Reviews of Titles for Children and Teens

EDITED BY RACHEL KAMIN & CHAVA PINCHUK

CELEBRATING 50 YEARS OF SYDNEY TAYLOR BOOK AWARD WINNERS

In celebration of the 50th anniversary of the Sydney Taylor Book Awards, AJL reviewers will revisit some of the past winners to determine their relevance for today’s readers. Are these classics timeless or do they feel dated? Will children today still relate to them? Was the book unique for its time? Was it a ‘pioneer’ in terms of subject matter, format, or illustrations? And, how does the book compare to other similar books that have been published since? In this issue, we will conclude our celebration by reexamining winners from the past 20 years:

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Re-reading *Speed of Light* for the first time since I chaired the Sydney Taylor Award committee that gave it the award 19 years ago, I was struck again by just how ambitious it is. It was Sybil Rosen’s first (and, as it turns out, only) book for children and she took some big risks in weaving such a serious theme and complex plot into a story accessible to children. *Speed of Light* addresses nothing less than the problem of evil by exploring racism in a small, still segregated Virginia town a few years after the Supreme Court has declared segregation unconstitutional and by relating racism to the Holocaust by showing the corollary between racism and genocide. The title comes from the heroine’s attempts to understand the changes swirling around her in terms of the speed of light – a somewhat confusing and not particularly important plot strand.

Audrey Ina Stern’s summer vacation begins when she learns that her father, an Atticus Finch-like character, is championing the cause of a black man who wants to join the town’s all-white police force. As a result of the racist backlash this causes, the town’s Jewish minority soon learns how superficially they are tolerated by the town’s Gentiles. Action and suspense grow rapidly as threats and vandalism turn into more serious acts of violence against Jews and blacks. Many of his fellow Jews turn against Mr. Stern for upsetting the fragile balance upon which their acceptance rests. No one is more disturbed by the turn of events than a troubled young woman named Pessel who lives with the Sterns: a Holocaust survivor who has never overcome the nightmare that befell her and resulted in the death of her entire family. To her, Mr. Stern’s campaign on behalf of a black man constitutes an existential threat to all of Blue Gap’s Jews because, she feels, it awakens a genocidal hatred that is never far from the surface of Gentile society.

As characters, Audrey Ina and Pessel represent extremes of personality, both somewhat exaggerated but also important in articulating the story’s theme. The portrayal of characters in absolute terms, like the perpetually patient black townspeople or Audrey Ina’s unfailingly wise father, is, in fact, the chief flaw of the book. Audrey Ina is confused by Pessel and struggles throughout the story to understand her and win her affection. Although written almost two decades ago, *Speed of Light* remains relevant as a timely reminder that when it comes to racial bigotry, there are not “fine people” on both sides, despite President Trump’s assertion.

Linda R. Silver, retired librarian, Past Chair, Sydney Taylor Book Award Committee, Creator - AJL’s Jewish Valuesfinder, former editor - AJL Newsletter Children’s and YA Book Reviews, Lyndhurst, Ohio


A single, unidentified woman’s hat on display at the Jewish Historical Museum in Amsterdam is used as the catalyst for a simple, but deeply felt, supposition about the once ordinary life of a victim of the Holocaust. Author and illustrator Nancy Patz beautifully explores the possible details of the hat owner’s reality: how she took her coffee, what her friends and family were like, how old she was, even how she chose to wear this hat. At its conclusion,
readers are called to imagine that this person could have been them or someone they loved. Most importantly they are asked to somehow accept the discomfort of never truly knowing who this woman was but continue to wonder about her regardless. With just a handful of questions, Patz delivers a staggering emotional impact as she guides readers to grapple with the humanity this hat represents; that it is not just a relic of the mid-1900s but was worn by someone who suffered or was murdered because of institutionalized hatred.

Fifteen years after its publication and Sydney Taylor Award, *Who Was the Woman Who Wore the Hat?* continues to feel both current and timeless. Patz’s combination of sketches and sepia-toned photographs evokes uncovering evidence of our collective history. Even the small size of the hardcover book makes it feel like a time capsule or antique treasure found in the bottom of a box. Classroom teachers from elementary school to high school can easily use this title for their Holocaust curriculum, particularly as a read aloud and discussion starter. The book is a reflection of the author’s--and our--privilege and responsibility to tell the stories of Holocaust victims, even when all they have left behind are a shoe, eyeglasses, or a hat.

*Alex Quay, Alice and Nahum Lainer School, Los Angeles, CA*


In 2006, as a member of the Sydney Taylor Book Award Committee, I wrote the following review of *The Book Thief*:

“What an interesting and engaging story. *The Book Thief* is narrated by Death and is the story of Liesel, a young girl who lives with foster parents in Nazi Germany. She is the title character who begins her career by stealing The Grave Digger’s Handbook from the graveyard where her brother is buried after he dies on the way to the foster family. As her foster father helps her learn to read with this book, her story unfolds and we live through the Second World War and all its tragedies. Liesel loves her foster parents (despite their unique characteristics) and helps them in any way she can, including hiding a Jewish man in their basement for a period of time. As she steals more books primarily from the Mayor’s home library, she reads them to the Jew in hiding and then to the rest of the town during bombing raids. It is through these words that she maintains her hope and sanity. It is in fact a book she is writing that ultimately saves her life, while everyone else in her part of the town is lost to the bombs. Her book is found by Death and carried with him throughout time. It helps him cope with the suffering he must witness as he goes about his grim task of transporting the souls of people who have died.

I would recommend this book to Jewish libraries not only for their Young Adult collection but for the Adult collection as well. There is excellent writing in its pages and the descriptions of war-time life in Liesel’s German town are well done and keep the reader interested.” (*Quest for the Best* (CD), 2007, the Association of Jewish Libraries).

Back then, there was no Sydney Taylor Book Award for Teen Readers, but there was no question that we needed to award *The Book Thief* in some way, but how? The answer of course, was to create...
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50 YEARS OF THE SYDNEY TAYLOR AWARD (continued)

- with the support and funding of Jo Taylor Marshall and the Sydney Taylor family—a brand new category: Teen Readers. And thus, a new tradition was established honoring teen books with Jewish content like Strange Relations by Sonia Levitin (2007), Intentions by Deborah Heiligman (2012), The Hired Girl by Laura Amy Schlitz (2015), and more.

Twelve years later, I have reread The Book Thief: Special Anniversary Edition which includes notes and sketches from the author, Markus Zusak. Still “an interesting and engaging story,” Zusak’s unique use of Death as the narrator of this tragic tale is even more amazing today than in 2006. Truly a timeless tale and an extraordinary story of the Holocaust, The Book Thief portrays the lives of German people trying to survive the unthinkable in a way that today’s young adults may find unsettlingly close to home.

There will probably never be an end to Holocaust-based novels. However, when a book comes along that puts an unexpected spin on that horrific time, or makes the reader pause and rethink history, then even ‘another Holocaust book’ must find a place on library shelves. The Book Thief, while unique, will be joined by The Girl with the Red Balloon by Katherine Locke (2017), Code Name Verity by Elizabeth E. Wein (2012), and Prisoner of Light and Fog by Anne Blankman (2014) among others, as surprising and interesting books that offer creative twists on this time in history.

Kathy Bloomfield, AJL Vice President/President-Elect, Seal Beach, CA

[Editor’s note: see also Wendy Wasman’s review of The Book Thief’s first edition in AJL Newsletter, Volume XXVI, No.1 (September-October 2006), p.10].

HONORING HONOR WINNERS

BY CHAVA PINCHUCK

In compiling and editing The Sydney Taylor Book Award: A Guide to the Winners, Honor Books and Notables (AJL, 2018), I got to review all the books that have been recognized by the Sydney Taylor Book Award Committee for the past fifty years. While there are many memorable books, some years there are so many great Jewish books for children that it is challenging to pick a winner, so the committee starting recognizing Honor Books in 1988. Here are some of my all-time favorites:

While ‘diversity’ is a word of the moment, Jewish culture has always been diverse. Jackie Dembar Greene’s Out of Many Waters (Walker, 1988) and One Foot Ashore (Walker, 1994) take place in 1654 during the Portuguese Inquisition. Sisters Maria and Isobel Ben Lazar are kidnapped from their parents. Isobel ends up a slave in a Brazilian monastery, but she escapes and heads to Amsterdam to find Maria, who has been befriended by Rembrandt.

Hershel and the Hanukkah Goblins by Eric Kimmel and illustrated by Trina Schart Hyman
(Holiday House, 1989) was a 1989 Honor Book and remains one of the best-selling Hanukkah books of all time. The tale of clever Hershel outwitting the ghosts that haunt the old synagogue, amplified by beautiful illustrations, has become a staple of story time. A twenty-fifth anniversary edition was released in 2014. Harriet Feder’s Judah Who Always Said “No” (Kar-Ben, 1990), with illustrations by Katherine Janus Kahn, is another great Hanukkah read-aloud that begs for audience participation every time Judah the Maccabbee refuses to comply with the Assyrian Greeks’ dictates.

Authentic Jewish content and age appropriate vocabulary and pictures give You Never Know: A Legend of the Lamed-Vavniks (Greenwillow, 1998) staying power long after being named a 1998 Honor Book. Francine Prose’s text and Mark Podwal’s illustrations make the folktale of Schmuel the shoemaker relatable to younger readers. The author and illustrator also paired up for Dybbuk: A Story Made in Heaven (a 1996 Honor Book) and The Angel’s Mistake: Stories of Chelm (a 1997 Notable Book).

Although there are many versions of the repurposing of a worn garment, Simms Taback’s wonderful illustrations give Joseph Had a Little Overcoat (Viking Children’s Books, 1999) a quirky charm. This 1999 Sydney Taylor Honor Book was also the winner of the 2000 Caldecott Medal as “the preceding year’s most distinguished American picture book for children.” In a similar style is Kibitzers and Fools: Tales My Zayda Told Me, a 2006 Honor Book.

Jewish history comes to life in My Guardian Angel (Scholastic, 2004). Written by Sylvie Weil and translated by Gillian Rosner, the story of Rashi’s granddaughter depicts life in eleventh-century France. In this 2004 Honor Book, Elvina takes a great risk to help a young boy who has run away from a group of Christian Crusaders.

Who knew the creators of the mischievous monkey were Jewish, and that they escaped Nazi-occupied France? The Journey that Saved Curious George: The True Wartime Escape of Margret and H.A. Rey (Houghton Mifflin, 2005) by Louise Borden and illustrated by Allan Drummond chronicles their journey in an interesting and age appropriate story of World War II and the Holocaust. Named a 2006 Honor Book, it is the inspiration for a new musical play and documentary film.

Jean Marzollo, who died in April, was the author of over 100 children’s books, including the I Spy Series. She received Sydney Taylor Honors in 2006 and 2004 for her beautifully illustrated Bible stories published by Little Brown: Ruth and Naomi: A Bible Story (2005) and Daniel in the Lions’ Den (2003), respectively. David and Goliath, Jonah and the Whale (and the Worm), and Miriam and her Brother Moses were all 2004 Sydney Taylor Notables.

Esme Raji Codell’s 2007 Honor Book Vive La Paris (Hyperion, 2006) is mainly about African-American fifth-grader Paris McCray. But her interactions with her piano teacher, Mrs. Rosen, who is a Holocaust survivor, provide both humorous and poignant moments and change Paris’ whole perspective on life.

Most people know that Sandy Koufax sat out the first game of the 1965 World Series because it fell on Yom Kippur. A 2010 Honor Book, You Never Heard of Sandy Koufax? (Schwartz & Wade Books, 2009) by Jonah Winter with illustrations by Andre Carrilho, uses a conversational style and amazing illustrations, including a lenticular cover, to tell the story of Koufax’s Jewish identity and his rise to fame, with plenty of statistics for die-hard fans.

What are some of yours?

[Editors’ Note: The Sydney Taylor Book Award Guide is available on Amazon.]

There is something for everyone in this beautifully illustrated Alef-Bet book by master-artist Debra Band. Inspired by a 10th century manuscript – Perek Shira (Chapter of Song), the wonders of the earth are depicted in verse and illustration. Each letter has its own page containing a verse from the Tanakh with the voice of a specific part of our world – from stars through animals and even the earth itself. The Hebrew letter is in very large type, with its transliteration underneath, followed by the item being illustrated - transliterated, in Hebrew, then translated. Next the Hebrew verse is transliterated. The Hebrew and English of the verse are included in the detailed illustration. For Daled [grass in Hebrew is deshe]: “The grass says: May the glory of the Lord last forever; May the Lord rejoice in His own deeds!” Exquisitely illustrated bugs and a frog are sitting in the grass. In addition to being an Alef-Bet primer, this is a masterful seek-and-find book, in the best tradition of I Spy and Where’s Waldo. Each painting hides a honeybee (for the author Debra/Devorah/honeybee) and a dahlia (for the artist’s granddaughter, Dalia). Finding these is a delightful game requiring a close exploration of each painting. There are also two illustrations at the end that have the aleph-bet hidden inside them.

Many of the translations use the masculine pronoun for God and the masculine translation of Adonai/Lord.] The illustrations – really illuminations – are magnificent, highly detailed and brilliantly colored. At the back of the book is an explanation of each page, with discussion questions and links to photos that inspired the illustrations (e.g. the Hubble Space telescope site). More information, additional discussion questions and a key to finding all the hidden items can be found at [www.AlltheWorldPraisesYou.com](http://www.AlltheWorldPraisesYou.com). From beginning Hebrew learners to Torah scholars, this stunning book will delight all who explore its pages.

*Kathy Bloomfield, AJL Vice President/President-Elect, Seal Beach, CA*

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**BIBLE STORIES AND MIDRASH**


Artistic passion and talent are rewarded in this delightful rendition of Exodus 31 when God tells Moses that He has chosen Bezalel, whom he endowed with a divine spirit in every kind of craft, to build the Mishkan. The picture book shows these talents. Bezalel starts as a young child, a slave in Egypt. Beautiful things can make him forget his slavery. He collects special objects in his ‘Beautiful Things Box’ which he insists on taking on the Exodus march across the desert and through the sea. He collects objects too big for his box in his mind. God asks for his own Beautiful Place, stating that everyone can find something of beauty if they know where to look. Looking, seeing, finding, thinking beauty are the spectacular gifts of Bezalel. He pulls out the beautiful ideas stored in his mind and his box, encourages ideas from his fellow Israelites and guides them in the actual construction and decoration of the Mishkan. God gains a magnificent place to dwell. The sprightly text features personal dialog...

The biblical book of Daniel is being performed as a play. The story of four boys exiled to Babylonia who maintain their Jewish identity despite the risks and challenges is an example of Kiddush Hashem that can be emulated in modern times. As the play progresses and the scenes change, Chanayah, Mishael, Azaryah, and Daniel refuse to eat non-kosher food. Facing the order to bow down to an idol, they refuse and are thrown into a fire, which they survive. Daniel is later thrown into the lions’ den, but the lions do not harm him. At the end of the book is a certificate for those readers who want to join the Courage Club by “bravely following the Torah’s guidelines even when it is difficult to do so.”

Presenting the story of Daniel as a play is an effective vehicle for portraying historic events and involving the current-day characters, and the mix of boys acting in the play and setting up the scenery makes it somewhat realistic. While the verse and pictures seem to be geared to a younger audience, the action - exiling young boys, threatening them and throwing people into fires and lions’ dens is a little much for that age group. The forced rhymes (Inside our Bais HaMikdash, They made an awful mess. The gold and silver holy things - They ran out with them - oh, yes!) and the illustrations typical of books for Orthodox readers detract from the important biblical story and its relevance today.

Chava Pinchuck, Ramat Beit Shemesh, Israel

**BIOGRAPHY**


Attorney and former journalist Peter Aronson tells the story of Jewish violinist Bronislaw Huberman. Born in Czestochowa, Poland in 1882, Huberman soared in the musical world as a child prodigy. He traveled widely playing in orchestras around the world. When Hitler rose to power, Huberman used his fame and influence to bring fifty Jewish musicians to Palestine to eventually form the Israeli Philharmonic and eventually saving over 1,000 Jews.

Credit goes to Aronson for researching Huberman, using archival materials and corresponding with Huberman family members. Huberman’s story needs to be told. But this self-published narrative lacks depth, emotion, and balance, and there is nearly as much backmatter as there is narrative. The reader will learn nothing of Huberman’s upbringing, nor why he did what he did. Aronson glosses over the fact that Huberman received a Stradivarius violin, now in the possession of world-famous American violinist Joshua Bell. Although fiction, *The Sound of Freedom* by Kathy Kacer (Annick Press, 2018; also reviewed in this issue), includes Huberman as a character and includes more information about him.

Barbara Krasner, former member, Sydney Taylor Book Award Committee, Somerset, NJ


This long-overdue picture book biography of Alicia Markova, née Lily Marks (1910–2004), is a pleasure to behold. In clear and concise prose, the author tells the story of a talented Jewish girl born in London, England who loved to dance, overcame adversity, and eventually became a world-class ballerina. Furthermore, in Jewish liturgy, we often recite the words, “L’dor vador” (from generation to generation). Lily’s story exemplifies this ideal, for she admired another (Jewish) ballerina, Anna Pavlova. The two met at Pavlova’s home outside London. There, Pavlova encouraged Lily in the
pursuit of her dream: “You could become a fine dancer... but your life will be hard work, and you must be prepared to give up many pleasures.” And so it was. In the Afterward, we learn that Alicia had an illustrious career and always maintained her love for Judaism.

The illustrations by Japanese artist, Cosei Kawa, are truly stunning. Apparently, he sketches and then combines elements using digital tools. We are attracted to the expressive faces, muted colors, and period costumes and settings. Children will be intrigued by the tiny confetti-like drawings scattered on every page. An Unlikely Ballerina is an inspiring biography showing that passion and determination can conquer a great deal.

Anne Dublin, author of Dynamic Women Dancers (2009) and A Cage Without Bars (Second Story Press, 2018), Toronto, Canada


Previously published by the History Press (as Pocket Giant Albert Einstein and Pocket Giant Anne Frank), these dense but informative volumes provide somewhat engaging and in-depth introductions to their well-known subjects. Albert Einstein explores the legendary physicist’s scientific breakthroughs, his personal life, and his rise to fame: “It is easy to understand why Einstein is held in such high regard by scientists...But why should that make him a household name?” May incorporates many primary and secondary sources and archival photographs, helping set context through twentieth-century history (including the anti-Semitism Einstein faced) and, occasionally, his religious beliefs and practices (“Weizmann’s movement to create the modern state of Israel became known as Zionism, and it left Einstein with mixed feelings”). There’s a great deal of scientific explanation — May tries his best to make Einstein’s theories accessible, but they can still be hard to follow.

In Anne Frank, Waxman sets out to “look again at the life of Anne Frank — a life that we might already think we know,” in order to “attempt a more nuanced approach to victimhood during the Holocaust” — a goal that inherently requires some authorial speculation at times. Waxman relates what is known about the Frank family’s life before, during, and after World War II, while also exploring the lasting impact of Anne’s diary (convincingly arguing that was Anne’s own goal by keeping it the way that she did) and the various ways it has helped shape our collective view of the Holocaust. Photos of Anne and her family; the Annex dwellers; Miep and Jan Gies with Otto Frank (in 1961); archival images of Jews in Holland and in concentration camps; quotes from Anne’s diary; photographs from the Anne Frank and the Amsterdam Historic Museum; movie posters and stills; a photo of a young Bosnian refugee, inspired by Anne, holding her own diary, all assist in putting a personal face on Anne’s legacy. Both volumes include an appended chronology, glossary of words that appear in bold throughout the text, further information (books and websites), bibliography, and index.

Elissa Gershowitz, The Horn Book, Inc., Boston, MA


All About Anne offers a close look at Anne Frank’s experience and the experience of those who hid with her, moving chronologically through Anne’s childhood, the secret annex years, the residents’ capture and their paths through concentration camps, and Anne’s post-war legacy. Created by the Anne Frank House, the book includes plenty of primary sources: childhood photos, newspaper clippings, concentration camp records. The main text draws on Anne’s diary and other sources — letters from Anne and other family members, statements from people who encountered the family — and focuses primarily on Anne’s story, weaving in historical information occasionally for context.
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More historical notes and other sidebar content appear on interspersed half-pages printed on colored paper; the full pages are designed so that these half-pages can be laid against them without feeling like interruptions. Though the muted colors aren’t particularly striking, this feature gives the book an interactive feel. In many cases, the half-pages use frequently asked questions as headings (“How did the Nazis know who was Jewish?,” “How did the people in hiding get new clothes and other things?”). In the “In Hiding” chapter, which covers a time when those in the Annex presumably didn’t take photos, Huck Scarry provides drawings that give a sense of the hidden people’s daily life. Cutaway drawings of the layout are particularly helpful, and are juxtaposed with photos of some of the rooms, taken later. The greatest shortcoming of this English edition is the translation from Dutch, which results in some awkward phrasing. Aside from this, however, All About Anne essentially functions as a small museum in book form, walking young readers through Anne’s life as well as through the Secret Annex.

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


Henny Machlis was an “extraordinary ordinary person.” She spent her relatively short life constantly working to refine her middos (character traits) and embracing the mitzvah of hachnasat orchim (hospitality), often hosting more than one hundred people in her apartment for Shabbat meals. The Machlises chose an apartment within walking distance of the Kotel (Western Wall), and people visiting Israel from all over the world and from all backgrounds flocked to her home to enjoy her warmth and her cooking. Her fourteen children learned the lessons of generosity and caring for others first hand. Based on Emunah with Love and Chicken Soup by Sara Yocheved Rigler (Shaar Press/Mesorah, 2016), this “biography for young readers” is told in conversational style. There are many photographs and dispersed through the text are “Henny’s Recipes for Life,” which are Torah thoughts or reminders to herself about dealing with challenging situations. Sadly, Henny succumbed to cancer at the age of 57 on October 16, 2015, but she left a formidable legacy for her family and the world. A glossary is included, which probably isn’t necessary for the target audience.

While the original book delves deeply into Henny’s childhood and upbringing, and includes many anecdotes from guests and students, the version for young readers gives a brief overview and focuses on her hospitality and her children. Two additional sections are included with Henny’s recipes and recollections from some of her grandchildren. Usually the narrative style works and makes Henny’s achievements more relatable, but it is often didactic, and sometimes treacly (interjections of “Wow!” and “Ouch!”). The proportions in the recipes are for serving over one hundred people, which helps illustrate how much time and effort went into preparing meals for strangers but precludes the young reader from using them before doing quite a bit of math to reduce the quantities. Henny’s story is inspiring and can be used in any Jewish Values curriculum or as a book club selection, regardless of affiliation.

Chava Pinchuck, Ramat Beit Shemesh, Israel

FICTION - MIDDLE GRADE


The year is 1492 and the Jews of Spain are being expelled. Along with their parents, twelve-year-old Joseph and his younger sister Gracia are forced to leave their beloved home because they are unwilling to convert to Christianity. A palpable sense of dread accompanies the family on their trek to Portugal. With only a donkey to carry their meager remaining possessions, they finally arrive in Lisbon with the
rest of their uprooted community. Although the situation is difficult, infinitely worse horrors are about to occur. As the Jews wait at the port for passage to other places of refuge, the children are literally torn from their parents’ arms and forcibly converted. They are then thrown onto a slave ship bound for São Tomé, a jungle island off the coast of Africa. They soon become slaves on a sugar plantation which will be built in this Portuguese colony. The terrible story of the Jewish slave children is told here with compassion and grace, but Dublin minces no words in describing the emotional anguish and physical hardships endured by the victims. She also weaves in a subplot about the African slaves who were captured and forced to work alongside the Jewish children. In order to allow a bit of hope for a young audience, Joseph eventually earns his freedom, though his sister decides to remain on the island, having embraced the Catholic faith.

This is a standout work of historical fiction for children. Dublin has obviously done careful research and adheres to accurate detail. She prefaces the book with historical notes, and concludes with a glossary and suggestions for further reading about the capture of the Jewish children and about slavery in general.

Joyce Levine, retired high school and children’s librarian
(formerly AJL Publications Chair and SSC President), Boynton Beach, FL


For a new take on the choose-your-own adventure genre that leans more toward romance than adventure, Yael and the Party of the Year is a mild, pleasurable option for middle grade audiences. Artistic, spotlight-avoidant Yael is preparing for her Bat Mitzvah and hoping for a small, intimate gathering in her honor. Her mom, however, has other ideas about what a Bat Mitzvah party should look like. In order to appease Mom and still have a say in her day, she agrees to a blowout celebration at the location of her choosing: the Maize, a local amusement park. Meanwhile, vying for her attention are three potential love interests: Eli, the kind, astronomy-loving neighbor boy from her Bar/Bat Mitzvah class; Cam, her crush and the intelligent nephew of the owners of the Maize; and Gabriel, the alluring, uber-cool teen who is assisting her Bat Mitzvah emcee. No matter which boy the reader has Yael pursue, she always comes out on top, staying true to herself and finding the best way to enjoy this major life event.

It is refreshing to read a secular publication wherein the title character’s family is not only culturally Jewish but a religious family who is involved with their synagogue. Author Tamsin Lane takes readers through different elements of Shabbat services, explains the purpose of Bar/Bat mitzvahs, and discusses how Hebrew is read on the page. Most importantly, Yael does not struggle with her Jewish identity, in fact, she embraces it. However, two-dimensional characters and clunky, dated language (“girl power” and “totally crushing on” are no longer used by the target audience) take away from the reading experience. School and synagogue librarians may recommend Yael and the Party of the Year to realistic fiction fans looking for a light-hearted, predictable read. In libraries were romance is popular, consider purchasing alongside companion title Tara Takes the Stage, featuring Yael’s best friend Tara Singh, which is similarly structured around three romantic story options.

Alex Quay, Alice and Nahum Lainer School, Los Angeles, CA


—. Rokitno Square. Illus. by Gail Davis. Indianapolis, IN: Dog Ear Publishing, 2018. 26 pp. $22.95 (9781457563843) HC; $12.95 (9781457564550) PBK. Gr. 4-6.
---. The Visit to Latrun. Illus. by Gail Davis. Indianapolis, IN: Dog Ear Publishing, 2018. 30pp. $22.95 (9781457563003) HC; $12.95 (9781457563386) PBK. Gr. 5-7.

All of these short, 22-30 page books have a similar format: a page of text matched by a full page color illustration and short. Gail Davis’s illustrations are the most successful in portraying mood and setting. The settings are historical: medieval Germany (Ben and the Bishop), Spain in 1492 (Expulsion), a Polish village before and during the Holocaust (Rokitno Square), and two stories set in Israel at the dawn of statehood (The Sinking of the Patria and The Visit to Latrun). All are marked by flaws that make them problematic for young readers. The settings lack context so readers without historical knowledge will be perplexed as to both character motivation and plot development. The writing style is stilted, reading more like a report than as creative literature for children. When an attempt is made to be more informal, the result is historical anachronism, like calling the parents of a Jewish child living in Spain in 1492 “mom” and “dad.” The vocabulary and syntax are adult, with usage such as “Pursuant to…” and “Systematically, the Nazis made their way east …” and the stories end abruptly, with pat, unsatisfactory resolutions. Of all the books, the two set in Israel are worth considering because of the dearth of stories for younger readers set during the birth of statehood.

The books cited above are self-published, giving the impression that they are based on experiences of the author and her ancestors. Ms. Liberman’s website describes her as a woman in her eighties who was born in Israel [Palestine], moved to the US when she finished high school, attended law school and art schools, and established a successful creative career. Writing for children is clearly not one of her strengths. The weakest of the lot is Queen Esther: A Bible Story Retold. It is written in what attempts to be a rhyming style and illustrated with trite, insipid illustrations. Overall and like many self-published books written for children, the audience is probably limited to the author’s family and friends.

Linda R. Silver, retired librarian, Past Chair, Sydney Taylor Book Award Committee, Creator - AJL’s Jewish Valuesfinder, former editor - AJL Newsletter Children’s and YA Book Reviews, Lyndhurst, Ohio


The very first page of this novel grabs the reader and doesn’t let go. Max Einstein, a twelve-year-old orphan living in New York City, is not your typical girl. She attends college, plays speed chess in the park, thinks of inventions to help the homeless, and talks to Albert Einstein (in her head). By the way, she’s also a genius. Everything is more or less ‘normal’ in her life until she’s recruited by a mysterious organization called the CMI (Change Makers Institute) and whisked off to Jerusalem. There, she meets other child geniuses who have been gathered together to find ways to solve some of the world’s problems. However, the sinister, greedy, self-serving Corp tries to kidnap the children for their own nefarious motives. Create a group of likeable (and not so likeable) characters, add suspense and plot twists galore, sprinkle in some science and technology, top with a few quotes from Albert Einstein, and this novel is a sure winner.

Although the plot zooms along nicely, the authors have added details in the writing that add depth, color, and humor. For example, “Several number 2 soft lead pencils were given to the contestants,” or even examples of Israeli junk food: “BBQ Bissli wheat twists and peanut buttery Bamba curls”. The pencil drawings by Bev Johnson add a touch of whimsy to the text—beakers, magnets, DNA strands, light bulbs, and so on. Finally, interwoven in the plot’s roller-coaster ride is the theme of the story: the importance of tikkun olam (making the world a better place) through friendship and cooperation. Max Einstein is the first of a series that is sure to captivate children—girls and boys alike.

Anne Dublin, author of Dynamic Women Dancers (2009) and A Cage Without Bars (Second Story Press, 2018), Toronto, Canada

Noah, Dash, and Noa are grouped together for their B’nai Mitzvah tzedakah project. Noah can’t stand Noa, a girl who annoyingly shares his name and B’nai Mitzvah date and seems to do everything right. Dash and Noah are best friends who love sleepovers devoted to hanging out with Dash’s dad watching old comedy routines, until… Dash’s dad commits suicide. Then, everything falls apart. Noah loses his father figure, whom he needs because he has two loving, but somewhat ineffective moms. Dash becomes angry and depressed and pulls away from Noah and even therapy doesn’t help. Noa relives the death of her own dad, for which she is still seeing a counselor. In his weekly meetings with the B’nai Mitzvah class, the rabbi talks about Torah and acts of loving kindness, but doesn’t really help any of his students address their issues. As the tweens try to work through everything, often with humor, at times with immaturity, Perl gives us voices that ring true, believable situations, and a warm, loving story with more than a sprinkling of Judaism. The descriptions of the funeral and shiva are particularly fine and would be helpful for any librarian, educator, or rabbi to offer a middle schooler experiencing suicide or death.

Since Noah voices the story, we come to know him best, rooting for him when he tries to be a friend to Dash, hurting with him when his classmates turn against him, and commiserating with him when he says just the wrong thing when he’s trying so hard. We are appalled at him when he reads Dash’s text messages after finding Dash’s cell phone and fails to return it for an unreasonably long time. The choices Noah makes would fill an hour’s book discussion!

Perl provides notes about why she wrote a novel about suicide and includes a list of resources for readers dealing with mental health issues, suicide, depression, loss, and healing. Reading with an adult would enhance the experience.

*Debbie Colodny, Cook Memorial Public Library District, Libertyville, IL. Former owner Sefer, So Good, and former member, Sydney Taylor Book Award Committee*


Esther and her best friend Michiko share the same birthday, which is how their families first became friends. The eight-year-olds are obsessed with the British princesses, often speaking with English accents and greeting each other with the ‘royal wave.’ But bigger issues are looming in Western Canada in early 1942. There is growing anti-Japanese sentiment, and when Grandma Sadie visits from Toronto, she is not herself, overcome with worry about her sister and brother-in-law in Germany from whom she has not heard in a very long time. When beautiful dolls of Elizabeth and Margaret appear in the window of a toy store, the girls’ hearts are set on them. Esther receives the Elizabeth doll from Grandma Sadie as a birthday present, Esther is upset that Michiko isn’t thrilled for her, and Michiko feels ignored and a bit jealous. Before the girls can make up, Michiko’s father is sent away, and soon the rest of the family is ordered to leave Vancouver for the Kaslo internment camp. Soon Esther’s class is empty, since the government has ordered all Canadian Japanese to relocate away from the coast. Missing her friend terribly, Esther decides she must reconcile and sends Michiko the Princess Elizabeth doll. Grandma Sadie learns that her family is safe in Switzerland, and soon a package arrives. Michiko and her mother have made a Princess Margaret doll for Esther.

There is minimal Jewish content, which is disappointing when the middos of lovingkindness, helping others, and being mevater (nullify one’s desires for the good of others) are so evident in this sweet story. Esther’s family’s Jewish identity is limited to Jewish-sounding names, mention that the dress she wears at her birthday party was from Rosh Hashanah, and a Yiddish-speaking Bubbe. This story of friendship and lesson about an unpleasant time in Canadian (and American) history is more suitable for a public or school library.

*Chava Pinchuck, Ramat Beit Shemesh, Israel*

Meir’s brother Yehuda left Paris seven years ago under mysterious circumstances. Meir was only five at the time, but now that he is approaching bar mitzvah age, he bears a strong resemblance to his sibling, and the community is concerned for its safety. His parents send him away to a cousin in Troyes, but Meir is curious about his brother and decides he must track him down. He stops in cities with Jewish populations, but he senses he is being followed. In his travels, more clues to his brother’s disappearance come to light, which may involve the burning of the Talmud in 1242. He finally meets “the Wolf,” who tells Meir is brother is a thief, and that he is hoping Meir will lead him to Yehuda, so he can recapture him and regain his reputation with the Paris guard. Meir bribes him with a compass he was given for helping a boat captain save his cargo. Meir is directed to the German city of Speyer, and he hears of a scribe named Yehuda. His frantic search leads to a road outside town, and when they finally meet, Yehuda tells Meir the whole story. During the burning, Yehuda saved several volumes of the Talmud, but he was seen and had to flee. The brothers celebrate their reunion joyously. A glossary is included.

There are many positive aspects here: a strong sense of place in France and historical details included in an interesting way. The main character’s challenges and the atmosphere of mystery and suspense will appeal to middle-grade boys. The illustrations, which break up the short chapters, are dark and amateurish, and do nothing to bring the text to life. And as a young Jewish boy traveling alone in Medieval France, it is amazing hashgasha pratis (Divine Providence) that he remained safe and alive. Still, its value as a choice for underserved readers outweighs its flaws, and it will be a welcome addition to Jewish school and synagogue libraries. Pair with *My Guardian Angel* by Sylvia Weil (Arthur A. Levine Books, 2004) for more Jewish history in France.

Chava Pinchuck, Ramat Beit Shemesh, Israel


Molly Peskin-Suso has had twenty-six crushes, but never as much as a date. But the summer before her senior year in high school holds two prospects: Reid, a Tolkien fan who works with Molly in his parents’ store, and Will, the hipster friend of Molly’s twin sister Cassie’s new girlfriend, Mina. Molly, self-conscious about her weight and not sure how to “have” a boyfriend, stumbles through texts and some awkward situations. She and Cassie seem to be growing apart as significant others enter both their lives. Then there is the stress of planning and executing their mothers’ wedding. But as with any romance novel, all ends happily. Molly and Reid make an adorable couple, and the wedding, with all of Molly’s crafty decorations, is beautiful. Cassie and Molly realize they will have to make an effort to maintain their close relationship.

Albertalli, formally a clinical psychologist and the author of *Simon vs. the Homo Sapiens Agenda* (Balzer +Bray, 2015) has again authentically captured the gamut of teenage emotions and insecurities. The characters are hip and funny and quirky, but they also get drunk and talk about (all kinds of) sex a lot. This is a modern family with two open-minded mothers -- Patty, who used a sperm donor to conceive Molly and Cassie; and Nadine, who used the same donor to conceive one-year-old Xavier, who has the same “chocolate” African-American skin color as she does. There is a smattering of Jewish content, which is not integral to the story: Molly’s family “are definitely the kind of Jews who eat bacon;” she works in a store called “Bissel” owned by Deborah and Ari Wertheim who have tattoos despite being Jewish; and Molly’s nerves made her and Cassie’s moment of coming of age into a “barf” mitzvah. There is also a Jewish grandmother chiding zaftig Molly about her weight. With a very strong sense of place in the DC suburbs, this one is best suited to the public library and LGBTQ collections.

Chava Pinchuck, Ramat Beit Shemesh, Israel
**HANUKKAH**


Somewhere between Anatevka and Chelm lies Oykvetchnik, a village whose inhabitants tend to complain. Eight tales of Chanukah introduce some of the interesting residents, including a mouse who helps a yeshiva boy find a trade, and a *chanukiyah* that realizes his special role when a dreidel tells him the story of Chanukah. In “Dvorah Rohkl’s Chanukah Party,” the whole town celebrates together. “The Rabbi’s Daughter” is a touching tale of how a young lady with a mole ends up marrying a young man with a hunchback. “Reb Shimon the Shammes” is a kind-hearted soul whose memory is not what it used to be. Will he remember where he put the shul’s *chanukiyah* in time for Chanukah?

Scott Hilton Davis is a “storyteller, author and filmmaker who brings the works of Yiddish authors like Sholem Aleichem and I.L. Peretz to new audiences.” There is usually something lost in translation when oral fables are put to paper, but Davis manages to keep the somewhat Yiddish inflection of questions, sentence structure, and conversational style intact. While younger readers may have no nostalgia for shtetl life, readers (and listeners) of all ages will still enjoy the humor and wisdom of these stories. “Chaim the Chanukiyah” and “Myzele the Mouse” make great Readers’ Theater.

Chava Pinchuck, Ramat Beit Shemesh, Israel


Join a playful, cuddly kitty to spin, bounce, tumble, hop, and more, from one to eight on Hanukkah. Each full color spread offers a numeral, an action, a cute pose for the kitty to match the action named, and the appropriate number of dreidels to match each numeral. Each double page spread also includes a hidden surprise to count that also matches the numeral and may keep older readers and listeners interested. The author/illustrator presents a lovely palette of pastel shades of turquoise, fuchsia, lime green, purple, and orange, with a mixture of colors shading the backgrounds throughout to look like blended pastels or watercolors. Each of the 36 dreidels that symbolize the eight days of Hanukkah are slightly different in their elaborate decorations, and the Hebrew letters are always correctly displayed in the order they might land when spun: paired combinations of nun, gimmel, hey, shin. In addition to the dreidels, other Hanukkah symbols include a plate of latkes and jar of applesauce, gelt, and, of course, a Hanukkiah with candles on the page with the numeral 8. Lots of concepts to enrich language and early literacy.

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


True to its subtitle, this is a resource for families observing the Festival of Lights at home. The candle blessings – in Hebrew, transliteration, and English – are followed by free verse poems and brief reflections to read on each of the eight nights of the holiday. The poems contain references to light (“First Night: On this night, we bless the first flame. The light willing to stand alone – to speak out when others stand back – to burn brightly when others are indifferent”). The reflections infuse the referenced historical, ritual, and cultural aspects of Hanukkah with meaning, and make connections to each poem’s theme (“... there are times in life when we need to be the first candle, to brighten the
darkness the best we can, even if we must stand alone.”). A four-page “Story of Hanukkah” provides background information about the Maccabean revolt and the miracle of the oil, and a “More About Hanukkah” section answers several questions including “How many candles are needed to celebrate all nights?”; “What role did women play in the Hanukkah story?”; and, “Where is the Hanukkah story recorded?” Also included are instructions for playing dreidel, latkes and sufganiyot recipes, and Hanukkah songs and crafts. The text is enhanced by Swarner’s illustrations which are dreamily evocative – in this book as well as in her numerous Sydney Taylor award-winning and notable books.

Marcie Eskin, Beth Hillel Bnai Emunah, Wilmette, IL


“A is for alphabet / B is for blessing / C is for candles / D is for dreidel / E is for eight nights / F is for Festival of Lights / G is for gelt / H is for Hanukkah . . .” So begins this slightly oversized (6x8 inch) Hanukkah-themed alphabet board book that naturally includes jelly doughnuts, latkes, menorah, and oil. The colorful retro styled illustrations are detailed and feature a diverse cast of characters in an array of skin tones and ages joyfully participating in all of the Hanukkah rituals and celebrations. In “R is for rabbi” the picture depicts a kippah and tallit wearing woman carrying a Torah. Of course, the writer has to get a little creative to cover all twenty-six letters with “Israel,” “questions,” “eXcited,” “yontiff,” and “zaide.” “Kinship,” “noodles,” and “unison” seem a bit odd but the visual appeal of the overall package makes up for this minor shortcoming. Nothing is explained or identified so this is clearly geared for those already familiar with the holiday. Other books in the series include *B Is for Boo: A Halloween Alphabet*, *S Is for Santa: A Christmas Alphabet*, and *E Is for Easter*.

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

Just what we need – yet another silly Hanukkah book. The Latke family is just like yours or mine, except that they’re potato pancakes. There’s Lucy, Mom, Dad, Grandpa, the teenage brother, Lex, who doesn’t care about anything, and the dog, also a potato pancake, named Applesauce. The book begins well by describing the family making *sufganiyot* (jelly-filled doughnuts) and getting ready for the first night of Hanukkah -- cooking, singing, lighting the menorah, spinning dreidels, and gobbling gelt. It goes downhill from there, when Grandpa yells “It’s not Hanukkah, but CHHA-nukah, CHHHHHHHanukah!” This is where Applesauce, the dog begins its role of teaching the traditions of Hanukkah and debating all of Grandpa’s errors. But, unless the reader/listener knows the facts and story of Hanukkah, it’s very difficult to understand that the dog is giving correct information while Grandpa is uttering pure silliness: brave bees, Mega-Bees, who buzzed and stung to keep our people safe; Judah Mega-Bee, the biggest and bravest, battling Alien Potatoes from Planet CHHHH; outer space spuds invading Earth; only enough honey in the hive to last one day; an enormous wooden dreidel filled with bees that whipped and mashed the tater tyrants into tatters, so Judah Mega-Bee added some egg, onion, and flour and made potato latkes! Finally, near the end of the book, the dog tells the true story of Hanukkah and helps everyone, including Grandpa, understand the symbolism of eight days, eight candles.

The illustrations, done in brightly colored, full page spreads, are reminiscent of Pilkey’s action packed *Captain Underpants* and the text reminds us, as the publisher suggests, of Allard’s and Marshall’s *The Stupids*. The misinformation is done with humor, but the humor will be lost to those who don’t understand the spoof. There is a paragraph telling the story of Chanukah (or Hanukkah!) and glossary at the end.

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

**HOLOCAUST AND WORLD WAR II**


Set in Germany in 1938, this story’s young narrator, Kurt, longs to be an anti-Nazi activist like his older brother, who is a member of the resistance group, the Edelweiss Pirates. Their risky activities include distributing anti-Hitler leaflets, painting over Nazi symbols, and playing prohibited Jazz music. Kurt’s brother insists Kurt is too young to join the group, so privately, Kurt and his Jewish best friend, Fritz, enjoy playing banned Louis Armstrong songs at home together. When Kurt witnesses the abuse Fritz suffers in school for being Jewish, he pulls off his own small, but significant, act of resistance that shows his solidarity to his friend and proves his courageousness to his brother. With warm illustrations in muted tones that wonderfully compliment the sense of the era, this powerful story illuminates a lesser known branch of Nazi dissenters, as well as the difference that one person’s actions can make. An author’s note further explains the historical facts of the Pirates and their efforts to help Jews.

Martha McMahon, Alice and Nahum Lainer School, Los Angeles, CA


In Krakow, Poland in 1935, Anna Hirsch’s world is crumbling: her mother succumbed to sickness the previous year; she and her best friend, Renate, have witnessed anti-Semitic violence with no intervention by the local police; and Adolf Hitler has announced over the radio he intends to eliminate all Jews. The situation worsens when Papa refuses to leave Poland as Renate and her family plan...
their immigration to Denmark. But then Papa announces the famous violinist Bronislaw Huberman is forming a new orchestra in Palestine. Anna and her grandmother write a letter of application for Papa, who slowly agrees leaving Poland might save them. He auditions in Warsaw where Anna meets Eric Sobel, whose father is also auditioning. Huberman accepts their fathers into the orchestra, and the two youngsters get into trouble in Tel Aviv when they steal away to the beach and there is an explosion. Eric’s family decides to return to Poland. Anna attends the first performance of the Palestine Symphony Orchestra and graciously accepts an unexpected gift from Huberman.

This is another fine tale spun by veteran Holocaust children’s writer Kathy Kacer. The reader will cheer for Anna and her family as they leave a world still to experience its worst crimes and they will worry about the future for Renate and Eric. Bronislaw Huberman, of course, was a real person and Kacer draws on the true story of his rescue of about 1,000 Jewish musicians and their families by creating what becomes the Israeli Philharmonic Orchestra. Her narrative edges toward the lyrical, especially about music. The author’s note provides background on Huberman and his orchestra as well as on his famous violin that was stolen during a visit to New York. The Sound of Freedom depicts a world where perpetrators, bystanders, and victims quickly become the norm while at the same time showing at least one man willing to take a stand to fight against the tsunami of anti-Semitism. The only confusion is a set of character names that is decidedly Germanic rather than Polish and the lack of an age given for Anna.

Barbara Krasner, former member, Sydney Taylor Book Award Committee, Somerset, NJ

Shoup, Kate. Nazi Propaganda: Jews in Hitler’s Germany (Public Persecutions Series). New York: Cavendish Square, 2017. 128pp. $45.54 (9781502623218) Gr. 7-12.

Shoup begins with “The Seeds of the Holocaust,” covering World War I, the Weimar Republic, and the rise of the Nazis up to 1933. Chapter 2, “Indoctrination of the German People,” includes a history of European anti-Semitism prior to the Nazis. It continues with an explanation of the many ways Hitler fomented hatred. These include Anti-Jewish laws, use of the media, and the constriction of the Jews’ lives. Chapter 3, “The Nazi Terror,” starts with Kristallnacht, and describes the Ghettos, death marches, camps and other horrors (but with limited graphic content). Chapter 4, “Defiance,” recounts the bravery of those who resisted, and those who saved Jews, as well as pointing to the victims, including Anne Frank. The final chapter, “Fallout,” describes the post-War world, including the Nuremberg Trials, the creation of the State of Israel, and honoring the Survivors and Rescuers. There are also several sidebars, including a Holocaust Fact Sheet; portraits of leading Nazis; and “Who Was Jewish?”

Despite its concentrated subject matter, Nazi Propaganda provides a useful history of Nazi oppression, and includes a timeline, glossary, sources for further information, a selected bibliography and an index. It is, however, a supplementary work; there is a presumption that the reader has some Holocaust knowledge.

Fred Isaac, Temple Sinai, Oakland, CA

ISRAEL


The Crane family wonders what to do with Alexandra Crane. She doesn’t follow in formation. She doesn’t march correctly. Instead, she likes to explore and flirt with danger. Saba Crane goes along with her and begins to understand Alexandra’s strengths. He sees that she correctly senses climate, winds, and threats. As the flock begins the winter’s migratory journey to Israel, Saba recommends that Alexandra take a turn at leading them. She may not follow, but she can certainly lead. She guides the family to many points in Israel before landing in the Hula Valley.
This beautifully illustrated and well-paced picture book has so many wonderful layers. On one level, it is the story of a girl who doesn’t quite fit in. On another level, it is the story of migratory birds. On yet a third level, it is the story of geography. The text and illustrations provide every indication of this book becoming a young reader’s favorite that can be read over and over again.

Barbara Krasner, former member, Sydney Taylor Book Award Committee, Somerset, NJ


Seven short stories introduce the reader to Mati and Ahmed, two tiny boys (both “thumb-sized”) who live in current-day Jerusalem. In the first tale, they meet at the Kotel during a rainstorm, and become fast friends. The following tales (which are meant to be read separately) take them to various locations in the city -- the Old City Shuk, Ben Yehuda Square, and the Al-Aksa Mosque. In each place, they have adventures appropriate for small children: they shop in the market; tame and return a runaway donkey; rescue an injured cat; give tzedakah to a poor woman; and help a blind man to his place for prayer. Their exploits also provide opportunities to perform mitzvot. The tiny friends are brave and resourceful, but do not face significant danger. The lovely illustrations are evocative, carrying the sense of the Holy Land to the young reader.

Sheldon Lewis was for many years the Rabbi of Congregation Kol Emeth in Palo Alto, CA. As a parent (and now a grandparent) he loved the stories of K’tonton, “the Jewish Tom Thumb.” In this slender volume, he has brought Sadie Rose Weilerstein’s concept back to life in contemporary Israel. Children will find these “mini-voyagers” charming and instructive, and will get a glimpse into modern Jerusalem. In all, this is a worthy updating of the adventures of K’tonton (K’tonton in Israel was first published in 1964). For those who enjoy these tales, there is a second volume available.

Fred Isaac, Temple Sinai, Oakland, CA


The rooster’s k ukuriku awakens Mrs. Strauss. He is soon joined by a cat and a mosquito. Mrs. Strauss only wants sheket (silence) so she can go back to sleep. The train, street sweeper, and radio add to the early morning sounds. She dreams of the beautiful cool and green places in Israel. Suddenly Mrs. Strauss awakens with a start. She hears a new sound, geshem (rain), outside of her window. The rain is a very welcome sound to the little village in Israel. The animals return to their homes.

This charming book introduces young children to life in Israel, a very simple Hebrew vocabulary and animal sounds. The detailed colorful illustrations have a dreamlike quality to them. The street sweeper must clean the Bamba wrappers off of the street before everyone begins their day -- a charming fact about life in Israel. The end note explains that it only rains in Israel from October to March. So, the first rain of the year is a time to celebrate.

Ellen Tilman, Meyers Library, Reform Congregation Kneseth Israel, Elkins Park, PA; Past Chair, Sydney Taylor Book Award Committee


Molly is looking forward to spending the summer at camp with her friends when her parents tell her about a change in plans. She will be visiting her father’s family in Israel instead, spending an entire month staying with them and getting to know them. Her paternal grandparents speak no English and Molly is afraid that no communication will equal no relationship and no fun. Israel seems like a foreign and strange place and Molly is sure she will feel uncomfortable and out-of-place the entire time due to lack of Hebrew-speaking skills and her resentment of a forced change in her summer plans. But when
Molly arrives in Israel surprises await. Each is a revelation, and each opens her mind bit by bit. Her English-speaking aunt brings her to a kibbutz where she has fun and she begins to learn about her family and their roots. She gradually sees more of the country and becomes fascinated by the sights and stories she encounters. Slowly, Molly begins to realize that Israel is a treasure chest filled with discoveries. The culture is interesting, the food is interesting, and different does not always mean terrible. Her Israeli grandparents teach her that effective communication can start with smiles and welcoming gestures and that learning each other’s language can be a labor of love.

The story takes place in 1986 and the descriptions show an Israel very different than the country it is today. The descriptions of Israel and the subtle historical lessons which accompany them combine with the story of a maturing young girl to form a satisfying tale.

Michal Hoschander Malen, retired day school librarian (NYC); library volunteer, Efrat, Israel; editor of children’s and YA book reviews for the Jewish Book Council

JEWISH VALUES


A child wants to be like the adults around her; she can be like a firefighter when she helps someone in need. A boy can be like a doctor when he helps someone feel better or like a police officer when he keeps others safe. Unfortunately, the language used in some of the other examples limit the book’s use to an Orthodox population: “I am a builder when I do a mitzvah and add a brick to the Bais Hamikdash.” “I am a soldier in Hashem’s army, following the Torah rules.” “I am a princess when I dress and act with tzniyus.” “I am like a pilot when I fly my words of davening up to Shamayim.” The full color illustrations are simple and attractive for a young child. The glossy pages are perfect for removing the spills and stains of young hands. There is a short quiz at the end of the book where one can match the mitzvah with one of three people from the book.

Ellen Tilman, Meyers Library, Reform Congregation Keneseth Israel, Elkins Park, PA; Past Chair, Sydney Taylor Book Award Committee


Anna’s mother is renowned for her kindness, creativity, and outgoing humor, which makes Anna feel they have nothing in common and that she will never live up to her mother’s exceptional qualities. After noticing a hungry man asking for money outside their frequently visited deli, Anna can’t get the image of the man out of her mind and quietly decides to make a tzedakah box in which she collects her own money to provide bagels for the hungry man. In doing so, Anna discovers that it is her generous spirit that is the special characteristic she shares with her mother. The theme of selfless, anonymous giving is relayed beautifully, without being overdone, and Anna’s insecurity in comparing herself to her mother is a valuable concept to explore for children who may feel diminished by the abilities of those around them. Cis’s beautiful illustrations, often double-spread, complement the text.

Martha McMahon, Alice and Nahum Lainer School
PICTURE BOOKS


Zaida and grandson Eli share a bagel routine every Sunday morning. They delight in the food and each other’s company. Sometimes Eli would go with Zaida, when he would win a pickle from the deli jar. But usually Zaida comes to Eli -- they share and nosh. Of course, until Zaida’s fall in the deli, hurting his tuches (bottom), and needing to stay home for two weeks. Eli cannot believe how much he misses the bagels. While he makes sick calls on Zaida, three neighbors arrive, who, it turns out, also have a bagel tradition with Zaida. Chicken soup, the traditional cure, is brought in, but it does not hurry time. Eli misses his routine so much the moon looks like a bagel with cream cheese, which jump starts his solution. He goes to the deli and puts in an order to cover Zaida, his friends and himself, then adds a surprise which turns Eli from a prince of a mensch into “the bagel king!”

Cute illustrations bounce along with the story. The innocent story has a glaring oddity: neither the grandson, the grandfather nor any other adult pays for their orders. There is not even a picture of a cash register on the sales counter, despite several illustrations of the lady who manages the transactions. The charming illustrations have two more flaws: no one’s door in a full cast of Jewish homes has a mezuzah and only Eli escapes a big Jewish nose. Yes, chicken soup and bagels are stereotyped here, but not in a bad way. Most young readers will not notice this picture problem, allowing them to enjoy a sweet grandfather/grandson tale that is warmly and openly Jewish and full of Yiddish tam with its vocabulary, food choices and characters with more well-meaning fun than not.

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


Los Angeles based writer and animator Marc Lumer has repositioned the medieval Golem legend into the first half of 20th century America. A young Jewish immigrant from “the old country” arrives in bustling New York City but is immediately fearful of his strange and crowded new surroundings. He especially is uncomfortable making new friends because his previous experiences around gangs of boys probably included anti-Semitic harassment. He cleverly fashions a huge mud-golem for protection as his father had once done, but it takes him no time at all to realize that other children are actually friendly, and in New York, his golem isn’t needed in the same way. But what does one do with a kindly golem who has no one to protect? Perhaps a courageous golem could be a construction worker working high up on a new skyscraper, or a neighborhood ice cream man, or even a King Kong wannabe. He certainly has the right characteristics to do almost anything. Anything, that is, but entering the river in order to save a distressed child who has fallen in--since a creature made of mud will surely melt away. In the end, baseball, the opportunities that New York City provides, and a reconstructed golem pal represent the successes of the Jewish immigrant experience.

This book succeeds on many levels, including clever design details, appealing illustrations that are mixed with archival photos, and fun graphic novel elements that mirror comic book techniques. The storyline is also quite humorous, and even provides a bit of historical information regarding early Jewish immigration to New York City through photos and illustration alone. Kids will enjoy the spirited (and cuddly) golem and his superhero antics when he saves the day while helping a plucky greenhorn make some new friends.

Lisa Silverman, Library Director, Burton Sperber Jewish Community Library, Los Angeles, CA

When *Maus* was published in 1986, commentators debated over whether the comic format should be used to tell a Holocaust narrative. No such argument seems to have occurred when its six-page precursor appeared in 1972 or when ‘Master Race’ (which Art Spiegelman freely acknowledges as an influence) hit newsstands in 1955. Furthermore, in the decades before comics journalism and social media, a comics reader usually only gleaned hints about the stories in a particular issue from the details on the cover.

Though there are similarities between the stories on offer here, the authors have presented an assortment which allows the reader to compare a range of writing and art styles, different genres (e.g. horror, superhero, war, biography, fantasy), and a medley of themes (e.g. vengeance, resistance, trauma, unethical medical experiments). Each entry is preceded by a brief introduction which lists the bibliographical details, gives background for the story, provides historical context, and tells the reader information about the creators. These introductions contain bibliographical references.

Although many of the stories are straight-forward, self-contained narratives, some of the tales contain references to characters, concepts, and events with which the reader may be unfamiliar. Such stories may make the reading a bit awkward. Although about half of the covers are reproduced, it would have been interesting to see the rest as they would show the many different ways in which the comics hinted to readers at what was inside. A bibliography listing the stories which could not be included in this volume would have been helpful.

Overall, this excellent anthology is highly recommended for academic, school, public, and Judaica libraries. The book serves as a ‘comic time capsule’ allowing readers to imagine themselves discovering Holocaust-themed comic stories in an era when the Shoah was still a taboo topic, even within the Jewish community.

*Steven M. Bergson http://jewishcomics.blogspot.com*


This concise historical treatment of the history of the creation of modern Israel is truly unique and distinctive among the related titles that preceded its publication. Bartfeld, a ‘Palmachnik’ (Palmach veteran), offers many insightful memories and details of pre-state resistance activities and military operations during the Israeli War of Independence. His co-author, the Reverend Dr. Ehlke, is a student of Israeli history and a companion of the late Bartfeld.

This is, perhaps, the best introductory study of how Israel came into being for anyone unfamiliar with the country’s history and origin. The narrative proceeds in chronological order, covering the emergence of Zionism as the ideological basis of the state; the British Government’s Balfour Declaration during WWI, which supported the establishment of a national homeland for the Jews in Palestine; life as it developed under the British mandate; ensuing violent episodes initiated by the native Arab population and the Yishuv’s reaction; the activities of the Palmach; the emergence of the state and the subsequent War of Independence. Appendices offer a set of useful data on Ottoman Turkish census figures, key data, and key personalities.

*Sanford R. Silverburg, Catawba College, Salisbury, NC*
Reviews of Nonfiction Titles for Adults


When eight leading scholars of Hasidism coordinate to produce a one-volume summary of the movement and its thought, scholars across disciplines are sure to take notice. An instant classic, this important work has already become the go-to introduction and course textbook for those seeking to understand one of the most dynamic and influential movements in modern Judaism.

Reflecting the current state of the field, the book pushes back against some older accepted notions: the uniqueness of Israel Ba’al Shem Tov (Besht) as a founding of the movement, limited creativity in the 19th century, and the decline of Hasidism following World War II. Instead, the authors view Hasidism as a movement whose origins are quite mysterious, and which has not ceased creating and re-creating itself in response to changing times and circumstances. From a small mystical group, made up of individuals who saw themselves as students of the Besht in the late 18th century, to a mass movement with numerous smaller and larger centers scattered throughout eastern Europe in the 19th century, through widespread destruction during the Holocaust, leading up to a surprising rebirth in North America, Europe, and Israel in the second half of the 20th century, Hasidism has thrived by meeting the changing religious, cultural, and spiritual needs of countless men, and later women, throughout the Jewish world. Focusing on the diversity of Hasidic ideas and communities, Hasidism: A New History sees change and difference over time as the secret of Hasidic success.

Yoel Finkelman


This short, accessible book consists largely of a chapter by chapter commentary on the eleven chapters of I Kings that relate the life of King Solomon. (Chronicles is referred to relatively little as Dr. Drazin considers it, at least to some extent, a whitewash of David and Solomon). Drazin is no fan of King Solomon. He acknowledges that I Kings repeatedly refers to Solomon as wise but he maintains that this is ironic: the deeds of Solomon recorded in I Kings do not display wisdom but, quite often, the opposite; he also maintains that the author of I Kings is well aware of this. The argument is clearly presented. Drazin cites a number of commentators, some of whom do not agree with him. In a second, even more anti-traditional position, Drazin states that the Torah of Moses was unknown to Israel until the reign
of King Josiah. This is mentioned almost in passing, however, as he has dealt with this argument in greater depth in some of his earlier books to which he makes reference. As short as it is, the book goes off on tangents concerning temples and the Hebrew calendar and has a pointless chapter narrating some Midrashim on Solomon. As to the book’s main focus, the character of Solomon as presented in I Kings, the thesis is intriguing but probably needs to be more extensively argued in order to be more convincing.

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


During World War II, some 200,000 Polish Jews escaped from Poland and the Final Solution via the Soviet Union. This compilation of essays examines their ordeals, which were profoundly diverse. The Russian attack and annexation of eastern Poland in September 1939 opened up an exit route for regional Jews. Following the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union in June 1941, even more fled eastward. Interviews reveal experiences of cultural shock and self-examinations of their decisions of whether to flee or stay. While some integrated into the Communist regime, even lauding the educational, vocational, or military opportunities, others viewed their wartime situation as “a passage from Nazi inferno to Soviet hell,” i.e., brutal living and working conditions, government oppression, and anti-Semitic citizenry. Many perished or ended up in the gulags of Siberia or in the chaotic refugee centers of Central Asia. The Torah-observant felt alienated among secularized brethren yet exposed some to their heritage. Yet exiles describe ambivalence and even gratitude toward Stalin, a ‘lesser evil’ to Hitler, which explains a certain reticence and refusal over the years to condemn their former host country. Other essays cover the Tehran Jews who escaped to Iran and their sense of isolation, and the Jews who repatriated to Poland, only to encounter postwar pogroms, towns in ruin, and futile searches for loved ones.

Extensively researched, this book lends greater dimension to the word ‘survivor,’ taking the definition beyond the ghetto/concentration camp victims. It is a welcome appreciation of an overlooked group who merit a place of their own within the landscape of Holocaust experience. Recommended for all academic libraries with Judaica or Holocaust collections.

Hallie Cantor, Yeshiva University, New York, NY


This is a memoir of Anna Kunstler, a hidden child born November 1942 in the Krakow ghetto hospital. It describes how she was smuggled out of the ghetto by her father when she was three-months-old. She was saved by being baptized, having her name changed, and being raised alongside other children in a Polish Catholic family. Her mother, who survived the concentration camps, tracked her down after the war. The main part of the book describes their life together as displaced persons, first in Germany, then in the United States. The book includes black and white photographs, as well as an afterword about forgiveness. It is part of the series The Holocaust: History and Literature, Ethics, and Philosophy, edited by Michael Berenbaum, who has written a short, useful forward. The book is a worthy addition to Holocaust collections in all types of Jewish libraries.

Susan Freiband, Retired Library Educator and Volunteer, Temple Librarian, Alexandria, Virginia


Negative theology is the conviction that human concepts of God are limited. This can be either because certain or all positive attributes do not in fact constitute God’s nature and we can only know what God is not, or because God’s nature is beyond human knowing. Jewish negative theology can be found in the writings of some philosophers (notably Maimonides, but at least as far back as Philo) and amongst certain kabbalists.
This book consists of sixteen original essays on Jewish negative theology. It is based upon the notion that negative theology has certain affinities with modern Jewish intellectual and artistic life. Many of the essays deal with how certain modern Jewish figures relate to negative theology, including Paul Celan, Derrida, Adorno, and Avraham Yitzchak Kook. Other essays focus on additional aspects and outcomes of negative theology; for example, the essay “Can Halakhah Survive Negative Theology” by David Shatz.

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


As a young boy in Warsaw, Joseph Feingold led a happy life full of music. World War II changed that. Forced to flee his home, he spent time in Siberian labor camps, survived the 1946 Kielce pogrom, and ended up in a displaced persons camp outside of Frankfurt. It was at a flea market in the camp that he traded a carton of cigarettes for a violin, allowing him the joy of playing songs from his childhood. He later immigrated to New York, studied architecture and married. As he grew older, he no longer played his violin. Hearing about an instrument drive on a local classical music station, he donated the violin and told his story. Filmmaker Kahane Cooperman heard his story and made a short Oscar-nominated documentary about Joseph, his violin, and the students at the Bronx Global Learning Institute for Girls who received the donation. Feingold’s heartwarming memoir is a statement about the importance of music in life, the contribution of immigrants to American Society, and the bonds created by generosity. The book will interest all adult readers; it will also appeal to teens.

Barbara Bibel, Congregation Netivot Shalom, Berkeley, CA.


Arnold Fine was a New York City native born in the Bronx in 1924. Beginning in the late 1950s, he worked as a Special Education teacher in the mornings and for The Jewish Press during the rest of his day. For several decades, he served as the senior editor for the paper, and he also provided regular features such as “The Silly World of Chelm” and “I Remember When!”, a very popular column. Fine also had a joke-of-the-week section under the heading “Abi Gezunt!”, Yiddish for “At least we are healthy!” He passed away in 2014. The compiler of this collection, Rabbi Zalman Goldstein, previously published a collection of stories from “The Silly World of Chelm”. In this collection, he brings together over 50 years of jokes that appeared in “Abi Gezunt!”.

The jokes found here often reflect the time period and can be a bit dated. For example, there is a joke in reference to “the world famous violinist, Mischa Elman”, who died in 1967. The joke with the punchline “But that is not my dog” can also be found in this volume. The jokes are appropriate for all ages. If you already own other Jewish humor books, such as The Big Book of Jewish Humor, then you may not want to purchase this volume. However, collectors of Jewish humor and other readers will enjoy this loving tribute to Mr. Fine and his world.

Suzanne Smailes, Wittenberg University, Springfield, OH.


A Travel Guide to Jewish Europe is much more than a book that recommends sites of Jewish interest in Europe. It is a comprehensive guide and reference book to the culture, history, politics and life of Jews who live in Europe. Each chapter begins with a clear map of the country discussed and shows the location of cities where Jews live or have lived in the past. Frank then briefly discusses the Jewish history of each city and country. For example, in the chapter on France, he begins his account with the Roman period and ends with the rise of anti-Semitism and terrorism in today’s France. Each chapter includes concise
Reviews of Nonfiction Titles for Adults

biographies of notable Jews who lived in a particular city or country. Included is information on Jewish population (past and present), expulsions, pogroms, blood libels, book burnings, and the inquisition. Frank lists kosher restaurants, synagogues of all denominations, museums, and memorial sites. In addition, he recommends Jewish tours and tour guides. Jewish organizations, community activity centers, libraries, cemeteries are also listed, as well as their addresses and phone numbers. At the end of each chapter Frank recommends books for further study. Black and white photographs of both the interior and exterior of synagogues enhance the book. A comprehensive index is included. A Travel Guide to Jewish Europe is highly recommended for all libraries. It is interesting, well written and can be appreciated by patrons who are planning a trip to Europe or patrons who are interested in the life of European Jews.

Ilka Gordon, Beachwood, Ohio


Children react differently to traumatic events and helping them overcome trauma necessitates a different approach than with adults. After presenting clinical definitions of trauma and the signs and symptoms of trauma in children, Dr. Fried suggests four treatment approaches. He discusses the importance of letting the young patients tell their story in their own words and giving them the time and the space to do so. Play is also important, as it builds rapport and lets the child relax and disengage from memories of the trauma. Texture therapy and nature walks are also suggested. Education entails “stating the facts simply, naming emotions, and empowering parents.” The final approach, creativity, includes poetry, guided thinking, and writing, as well as other outlets. The final chapter talks about the resolution of trauma and the power of relationships. Several studies by experts are mentioned; none of them fully referenced.

Dr. Fried is a clinical psychologist with many years of experience of working with children dealing with trauma. The short volume is insightful and contains many suggestions for helping children cope with their emotions, but the target audience is hard to define. Other practitioners will be aware of these techniques through their schooling and practice. Non-practitioners may be interested because they are parents or relatives of traumatized children and are looking for ways to help them. The Jewish content consists of several un referenced quotes from Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik, referred to as “the Rav,” and a few biblical quotes. The short paragraph asserting that “storytelling brings the child closer to a relationship with the Ultimate Listener” discusses the benefits of prayer, which may be lost on a younger patient and may stir up additional feelings of abandonment (Where was God when this happened?). While somewhat simplistic for the professional, the book may be useful to parents and would be suited to a resource center or Jewish community services library.

Chava Pinchuck, Ramat Beit Shemesh, Israel


Many jokes have been made about Jewish food, particularly foods regarded as traditionally Ashkenazi and originating from either Germany or Eastern European countries. People who made jokes usually spoke of these foods as being either too bland or colorless; too fatty or heavy. Such stereotypes are misleading and with this rich compendium of recipes and stories, the Gropmans allow us to revel in a cuisine that has been unjustly maligned for too long. The German-Jewish Cookbook provides both the cook and the interested reader with much to enjoy both for gustatory pleasure and for the historical and familial context in which these foods reside.

This reader is eager to test out many of the recipes and also to seek out the more esoteric ingredients that have for all intents and purposes vanished from the regular retail sources to which we normally turn for our foodstuffs. Where are the purveyors of kosher head cheese, for example? Wouldn’t it be wonderful if some of the newer suppliers of our kosher, organic, grass fed meats took these items
seriously and made them available to the adventurous gastronomes among us? We need to return to these dishes that have all but disappeared with the rise of world Jewish food as we’ve come to know it. The Israeli food scene is celebrated for its fusion of rich influences from the Middle East and Western Europe. But let’s bring back the forgotten German dishes too!

One of the best things about this cookbook is that you don’t even need to be interested in cooking to find it fascinating. There is so much history and culture woven into the text, that it almost feels like a trip to another country. The recipes in the book are not all kosher but the authors make clear which ones are not and it is easy to adjust them to make them kosher if one desires. The book includes two indexes, a list of resources for foods, a bibliography and a list of acknowledgements. This book is highly recommended for all Jewish libraries and for general culinary collections as well.

Marion Stein, retired librarian


Any intellectual building block in the academic niche of Gender Studies in Israeli culture is a welcome addition, and indeed, the title of the book suggests new and exciting excursions into the field. The table of contents offers chapters dealing with militarism, ethnicity and sexuality, and feminism (some previously published in other venues) as reflected in female characters in Israeli Cinema, motivating the reader to embark on this voyage. But alas, for a title offering discussions of the visual art of film making, as well as the critical analysis of the representation of women—the physical book itself, cover to cover and in between, makes it almost impossible to get to the message(s).

One can begin with the visuals of small print on congested pages, and the occasional fading ink. Twenty-seven pages of notes at the end of the body of 217-page work would be helpful if one could read easily the numbers in the chapters themselves. But the most egregious faux-pas is the quality of black and white images illustrating each chapter—they present blurry scenes from the movies, and as such are more of a hindrance than an aide to the points the author is attempting to convey. No book about any visual art should be produced with such little care of the ‘visual’ parts.

I have no doubt that the information and the analysis contained in each chapter advance the cause of gender studies in Israeli cinema. I just had to stop reading every time my vision became too blurry. (Yes, I did wear my reading glasses). My suggestion is that Professor Harris requests a re-issue of such an important work, but this time with a higher standard of publication.

Dr. Yaffa Weisman, Los Angeles, Past President, AJL

Haruni, Joshua. מאך נישט קיין ווילדער (Do not Photograph). Jerusalem: Jerusalem Fine Arts Prints, 2018. 303 pp. $90.00. (9789655725445).

In this beautiful book, London journalist and photographer Joshua Haruni gives us the opportunity to take a closer look inside a world where tourists and observers are not normally welcome. Haruni provides a window into the little-known daily life of the Hassidic community; into a world that preserves its way of life and modesty by shunning onlookers and photographers, and into a community that usually yells to photographers “Do not photograph!”

After befriending the leader of the Pinsk-Karlin Chasidic sect, the author gained access to the Kabbalistic and Hassidic dynasties of Meah Shearim and Bnai Brak in Israel, where he started photographing their members during moments of their daily life, prayers and celebrations.

The photographs, originally in black and white, have been enhanced digitally with color, thus giving the images a beautiful tint. The text is in English and Hebrew and a glossary is included where all the Yiddish terms are explained.

All readers will enjoy perusing this coffee table book and seeing the faces of piety and sanctity captured so splendidly by Joshua Haruni.

Sonia Smith, McGill University, Montreal, Canada
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The title *Equality Lost* is taken from Rav Henkin’s brilliant first chapter which is a reading of how zilzul (disrespect and belittlement, underestimation) by one person of another, in spite of their having been created equal, has tragic results. The book is divided into three sections: Torah commentary, Halacha, and Jewish Thought. Additionally, it includes a biography of Rav Henkin’s grandfather, Rabbi Yosef Eliyahu Henkin -- the first biographical account to appear in English. Henkin is extremely erudite, and his book is punctuated by learned footnotes for following up with sources. This is an important work, and welcome second edition for the English-reading public unfamiliar with Henkin’s Hebrew writings.

In the Halacha section, Henkin demonstrates how to interpret Halacha in regard to women in this age of feminism. Sensitivity is given to Kol Isha (the voice of a woman) and women reciting kaddish and other prayers. He also deals with the conversion to Judaism of children in non-observant homes, and the killing of captured terrorists.

In the section on Jewish thought, great insights are offered into the role rechilut (tale bearing) played in the destruction of the second temple and the lessons to be learned regarding the state of Israel, and the true meaning of teshuvah related to current events. With regard to the glatt kosher ‘craze,’ Henkin demonstrates that what comes out of one’s mouth is more important than what goes into it. Highly recommended for all libraries.

David B Levy, Touro College, NYC


The authors provide a “halachic overview to the laws of wine and whisky.” After the rabbinic approbations, the volume is split into three books. The first explores the rules and status of wines, particularly when non-Jews are involved in its production or handling. The second book discusses the issues with whisky: while whisky is inherently kosher, it is often stored in wine casks or flavored with wine, about which different rabbis have different opinions as to the kashrut of the product. The final book is a master list with an alphabetical listing of scotch whiskies including pictures of their labels and their status as permissible or forbidden. The meticulous research is obvious in the detailed source notes, and there is an index and a glossary.

Rabbis Kallus and Slansky have compiled an invaluable resource for consumers of alcoholic beverages that adhere to the laws of kashrut. As they often note, many people are stringent when they can be more lenient, and vice versa. They present the differing opinions on these matters and provide the modern-day interpretation of the halachah. The combination of halachic discussion, practical advice, and an illustrated guide to permissible brands make the book an important addition to both personal libraries and those of Orthodox institutions.

Chava Pinchuck, Ramat Beit Shemesh, Israel


Rabbi Soloveitchik was a great teacher and philosopher whose views on Judaism and Zionism have influenced several generations of modern Orthodox Jews, as well as the general Jewish community. Even non-Jews have demonstrated interest in his ethical philosophy, such as the book written by the Jesuit priest, Christian Rutishauser for his doctoral thesis: *The Human Condition and the Thought of Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik* (Jersey City, Ktav, 2013).

The essays edited by Kanarfogel and Schwartz examine Soloveitchik’s views of ethics, Biblical hermeneutics, love and cognition, and the history of the Tosafists. The essays are scholarly with copious
footnotes, and they are aimed at experts in the field. For this reader, the most interesting contribution was the last in the book: a bibliographic review of the scholarship on Soloveitchik’s thought. Overall, the essays demonstrate that Soloveitchik’s writings on Jewish law and the human experience, while sometimes dated, will continue to apply today and in the future. This book is recommended for all libraries; however, the scholarly nature of the book may limit its broad appeal.

Daniel D. Stuhlman, Temple Sholom Library and City Colleges of Chicago, Chicago, IL


The author has had a career as a scholar, author, and lecturer in Israel and the United States, and has written several books on Judaism, and Jewish art and culture. The book begins with an introduction, followed by eleven chapters. Each chapter is introduced with a quotation by Maimonides, referred to in the book as Rambam. The underlying theme of each chapter is the practice of healthy diet and exercise as consistent with *halakhah* (Jewish law). Both the quotations of Rambam and the contemporary interpretation of those quotations provide guidance for a holistic lifestyle that includes preventive medicine, cleanliness, practicing good personal habits, avoiding inactivity, and diet and exercise that extend life.

The tenth chapter is dedicated to outlining best practices for those over fifty, emphasizing diet and exercise as essential in order to maintain a rewarding quality of life into the senior years. In addition to Rambam’s advice, the author has included considerable medical research to support his thesis cited in the endnotes. At the same time, the topic is presented in layman’s language, often summarizing the major points in brief terms. This volume would be a welcome addition to any non-fiction adult collection.

Arthur G. Quinn, St. Vincent de Paul Seminary, Boynton Beach, FL


This book examines the centers of medieval Hebrew poetry and how the dominance of the Spanish school migrated to and affected other parts of the Jewish poetic world in Italy, Provence, Egypt, and Iraq. Kfir demonstrates how the Hebrew poets from the Iberian Peninsula established Spain as the epicenter of cultural distinction and how through the dissemination of their poems, their works became regarded as canonic. The book also shows how poets outside the Iberian Peninsula reacted to this Spanish hegemony and the widespread perception of Spanish Hebrew poetry as a bench mark. In-depth readings of select poems, as well as translations (in some cases, appearing in English for the first time), are offered to support his thesis. Kfir is familiar with the scholarly literature in the field, and he incorporates the major studies by the doyen of medieval Hebrew poetry, Ezra Fleischer, and other focused works by Drory, Schirmann, and Yahalom. However, this reader would have liked to have seen the work of Aryeh Vilsker and Gita Gluskina mentioned.

Overall, Kfir’s book makes a strong case for the craft, vibrancy, and richness of Medieval Hebrew poetry as rooted in place. Highly recommended for scholars of medieval Hebrew poetry, poetry aficionados, and historians. Includes bibliographical references and an index.

David B Levy, Touro College, NYC


In this book the entire Bodleian manuscript is reproduced in facsimile; the Hebrew text is offered in an annotated edition and translated in English. Part I, titled “Cultural, literary, and comparative
perspectives in *Sefer ha-ma’asim,* contains three chapters: one chapter presenting the manuscript, and two others on the Jewish and non-Jewish sources of the tales.

*Sefer ha-ma’asim* is a collection of sixty-nine tales, “many of them can be classified as international tale types, despite their Jewish characters.” Thirty-two tales have “intratextual affinity” with Midrash *aseret ha-dibrot,* which is also copied in the same manuscript volume preserved at the Bodleian Library. Most interesting are four tales (nos. 28, 52, 55, and 66) where the author shows that they “share themes and motifs with the surrounding vernacular literature in Western Europe, particularly in France,” be it Arthurian romances, life of Christian saints, the romance of Tristan and Iseult, or Mishle Sendabar (“The Seven sages of Rome”).

Part III of this work contains a tale by tale analysis of the sixty-nine tales. Finally, a 36 page-long epilogue provides an historical perspective by Elisheva Baumgarten, in which some aspects such as the Hasid, women, and the Jewish community are submitted to “further historical inquiry.” Baumgarten concludes that “reading *Sefer ha-ma’asim* with an eye to Jewish-Christian relations is not all that fruitful.” A bibliography and indices are included. All in all, this is a very valuable book for Hebrew paleography, Jewish folklore, and medieval literary history broadly defined. Recommended to large academic libraries.

Roger S. Kohn, Silver Spring, MD.


A meandering narrative of a Hungarian Jewish family who endured the many tragedies of the Shoah followed by the repressive Communist regime following World War II. The tale is undertaken by a multi-talented daughter who is a journalist, publicist, and a story teller. The book’s title is actually a subtext that fills a very slim portion of the overall memoir, whose overall theme appears to be a portrait of Hungarian Jewish life from the pre-World War II era up through the early decade of 2000. The Vadas family, or what was left of it after the war, escaped Communist Hungary into Austria then, ultimately, into Canada where they built a cottage on a lake in Muskoka. Then there is the subtheme captured by the title, when the family finds a wooden crate in the crawl space of their cabin in which the local police find the dismembered remains of a wayward young woman who was murdered by an angered lover. The best aspect of this tale are the occasional references to Hungarian cuisine, language, and religious traditions; otherwise, not recommended.

Sanford R. Silverburg, Ph.D, Catawba College, Salisbury, NC


This book offers 69 annotated translations of poems written between the 4th and 7th century CE in the Land of Israel. The poems examined here range from joyful celebration poems for holidays and weddings to mournful compositions created for Tisha b’Av and funerals. They are all rooted in a period which engendered the consolidation of rabbinic textual traditions, the Christianization of the Roman Empire, the renewal of the Samaritan tradition, and the birth of Islam. Lieber mines the poems for clues about the lived reality out of which they were written. She suggests that the poets’ level of Aramaic was more plebian and lowbrow than the eloquent Hebrew typified by the poets Yannai and Eleazar ha-Qallir. Stylistically, the Jewish Aramaic poems contain refrains, acrostics, rhymes puns, and allusions based on the Biblical text.

Lieber’s volume provides English readers a glimpse into the world of Jews in ancient Palestine through the events, calendrical and occasional, which they chose to mark with their poems. She also offers commentaries, introductions, and a section on the philosophy of translation. Recommended for scholarly Judaica collections and comparative religion libraries.

David B Levy, NYC, Touro College

This book is a first-hand narrative exploring Jewish life in Palestine before 1948. Chaim Linder wrote this story for his family; it was edited by his son Mark.

The tale begins in Poland, in the late 19th century. Chaim Linder’s father’s family left their shtetl and landed in Jerusalem, where his father grew up. Linder describes both the joys and difficulties of life for immigrants to the Holy Land, including the problems his grandfather had establishing a business. The focus shifts to his parents, Haskel and Raizel, their wedding, and the world of turn-of-the-century Palestine. Chaim then recounts his own boyhood there, including his education before and during the First World War under the Ottomans and the following decade when Britain ruled the land. After the Riots of 1929, Linder and his family emigrated again, this time to America. In his new country he learned English and became a skilled linotype operator. Alongside the personal story are numerous touching vignettes of life in Palestine and America, and the events he lived through. These include the growth of Jerusalem which he saw as a child and young man, and Jewish life in America in the 1930s and after.

Chaim Linder’s story is not a literary one. The chronology often lacks dates, and the narrative is not always smooth. The story is important however, both in its grand scale and in the many details of everyday life it contains. As such it fills a gap in our understanding of pre-1948 life in the Holy Land. It is recommended for larger libraries focusing on the private lives of ordinary Jews in the 20th century.

Fred Isaac, Temple Sinai, Oakland, CA


Anna Rabkin had a comfortable childhood in Krakow until her family had to flee, first from the Communists and then from the Nazis. Only she and her brother survived. After being smuggled out of the Lvov ghetto, she went to England on the Kindertransport. She attended a boarding school there and eventually went to New York, where she met her American husband. They spent their honeymoon in Castro’s Cuba and then moved to Berkeley, California. The events of the 1960s led Anna to abandon the life of a stay-at-home parent, further her education, and become involved in local politics. She was elected to serve as Berkeley’s auditor in 1979 and held the post until 1994. Her book tells an important story of resilience and political engagement, demonstrating that immigrants make valuable contributions to American society. She also explores balancing work and family life and navigating the major life changes of retiring and losing her husband. This book will appeal to a wide range of readers: women, history lovers, and those interested in politics and Holocaust studies.

Barbara Bibel, Congregation Netivot Shalom, Berkeley, CA.


Jews had maintained a community in what is presently known as Libya for 2300 years; this continuum ended abruptly after the 1967 war, with whatever was left of the Jewish population emigrating to Israel, Italy, and the United States. This book is a compendium of 12 articles, edited by two members of a prominent Jewish Libyan family (Jacques and Judith Roumani) and David Meghnagi, a noted professor of Holocaust studies in Rome, and a well-known Libyan history figure. Beautifully printed on fine paper stock, the text is supplemented by memorabilia supplied by members of the Libyan Jewish community and related institutions. The coverage is truly extensive and comprehensively augmented by a small bibliography of important and related literature. The various contributions deal with a general history of the Libyan Jewish community, its traditions and folklore, Libyan form of Judeo-Arabic, Jewish women in Libyan culture, and the tumult of the community faced with a hostile and dominating Arab Muslim population. The tale proceeds, historically, through Muslim, Italian, and British presence. This is an exceptionally fine example of history of Jews in North Africa.

Sanford R. Silverburg, Catawba College, Salisbury, NC

Every writer on Israeli history presents a different list of the state’s most important heroes. In this volume, the prolific Rabbi Schreiber presents his triumvirate: David Ben-Gurion, Avraham Stern, and Menachem Begin. The book begins with chapters on each of the men and ends during World War II. In 1942, after Stern (the namesake of the Stern Gang) was killed by the British, Ben-Gurion and Begin became the leaders of their respective branches of Israeli political life, Labor and Likud. The following two chapters re-tell the story of Jewish desire to return to the Holy Land, the many leaders who created the State of Israel, and the Palestinian experience of World War II and the Holocaust. Chapters six and seven cover the post-War years and the War for Independence; they include some poignant vignettes of the author’s life growing up during that decade. Chapters eight and nine describe the first two decades in Israel with Ben-Gurion as Prime Minister and a close-up view of “The Real Ben-Gurion” through personal reflections. Chapters 10 to 12 review Begin’s years in power, ending with the Lebanon War. Chapter 13 portrays Begin’s last years in seclusion. Chapter 14 provides an overview of the legacy of all three. The Afterword is an overview of Israel today, after 70 years.

While it is always important to understand Israel’s history, this book is of limited value. Its greatest contributions include Avraham Stern’s life alongside Ben-Gurion and Begin, and the author’s stories of growing up in Haifa in the 1940s and 1950s. Regrettably, there are a variety of typos and editorial errors scattered through the text. Includes illustrations, bibliography, and index. It is only recommended to the largest and most comprehensive libraries.

Fred Isaac, Temple Sinai, Oakland, CA


We live in an age in which the rules of news coverage are changing quickly and dramatically. In this book Nachman Shai, a specialist in communications and current MK, analyzes how Israel has dealt with these issues. Shai’s primary focus is the Second Intifada, but his examination is far-reaching and incisive.

The book opens with the death of 12-year-old Muhammad Al-Dura at the beginning of the Second Intifada in 2000, and the competing public relations narratives that followed the incident. Shai then chronicles the history of *hasbara* (public affairs, managed in Israel under the ‘Information Ministry’) in Israeli society and government and seeks to unravel the complexities of reporting the realities of the Middle East. He discusses both the variety of governmental and public information services through the years, and the plethora of NGOs involved in collecting, reporting, and interpreting Israeli activities. This confusion has allowed domestic and foreign media outlets, including hostile forces, to disseminate their own interpretations. The author also examines other stories, beginning with the Durban Conference in 2000 and including the battles in Jenin. He asserts that when the government has reported on events, its messages have been mixed. Because they have been neither coordinated nor permanent, the Israeli message has been inconsistent. The volume concludes with a chapter on challenges posed by the BDS movement.

Nachman Shai has served as an Israeli representative since the late 1980s, including stints at the UN and in Washington. He provides a wide-ranging understanding of Israeli public relations over the past 20 years. His descriptions and analyses are detailed and presented in a scholarly tone. The book would be useful in any setting, but is most appropriate for universities with communications and public relations programs.

Fred Isaac, Temple Sinai, Oakland, CA

This book has no Jewish content. It is a collection of articles by people who have promoted genealogical research, programming, and collection in libraries of all types. The articles are grouped into sections such as case studies, research, instruction, family, and outreach. Many of these ideas could be beneficial to Jewish library programming and outreach. The projects described are wide-ranging and several could be stripped down and simplified for use in a synagogue library. Programs such as instruction in the use of digital genealogical tools, beginner instruction using pedigree charts, and instruction in digitizing personal archival material, are all conceivable in the Jewish library, along with collaborations between libraries and historical societies and digitization of community archives and records. All the articles have copious references, and the book is indexed. Genealogical programming is a simple and obvious way to reach out and promote Jewish libraries to Jewish genealogists, who are a major and significant presence in the world of genealogy and Jewish history. Recommended for libraries that specialize in genealogy or that want to expand their programming in it.

*Beth Dwoskin, Proquest (Retired), Library Committee Chair, Beth Israel Congregation, Ann Arbor, MI*


Simon Levis Sullam, an associate professor of modern history at Ca’ Foscari University of Venice, sets out in this book, originally published in Italian in 2015, to dismantle the view of the ‘good Italians’ as helping and saving Jews during World War II. Focusing on the period of Benito Mussolini’s Italian Social Republic, which was under German occupation in central and northern Italy (late 1943–mid 1945), he describes how Italians collaborated with the Germans. He looks at how they declared Jews as foreigners and enemies, rounded and arrested them, put them in concentration camps, and handed them over to the Germans who then sent them to death camps outside of Italy. All told, 8,860 Jews living on Italian soil (amounting to 19 percent of the 47,000 Jews recorded in the 1938 census) were deported. Thus, because of their collaboration, Levis Sullam regards the Italians as responsible for the execution of Italian and foreign Jews in the death camps outside of Italy (I could not find in this book explicit data about the size of those who survived). The author describes in great detail the arrests of the Jews of Rome, Venice, and Florence, which were facilitated by the lists of Jews prepared in Italy following the antisemitic legislation of 1938. He shows the determination of individuals and groups to make sure no Jew escaped the arrests or managed to cross the border to Switzerland. Much attention is also given to the volunteers who helped those Italian entities related to the regime in these activities, at times with financial and economic gain to themselves. Levis Sullam also criticizes the fact that only a few Italians were put on trial after the war for war crimes, with the majority being pardoned or serving short sentences; some of them even received later the state’s highest honors. While the information presented in this book is well documented, I find the title of the book to be somewhat misleading. The study deals only with a specific, short period of the war in central and northern Italy when it was under German occupation. And while it is true that Italians during the regime of the Italian Social Republic were instrumental in arresting Jews and handing them over to the Germans, the killings were executed by the latter outside of Italy and mainly in Poland. The notes at the end of the book are helpful, but the lack of a bibliography makes the identification of sources more difficult.

*Rachel Simon, Princeton University, Princeton, NJ*


Dan Tamir (Ben Gurion University and the University of Zurich) has written an intriguing study of a small but not unimportant group of Zionist activists whom he considers fascists. Very early on in his
study, Tamir commendably discusses the definition of a word that is often used merely as an imprecise pejorative. He organizes his book by adopting Robert Paxton’s schema of fascism as a nationalist ideology with nine “mobilising emotions.” This schema succeeds in capturing at least most of the essential elements of fascism (nationalism, militarism, totalitarianism, and the cult of the leader). It is difficult for this reviewer to think all nine emotions are fundamental to fascism. In addition, the schema seems to miss the role of the fascist party as the sole ruler of the state. Dr. Tamir explicitly admits that, of the individuals he considers, his argument that they are fascists is stronger for some than for others. It is strange to read, though, in the conclusion of this enlightening book, that fascism is “an uncertain open-ended dynamic with no fixed essence.” Surely a nationalistic, militaristic mass totalitarianism, while perhaps not as detailed an ideology as communism or liberalism, is hardly lacking a “fixed essence.” For larger Zionist history collections.

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


Taylor’s biography of Chief Rabbi Nathan Marcus Adler successfully places his life into the context of British Jewish life. The narrative describes how Adler dealt with a British Jewish community that had no native English-speaking rabbis nor any yeshiva that could train rabbis or teachers. The community overall was poorly educated, and Adler endeavored to reorganize them and create a stronger, better educated, and observant community. He helped create Jews College (known today as the London School of Jewish Studies) to train teachers and ministers. Adler had a hard time finding qualified *dayanim* (judges) for the London Beth Din (Jewish religious court). Three of the most learned Talmudic minds in that period never wanted to serve congregations; they worked as Hebraica librarians for the British Museum and Oxford University.

This book needs a better editor: some parts are repeated; some sentences are incomprehensible or ill-structured, and there is an assumption that the reader is familiar with the parts of London described throughout the book. Indeed, a map of London and the other English cities mentioned in the text would have been a welcome addition to the work.

This book is recommended with reservations for personal, synagogue, school, academic libraries, and other libraries with patrons interested in Jewish communities in the 19th century and/or the vicissitudes of the Orthodox community in England.

Daniel D. Stuhlman, Temple Sholom Library and City Colleges of Chicago, Chicago, IL


In this rather novel book, Eliezer Trachtenberg’s motivating concern is a difference in behavior that he perceives between Jews and non-Jews, a distinction he attributes to contrasting modes of thought. Basing his exploration of this contrast on Plato’s premise that “time causes thought,” Trachtenberg sets out to combine science and philosophy to explain why the occidental and Jewish worlds developed very different concepts of time. Additionally, he considers how the Judeo-Christian paradigm could become a foundational principle of western civilization when it harbors such fundamental conflicts.

Trachtenberg argues that the occident, based on the science of Aristotle, developed a concept in which time was conceived as operating in a step by step “sequential” pattern, “like a logical syllogism.” Jews, on the other hand, developed a model in which time was conceived as a multi-stream parallel pattern, in which a wide variety of factors “affect decision making simultaneously.” He asserts that for Aristotle time is measured in abstract positive integers - “a mere philosophical abstraction” - and as a logical syllogism, as in any geometry proof, there is no room for such a thing as moral judgement. In the parallelism which Trachtenberg attributes to the Jews however, moral judgements may well
be involved in order to resolve contradictions between different aspects of the same decision. The incompatibility of the sequential and the parallel conceptions of reality, resulted in a comparable conflict in perceptions of the meaning of life.

As he formulates his thesis Trachtenberg sets out to develop new ways of exploring Jewish thought by means of mathematics. However, his analysis lacks clarity and accessibility for the average reader. His philosophical assertions are not well demonstrated, and the book is rather thinly referenced.

Randall C. and Anne-Marie Belinfante


Since the candidacy of President Trump was announced in 2015, the amount of documented hate crimes and harassment including anti-Semitic attacks, both online and in the real world, has grown exponentially. It seems clear to Weisman and others that this is a direct result of Trump and his supporters’ vitriol towards minority and marginalized groups, including immigrants, Jews, and other non-white or non-Christian groups. In (((Semitism))): Being Jewish in the Age of Trump, journalist Jonathan Weisman recounts his own online harassment on Twitter and other platforms, as emblematic of this new trend. The triple parentheses of the title, or ‘echo,’ was/is a tactic used by white supremacists and others of their ilk to mark Jewish people, or people assumed to be Jewish or working on behalf of Jews. He experienced anti-Semitic taunts, threats, Holocaust denial images, and other such things. He also writes about some of the other journalists who have had the same experiences.

Weisman writes about his Jewish identity and American Jewish identity more generally in the current political and cultural climate, and he explores how expressions of Jewish identity are changing because of the increase in anti-Semitic language and attacks. He explores the history behind the rise of the Alt-Right, the loose confederation of different supremacist groups and their followers and fellow travelers. He traces the history of antisemitism and anti-Semitic incidents in the United States, from the lynching of Leo Frank in Georgia to the present day. He details how they became emboldened to spread their seemingly newly palatable views online through using the anonymity of online forums such as Twitter, to the eventual Unite the Right rally in Charlottesville. He writes that the same issues of prejudice and online (and offline) hate and vitriol that apply to the Jewish community in the United States, also apply to other marginalized groups. His conclusion and suggestion are that the Jewish community should unite among itself to defend against attacks such as these, but also to unite behind and strengthen other marginalized groups being attacked both online and in real life. By doing so, Weisman states that Jewish identity and community will be able to assert itself in a new way in the current climate in the United States. This book is highly recommended for all levels of Jewish libraries.

Eli Lieberman, HUC-JIR, NY, New York

Keep Up to Date with Hasafran

Hasafran is the electronic discussion list of the Association of Jewish Libraries. It was created in 1991 to provide a forum for the discussion of Judaica librarianship. The list is moderated by Joseph (Yossi) Galron, Jewish studies librarian at The Ohio State University. The views expressed in the list are the opinions of the participants and not necessarily the views of the moderator or of AJL. A keyword-searchable archive of Hasafran messages posted since June 12, 2003 is now available.

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Upon his retirement as a Professor of Pathology at Penn State University, Dr. Appelbaum began writing and translating books on World War I Jewish military history. His first two books, Loyalty Betrayed: Jewish Chaplains in the German Army during the First World War and Loyal Sons: Jews in the German Army in the Great War, explored the history of the Jewish soldier’s experience in the Great War. His third book (and first working with Scott as translator) was an anthology of war essays and poems by Kurt Tucholsky (a Jewish journalist and writer during the the Weimar Republic) entitled Prayer after the Slaughter: The Great War: Poems and Stories from World War I (Berlinica, 2015).

This book continues Dr. Appelbaum’s research in the German Jewish soldier’s experience. Each poem is prefaced with a short biography (and photograph if available) of the poem’s author, many of whom were prose writers but not known for their poetry. Each poem is printed in the original German with an English translation on the opposite page. The book includes notes and a bibliography. Recommended to all libraries, especially libraries collecting in the area of the First World War.

Suzanne Smailes, Wittenberg University, Springfield, OH


This is the first work of fiction by the journalist and radio host Chisvin, herself a child of Russian Jewish immigrants to Winnipeg, Canada. After the assassination of the Tsar was blamed on the Jews in Russia, two young Jewish girls, five-year-old Anna and her elder sister Esther, flee persecution by immigrating to Winnipeg. They are sent there under the care of the family’s wealthy employers, the Chernovksis. As the two grow up, Esther’s attempts to live a glamorous lifestyle belying her fragile mental state and onset of mental illness that was hinted at earlier in Russia. Anna both cares for Esther and tries to live her own life by eventually leaving Canada for New York. Anna creates a new life for herself as a women’s rights activist, going so far as to establish a very illegal business selling contraceptives to women in Manhattan. While the two sisters are living very different lives, Anna’s connection to her sister never seems to waver throughout all the events of the story, illustrating how deeply she cares for her sister, even though they are very different people.

Esther’s possible suicide on If Day, a scenario created by the Canadian government to simulate a Nazi attack on the city of Winnipeg on February 19th, 1942, in attempt to raise money for the Canadian war efforts against the Nazis, brings Anna back to Winnipeg to try to uncover the reasons behind her sister’s death. Anna starts to question why their mother never made it to Canada to join them and attempts to uncover what happened to her family all those years ago in Russia, bringing the narrative full-circle as she endeavors to find out why she and her sister were sent to Canada. This title is recommended for libraries that already have other similar books of historical fiction, or that already possess other books illustrating various immigrant experiences.

Eli Lieberman, HUC-JIR, NY, New York


These twelve short stories present the human experience in a variety of geographical settings and times. They are powerful, arresting, and thought provoking. They capture the reader’s attention, through plot, humor, and insight. The content and characters are Jewish. The author, winner of several writing awards, has published three previous short story collections, a memoir, and a novel. This book is a noteworthy, recommended addition to fiction collections in all types of Jewish libraries.

Susan Freiband, Retired Library Educator and Volunteer, Temple Librarian, Alexandria, Virginia

An unexpected inheritance in the form of a looted masterpiece leads the narrator, a second-generation Hungarian-American, on a journey through family history and unwanted memories.

His struggle with the meaning of this gift and the changes it forces on his hitherto uncomplicated life-plan, helps him come to terms with the impact of the Holocaust on his own life. Interwoven in his search for the meaning of these events, is a rarely-told story of Hungary’s participation in the Holocaust.

This is a fluent narrative that is not overburdened by the bleak history that serves as its backdrop. Recommended for all libraries that collect Holocaust fiction.

*Dr. Yaffa Weisman, Los Angeles, Past President, AJL*


In this novel, Jonathan Stein, an Elon Musk-type character, is coming to a crossroad in his life. He found out that he has a minor heart defect, his wife is pregnant, and he is preparing to be the first person to step on the moon in over 30 years through his company’s space launch. But instead of focusing on these events, he becomes obsessed with investigating his father’s death.

Avi Stein was an Israeli astronaut who was invited to join the Apollo team on its last moon mission. But the day before the launch, Avi dies of a heart attack which was the result of “natural causes.” As a child, Jonathan accepted this verdict, but as an adult he wonders how a heart problem could have escaped the NASA doctors’ examinations and he begins to suspect that there is a cover-up involved.

Jonathan gathers clues from his father’s colleagues at NASA, the National Archives, and conspiracy websites. Through his research he uncovers Antisemitism and the use of Nazi medical research at NASA; motives for the possible murder of his father.

Part literary thriller and part delayed ‘coming of age’ story, unfortunately, this book doesn’t quite deliver any thrills. Recommended for large collections only.

*Sheryl Stahl, Director, Frances-Henry Library, HUC-JIR, Los Angeles.*


This collection of short stories is the first full-length prose book by Taub, a multilingual (Yiddish, Hebrew, English) poet, translator, and author. Taub’s stories focus on the inner life and close relationships of characters around themes of Orthodox Judaism and queer identity. Taub creates intimate portraits with meticulous attention to language, seamlessly integrating a deep knowledge of Yiddish and *Yiddishkayt* in a way that one seldom finds in contemporary fiction.

The book’s two sections, “Daughters” and “Sons”, include unforgettable characters that interact across the stories and cross boundaries in unexpected ways. *Night in the solarium* describes a prim boarding-house owner and her impressions of her boarders; while *Phoenix, with hat* is about Khane, a lonely and secretive soul who seeks refuge in the boarding house. In *Called away in the spirit*, Silas is a young gay Christian man from a small town who goes to the city, while *Angel of the underworld* is the story of Meyer, a young, married gay Hasid who finds romance with Silas, thus experiencing a revelation that “the duality in which he had lived all of his adult life had somehow taken a turn …” With this beautiful, thoughtful and poetic unification of dualities, Taub illuminates complex lives and gives voice to his original characters. Recommended.

*Amanda Seigel, Dorot Jewish Division, New York Public Library*
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