

MORE THAN 10 YEARS OF GREAT READING
FROM THE OHR KODESH BOOK CLUB

Baker, Kevin. *Dreamland* This vast, sprawling carnival of a book takes in Coney Island and the Lower East Side, midgets and gangsters, Bowery bars and opium dens, even Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung.

Bassani, Gregorio. *Garden of the Finzi-Continis* The story of a wealthy, insular Jewish family in Fascist Italy just before the outbreak of World War II.

Bellow, Saul. *Ravenstein*

Benioff, David. *City of Thieves*

Bernstein, Harry. *The Invisible Wall*

Bloom, Amy. *Away*

Bloom, Stephen. *Postville: A Clash of Cultures in Heartland America* This account of a vicious clash between the residents of a small, intensely Christian town and the group of Lubavitcher Jews who open a highly successful kosher slaughterhouse there is a model of sociological reportage and personal journalism.

Brooks, Geraldine. *People of the Book*

Brown, Dan. *The Da Vinci Code* - A popular, extensively researched, but controversial page-turner about secret Catholic religious societies, ancient cover-ups, and savage vengeance.

Cahill, Thomas. *The Gifts of the Jews* A light-handed, popular account of ancient Jewish culture, the culture of the Bible written from a decidedly modern point of view.

Chabon, Michael. *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier and Clay* A witty and sometimes touching story of two talented Jewish cousins--one a writer, the other an artist. At the beginning of WWII they collaborate and create comic book action heroes who battle Hitler and his minions. A colossal masterwork. Thoroughly enjoyable.

Chabon, Michael. *The Final Solution* A Sherlock Holmes pastiche. Roused out of retirement, a former detective, now a beekeeper, is identified only as "the old man." The story opens in the summer of 1944 when he sees a boy with a parrot on his shoulder walking along the train tracks. Short, imaginative and very sweet.

Chabon, Michael. *The Yiddish Policeman's Union*

Cohen, Rick. *Tough Jews* When we think gangster, hood, or wiseguy, we often associate these characters with such names as Capone, Luciano, or even Corleone. However, when organized crime reared its ugly head in the late 1920s in Brooklyn, at the foundation were men like Meyer Lansky and Ben Siegel--both Jews. Rich Cohen's romantic account of Jewish gangsters, *Tough Jews*, brings to life the story of Jewish involvement in the world of organized crime.

Cohn, Edward. *The Peddler's Grandson* A non-fiction selection. Cohn grew up in Jackson, Mississippi, in the 1950s and 1960s. In a city of 100,000 people, mostly Baptists, he was one of about 300 Jews. His immigrant grandparents settled there, coming from Romania, Russia, and Poland. Cohn remembers that

the only Jewish institution in town was Temple Beth Israel, located next door to the state women's club, which didn't allow Jews, and down the street from his high school, which did allow Jews but not blacks.

Cornwell, John. *Hitler's Pope* Relying on exclusive access to Vatican and Jesuit archives, an award-winning Roman Catholic journalist argues that through a 1933 Concordat with Hitler, Pope Pius XII facilitated the dictator's rise and, ultimately, the Holocaust.

David, Jay. *Growing Up Jewish: An Anthology* This volume of excerpts contains stories and essays about being Jewish and young in 20th-century America. Despite the anti-Semitism and poverty they detail, the personal anecdotes and descriptions are fascinating windows into other people's joys and successes.

Diamant, Anita. *The Red Tent* Skillfully interweaving biblical tales with events and characters of her own invention, Diamant's sweeping first novel re-creates the life of Dinah, daughter of Leah and Jacob, from her birth and happy childhood in Mesopotamia through her years in Canaan and death in Egypt. When Dinah reaches puberty and enters the Red Tent (the place women visit to give birth or have their monthly periods), her mother and Jacob's three other wives initiate her into the religious and sexual practices of the tribe.

Doctorow, E.L. *The Book of Daniel* The central figure of this novel is a young man whose parents were executed for conspiring to steal atomic secrets for Russia. It is a book rich in characters, from elderly grandmothers of immigrant culture, to covert radicals of the McCarthy era, to hippie marchers on the Pentagon. It is a book that spans the quarter-century of American life since World War II. It is a book about the nature of Left politics in this country its sacrificial rites, its peculiar cruelties, its humility, its bitterness. It is a book about some of the beautiful and terrible feelings of childhood. It is about the nature of guilt and innocence, and about the relations of people to nations.

Doctorow, E.L. *Ragtime* (10/00) "Ragtime" (1974) remains Doctorow's best-known work. The book is a delight to read, moves with the feel of ragtime piano, and has a light happy surface. Yet the book combines many disparate threads and stories, a wealth of historical and fictional characters thrown together, and offers an unsettling vision of the United States at the turn of the century, c.1906. There is a complex, multi-layered vision at work here.

Duffy, Peter. *The Bielski Brothers* Nonfiction. In 1941, three brothers witnessed their parents and two other siblings being led away to their eventual murders. It was a grim scene that would, of course, be repeated endlessly throughout the war. Instead of running or giving in to despair, these brothers -- Tuvia, Zus, and Asael Bielski -- fought back, waging a guerrilla war of wits against the Nazis. By using their intimate knowledge of the dense forests surrounding the Belarusan towns of Novogrudek and Lida, the Bielskis evaded the Nazis and established a hidden base camp, then set about convincing other Jews to join their ranks. As more and more Jews arrived each day, a robust community began to emerge, a "Jerusalem in the woods." After two and a half years in the woods, in July 1944, the Bielskis learned that the Germans, overrun by the Red Army, were retreating back toward Berlin. More than one thousand Bielski Jews emerged -- alive -- on that final, triumphant exit from the woods.

Epstein, Joseph. *Fabulous Small Jews* In *Fabulous Small Jews*, the best-selling author Joseph Epstein has produced eighteen charming, magical, and finely detailed stories. They are populated by lawyers, professors, scrap-iron dealers, dry cleaners, all men of a certain age who feel themselves adrift in the radically changed values of the day. Epstein's richly drawn characters are at various crossroads and turning points in their lives. *Fabulous Small Jews* is a marvelous collection from a master of the short form.

Epstein, Lawrence J. *The Haunted Smile: The Story of Jewish Comedians in America* Early in this entertaining book, Epstein argues that Jewish comedians have "fulfilled a special mission in American life . . . [mediating] between Jews and American culture." It is an intriguing assertion, but one Epstein never fully develops. Instead, he focuses on saying something about every major Jewish comedian to hit the big time in America, from the early days of vaudeville to last year's TV season. A fun read.

Epstein, Leslie. *King of the Jews*

Evans, Eli N. *Judah Benjamin* This well-written and well-researched volume replaces Robert Meade's biography (1943) as the standard study and is a significant contribution both to Southern Jewish and Civil War history. Unlike previous biographers, Evans sees Jewishness as the key to understanding Benjamin's life. He also traces in fascinating detail Benjamin's relationship with Jefferson Davis.

Evans, Eli N. *The Provincials: A Personal History of Jews in the South* In this classic portrait of Jews in the South, Eli N. Evans takes readers inside the nexus of southern and Jewish histories, from the earliest immigrants to the present day. Evoking the rhythms and heartbeat of Jewish life in the Bible belt, Evans weaves together chapters of recollections from his youth and early years in North Carolina with chapters that explore the experiences of Jews in cities and small towns across the South. He presents the stories of communities, individuals, and events in this quintessential American landscape that reveal the deeply intertwined strands of what he calls a unique "Southern Jewish consciousness."

Eve, Nomi. *Family Orchard* The multigenerational history of a family that prospers and falters, blooms and wanes, as do the fortunes of Israel, the country in which it is set, is only a surface description of what Eve accomplishes in this vivid debut. Intensely imagined, at once sensual, spiritual and humorous, an artful mixture of dreams and reality, legend and fact, this impressive novel takes risks with narrative method and succeeds beautifully.

Feiler, Bruce. *Walking the Bible: A Journey by Land Through the Five Books of Moses* is the story of Bruce Feiler's 10,000-mile trek from Mount Ararat to Mount Nebo. Feiler, a fifth-generation American Jew from the South, had felt no particular attachment to the Holy Land. Yet during his journey, Feiler's previously abstract faith grew more grounded. ("I began to feel a certain pull from the landscape.... It was a feeling of gravity. A feeling that I wanted to take off all my clothes and lie facedown in the soil.") Feiler's attentiveness, intelligence, and adventurousness enliven every page of this book.

Foer, Jonathan Safran. *Everything Is Illuminated* This highly imaginative debut novel features a protagonist with the same name as the author. The fictional Jonathan Safran Foer, also a writer, travels to Eastern Europe after his junior year in college. His mission, as he ventures through the farmlands, is to find Augustine, who may have saved the grandfather he never knew from the Nazis. Accompanying Jonathan on his quixotic quest is Alex, a young Ukrainian translator who speaks hilariously fractured English. The fabled history of his grandfather's shtetl, or village, is juxtaposed with events in the present using comedy interspersed with tragedy. Generations become united across time in this fanciful tale, as Foer, the author, gives the reader a contemporary version of 19th-century Jewish drama one that blends laughter and tears.

Franklin, Ariana. *Mistress of the Art of Death*

Freely, John. *The Lost Messiah*

Fried, Stephen. *The New Rabbi* This inside portrait of Conservative Judaism, the largest American Jewish denomination, reads like a novel fueled by a simple yet dramatic plot: Who will become the next rabbi of Har Zion a powerful 1,400-family Philadelphia synagogue upon the retirement of Gerald Wolpe, its vibrant spiritual leader of 30 years? Fried draws on his resourcefulness as an investigative journalist to gain access

to the usually closed, juicy inner workings of the search process, delivered in a fond spirit that nevertheless has a potentially embarrassing, spill-the-beans quality for some of the players.

Gabler, Neil. *An Empire of Their Own* The subtitle of this book is "How the Jews Invented Hollywood". That subtitle may inspire in some readers waves of ethnic pride, and in others waves of ethnic revulsion, but the point of this book is that its claim of origin is quite literally true. And what makes it an interesting read for political types is the way it demonstrates that no matter how much the founding Hollywood moguls and their successors tried to peddle an idealized, escapist form of entertainment, bubbling up under and around their every project was ideology, racism, ethnic prejudice, class friction, domestic and international politics and all the other raw, seething stuff that distinguishes this country from all others. In Gabler's hands, the Industry draws a picture of American political history in spite of itself.

Gluckel of Hameln. *The Memoirs of Gluckel of Hameln*.

Gold, Dore. *Hatred's Kingdom: How Saudi Arabia Supports the New Global Terrorism*

Goldberg, Myla. *Bee Season* An eccentric family falls apart at the seams in an absorbing debut that finds congruencies between the elementary school spelling-bee circuit, Jewish mysticism, Eastern religious cults and compulsive behavior. Nine-year-old Eliza Naumann feels like the dullest resident of a house full of intellectuals--her older brother, Aaron, is an overachiever; her mother, Miriam, is a lawyer; and her father, Saul, is a self-taught scholar and a cantor at the community synagogue. She surprises herself and the rest of the Naumanns when she discovers a rare aptitude for spelling, winning her school and district bees with a surreal surge of mystical insight, in which letters seem to take on a life of their own.

Goldsmith, Martin. *The Inextinguishable Symphony* Set amid the growing tyranny of Germany's Third Reich, here is the riveting and emotional tale of Gunther Goldschmidt and Rosemarie Gumpert, two courageous Jewish musicians who struggled to perform under unimaginable circumstances and found themselves falling in love in a country bent on destroying them.

Goldstein, Rebecca. *Mazel* means luck in Yiddish, and luck is the guiding force in this magical and mesmerizing novel that spans three generations. Sasha Saunders is the daughter of a Polish rabbi who abandons the shtetl and wins renown as a Yiddish actress in Warsaw and New York. Her daughter Chloe becomes a professor of classics at Columbia. Chloe's daughter Phoebe grows up to become a mathematician who is drawn to traditional Judaism and the sort of domestic life her mother and grandmother rejected. Winner of the National Jewish Book Award for Fiction and winner of the Edward Lewis Wallant Award.

Goodman, Allegra. *Kaaterskill Falls* is a small town in upstate New York, summer home to Orthodox Jews who come from their tightly knit community in New York City carrying family memories and long friendships. They also carry a stifling adherence to the Jewish religion and obedience to Rav Elijah Kirshner, who is near the end of his life and struggling to reconcile his feelings for his two sons. The women of the community are bound by traditions that dictate their dress, manners, and preoccupations. Elizabeth Shulman, driven by ambitions beyond raising five daughters, opens a store with the Rav's approval and later runs afoul of the son who succeeds him when she violates a tradition. The men are not immune from the restrictive environment. Isaac Shulman yearns for a more learned place in the religious community. Jeremy, the Rav's scholarly but rebellious son, is haunted by his father's disapproval. Goodman, author of the best-selling short story collection *The Family Markowitz*, renders a finely drawn portrait of an insulated community in this debut novel.

Gordis, Dan. *If a Place Can Make You Cry*

Gorenberg, Gershom. *The End of Days: Fundamentalism and the Struggle for the Temple Mount*

Grant, L. *When I Lived in Modern Times* Evelyn Sert, 20 and Jewish, arrives in Palestine looking for the home she's never had. The granddaughter of Latvian immigrants, she always felt like an outsider in London. When her mother dies, there is nothing to keep her in England, so, at the urging of her "uncle" (her late mother's married lover), she changes her name to Eve and travels to Palestine, tricking British officials to gain entry, then joining a kibbutz because she has nowhere else to stay. Passionate and longing for something she can't name, Eve eventually leaves the kibbutz, accepts a ride from a stranger named Johnny, and finds an apartment in Tel Aviv. Grant's prose is simple and moving, clearly expressing the intensity of a young girl's quest for herself, and of a young nation seeking to establish its boundaries. Eve's travels parallel her spiritual journey, and nearly everyone she meets is also searching, including concentration camp survivors, Russian Jews trying to build their own utopia, European Jews in exile, and those who've come to Palestine simply because they never felt comfortable anywhere else.

Gur, Batya. *The Saturday Morning Murder* With sly, affectionate humor and acute insight, this flawless mystery by an Israeli literature professor traces the parallel processes of police detection and psychoanalysis. Chief Inspector Michael Ohayon is called to the Jerusalem Psychoanalytic Institute on a quiet Sabbath morning when Dr. Eva Neidorf, a highly respected senior analyst, is found dead of a gunshot shortly before she was to have given a lecture on ethical and forensic problems in psychoanalysis. As the intelligent, somewhat sorrowful Ohayon interviews the institute staff, its training analysts and candidates, Gur deftly and subtly inserts red herrings in her plot, at the same time investing her characters with remarkable depth and individuality. A complex, fully satisfying resolution wraps up this masterful American debut.

Heller, Joseph. *God Knows* Joseph Heller's powerful, wonderfully funny, deeply moving novel is the story of David -- yes, King David -- but as you've never seen him before. You already know David as the legendary warrior king of Israel, husband of Bathsheba, and father of Solomon; now meet David as he really was: the cocky Jewish kid, the plagiarized poet, and the Jewish father. Listen as David tells his own story, a story both relentlessly ancient and surprisingly modern, about growing up and growing old, about men and women, and about man and God. It is quintessential Heller.

Hoffman, Eva. *Lost in Translation* Daughter of Holocaust survivors, the author, a New York Times Book Review editor, lost her sense of place and belonging when she emigrated with her family from Poland to Vancouver in 1959 at the age of 13. Although she works within a familiar genre here, Hoffman's is a penetrating, lyrical memoir that casts a wide net as it joins vivid anecdotes and vigorous philosophical insights on Old World Cracow and Ivy League America; Polish anti-Semitism; the degradations suffered by immigrants; Hoffman's cultural nostalgia, self-analysis and intellectual passion; and the atrophy of her Polish from disuse and her own disabling inarticulateness in English as a newcomer. Linguistic dispossession, she explains, "is close to the dispossession of one's self." As Hoffman savors the cadences and nuances of her adopted language, she remains ever conscious of assimilation's perils: "But how does one bend toward another culture without falling over, how does one strike an elastic balance between rigidity and self-effacement?"

Horn, Sheila. *Four Mothers* Five generations of Jewish women suffer through personal and political turmoil in this Jerusalem-set novel, a bestseller in Israel. When relatives correctly predict that her husband will leave her after their son's birth, Amal inquires into the origins of her matriarchal family's curse of the disappearing husband. Her research takes her back a century, to the day matchmakers marry her great-great-grandmother Mazal to a young shopkeeper who abandons her after the birth of their baby girl. Mazal shares bed and board with a girlfriend who helps to raise Mazal's daughter, Sara, as she grows into a legendary beauty. Horn, making her American debut, vividly brings to life Jerusalem's residential

neighborhoods, but her characters are epic heroines as frequently overwrought with calamity as they are stoic, impenetrable ancestors. That the tale is dense, ponderous and sincere is part of its charm as a novelized Israeli genealogy, while Horn's unique visualization of 100 years of one family's women in Jerusalem gives a personal perspective to that city more often defined by its historic and political headlines.

Hosseini, Khaled. *The Kite Runner* Taking us from Afghanistan in the final days of the monarchy to the present, *The Kite Runner* is the unforgettable, beautifully told story of the friendship between two boys growing up in Kabul. Raised in the same household and sharing the same wet nurse, Amir and Hassan nonetheless grow up in different worlds: Amir is the son of a prominent and wealthy man, while Hassan, the son of Amir's father's servant, is a Hazara, member of a shunned ethnic minority. Their intertwined lives, and their fates, reflect the eventual tragedy of the world around them. When the Soviets invade and Amir and his father flee the country for a new life in California, Khaled Hosseini also gives us hope: through the novel's faith in the power of reading and storytelling, and in the possibilities he shows for redemption."

Isler, Alan. *The Bacon Fancier* Shakespeare, Oscar Wilde, and Francis Bacon all figure prominently in the four novellas that are Alan Isler's *The Bacon Fancier*. In the title story, an 18th-century Jewish violinmaker fancies both the philosopher and the breakfast meat of that name, his taste for the unkosher spilling over into his private affairs as well. Jews are at the center of all four of Isler's tales; in the first, the author retells Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*. Here Shylock is neither the venal, bloodthirsty Jew of Shakespeare's play, nor some 20th-century revisionist martyr; rather, he is a crusty, belligerent old man who goes looking for reasons to wrangle with the gentiles and considers his famous court case against the Christian merchant a highpoint for the ghetto. In "The Crossing," a wealthy young Jew meets Oscar Wilde on an ocean liner and finds both are shunned for different reasons. The final tale, "The Affair," takes readers to Broadway, where a young actor finds his research for a book on the infamous Dreyfus affair turned into a lurid musical. These four intelligent stories filled with sex, theft, betrayal, and memory are concerned with a minority's struggle to retain identity in the face of the majority's disapproval. Filled with multifaceted characters and complex themes, Alan Isler's *The Bacon Fancier* serves up its provocative fare well-done.

Isler, Alan. *Prince of West End Avenue* At first glance, this novel is a deceptively humorous take on life in a Manhattan Jewish retirement community. The narrator, Otto Korner, is writing a journal of the events surrounding a production of *Hamlet* at the Emma Lazarus Home, a production beset by catastrophe as various cast members jockey for power within the theatrical group. Yet this affectionate look at the foibles of old age becomes a moving meditation on the guilt of survivors and the means by which those who have experienced the unspeakable continue to exist despite the emotional baggage they carry. Korner, who lost his entire family in the Holocaust, spends his days plotting to gain the role of *Hamlet* and directorship of the drama, but this activity is only an attempt to keep the doors of memory firmly closed. Isler deftly limns the denizens of the home to create a vital world.

Kahan, Abraham. *The Rise of David Levinsky*, written by the legendary founder and editor of the *Jewish Daily Forward*, is an early Jewish-American classic. According to the scholar Sam B. Girgus, "The novel is more than an important literary work and cultural document. It forms part of the traditional ritual of renewal of the American Way." First published in 1917, Abraham Cahan's realistic novel tells the story of a young talmudic scholar who emigrates from a small town in Russia to the melting pot of turn-of-the-century New York City. As the Jewish "greenhorn" rises from the depths of poverty to become a millionaire garment merchant, he discovers the unbearably high price of assimilation.

Kellerman, Jonathan. *Butcher's Theatre* In the late 60s Jerusalem was dubbed *The Butcher's Theatre*. Now decades later the City of Peace is a butcher's theatre once more. The first victim is a young Arab girl whose obscenely mutilated corpse is found in some bushes on the slopes of Mount Scopus. The mixture of calculation and frenzy involved in her murder sends a shockwave through a society where warfare and

terrorism are everyday facts of life - but where sex murders and serial killers are virtually unknown. Chief Inspector Daniel Shalom Sharavi himself a Yemenite Jew takes charge of the case to uncover a complex trail which leads to a point where private psychosis and public politics threaten to explode. But will he be too late?

Kertzer, David. *The Kidnapping of Edgardo Mortara* Out of seemingly small events are sometimes born great historical moments. The case of young Edgardo Mortara is one. In 1858 the 6-year-old Jewish boy was taken from his parents' home in Bologna, Italy, by agents of the Papal inquisition. The year before, seriously ill, Edgardo had been secretly baptized, by the Mortaras' Catholic servant (or so she claimed); it was against the law for baptized Christians to be raised by Jews, and so, in the eyes of the Church, the kidnapping was only just. Secular Italians did not agree, and thus was set in motion a series of reforms that ended the Church's temporal power in Italy and forged the creation of a liberal, near-democratic state. For his part, young Edgardo became a priest and lived in a Belgian abbey until 1940--just before the invading Germans began to deport and execute all those tainted with Jewish blood. David Kertzer has shaped a remarkable narrative from almost forgotten events.

Koestler, Arthur. *The 13th Tribe* Koestler describes the history of a long-vanished, Turkic people called the Khazars, whose ruler, faced with pressure from both Muslim and Christian nations around them, took the radical step of converting to Judaism. As this is one of the very few instances (if not the single one) in history of such a royal move, the Khazars have attracted scholarly attention ever since, particularly, but not only, from Jews. However, *The 13th Tribe* is not just a history. Koestler constructs an argument for the Eastern European Jews' being the descendants of these Khazars. He asks where the Khazars all disappeared to. He says population statistics from the period 1300-1500 bear evidence that there could not have been so many Jews to be killed by the brutal Bogdan Khmielnitsky in the great massacres of 1648-49 in the Ukraine unless the Khazars had become the Polish-Ukrainian Jews by then. He deals in some dubious racial theorizing, throws in a few arguments based on place names, and concludes that the "original stock" of the Jews was predominantly Turkish.

Koontz, Cynthia. *The Nazi Conscience*

Kurzem, Mark. *The Mascot: Unraveling the Mystery of My Jewish Father's Nazi Boyhood*

Kuznetson, Anatoli. *Babi Yar*

Lagnado, Lucette. *The Man in the White Sharkskin Suit*

Lavigne, Michael. *Not Me: A Novel*

Lelyveld, Joseph. *Omaha Blues*

Lipstadt, Deborah. *My Day in Court* In a much-publicized case, David Irving, the author of numerous books about WWII, sued Emory University historian Lipstadt and her British publisher, Penguin, for libel. Lipstadt had called Irving a Holocaust denier in a book about the Holocaust denial movement, and Britain's libel laws put the burden of proof on her to show that the charge was true. Did that mean proving the Holocaust had happened? Was Lipstadt, as Irving claimed, trying to restrict his freedom of speech, or was he restraining hers? Was the courtroom the proper place to examine historical truth?

Liss, David. *The Coffee Trader* This novel is set in the confined world of 17th-century Amsterdam's immigrant Jewish community. Miguel Lienzo escaped the Inquisition in Portugal and lives by his wits trading commodities. He honed his skills in deception during years of hiding his Jewish identity in Portugal, so he finds it easy to engage in the evasions and bluffs necessary for a trader on Amsterdam's stock exchange.

While he wants to retain his standing in the Jewish community, he finds it increasingly difficult to abide by the draconian dictates of the Ma'amad, the ruling council. Which is all the more reason not to acknowledge his longing for his brother's wife, with whom he now lives, having lost all his money in the sugar trade. Each player in this complex thriller has a hidden agenda, and the twists and turns accelerate as motives gradually become clear. There's a central question, too: When men manipulate money for a living, are they then inevitably tempted to manipulate truth and morality?

Liss, David. *A Conspiracy of Paper*. A fool and his money are soon parted--and nowhere so quickly as in the stock market, it would seem. In David Liss's ambitious first novel, *A Conspiracy of Paper*, the year is 1719 and the place London, where human greed, apparently, operated then in much the same manner as it does today. Liss focuses his intricate tale of murder, money, and conspiracy on Benjamin Weaver, ex-boxer, self-described "protector, guardian, bailiff, constable-for-hire, and thief-taker," and son of a Portuguese Jewish "stock-jobber." Weaver's father, from whom he has been estranged, has recently died, the victim of a horse-drawn carriage hit and run. Though his uncle has suggested that the accident wasn't quite so accidental, Benjamin doesn't give the idea much credence. *A Conspiracy of Paper* weaves all these themes together in a manner reminiscent of the long, gossipy novels of Henry Fielding and Laurence Stern. Indeed, Liss manages to suggest the prose style of those authors while keeping his own, less convoluted style. This is one conspiracy guaranteed to succeed.

Macintyre, Ben. *The Napoleon of Crime: The Life and Time of Adam Worth, Master Thief* The model for Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's Professor Moriarty, Adam Worth (1844-1902) was one of the greatest thieves of the Victorian era. Macintyre's (*Forgotten Fatherland: The Search for Elizabeth Nietzsche*, LJ 10/1/92) entertaining biography traces how the American-born German Jew became the "godfather" of his era, building up a network that stole from banks and the wealthy. His biggest claim to fame was the theft of Thomas Gainsborough's portrait of the Duchess of Devonshire. For a quarter of a century, the obsessed Worth kept the painting. He had such an unusual relationship with the Pinkerton brothers that they acted as intermediaries when Worth returned the painting to its owner, thereby enhancing their detective agency's reputation. Macintyre has done his research well, and his book reads like an exciting detective novel. Providing a rare glimpse of the criminal and social atmosphere during the last part of the 19th century, it is highly recommended.

Malamud, Bernard. *The Fixer* Yakov Bok, a rural Ukrainian handyman (a "fixer") in the years before World War I, yearns for something better. His luck has been down all his life, he can't make ends meet, his wife ran off, and what brings him the most injustice of all: he is a Jew. The strangling weight of anti-Semitism in Tsarist Russia clubs the reader page after page and slowly grinds Yakov down when he is jailed for a crime he did not commit. Much of "The Fixer" is jail time, seen through Yakov's disbelieving yet cynical eyes. Malamud won the Pulitzer Prize for "The Fixer", written in 1976.

Malamud, Bernard. In *A New Life*, Bernard Malamud--generally thought of as a distinctly New York writer--took on the American myth of the West as a place of personal reinvention. When Sy Levin, a high school teacher beset by alcohol and bad decisions, leaves the city for the Pacific Northwest to start over, it's no surprise that he conjures a vision of the extraordinary new life awaiting him there: "He imagined the pioneers in covered wagons entering this valley for the first time. Although he had lived little in nature Levin had always loved it, and the sense of having done the right thing in leaving New York was renewed in him." Soon after his arrival at Cascadia College, however, Levin realizes he has been taken in by a mirage. The failures pile up anew, and Levin, fired from his post, finds himself back where he started and little the wiser for it.

Mendelsohn, Daniel. *The Lost: A Search for Six of the Lost Six Million*

Mervis, Tova. *The Ladies Auxiliary* Life in Memphis's Orthodox community is as it always has been, until a free-spirited widow arrives with her young daughter. Now alone in the world, Batsheva is looking for a close-knit community and has heard that Memphis, the hometown of her late husband, is pleasant. Uninhibited and artistic, she raises suspicion immediately among the Orthodox women in the community. A convert to Judaism, Batsheva observes the holidays and rituals with more joy and abandon than some believe appropriate. When she becomes the art teacher at the Jewish school, the teenage girls finally have a sympathetic ear. Unfortunately, their rebelliousness and the decision of the rabbi's son to leave yeshiva have to be blamed on someone. As the outsider, Batsheva becomes a scapegoat for all the ills in the community. A well-wrought tale of fear and intolerance that is universal.

Miller, Arthur. *Incident at Vichy* In this stunning play, set in a holding room in Vichy, France, in 1942, Arthur Miller introduces nine men who have been picked up on suspicion that they are Jews or Jewish sympathizers. As they are called, one by one, to be interrogated by Nazi officials before being released or put on the thirty-car freight train waiting at the station, they reveal their thinking, their rationalizations for having been picked up, and their belief that this is all a big mistake. A German major involved in the interrogations also begins to question his own role, reminding his colleague, a professor in charge of carrying out Nazi racial policies, that he is a "line officer," not trained for his role.

Mirapol, Robert. *An Execution in the Family* On June 19, 1953, Julius and Ethel Rosenberg were executed after being convicted of passing secrets to the Soviet Union. Their two sons were 6 and 10 years old; their younger son, Robert, is the author of this memoir about life after his parents' death. The book is not about the Rosenberg case, although obviously it must touch on the events surrounding his parents' execution; it is a book about a little boy who didn't really understand why his parents went away, who was adopted into another family (and acquired a new last name), and who grew to manhood knowing he was the son of two very famous, and very hated, people. It's the story of a childhood scarred by accusation and persecution and of a man who somehow managed to build an adult life out of the ruins of his boyhood. The book is both a telling portrait of America in the Communist-obsessed 1950s and an immensely moving story of a boy who lost his parents and can't even remember the sounds of their voices.

Nadler, Steven. *Rembrandt's Jews* There is a popular and romantic myth about Rembrandt and the Jewish people. One of history's greatest artists, we are often told, had a special affinity for Judaism. With so many of Rembrandt's works devoted to stories of the Hebrew Bible, and with his apparent penchant for Jewish themes and the sympathetic portrayal of Jewish faces, it is no wonder that the myth has endured for centuries. *Rembrandt's Jews* puts this myth to the test as it examines both the legend and the reality of Rembrandt's relationship to Jews and Judaism.

Nattel, Lillian. *River Midnight* Myth meets history in Blaszk, a fictional village in Poland and the site of this beautiful, multi-layered novel set in 1894. Listen. You can hear the excitement in the village square, the flimsy stalls piled high with wares, and in the centre Misha the midwife laughing. The wayward heart of Blaszk, she holds safe all the local secrets, including the stories of the four vilda hayas, "the wild creatures," as she and her girlfriends were known. Although the women have grown apart, unexpected love, a daughter imprisoned, and two orphan children sent home from America, entwine their lives again - all as Europe moves headlong towards chaos. In this magnificent novel of magic and mystery, Lillian Nattel has resurrected a vanished world that explores the tensions between men and women, and celebrates the wordless bonds of friendship in a way that is simply unparalleled.

Nemirovsky, Irene. *Suite Francaise*

Oz, Amos. *A Perfect Peace*

Oz, Amos. *The Panther in the Basement* Mr. Oz's reminiscent novel describes the doings of a twelve-year-old boy in the last year of British control in Israel. Young Proffy has organized a pro-Israel underground cell that proposes to blow up Buckingham Palace or perhaps 10 Downing Street. These heroic dreams are no danger to anybody, but Proffy's friendship with a kindly British soldier causes his two fellow panthers to accuse him of treason. Around this juvenile imbroglio Mr. Oz creates a vivid picture of life in Jerusalem, with sharply drawn characters doing what Proffy reports without necessarily understanding it. The novel offers an unexpectedly charming and humane memory of a tense, tough time.

Potok, Chaim. *Gates of November* Novelist Potok (*The Chosen*) presents here the history of a family of Soviet Jews centered on the relationship of father and son. Solomon Slepak was an old-guard Bolshevik who never lost his faith in the party and survived the Stalinist purges miraculously and mysteriously (Stalin exterminated almost all old party members). His son, Volodya, grew up believing in the party but, as he married and started raising a family, came to question the Communist system and eventually became a refusenik, a dissident who protested openly against the regime. The author met Volodya and his wife, Masha, in 1985 while on a trip to Moscow. This compelling account, which is also a chronicle of the Soviet dissident movement, highlights the heroism, and sacrifice, of those who stand up to the power of a totalitarian state.

Praeger, Dennis and Telushkin, Joseph. *Why the Jews?* In this seminal study, Dennis Prager and Joseph Telushkin attempt to uncover and understand the roots of anti-semitism -- from the ancient world to the Holocaust to the current crisis in the Middle East. This postmillennial edition of *Why the Jews?* offers new insights and unparalleled perspectives on some of the most recent, pressing developments in the contemporary world. Clear, persuasive, and thought provoking, *Why the Jews?* Is must reading for anyone who seeks to understand the unique role of the Jews in human history.

Richler, Mordecai. *Barney's Version* You have to like a narrator who can ask about libel after being accused "in print, of being a wife-abuser, an intellectual fraud, a purveyor of pap, a drunk with a penchant for violence, and probably a murderer as well" only to have his lawyer answer, "Sounds like [the writer] got things just about right." Richler is in top form with this first-person voice of Barney Panovsky, 67-year-old TV producer at Totally Useless Productions, thrice-married (the third being the one that matters, and she's gone; the second, after being found in bed with Barney's best friend, Boogie, is the catalyst for the putative murder), fretting over liver spots and mental slippage. The book is always hilarious, but the humor is sharpened by the psychological accuracy/honesty and the richness of detail; in short, this is one well-written book. There are even footnotes to help out when Barney gets something wrong. Absolutely for all collections, this is what Barney calls his third wife: "a keeper."

Rosenblatt, Naomi. *After the Apple* In a powerful blend of history, psychology, and storytelling, Naomi Rosenblatt reinterprets the stories of the women of the Old Testament. Through her lens, we view these women with a new understanding, marveling at the very modern dilemmas and problems they confronted. Women everywhere will recognize their own struggles to love, to mother, to succeed in relationships, and to survive their way through a complicated world. Naomi Harris Rosenblatt is an author, speaker, and therapist in private practice specializing in marital relationships. She lives in Washington, D.C.

Roth, Philip. *American Pastoral*

Roth, Philip. *The Plot Against America* In an astonishing feat of empathy and narrative invention, our most ambitious novelist imagines an alternate version of American history. In 1940 Charles A. Lindbergh, heroic aviator and rabid isolationist, is elected President. Shortly thereafter, he negotiates a cordial "understanding" with Adolf Hitler, while the new government embarks on a program of folksy anti-Semitism. For one boy growing up in Newark, Lindbergh's election is the first in a series of ruptures that

threaten to destroy his small, safe corner of America and with it, his mother, his father, and his older brother.

Sayer, Ian; Botting, Douglas. *Nazi Gold*

Schlink, Bernhard. *The Reader* A compact portrayal of a teenaged German boy's love affair with an emotionally remote older woman, and the troubled consequence of his discovery of who she really is and why she simultaneously needed him and rejected him. Seven years after their intimacy, university student Michael Berg accidentally learns that (now) 40ish Hannah Schmitz had concealed from him a past that reaches back to Auschwitz and had burdened her with nightmares from which her young lover was powerless to awaken her. Toward its climax, the novel becomes, fitfully, frustratingly abstract, but on balance this is a gripping psychological study that moves skillfully toward its surprising and moving conclusion. An Oprah book club selection.

Schoenfeld, Gabriel. *The Return of Anti-Semitism*

Schwarz-Bart, Andre. *The Last of the Just* Schwarz-Bart's 1959 novel is a chronicle of Jewish persecution beginning in England in 1105 and ending with the Holocaust. This book was a huge hit when first released, eventually being translated into several languages. It is both a historical document and a compelling piece of fiction.

Shakespeare, William. *The Merchant of Venice* Merchant may be one of Shakespeare's more challenging works for the modern reader. The obvious anti-semitism that underlies much of the plot and language and the forceable conversion of Shylock to Christianity near the end of the play is difficult to reconcile in our own age. Nevertheless Merchant is categorized as a comedy and despite some of its darker elements retains the classic comic devices of disguises, cross-dressing and the denouement of festivity and multiple marriages. What separates this from some of the other comedies is the relatively unsympathetic characters of the major protagonists. As they celebrate their weddings and the fact that all is set right in the world the reader is left to wonder about the fate of the ostensibly evil character of Shylock. While the Merchant Antonio's fortunes are restored, Shylock is left without means. A statement perhaps regarding the practice of usury, but to me Antonio's enterprise and his willingness to commit to a bond with the moneylender when it suits him implies that Shylock has earned a rightful place in the economic world of Venice. It is his insistence on the strict adherence to his bond that ultimately leads to his undoing.

Shalev, Meir. *The Blue Mountain* Passionate, ribald and tender, bursting with dozens of interwoven tales, this lushly nostalgic novel (a bestseller in Israel) records the loves, hates, infidelities, feuds and enterprises that fuel one community over three decades. It also gently laments the eclipse of the pioneer spirit in modern Israel. Orphaned at age two when a bomb thrown by Arab terrorists kills his sleeping parents, Baruch Shenkar is raised by his grandfather, a Russian Jewish immigrant and founding father of a cooperative village in Palestine. Now a mortician reflecting on the many people he has buried, narrator Baruch mulls over questions that still haunt him: Why did rumors circulate that Grandfather Ya'akov Mirkin killed Grandmother Feyge? Whatever became of Uncle Efrayim, who, before he mysteriously vanished, was renowned for carrying an enormous bull named Jean Valjean on his back? Shalev's colorful, feisty characters and vibrant prose animate this indelible depiction of the birth of a nation.

Shalev, Meir. *A Pigeon and a Boy*

Silver, Daniel Jen. *Refuge in Hell*

Singer, Isaac Bashevis. *Gimpel the Fool* Singer's first collection of stories, *Gimpel the Fool*, is a landmark of world literature and attracted international attention when it was first published in 1957. The title story,

beautifully translated by Saul Bellow, follows the exploits of Gimpel, an ingenuous baker, who is universally deceived but declines to retaliate. Other protagonists are not so innocent. Hodel, of "The Gentleman from Cracow," is wed to Ketev Mriri, Chief of the Devils, and Nathan, of "The Unseen," leaves his wife for a demon in the form of a young woman. Enlightened or condemned, all characters inhabit the pre-World War II ghettos of Poland, and take shape in Singer's distinctive prose. Isaac Bashevis Singer (1904-91) was the author of many novels, stories, children's books, and memoirs. He was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1978.

Singer, Isaac Bashevis. *In My Father's Court* In My Father's Court is a retelling of Singer's childhood in Krochmalna Street, Warsaw. As a rabbi's son, Singer was an observer to the multiple worlds that intersected in his father's study at the dawn of the century -- his childhood, the traditional Jewish community, and pre-World War Poland. And while the worlds he knew have long since disappeared, the voices that Singer calls up seem as current as those encountered today. Much of this cross-generational appeal rests on the universality of relationships - father to child, wife to husband, worshipper to God. Nonetheless, it is Singer's skill as a writer that brings those relationships to life.

Sofer, Dalia. *The Septembers of Shiraz*

Solotoroff, Ted & Rapoport, Nessa, eds. *Schocken Book of Contemporary Jewish Fiction* This landmark anthology brings together some of the best stories written in the last thirty years by and about American Jews. Saul Bellow tells a brutal coming-of-age story set in Chicago; Mark Helprin recalls a stint in the Israeli army during the Six-Day War; Grace Paley explores the complex relationship between Jews and Blacks; Philip Roth muses on what life would have been like for Kafka if he had come to America, and maybe dated Roth's aunt. From I.B. Singer's unforgettable depiction of a widower in Miami Beach to Michael Chabon's California-style Jewish wedding and Allegra Goodman's satiric portrayal of a yuppie Orthodox family, a rare view--and one surprising in its diversity--emerges out of the contemporary experience in America.

Stanislawski, Michael. *A Murder in Lemberg: Politics, Religion, and Violence in Modern Jewish History*

Steinberg, Milton. *As a Driven Leaf* This book should be of interest to both Jews and Christians. It follows the life of Elishia Ben Abouya, a brilliant young rabbi who lived in the first century of the common era. Based on accounts reported in the Talmud, this book contains Steinberg's imaginative and sensitive depiction of a time strangely like our own, in which the stresses and strains between the secular world and old and new religion play themselves out. Jews will find many of their rabbinic heroes portrayed -- such as Rabbi Akiba and Rabbi Meir. Christians will be fascinated by the tensions between the Hebrew Christians and the Gentile Christians of the first century. Particularly moving is Steinberg's elaboration of Ben Abouya's reaction to the deaths of Meir's children, a story also based on talmudic writings. This is historical fiction at its best. A classic. Very highly recommended.

Stern, Isaac, with Chaim Potok. *My First 79 Years* The conductor George Szell once told Isaac Stern that if he spent less time doing other things and more time practicing he could be "the greatest violinist in the world." Since those "other things" included saving Carnegie Hall from the wrecker's ball, generously sponsoring young artists like Yo-Yo Ma and Itzhak Perlman, and touring the world as an ambassador of American classical performance, music lovers can only be grateful that Stern settled for being one of the world's great violinists. His appealing memoir reveals a well-rounded man with a gusto for life beyond the concert hall that made his passion for music all the more fulfilling.

Suberman, Stella. *The Jew Store: A Family Memoir* Russian immigrant Aaron Bronson took his wife and children from their enclave of New York Jews to a tiny Tennessee town where he set himself up as a successful storekeeper in the 1920s. The social, economic, and even spiritual experiences of the Bronson

family are recounted by its youngest member, who evidently was a keen listener to family tales as well as an observer of events around her in early childhood. Nearly half of this autobiographical work predates Stella Ruth's birth and even when she appears on the stage, she is no scene-stealer. Her mother had to hide her ethnicity on her jobs in New York, and took years to assimilate to life in Tennessee. Joey and Miriam, the older children, dealt with the blunt questions asked by local children about their Jewishness with aplomb and made good friends. Mr. Bronson had to sell the insular town of Concordia on the idea that a "Jew store," a low-priced dry-goods store, was even needed and, being a "born sal-es-man," he succeeded in selling the idea and the goods as well. Suberman's fine writing and her ability to record tones and scents as well as images make this a lively and engaging story.

Wasserstein, Wendy. *Heidi Chronicles; Uncommon Women and Others; Isn't It Romantic* Wasserstein has made the cultural territory of the American experience since the 1960s her own. She is its most articulate theatrical chronicler. This collection of her recent work, *Uncommon Women and Others, Isn't It Romantic*, and the Pulitzer Prize-winning *The Heidi Chronicles*, traces that experience through three decades of changing styles, mores, life objectives, and intellectual challenges. She examines her characters and their times with great good humor, complexity, depth of feeling, and a firm refusal to accept trite and easy images. She writes the truth about people and their lives without blinking. She teaches us all what it was like to live through a period of great turmoil and confusion. Recommended.

Wex, Michael. *Born to Kvetch: Yiddish Language and Culture in All Its Moods*

Wiesel, Eli. *Night*

Wiesel, Eli. *Rashi*

Wyllie, James. *The Warlord and the Renegade: The Story of Hermann and Albert Goering*

Yalom, Irvin. *When Nietzsche Wept* Freud's mentor, Josef Breuer, attempts to cure Friedrich Nietzsche of suicidal despair in the clinics, cemeteries, and coffeehouses of 19th-century Vienna--in this first novel by the author of the bestselling *Love's Executioner*: an entertaining and highly original tale of an uncompromising friendship between two brilliant men. Distinguished physician, renowned scientist, beloved husband and father, Josef Breuer finds himself at 40 simultaneously at the crest of his professional life and near the bottom of a pit of incomprehensible despair. Cursed with nightmares, insomnia, and obsessive sexual fantasies of his former patient, Anna O. (whom he cured, miraculously if temporarily, through a new technique called "talk therapy"), Breuer welcomes the distraction when the imperious future psychoanalyst Lou Salom demands that he use talk therapy to cure the suicidal depression of her friend, Friedrich Nietzsche.

Yehoshua, A.B. *Journey to the End of the Millenium*

Yehoshua, A.B. *The Lover*

Yehoshua, A.B. *Open Heart* Unlike Yehoshua's previous books, the motives of his central character in his fifth novel, *Open Heart*, appear unrelated to the larger social changes in Israeli society. During an assignment to India, Dr. Benjamin Rubin falls in love with the country's spiritual mystery and the nurturing sexuality of his patient's mother. In looking to the East for enlightenment, he neglects his religious heritage, even as others are reclaiming traditional Jewish culture. As he immerses himself in newfound religion, one is forced to wonder if Rubin is genuinely acknowledging the self's larger place in the cosmos or is simply on an opportunistic venture to mask his own impoverished spirit.

Zimler, Richard. *The Last Kabbalist in Lisbon* Richard Zimler's *The Last Kabbalist of Lisbon* is not a particularly religious novel, but it uses religion to great dramatic effect. Although its story takes place during the 16th-century slaughter of Jews in Portugal, and its main characters are Jewish mystics, Zimler is less interested in describing their spiritual lives than in plotting a fantastic murder mystery. The book purports to be a modern translation of a medieval manuscript telling the story of the murder of a great kabbalist in Lisbon named Abraham. Occasionally, the story invokes a bit of kabbalist wisdom that is every bit as luminous as the ancient texts that inspired this novel: "Books are created from holy letters," one character says. "Just as angels are, according to some. Viewed from this perspective--through a window of Kabbalah, if you like--an angel is nothing but a book given heavenly form." Such moments are too rare for the book to be very perceptive about the tradition to which its title alludes, but nevertheless, it's an absorbing and genuinely suspenseful story.

Zachter, Mort. *Dough: A Memoir*

Zusak, Markus. *The Book Thief*