

TOOLBOX FOR TEACHERS AND MENTORS: MOVING MADRICHIM TO MENTOR TEACHERS AND BEYOND

Richard D. Solomon and Elaine C. Solomon
Wheatmark, 2009. 338 pp. \$33.95
ISBN: 978-1604942682

Teaching is often seen as an easy job; just walk into any classroom and start teaching the children, who are eager to learn. If only it were so simple! Unfortunately, throughout North America and especially in the Jewish community, there are many who think these statements are true.

This is why *Toolbox for Teachers and Mentors* is such an important book for educational leaders in the Jewish community. Beginning with the assumption that becoming a successful teacher is the result of years of training under the close supervision of mentors and guides, the Solomons outline a series of strategies for recruiting and developing teachers from novice high school *madrichim* to master teachers ready to mentor the next generation.

By incorporating the best thinking from the fields of education and psychology, this book lays out an in-depth approach for preparing our brightest young people to be outstanding teachers in the future. PAF

FICTION



36 ARGUMENTS FOR THE EXISTENCE OF GOD: A WORK OF FICTION

Rebecca Newberger Goldstein
Pantheon Books, 2010. 416 pp. \$27.95
ISBN: 978-0307378187

When Rebecca Goldstein won a MacArthur “Genius” Award in 1996, the foundation wrote, “In her (Goldstein’s) fiction her characters confront problems of faith: religious faith and faith in an ability to comprehend the mysteries of the physical

world.” The MacArthur Foundation went on to say that “Goldstein’s writings emerge as brilliant arguments for the belief that fiction in our time may be the best vehicle for involving readers in questions of morality and existence.”

While those geniuses at MacArthur couldn’t have anticipated that Google would replace fiction as readers’ preferred vehicle to address questions of morality and existence, their praise for Goldstein and her work was as clairvoyant as it was accurate. Her characters absolutely deal with religious faith, faith in self, faith in love, and faith in no less than humankind.

In her latest novel, *36 Arguments for the Existence of God*, psychology professor Cass Seltzer has just been launched from academic obscurity to fame with a new book, “The Varieties of Religious Illusion.” Seltzer, who teaches at a small liberal-arts college in Boston, is less jarred by fame—being a guest on Jon Stewart’s “*The Daily Show*” or speaking to a sold-out crowd at the 92nd St Y—than with understanding game theory, which is the academic specialty of his girlfriend and fellow psych professor at Frankfurter University.

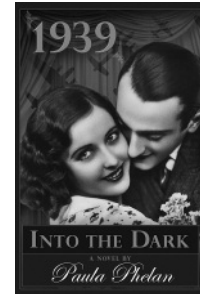
Another asset...is the author’s strong knowledge of philosophy and religion...

When we meet the protagonist, he is deliberating over a job offer from Harvard and thinking of how to tell his competitive yet sensitive girlfriend, Lucinda Mandelbaum, about the offer. She is away lecturing. Without warning, Seltzer’s past begins to catch up with him as eccentric characters enter the story to escort him down memory lane. Through encounters with a zesty anthropologist ex-girlfriend now on a quest for immortality and middle of the night email exchanges with an old colleague, Seltzer’s major influencers are revealed to the reader; the list involves Seltzer’s mom, a Hasidic rabbi, a zany philosopher, and a prodigious six-year-old.

One of the strongest features of the book is the 50 page appendix in the back, which outlines each of the 36 arguments for the existence of G-d. These arguments are quite rational and very well thought out. Another asset of the novel is the author’s strong knowledge of philosophy and religion, both of which she breaks down for readers into understandable terms.

The last novel that forced me to think about abstract concepts and forage through a dense appendix, all the while laughing with the characters, was David Foster Wallace’s

Infinite Jest. While this book can be difficult to get through at times, with its hefty and complicated content, like *Infinite Jest* it is an immensely rewarding read. MT



1939: INTO THE DARK

Paula Phelan
ZAPmedia, 2009. 242 pp. \$14.95
ISBN: 978-0-9778192-1-8

This book is a fascinating fictional account of the cultural and political events of the year 1939, told in 12 chapters, month by month. The rise of Hitler is followed closely in reports by a fictional war correspondent while entertainment news is tracked by another reporter. We learn about the public and behind-the-scenes details of the 1939 World’s Fair. The story progresses through the lives of a cast of characters in New York and Hollywood, including a director, actors, musicians, dancers, poets, an architect, and a patron of the arts who is also an arms merchant. Everyone is affected by the impending war, but some ignore it while others wish to take action. The family of one character is unable to get out of Europe and there is a pall of doom over the future. An innovative novel for teens and adults. MBA



ANGEL TIME: A NOVEL

Anne Rice
Knopf, 2009. 288 pp. \$25.95
ISBN: 978-1-4000-4353-8

Only a masterful storyteller could pull off this engaging metaphysical adventure novel, and Rice is certainly among the most prolific and skillful writers of our time.