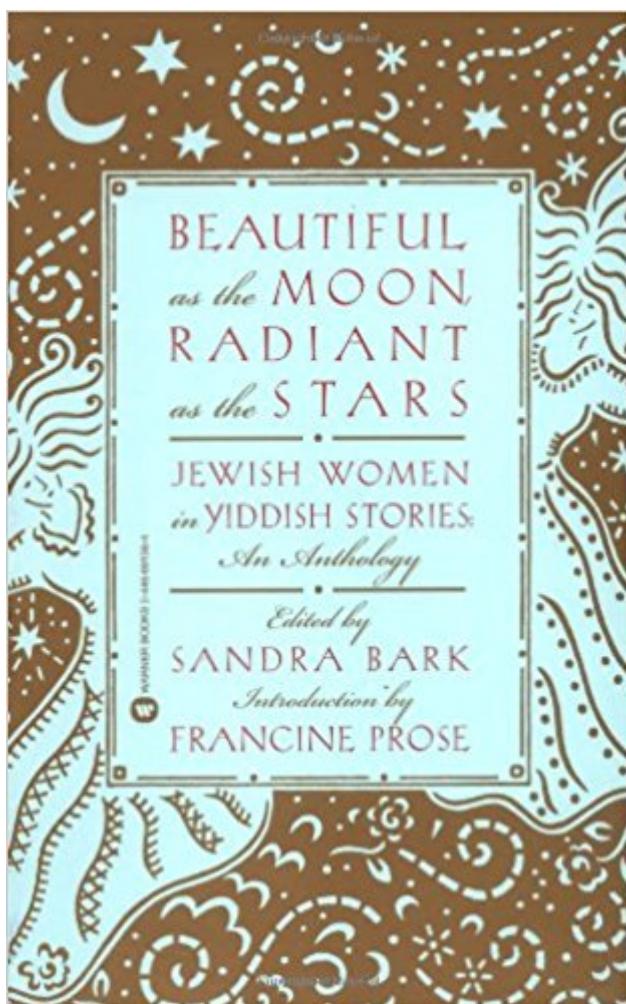


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Beautiful As The Moon, Radiant As The Stars: Jewish Women In Yiddish Stories - An Anthology



Synopsis

- This book is certain to appeal to the millions of Jewish women interested in Jewish literature and the writings of Cynthia Ozick, Francine Prose, and Grace Paley. Beautifully packaged, it is an ideal Mother's Day or Bat-Mitzvah gift.- This volume contains translations of Yiddish stories from eminent scholars--including an Isaac Bashevis Singer story that has never before been published in English--and well-known tales that Jewish readers everywhere love.- As bestsellers such as "Everything is Illuminated by Jonathan Safran Foer (Houghton Mifflin, 4/02) and "For the Relief of Unbearable Urges by Nathan Englander (Knopf, 1999) have demonstrated, there is a strong interest in Jewish stories.- Yiddish culture and music have seen a resurgence in recent years. NPR's "All Things Considered aired a series of highly acclaimed documentaries about the Yiddish Radio Project and Klezmer musicians regularly play at top alternative venues.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Bark's appealing anthology gathers 22 stories chronicling Jewish women's lives in late 19th- and early 20th-century Europe, Russia, the United States and Israel. Though most of the stories were published in the 1920s and '30s, many in Yiddish newspapers and magazines, their themes-love, thwarted ambition, identity, assimilation-still resonate. The heroines, who are of all ages and classes, find themselves struggling for education, autonomy, equality-just as many of their real-life contemporaries did. In a collection emphasizing female experience, some of the best stories are written by men. David Bergelson's newly translated "Spring," for example, is a bittersweet story of

two sisters' desire for the same impassioned artist. Isaac Bashevis Singer makes two memorable appearances, with his enduring "Yentl the Yeshiva Boy" and his gender-bending "Androgynous," which recently appeared for the first time in English in the *New Yorker*. (Bark posits that "Yentl" was inspired by the unrealized educational aspirations of Singer's sister, Esther Singer Kreitman, whose own short story in this collection, sandwiched between two of her brother's, pales somewhat in comparison.) The writers offer intriguing glimpses into a rich and complex world, and together their stories create a moving testament to the intelligence and resilience of turn-of-the-century Jewish women. As Francine Prose writes in her succinct introduction, the book "makes us grateful to these heroines for having had the courage and resolve to help prepare the way for us to insist upon-and even to take for granted-the ordinary, everyday, absolutely essential freedoms that we enjoy today."

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These 23 stories by both male and female writers all center on female Ashkenazi in twentieth-century Europe, Russia, Israel, and the U.S. Three of the writers are well-known: Isaac Bashevis Singer ("Yentl, the Yeshiva Boy" and "Androgynous"), Sholem Aleichem ("Hodel"), and I. L. Peretz ("Bryna's Mendl"); but others are not so well known. (One of the stories, "A Satin Coat," is by Esther Singer Kreitman, the sister of I. B. Singer and I. J. Singer.) The stories concern thwarted lovers, unwilling brides, poor immigrants, and rebellious daughters. The range of themes includes anti-Semitism, assimilation, the obstacles that young women faced if they sought an education, the survival strategies they had to adopt in order to realize their ambitions, and the challenges and difficulties they encountered after establishing independent lives. In her perceptive introduction, Francine Prose points out that many of these stories concern women who must fight just to express an opinion of their own or to exert the slightest influence on the shape of their own destinies.

Translated from Yiddish, these stories are a definite pleasure. George CohenCopyright © American Library Association. All rights reserved

It is not possible in a short space to review all the stories. I have selected my three favorites; all are exquisitely written:Kaddish by Dvora BaronThe word imagery and melancholy tone is superb and sets the stage for Rivele's profound feelings for her grandfather and for happenings that one suspects but would wish otherwise. "Outside- a disheveled, lumbering sky over a congealed, dead earth" was foreboding.Rivele, a small slip of a girl, shows extraordinary courage to enter the study hall. She is mocked by a band of school boys and men block her way to the lectern casting her out. The description of the beseeching, lonesome, thoughtful pious eyes looking down on her from

above the Holy Ark was poignant. I wondered if the writer intended for the reader to think that these eyes were not only those of her grandfather but also the eyes of the Almighty. *Spring* by David Bergelson
Polly Ratner was exactly twice the age of her sister Mura. She was a determined young woman, reclusive because of her demanding studies for her final examinations in the Faculty of Medicine. "Some kind of strange, invisible musical box was tinkling ceaselessly, day and night playing the last heartfelt melody of spring." Mura, at the impressionable age of fourteen, had become beguiled by an artist she had met while she and her school girl friends were viewing an exhibit of his work. Polly decides to intervene in order to find out what sort of man would send a love note to a child, one filled with passionate longing. The wording of the message awakens yearnings in Polly and she follows a predestined meeting with the artist. *Bella Fell In Love* by Celia Dropkin
This is a complex story of a bored young woman leading a drab existence with a secret from her past that guides the narrative. As a child, she was lashed by her father when he lost his temper. The sharpness on her flesh "made her instantly holy, and purged her of her wrongdoings". There is an underlying sexuality in this reinforced by the reference to a fiery love for her father. When she falls in love with Stisson, she is re-enacting this act of pain mixed with pleasure. Her ardor is inflamed with each rejection as she shamelessly pursues him.

All Jewish women older than 25 should read it. A group of women in SS meet to chat on this book every other month just for fun... Two stories at a time.

awesome book with beautiful stories

BEAUTIFUL AS THE MOON, RADIANT AS THE STARS: JEWISH WOMEN IN YIDDISH STORIES: AN ANTHOLOGY is a superb look at what it means to be a Jewish woman especially in a westernized society but also in places like Tsar Russia. Many of the stories were originally written in Yiddish and are transliterated into English so some of the idiomatic meaning may be lost, but the overall intent is captured and the prose smooth. The contributions were published in late 19th- and early 20th-century Europe, Russia, the United States and Israel with most found in 1920s and 1930s Yiddish newspapers and magazines. Each of the short stories is well written and endearing as the topics remain strong today. Subjects like love for family, community and torah, and identity and assimilation remain powerful discussion topics even today. The commonality besides being interesting is that all share (regardless of the authors' age, marital status, or social class) the belief that the Jewish female is key to the religion's survival. This is a superb anthology that though it

provides a deep look into the early twentieth century Jewish life, the stories ring true for any person living in the information technology age.Harriet Klausner

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