

Association of Jewish Libraries – Greater Cleveland Chapter

NEW AND NOTABLE BOOKS AND FILMS FOR ADULTS

Jewish Book Month 5771/2010

For the first time since the Greater Cleveland Chapter of the Association of Jewish Libraries began compiling Jewish Book Month lists, the 2010 lists will be published in electronic format only. The main reason is economic: printing multiple copies on paper is expensive. But we also think/hope that these electronic versions will be more accessible to our intended audience of librarians and library patrons, who may print them for their own use or store and view them on their computers. Another advantage is that an electronic format allows us to compile longer lists, with more titles on them and longer descriptions for each title. The titles chosen are all from 2010 and they represent what the compilers, members of the Greater Cleveland Chapter of the Association of Jewish Libraries, consider the books and films of Jewish significance most worth reading or viewing, most notable of their kind, and most thought-provoking of the year. Librarians use these lists to help them decide what to purchase for their collections so library patrons should be able to find all of them among the Cleveland area's many fine synagogue, school, academic, and public libraries.

FICTION

Appelfeld, Aharon. ***Blooms of Darkness***. Schocken. A haunting story of love and loss set during the Holocaust. As the ghetto where they are imprisoned is being liquidated by the Nazis, eleven year-old Bruno's mother leaves him at a brothel where her friend Mariana works. Protected by Mariana and witness to the harshness of her life, Bruno provides the unhappy woman with solace. As their lives spiral downward, Bruno and Mariana have only one another to cling to.

Dershowitz, Alan. ***The Trials of Zion***. Grand Central. Celebrity lawyer, Abe Ringel, rushes to Israel after his daughter is kidnapped in the aftermath of a terrorist attack that has killed several of the world's leaders. Ringel, a character who resembles the author, becomes involved in several trials whose outcomes threaten the lives of his family not to mention world peace. The blend of foreign intrigue, courtroom drama, and non-stop action makes this a page-turner.

Epstein, Joseph. ***The Love Song of A. Jerome Minkoff***. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt. Fourteen short stories chart the lives of aging Jewish men who live in Chicago. Their successes and disappointments, family dynamics, longings and love affairs, could happen anywhere that American Jews call home and they resonate with humor, pathos, and meaning.

Gilmore, Jennifer. ***Something Red***. Scribner. For the Goldstein family, idealism has traditionally meant protest against the status quo, an insistence on repairing the world. But with Nixon, Watergate, and Viet Nam in the recent past, political commitment has given way to self-involvement. The story glides smoothly from one family member's perspective to another, giving equal and anxious weight to each, as it chronicles a few months in their lives.

Goldstein, Rebecca. ***36 Arguments for the Existence of God***. Pantheon. Goldstein's brilliantly conceived characters offer a satiric, humorous, and often very moving view of

academic pomposity, human striving, spiritual dilemmas, and the choices every person, whether a believer or an atheist, must make to lead a moral life.

Goodman, Allegra. *The Cookbook Collector*. Dial. A contemporary story of two sisters with diverse lifestyles, one the calm and responsible CEO of a Silicon Valley software company, the other a capricious environmentalist with a love of philosophy and old books. Romance, money, ambition, plus a Hasidic presence come together to create a book rich in characters and ideas.

Grossman, David. *To the End of the Land*. Translated by Jessica Cohen. Knopf. This highly acclaimed novel by one of Israel's foremost writers is about a mother, her sons, and the two most important men in her life. After Ora's youngest son rejoins the army for more active duty, Ora decides she will avert any possible harm to him with a kind of magical thinking that will keep her from answering the door when those who bring news of his death arrive. As she and her tormented friend, Avram, set off on a hike through Israel, Ora's broken marriage to Ilan, her memories of her son's infancy and childhood, and the complexities of Israeli life are explored with wrenching emotional intensity.

Jacobson, Howard. *The Finkler Question*. Bloomsbury. A dark comedy about three friends in later life, each with comic foibles but each, also, feeling the weight of his past. Confused and funny musings about Jewish identity pervade the book while English anti-Semitism clouds the atmosphere in which the three men wrestle with their demons. Jacobson has been called the English Philip Roth and for this riveting novel, he was recently awarded England's Man Booker Prize.

Krauss, Nicole. *Great House*. Norton. This novel's four stories all touch on themes of loss and recovery, and are anchored to a massive writing desk that resurfaces among numerous households, much to the bewilderment and existential tension of those in its orbit, among them a lonely American novelist clinging to the memory of a poet who has mysteriously vanished in Chile, an old man in Israel facing the imminent death of his wife of 51 years, and an esteemed antiques dealer tracking down the things stolen from his father by the Nazis.

Mandelman, Avner. *The Debba*. Other Press. When David Starkman, a former clandestine Israeli assassin who renounced his Israeli citizenship and migrated to Canada, learns of the gruesome murder of his father he is forced to return to Israel for the funeral. His father's dying wish is for him to perform "The Debba," a play he wrote which had only been performed once in 1946 and caused major riots. The mystery of who killed his father, the identity of the Debba, an Arab mythical figure, and why the play had to be performed forty-five days from the time of his father's death embroil David in intrigues and paradoxes that are at the heart of modern Israel's history.

Lemelman, Martin. *HYPERLINK " <http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/1608190048/sefersafarianonl> " *wo Cents Plain: My Brooklyn Boyhood*. Bloomsbury. Drawings, photographs, found objects, and an engaging narrative evoke the author's Brooklyn boyhood from the 1950's, when Lemelman's Holocaust survivor parents arrived, to 1968 and the neighborhood's stark decline. Memories of childhood and immigrant family life are mingled with the turbulent history of urban America during the period, presenting a bittersweet portrait.*

Orringer, Julie. *The Invisible Bridge*. Knopf. This long, memorable feat of storytelling, based on the author's family, brings to life the experiences of Hungarian Jews during the 1930's and '40's. Readers are transported into a world that is disintegrating for Jews like Andras Levi, his friends, lover, and family – robbing them of careers, hope, and worst of all, one another. Beginning just as Andras leaves Hungary to study architecture in Paris and

ending sometime around the Hungarian Revolution, this chronicle of three brothers is above all a love story.

Roth, Philip. *Nemesis*. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt. Polio is the nemesis that brings down the hero of this short novel. Bucky Cantor is an idealistic young man who is motivated by a sense of responsibility and fair play. Unable to fight in World War II because of his poor eyesight, Bucky becomes a gym teacher. During the summer of 1944 when he is working as a playground supervisor, a polio epidemic hits Newark, affecting the Jewish section of the city most severely. Heartbreaking scenes of stricken children and anguished parents fill the novel, as the choices Bucky makes tragically decide his future.

Schine, Cathleen. *The Three Weissmanns of Westport*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2010. A novel of manners about an elderly mother and two adult daughters who are impoverished as a result of divorce and career reversals. They depend on eccentric Cousin Lou for a roof over their heads and it falls to Annie, one of the daughters, to provide her free-spending mother and sister with an income. A wide ranging cast of characters – fools, scoundrels, poseurs, the good hearted, and secret heroes – provides fascinating interplay. Wild coincidences abound so that Manhattan, Westport, and Palm Springs are but extensions of the classic drawing room. There is sadness but also love in this thoroughly enjoyable novel.

Skibell, Joseph. *A Curable Romantic*. Algonquin. An intellectually comic novel that chronicles the tumultuous life of a hapless but endearing protagonist, Dr. Jacob Sammelsohn, who has escaped the shtetl of his birth for cosmopolitan Vienna in 1895. Moving for a while in the shadow of the cocaine snorting Sigmund Freud, Dr. Sammelson encounters a dybbuk and careens through several more decades of Eastern European history. Written with satirical brilliance, it casts a skeptical eye on some accepted truths.

Stern, Steve. *The Frozen Rabbi*. Algonquin. 15 year-old Bernie Karp of Memphis, Tennessee finds a rabbi in his parents' freezer. During a power outage, the rabbi defrosts and so begins a hilarious, satiric, and moving tragic-comedy that roams in time from the 18th century to the present, in settings as diverse as the Yishuv and the Lower East Side, and with characters as striking as a hunch-backed mystical inventor, a young immigrant woman disguised as a man, and the entrepreneurial frozen rabbi himself.

NON-FICTION

Alter, Robert. *Pen of Iron: American Prose and the King James Bible*. Princeton University Press. The author, a leading scholar and Bible translator, shows how the Hebrew Scriptures influenced American language and thought while also transmitting Jewish history and moral vision to the American people.

Bard, Mitchell. *The Arab Lobby: The Invisible Alliance That Undermines America's Interests in the Middle East*. Harper.

Although the Israel lobby has been denounced and vilified in the media, very little is known about a lobby which the author claims is vastly more powerful. Bard is an authority on U.S. – Israel relations and in this timely book he shows how the Arab lobby tries to weaken our alliance with Israel and to inject distorted views about the Middle East into high school and college classrooms.

Beckerman, Gal. **HYPERLINK** "<http://www.houghtonmifflinbooks.com/catalog/searchresults.cfm?adv=y&description=When%20They%20Come%20for%20Us%2C%20We%27ll%20Be%20Gone>" *When They Come for Us, We'll Be Gone: The Epic Struggle to Save Soviet Jewry*. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt. Newly released Soviet documents plus interviews with hundreds of "refuseniks" and activists portray a Cold War struggle that eventually led to

a mass exodus of Soviet Jews in 1989. As a result of the struggle, American Jews found a new sense of purpose and human rights moved to the top of the political agenda. Cleveland figures prominently in the person of Herb Rosenblum, a member of Beth Israel -The West Temple and one of the leading American advocates on behalf of Soviet Jewry.

Fishkoff, Sue. *Kosher Nation: Why More and More of America's Food Answers to a Higher Authority*. Schocken.

“Kosher food and the kosher food system started out as Jewish, and like other immigrant food traditions, have become American,” the author writes in her informative and richly researched book, which details how kashruth, the rigorous system of Jewish dietary laws, has become a thoroughly American phenomenon.

Gottlieb, Robert. *Sarah: The Life of Sarah Bernhardt*. Yale University Press. Everything about Sarah Bernhardt is fascinating, from her obscure birth to her glorious career to her highly public romantic life to her indomitable spirit. This biography tracks a trajectory through which an illegitimate—and scandalous—daughter of a courtesan transformed herself into an icon of French culture.

Green, Abigail. *Moses Montefiore: Jewish Liberator, Imperial Hero*. Harvard University. A full account, from birth to death, of the remarkable life of the nineteenth century English Jewish philanthropist who used his wealth and influence on behalf of the Jewish people wherever and whenever they were in need.

Halkin, Hillel. *Yehuda Halevi*. Schocken/Next Book. *Jewish Encounters Series*. During the Spanish Middle Ages, one of poetry's golden eras, Yehuda Halevi's work shone with virtuosity. Against a shifting background of political and religious thought, Halkin presents an engaging portrait of both the artist and his age.

Harris, Ruth. *Dreyfus: Politics, Emotion, and the Scandal of the Century*. Holt. Convicted unjustly of spying for Germany, the French Jewish army officer's trial and subsequent imprisonment galvanized fin de siècle France. This carefully researched account explores the beliefs, politics, and motivations of his supporters as well as those who considered him guilty, not least because he was a Jew.

Hirsch, Edward. *The Living Fire: New and Selected Poems*. Knopf. A rich and significant collection drawn from a lifetime of “wild gratitude” in poetry. Grieving for the losses occasioned by our mortality, Hirsch's ultimate impulse as a poet is to praise—to wreathe himself, as he writes, in “the living fire” that burns with a ferocious intensity.

Jeffers, Thomas L. *Norman Podhoretz: A Biography*. Cambridge University Press. In this sympathetic study one of the most influential and controversial editors and writers of our time, Jeffers, a professor of literature at Marquette, offers what is primarily an intellectual biography of Podhoretz from his earliest years to the present. The career and political evolution of Podhoretz are set against the tumult of the last fifty years: Civil Rights, Vietnam, Ocean Hill-Brownsville, the rise of neo-conservatism, Reagan, Israel, and more.

Kamenetz, Rodger. *Burnt Books: Rabbi Nachman of Bratzlav and Franz Kafka*. Schocken/Nextbook. *Jewish Encounter Series*. The author of *The Jew in the Lotus* explores the surprising connections in the lives of two very different men. Kafka was a secular artist fascinated by Jewish mysticism, and Rabbi Nachman was a religious mystic who used storytelling to reach out to secular Jews. Both men died close to age forty of tuberculosis. Both invented new forms of storytelling that explore the search for meaning in an illogical, unjust world. Both gained prominence with the posthumous publication of their writing. And both left strict instructions at the end of their lives that their unpublished books be burnt.

Segev, Tom. *Simon Wiesenthal: The Life and the Legends*. Doubleday. One of the great figures of our time, Simon Wiesenthal never let the world forget about the crimes perpetrated by the Nazis. "Justice, not revenge" was his credo. In this fully-documented biography, his complex personality and the story of his life are explored to produce a compelling picture of a man whose flaws and accomplishments were of heroic proportions.

Shoyer, Paula. *The Kosher Baker: 160 Dairy-Free Recipes from Traditional to Trendy*. Brandeis University Press. Cakes, pies, cookies, scones, tarts, strudels, and whatever else may tempt your sweet tooth are found in this compendium of recipes that don't use any dairy products. It is arranged in sections from easy-to-make to multiple-step recipes plus a section for Passover and offers a complete baking course for anyone wanting to specialize in home-made treats.

Shulevitz, Judith. *The Sabbath World: Glimpses of a Different Order of Time*. Random House. A personal approach to the Sabbath from both a Jewish and a Christian perspective, reflecting the author's ambivalent appreciation of the Sabbath which leads her to write "...I still like the idea of the fully observed Sabbath more than I like observing it."

Silver, Linda R. *Best Jewish Books for Children and Teens: JPS Guide*. The Jewish Publication Society. Looking for a good book for your children or grandchildren? Part of the JPS guide series, this annotated collection of over 1,000 titles is for librarians, teachers, clergy, and parents as well as anyone else who is interested in Jewish literature for children and teens. The author is a member of the Association of Jewish Libraries' Greater Cleveland Chapter.

Tawil, Hayim and Bernard Schneider. *Crown of Aleppo: The Mystery of the Oldest Hebrew Bible Codex*. The Jewish Publication Society. Few mystery stories are as riddled with intrigue as this one. The Aleppo Codex is the oldest surviving edition of the Hebrew Bible in manuscript form, published around 939. In its thousand year journey, the Crown became the most treasured possession of the Jewish community of Aleppo, Syria, whose almost fanatical protection of it failed during the pogrom of 1947, when the damaged Crown was lost and then smuggled to Israel, where it now resides. Many mysteries about it remain unsolved and a facsimile of it can be viewed at [HYPERLINK "http://www.aleppocodex.org"](http://www.aleppocodex.org) www.aleppocodex.org.

Telushkin, Joseph. *Hillel: If Not Now, When?* Schocken/Nextbook. *Jewish Encounter Series*. "What is hateful to you, do not do unto others. That is the whole Torah, the rest is commentary" is the most famous teaching of Rabbi Hillel, whose wisdom, stories, and legal rulings can be found throughout the Talmud. In this illuminating study, Rabbi Telushkin emphasizes Hillel's ethical teachings and their universal application.

Wistrich, Robert S. *A Lethal Obsession: Anti-Semitism from Antiquity to the Global Jihad*. Random House. In a monumental work of scholarship, the author dissects anti-Semitism in all of its most blatant and most subtle forms. Serious readers will be rewarded with the clarity of Wistrich's writing and his analysis of what he considers the "oldest and darkest of ideological obsessions."

Ziegelman, Jane. *97 Orchard: An Edible History of Five Immigrant Families in One New York Tenement*. Harper Collins/Smithsonian Books. Inspired by the Lower East Side Tenement Museum, this is a social history of European immigrants who arrived in New York City beginning in the 1840's, complete with photographs and original recipes. Multiple dwellings, called tenements, enabled residents to co-exist in each building, usually with no

indoor plumbing, as they settled in their new country with old traditions and new names.

This book focuses on their way of preparing food, explaining, among other things, that stews became hugely popular as a simplified way of preparing and serving food using as few dishes as possible.

FILMS

Blessed is the Match: The Life and Death of Hannah Senesh. New York: DocuramaFilms, 2010. 85 min. A documentary that traces Hannah Senesh's life through diaries, poems and letters to her mother. It starts with her childhood in Budapest, continues to her time as a *kibbutz*nik in British-controlled Palestine, and concludes with the daring mission in which she parachuted into Europe to rescue downed Allied pilots and Jews.

A Serious Man. Universal City, CA: Universal Studios, 2010. 106 min. Rated R. Joel and Ethan Coen directed this comedy set in 1967. When Larry Gopnik's life turns upside-down, he consults three different rabbis to help him cope with his afflictions and become a righteous person -- a mensch -- a serious man. The film has direct parallels to the biblical Job.

Yoo-hoo Mrs Goldberg. New Video Group, 2010. DVD, 92 min. A documentary about the life of Gertrude Berg, granddaughter of Jewish refugees, who was born Tillie Edelstein, in 1898 in East Harlem. In the 1930s and beyond, Berg created a character, Molly Goldberg, a lovable and loving Jewish mother, shaped in the immigrant neighborhoods of New York City, who became a national heroine and one of the first true pop culture icons of the 20th century.

WEBSITES

HYPERLINK "http://www.yivoencyclopedia.org" www.yivoencyclopedia.org

The YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe

The only resource of its kind, this encyclopedia provides the most complete picture of the history and culture of Jews in Eastern Europe from the beginnings of their settlement in the region to the present.

HYPERLINK "http://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en" www.ushmm.org/wlc/en

The United States Holocaust Memorial and Museum's online encyclopedia makes many of the museum's resources available.

Visit our blog at <http://greaterclevelandjewishlibraries.wordpress.com/>

