

“The Sabbath is for Shiksas”

Ari Sussman

Bibliography List

Aleichem, Shalom, Julius and Frances Butwin (trans.). *The Tevye Stories and Others*. Pocket Book. New York, 1965.

The stories of Aleichem’s sometimes jocular, sometimes morose milkman. Aleichem once said, “as long as a Jew can still draw breath and feel the blood beating in his veins, he must never lose hope.” Through Tevye, Aleichem portrays daily village life and an ethos rooted in biblical lore.

____Tamara Kahana (trans.). *The Great Fair: Scenes From My Childhood*. Noonday Press. New York, 1955.

Aleichem considered this ‘novelized memoir’ his most important book. He recounts his childhood from a third person perspective. Particularly prominent are the accounts of shtetl (village) life and sexual discovery, a popular theme. Kahana is Aleichem’s granddaughter.

____Curt Leviant (trans.). *From the Fair*. Penguin Books. New York, 1985.

An alternative and better translation of the aforementioned book. This version is generally more vibrant and the humor is sharper than the version from Aleichem’s progeny.

Basiura, Ewa. *The Jews of Poland in Tale and Legend*. Storyteller. Krakow, 1997.

For many years, Poland was at the center of Jewish thought and culture. These fourteen tales describe that time period with characteristic humor and sagacity. This is an adorable edition from a small Polish press.

Cargas, Harry James (ed.). *Responses to Elie Wiesel: Critical Essays by Major Jewish and Christian Scholars*. Persea Books. New York, 1978

Fascinating interpretations of the morality and history from Wiesel’s writings. Themes such as God, faith, mortality, evil and truth are discussed by a diverse group of contemporary theological scholars.

Hapgood, Hutchins. *The Spirit of the Ghetto: Studies of the Jewish Quarter of New York*. Schocken. New York, 1966.

Despite the pretension of scholarly purpose, this book reads like a labor of love. Vivid descriptions of the culture of the Lower East Side during the first waves of immigration. Particularly salient is the tension of 'old' versus 'new world' identity.

Howe, Irving and Eliezer Greenberg (eds.). *A Treasury of Yiddish Poetry*. Holt Books. New York, 1969

Until recently, Yiddish poetry was not regarded with the merit it deserves. Few people read Yiddish anymore and so this book has become one of the few windows we have on a possibly departing literary tradition.

Kogos, Fred. *1001 Yiddish Proverbs*. Castle Books. Secaucus, N.J., 1974.

A treasury of old-world proverbs with clever drawings. The Yiddish transliteration is provided and laboriously muddled through. Subjects include faith, love, employment, non-employment, marriage, sex and goats.

Ozick, Cynthia. *The Pagan Rabbi and Other Stories*. Penguin Books. New York, 1983.

Cynthia Ozick has for years been considered the dominant sex symbol of contemporary Jewish literature. Her writings are infused with tenderness, wit and eroticism. In stories like "Virility" and "The Doctor's Wife," Ozick explores Yiddish morality for a modern, sometimes existentialist, viewpoint.

Roth, Henry. *Call it Sleep*. Noonday Press. New York, 1934.

Probably the most noted book about first generation Jewish immigrants on the Lower East Side. Life is hard for the young protagonist as he suffers an overbearing father and overprotective mother. Contains the finest line in all Jewish-American writing: De poppa's god de pretzel and de momma's god de knish.

Roth, Philip. *Portnoy's Complaint*. Vintage Press. New York, 1967.

Call it Sleep on acid cut with too much speed. It's a monologue by a second-generation immigrant Jewish boy from his psychologist's couch. The infirmity of "Portnoy's Complaint" is defined as "A disorder in which strongly-felt ethical and altruistic impulses are perpetually warring with extreme sexual longings, often of a perverse nature..."

Safran Foer, Jonathan. *Everything is Illuminated*. Houghton. New York, 2002

A third generation Jew travels back to Ukraine to search for his roots. The writer is well steeped in Yiddish literature as evidenced in the scenes that take place in the shtetl. Foer can write like the rest of them.

Samuel, Maurice. *The World of Sholom Aleichem*. Vintage Books. New York, 1973.

Samuel depicts the villages and countryside in which so many Aleichem stories take place. The vibrant descriptions of communities and individuals are told with a deep sense of impending doom.

_____. *Prince of the Ghetto: The Stories of Y.L. Peretz Retold*. Schocken Books. New York, 1973.

Y.L. Peretz is a giant of old-world Jewish literature, however he is much darker than his community of doyen. Themes in his work include poverty, injustice, suffering, death, and unhappiness.

Steinsaltz, Adin, Yehuda Hanegbi, Herzlia Dobkin, Deborah French, and Freema Gottlieb (trans.), Jonathan Omer-man (ed.). *Beggars and Prayers, Retells the Tales of Rabbi Nachman of Bratslav*. Basic Books. New York, 1979.

Recounts the teaching of the Hasidic movements most endearing figure. Mysticism, magic, and mitzvah interplay in these compelling tales. This is probably the best-translated book in the Hasidic tradition.

Singer, Isaac Bashevis. *The Spinoza of Market Street*. Noonday Press. New York, 1967.

Takes place in Warsaw on the brink of WWI. A man fixated on the philosopher Spinoza becomes embroiled in an affair with a homely woman. Like so many Jewish characters, the protagonist attempts to balance the drives of his intellect, heart, and loins.

_____. *Satan in Goray*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux. New York, 1996.

Singer's first Yiddish novel and his only to be published while still in Europe. Against a backdrop of pogroms, mass-murders, and false prophets, the story moves back and forth between a mystical world of sex-crazed demons and actual destruction. Singer satires Jews for believing the Messiah will one day arrive.

_____. *The Death of Methuselah and Other Stories*. Plume Books. New York, 1971.

Singer's tenth, and my favorite, compilation of short stories. Again, demons, transvestites, cheating wives, unrequited lust and 900 year-old men play out tales of misery and love. Yiddish themes, including humor, run throughout.

_____. *Lost in America*. Doubleday. New York, 1981.

Highly autobiographical telling of the author's life in Poland and then New York. The morality he had been taught was immutable has no place in his new surroundings.

The old world is being replaced by one far more depraved. This is a miserable and terrible book I love to read.

_____ *The Image and Other Stories*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux. New York, 1965.

Ten stories that run the gamut from philosophical to satirical, tragic and uplifting. Setting range from the old-world to the new world to the world-to-come.

_____ *The Image and Other Stories*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux. New York, 1964.

When not invoking Kafka, the Holocaust, hunger and the devil, Singer can write with beautiful levity. These 36 stories are for children. The characters are village fools, talking fish, and quirky children.

_____ *Shosha*. Noonday Press. New York, 1978.

Story takes place in Warsaw on the eve of its annihilation at the hands of the Nazi's. Despite impending doom, the young protagonist—a writer—falls in love with his childhood sweetheart. Moral: there is never good without overwhelming bad.

Sitarz, Magdalena. *Yiddish and Polish Proverbs: Contrastive Analysis Against Cultural Background*. Polska Akademia Umiejetnosci. Krakow, 2000.

A jewel of a find. Published by a small press in Krakow, this book searches, mostly in vain, for the origins of common and not so common Yiddish phrases. It's a very interesting journey, made all the more enjoyable by the multitude of typos and general carelessness.

Swarner, Kristina (illustrator). *Yiddish Wisdom: Yiddishe Chochma*. Chronical Books. San Fransisco, 1996.

More proverbs. This is the hallmark version of the Fred Kogos book. This is to be displayed on a bookshelf, while the Kogos is to be pored over and absorbed in more contemplative settings.

Wiesel, Elie, Stephen Becker (trans.). *The Town Beyond the Wall*. Avon Books. New York, 1964.

In a series of flashbacks to torture prisons, Michael, a Holocaust survivor, tries to understand the underlying meaning of life. Consumed by regret and unanswerable questions, this book deals with the absurdity of life. It ends, "it isn't easy to live always under a question mark. But who says that the essential question has an answer? The essence of man is to be a question, and the essence of the question is to be without an answer."

____Frances Frenaye (trans.). *The Gates of the Forest*. Avon Books. New York, 1966

Gregor runs from the Nazis, first to a cave in the countryside, then to a city where he pretends to be a deaf-mute, and finally among the freedom fighters who resisted the Nazis. Again, Wiesel asks where we can find salvation on a planet that God has seemingly abandoned.

____Marion Wiesel (trans.). *Souls on Fire: Portraits and Legends of Hasidic Masters*. Vintage Books. New York, 1972.

Beginning by recounting the Rabbi Baal Shem Tov and extending throughout the Hasidic tradition, Wiesel celebrates this cult of fervent mystics. Themes include the oneness of reality, the unity of God and mankind, and the preservation of forbidden knowledge.

____Marion Wiesel (trans.). *Messengers of God: Biblical Portraits and Legends*. Summit Books. New York, 1976.

Following the near loss of Jewish tradition in the wake of WWII, Wiesel seeks to revisualize Jewish biblical lore by removing major figures out of the canon and hagiographies and into the world of fiction. This is an example of a very recent brand of biblical scholarship, which reflects the needs of modern Judaism.

____Nathan Edelman (trans.). *Zalmen, or The Madness of God*. Quokka Books. New York, 1974.

Wiesel's departure to the stage. This story takes place in a synagogue in post-Stalinist Russia. The community is waiting for an acting troupe to perform for them.