

Reviews of Titles for Adults

EDITED BY MERRILY F. HART AND DANIEL SCHEIDE

FICTION & POETRY

Borman, Leonard. *Our Jewish Robot Future: A Novel About The Garden Of Eden And The Cyborgian Transformation Of The Human Race.* Minneapolis, MN: Scarletta Press, 2010. 280 p. \$14.95 (ISBN 978-0-98244-581-9).

Do you remember the Terminator movies? An evil cyborg from the future comes back in time with the mission to kill the woman who would become the mother of the leader of the human resistance movement. In a twist on that theme, Borman creates a Jewish robot of the future who travels back in time to tell Alex and Margarita Haralson that they must convince their adult children to start reproducing in order for their many-times-great-grandchildren to ultimately develop the robots that would travel into space and preserve Judaism.

Some centuries into the future, the Haralsons' descendants, appalled at the state of humanity and the state of the planet, transfer their personalities into robots and blast off into space. The robots settle on a planet with a Garden of Eden complete with a serpent, Adam and Eve, and early humanoid inhabitants. A spiritual crisis afflicts the robots so they decide to return to Earth to kidnap Alex and bring him to the planet to confront the serpent, discover the unwritten 11th commandment, and determine the exact nature of the forbidden fruit. After Alex returns to earth, he affects the people around him by enhancing some of their senses, including his wife's sense of smell and the rabbi's hearing. Numerous complications, many quite humorous, arise from this.

I'm not sure how the space-time continuum can survive all the convoluted plots twists, but the Haralsons are feisty, likeable characters. The style is light and conversational and the work contains some sexually explicit passages. Recommended for large (adult) fiction collections only.

Sheryl Stahl, Hebrew Union College-JIR, Los Angeles, CA

Frank, Thaisa. *Heidegger's Glasses: A Novel.* Beverly Hills, CA: Phoenix Books, 2010. 335 p. \$22.95 (ISBN 978-1-60747-726-6). Reviewed from ARC.

The setting for this historical novel is the Holocaust but in place of facts there is sheer fantasy. The author has hijacked familiar names, places, and events for no other purpose than to be provocative. For Jewish readers, the Final Solution is not a subject for entertainment and *Heidegger's Glasses* will give the wrong impression to naïve readers interested in the Holocaust.

The German philosopher Martin Heidegger became a member of the Nazi Party in 1933; he never resigned from the party or denounced it. Despite the title, he and his glasses play a minimal role in the novel. Heidegger's Jewish friend, Asher Englehardt, is pure fiction. The Nazis used many strategies to hide their genocide; one of them was known as *Briefaktion* (Operation Mail). The novel is set in an underground mine converted by the Nazis into the headquarters for multilingual prisoners who are forced to answer letters sent to deceased victims. Scattered throughout

the book are snapshots of short letters, in various languages and in English translation. The plot is complicated by the supernatural, mystical inclinations of the Nazi hierarchy and connections with the Thule Society. In the uncorrected proof, some of the "letters" are written in Hebrew characters that read from left to right, and the English translation does not always correspond to the Hebrew text. *Heidegger's Glasses* trivializes the Holocaust and is not recommended.

Nira Glily Wolfe, Highland Park, IL

Grossman, David. *To the End of the Land.* Translated by Jessica Cohen. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2010. 583 p. \$27.95 (ISBN 978-0-30759-297-2).

Award-winning Israeli author David Grossman has written an epic novel that makes a powerful statement about war. Ora, a woman eagerly awaiting the return of her son, Ofer, from military service, is devastated when he decides to re-enlist. Worried that he will not return, she decides to take a hike along the Israel trail in the Galilee, leaving her cell phone at home so that the "notifiers" cannot bring her bad news. Recently separated from her husband, Ilan, she decides to ask Avram, an old friend and former lover, to accompany her. As they walk, Ora fills Avram in on her life since they last met. She, Avram, and Ilan were in the army together and Avram has never recovered from his experience as a POW in Egypt. Ora tells Avram about her experience as a mother and about Ofer, who is his biological son. This is a big book, at times too big. Ora talks incessantly and it seems strange that Avram puts up with it. Readers will find that it is indeed a long hike, but it is an honest and poignant statement from a great author who lost a son during the 2006 Lebanon War.

*Barbara M. Bibel, Oakland Public Library, Oakland, CA;
Congregation Netivot Shalom, Berkeley, CA*

Houghteling, Sara. *Pictures at an Exhibition.* New York: Vintage Books, 2009. 243 p. \$15.00 (ISBN 978-0-30738-630-4).

This debut novel is the story of an art dealer and his family, living in Paris during the Second World War. The son of the famous and successful owner of the Berenson Gallery searches for his father's priceless art collection, which vanished during the war while the family was in hiding. The author has included several important historical figures in the story and her careful research is evident. This engrossing, well-written novel is recommended for fiction collections in Jewish public libraries, community centers, colleges, and high schools.

Susan Freiband, Puerto Rico

Mahgerfteh, Michal. *In My Bustan: Poems.* Norfolk, VA: Poetica Pub. Co., 2009. 77 p. \$13.00 (ISBN 978-1-61539-247-6).

This is a very personal collection of the poetic memories of a contemporary Israeli woman who now lives in Virginia. She writes with emotion about her childhood in Israel and her beloved Moroccan mother, left behind to die of cancer. She also explores her experience of Jewish mysticism and prayer in a Renewal framework, riffing on Psalms, most successfully in