictures in the endpapers will resonate with young children as they recognize the familiar Rosh Hashanah symbols of honey, apples, and bees which we sing about and create for their own family tables.

The narrator encourages the reader to reflect on their life and actions and to consider important moments which may have been happy or sad, positive or negative, regretful or satisfying. A child or individual of any age can look inside themselves and search or measure the virtues and challenges of their lives. The emphasis is on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur as we begin a new year, but the lessons are appropriate for the entire year. This is a story of thanksgiving, memories, acceptance, and love for our family, friends, and the world at large.

Rachel Glasser, Retired Librarian, Yavneh Academy, Paramus, NJ

Melanie Romero is the editor of Lil’ Libros, a publisher that specializes in bilingual board books for young children. *J is for Januca* is *Hanukkah* in Spanish. In this bilingual alphabet book each letter stands for a Jewish symbol, food, or concept and is written in Spanish with an English translation. For example, F is for frito / fried, E is for estrella de David / star of David, and O is for ocaso, sunset. Each large colorfully illustrated page has a brief text in Spanish and in English explaining the symbol or concept represented by the particular letter.

Most of the book focuses on the laws and symbols connected with Januca. Non English words such as kugel, gemel, sufghaniot and dreidel are identical in Spanish and Spanish. The two page back matter written in English with the facing page in Spanish retells the Hanukkah story and the miracle of the oil in detail. Jewish patrons who speak Spanish will easily relate to this large size picture book. Children and adults who do not speak Spanish will enjoy trying to pronounce the Spanish text which is a direct translation of the English words. The full page vibrant illustrations are beautiful and can be enjoyed by anyone who reads this book. The illustrations of the sufghaniot are especially appealing and look good enough to eat.

Ilka Gordon, Beachwood, OH


What if your family celebrated every Jewish holiday during an entire year? Through 16 non-rhyming poems, called free-verse, the holidays are described from a little girl’s viewpoint, beginning with a *Rosh Hashanah* poem in which she vows to be sweeter. The well-known holidays, like Yom Kippur, Sukkot, Simchat Torah, Hanukkah, Tu B’Shevat, Purim, Passover, and Shabbat are featured. Lesser known holidays like Shemini Atzeret, Lag B’Omer, Tisha B’At, Yom Hashoah, and even Tu B’At are given equal prominence. References to the girl’s family members enrich descriptions of holidays: “…at Aunt Hannah’s house... ‘Havdalah, to end Shabbat...’” Gradually, we learn that there are also Israeli relatives: “There, where my cousins live, there are also Israeli relatives: “There, where my cousins live, grata for almond trees...are already blooming...”


Continued on page 21
The award-winning author of over a hundred children’s books in a wide variety of genres captures the young child’s voice: “I kind of hope we don’t get (rain) tonight... down the dangling gourds and corn cobs onto my bed, onto my head, on this, my last night in the beautiful sukkah.” Sentiments expressed throughout the collection are warm and engaging, happy or sad appropriately for the holiday, sometimes stretching or being silly to keep the poem’s rhythm: “And then I get to (Passover question) Number Three...I don’t ask why we dip herbs twice; I ask why we “drip ice.” Detailed prose explanations accompany each poem, with facts about the history, customs, and observances. A note about the Jewish calendar explains why holidays don’t occur on the same English date each year. A list of six internet resources completes the book. Illustrations are colorful, simply drawn scenes of the family, school, synagogue, and wider community, including the light-skinned and mostly dark-haired family, as well as a few dark-skinned people in the larger groupings. There is a woman wearing a tallit and kippah who appears to be a rabbi or prayer leader, and a few boys and men wearing kippot. One girl is shown using a wheelchair.

Some children may find the poems pedantic and even a little boring, reading the entire book in one sitting; most will appreciate it as a valuable, easy source of information about each holiday as it comes along.

Debbie Colodny, 
Cook Memorial Public Library District, Libertyville, IL. (retired)

Steinberg, D.J. Hanukkah, Here I Come! Illustrated by Sarah Palacios. New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 2022. Hanukkah, Here I Come! series which includes books about kindergarten, first grade, second grade, and various non-Jewish holidays such as Easter and Christmas. This delightful and informative rhyming picture book, presents Hanukkah facts in a concise and clear manner easily accessible to young children in preschool through grade 2.

The fierce looking Maccabees are introduced with a large print “MACCA-BAM! MACCA-BOOM” in striking red ink. Laws and customs included are instructions on how to play dreidel, chocolate gelt and the menorah. Bubbe, Grandpa and other relatives come to celebrate with the family. The illustrations capture the festive atmosphere of the diverse family gathering. Bubbe, who is frying latkes, is not the stereotypical plump old gray haired woman. Instead, she is dressed stylishly and has beautifully coiffed brown hair which is a more realistic portrayal of today’s Bubbe. Some of the male characters wear kippot and some do not. Humor is added in the double page illustrations of a child taking a selfie, with some of the photos blurred and others have family members’ heads cut off. A sticker page at the end of the book is an added bonus that makes this title more suitable for home, rather than library use. Adults and children will enjoy reading this charming and colorful book.

Ilka Gordon, 
Beachwood, OH


n Ava’s extended family everyone celebrates Hanukkah by bringing their own menorahs. Talking to her pet rabbit, coincidentally named Maccabee, Ava muses about how one additional menorah would be an exact match for the eight nights of the holiday. But what kind of menorah should it be? The important people in this child’s life each explain the personal significance for their own menorahs. Her mom’s was a gift when she served in the army, reminding her of ties to family when she felt homesick. Her grandfather’s unusual menorah gave him courage to be a unique individual. Some relatives recall significant people and life events reflected in the objects they’ve chosen to include in their menorahs. Others reflect a concern for the environment, for Israel, and for the history of the Jewish people. Without copying anyone else, Ava is able to use the collective wisdom of her loved ones to make that missing eighth menorah — one that tells her own special story. Sweet illustrations make this an inviting story with characters who realistically represent the wide range of people who identify as Jewish or participate in Jewish celebrations.

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

Continued on page 22

AJL News and Reviews December 2022 | January 2023 21

Inspired by characters from Chaim Potok’s classic, *The Chosen*, Maggie Anton, author of the trilogy *Rashi’s Daughters, Rav Hisda’s Daughter*, and the sequel, *Enchantress*, has written another book that explores the role of women in Judaism. The time period of this novel is the 1950s. H.M. Covey, the pen name for Hannah Eisen, a journalist for the Yiddish newspaper, *Daily Freiheit*, is assigned to interview Rabbi Nathan Mandel, a young orthodox rabbi, who is a Talmud professor at Spektor, an Orthodox college. H.M. Covey (Covey is her Christian father’s surname), whose former atheist mother has remarried an Orthodox lawyer after her father’s death, now uses her stepfather’s surname, Eisen.

Hannah convinces Nathan to teach her Talmud, which is strongly discouraged in the Orthodox world. Nathan and Hannah meet secretly to study Talmud together. Although Nathan has a girlfriend, Barbara, whom he meets at dance halls on Saturday nights, because he is an avid ballroom dancer, he breaks off the relationship because she has blatantly violated the Sabbath by arriving at the dance hall by car before sundown on Saturday night and has lied to Nathan about her transgression. Despite having differing views on observance and Hannah’s questioning of the roles of women in Jewish tradition, Hannah and Nathan fall in love.

A subplot involves Benny Stockser, the son of a Hasidic rabbi, who has been given permission by his father to attend college and to become a child psychologist. Benny treats young boys who have been sexually molested by their Hassidic rebbehs. A life changing issue for Nathan is niddah, ritual impurity. After Hannah gives birth to their first child, Nathan feels trapped by the Orthodox laws of niddah, which do not permit him to touch his wife until she has immersed in the mikvah. This prohibition is too much for Nathan to bear and he decides to give up Orthodox practice in favor of a mixture of Conservative and Orthodox Judaism. The chapter detailing sex on Hannah and Nathan’s wedding night may be too graphic for some readers. This book is not appropriate for children, teens or young adults. The book includes an extensive glossary of Yiddish and Hebrew terms used in the text. It also has a pronounced anti-orthodox bias. *The Choice* should be a discretionary purchase by libraries whose patrons are fans of Maggie Anton’s other books.

Ilka Gordon, Beachwood, OH


This collection of nine short stories originally written in Yiddish was published in 1939, weeks before the Nazis invaded Poland, and just weeks before the author died. It presents a fascinating glimpse into Eastern European Jewish culture in the days before the War. Most of the stories take place in and around Vilna. They deal with everyday life and relationships between Jews, both men and women. Although almost forgotten now, the author was widely admired during her lifetime, as a publisher, editor, journalist, and defender of women’s rights. The book includes a useful introduction, a note about translation, and Max Weinreich’s original 1939 introduction. The translator, Professor Emerita of English and Judaic Studies at the University of Michigan, has written and lectured widely on Yiddish language and literature. The short stories are an important contribution to the body of literature by forgotten Yiddish women writers. The book is recommended as a valuable addition to Judaica collections in academic, school, public, and synagogue libraries.

Susan Freiband, Volunteer Synagogue Librarian, Alexandria, Virginia


Raizl is an eighteen-year-old woman in an ultra-Orthodox community in Brooklyn. Unlike many of her peers, she has a scholarship to study accounting at Cohen College and a job. Like the others, she expects to find a husband in an arranged marriage. However, her scholarship and her job have given her a computer and internet access, both of which are forbidden in the community. Raizl uses her computer to learn about her body and sexuality, subjects not taught at her religious high school. She is fascinated and, wishing to learn more, she ends up on pornographic websites. This is both fascinating and terrifying for her. She tells her mother that she does not want to meet any prospective bridegrooms or get married and her mother sends her to a psychiatrist.

At her college, Raizl becomes friendly with some goths who
introduce her to treyf foods and give her a view of the wider world. Her pornography addiction complicates her family life and threatens her scholarship when her grades drop. The arranged dates that her mother sets up always go wrong. How will she deal with all of this? She has a thirst for knowledge, but she also loves her family and her religion. The book provides a glimpse of ultra-Orthodox life that is not always flattering, but it highlights the shortcomings of strict religious education and the conflicts that bright young women face. Book clubs will have a great deal to discuss here. The book includes a glossary of Yiddish phrases for readers unfamiliar with the language.

**Barbara Bibel, Congregation Netivot Shalom, Berkeley, CA**


This book takes place in a fictionalized version of the famed real-life Jerusalem café, *Tmol Shilshom*. The author, David Ehrlich, was the owner of *Tmol Shilshom*, which opened in 1994 and is still a major attraction in Jerusalem because of its food and its atmosphere. With its book-lined walls, it’s known as a place for writers to work on their craft and read it aloud in Hebrew or English, and some of Israel’s most famous writers have read their work at *Tmol Shilshom*. It also features live music, and it has a reputation as a great spot for first dates. David Ehrlich died at the beginning of the pandemic when the café had to close, and this book is, in some ways, his own epitaph. He appears as the character of Avigdor, the café owner who has become ambivalent about the wearisome work of running the café. The other characters are presumably drawn from real life as well. The book is really a series of vignettes in short chapters and dialogues, rather than a novel. There is a slight narrative arc built around Rutha, the young, empathetic waitress who assumes more and more of the physical and emotional work in the café as Avigdor pulls away. The patrons of the café are a varied lot but they are all troubled, broken souls and the café is their refuge. The writing is simple and lightweight, and it dwells on the emotional struggles of the café’s patrons rather than the charm of the place. There are also some small, color photographs. The foreword is by Sidra DeKoven Ezrahi. For collections of Israeli literature.

**Beth Dwoskin, Proquest (retired), Ann Arbor, MI**


Chaim Grade was an eminent, highly respected Yiddish writer of the twentieth century. This small book includes one story, in English and in Yiddish, with an in-depth introduction by Dr. Ruth Wisse, a prominent scholar, who was professor of Yiddish at Harvard for many years before retiring.

The story is about two friends, both Holocaust survivors, who meet between the years 1937-1948, and debate their Jewish faith. It was first published in 1952 and has since been the topic of discussion among a varied group of scholars. It is an eye-opening book, in which the essence of Judaism is discussed. It should be in every Jewish library from high school to academic and synagogue libraries.

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


Set in 1995, Sid, who never got over her mother’s disappearance when she was a young girl, is now forced to deal with her father’s sudden death in Chicago. While cleaning out her father’s apartment she finds a suitcase filled with items collected during his search for Sid’s mother, but not included is any information about the items themselves.

Sid returns to New York City and recruits her frequently “on and off again” boyfriend Andre, to help her understand the items in the suitcase and what they have to do with her mother’s disappearance. Included with the items is her father’s finished, but never published novel, *Slobgollion* with its story about Yiddish-speaking whales. Sid hopes it is the key to what her father has so far discovered in his searches.

There are three main themes fighting for prominence in *Rare Stuff*: dealing with the loss in families and the effects on those left behind; interracial and even interspecies relationships; the need for the conservation of whales and dolphins.

The story is told through multiple voices, each distinguished by a different font. There are the two main narrators, Sid and Andre in...
the “outer-novel,” as well as letters, a diary, full length book reviews of Sid’s father’s works, author interviews, and the character Sol in the “inner-novel” Slagollion.

Since Kaplan’s proceeds from sales of the novel will be donated to Whale and Dolphin Conservation (WDC), it appears that conservation of whales and dolphins were meant to be her main theme. But unlike Herman Melville’s Moby-Dick, that is alluded throughout Rare Stuff, that seamlessly weaves a story of dealing with loss, interracial relationships, and awareness of whales in a single coherent story, Kaplan’s work is choppy, and it is not just from the often-changing fonts.

Sean Patrick Boyle,
Librarian, Congregation Kneseth Israel, Allentown, PA
Vice President, President-elect, Association of Jewish Libraries


In this part historical fiction novel and character-driven crime drama, McCormack creates a vivid account of what a war crimes trial is like, and how that impacts all involved. The story is centered on the characters of Leah Jarvis and Stefan Drozd. The elderly Drozd, is an accused war-criminal on trial for the Kurapaty massacres under Stalin in Belarus, in which thousands of people were executed for political crimes against the state, many of them Jews. Jarvis is on the legal team trying to deport him from Canada, to which he had escaped and created a new life for himself. He was identified by survivors who had been tortured during this period as the clerk who assisted the NKVD in torturing prisoners and recorded their forced confessions.

The plot moves back and forth through time, detailing past events related to both Leah’s upbringing in Canada in which her mother died in a car accident, as well as Drozd’s much earlier childhood in Belarus and how these and other events molded each character. Drozd’s childhood abuse at the hands of his father and others is detailed, although it is unclear whether these events are true, or things Leah is imagining as reasons for why he tortured others during this time.

The themes of identity, trauma and responsibility are prominent in the narrative, with Leah’s Jewish identity being a major focal point of her struggles during the case. This is especially true when she embarks on an evidence and fact-finding mission to Belarus, as she is convinced of Drozd’s guilt. The plot is interspersed with affidavits from survivors recounting their torture and identification of Drozd as the perpetrator, historical notes, and political concerns about the outcome of the case for the Canadian government which wants to deport him.

This book is recommended for libraries which have collections of historical fiction and the impact of the Stalinist era on Eastern Europe and on the Jews specifically.

Eli Lieberman,
Assistant Librarian, Hebrew Union College New York Campus

Shalom, Sharon Zewde. Dialogues of Love and Fear: A Rabbi’s Daughter, a Kes’s Son, and Hope for the Future. New Milford: Maggid Books, 2021. 256 pp. $29.95 (9781592645466) HC.

Rabbi Dr. Sharon Zewde Shalom uses imagined conversations between a Rabbi’s Daughter and a Kes’s Son, to give an Ashkenazi Israeli’s and an Ethiopian Jew’s points of view of current Israeli society. The two speakers are former friends and reconnecting years later and grow romantically through their twenty-seven conversations. Each conversation, broken as chapters, can be read independently, with each side of the dialogue separated like a play with “RD:” and “KS:” distinguishing who is speaking. They both work towards a desire to find commonality and understanding, instead of challenges and accusations about each other’s social group members. The allowing of “love to triumph over fear.”

The dialogues create a way for Ashkenazi and Ethiopian Israelis to learn and understand each other’s perspectives in a relatable context. The Rabbi’s Daughter character worked in an immigration center with Ethiopian immigrants, so she has pointed questions and concerns. The Rabbi’s Daughter and Kes’s Son’s discussions are mixed between clarifications of cultural differences (Ashkenazi and Ethiopian) and how immigrants have helped shape Israeli culture through the years and how they think the Ethiopian immigrants will shape Israel’s future.

In the “Introduction,” Shalom sets up the fictional background of the two individuals and previous contact with each other and sets the scenario for their reuniting. He also provides some insight to their personality types and explains why he created them as he did. This book is recommended for synagogue and community libraries and for academic libraries that have collections on the topic of immigration and Israeli society.

Sean Patrick Boyle,
Librarian, Congregation Kneseth Israel, Allentown, PA
Vice President, President-elect Association of Jewish Libraries

Continued on page 25

When the story transitions to the time when the Shah gets overthrown, making life very dangerous for the Iranian Jews, leaving Zhila and her family no choice but to leave for America. By this time Zhila now has to deal with an unhappy marriage. From learning to deal with physical challenges, moving to America, learning English, American Sign Language, finding the courage to get out of an abusive marriage, learning to become a Certified Nursing Assistant, finding love again in a beautiful relationship, and then sadly, having to face her cancer diagnosis, Zhila does it all with grace and courage. While Thal’s portrayal of Zhila is fascinating, sadly, having to face her cancer diagnosis, Zhila does it all with a lot of determination to always get better her life. Readers will be inspired by Zhila’s determination to always better her life.

Esther Schnaidman,
Rosenbaum Yeshiva of North Jersey,
River Edge, NJ


Part of the SUNY Series in Contemporary Jewish Literature and Culture, this book is a collaboration between a poet and an artist. It explores the concept of sacrifice, based on the ancient practice of qorbanot, the Hebrew word for “sacrificial offerings.” The book, divided into seven parts, with a forward and three concluding essays, presents a dialogue of text and image. On one side of the page an abstract visual image (in color) appears, facing it on the other side, is text. The book includes biographical notes on each of the contributors, as well as a statement about the images. The scholarly essays serve to deepen and explain the meaning of sacrifice in religious, social and personal contexts. They enrich and deepen understanding of the text and images. The quality in physical appearance and design of the book enhances its value. The book is an interesting and insightful addition to Judaica collections in university, college and research libraries.

Susan Freiband,
Volunteer Synagogue Librarian, Alexandria, VA

Non-Fiction


This is a one volume introduction to everything Jewish including Jewish history, Bible, prayer, ritual, Jewish law, philosophy, and culture. Considering every one of those disciplines could take years to master and a library for the resources, one wonders what the author hopes to accomplish. He says this book is for high school students and adult education classes; however, the tone of the book seems like the author is hoping to limit his audience to those already observant. The tone of the narrative is sort of “yeshivish” rather than everyday English. The book is not inviting to adults who have little knowledge of Jewish observance. Some chapters are very exacting and others gloss over material to be informative. This is a book with a confusing message. Is the author trying to educate neophytes or create a foundation for more intense learning? Is the author trying to preach or inform? This book is not recommended for general audiences. For those who know, the book does not offer any new insights or information. For the non-Jew or non-observant Jew, the material will be too overwhelming and noninformative.

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


“...want to know everything about the Bible!” This pronouncement was overheard by the editors of this volume at a colloquium devoted to research approaches in the study of Hebrew Bible manuscripts. The declaration highlights the conundrum of advancing a “holistic” study of the Bible across multiple disciplinary fields, a task addressed by this volume. The title, *The Hebrew Bible Manuscripts: A Millennium*, reflects an attempt to draw together shared perspectives in three areas of study separated chronologically and geographically - the Dead Sea Scrolls,
the Cairo Genizah fragments, and Late Medieval biblical manuscripts.

There are fourteen articles contained within this volume and all the authors are based at European academic institutions. The majority have received their doctorates relatively recently (two are still doctoral candidates). The contributions are organized chronologically according to the source that the article focuses upon, beginning with a study of the Paleo-Hebrew script of the Dead Sea Scrolls. They range from examinations of specific manuscripts or fragments to broader collections-based concerns such as methodologies for cataloging manuscript fragments.

Materiality is a significant theme with attention centered on the manuscripts themselves - their production and transmission, and their nature and significance within their social milieu. As an example, one article furnishes a detailed presentation of mathematical formulae used in the reconstruction of large literary scrolls from fragments. Scribal practices are the focus in two of the articles and another provides a study of textual embellishments. There is also discussion of a 3D digitization experiment intended to place Bible manuscripts in an “online manuscript room.” The last two articles present “cross-comparison approaches” across the chronological spectrum explored in the preceding contributions.

In addition to the copious footnotes and bibliographies accompanying each article, the volume concludes with several indexes, including one detailing the manuscripts referenced. It would definitely make a valuable addition to an academic library focusing on biblical studies.

Randall C. and Anne-Marie Belinfante, Herkimer, NY


The author is a journalist; her style is personal, engaging, and witty. She worked on her book on and off for sixteen years. Possibly that is why sections read differently, and overall, it’s a bit disjointed. She unearths her family history in great detail, with many gems. No question, she is quite the “detective!”

Photos of memorabilia and family enhance the book. Voluminous footnotes offer many internet links. For those who enjoy footnotes, the softcover version is recommended rather than the Kindle version despite the webpage links. The back “board” has: “Experiential Reading. The links to historical footage, photos, and short texts make reading this work closer to a virtual museum than a traditional e-book.” For those who find other people’s

families fascinating, the narrative is well worth reading. While the author believes her audience to include “novice genealogists,” using this book as a guide would not serve beginning researchers well in terms of both time spent and eventual success achieved.

Examples of missing information essential for beginners include: not mentioning Soundex codes (secular and Judaic); not using standard gazetteers, for example, easy to use longitude and latitude to differentiate towns with the same name and not using the essential “One-Step Search Tool” instead of the Ellis Island database itself; and not using the One-Step volunteers’ improved database to search rather than NARA itself.

In addition, the author should give more weight to Judaic sources in general to explain terms such as tefillin and genealogical sources, rather than using Wikipedia, and the book should have a subject index. Two sections with other people writing about a decedent (the Israeli memorial pamphlet custom) were hard to follow without introductory material before each entry explaining how the writer knew the decedent. Libraries that collect family memoirs might consider acquiring this title.

Jonina Duker, Certified Book Discussion Facilitator and Judaic Educator


By 1938, the rising tide of Nazism in the United States had grown bolder in its quest to recruit more Americans of German and Nordic heritage. Nazi rallies, where Jews were demonized as the source of all evils, were held in major cities across the country. Judge Nathan Perlman in New York decided that a Jewish “army” was needed to combat this menace. His first call went to gangster Meyer Lanksy who reached out to dozens of fellow mobsters including Micky Cohen, Bugsy Siegel, Jacob “Sparky” Rubenstein (Jack Ruby), and members of the notorious Murder Incorporated. Benson tells the story of these “tough Jews” and their how they broke the American Nazis’ momentum in an informative and entertaining style. It is unfortunate that there are no photographs in this text.

The mobsters believed they were fulfilling their patriotic duty,
but there is some moral ambiguity. Benson often refers to them as “boys” when they were basically cold-blooded murderers. While they kept to Perlman’s demand that nobody be killed, readers must decide for themselves whether the level of violence was justified. Recommended for lovers of history and true crime stories. Benson includes a list of sources, making this appropriate for high school, public, and academic libraries.

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


This is an enjoyable addition to the first-person narrative accounts of saying Kaddish. What makes this book different is that the author is a woman, who was raised with little Jewish education and the person she is saying Kaddish for had instructed her not to say Kaddish for him and instead to pay for someone to perform that task.

The author is careful to define important terms (including a ten-page glossary) and provides historical context to the key concepts for the lay reader. The book is written with the Conservative, Reform, non-denominational, or unaffiliated reader in mind as the author attempts to broaden the appeal of saying Kaddish for their parents. Some might consider this book like Leon Wieseltier’s Kaddish, but not as dense and from the woman’s point of view. Her story is very personal with great details regarding her relationship with her father, the family’s Jewish observance, and her journey regarding her religious observance. The author is a social worker and human resources consultant and author of articles on leadership which comes through in her writing.

The story is engaging and one comes to understand the struggle that anyone who wants to honor the memory of a parent by saying Kaddish at every morning, afternoon, and evening service would experience. We are rooting for her in her struggle/adventure/odyssey to locate a minyan to recite Kaddish. The story is general to anyone who has had to navigate the obstacles, but her story is more complex since she is a woman. While she articulated the background to understand why traditional Orthodox Judaism may not be supportive of a women’s public recitation of the Kaddish, she also identifies the challenges that non-orthodox congregations experience in being able to support a daily minyan in today’s changing demographics.

A Daughter’s Kaddish is recommended as an engaging reading for women who might consider saying Kaddish for a parent, as well as to men and especially Rabbis and lay leaders so that they may be more supportive of women who want to say Kaddish for a parent, as it is a worthwhile emotional and cathartic experience, as well as the hope that their devotion and prayers may help elevate the soul of their loved one.

Nathan Rosen,
Knowledge manager, information researcher, speaker, writer, and trainer


This is an ambitious work, attempting to guide twenty-first century Jews on how to be Jewish in the complex contemporary world so different from that of our grandparents. The author’s background and experience make him imminently qualified to explore this topic and present his guidelines for us. He uses an acronym as “a model for reimagining Jewish Peoplehood for the present.” It is TACHLIS, which is a Yiddish word for “brass tacks.” The practical topics suggested by Bodner as guides for Jewish living now are: Tikkun Olam, Arts and Culture, Community, Holidays and Rituals, Learning, Israel and Sabbath and Spirituality.

Thus, the book reveals Bodner’s passion and devotion to a rich and meaningful Jewish life which he attempts to share with his readers.

The book is divided into three parts: Why Do Jewish?, What is Jewish?, and How To Do Jewish? It includes an extensive list of references and a useful Index.

This is an excellent book for synagogue and school libraries as an impetus to forging discussions and perhaps changes in the way we view and hope for the future of Judaism. Why Do Jewish? is highly recommended for school and synagogue libraries.

Michlean Lowy Amir,
United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

Charmé, Stuart Z. Authentically Jewish: Identity, Culture, and the Struggle For Recognition. New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 2022. 301 pp. $49.95 (9781978827592) PBK; $120.00 (9781978827608) HC.

Since the word “authentic” is loaded with connotations, the author spends two chapters explaining the concept. The Jewish people are diverse in their beliefs, practices, and traditions. Jews are progressive, reactionary, and everything in between, but one can debate with everyone “Are you authentically Jewish?” If one says one group is “authentic” does that mean other groups are inauthentic?

Continued on page 28
Charmeʻ confronts the full range of what is Jewish identity including literature, religion, food, the arts, culture, peoplehood, and shared history. He analyzes the “authenticity” of groups such as Ethiopians, black Jews, crypto Jews, and Bene Israel of India, that are outside of mainstream Judaism. He concludes that an understanding of the multiple types of authenticity should express itself in tolerance, acceptance, and celebration of all kinds of differences.

This is an academic book that can be understood by non-academics. The author will make the reader think about ideas associated with many aspects of the Jewish people that one never thought of before. The author achieves his goal of promoting tolerance.

This book is recommended for personal, synagogue, and academic libraries.

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

In this book, Dr. Charny outlines the history of and rationales given by the Israeli government in their continuing denial of the legitimacy of the Armenian Genocide as a genocide. He discusses the history of Israel canceling or influencing conferences that he chaired about this topic and recounts his successful attempt to hold conferences on this topic against the wishes of the Israeli government as well. He also shows how this denial impacts recognition of this and other genocidal events among the Israeli public.

Among the rationales he discusses for this official denial are relations with the Turkish government which officially denies the Genocide. Another rationale given is that there is a perception among some in Israel and elsewhere that recognizing other genocidal events as genocide detracts from the uniqueness and historical impact and importance of the study of the Holocaust. Even when individual members of the Israeli government agree to define the Armenian Genocide as a genocide, the Israeli government writ large states that this does not reflect such an endorsement by the Israeli government. Rather, the government will say that this is the personal conclusion of specific members to not anger the anti-Armenian Genocide elements of the Turkish government and state as well as other such elements elsewhere.

He also includes the history of Armenian Genocide denial in general, whether comparing the Holocaust to other genocides is warranted, and how Israeli political figures like Shimon Peres and others have dealt with this issue and other topics. There are also moving perspectives from Turkish, Armenian-American, and American scholars on this issue and the history of the materials in the US Holocaust Museum and how it links the Holocaust to other historical genocides.

This book is recommended for academic libraries that have collections on the Holocaust and genocide studies and history.

Eli Lieberman, Assistant Librarian, Hebrew Union College New York

Land and Spirituality in Rabbinic Literature; A Memorial Volume for Yakov Elman. Leiden, Netherlands, 2022: Brill Reference Library of Judaism, 71. 340 pp. $149.00 (9789004503151) HC.

Land and Spirituality in Rabbinic Literature is a collection of essays compiled in a memorial volume for Yakov Elman, the late beloved professor of Talmud at Yeshiva University. Elman’s interests were diverse, but he is best known for his work on Rabbinics/Talmud and its interaction with Persian culture and religion.

The first section of the book has a collection of articles that focus on literature that examines indigenous practices and beliefs in Late Antique Palestine. Topics in this section include cultural interaction with the Roman overseers, how Jews at that time understood their own past, and the shaping of Rabbinic Law, including the interaction between the scholars and the everyday Jews living in that society. The last two articles in this chapter focus on the Samaritans and the Byzantine/Early Islamic eras.

The second section of the book contains articles that focus on the Babylonian Talmud (written in Iran) and specifically how the Talmud “encountered, incorporated, and differed from traditions from the Land of Israel.” Included in this is a fascinating article that looks at a particular Biblical verse and how it was interpreted differently in Palestine and Iran based on their respective surrounding cultures.

The third section contains tributes that were written after Yakov Elman’s passing by his doctoral advisor and three students. This is followed by a bibliography of Ellman’s publications, some of which were published posthumously.

This collection of articles will be of great interest to the scholar or advanced student of Rabbinics/Talmud and the interplay of Jewish law of this era to Roman and Persian society, culture and religion.

David Tesler, Efrat, Israel

Continued on page 29
Friedman, Francine. Like Salt For Bread: The Jews of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2022. Studia Judaoslavica, 13, 946 pp. $279.00 (9789004471047) HC.

This monumental work is the most comprehensive compendium yet produced chronicling the history of the Jews in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH). Friedman characterizes BiH as a multi-religious culture and asserts that in this tiny region, ethnic relations have been inextricably integrated with religion. Whether one was a believer or not, identity was inevitably linked to one’s religion. Jews, being a relatively small minority, were left in peace for nearly 400 years. This did little, however, to alleviate their struggle between assimilation and maintaining a Jewish identity. As Jews lived in a relatively accommodating state, “…they responded to the appeal of conformity and did not strive as much to preserve special aspects of their culture and group identity.”

Friedman traces the history of both the Sephardi and the Ashkenazi Jews in BiH. Most of the Sephardim began to arrive in the region at the beginning of the 16th Century, after they had been driven from the Iberian Peninsula. With the patronage of the Ottoman rulers, they were able to thrive economically. When Ottoman fortunes began to decline, the Sephardim began to fall into impoverishment. At the end of the 19th century, as the Sephardi community was in decline, Ashkenazi Jews began arriving, having been driven from Europe by pogroms and expulsions. Rebuffed and excluded by the Sephardim, the Ashkanzim became their commercial competitors.

Much of the Bosnian Jewish community was decimated during the Shoah. Nevertheless, those who could, escaped and fought back with the partisans. Friedman thus characterizes the postwar remnant community as one that saw itself as an “equal partner” in the creation of Yugoslavia. The country’s collapse and the descent into ethnic nationalism led to the Bosnian war in the 1990s. Friedman contends that, as an overarching Yugoslav identification was no longer available to the Bosnian Jews, the largely assimilated population rediscovered its Jewish heritage. Additionally, she highlights that, although the war marginalized the community, Bosnian Jews did not stand on the sidelines. Rather, they used all their networks to provide humanitarian aid and support to their non-Jewish neighbors. Friedman sees these actions as the culmination of the historical experiences of the community in BiH.

At present the Jews of BiH are left teetering on the edge of existence. Most of the younger people who lived through the 1990s conflict have left, leaving behind a mainly elderly population. Yet, Friedman contends that, since the three surrounding major communities remain hostile to everyone but themselves, the Jews have a singular opportunity to present a universal front, a “light to the nations.” Whether they can succeed in this venture has yet to be determined. With a truly comprehensive bibliography and an extensive index, this volume would be an incredible addition to any Judaica library.

Randall C. and Anne-Marie Belinfante, Herkimer, NY


Studies is a collection of writings by Rabbi Eitam Henkin, whose life was tragically cut short. He was a prolific writer who published many papers in Hebrew along with several books. After his death, many undertook the effort to translate several of his essays, published, and unpublished, into English. Studies in Halakhab and Rabbinic History is the result of that group effort. This volume is divided into two aptly named sections, Halakhab, and History. There is a smaller third biographical section about his great grandfather, Yosef Henkin, which in this case is an extension of the history section.

The Halakhab section is six essays he wrote about modern issues of Jewish law. A specific focus is not seen in the section as it is small, rather they are topics he found interesting and worth exploring. The History section is where this book shines. A large portion of these essays deal with historical accounts that Henkin felt were not being given proper attention. It blurs the line of history and historiography as Henkin attempts to set the record straight on several historic episodes and their ongoing effects.

The essays are not focused enough on a singular topic to make it a critical part of a library. If an institution has an audience that enjoys short forays into history, it will make an excellent purchase.

Andrew Lillian, AJL Treasurer


This is a very important book, rich in historical details and insights. Dr. Herf, a professor of history at the University of Maryland, describes his book as a “history of the ideas and passions that motivated support and opposition to Zionist aspirations.” He strongly argues that “emotions and power politics were both motivating factors” for the support for Zionism in
REVIEWS OF TITLES FOR ADULTS

the Soviet Union and eastern European communist countries. An important factor in this regard is that many European leftists saw the Zionist struggle as, in a sense, a continuation of the anti-fascist and anti-imperialist aspects of the Second World War. Contrariwise, much of the deep antagonism to the rise of a Jewish state in the Middle East in the U.S. State Department, Pentagon, and CIA was because they saw such a state as an obstacle to U.S. power in the Middle East, reflecting concerns about the embryonic Cold War. Also discussed in the book is the broad support for Zionism in France from Gaullists to communists, and the role that parts of the government, run by socialists, played in supporting Jewish immigration to the Land of Israel despite fierce and active British opposition to it. Dr. Herf’s book obviously has special ironic significance because of the current strength of anti-Zionism found in much of the left, but this history of the crucial four years in the founding of the modern State of Israel is also of lasting value.

Shmuel Ben-Gad, Gelman Library, George Washington University, Washington, DC.


Historian Tal Ilan is Professor Emerita of Jewish Studies at the Free University of Berlin; she specialized in Late Antiquity, gender issues in the Hebrew Bible and rabbinic literature, and Judaic onomastics. She is the founder and series editor of the Feminist Commentary on the Mishnah and the Babylonian Talmud (FCBT); FCBT’s recent offering is from Rabbi Gail Labovitz and is reviewed elsewhere in this issue. Brill’s STAR series focuses on “theological and religious themes that interact with public issues of contemporary society” with particular emphasis on “interdisciplinary research in an ecumenical, interreligious and intercultural context.”

Queen Berenice, born 28 CE and last mentioned in sources in 79 CE, descended from both the Hasmonean and Herodean dynasties. Crediting the “women-and-gender paradigm shift,” the author presents a “radically different” view of the vilified Queen than in historical sources dating from her lifetime to 1974. The departure is to view women in the historical record as more than ancillary to men (Berenice, daughter and sister of kings, was married to two kings among at least three husbands, was close to other rulers, and was in relationship with Titus). Within the framework of a scholarly work, the writing is gripping, including the frequent use of attention-grabbing questions (example: The Berenice Coin — Was Berenice Ever Empress of Rome? Do we know how Berenice looked in the year Titus became emperor?) “The book is intended for academics of classical studies, Jewish studies, Christian theology, history, as well as an educated and interested general public (especially those interested in biographies).” It reaches some fascinating conclusions and provides broad context for a tumultuous period of time in Jewish history: “her life embodies the very essence of this century.” If budgets allow, school and synagogue libraries, in addition to university libraries, would do well to add this to their collections.

Jonina Duker, Certified Book Discussion Facilitator and Judaic Educator


Brad Kolodny’s extensive work is a scrupulous masterpiece about the early years of Jews in Long Island. It gives a new life, background and understanding to how people, who are no longer among the living, used to be connected to each other. His findings reveal the lineage, links and descendants of people in all walks of life and should be valued by those who appreciate the history of the Jews in New York. It fascinatingly transfers the reader to the story of how Jewish communities were founded and settled from east of New York City, i.e., Great Neck to Greenport and Cedarhurst to Sag Harbor. Kolodny retells a legend of peddlers, farmers, and factory workers’ daily challenges, along with thriving traders like the Guggenheims. The author used archival material, including census records, newspaper accounts, and photos to brighten the history of Jewish life and experiences during these formative years. His deep research and understanding bring an important treasure to the Jewish world.

Dr. Moshe P. Weisblum, Professor, Washington University of Science, Vienna, VA

Continued on page 31
REVIEW OF TITLES FOR ADULTS


Rabbi Gail Labovitz is Professor of Rabbinic Literature at American Jewish University’s Ziegler School of Rabbinic Studies (seminary). Ordained by JTS in 1992, in 2002 she earned a PhD at JTS in Talmud and Rabbinics. In addition, her relevant background includes research for The Feminist Sexual Ethics Project at Brandeis and coordination of the Jewish Feminist Research Group, a project of the JTS Jewish Women’s Studies Program. (Elsewhere in this issue is a review of a book by Tal Ilan, the series editor). It considers the laws of mourning in addition to Jewish Holidays in relation to women. The work is very accessible to English-only readers offering: general, methodological, and feminist introductions; Mishnah and Talmud commentaries; topic-specific and feminist introductions; Mishnah and Talmud commentaries; a 13-page bibliography; “sources” observations organized as “general” and “feminist;” topic-specific sections in the commentaries; a 13-page bibliography; “sources” and “gendered terms” indexes; and full English translations (most done by the author).

Labovitz considers commentators from rabbinic to modern and locates the content of the tractate within the corpus of sacred texts and classic law codes. The material is structured so that one could read it on its own, or study it with a study partner, or approach it within a class. The author’s “intent... is to see if I can dig just a bit deeper regarding the (albeit few) women who appear in” the tractate *Moed Qatan*. An example is a focus on names: identified by relationships to men; and when certain names (Leah) might be generic (“Jane Doe”). Older readers might need a magnifier for font size, or book holder for heft. If budgets allow, libraries with those who study Talmud, those who are interested in scholarly feminist approaches including high-school day schools and synagogue libraries would do well to acquire this volume and the entire series.

Jonna Duker, Certified Book Discussion Facilitator and Judaic Educator

Golde Meir, the only woman who served as Israel’s Prime Minister (1969-1974), is still admired throughout the world and remembered as a dynamic public speaker. *The Only Woman in the Room* gives an overview of her life with the focus being the feminist perspective. As the fourth Prime Minister of Israel, she “broke the glass ceiling” long before the term was coined. Golde, like many women of today, was always balancing the responsibilities of her children along with the long and arduous hours as a working mother. Her strong work ethic brought her fame and success in whatever responsibility was laid before her.

Her personal life was complex and paradoxic. She was separated from her husband, but kept his picture by her bed. She advocated for women yet preferred to work with men. She had to learn to navigate in Israel politics which was dominated by men. To do this, there evolved a complexity in her relationship with her mentors, lovers, and men’s guidance which led to her advancement in Israeli politics.

A remarkable achievement was her success for providing women with benefits unheard of in the Middle East. "The crown jewel was the Social Security Act (known in Hebrew as National Insurance)." When she was Minister of Labor, the Knesset under her leadership passed this act which included benefits related to birth and maternity leave. She was influenced by Frances Perkins, the American Secretary of Labor, who advocated for the American Social Security Act in 1936. While Golde is often not credited with the law, it was her vision that got it passed.

Golde Meir continues to inspire women today with her life of selfless dedication and accomplishments. Another recommended book is *Golda: The Romantic Years* by Ralph G. Martin which is a biography of Golde’s life against the backdrop of social and political history.

Ellen Share, Washington Hebrew Congregation’s Religious School Librarian, Washington, DC


Archaeologist Jodi Magness holds the Kenan Distinguished Professor for Teaching Excellence in Early Judaism chair at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill’s Department of Religious Studies. She is a noted public speaker with featured roles in documentaries; the national press often quotes her during controversies. Her first edition of this book won two 2003 awards: Choice Magazine’s Outstanding Academic Book and the Biblical Archaeology Society’s Best Popular Book on Archaeology. This updated edition with her new material fully integrated will appeal to general readers with interests in archaeology in general and Biblical archaeology. After all, “Qumran is one of the most famous and remarkable archaeological sites in the world.” The work is beautifully organized: ten descriptive chapter headings

Continued on page 32
with three to eight subheadings in the table of contents; within chapters short sections from a few paragraphs to a few pages have thematic titles; each chapter ends with bibliographic notes; a thirty-six-page section with diagrams, maps, plans, and photos illustrate the text; and there are four different indexes.

While advocating for interpreting Qumran as a sectarian community, Magness does full justice to the range of other opinions (commercial entrepot, fortress, pottery center, or villa). She considers a wide range of subjects including evidence from ancient toilets. Her Judaic cultural literacy informs the text in multiple ways. As one example, when evaluating literary evidence from the Dead Sea Scrolls alongside material culture, her lucid explanations of such notions as ritual purity make her even more persuasive. She includes contrasting views with nuance; an example is a section on gendered objects with a contemporary sensibility. “Archaeology is not an exact science because it involves human behavior, past and present.” The one caveat is the small font size. The work is recommended for public, school, and synagogue libraries.

_Jonina Duker, Certified Book Discussion Facilitator and Judaic Educator_


Isaac’s Fear (Pachad Yitzhak) was the first multi-volume encyclopedia of Jewish law, edited by Isaac Lampronti (1679-1756), a rabbi and physician from Ferrara. David Malkiel, Professor of Jewish History at Bar-Ilan University, explores the religious, cultural, and intellectual life of eighteenth-century Italian Jews through a detailed scholarly study of the encyclopedia.

Malkiel previously published the eight chapters as articles. The first half of the book focuses on Lampronti, his medical and rabbinical background, and his attempts to deal with the challenges to traditional Jewish religion arising from the advances in European science. Malkiel shows how Lampronti’s empirical methods from his training as a physician at the University of Padua were at times tested by his respect for rabbinical tradition. His experiments included the mathematics of an echo chamber in a Mantuan palazzo and evaluating a Talmudic dispute over slaughter of animals through dissection.

The encyclopedia, with alphabetically arranged entries on Talmudic law and Midrash, also collected the multitude of customary practices in various Italians communities, some tied to the spread of kabbalistic practices. Malkiel uses this tension to explore the relationship of the Italian rabbinate to the lay community at the end of early modern period, showing that there was both a loosening of practice but still an adherence to tradition and rabbinic authority; not yet the early signs of reform that other historians had portrayed.

The second half of the book presents topics of intellectual controversy covered by the encyclopedia, including an entry on the Sambation river; a debate over intercessory prayer through angels; and a problem of ritual “pollution” of _kohanim_ due to the crowded condition of Jewish ghettos. The final chapter broadens the picture through a study of an exchange of letters between a Christian Hebraist and a rabbi.

This title is highly recommended for an academic library.

_Harvey Sukenic, Hebrew College Library_


Eliezer Berkovits (1908-1992), a major thinker of the twentieth century who studied under Rabbi Yehiel Yaakov Weinberg at the Hildesheimer Rabbinical Seminary in Berlin and received his PhD in philosophy from the University of Berlin, is best known for his writings on the Holocaust. He refused to agree to any obscene sadistic logic that the _Shoah_ was a punishment for sins of the Jewish people in some form of a construction of theodicy explanation and as with Chaim Grade’s _My Quarrel with Hersh Raseyner_. In the argument of this Rosh Yeshivah, many Jews remained with their faith during the Holocaust (_With God in Hell_) and emerged strengthened in faith (_Faith After the Holocaust_).

Also well-known are Berkovits works on Jewish women such as his _T’nai B’nenuin u’V’Get_, which attempted to solve the _agunah_ crisis and his _Jewish Women in Time and Torah_. An essay from this latter book is included exhibiting Berkovits’ _halakhic_ approval of women reading the Megillah publically.

Mohl, like an expert filmographer, has spliced in kaleidoscopic fashion relevant and timely snippets of many of Berkovits’ works that are pointedly on the _Ma’ariv tefillah_ and on _Megillat Esther_. What emerges is a coherent commentary on these two crucial

Continued on page 33
aspects of Jewish liturgical life. Mohl employed this method of selection earlier in organizing excerpts of Berkvits’ writings to create *Faith and Freedom*, a commentary to the Passover Haggadah. Through the most recent commentary the reader can gain a greater appreciation of Berkvits’ contribution and enjoy reading a novel interpretation of the *Megillah*. A bibliography of the works from which the excerpts are expertly drawn is found at the end of the volume.

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

Muller, Jerry Z. *Professor of Apocalypse: The Many Lives of Jacob Taubes.* Princeton: Princeton UP, 2022, 656 pp. $39.95 (9780691170596) HC.

Jacob Taubes, the highly charismatic and eccentric scholar that is the subject of this stimulating biography, was born in Vienna in 1923 and received his PhD in 1947 when he wrote his doctoral dissertation on eschatology. Taubes also came from a distinguished line of Rabbis and was himself ordained. In 1947, he came to New York and studied at the Jewish Theological Seminary and befriended and learned from the great German Jewish political philosopher Leo Strauss. In 1949, he went to Israel to learn under the great Israeli historian of mysticism Gershon Scholem. Taubes’ travels also led him to Berlin (where he had a professorship), Plettenberg (where he encountered Carl Schmitt), and Heidelberg (where he spent his last productive month lecturing on the political philosophy of the Apostle Paul).

This biography offers a fascinating intellectual history of the 20th century through this truly enigmatic figure. As much as Taubes attracted some of the greatest minds of the era, he also repelled nearly everyone who knew him well — the most frequent word used to describe him, by friends and enemies alike, was “demonic.” Taubes existed “on the border between Judaism and Christianity, between skepticism and belief, between scholarly distance and religious fervor.” Muller provides the definitive work on Taubes but tells a much wider tale about the intellectual currents prevalent in the United States, Israel and Germany during the forty years that correspond with Taubes’ adult life.

This is a compellingly told tale and a serious work that is eminently readable. Any general reader interested in the intellectual history of this era, of the relationship between religion and politics and religious critiques of modern society will enjoy this work. But it is also the story of a turbulent soul and intellect, who the conservative intellectual, Irving Kristol, called “the only really charismatic intellectual” he had ever met.

David Tesler,
*Efrat, Israel*

Nestakova, Denise, editor. *If This is a Woman: Studies on Women and Gender in the Holocaust.* Brookline, MA: Academic Studies Press, 2021. 271 pp. $119.00 (9781644697108) HC.

Years after the events, the subject of gender and family during the Holocaust began to be researched and written about by scholars, and this volume is a welcome addition to the topic. It includes thirteen papers by international scholars for a conference that was held in Bratislava, Slovakia in January 2019. The papers are in five separate chapters: 1. Theoretical Reflections on Gender Focus in Holocaust Studies; 2. Gender in Time of Occupation and Authoritarianism; 3. Women’s Lives in Camps; 4. Women in Positions of Community Leadership; and 5. Women in Resistance. The book covers these topics in geographical areas not researched specifically before, such as Slovakia, Hungary the Netherlands and more.

Because of the very specific and scholarly focus of this book and its price, it is recommended mainly for academic libraries with extensive Holocaust book collections.

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


The aim of this book is to show that the ancient and medieval contexts of The Apocalypse of Abraham (TAOA) are multiple and intertwined: medieval Eastern Christianity, medieval Slavic Christianity, ancient Judaism, the specific post 70 CE situation, and the rich world of Jewish biblical exegesis.

The overall goal in this book is to provide a fuller picture of how TAOA fits within its multiple contexts, i.e., medieval Slavic lands and Palestine after the revolt of 66-70 CE. The author recognizes that although she is primarily interested in TAOA as an ancient Jewish document, its medieval context and character are worthy of study, apart from their value for the study of ancient Judaism.

TAOA contains two parts: (1) Abraham’s intellectual journey to monotheism and his futile attempts to convince his father Terah not to worship idols, (2) Abraham’s ascension to heaven with the
help of an angel where he is shown cosmic, historical, and eschatological secrets.

The book asks questions such as: Who translated TAOA and why? What is the nature of the original Hebrew core language of TAOA? In its reception history what Christian emendations and interpolations have accrued? Who was translating and copying the medieval manuscripts? What are some of the themes? Can comparative analysis between 4 Ezra and 2 Baruch be made? Can methodological insights from midrash studies be applied? What parallels can be learned between TAOA and rabbinic literature? By comparing different versions of the traditions attached to particular biblical verses, how can one gain better appreciation for the exegetical richness and creativity of ancient Jewish communities?

The book does not engage all topics currently being debated in medieval Slavic studies nor provide exhaustive details on the topics it covers, but offers accessible summaries of the most important topics for the study of Slavonic pseudepigrapha. This title encourages further research of TAOA and other Slavonic pseudepigrapha and the enrichment of the study of ancient Jewish literature as a result.

The book is recommended to libraries hosting those who study ancient Jewish literature, Second Temple literature, Jewish mysticism, Jewish apocalyptic literature, biblical exegesis, Old Church Slavonic Studies, Greek Orthodoxy and similar topics.

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


The latest book on the “Italian Geniza” presents a broad overview of the field to date. Edited by Mauro Perani, the work provides a great overview of the field as well as very specific case studies and scholarship. Essays describe manuscripts impacting the fields of Bible, Talmud and *Halakha*, Midrash, and Kabbalah. Eight of the twenty-two chapters are written or co-written by Perani, including one presenting a “... Report on Forty Years of Research” that gives a bird’s eye view to the work done to the present. Some essays are purely technical, with bibliographic descriptions or text comparisons, while others provide a more thoughtful analysis, like an excellent piece by Simcha Emanuel cautioning against jumping to conclusions from a single page. Color photographs add a clear perspective of the manuscripts under discussion. A bibliography of works dealing with the Italian Geniza will be helpful for researchers interested in learning about prior scholarship. This text is recommended for research libraries.

**Michelle Margolis, Norman E. Alexander Librarian for Jewish Studies, Columbia University AJL President**


This book is a tour de force of great research, synthesis, creativity, medical, and *halakhabic* breadth. It is witty, well written, and insightful. On every page the reader is bound to learn important relevant new things, not only giving one the appreciation of medical history, Jewish history, and *halakhabic* history, but also enlightening one’s knowledge and understanding of Jewish sources. The learned substantive footnotes enable further research. The author’s knowledge in discerning how Jews, Jewish physicians, and rabbis well versed in the science of their day played a role in the rabbinic reception of a responsa history to pressing medical *halakhabic* dilemmas makes this work outstanding. We not only gain a better appreciation of the power of the *halakhabic* mind and responsa literature to deal with new medical phenomena but also the rabbinic intellectual tradition’s largesse in treating *materia medica*. The book achieves and goes beyond its goal to sensitize the reader to the historical dimension of medical *halakhabic* research by enhancing *Torah* study and providing an appreciation of the ongoing and continuously evolving relationship between science, medicine, and Jewish law.

One gains a better appreciation of how past medical theories of innate heat, doctrines of the seven-chamber uterus, and premodern theories of reproductive, cardiac, and respiratory physiology represent a developing moment in medical history of the day that many of the *poskim* found necessary to learn. The reader gains a better appreciation of the majesty of the Rabbinic intellectual tradition to incorporate new findings in genetic engineering, cloning, surrogate motherhood, euthanasia, and end of life issues... to test the limits of rabbinic creativity in finding relevant pre-modern case law in the existing corpus of *halakhabic* texts. The book shows that the principles distilled from the rich history of rabbinic literature in conjunction with a knowledge and appreciation of medical history, will better equip us to confront the ever increasing complexities

**Continued on page 35**
of the medical discoveries in the future.

This study, which may be the benchmark in the field, is recommended for all libraries that collect on Jewish law and on the history of medicine.

David B Levy, 
Lander College for Women, NYC


Robert Schapiro’s memoir, published by his wife after his death, was originally his way to pass his flying stories to his son Morgan. It begins in 1975 with his conscription time in the apartheid South African Army and his applying and acceptance into the South African Airforce Pilot program. It then continues throughout his career in the South African Airlines and finally being a loan pilot to Japan’s Nippon Cargo Airlines.

The memoir is mainly stories about flying and his training. There are limited stories about going out for drinks and meals and sightseeing trips during layovers. There are several mid-flight emergencies, and a few interesting stories when he was on war patrols in the South African Air Force. Since Schapiro married young, the “pilots behaving badly” stories are more about mistakes in the air than about misadventures with air crew or locals at destinations.

Schapiro’s wife received help researching, clarifying, and verifying his accounts in the South African military and South African Airlines. His accounts about working for Nippon Cargo Airlines are interesting in his portrayals of working and miscommunicating with the Japanese staff.

Schapiro was called “Jood” in his early military training and did write about attempted antisemitic attacks as a conscript. But otherwise, the only other reference to his Jewishness is when he occasionally states “who would know that a Jewish boy from Cape Town, South Africa would grow up to fly (the aircraft type he was currently flying at the time)!” There are black and white photographs of Schapiro’s family and of him in aircraft throughout the book. This book is primarily for pilots or those wanting to become pilots but can still be entertaining for anyone who has ever flown or served in the military. Recommended for libraries located near hub airports or military bases.

Sean Patrick Boyle, 
Librarian, Congregation Keneseth Israel, Allentown, PA Vice President, President-elect Association of Jewish Libraries


There is much written on Jewish life in Czarist Russia, the USSR, and post-Soviet Russia and a significant community of scholars and researchers in North America, Europe, and Israel whose professional careers focus on this area. Sasha Senderovich, an Assistant Professor in the Department of Slavic Languages and Literatures and the Jackson School of International Studies, as well as an affiliate of the Stroum Center for Jewish Studies at the University of Washington,Seattle, is a young scholar who has, seemingly, read most of this enormous body of work. Senderovich’s new book, published in July 2022 by Harvard University Press, will give the persistent reader an extraordinary overview of the serious scholarly writing on the multiple dimensions of Jewish life in the Russian/Soviet space, with some reference, as well, to the post-Soviet space following.

The time frame taken on by Professor Senderovich for special focus begins with the dissolution of the Pale of Settlement in 1917 through the end of the 1930s, at which time the Soviet army occupied parts of Poland and the Baltic countries of Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia — incorporating them into the USSR. His approach in the book’s five chapters is to consider features of what he calls the “emergent Soviet Jew” in different geographic or thematic settings — sometimes combining the two. Each chapter is structured around a single text, event, or issue that links to other texts and contexts. The richly referenced links call upon sources largely in Yiddish and Russian, encompassing novels, short stories, journalism, film, and theater.

Through a close reading of texts and narrative, attentive not only to stated plot, but to the most subtle nuances and uses of language itself, Senderovich makes his case that “The Soviet Jew, on the move in the first two decades after the [Russian] revolution, comes into existence in spaces of encounter between the cultural attributes ascribed to the Pale of Settlement and the inchoate cultural space of Sovietness in the making.” Senderovich is at pains, through mining his many sources, to indicate the pulls toward and the resistances away from the new Soviet world in the making. “Before the Second World War, the Soviet Jew came into being within an idiosyncratic and culturally rich response to the Soviet state’s attempts to reform Jews, like other non-Russian ethnic groups, into model Soviet citizens.”

In the Epilogue to his book, Senderovich underlines that “it is important to recognize that the Soviet Jew developed in response

Efraim Sicher, a professor of English and Comparative Literature at Ben Gurion University in Israel, approaches the infinitely complex issue of Jewish identity through the prism of literature and the arts. His book, bringing together chapters he has written and updated going back to 2013, does not here consider social science research on Jewish identity or, in a sustained and searching way, the writing and thinking of contemporary religious figures and professional philosophers.

For most readers encountering this book, author Sicher, coming from the specialized and rather esoteric world of literary criticism, opens the world of contemporary “post-modern” Jewish writers and artists engaged in various art forms including theater and the visual arts whose work touches, implicates, and addresses Jewish identity in multiple ways.

Sicher does a nice job in his introduction in situating what he is up to. He notes that “postmodern and postcolonialist discourse of diversity and hybridity dissolve all ethnic, sexual, religious and gender boundaries and make it difficult, if not undesirable, to fix any stable identities.” The mission Sicher takes on in this book, and in his reflections on what he has been interpreting and explicating over the years, is to meet “the challenge of deconstruction and fragmentation” of contemporary life. This is accomplished by examining clusters of texts and artworks (and the book does feature twenty illustrations) loosely organized around key issues at the center of debate today: nation, ethnicity, gender and sexuality, religion, feminism, and the Holocaust.

The texts and images considered in the book, as Sicher observes, are indeed “provocative” and “disturbing” — and will be offensive and indecent to some — making this a volume that may not be at home in a synagogue or community library. Titles of several of the book chapters should provide a sense of the worlds to be explored in the volume: “Sephardism: Alternate Histories of the Americas;” “Bad Jews and New Men: Re-envisioning Masculinity;” and “Written on the Body: Re-envisioning Judaism in Contemporary Jewish Feminist Art.”

In the midst of the fluidity and flow which Sicher sees as characterizing contemporary life, he grapples with the grand question as to “how much such fluidity redefines what Jewishness means and what will continue to define what we mean by that.” In his “Afterword: Instead of a Conclusion,” Sicher does note that the Jewish world is not all deconstruction and inversion, and that “Jews have been returning to Judaism and to Israel, and many have turned their backs on what they see as the failure of assimilating after three hundred years of secularization, after emancipation did not prevent pogroms and genocide; they have reaffirmed a faith-based or core-culture identification with Jewish history and with a Jewish future.”

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


Isaac Bashevis Singer, winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1978, is known as a prolific and masterful storyteller. Few readers are acquainted with his essays, written in English and Yiddish. *Old Truths and New Clichés* is a collection of Singer’s essays and lectures that he delivered at various universities, community centers, and synagogues. Some of the essays were printed in newspapers, journals, and magazines. Singer’s life and writing are presented in an informative and interesting introduction. Especially poignant is the description of his last years. The book is divided into three sections: the first part consists of seven academic essays on topics such as literature, censorship, and children’s literature; the following seven essays deal with Yiddish and Jewish life, including Singer’s thoughts on Kabbalah, the Ten Commandments, and Yiddish language; the final six essays are more personal. Especially interesting is the essay entitled “A Trip to the Circus,” which tells the story of young Isaac’s trip to the circus with his childhood love, Shosha. Information on where and when each essay was delivered is presented at the beginning of each article. Notes, a bibliography, an afterward,
and an index are also included. Readers of Singer’s novels will enjoy this fascinating book which delves into Singer’s thoughts and philosophy.

Ilka Gordon, 
Beachwood, OH


Jeffrey Stackert, as part of the Anchor Yale Bible Reference Library, has written an indispensable scholarly introduction to the book of Deuteronomy. Stackert is a proponent of the Neo Documentary Hypothesis (a later modification of the Documentary Hypothesis), namely that the Pentateuch is a composite document that combines four originally independent literary works, commonly known as J (Yahwistic), E (Elohistic), P (Priestly) and D (Deuteronomic).

The book begins with a very substantive introduction that sets the table for the rest of the work. Chapter 1 asks the question, “What is Deuteronomy?” — which the author believes should be described as a literary work that is guided by its own “internal field of reference.” The second chapter discusses the various theories seeking to explain how and why D revised earlier source material (E and J) and recast it in its unique mold. Chapter 3 focuses on Ancient Near East Influence in D, particular parallels to and the limited influence of Esarhaddon’s Succession Treaty of the Neo Assyrian Treaty. The fourth chapter analyzes Deuteronomic Reception history and emphasizes that the earliest interpretations involved harmonizing the text with the rest of the Pentateuch. The final chapter seeks to place a date on Deuteronomic composition (first half to first third of the 7th Century BCE).

*Deuteronomy and the Pentateuch* is an excellent scholarly introduction to the Book of Deuteronomy. Despite the academic nature of the work, Stackert writes clearly and lucidly and does an excellent job summarizing extant scholarship. It is highly recommended for academic and libraries that specialize in religious text study.

David Tesler, 
Efrat, Israel


During the immediate years after World War One, some 100,000 Jews of Ukraine perished in a spate of uprisings which all together, in this harrowing book, are considered not a mere fallout of regional chaos, but rather an actual prelude to the Holocaust. Chapters cover specific cities and the political turmoil that followed the collapse of the Tsarist and Austria-Hungarian empires: civil wars between the “Red” and the “White” armies; virulent nationalism led by kooks and xenophobes; Bolsheviks who viewed Jews as capitalists, parasites, or backward fundamentalists; and anti-Bolsheviks who equated Jews with revolutionaries—not totally unbiased, given the large Jewish presence there. However, their naivete and lack of ideological unity prevented any cohesive self-defense.

Added to the toxic mix was religious and economic resentment, culminating in opportunities for mass looting, rape, and murder. The Jews, the author asserts, were not collateral damage, rather the target and historical scapegoat, even later in the decade, when the influx of refugees to Palestine or the West exacerbated Zionist-Arab hostilities as well as Hitler’s conspiracy theories. “Evidence is clear,” the author writes, “that the murder of six million Jews in Europe was not only conceivable but feared as a distinct possibility for at least twenty years before it became a reality.” The fate of the Jews in Ukraine during World War Two — participation of gentle neighbors in the SS roundups and killing fields — had not only been planted long ago. Well researched and readable, with shocking photos and ledgers of victims, this book presents a new light the Holocaust, which did not spring ex nihilo in 1933 with the rise of Nazi Germany; rather, it reflected a tragic continuum.

Hallie Cantor, 
Acquisitions Associate, Yeshiva University, NY


This study is a critical analysis of Shahzadeh va-Sufi (‘The Prince and the Sufi’), the late seventeenth century literary Judeo-Persian (JP) composition of pragmatic counsel and

Continued on page 38

This book, part of the *Jews in Eastern Europe* series of publications issued by Indiana University Press, will be of special interest to two audiences — those individuals looking to trace the evolution and spread of literature written in Hebrew, from the mid-19th century through the early 20th century, addressing subjects beyond *Torah* and *Talmud* — and that community looking to learn about the world of the yeshiva in the Russian Empire.

Author Marina Zilbergerts has authored a closely argued book, documenting the impact of immersion in the world of the yeshiva — her primary example being the Volozhin Yeshiva (in what is now Belarus) — on the growth and dissemination of Hebrew literature.

Surprising as it may be to the non-specialist reader, the yeshiva, beyond serving as the locus of ongoing Talmudic study and disputation, as the 19th century wore on came to provide a community for young Jewish men to discover the Hebrew writings of the *Maskilim* and their followers, Jewish intellectuals pursuing areas of interest and lines of thought opened by the *Haskalah*, or the Jewish Enlightenment. These publications, autobiographical novels, memoirs, journals, all written in Hebrew prose and poetry, while frowned upon by many yeshiva authorities, catalyzed responses by their yeshiva student readers, and led to an ongoing chain of further Hebrew language works.

Marina Zilbergerts takes special pains to show that yeshiva-trained young Jewish men who would go on to, themselves, write in Hebrew, not only gained fluency in the substance of Talmudic disputation through their yeshiva studies, they also profoundly absorbed the manner of Talmudic argumentation — a mode of discourse which would affect the form, style and manner of their Hebrew writing. What deeply characterized this world was a devotion to textual analysis — as the author puts it “unconditional devotion to textuality” and with this expertise came delight in employing language mirroring the Talmudic writers’ and commentators’ reliance on textual games and textual subtleties — “the culture of debate, letter games and the use of allusion, the quest for innovation and the play and pleasure of the text.”

She takes the reader on a quick tour of the intellectual currents at play in the wider world, both in the Russian Empire and in Western Europe, which came to an exert an influence on the thinking of the yeshiva-trained Hebrew-language writers who would leave the yeshiva, and often head to Odessa, which became a center

Continued on page 39
for Jewish writers and thinkers, exploring themes of concern to Jewish life and culture from a secular perspective and written in Hebrew. She states, “one of my book’s central aims is to recover the little-understood importance of nineteenth-century Russian intellectual history to the rise of Hebrew letters. Nihilist and materialist thinking — making its way from the writing of Russian Orthodox seminary students and priests — with a focus on the importance of crafting literature as a force for social good in the world influenced the young Hebrew authors.” The later European “decadent movement” underscoring the aesthetic role of literature — its identity as art and pleasure — was an influential force. The Zionist movement, Hovevei Tziyon, exerted a powerful influence on the writing and thinking of the post-yeshiva writers, as well, with journals such as Ha-shilo’ah edited by Ahad Ha’am and later Chayim Nachman Bialik.

Marina Zilbergerts sees an ongoing influence of talmudic wordplay and delight in interrogating language in contemporary Hebrew literature. Let the reader approach their next Hebrew novel or poem with this in mind.

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


This collection of articles Contemporary Uses and Forms of Hasidut is part of the Orthodox Forum series that Yeshiva University convenes to discuss important cultural, legal, and sociological trends occurring within the Jewish Orthodox world. This volume focuses on a pronounced shift within modern Orthodox life toward Hasidut and increased spirituality — what many now call “Neo-Hasidut.”

The interesting and helpful opening chapter of this work written by the editor seeks to contextualize and define what Neo-Hasidut means and why it is worthy of interest. Part I of this book discusses Hasidic thought among Mitnagdic (non-Hasidic) thinkers and demonstrates that many Hasidic concepts have often been found in non-Hasidic thought. Part II explores the thought of an array of relatively recent Hasidic (and neo-Hasidic) thinkers (Zeitlin, Buber, Heschel, Mishkovsky, Carlebach, Schachter-Shalomi, Green, Shapira, and Shagar). Part III focuses on the sociology of contemporary Neo-Hasidut. Particularly noteworthy in this section is a fascinating sociological analysis by the late David Landes of Neo-Hasidism among American modern Orthodoxy in general, and at Yeshiva University in particular. The final section, Part IV, turns to theological perspectives on Neo-Hasidut, including articles on the appeal of Neo-Hasidut to contemporary Jewry and one Rabbinic educator’s hesitations regarding contemporary Neo-Hasidut.

This book is a fascinating read for anybody interested in contemporary Jewish Orthodoxy (in both the United States and Israel). The growing phenomenon of Neo-Hasidut within Orthodoxy is quite dynamic, and this book does an excellent job of explaining and contextualizing this noteworthy movement.

David Tesler, Efrat, Israel
Association of Jewish Libraries Teaneck, NJ 07666
(201) 371-3255

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 https://jewishlibraries.org/ for membership rates.

Editor-in-Chief
Sally Stieglitz
Communications and Outreach Coordinator
Long Island Library Resources Council
627 N. Sunrise Service Road
Bellport, NY 11713
generaleditor@jewishlibraries.org

Adult Review Editors
Daniel Scheide
S. E. Wimberly Library
Florida Atlantic University
777 Glades Road
Boca Raton, FL 33431-6424
561-297-0519
dascheide@gmail.com

Please send adult books for review to D. Scheide

Laura Schutzman
Librarian, Brookdale High School Library
Hebrew Academy of Nassau County, Uniondale, NY
410-967-5531
laura.schutzman@gmail.com

Please send adult reviews to L. Schutzman

Assistant Editor in Chief
Ellen Drucker-Albert
Head of Reference & Collections,
Lecturer in Law
Benjamin N. Cardozo School of Law,
Yeshiva University
edruckerajlreviews@gmail.com

Please contact Rebecca Levitan by email to inquire where to send children’s and YA books for review.

Children and YA Review Editors
Rebecca Levitan
Librarian III
Baltimore County Public Library - Pikesville Branch
ralevitan@gmail.com

Design and Art Direction
Rachel Levitan
7111 Park Heights Ave., Unit 612
Baltimore, MD 21215
ajlcopyeditor@gmail.com

Membership
Please send requests for membership and dues information to:
AJL VP for Membership
Sharon Benamou
UCLA 11020 Kinross Ave., P.O. Box 957230
Los Angeles, CA 90095
membership@jewishlibraries.org

Advertising Rates

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Format</th>
<th>Rate</th>
<th>Dimensions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Full page</td>
<td>$200</td>
<td>7 1/2” x 9 1/2”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Half-page (vert)</td>
<td>$110</td>
<td>3 5/8” x 9 1/2”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Half-page (horiz)</td>
<td>$110</td>
<td>7 1/2” x 4 3/4”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quarter-page</td>
<td>$55</td>
<td>3 5/8” x 4 3/4”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Ads may include color and hyperlinks. Dimensions are in inches

All ads must be prepaid. Please submit all inquiries, finished copy, and checks to:

Jackie Ben-Efraim
Ostrow Library
American Jewish University
15600 Mulholland Dr.
Los Angeles, CA 90077
(818) 383-9672 (cell)
ajladmanager@gmail.com