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## Menorah Review (No. 41, Fall, 1997)

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# MENORAH

## REVIEW



NUMBER 41 • CENTER FOR JUDAIC STUDIES OF VIRGINIA COMMONWEALTH UNIVERSITY • SPRING/SUMMER 1997

FALL

## For the Enrichment of Jewish Thought

### The Jewish Image in American Fiction

1997 Brown Lecture

*The following article is excerpted from the lecture presented by Dr. Richard E. Sherwin for the Selma and Jacob Brown Lecture held last March. The annual lecture is sponsored by the Center for Judaic Studies and the Friends of the Library of Virginia Commonwealth University. Dr. Sherwin is professor of English at Bar-Ilan University in Israel.*

#### A. Goals and Biases

What I'm really interested in is less the image of the Jew in novels published by American Jews than in what these images suggest about American Jewry and its visibility as a people and a religion. To that end, perhaps both unfairly and irrelevantly, I examine some literary and popular novels from the 1950s through the 1990s. Unfairly, because it is not the mandate of a novelist to present images of anything that can or will be extrapolated to judge an entire group; a well-told tale, interesting in itself, and with whatever significances a writer can embed, is more than enough to ask from a novelist.

Irrelevantly also, perhaps, because it can be—and has been—quite fairly argued that a culture could more accurately be evaluated by examining not mainstream but popular arts of the day. Or not arts at all but rather the legal, economic, political, technological or theological constructions of contemporary Jews to achieve such a valuation as I am after. Granting that this may be so, I am not even an amateur in those fields and, second, I feel most readers do take from novels an opinion of both the writer's view of the world, compare it to their own and judge its accuracy therefrom.

My approach is moreover that of a committed American Jew reading novels written by American Jews about American Jews. I will be looking for any and all signs I can find about the works' representation of elements I consider crucial to the healthy continuity of Jews as a group, community, people, religion or culture, alone or in combination.

At the same time, I try to avoid giving preference to any of the established contemporary Jewish communities: organizations, religious (Havurot, Reconstructionists, Reform, Conservative or Orthodox) or secular (WIZO, UJA, JCC, Zionist, Yiddishists and others); the less regulated approaches including bagels-and-lox; Jewish-by-birth-and-that's-where-it-ends; and others. At various times in my life, each and every one of these aspects was more Jewishness than I wanted, or less.

And here, perhaps, I should foreground my major assumption. Jews exist, survive, thrive and fall as members of a group. Jewish holiness is group holiness rather than primarily an individual one. The worst punishment for a Jew is not hell or death but being cut off from the collective salvation of Jewish people of whatever denomination. All Jewish covenants, until the late 1900s at least, have been with the entire people: the group of living, dead and as yet born Jews—the present, past and future Jews. For all that, the American experience may be attempting to individualize Jewishness, Jewish behavior, essence, whatever.

My comments are deliberative about precisely the areas I cannot hope to prove. While I will be suggesting which works seem to be concerned with the survival of the Jews and which do not, there is, however, nothing that says a novel dealing with the survival of the Jews is better or will have greater influence or survive longer than a novel about Jews that ignores this matter altogether. And it may well be that the theme of Jewish survival is a parochial 20th century Western emphasis deriving from the Shoah and not in itself important enough to warrant my emphasis. But then, I am a 20th-century Jewish person trying to make such

sense as I may from what I read, about and for my own life.

#### B. Selected American Novels of Jews, by Jews, for Whomever

There were years when I felt that if I had to read—no, even hear about the existence of—another "American Jewish novel," I'd vomit. It had become typified as a novel with an isolated, anxiety-ridden, identity crisis'd, nasty-behaving American Jewish hero. I was more than tired of these yuppie schlemiels long before the term yuppie existed and definitely irritated with their obsession with themselves and their rather common sexual, social and psychological goals and troubles. For decades I simply stopped reading such novels. And when I went back, finally, to reread them, I didn't find my opinions or tastes much changed.

Not only didn't I like their representation of Jews, I didn't believe them. I felt they exploited and, worse, defined the Jew as someone with extreme anxiety and suffering. This did not contain or represent most Jews I knew, or was interested in. There were no friends, no community of much significance; and their goals might be admirably human—family life and professional success—but neither peculiarly Jewish nor achieved or even treated from Jewish viewpoints or custom. The Jewishness seemed accidental if not gratuitous. Jews meant angst in these novels' worlds as it still means funny in the world of the sitcom.

The message seemed to me to be the same I suspect that made the Jews in America less threatening after the news of the Shoah began to be disseminated in the 50s. Collectively, world Jewry had been butchered by one-third, so couldn't be considered as big a threat to American or Christian values as the Gallup Polls had recorded American opinion as feeling it was in the 40s. Individually, the novels seemed to be saying: "See, even when we're successful in the world's eyes, we're still isolated, tormented sufferers who do our best to shoot ourselves in the feet—and succeed at it." I refer, for example, to Saul Bellow's *The Victim* (1946) and Herzog (1964), Malamud's *The Assistant* (1957) and *The Fixer* (1967), and even Roth's *Portnoy's Complaint* (1969).

I think the negative schlemiel charac-

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terization is predominantly correct even though there are many good things to say about the novels artistically and in their socialeffects. Bellow's *Herzog* is at times a brilliant tour-de-force of intellectual hysteria—and Western literary history. Roth's *Portnoy's Complaint* is a sexual and ethnic extravaganza, and as well about the only novel I know that tries to describe the psychic prices paid by the one-generation leap into middle-class success of American Jewish males. Malamud's *The Assistant*—more Christian in value than Jewish—nonetheless gives the smell and feel of lower middle-class poverty and failure unforgettably. *The Fixer* is based on the historical fact of the Russian Beilis Trial. And socially, these three writers effectively broke the ground for all future American Jewish writers, a task and a success not to be underestimated in difficulty, or importance, for later Jewish writers with other visions of Jews who find an audience available to support them.

Still, these novels and writers depict Jews who are at best nominally Jewish, generally uninterested in their Jewishness except as something they endure, or escape from. The heroes are—and remain—unconnected to Jewish community, when not antagonistic to it. They seem to be walking out of Jewry as fast as their consciences. Knowledge and situations allow. And paradoxically enough, this includes even Roth's later and wittiest novels like *Counterlife* (1987) and *Operation Skylock* (1993); paradoxically because, of all the classic, literary American novelists, Roth is, as his heroes keep saying, the least able to simply drop Jewishness—and his conflicts with it—as a central thematic of his work.

Fortunately for the image of the Jew, there are two other streams of American Jewish fiction to counter that of the isolated, over-intellectualized, hysterical, individual Jewish male, at loss in and hungry for acceptance into the wider Christian world. One stream was that of more widely read novels dealing directly and much more positively and recognizably with Jews living in history, tradition and communities—religious and secular—like, for example, Leon Uris' *Exodus* (1959), Noah Gordon's *The Rabbi* (1965), and Chaim Potok's series of novels beginning with *The Chosen* (1958) through *My Name is Asher Lev* (1972) and later.

The second stream was and is that of the Jewish detective novel, established with brilliant success by Harry Kemelman in 1964 with *Friday the Rabbi Slept Late* and maintained until 1992 with *The Day the Rabbi Resigned*. Working within this mode and extending the frame of time and reference are, among others, Faye Kellerman's Rina Lazarus-Decker series from *The Ritual Bath* (1986) to *Sanctuary* (1994) and Stuart Kaminsky's series about Abe Lieberman, from *Lieberman's Folly* to *Lieberman's Day* (1994).

Leon Uris' *Exodus* presented Jews and Gentiles melodramatically as either good guys or bad guys. In the process of describing the creation of the State of Israel, he presented Jews as people whose goals and behavior, if somewhat larger and more heroic than real life, most Americans could esteem. Even the idea of Zionism as unifying many otherwise conflicting Jewish groups did not contradict the way the average American Jew felt about himself and his values, whether or not he himself wanted to live in Israel. The book helped make Jews, the Shoah and the State of Israel comprehensible and, at least, temporarily admirable to American Jews and Gentiles alike.

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***The Jewish detective story...reaches a wider audience and brings a positive image of Jews of a different kind. These books...show men and women living lives like most Americans or as many Americans still dream of living.***

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Noah Gordon's novel gave sympathetic form to the struggles between assimilation and tradition, secularism and spirituality, in the Reform Jewish community, the largest Jewish group in the United States. Chaim Potok's novels presented, for the first time in English, a representation of the Chassidic world, sympathetically and with great emotional intensity, especially in its depictions of the close family life, coming to terms with the mild degrees of secularization toward which its heroes are drawn.

One can say fairly, I think, that all the novels so far mentioned have in common their attempt to deal with the Jewish individuals and communities trying to accommodate themselves to the modern Christian secular world in which they are embedded. However, my point is that I think only the works of the later group—Uris, Gordon and Potok—show how the great majority of Jews actually try to handle their conflicts of tradition and assimilation, in terms of a community they are committed to. That is, the latter group of novels, whatever one's estimation of their talent or success, deals with Jews intending to stay Jews in a historic community of Jews.

The Jewish detective story, represented here by Kemelman, Kellerman and Kaminsky, reaches a wider audience and brings a positive image of Jews of a different kind. These books, unlike those of Malamud, Roth and Bellow, show men and women living lives like most Americans or as many Americans still dream of living. The heroes live family lives, community lives, working lives, trying to handle as fairly and justly as possible the conflicting demands of these

goods. They add onto it the element of police work, the attempt to limit if not eliminate the impact of evil on our individual and collective lives. The heroes and heroines of this group represent, without doubt, the forces of good.

They also represent Jews working in harmony with Gentiles for a common good. Rabbi Small in Kellerman's series works with an Irish police chief, Detective Abe Lieberman works with an Irish colleague and Rina Lazarus is the Orthodox wife of a newly returned Jewish detective whom his colleagues call "Rabbi." It is perhaps accidental that these detectives also reflect the normative distribution of American Jews geographically and religiously. Rabbi Joshua Small is a Conservative rabbi in a small New England town, Abe Lieberman is a Reform Jew in Chicago, and Rina Lazarus and her husband are Orthodox Jews in Los Angeles.

I think these two latter groups of Jewish American fiction have happily modified, expanded and made truer to American Jewish life the representation of American Jews in contemporary novels from the 1950s forward. And yet, all three traditions could profitably be considered as a continuum rather than as isolated depictions of Jewish reality.

For one can consider the literary novels as, in some sense, dealing with Jews at the outer edge of Jewish experience, living on edge if you will, and therefore, like many a pioneer moving into a new world, likely enough to undergo strong crises of conscience, psyche and sexuality, and to respond extremely, even hysterically, perhaps schizophrenically. Usually these characters stay at the edges of the Jewish world, tangentially related to Jewish families and customs but not much more. Even the degree of "not much more" can vary radically from loving one's relatives who are firmly Jewish to barely tolerating them, or despising them.

The middle group—Uris, Gordon, Potok—with individuals firmly within their Jewish communities, as heroes, rabbis or associated with rabbis, sets the individual at odds with some community demands and results in the hero finding a Jewish community more sympathetic to his talents and conscience. There is no sense here, or later, that abandoning the Jewish community is required or desired.

The nearer group—the detective story—does not often put the Jewish community, as such, on trial by the individual as being unresponsive to his or her needs. Rather the hero usually interprets the outside world and the community to each other by means of possessing a middle ground both sides respect and need: the force of law and order, the antagonism to murder and crime, as analogous at times to Divine Order in the world. The mystery of the divine representation is reflected in comments, plot twists and individual fates that, from a secular

view, look like lack of order and is experienced often with various degrees of irony—from humorous to the horrific. It is this range of conflicts and resolutions of value including the ironic that gives much of this kind of novel its power, readability and, at times, rereadability. We're left with the picture of Jewish and secular communities maintaining themselves as they maintain their values. With struggle, humor, violence, horror and, I think finally, great decency.

### C. Futures

There is, I think, a new kind of American Jewish novel, quite recent, with which I wish to close the discussion. I use Rebecca Goldstein's *Mazel* (1995) as generally representative of this. It combines much of the decency and sophistication of characterization we saw in the detective stories—the awareness of the European Jewish world and its American counterparts from Chaim Potok and Noah Gordon—with elements I did not discuss at all: Bashevis Singer's interpenetration of fantasy and myth with realistic detail of pre-Second World War Jewish Europe; the blockbuster sagas of Jewish immigrant life popular in the last 30 years or so; and the Jewish novels of the 1930s depicting the Jewish immigrant in America.

Goldstein's novel is promise that Jewish-American fiction is not dead, not decaying, but quite alive, developing and improving. Personally, I think it's brilliant. She tells the ironic story of a woman escaping Europe and the confinements, religious and social, of European shtetl life only to discover that her American liberated Princeton professor granddaughter voluntarily returns to the life of a Jewish wife in a Jewish American small town, which the grandmother calls "a shtetl with a designer label."

The story is told with wit and humor, in

a prose so clear it's elegant in its ability to handle philosophy, social satire and human devotion. One esteems and likes the characters, the plot, and exposition of basically difficult matters run so smoothly it's rare you notice it, and the frame-fable of Luck versus Brains stands neatly for Divine Providence versus Human Initiative without requiring our conscious attention if we wish to ignore such matters. And all the levels interact comfortably with each other in "happy" endings. If this represents anything like the Jewish world's ability to live among varied selves, the image of the Jew in American fiction is mature, healthy and hopeful—even devout and certainly that of a survivor.

## An Endless Journey?

*A Chosen Few*  
by Mark Kurlansky  
Reading, MA: Addison Wesley  
Longman

A Review Essay  
by Steven Windmueller

Using the criteria that the specific European communities selected had been previously decimated by the Holocaust, Mark Kurlansky's *A Chosen Few* represents one of the only literary portraits defining the return and revival of Europe's centers of Jewish life. Before the Shoah, nine million (nearly one-half of the global Jewish population) resided on the European continent. Today, significantly less than half that number inhabit the cities of Europe. Despite Hitler's promise and the implementation of the "Final Solution," the world's Jewish population will reflect approximately the same numbers as had existed at the begin-

ning of this century. Noting that "Judaism was predominantly a European culture," before the Second World War, Mark Kurlansky has uncovered the seeds of a rebirth of Jewish life as defined in the stories of individual Jews and their interactions with the newly created Jewish communal structures emerging throughout the nations of Europe.

The focus of this study is centered around eight communities that extend from Paris to Warsaw and incorporate as diverse ethnic and national cultures as Russian and German. The story line here is primarily presented through the lenses of individual lives. Emphasizing the links between a family's past with its choices for remaining a part of contemporary post-war Europe, the author has uncovered both the emotional scars tied to the memories of Nazism and Communism and to the current fears associated with the revival of expressions of anti-Semitism and the new experiments in democracy.

The book is divided into six fascinating units, capturing different thematic highlights categorized around principal time periods, including the immediate years after World War II; the impact of the advent of the Cold War; the post-1967 era with its backlash anti-Zionist attacks; the era of "silence," marking attacks directed against Western European Jews and their institutions while government leaders remain unresponsive; and, finally, the "new" European Jewish World of the past decade, with all the hopes and expectations for creative change. Each tale is wrapped with its own set of unique and difficult conflicts. Kurlansky's study of several Polish Jewish families, for instance, uncovers a series of personal scenarios of individuals re-discovering their faith all but minimized and destroyed under Communism; of a set of families conflicted over being Jewish activists in Poland with its historical hatreds, and the signs of spiritual and intellectual Jewish re-awakening, positively linked to the Israel connection being experienced by Jews in Poland and elsewhere.

The seeds of traditional European anti-Semitism and the more contemporary presence of anti-Israel backlash reverberate throughout the storylines found in *A Chosen Few*. For example, the author recounts a scene of French Jewry in the 1940s, uncomfortably confronting the new reality that "the ideal of assimilation seemed a fantasy of the foolish" (p. 36), as the Nazis and their French cohorts systematically destroyed one quarter of that community's population. A second snapshot of this city, 20 years later, captures scenes of France's political opposition and DeGaulle's personal hostility toward Israel, while witnessing an assertion of strength and even militancy as 100,000 Jews gathered to support the Zionist cause in 1967. A decade and a half later, Kurlansky revisited Paris, and we were introduced both

## A SUMMER'S GAME

My grandson and I hold out our hands, intent on counting jacaranda trumpets blown in their fall, and start all over when they're ten unsure past numberings our fingers know

Being Sabbath, we're careful not to pluck or separate or gather the purple rain—content to register our wind-blown luck that we have found ourselves a together game

The look of lavender among the fern, the feel and smell of summer green and sweet carpeting the flagstones, grass and feet and underneath all withered brown and burnt

Some afternoon we're young and old and greet decay and growth as one and love our meetings

— Richard Sherwin

to French right-wing extremism when its politics of hate spilled over in an attack on a Jewish-owned department store, involved the death of six individuals and the wounding of 21 others. Even as late as 1987 and in spite of high rates of assimilation, French nationalists would charge the Mitterrand leadership as being dominated and controlled by Jewish personalities reaffirming the roots of nativist hostility toward the Jews.

Of special interest to the reader are those components of behavior that are particularly difficult to intellectually comprehend. For example, how can Jews who lived under the ruthlessness of Soviet rule still proclaim their belief in Communism? Why would Jews, especially survivors, return to Germany or to Poland after the Shoah, as Jewish visitors would ask, "Why are you still here?" The answers that Mark Kurlansky uncovers appear unsatisfactory, at least for some of us. "People stayed because, in spite of what anti-Semite countrymen might claim, they were indeed Poles or Frenchmen or even Germans." (p. xi). Others offered different reasons including their desire not to be the last generation of European Jewry but in fact to begin to build a "new society" (p. xi). Clearly, these "chosen few" will be engaged as well in ideological and political conflicts with Zionist elements over their decision to remain "European."

If this book has a major deficiency, it rests with the absence of a macro analysis of the future institutional and communal direction for the European Jewish communities. Other writers, including Daniel Elazar of the Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs, have begun to fill this void. While Kurlansky provides his reader with these marvelous portraits and stories of single families and captures snapshots of communities at various post-war stages (an excellent example being his scenarios regarding the Antwerp Jewish community) *A Chosen Few* does not adequately introduce the demographic materials, organizational and community building issues, or the fundraising patterns associated with European Jewry. From data inferred in this text and from other sources, these are key considerations. Can the Jews of Europe, with their significantly continental population in excess of two million, including nearly 800,000 from the CIS (Commonwealth of Independent States), develop a modern infrastructure of resources and services?...these are issues associated with the futurist character of these diverse communities. The ability of these voluntary organizations to develop formalized systems of Jewish education for the next generation, the resolution of halachic considerations, including "Who is a Jew?" and the creation of a political advocacy movement designed to help articulate the external, as well as internal, agendas of this community, remain major considerations for future action.

Nevertheless, there are today ominous signals and symbols of the rebirth of the old order, as identified by the emergence of tensions between former enemies, as in Yugoslavia, or by the resurrection of "heroes" from a different time and place, who still represent for Jews the same negative images and fears as they once did when these very leaders articulated their nationalistic or anti-Semitic rhetoric.

At the outset of his epilogue, Kurlansky cites a quote from the Exodus tale and the Haggadah ritual: "and when, in time to come, your son asks you, saying 'What does this mean?' you shall say to him, 'It was with a mighty hand that the Lord brought us from Egypt, the house of bondage.'" (Exodus 13:14). In many ways, every generation of the Jewish people, wherever they reside, must raise the issue of the endless journey that has marked Jewish history. For such a community, the stories of triumph and tragedy as presented in this book need to be retold, as they add to the legacy and literature of this great and historic civilization.

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## The Exilic Home of Jewish Literature

*The Ritual of New Creation:  
Jewish Tradition and  
Contemporary Literature*  
by Norman Finkelstein  
New York: State University  
of New York Press

*A Review Essay*  
by Kristi Swenson

"When you come into the land...you shall make response before the Lord your God: 'A wandering Aramean was my father...' " so begins the historical credo that formed a confession of identity for ancient Israelites and continues to be a statement of faith today. This text in Deuteronomy 26 contains an injunction that combines a recognition of stability (landedness) with a reminder of instability (landlessness). Both of them exist under the umbrella of faith in a context of identity. Presented as a commandment, this injunction calls the hearers to proclaim their identity, which involves three things: place, faith and ancestry. Entering the land, they are told to declare YHWH as their God in pronouncing "a wandering Aramean" as their ancestor.

What is it that distinguished something or someone as Jewish three millennia past? What distinguishes them now? And what do

they have in common? Is "Jewish" determined by a specific position, geographical or ideological? Is it based on a belief in and practicing obedience to the God of the Biblical ancestors? Is it considered genealogically, as someone ethnically tied to the Aramean, Jacob? And what of the "wandering"?

In the introduction to his book of essays, Norman Finkelstein confesses both a profound sense of his Jewishness despite the fact that he "was a rather pious atheist" and an inability to identify what it is that comprises this Jewishness. In the process of exploring how this could be, Finkelstein explains that the Jewish foundation in and respect for text(s) plays a significant role in characterizing modern Jewish thought, and, from this position of text-centeredness, Finkelstein felt most at home. Settled, as it were, in the textual situation, Finkelstein proceeds to ask what it is about modern Jewish writing that is itself distinct. The three themes that he names on page three embrace the sense that inspired the title. That is, the matters of secular literary activity, of "wandering meaning," and of loss and exile all recognize the past in breaking with it. All participate in what Finkelstein calls "the act of new creation." Each of these three themes enters the land by taking its place in text and in its response to the Jewish tradition of wandering and exile, each may collapse the difference between secular and sacred. Therefore, the very act of challenging, even rupturing the past is itself in keeping with that past, and it is in such texts that Finkelstein maintains their Jewishness is most clear.

He begins with a discussion of the environment within which modern Jewish intellectuals exercise this simultaneous breaking and keeping with the past, namely Postmodernism. One might imagine that the Postmodern emphasis on a fundamental impossibility of definition or surety and a basic disregard for the significance of history would necessarily exclude Jewish thought. Indeed, Finkelstein describes the incongruity of Jewish thought with Postmodernism. In the process, however, he illustrates how the paradigmatic Jewish intellectuals with whom he deals in his essays actually engage, even if simply to deride, Postmodernism as the inescapable environment within which they must operate. Finkelstein notes that among the very elements that demand a Jewish intellectual's rejection of Postmodernism are the specific characteristics that make it well-suited to expressions of Jewish experience and thought.

Primary among them is the notion of *difference*, which paradoxically both allows an acknowledgement of the historical consciousness of Judaism (a difference that is itself counterhistorical) and recognizes how it is that Jewish writers avoid an utter dis-

tegration into difference by the "narratives of culture" (17). Furthermore, the challenges of Postmodernism cast the Jewish intellectual back into the role of one who must make meaning within and out of wandering and exile. This task requires the creative adaptation of traditional categories such as those of sacred and secular. Harold Bloom writes of "the stubborn resistance of imaginative literature to the categories of sacred and secular" (22) and, "pragmatically, Jewish freedom is freedom of interpretation" (23). Finkelstein reminds us again and again that the foundation for such interpretation and reinterpretation arises from the Jewish adherence to text combined with an obsession for cultural transmission.

In his chapter entitled, "Harold Bloom; Or, the Sage of New Haven," Finkelstein illustrates how Bloom attempts to walk a line between times past and times today and between the secular and the sacred. In so doing, he challenges his readers to consider the overlap of these categories, perhaps even their ultimate artificiality. He assumes an archaic stance in dealing with modern situations for as Finkelstein writes, "in order to further the validity of any text, Bloom, true to his Jewish heritage, must make all things old" (36). As one invested with the responsibility of passing traditions to succeeding generations, the sage is always at work to make them vital for a new age and audience. In Finkelstein's discussion of Bloom's role as sage, he raises the critical issue of canonization and authority. It must receive attention in the transmitting of tradition but Finkelstein insightfully observes that it can also contribute to a situation of real distress for the transmitter.

As scholarship in Biblical theology during recent decades has revealed, the question of how a text or tradition garners authority in its time, maintains that authority through the process of canonization and, further, remains a viable text after a recognition of its canonical status is a rich and controversial one. Finkelstein draws on Bloom's work to approach the issue from a different angle noting that the process of canonization, as recognition of the power and importance of that text, necessarily damages the very stuff of its power and importance. However, there is a certain humility in recognizing, as Bloom does, that the misreadings that distort tradition invest the text with valuable influence. For, Bloom writes, "we are nurtured by distortion, and not by apostolic succession" (39). So too Finkelstein concludes that "the generative fecundity of strong misreading becomes the final arbiter of cultural value" (40). And so it is that a text wanders. To maintain its meaning, relevance and vitality in a community, the sage recognizes, evaluates and appropriates misreadings; but, in doing so, s/he "must always struggle with precursor texts and win their blessing" (43). Surely Gershom Scholem illustrates this

## BOOK LISTING

*Editor's Note: The following is a list of books received from publishers but, as of this printing, have not been reviewed for Menorah Review.*

- Like Bread on the Seder Plate: Jewish Lesbians and the Transformation of Tradition.*** By Rebecca Alpert. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Middletown Jews: The Tenuous Survival of an American Jewish Community.*** Edited by Dan Rottenberg. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Conversations with Dvora: An Experimental Biography of the First Modern Hebrew Woman Writer.*** By Amia Lieblich. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Jews, Germans, Memory: Reconstructions of Jewish Life in Germany.*** Edited by Y. Michal Bodemann. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press.
- Jewish Philosophy and the Crisis of Modernity: Essays and Lectures in Modern Jewish Thought.*** By Leo Strauss, edited with an introduction by Kenneth Hart Green. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Witness to the Holocaust: An Illustrated Documentary History of the Holocaust in the Words of Its Victims, Perpetrators and Bystanders.*** Edited by Michael Berenbaum. New York: HarperCollins.
- The Nakedness of the Fathers: Biblical Visions and Revisions.*** By Alicia Suskin Ostriker. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.
- The Bible and the Ancient Near East (Fourth Edition).*** By Cyrus H. Gordon and Gary A. Rendsburg. New York: W.W. Norton & Company.
- Western Jewry and the Zionist Project 1914-1933.*** By Michael Berkowitz. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- My Years in Theresienstadt: How One Woman Survived the Holocaust.*** By Gerty Spies. Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books.
- Moses the Egyptian: The Memory of Egypt in Western Monotheism.*** By Jan Assman. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Jewish Emancipation in a German City: Cologne, 1798-1871.*** By Shulamit S. Magnus. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- The Oxford Dictionary of the Jewish Religion.*** Edited by R.J. Zwi Werblowsky and Geoffrey Wigoder. New York: The Oxford University Press.
- Crossing the Jabbok: Illness and Death in Ashkenazi Judaism in 16th- Through 19th-Century Prague.*** By Sylvie-Anne Goldberg. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Judaism: A Very Short Introduction.*** By Norman Solomon. New York: Oxford University Press.
- The Essential Agus: The Writings of Jacob B. Agus.*** Edited by Steven T. Katz. New York: University Press.
- American Rabbi: The Life and Thought of Jacob B. Agus.*** Edited by Steven T. Katz. New York: University Press.
- Kibbutz Buchenwald: Survivors and Pioneers.*** By Judith Tydor Baumel. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.
- Jewish Bridges: East to West.*** By Michael Cohn. Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers.
- Israel Through the Jewish-American Imagination: A Survey of Jewish-American Literature on Israel 1928-1995.*** By Andrew Furman. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- To the Promised Land: A History of Zionist Thought.*** By David J. Goldberg. New York: Penguin USA.
- An Introduction to the History and Sources of Jewish Law.*** Edited by N.S. Hecht et al. New York: Oxford University Press.



struggle in a most authentic way, wrestling as he has with the Kabbalah. In this chapter, Finkelstein shows that Scholem's work with Jewish mysticism is a largely untapped wealth of material for modern literary criticism. His willingness to engage extremes without disintegrating into pure deconstruction provides a valuable model for modern literary criticism. Ironically, Scholem's disrupting innovations enable living in an exile from traditional interpretation, an exile that is nevertheless fully at home with the field spanning textual authority and interpretative freedom. Through his engagement with the Kabbalistic understanding of Oral Torah, Scholem illustrates the irony that it is precisely within the dynamic of disruption and interpretation that canonical authority is best realized. It is at this pitch, Finkelstein asserts, that Scholem's work could add considerably to the discourse of modern literary criticism. For faced with the impossible choice of either claiming the utter absence of textual authority or admitting that such authority exists but is invisible, Scholem brings into view the possibility of living in an exile between the two of "dialectical distance," both within and apart from tradition. Finkelstein suggests that this relationship with the "scattered letters" is precisely what literary critics seek and precisely what Scholem could offer them.

The philosophical/theoretical/mystical dimension of Scholem's work finds its counterpart in Finkelstein's observations of Cynthia Ozick's fiction with its "struggle for historicity." The definite, tangible grounding in history provides fertile soil for the imagination to appreciate the Source without making the literary means for this appreciation into an empty idol. These represent the extremes of sacred and secular between which Ozick makes her exilic home and by which she admonishes and exemplifies other Jews. That is, she works from the age-old Jewish dilemma of living simultaneously within the sacrality of the Covenant and within the secularity of history. For a writer, it involves engaging both imagination and faith to produce "liturgical" literature whereby the imagination is linked with monotheism and so "rise(s) to the idea of a non-corporeal God" (69). Ozick maintains that this is very difficult, however, for "the lower imagination, the weaker, falls into the proliferation of images" (69).

In this chapter, Finkelstein explores these aspects of Ozick's thought by means of example, drawing her work to show that as often as not, it appears to undermine what she intends to do. It is this paradox that situates her in the company of those that Finkelstein profiles. Though Ozick's "narrative art (is) consciously designed to resist if not deny" (77) the historical breaks and tears that contribute to the very identity of Jewish culture, nevertheless Finkelstein

### *Thirteenth Annual Pelma and Jacob Brown Lecture*

*March 25, 1998*

*Speaker: Dr. Cliff Edwards*

*Topic: "When Bad Things Happen to Anyone:  
The Search for Meaning in Impossible Situations"*

*Creative responses to pain, suffering and meaningless are explored in  
Scripture, meaning therapy and Jewish-Buddhist dialogue  
Open to the Public*

shows that her stories actually contain those very elements. That is not to say, however, that Ozick has failed in what she intended to do. On the contrary, Finkelstein applauds Ozick's tenacity in eschewing this historical rupture and persisting in the search to negotiate a path "between halakhic restraint and agadic freedom" (79).

In the chapter following, Finkelstein again relies heavily on primary texts, those of Hollander and Mandelbaum, to illustrate text "lost and found." Related to Ozick's concern that art not configure an idolatry, that agadic influences not override halakhic ones, Finkelstein considers how the poetry of these two Jews actually displaces sacred text to replace it. Faced with what Finkelstein describes as a problem particular to poets, that is the "lack of halakhic certainty," modern Jewish poets must fashion for themselves a substitute text. In this way, they experience most acutely the situation of exile.

The response described by Finkelstein of developing a substitute text raises the question of whether the end product could suffice. Is a substitution satisfactory? "Can the new Text...truly compensate for that which has been lost?" (83) When the sacred text no longer has meaning for a person or community, is there justification to create a new one? Can one claim that the new text is an interpretation of the old and so loyal to the tenets of the original? Is the process of examining the "original" sacred text, considering it in interpretation, and then articulating that interpretation in an entirely new way not a betrayal of the "original"? These questions are not limited to poets but bear relevance to the entire community of faith. Finkelstein is certainly right to observe that it is easier to write about something than to write from within that state of being, but I wonder if the latter is truly limited to poets and not pointedly the case for all who seek relevance for their lives within a religious tradition based on an ancient text. Finkelstein observes that the poetry of Hollander and Mandelbaum posits a means of interpretation by removing sacred Text to fashion a substitute. However, he recognizes in conclusion of this chapter that the grave danger implicit

in every process of interpretation remains. It is possible to displace the priceless text to replace it with nothing of value.

Noting our age as one in which the world and world have broken away from one another, Steiner describes our position as that discussed above. Namely, the sacred text no longer appears relevant to the modern situation and we are caught in exile. In such a placeless case, Steiner claims that a truth-seeking that returns to the text enables a powerful homecoming requiring neither country nor kin. Further, Steiner suggests that the means by which to bridge the gap between the ideals of the text and the "inhuman" element in history is art. Art assumes a posture vulnerable to the transcendent, open to the surprise and demands of presence. I wonder how such an attitude toward art would accord with Ozick's hitherto condemnation of it. Perhaps these opposing views illustrate the heatedly differing opinions about Steiner's novel *Portage* that Finkelstein considers as an attempt to bridge the gap between the ideal and the inhuman. Does it exalt Hitler and justify the horrors of the anti-Semitic Nazi state, or does it warn the reader to be vigilant against the fact that an ever-present possibility of evil could twist circumstances and people to its own horrific end? Finally, Finkelstein writes that "in midrashic fashion, the text casts its problem back upon the reader..." (116) and so we return endlessly to the necessary exile of interpretation and reinterpretation.

As noted above, the situation of this exile is one of historical rupture, and Finkelstein presents Walter Benjamin's work as exemplary of making the breaks and tears into a means by which to hold Marxism, messianism and secular literature together. This "peculiar constellation" is comprised of complementary elements when considered within the historical materialism of Benjamin. Indeed, the ideology of Marxism, itself secular, is nevertheless always brushing with the theological addressed in a messianism, which is by definition redemptive but also deferred. It is in the deferment that Benjamin asserts the paradoxical yet positivistic claim that when the past and the present are so discontinuous, the present is

able to touch on the past. The redemptive nature of Benjamin's criticism as it involves Marxism, messianism and secular literature is attacked in the final analysis precisely because of the disruptions of history. Finkelstein concludes his discussion of Benjamin by recognizing the validity of Benjamin's endeavors in his time while noting that "we must content ourselves with a different sort of heroism" (126).

This recognition of time as an important factor in placing Jewish literature is fundamental to Finkelstein's discussion of the present state of Jewish literature and where it appears to be headed. He observes that the spatial exile that Jews have continually faced has an opposite counterpart in time. That is, the spatial exile has "acclimated us to the irreversible order of time" (138). The nostalgia reflected in many Jewish writers is as much for another time as for another place but, in both cases, Jews have had to make new meaning for new situations. The past becomes an area of longing and desire, and modern Jewish writing draws from this rich and desirable past to identify and manage the present.

It is this deep recognition of the past as a particular time or distant home that enables an engagement with it that is anchored in respect. Such engagement nevertheless challenges one to make it relevant and meaningful today, in an exile of time and place. Finkelstein cogently illustrates the manner in which several outstanding Jewish intellectuals have grappled with this exile and won the blessing of a new creation. In diverse ways they have worked within the area of secular literature to portray the wandering meaning of a sacred textual heritage. Finkelstein's discussion of this process, at once unique to each one nevertheless bears this commonality of serious engagement with sacred tradition in situations far removed from its origins.

The nostalgia for this home of the past built on the tenets of faith demands ongoing creative work and a text that bears "wandering meaning." Finkelstein shows that this is both a blessing and a curse in Jewish tradition. In his development of the manner in which contemporary Jewish intellectuals have handled this task, he raises both inspiration and warning; inspiration to grasp the potential for relevance in ancient texts and traditions, particularly Biblical texts and their related religious traditions; and warning that the process by which one harnesses their "wandering meaning" may yield an important or, worse, misguided interpretation.

Finkelstein's *The Ritual of New Creation* serves both to acquaint his readers with those aspects that can identify what is Jewish in contemporary literature and to make the manner in which various intellectuals exhibit those aspects into models for the ongoing process of new creation. I am grateful for his observations and the possi-

## BOOK BRIEFINGS

*Editor's Note: Inclusion of a book in "Briefings" does not preclude its being reviewed in a future issue of Menorah Review.*

***Beyond the Verse: Talmudic Readings and Letters.*** By Emmanuel Levinas. Bloomington: Indiana University Press. This is an important collection of essays treating specific Jewish problems: exegetic methodology, points of Jewish doctrine, Jewish religious philosophy, and contemporary political and cultural issues. It also includes five Talmudic readings. This work will be of wide interest to the philosophical and religious communities at large.

***Hebrew and Modernity.*** By Robert Alter. Bloomington: Indiana University Press. Few readers of the contemporary Israeli novel are aware that a modern Hebrew literature existed in Europe before Zionism, making both Zionism and the Hebrew culture possible. Alter explores this literature in a series of engaging essays that, together, sketch a portrait of a vital literary tradition. Included are considerations of a wide range of Hebrew writers, such as David Fogel, S.Y. Agnon, David Grossman and Yehuda Amichai.

***The Holocaust and the Crisis of Human Behavior.*** By George M. Kren and Leon Rappoport (rev. ed.). New York: Holmes & Meier Publishers. The authors take a provocative, multi-disciplinary interpretation of the major historical and psychological factors contributing to the Holocaust and its long-range implications. They provide insights into the behavior of perpetrators, victims, bystanders and active resisters, exploring the unique German context of the Holocaust and the myths of victim passivity and SS psychopathology. But their inquiry probes beyond actions and behavior to confront the meaning of the event and the limited ability of prior forms of knowledge, values and conceptual theories to interpret it. The authors ask: How are we to understand the Holocaust? How could it happen?

***Essays on Ancient and Modern Judaism.*** By Arnaldo Momigliano. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press. Momigliano (1908-1987), the great classicist and historian, wrote essays on a variety of Jewish themes and individuals. This volume collects 26 of these essays, most of which appear in English for the first time. He acknowledged that his Judaism was the most fundamental inspiration for his scholarship, and the writings in this collection demonstrate how the ethical experience of the Hebraic tradition informed his other works. The first part is devoted to writings on ancient and medieval Judaism. The second part comprises Momigliano's writings on modern subjects.

***German Ideology: From France to Germany and Back.*** By Louis Dumont. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press. In this book, Dumont compares different national forms of modern ideology. He pinpoints the differences—otherwise frequently but vaguely alluded to—between French and German cultures. In his comparative anthropological analysis, Germany and France reveal much about one another, about European culture and, more generally, about the interaction of cultures. Anyone interested in the fate of national ideology and the concept of the individual will benefit from this radical interpretation of modern values and the place of modernity in history.

***Alternatives to Assimilation: The Response of Reform Judaism to American Culture, 1840-1930.*** By Alan Silverstein. Hanover, NH: University Press of New England. The author offers abundant evidence of Jews responding uniquely to American culture, in a fashion parallel to innovations in American Protestant churches. By offering a viable response to American culture's rampant secularization and to its pressure on Jews to relinquish their distinctive traditions and commitments, the author argues that the Reform movement inspired emerging Conservative and Orthodox Jewish movements to offer their own constituents tangible institutional alternatives to assimilation.

bilities they offer in recognizing the necessarily exilic situation of sacred tradition and so crafting a home of sorts in the unlikely situation of secular literature. Though Finkelstein doesn't claim to have identified once and for all that which makes something or someone Jewish, he does succeed in showing how a number of different modern Jewish intellectuals have responded to the sa-

cred tradition of an ancestral past by means of a textual location. Consequently, each one has created a new land of text wherein he or she embraced a heritage of wandering meaning, participating in the past by breaking with it.

*Kristin Swenson is completing her doctoral studies at Boston University.*



***Jews For Sale? Nazi-Jewish Negotiations, 1933-1945.*** By Yehuda Bauer. New Haven: Yale University Press. Drawing on a wealth of previously unexamined sources, Bauer reveals how Jews and non-Jews throughout the world attempted to make deals with Himmler, Eichmann and other high-ranking Nazis. In this engrossing and deeply moving book, he tries to answer some of the most difficult questions that have ever been asked about the Holocaust: Why did the vast majority of attempts to negotiate with the Nazis in saving the lives of Jews fail? Why were so many high-level Nazis willing to make deals? If the Nazis were actually open to surrendering more Jews, should the Allies have acted on their offers? What are the moral and philosophical implications of negotiating with Nazis? Does exchanging lives for money constitute collaboration with the enemy or heroism? And perhaps the most tormenting question of all: Was there ever a realistic chance of saving more Jews from the Holocaust?

***The Secret War Against the Jews: How Western Espionage Betrayed the Jewish People.*** By John Loftus and Mark Aarons. New York: St. Martin's Press. The authors reveal how the most powerful Western nations, primarily the United States and Great Britain, have proclaimed their public support for Israel while, secretly, their intelligence officials and top leaders have conspired to thwart first the creation and then the secure existence of the Jewish State. This stunning book documents an extraordinary century of anti-Semitism practiced covertly in the highest levels of government. It is a book that names names and used hundreds of sources that have never been tapped before. It will have readers reexamining widely held ideas about foreign policy and recent history.

***Jewish Responses to Modernity: New Voices in America and Eastern Europe.*** By Eli Lederhendler. New York: University Press.

Lederhendler illustrates how the self-perceptions of Jews evolved, both in the Old World and among immigrants to America in the 19th and early 20th centuries. He focuses on a wide range of subjects to provide an overview of this clash between old and new and to reveal ways in which cultural conflicts were reconciled. The book highlights the manner in which codes and symbols are passed from one generation to the next, reinforcing a group's sense of self and helping to define its relations with others, demonstrating yet again the importance of language as a vehicle for minority-group self-expression in the past and in the present.

***Hasidism: Between Ecstasy and Magic.*** By Moshe Idel. Albany: State University of New York Press. Idel breaks new ground in this study of the mystical Judaism of Eastern Europe in the 18th and 19th centuries. By applying what he calls the "panoramic approach," in contrast to the existentialist approach of Buber and the historicist approach of Scholem, Idel illuminates the phenomenon of Hasidism in all its complexity and diversity. He broadens our understanding of Hasidism through clarifying its relations to phenomenological models that are typical of earlier stages of Jewish mysticism. Hasidism emerges as an important stage in Jewish mysticism rather than as a mere reaction or result of historical and social forces.

***What is Jewish Literature?*** Edited by Hana Wirth-Nesher. Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society. This is a richly thoughtful analysis and comprehensive overview of what defines Jewish literature. The book explores long-standing questions: What are the criteria for identifying Jewish literature? Are they language, religious affiliation of the author, religious sensibility, a distinctive Jewish imagination or literary tradition? The study debates all these possibilities. This landmark collection encourages the reader to participate in the quest for answers that defy simple responses.



Menorah Review is published by the Center for Judaic Studies of Virginia Commonwealth University and distributed worldwide. Comments and manuscripts are welcome. Address all correspondence to Center for Judaic Studies, P.O. Box 842025, Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond, VA 23284-2025.

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# BOOK BRIEFINGS

A Supplement to *Menorah Review*

Fall 1997

**Editor's Note:** Inclusion of a book in "Briefings" does not preclude its being reviewed in a future issue of *Menorah Review*.

***Jews in the Japanese Mind: The History and Uses of a Cultural Stereotype.*** By David G. Goodman and Masanori Miyazawa. New York: The Free Press. The popularity in Japan of books about Jews has climbed to staggering proportions. Many of these books are overtly anti-Semitic. How can we account for the indiscriminate mixture of fact and fantasy in the Japanese view of the Jews? Is Japanese anti-Semitism a growing phenomenon? While the Japanese do seem to accept the worst anti-Jewish stereotypes at face value, they also frequently admire the Jews for putatively achieving "disproportionate power." The authors give valuable insight into the Japanese penchant for adapting imported ideas and images to peculiar cultural ends.

***Ancient Zionism: The Biblical Origins of the National Idea.*** By Avil Erlich. New York: The Free Press. The unity of land, law and literature created by the ancient Hebrews has been one of the most potent historical metaphors ever devised, strong enough to maintain a sense of national identity among Jews for more than 2,000 years. Without this Jewish literary culture, Erlich argues, there could have been no Israel, no matter what efforts were made by modern Zionist ideologues. This book reads the ancient text with ancient eyes that make it startling and fresh. Erlich concludes that many problems not only of Israel but of all modern nations struggling to define themselves in a changing world really stem from the loss of this vigorous ancient alternative.

***The Tragedy of Romanian Jewry.*** Edited by Randolph L. Braham. New York: Columbia University Press. The tragedy that befell Romanian Jewry during World War II represents one of the most neglected chapters in the history of the Holocaust. Romania's wartime record was contradictory. During the first 18 months of Romanian involvement, the Antonescu regime pursued its own independent approach to the "solution" concerning the Jewish question with an intensity and brutality that impressed even the Nazi leaders. But after some hesitation during the latter part of the involvement, it rejected the Nazi-style Final Solution, saving almost all the Jews of Wallachia, Moldavia and Southern Transylvania. The authors of this book deal incisively with the contradictions and explain them clearly.

***Welcoming the Undesirables: Brazil and the Jewish Question.*** By Jeffrey Lesser. Berkeley: The University of California Press. Lesser tells the poignant and puzzling story of how earlier in this century, in spite of anti-Semitic messages from politicians and intellectuals, Jews made their exodus to Brazil, "the land of the future." He uses exhaustive archival research to reveal the convoluted workings of Brazil's wartime immigration policy. His subtle analysis and telling anecdotes shed light on such pressing issues as race, ethnicity, nativism and nationalism in post-colonial societies at a time when "ethnic cleansing" in Europe is once again driving increasing numbers of refugees across its borders.

***After the Wall: Germany, the Germans and the Burdens of History.*** By March Fisher. New York: Simon & Schuster. Blending

essay and reportage, Fisher tells stories that reveal a seething and chaotic nation handicapped by its past and struggling to define its role at home and abroad. The stories touch on the lingering fear of a mighty Germany, memories of the Holocaust, Germany's economic role as the engine of Europe and its diplomatic role as the strongest nation at the border of the former Soviet Bloc. The history of Germany is both fascinating and repellent as Fisher uncovers the Germans of today.

***Reluctant Witness: Jews and Christian Imagination.*** By Stephen R. Haynes. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press. Haynes takes a hard look at contemporary Christian theology as he explores the pervasive Christian "witness-people" myth that dominates much Christian thinking about Jews in both Christian and Jewish minds. This myth, an ancient theological construct that has put Jews in the role of living symbols of God's dealings with the world, has for centuries, according to Haynes, created an ambivalence toward the Jews in the Christian mind, often with disastrous results. Well researched and comprehensive, this book is a significant contribution to Jewish-Christian relations.

***Jewish State or Israel Nation?*** By Boas Evron. Bloomington: Indiana University Press. Evron traces the violent fissures in Israeli society to a basic incompatibility between the concept of a democratic, secular state, on the one hand, and an integral nation defined on a religious basis, on the other. Surveying the full sweep of Jewish history, Evron argues that the Jews were never a territorial nation. Judaism is instead a religious civilization for which the diaspora was not a historical coincidence but a necessary condition of its existence. He concludes that Israel should become a territorial state accommodating its sizable non-Jewish minority in a truly democratic way.

***Haim Nahum: A Sephardic Chief Rabbi in Politics, 1892-1923.*** Edited by Esther Benbassa. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press. First published in French, this book relates the history of Turkish Jewry during the last decade of the Ottoman Empire. This little-known story is told through the life and work of one of its central figures, Haim Nahum (1872-1960), Chief Rabbi of the Ottoman Empire from 1909 to 1920. This book sheds much light on the history of Sephardic Jewry in modern times, in general, and on the life of one of its most important leaders, in particular, during a critical epoch in Jewish and Ottoman history.

***A Gay Synagogue in New York.*** By Moshe Shokeid. New York: Columbia University Press. Since the early 1970s, gay synagogues have emerged to offer their members a spiritual and social outlet. Shokeid spent 13 months with the congregation of Beth Simchat Torah in Greenwich Village, whose membership has grown to more than 1,000 since its founding in 1973, making it the largest gay congregation in the United States. Drawing on interviews and direct observation, Shokeid describes the struggles this institution has undergone and the important role the synagogue plays in the lives of its members. He recounts the personal experiences and life histories

of many of the congregation, illustrating the communal issues and personal dilemmas involved in being both Jews and gay or lesbian.

**Emma Lazarus in Her World: Life and Letters.** By Bette Roth Young. Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society. Young has discovered more than 60 original letters in the attic of Emma Lazarus' close friends. These letters shed light on this legendary figure. They describe the social life and personality of a vital young woman who traveled widely, socializing wherever she went, and meeting life with passion and an unflinching sense of humor. This book is more than a collection of letters. It shows that she was more at home in the cultured milieu of New York, Newport, Paris and London than in the Jewish world she so ardently embraced in the last years of her life when she is said to have had a "conversion experience." On meeting East European Jewish refugees at Ward's Island, she became their spokeswoman in poetry and prose.

**Konin: A Quest.** By Theo Richmond. New York: Pantheon Books. Since his early childhood, Richmond had heard a word that stayed in his mind: Konin, the name of the Polish shtetl from which his parents had come. He set out to learn more about this small town and its Jewish community, which the Nazis had destroyed. Richmond creates, in minute detail, a world gone forever. This is the story of this vanished community and the people who once lived there.

**Reading Ruth: Contemporary Women Reclaim a Sacred Story.** Edited by Judith A. Kates and Gail Twersky Reimer. New York: Ballantine Books. Of all the books in the Hebrew Bible, the Book of Ruth—whose themes include marriage, children, infertility and widowhood—is the most relevant to women. Yet for thousands of years, commentary on this book and others in the Bible has been dominated by men. Now, two creative scholars have brought together an amazingly eclectic group of Jewish women to offer their unique, and previously unheard, interpretations of one of the Bible's most beloved stories. Whether they examine the relationships between sisters, the complex bonds between mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law, the impact of loss, the place of the "other" in society, the limitations of loyalty or the elaborate connections of family, these extraordinary essays give voice to the exciting array of thought and interpretation that endows this sacred tale with new life.

**Israel and the Jewish World, 1948-1993: A Chronology.** By Hershel and Abraham J. Edelheit. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press. The authors have given us an extremely helpful tool, briefly describing the chronological context through which current developments in the Jewish world can be understood. This work provides a frame of reference for individuals interested in what transpired and when, concentrating on Israel and world Jewry through 45 critical years of history. Included are important political and diplomatic events, as well as key cultural, artistic and scientific developments.

**The Lord's Table: The Meaning of Food in Early Judaism and Christianity.** By Gillian Feeley-Harnik. Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press. "The author relies both on the general anthropology of food rules and other systems of classification and on the particular history of food imagery in post-exilic Judaism to provide a context for her analysis. Taking the last supper together with the crucifixion and resurrection, she finds a striking and thorough reversal of the symbols, values and goals of the Jewish Passover ritual. [This book] clearly demonstrates what anthropology can contribute to the recovery of the social world of early Christianity." —Eugene V. Gallagher, *Patristics*

**Conversos, Inquisition and the Expulsion of the Jews From Spain.** By Norman Roth. Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press. With evidence from extensive research, Roth refutes the traditionally accepted story of "crypto-Judaism," which contends that the "conversos" were forced publicly to abandon their faith, while

continuing secretly to maintain their Jewish traditions. He argues that the "conversos" were sincere Christians—that the majority of Spanish Jews converted in the 14th and 15th centuries in a period of declining Jewish leadership, and that these new Christians then encountered hostility from both Jews and the "old" Christians. The Inquisition falsely viewed the new converts as crypto-Jews because of its concern with the danger of heresy.

**Jerusalem Recovered: Victorian Intellectuals and the Birth of Modern Zionism.** By Michael Polowetzky. Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing Group. This book creates for the modern reader an illustration of the appeal Jewish history and culture had for some of the most influential men and women of 19th-century British intellectual society. Admiration for Judaism influenced these figures' actions and even their view of the world. It depicts how, for a period of time coinciding with the Balfour Declaration, the causes of Jewish political emancipation and Zionism possessed powerful support in the most important sectors of British society.

**Sholem Aleichem in the Theater.** By Jacob Weitzner. Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press. Frustrated by the Russian ban on Yiddish theater and shattered by the Kiev pogrom, Sholem Aleichem came to America in 1907. His efforts at writing and producing Yiddish theater here met with little success. Weitzner discusses the history of the stage productions, translations and adaptations of his works for theater and how his ideas were received by directors and producers. Only after his death did his work become a major part of the classical repertoire of the Yiddish theater.

**Jerusalem: An Archaeological Biography.** By Hershel Shanks. New York: Random House. This beautifully illustrated and written book is like a visit to Jerusalem, and more instructive: 200 full-color pictures lead the reader through a clear and fascinating text filled with little-known details. This authoritative book is the perfect introduction to the Holy City. Archaeology and Biblical history are brought to life in thrilling detail.

**The Essential Fromm: Life Between Having and Being.** Edited by Rainer Funk. New York: The Continuum Publishing Company. Fromm points out that ours is "a life between having and being." The alternatives of having and being as basic orientations of our passionate strivings—of our character—occupied Fromm for years before he dedicated himself to the subject in *To Have or To Be?* That volume plus *The Art of Being* encapsulates Fromm's views on the fulfilling life. In these works, represented in *The Essential Fromm*, the author defines the divergent lifestyles between mere having and healthy being, between destructiveness and creativity, narcissism and productive self-understanding, passivity and the joy of positive activity.

**Think a Second Time.** By Dennis Prager. New York: Regan Books (Harper-Collins Publishers). Prager offers his thoughts on a variety of pressing problems facing America today. As the 43 essays in this volume demonstrate, not only are his opinions well-reasoned, they are often controversial, sure to delight and enrage his readers simultaneously. These pieces touch on a vast array of subjects and are permeated with Prager's "desire to see good conquer evil." Divided into three parts, Prager deals with the ethics of daily life, the role of politics and ethical monotheism as the only solution to evil.

**Will To Live: One Family's Story of Surviving the Holocaust.** By Adam Starkopf. Albany: State University of New York Press. This story of a Jewish family's survival in Nazi-occupied Poland by assuming "Aryan" identities shows the Starkopf family's courage and tremendous will to live. The book documents their journey from Warsaw to the immediate vicinity of one of the most frightful places on earth—Treblinka. The Starkopfs survive on false papers and false identities as they witness the tragedy of millions.