

# *Fiction Bonanza: New Adult Jewish Fiction, 2002-2003*

*Rosalind Reisner*

## *Monmouth Reform Temple Library*

**Description:** Do you feel that you may have missed some of the good novels that were published recently? This is a roundup of the best ones--both popular and literary--with suggestions about titles suitable for book discussion groups and young adults. Bring a list of your own favorites from the last 18 months for some lively discussion.

*Rosalind Reisner* is a professional librarian who has worked in public, academic, and school libraries for the past 30 years. Since 1977 she has chaired the Library Committee at Monmouth Reform Temple in Tinton Falls, New Jersey. She is currently writing a reference book on Jewish-American literature for the publisher Libraries Unlimited.

### *Mysteries*

**Baron, Aileen G. *A Fly Has a Hundred Eyes*.** Academy Chicago Publishers. 2002

In 1938, while the British, Arabs, Jews, and Nazis are fighting for control over Palestine, Lily Sampson, an American archaeologist, searches for the murderer of a fellow archeologist from the teeming alleys in the Old City of Jerusalem to rural Arab villages in the north. A fast-paced mystery, full of intrigue, with a thoroughly detailed and atmospheric setting, and a tenacious heroine.

**Hellman, Libby Fischer. *An Eye for Murder*.** Poisoned Pen Press. 2002.

When Ellie Foreman's name is found among the papers of nonagenarian Ben Sinclair after his death, her own father provides the link between the dead man, the Holocaust, and the Chicago Jewish community of the 1930s and 1940s. A divorced mother and documentary film producer, Ellie has her own troubles.

**Kahn, Sharon. *Hold the Cream Cheese, Kill the Lox*.** Scribner. 2002.

Ruby the Rabbi's wife investigates the murder of Herman Guenther, an elderly lox cutter, whose history goes back to Nazi-occupied Denmark.

**Kaminsky, Stuart. *Not Quite Kosher*.** Forge. 2002.

Bumbling thieves and two bodies washed up on the shore occupy Abe and Bill, as well as wedding and bar mitzvah preparations.

**Kellerman, Faye. *Stone Kiss*.** Warner. 2002.

Rina and Peter investigate the murder of Peter's half-brother, Rabbi Jonathan Levin.

**Kellerman, Faye. *Street Dreams*.** Warner. 8/2003

Peter's daughter Cindy, now an L.A. cop, gets involved with a developmentally disabled young woman who abandons her baby. Cindy's new boyfriend is an Ethiopian-born Jew.

**Krich, Rochelle. *Blues in the Night*.** Ballantine Books. 2002.

Molly Blume, Los Angeles crime reporter and Orthodox Jew, investigates a hit-and-run accident that's not what it seems. She's also trying to decide whether to resume a relationship with an old boyfriend, now a rabbi. The first in a projected series, Molly is an independent, determined 28-year old, who goes her own way in her personal and professional life, while cherishing her religious heritage and her large, close-knit family.

**Roe, Caroline. *A Draught For a Dead Man*.** Berkley Prime Crime. 2002

A wedding brings Isaac, the blind Jewish physician, to the house of his old friend Jacob, in Perpignan, and to the assistance of a Christian nobleman.

**Waldman, Ayelet. *A Playdate with Death*.** Berkley Prime Crime. 2002.

The police think Juliet's trainer, Bobby Katz, committed suicide, but those close to him believe otherwise, prompting Juliet to probe into his complicated private life.

**Waldman, Ayelet. *Death Gets a Time Out*.** Berkley Prime Crime. 6/2003.

When Juliet is asked by a famous friend to help clear her brother's name in a murder, Juliet gets more than she bargained for.

### *Thrillers*

**Rosenberg, Joel. *The Last Jihad*.** Forge. 2002.

A timely techno-thriller which adds the threat of Iraqi nuclear war to the Israel's problems.

**Silva, Daniel. *The Confessor*.** Putnam. 3/2003.

Undercover Mossad officer Gabriel Allon is called on to expose a group planning to assassinate the pope to prevent exposure of Nazi collaborators in the Vatican. Silva draws on the research of historian Susan Zuccotti for this provocative and timely plot.

**Silva, Daniel. *The English Assassin*.** Putnam. 2002.

In Switzerland to restore a painting in a private collection, Allon becomes involved with an art theft dating back to Swiss collaboration with Nazi Germany in World War II.

### ***Historical Fiction***

**Liss, David. *Coffee Trader*.** Random. 3/2003

When Miguel Lienzo, a Portuguese *converso* living in seventeenth century Amsterdam, begins to trade in coffee bean futures to recoup his fortune and pay his debts, he becomes vulnerable to his enemies, including those in the Jewish community.

**Lotan, Yael. *Avishag*.** The Toby Press. 2002

When Avishag the Shunnamite is summoned as a young girl to the court of King David, to provide companionship and warmth to the dying King, she becomes involved in the political intrigue surrounding the court, including the fight over succession when David dies.

**Richler, Nancy. *Your Mouth is Lovely*.** Ecco Press. 2002

Recording her life story for her daughter from a prison in Siberia in the early 1900s, Miriam tells of her lonely childhood in a rural village after her mother died, and how she came to participate in the early years of the Russian Revolution.

**Sherwood, Frances. *The Book of Splendor*.** W.W. Norton. 2002

In this rich stew of history, legend, and romance set in seventeenth century Prague's Jewish ghetto and Emperor Rudolf II's castle, the mad Emperor's desire for immortality, the anti-Semitism of the populace, and the turbulent political issues intersect in unexpected ways in the life of Rochel, the orphan seamstress. While astronomy and the pseudo-science of alchemy entertain the court, Rabbi Judah Loewe creates a golem, Yossel, to protect the Jews from a rumored pogrom, but, as often happens, the golem is not the soulless creature Rabbi Loewe expected.

**Zelitch, Simone. *Moses in Sinai*.** Black Heron Press. 2002

Zelitch's account of Moses' life from the time he is taken from the river as an infant by the Egyptian princess Bityah, to his death on Mount Nebo is set in an atmospheric world of witches and superstition and exploring questions of theology and faith.

### ***Literary Fiction***

**Brownstein, Gabriel. *The Curious Case of Benjamin Button, Apt. 3W*.** W.W. Norton & Co. 2002.

A strong sense of place and a sharp eye for the telling details of character animate these nine stories set in the 1970s and 1980s. Five of the stories take place in an Upper West Side apartment building and incorporate elements from well-known stories by Auden, Fitzgerald, Hawthorne, Kafka, and Singer. In the title story, Benjamin Button is born old and grows young as he and his friends grow older and apart.

**Calisher, Hortense. *Sunday Jews*.** Harcourt. 2002

Plot takes a back seat as Calisher's typically analytical style is trained on the family of anthropologist Zipporah Zangwill and Peter Duffy, their many children and grandchildren, who have an ambivalent relationship to the Judaism inherited from their mother. Zipporah is forced to retire when Peter becomes ill; a nurse who cares for him sets in motion events that allow Calisher to examine the varieties of modern Jewish experience as displayed by a diverse cast of characters.

**Chefitz, Mitchell. *The Thirty-Third Hour of Moshe Katan*.** St. Martin's Press. 2002

The contrast between two rabbis and their approach to Judaism is thrown into relief when a congregant makes serious accusations against Rabbi Moshe Katan.

**Cohen, Paula Marantz. *Jane Austen in Boca*.** St. Martin's Press. 2002

A witty and hilarious take-off on *Pride and Prejudice* set in the Boca Festa retirement community, this comedy of manners examines the mating and courtship rituals of three women friends in the over-seventy set.

**Horn, Dara. *In the Image*.** W.W. Norton. 2002

When Leora loses her best friend Naomi in a hit and run accident, Naomi's grandfather Bill Landsmann, an elderly refugee, tries to interest her in his unusual slide collection. Leora rebuffs him, but threads of fate, coincidence, and Jewish history connect their lives in an almost mystical way.

**Kirshenbaum, Binnie. *Hester Among the Ruins*.** W.W. Norton. 2002

Historian Hester Rosenfeld, looking for a subject for her next book, decides to study her lover, a German professor born during World War II. As their relationship, and Hester's research, progresses, we uncover suppressed aspects of their own relationships with their families.

**Lelchuk, Alan. *Ziff: A Life?*** Carroll and Graf. 2003.

Danny Levitan takes on the task of writing a biography of a former close friend, who just happens to be the famous bad boy Jewish writer whose books and life are filled with controversy.

**Leviant, Curt. Ladies and Gentleman, the Original Music of the Hebrew Alphabet and Weekend in Mustara.** Univ. of Wisconsin Press. 2002

Two novellas in Leviant's often experimental style, combining intricate plots with Jewish mysticism.

**Miller, Risa. Welcome to Heavenly Heights.** St. Martin's Press. 2003

An intelligent, subtle portrait of four Orthodox American women who have made *aliyah* and are living with their families in an apartment condominium in Israel's West Bank. Against a background of political violence and small privations, the women struggle to make sense of their new lives.

**Moskowitz, Faye. Peace in the House: Tales from a Yiddish Kitchen.** David R. Godine. 2003

Autobiographical linked stories of growing up in Michigan as a second generation Jewish girl in a family holding fast to *Yiddishkeit*.

**Papernick, Jon. The Ascent of Eli Israel: And Other Stories.** Arcade Publishing. 2002

A dark and sometimes surreal collection that explores the tangle of Arab-Jewish relations in Israel, from the late 1940s to the present. In *An Unwelcome Guest*, Yossi confronts an Arab family's claims to his house in a ghostly visitation.

**Pogrebin, Letty Cottin. Three Daughters.** Farrar, Straus and Giroux. 2002

Sisters Shoshanna, Leah, and Rachel Wasserman share a tense, complex history of family secrets and betrayals, intensified by their very different personalities; their conflicts come to a boil as they prepare to celebrate the arrival of the millennium with their widowed father, Rabbi Sam. Full of crackling dialogue, feminist themes, well-drawn characters, and the messy truths of family relationships.

**Rand, Robert. My Suburban Shtetl: a Novel about Life in a Twentieth-Century Jewish-American Village.**

Syracuse Univ. Press. 2002

Nostalgic autobiographical fiction about growing up in Skokie Illinois, a close-knit Jewish community with a large number of Holocaust survivors, in the 1960s and 1970s. A pivotal event is the 1977 attempted march of Nazis in Skokie.

**Roszak, Theodore. The Devil and Daniel Silverman.** Leapfrog Press. 2003.

In this satirical novel, a gay Jewish novelist is invited to speak at a religious college in Minnesota; trapped by a snowstorm he confronts his hosts' dangerous bigotry.

**Schrank, Ben. Consent.** Random House. 2002

In the spring 1999, while the stock market is in free fall, Mike Zabusky's life is also out of control, as he struggles to complete his graduate dissertation on the golem; hold onto Katherine, his troubled lover; and make sense of his father's suicide. An insightful picture of troubled relationships in the twenty-something crowd in New York City.

**Shteyngart, Gary. The Russian Debutante's Handbook.** Riverhead Books. 2002

A picaresque, satiric story told by Russian immigrant Vladimir Girshkin, whose eye for the chance to get rich and become a real American leads him into adventures with an S/M girlfriend, artsy American graduate students, and con artists in Eastern Europe.

**Skibell, Joseph. The English Disease.** Algonquin Press. 5/2003

Charles Belski suffers from depression, the English disease, in this very literate and literary story about the unease of the assimilated Jew.

**Stollman, Aryeh Lev. The Dialogues of Time and Entropy.** Riverhead Books. 2003

Stollman's unique look into the human heart, often through the growing pains of young boys. He writes about loss and loneliness; some of his characters create doubles for companionship and completion.

**Tel, Jonathan. Arafat's Elephant.** Counterpoint. 2002

Haunting stories written by a physicist with an eye for the telling details of character, that offer a glimpse into the complexities and ironies of contemporary Israeli life. In *The Red Button*, we enter the mind of an Arab terrorist on a suicide mission only to find that the story is about something quite different.

**Unger, David. Life in the Damn Tropics.** Syracuse Univ. Press. 2002

A political novel about choices, deceit, and family loyalties set in 1980s Guatemala. Government corruption, terrorists, and family betrayals threaten the new-found happiness of Marcos Eltaleph, fiftyish playboy, and his lover, the sexy Esperanza, when their nightclub becomes an anti-government hangout.

## ***Holocaust Fiction***

**Busch, Frederick. A Memory of War.** W.W. Norton. 2003.

An encounter with a man claiming to be his half-brother, the child of his Jewish mother and a German prisoner, takes psychologist Alexander Lescziak into a world of secrets, guilt, and betrayal.

**Foer, Jonathan Safran. Everything is Illuminated.** Houghton Mifflin. 2002

"We are being very nomadic with the truth, yes?" says Alex, a young Russian, the translator on a strange trip into the past, whose fractured English provides humorous and insightful commentary. As Alex and his cantankerous grandfather guide an American named Jonathan Safran Foer through the Ukraine in search of the woman who may have saved his grandfather from the Nazis, the author reconstructs his ancestors' shtetl origins.

**Raeff, Anne. Clara Mondschein's Melancholia.** MacAdam/Cage Publishing. 2002

The grim legacy of the Holocaust is explored through its effect on three generations: Ruth, who gave birth in the camps to Clara, Clara herself, and Clara's teenage daughter Deborah, born in suburban New Jersey. The story is told alternately by grandmother and granddaughter, as they try to make sense of their own lives in the shadow of Clara's depression.

**Rosenbaum, Thane. The Golems of Gotham.** HarperCollins. 2002

Ariel Levin, trying to cure her father Oliver writer's block, summons up the ghosts of his parents and six writers, all Holocaust survivors who committed suicide, including Primo Levi and Jerzy Kosinski. The ghosts teach Oliver how to accept and transform the stifling emotional legacy of the children of Holocaust survivors; their humor and rage transform New York City.

**Stollman, Aryeh Lev. The Illuminated Soul.** Riverhead Books. 2002

Elegant Eva Laquedem Higashi, a refugee from Prague and Japan after World War II, with her precious treasure, an illuminated Hebrew manuscript, spends a few weeks with the Ivri family in Windsor, Ontario, and changes their lives with her wisdom, compassion, and scholarship.

**Nothing Makes You Free: Writings By Descendants of Jewish Holocaust Survivors.** W.W. Norton. 2002

An international collection of short stories, excerpts from novels, and essays, that captures some of the pain of growing up with the knowledge of the Holocaust.

## ***Romance***

**Mossanen, Dora Levy. Harem.** Scribner. 2002

Three generations of passionate, strong-willed Jewish women--Rebekah, Gold Dust, and Raven--challenge their fate in exotic fourteenth century Persia, among courtesans, eunuchs, and shahs. Carefully researched, intricately plotted, with lush descriptions, Mossanen brings to life an opulent and treacherous milieu.

## ***Science Fiction/Fantasy***

**Goldstein, Lisa. The Alchemist's Door.** Tor. 2002

Sixteenth century Prague is the setting for this fantasy that exploits the desire of rational men and women for forbidden knowledge and power. Rabbi Judah Loew, creator of a golem to protect the Jews from persecution, joins forces with the English scientist and alchemist John Dee to prevent Emperor Rudolf from finding the thirty-sixth righteous man and gaining control of the universe.

**Dann, Jack. Jubilee.** Tor. 2003

Among the 17 stories in this collection are several that feature Jewish characters and themes. In *Fairy Tale*, a Borscht Belt comedian finds a fantasy land in the Catskill forests, *Tattoos* describes an artist whose tattoos redeem and save his clients as he takes on their pain, and *Jumping the Road* is set on the Jewish planet of Tobias. A literate and varied collection spanning the range of science fiction subgenres.