



BookMarks

Women's League for Conservative Judaism

From International Books Chair Illene Schaeffer Rubin

We keep getting better! Each new issue of BookMarks seems to assume its own personality. And each one (if we say so ourselves) seems to surpass the previous issue, thanks to your positive feedback and encouragement.

Here are the highlights of what you will find in this issue:

- Interviews with our featured authors (three JTS faculty members) and an overview by Lisa Kogen. These books are a must for every Jewish home library.
- Favorite selections from our region presidents. What can you learn about a person from the books on her nightstand (or on their Kindle/Nook)?

● Suggested reading list by some of your favorite authors as well as by some first-timers. Wendy Zuckerberg, Books Chair from Garden State Region, and I had a great time at the Book Expo America seeking the greatest and latest for our avid readers.

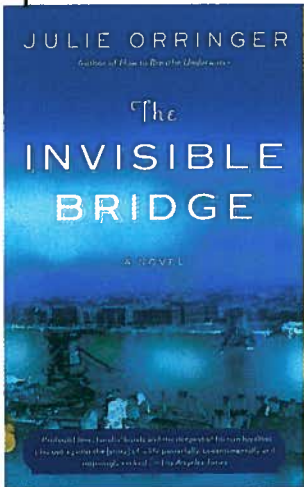
The Orpah selections for Jewish Book Month (November 21 – December 21) are below, and no, that's not a spelling error. Do you know who Orpah is in the Bible?

We have truly diversified our selections. There is something for every book club – history, education, literature, thrillers, chick-lit – all with Jewish themes.

May this new year bring you health, happiness and great reading!

Illene Schaeffer Rubin
Mid-Atlantic Region

Coming Soon: Orpah's List Selection



Extensive original study guides for both books will be available at www.wlcj.org: Orpah's List soon.

Fiction

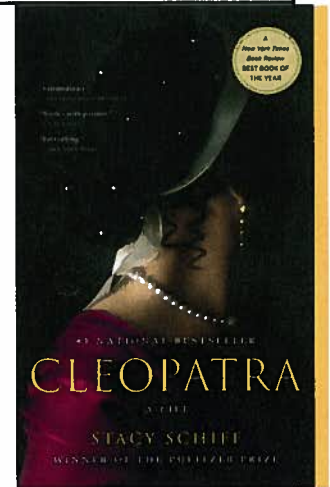
The Invisible Bridge, by Julie Orringer: On the eve of World War II, a Hungarian student studying in Paris falls in love with a slightly older Hungarian

ex-patriot whose past is shrouded in secrecy. As they are caught up in the maelstrom, they are forced to return to their homeland as the war comes crashing down on Hungarian Jews.

New Non-Fiction

Cleopatra: A Life, by Stacy Schiff: Before there were the Sopranos and the Borgias, there were the Ptolemies. Out of this inbred family of incompetents, psychopaths and murderers emerged a ruthless female monarch who was both politically intuitive and savvy.

Cleopatra, Queen of the Nile, lone female ruler in a world ruled by men... her real story is far more compelling than the Hollywood version. Selected by many publications as one of the outstanding works of non-fiction for 2010.



AUTHORS CORNER

Carol Ingall, ed. *The Women Who Reconstructed American Jewish Education, 1910-1965*. Brandeis University Press, 2010

Shira Kohn, Hasia Diner and Rachel Kranson, eds. *The Jewish Feminine Mystique?* Rutgers University Press, 2010 (Finalist, National Jewish Book Award, 2010)

Edna Nahshon, *Jews and Shoes*, Berg, 2008

An embarrassment of riches. How else to characterize this group of female authors, all on the faculty of the Jewish Theological Seminary? It is all the more remarkable because a quarter century ago it would have been unfathomable. But the meteoric rise of women in the academy has opened wide the doors of inquiry. Through their perspectives of gender and culture, they have helped create a more complete and textured understanding of the Jewish past.

In their recent works, these three authors have made contributions to the field of Jewish studies that are novel and engaging.

The Women Who Reconstructed American Jewish Education and *The Jewish Feminine Mystique?* provide counter-narratives to prevailing historical assumptions. Carol Ingall, a professor of Jewish education in the Davidson School, recasts the history of Jewish education in the United States as more than just the legacy of Samson Benderly (credited with shaping its institutions in the early 20th century that continue through this day) and Rabbi Mordecai Kaplan and their male disciples. The essays in this anthology focus rather on the impressive battalion of “unsung heroines” who imparted a love of Hebrew language, culture and Zionism to Jewish children (and women) through cultural arts programs and children’s literature, in Talmud Torahs, synagogue schools and Jewish youth groups and camps.

Ingall’s introduction offers a comprehensive overview of the history of American Jewish education from the mid-1700s through the 1960s. But she concentrates her primary focus on the fascinating and inspirational essays that

follow, highlighting the many accomplishments of her unsung heroines. Temima Gezari was a pioneer in Jewish art education. Rebecca Aronson Brickner (who started out as Samson Benderly’s secretary and eventually married “Benderly boy” Barnett Brickner) was an ardent Zionist and Hebraist, devoted to educating teachers and students. Sadie Rose Weilerstein’s numerous adventures of *K’tonton* provided Americanized Jewish kids with books that fused religious tradition with modern concepts of childhood and playfulness.

The Jewish Feminine Mystique?, co-edited by Shira Kohn (doctoral candidate at NYU and assistant dean of the JTS Graduate School), Hasia Diner and Rachel Kranson, is a response to Betty Friedan’s seminal 1963 work, *The Feminine Mystique*. Friedan portrayed American middle-class suburban women as empty vessels of materialism and intellectual ennui. Her call to action helped ignite second wave feminism, but Kohn, Diner and Kranson contend that Friedan’s characterization was simplistic and far from accurate. In fact, by mid-century American Jewish women were disproportionately represented in the work force, and had already transcended household domesticity through their involvement in cultural and religious institutions, political networks, and higher education.

Yes, there certainly were the “Sheila’s” of *Marjorie Morningstar*-fame, with their conflicting aspirations of bohemianism and gentility. But also in the mix were women like hotel entrepreneur Jennie Grossinger, bawdy comics Belle Barth, Pearl Williams and Patsy Abbot, and Judith Kaplan Eisenstein (daughter of Mordecai Kaplan) who lobbed the initial salvo in the campaign for women’s equality in Jewish ritual life. While acknowledging the social and historical importance of Friedan’s work, the authors provide a more complete picture of mid-20th-century Jewish women.

Jews and Shoes, by Edna Nahshon (professor of Hebrew), is not about Ferragamo pumps or

Jimmy Choo stilettos. Instead, it is an unusually diverse collection of essays about how Jews, their footwear and their history intersect with culture, theology and politics. Shoes – or the removal thereof – could reflect piety (Moses before the burning bush) or exile and wandering. In legal proceedings, shoes could indicate the transfer or disposal of property as in the *chalitzah* ceremony in which the removal of a shoe releases a woman from an imposed marriage. Shoemakers, their wisdom and their *tsuris*, figure prominently in Yiddish folktales. Even political ideology was reflected in foot ware: Zionist sandals were deliberately anti-bourgeois and unisex, an expression of the nationalist agenda. And finally, one of the most haunting images of the Holocaust is a room filled with thousands of shoes – men’s, women’s and children’s.

While modern women discuss, often at great length, the pros and cons of comfort over style, buying retail or waiting for the end-of-season sale, whether expensive shoes are an indulgence or a pragmatic choice, most of us don’t give much thought to shoes as a symbol of piety or ideology. Thanks to Nahshon’s unique perspective, we now can engage in some serious “sole”-searching.

We thank Carol Ingall, Shira Kohn and Edna Nahshon. As members of Women’s League, we are immensely proud of these scholars on the faculty of one of the premier institution of Jewish higher learning in the United States. You will see that their stories, and how they view the writing process and their own tastes in books are as interesting as the stories they tell about others.

Interview with Carol Ingall

Please give us a brief description of your book.

The conventional history of Jewish education in the United States focuses on the contributions of Samson Benderly and his male disciples. This volume tells a different story, the story of the often unheralded women who either influenced or were influenced by Benderly or his closest friend, Mordecai Kaplan. In ten profiles, the contributors illuminate the impact of the women who introduced American Jews to Hebraism and Zionism and laid the foundation for contemporary experiential Jewish education. Taken together, they highlight the important and hitherto unexamined contributions of women to the development of American Jewish education. It is the first volume to examine the integration of American progressive education with Hebrew culture and Jewish nationalism, which they crafted.

What attracted you to this subject?

A brief conversation led to a four-year project. A woman I knew asked if I had heard of her mother who had taught at JTS for more than 40 years. I was a graduate of the Seminary College and a faculty member and not only did I

not recognize her name, but I couldn’t find any mention of her in the histories of JTS. This introduction to Anna Grossman Sherman led to my filling in the holes in the history of JTS and then to inviting colleagues whose research interests coincided with mine. Along the way, I stumbled upon my premise, that it was largely the influence of Mordecai Kaplan, and less so Samson Benderly, that shaped the course of American Jewish education from 1910-65. Not only did American Jews learn to be Zionists because of the women who taught them, wrote the books they read or were read to them, who established their camps and fused Jewish education with music and art, but they also learned to be American Jews from them as well.

What is your favorite part of the writing process?

During the research phase I love the “aha!” moments when I discover something surprising in the archives. During the writing phase, I love it when I’m really cooking. I experience what psychologist Csikszentmihalyi calls a “flow experience,” when I completely lose awareness of time and space.

As an academic, the issue of audience is always a challenge. With that in mind, who do you think is your audience? Do you think that the book can be read more popularly. Have you found a process of modifying your interests and style for a more diverse audience?

I wrote this book for an academic audience; I hoped to provide opportunities for my younger colleagues to feed the maw of the tenure machine. I expected the audience to be my colleagues who do research in Jewish education, American Jewish studies, Jewish history, and women's or gender studies. I hoped that heads of schools and central agencies would read it as well. I think it's an easy read even though it's an academic book. I've heard from lay leaders who really enjoyed it. Most Jews have had some experience with Jewish education; the subject isn't arcane. I see accessibility as a virtue and assume an intelligent reader, even though my books have been published by academic presses.

Your book highlights the accomplishments of many women. Do you have a favorite or two?

This is like choosing which child do you like best. I love the chapter I wrote on Sylvia Ettenberg. She was a real collaborator in the

process; she had some great stories to tell and others had great stories to tell about her. I like the chapter on Jessie Sampter, by Rebecca Boim Wolf, very much because I learned so much from it. Like most people, I knew about Henrietta Szold; I had never heard of Sampter. Through her efforts to add an educational component to Hadassah's work, she hoped to save American Jews, not only European Jews.

Who do you enjoy reading? Genre? What's on your nightstand right now?

I love mysteries. Donna Leon's books set in Venice get it right: great sense of place, character development, and twisted plots. On my night table is my Kindle, where I'm rereading *David Copperfield* and loving it.

Are you available for programs or book clubs? Can you be reached via email?

Yes, yes, and yes: caingall@jtsa.edu

Future publications?

I just completed a review of the *International Handbook of Jewish Education for the Journal of Jewish Education*.

Interview with Shira Kohn

What attracted you to this subject?

The idea of exploring Jewish women's lives in postwar America came to me and my colleague, Rachel Kranson, when we were sitting in Professor Hasia Diner's postwar Jewry class at New York University. We are both doctoral students and we realized halfway into the course that none of the materials on the reading list incorporated gender. We asked Hasia about this disturbing omission and she told us that nothing existed on the topic and that we should explore it.

What is your favorite part of the writing process?

Creating the opening paragraph – it's the most terrifying and satisfying part of the whole process. How can I grab a reader's attention? How do I frame my entire project in just a few sentences? If the first paragraph fails to excite, so

will the rest of the piece.

As an academic, the issue of audience is always a challenge. With that in mind, who do you think is your audience? Do you think that the book can be read more popularly. Have you found a process of modifying your interests and style for a more diverse audience?

I am particularly proud that the book is accessible (and hopefully interesting) to a wide variety of readers, whether they are scholars in Jewish or women's studies or are reading for pleasure and personal enrichment. We solicited articles that were intellectually satisfying but free of the academic jargon that often dissuades readers from getting past the first few pages. (We're back to the importance of the first paragraph again.)

I hope that women who came of age during

the postwar decades read the articles and find them reflective of their own experiences. For readers without an immediate connection to that era, the book illuminates a fascinating chapter in Jewish women's history and gives a greater appreciation for the obstacles that postwar American Jewish women faced and their accomplishments.

Your book highlights the accomplishments of many women. Do you have a favorite or two?

I most definitely do! The two pieces on Jewish immigrants – Rebecca Kobrin's on physicians who were Holocaust survivors and Audrey Nasar's on Egyptian women – are among the first to pay serious attention to these important populations. Many Jews immigrated to America during the postwar decades but their stories are eclipsed by the earlier period of mass migration (1880s-1920s). Also, I enjoy Barbara Sicherman's article on readers' responses to *Marjorie Morningstar*. What an impact this iconic character has had on generations of both Jewish and non-Jewish women!

Who do you enjoy reading? Genre? What's on your nightstand right now?

This probably comes as no surprise, but I love historical fiction and non-fiction. I recently finished Julie Olinger's *The Invisible Bridge* and thought it was a beautifully written and rich tale of love and loss. She's quite a storyteller. Next up is *Sacred Trash: The Lost and Found World of the Cairo Genizah*, by Adina Hoffman and Peter Cole. People say it's a fascinating read and a real page-turner. And possibly a reread of the Harry Potter series. It's good to have some diversity in reading materials!

Are you available for programs and book clubs? Can you be reached via email?

I am available and would be delighted to share the book with your community. Please email me at ShKohn@jtsa.edu.

Future publications?

First I need to finish my dissertation, which is on Jewish sororities during the postwar decades. My plan is to turn that into a book, but it will be a few years before it appears in any stores.

Interview with Edna Nahshon

Please give us a brief description of your book.

Jews and Shoes focuses on various aspects of the making and meanings of shoes and shoelessness in Jewish culture. Shoes convey theological, social, and economic concepts, and as such are intriguing subjects within a wide range of cultural, artistic, and historical contexts. The book's approach encompasses a wide range of disciplines as diverse as Bible and Talmud, history, visual culture, anthropology, performance studies, and fashion.

What attracted you to this subject?

I was in Montreal for a conference and had 40 minutes to kill. The Bata Shoe Museum was across the street, so I decided to pay a quick visit. Since my "Jewish lens" is always on, the many shoes that surrounded me made me think

of the use of shoes in Holocaust memorials, of the *chalitza* shoe, and of the Israeli sandals of my youth. The rest just followed.

What is your favorite part of the writing process?

I enjoy the entire process. I love to do the research, which always feels like an adventure, but I also like the next stage when I struggle with the material I've assembled and derive meaning from it. The act of putting your findings and thoughts into words transforms what has been a half-baked mass into a clear and hopefully aesthetically pleasing product. It's not a painless process, but when you've got it right, it is quite pleasing.

As an academic, the issue of audience is always a challenge. With that in mind, who do you think is your

audience? Do you think that the book can be read more popularly. Have you found a process of modifying your interests and style for a more diverse audience?

I am writing for an intelligent reader with a certain assumed cultural knowledge who is not necessarily a specialist in the field. Obviously, when you write for English readers there are certain things you do not need to explain. Ditto for Hebrew readers.

Who do you enjoy reading? Genre? What's on your nightstand right now?

I read everything. For sheer fun I like good mysteries.

Are you available for programs and book clubs? Can you be reached via email?

Yes. ednahshon@jtsa.edu or ednahshon@gmail.com

Future publications?

I've just completed *Jews and Theatre in an Intercultural Context* (Brill Publishers), a collection of essays by 18 contributors. My rather long essay is entitled "Breaking Taboos: Jews and Passion Plays in America, 1879-1929." I expect it to come out in about six months.

I am currently working (with Prof. Michael Shapiro) on a book tentatively titled *Countering Shylock: Jewish Responses to the Merchant of Venice*.

SUGGESTED FICTION READING LIST

(Websites provide discussion guides)

Adler, H. G. *Panorama*. Random House, 2011. (This novel is based on the author's life – a Czech writer and Holocaust survivor. It is the first English-language translation of the work, written in 1948.)

Amend, Allison. *Stations West*. Louisiana State University Press, 2010. (A pioneer family hacks its way through the frontier states, beginning with the 1880 marriage of Jewish-Cherokee dishwasher Moshe Hauowitz to pregnant Irish prostitute Alice O'Malley.) www.thingsthatpassforlove.com/novel

Bezmozgis, David. *The Free World*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2011. (The Krasnansky family emigrates from Latvia to Italy in 1978 and eventually to the West.) www.bezmozgis.com

Bourne, Sam, *The Final Reckoning*. Harper Collins, 2010. (Set in post 9/11 New York, a group of Holocaust survivors bands together to avenge the Nazis.)

Carner, Talia. *Jerusalem Maiden*. Harper, 2011. (In early 20th-century Ottoman controlled Jerusalem, a young Orthodox woman confronts the conflicts between personal expression and religious constraints.) www.taliacarner.com

Corwin, Miles. *Kind of Blue*. Oceanview Publishers, 2010. (Former L.A. Times crime reporter Corwin's first novel introduces Ash Levine, an IDF veteran, son of Holocaust survivors and the LAPD's top detective, who is coaxed back from retirement.) www.milescorwin.com

Dershowitz, Alan M. *Trials of Zion*. Grand Central Publishing, 2010. (Emma Ringel, daughter of a prominent defense attorney and recent Yale Law School graduate, gives up a prestigious clerkship to go to Israel to defend an Arab terrorist bomber.) www.alandershowitz.com

Dezenhall, Eric. *The Devil Himself*. Thomas Dunne Books, 2011. (Fictional account of the mob and the navy joining together to undermine Hitler's U-boat terrorism, told through the eyes of Meyer Lansky.) www.dezenhall.com/eric

Feldman, Ellen. *Next to Love*. Spiegel & Grau, 2011. (Three childhood friends whose husbands are called to fight in WWII.) www.ellenfeldman.com

Fletcher, Martin. *The List*. Thomas Dunne Books, 2011. (Edith and George, Austrian refugees,

- are expecting their first baby in post-WWII London, still rife with anti-Semitism.)
- Gitlitz, David M. *The Lost Minyan*. University of New Mexico Press, 2010. (Ten fictionalized stories of Conversos, Jews forced to convert to Catholicism, during the 15th-17th centuries.)
- Goldstein, Brigitte. *Dina's Lost Tribe*. iUniverse.com. (Two historians journey to France to find a mysterious village with ties to the French expulsion of its Jews in 1306.) www.brigittegoldstein.com
- Hoffman, Alice. *The Dovekeepers*. Scribner, Publication date Oct. 2011. (The lives of four complex and fiercely independent women intersect in the desperate days of the siege of Masada in 73 BCE.)
- Hoffman, Wayne. *Sweet Like Sugar*. Kensington, 2011. (A young gay man and an older Orthodox rabbi, who believes the Torah forbids homosexuality; overcome their differences and become friends.) www.waynehoffmanwriter.com
- Jacobson, Howard. *The Mighty Walzer*. Bloomsbury USA, 2011. (Humorous yet bittersweet coming of age story set in 1950s Manchester, by the author of *The Finkler Question*.) www.bloomsbury.com/Howard-Jacobson
- Jiji, Jessica. *Sweet Dates in Basra*. Avon, 2010. (Set in World War II Iraq, this evocative novel chronicles friendship between Muslim and Jewish neighbors during growing political and social conflict, and a tragic forbidden love.)
- Kalman, Nadia. *The Cosmopolitans*. Livingston Press, 2010 (The Molochnik family are striving Russian immigrants living in an alien American suburban community.)
- Lessner, Joanne. *Pandora's Bottle*. Flint Mine Press, 2010. (The uncorking of a fabled bottle of wine once owned by Thomas Jefferson opens a provocative glimpse into the world of fine wine, from New York City to the historic vineyards of the Hudson Valley.)
- Malcolm, M. L. *Heart of Deception*. Harper Paperbacks, 2011. (Leo Hoffman, a spy for the Allies during WWII, searches for his daughter in the United States in this sequel to *Heart of Lies*.) www.mlmalcolm.com
- Pearlman, Edith. *Binocular Vision*. Lookout Books, 2011. (Short stories set all over the world detail a variety of story lines, including a forbidden love affair, a final visit with a dying college roommate, and caring for a comatose child.) www.edithpearlman.com
- Roth, Joseph. *Job*. Archipelago, 2010. (20th century version of the biblical parable of loss and restoration.)
- Schmahmann, David. *Ivory From Paradise*. Academy Chicago, 2011. (A family returns to its native Durban, South Africa, to arrange a Jewish memorial service for their mother, an anti-apartheid activist.) www.davidschmahmann.com
- Sem-Sandburg, Steve. *Emperor of Lies*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2011. (Mordechai Chaim Rumkowski, a Jewish businessman, is placed in charge of the Jewish ghetto in Lodz by the Nazis.)
- Shalev, Zeruya. *Thera*. The Toby Press, 2010. (By the popular Israeli author, a 36-year-old mother and archeologist faces life after her divorce.)
- Silva, Daniel. *Portrait of a Spy*. Harper, 2011. (He tried to get out and they pulled him back in. Gabriel Allon in another Mossad spy fest.) www.danielsilvabooks.com
- Switsky, Rachel and Sean Wallace, ed. *People of the Book: A Decade of Jewish Science Fiction & Fantasy*. Prime Books, 2010. (A Jewish science fiction anthology that includes Neil Gaiman, Michael Chabon and Jane Yolen.)
- Winer, Andrew. *The Marriage Artist*. Henry Holt and Co., 2010. (Set in New York City, an art critic's wife and his favorite artist die under strange circumstances.) www.andrewwiner.com

FAVORITE BOOKS OF THE REGION PRESIDENTS

BQLI: Molly Chernofsky *The Ladies Auxiliary* by Tova Mervis: I love the main character, a Jew-by-choice who teaches her new community how to be “better” Jews.

CENTRAL GREAT LAKES: Rhonda Cohn *Eat, Drink & Succeed* by Laura Schwartz: Pretty self explanatory. [Wine not included.]

FLORIDA: Amy Hymes The book I found the most inspirational was *The Everyday Torah* by Rabbi Bradley Artson. I enjoy his take on each week’s portion and can almost always find something interesting to take away from it.

GARDEN STATE: Janet Geldzahler In recent years I have been drawn into the novels of love and Talmud in medieval France by Maggie Anton in her *Rashi’s Daughters* series. I usually read books with some Jewish content, and she did bring me completely into the minds of the women she described, the times in which they lived, and their plight as women.

METRONORTH: Susan Orlando I really enjoyed *Those Who Save Us*, by Jenna Blum, because it had a bit of a different spin on a Holocaust story. I had to consider, what if... [This was the Orpah selection for 2006 – Ed.]

MID-ATLANTIC: Donna Finkelstein *Sarah’s Key* by Tatiana De Rosnay made an impressive impact on me. It opened my eyes to France’s role in World War II and the significance of the Vel d’Hiv round-up. My sisterhood selected this for our book club and everyone agreed it was thought-provoking and an excellent choice for meaningful discussion.


The Women’s League Hiddur Mitzvah Project, available in the next few weeks, includes a comprehensive resource list of books that focus on holiday and Shabbat celebrations. Included are books about Jewish holidays, holiday cooking and crafts.

NORTH ATLANTIC: Karen Block One of my favorite authors is Barbara Kingsolver: *Animal Dreams* and *The Poisonwood Bible* are two that I highly recommend.

NORTH BY NORTHWEST: Anne Nicolson I recommend Ariana Franklin’s *The Mistress of the Art of Death*, a gory historical fiction murder mystery set in England during the reign of Henry II, and making reference to the blood libel connected with Hugh of Lincoln. Not an easy read (people have commented that the vocabulary is difficult or obscure but I didn’t find it so), but fascinating and well worth the effort (and the length).
Seaboard

PACIFIC SOUTHWEST: Renee Ravich As for my favorite book, *The Joy Luck Club* comes to mind. I like historical fiction and Chinese culture.

SOUTHERN: Anne Greenbaum Twenty-five years ago I read *Life and Death in Shanghai*, an autobiography by Nien Cheng. I’m surprised by how very often I still think about this remarkable woman and her story.



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WOMEN’S LEAGUE FOR
CONSERVATIVE JUDAISM

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