

Jewish Children's Literature in France*

Susie Morgenstern

Nice, France

Jews in France Today

Due to the tombstone desecration incidents in the cemetery in Carpentras, headline stories in early 1990 furnished quantities of information on the long history of the Jews in France. Starting from the Roman period, we are told all the usual ups and downs—mostly the downs, with the forced baptisms, expulsions, slaughters, accusations, and disasters that Jewish history everywhere features. The ups are the moments when Jewish learning and literary efforts flourished, as in the 11th century in Troyes, where Rashi was France's—and perhaps Judaism's—greatest commentator on the Bible and Talmud. The newspapers mentioned the emancipation of 1791; the Dreyfus trial in 1894; Leon Blum, the first Jewish prime minister of France; the battleground of the Second World War; and the perpetual battle and tenacity of being Jewish.

The Jewish population, 700,000 strong, makes France's the largest Jewish community in western Europe, maintaining synagogues, schools, and communal services. The North African Jews who came to France in the 1950s and early 1960s, from Morocco, Tunisia, and Algeria, brought fresh life into the devastated Ashkenazic community. The liveliness of Jewish life is seen in forty or so weekly and monthly publications, one weekly national radio broadcast, and a weekly TV show. Hebrew can be taught as a foreign language in state high schools. Ten universities teach Jewish history, literature, and sociology.

Scarcity of Children's Writers

There is less to boast about, I'm afraid, in the domain of Jewish children's literature

in France. There is very little creation, and all I could scrape up in the category of living contemporary Jewish authors in France writing Jewish books for children are four souls: Michèle Kahn, Claude Gutman, Gil Ben Aych, and myself. I have slightly enlarged my category to include some excellent adult writers whose books could be enjoyed by young adults.

The fact that there is so little original creation for children not only applies to Jewish but to the whole sector of children's books in France. France is not a child's world. Childhood is considered a passage to be undertaken as quickly and painfully as possible towards becoming a responsible adult. The French school system so overwhelmingly fills a child's life that there is little time left for leisure and fantasy. Nevertheless, around twenty years ago, some astute publishers started swelling their lists with titles imported from the United States and elsewhere, adding to the Golden Age of such French classics as Jules Verne, the Comtesse de Segur, and Hector Malot. French children's publishing is a buyer's market. The publishers run around frantically at the Children's Book Fairs in Bologna or Frankfurt, buying everything in sight, translating them any old way, and selling them "à gogo." Eighty-five percent of the children's books published are imported, mainly from the U.S., England, Japan, and Germany. The remaining 15% are original French creations that are somewhat below the professional and literary level of the imported stock, yet among which exist a few bright lights. There are excellent illustrators in France, but few writers willing to "stoop" to write for children. Some French publishers are more willing to take risks in publishing unusual, poetic, avant-garde literature than are Americans, who are often more consumer-conscious. There is a definite increase in the number of writers devoting themselves to children, and the tendency to improve the ratio of French creations versus im-

ports is very strong. French publishers who have had it very easy, scooping up tried and tested Anglo-Saxon novels, are discovering the joys of conceiving collections, provoking and encouraging writers, and sending the resulting books out into an accepting and chauvinistic world.

Availability of Translations

Thus, many popular Jewish books are published in France, but are not considered particularly Jewish. Israeli authors, such as Uri Orlev, Amos Oz, and David Shahar, are greatly appreciated. There are no Jewish lists, but the works of Judy Blume, Maurice Sendak, Hila Colman, B.F. Goffstein, Bette Greene, Esther Hautzig, Judith Kerr, Marilyn Sachs, Renée Roth-Hano, and others are on all the shelves. The translations are nearly always abominable (maybe because translators are so poorly paid), with annoying footnotes that hint at the supposed ignorance of the eventual reader. Some of the footnotes I found were on the words *rabbi*, *Yiddish*, *kosher*, *bar mitzvah*, *synagogue*, *seder*, and *antisemitism*, as if the words didn't exist in French. Mistakes are rampant, and nobody seems to check. In the French version of Marilyn Sachs' *A Pocket Full of Seeds*, the father is reported to say *kaddish* at the *seder*. The footnote correctly indicates that the *kaddish* is a Jewish prayer. In all the subsequent reprintings, no one ever corrected this mistaken identity between *kaddish* and *kiddush*. An art book for children about Marc Chagall describes a sumptuous breakfast he had in his childhood in the *shtetl* . . . on Yom Kippur! In a lovely book about the Bible published by the prestigious Gallimard, Hebrew writing is backwards, upside down, lopsided, and misspelled. I protested. They laughed. I receive breathless urgent emergency calls from my own publisher, asking me before even saying hello: "What's a *knish*?"

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I have lobbied for some of my favorite books to be published in France. I brought Aranka Siegal's *Upon the Head of a Goat*, which has been very successful, to the attention of my publisher. After years of knocking at doors for B.F. Goffstein, *Two Piano Tuners* and *Goldie the Dollmaker* came out. I have never been able to do anything for Lore Segal's *Tell Me A Mitzi*, which I love; the publisher's comment: "Ils sont trop typés" ("The people look too Jewish" is what he was diplomatically trying to tell me). I fought for *The Children We Remember*; the publisher's comment: "Why bore kids stiff with this stuff?"

Hostility to Jewish Children's Literature

There is tremendous resistance to being openly, blatantly Jewish in French children's literature. One of my books, *An Old Story*, about old age, tells the story of my own mother-in-law and how she saw her husband deported, her sons hidden by nuns, her life as seen through flashbacks of sad and happy Jewish moments. I never mentioned the word Jew, hoping to illustrate that aspect. But the publishers refused my illustrations, because they thought that all the Jewish images would restrict the audience and prevent non-Jews from enjoying the book. I fought with them for nine years after signing the contract. I finally accepted the illustrations they proposed, after meeting the illustrator secretly in Paris and talking over my conception of the book with him. It happens that he, Serge Bloch, is the son of the kosher butcher of Colmar, and he was able to sneak into the pictures a *hupah* [wedding canopy], the *seder*, and other clandestine references. Nobody ever knew. The book did well, and everybody is happy.

There is much hostility in France to the very idea of Jewish children's literature. I contacted a number of people, seeking information and help in presenting a complete picture in this paper. Many librarians, critics, authors, and publishers gave me their opinions; some never answered. One critic wrote to me, "As far as Jewish children's literature is concerned, I personally find the idea of individualizing Jewish literature within general French children's literature grotesque. And this, despite my own Jewish origins, which I do not repudiate. I don't know of any Jewish children's literature in France. What would be the criterion? The name of the author? Fur-

thermore, considering the status of general children's literature in France, where would the market of a specific literature be?"

Another critic answers my question about Jewish children's literature by saying: "I have no idea, never having classified authors according to religious criteria."

The French publisher of Aranka Siegal, Esther Hautzig, and others tells me: "I don't think I'm an editor of Jewish literature such as is found in the U.S.—Marjorie Sharmat, for example. It seems to me that the memory we're transmitting to teenagers is really that of Nazism, which contains so many questions in itself, but also others, from Vietnam to Algeria and Armenia—always the question of the other."

Some authors, such as Paul Thiès (a pseudonym for Emmanuel Lipschutz)—an excellent children's writer—responded to my letter as if I were a spy for the F.B.I. and swore that he had never been a member of the Communist Party: "Actually, I am Jewish," he said, "but my literature is not."

Another Jewish writer swears to me that he was never circumcised, was brought up a total atheist, never set foot in a synagogue, and now everytime he sees me he acts as if I personally am the Spanish Inquisition.

Napoleon said, "Let the Jews look for their Jerusalem in France." Many followed his advice and became secular Jews.

The Holocaust and Jewish Identity

A glance at the list of Jewish juvenile books published in France will reveal that most of them deal with being Jewish during the Second World War. Many of them are autobiographies, like the moving account of Renée Roth-Hano in *Touch Wood*, or Esther Hautzig's *The Endless Steppe*. I asked Régine Soszewick why she wrote her recently published autobiography *Les étoiles cachées* (The Hidden Stars):

I thought it over for a long time. Could I write serenely about this period of misfortune?—"Make money" out of the distress of my own? And then I wasn't alone; what would my sister think, my children, my dear ones?

They were unanimous. One has to bear witness for all those who were

going to disappear, but especially for those who were still young or yet to be born.

I realized that this experience, lived by two little girls, was exemplary, in the sense of being a unique experience. Each and all suffering endured during the war was. Ours could testify to the daily trials of surviving in France, not getting caught, just surviving.

I also realized that non-Jewish Frenchmen who had lived through the war with other fears and other problems didn't know anything, or didn't know much about the daily humiliations inflicted upon us, which had become commonplace.

Everything written in the book really happened. I didn't invent anything; maybe I watered it down a little and adapted the type of writing to the kind of public.

I have this fight with myself. While I think that every witness of this period should be published and that there can never be enough reminders, I can't help thinking that after Anne Frank, Etty Hillesum, and the perfection and talent of Primo Lévi, why are these Holocaust books monopolizing the market? Why is my generation, born after the war, still thriving on it, instead of speaking for ourselves, out of new springs of being Jewish? One of the most important and astonishing Jewish books of the last year is *Le Juif imaginaire* (The would-be Jew, the make-believe Jew, the imaginary Jew), by the philosopher Alain Finkielkraut. He writes:

I inherited the suffering that I didn't endure. Of the oppressed, I kept the character but never underwent the oppression. I could tranquilly delight in an exceptional destiny. Without exposing myself to real danger, I had the stature of a hero. It was enough just to be Jewish to escape the anonymousness of an interchangeable existence and the platitude of an eventless life.

Finkielkraut calls himself an armchair Holocaust consumer, an heir to misfortune, a stay-at-home of persecution—and the deficit Jew. He proclaims, "I want to leave this theatrical homeland where I took root. I want to read something other in Judaism than a pathetic, ostentatious, and empty affirmation." I would like to quote the whole

book as a manifesto to a new outlook for Jewish writers. I highly recommend it.

Georges Perec is a great French Jewish writer who may be known to English readers because of a recent translation published by David Godine, *Life: A User's Manual*—an unfortunate title for a grandiose book, (*La vie: mode d'emploi*). *W, ou le souvenir d'enfance* (*W, or Remembering Childhood*) is presented as an autobiography alternating with a fictional account of a concentration camp universe. The first-person narrator claims to have no memory and no past; thus, he takes the opposite direction of an autobiography. In fact, his childhood was robbed from him: his father died in the war, his mother in Auschwitz, and he was baptized in a Catholic school where he was hidden. His Jewishness—more than his Judaism—is based on terms such as *camp*, *yellow star*, *gas*, and *ovens*. His definition of his own identity is perhaps representative of the vast French Jewish reading public:

I don't know precisely what it is to be Jewish or what being Jewish means to me. It's evident, if you will, but evident in a mediocre way. It's a mark, but a mark that doesn't attract me to anything precise, to anything concrete: it isn't a sign of belonging; it isn't related to a belief, religion, practice, culture, folklore, history, a destiny, or a language. It would be more of an absence, a question, a questioning, wavering, anxiety. . . .

I was born in France. I am French. I have a French first name—Georges, and a French last name, or almost—Perec, . . . because Perec is the Polish spelling of Peretz. Had I been born in Poland, I would have been called, let's say, Mordecai Perec, and everyone would have known I was Jewish. But I wasn't born in Poland, luckily for me, and I have a name sounding like Brittany. . . . I don't speak the language my parents spoke. I don't share any of the memories they could have had. Something that was theirs, that made them into them—their history, their culture, beliefs, hopes—was not transmitted to me.

The consciousness of this dispossession isn't accompanied by any nostalgia, any partiality for those who would be closer to me because

they're Jewish. I have been writing for several years, gleaned from memories transmitted by my aunt, a history of my family, trying to retrace their adventure, their wanderings, the long and improbable progression that led them everywhere and nowhere—this perpetual bursting the survivors no longer have in common with them, except to have been, somehow, deprived of their history.

Children's Books on Religious Topics

In the same world as this amnesia co-exists a mini-market of specifically Jewish books published by Orthodox groups or the Jewish community, and distributed by the fifteen or so Jewish bookstores, 70% of which are in Paris. I regularly visit the Jewish bookstore in Nice to inform the bookseller of the new titles of children's books that would interest his public. He dutifully orders one copy of each, and three years later it is still there. I say, "How is this possible? You must set up piles of each title and insist." He answers, "How could I? If I love a book, does that mean they are going to love it?" This humble, non-combative attitude reminds me of my ancestor Ray Menahem Mendl of Kotsk. Martin Buber tells the story in *Tales of the Hasidim*:

Do you know why I don't publish anything? I'll tell you why: who would read me? Not scholars and not sages, for they know more than me. Only someone who knows less would want to read me. So who is that? A poor fellow who works hard all week. When would he have time to open a book? On Shabbas? But what time? When? Saturday morning? No, that's when he prays. He goes home, eats, and sings as usual at the end of the meal, and then lies down on the sofa to rest his spirit. That's the moment when at last he will be able to have a look at a book. He opens mine. But he has eaten too much and he feels the weight of life. He falls asleep. My book drops out of his hands. So is it for him that I should publish a book?

Maybe in the back of our minds, this story, this attitude lurks and stops us from writing Jewish books. Aside from the five Jewish books I have published in French, I have been accumulating Jewish holiday stories, which I call "Bittersweet Feasts," written in secret as if it were pornographic literature,

never showing it to any French publishers, because they simply wouldn't understand them. The publishers have come to recognize the language of the Shoah, but the everyday life of Jews as "normal" people is foreign to them. Michèle Kahn says, "I don't think a Jewish collection would work out in France. The press wouldn't support it and the public wouldn't be informed about its existence. Various attempts have failed. From the looks of it, we are not numerous enough. Not enough writers, not enough readers. My regret: the attitude of the Jewish press. It only recognizes those who have obtained national success, and to obtain national success, a Jewish theme is far from the best."

I personally think the time would be right to start a basic Jewish publishing house in France, to satisfy the hunger for identity of young parents and children. Were there a dynamic enough team to set up Kar-Ben Copies in France, I think it would be a big success. I have been showing Kar-Ben books around, but the general consensus is that they are too Ashkenazic and American-oriented. To give you an idea of what does exist, we shall examine a classic publication of the Jewish community, *Anne et David*, published in 1975 by Claude-Annie Gugenheim. In the book, a work of fiction, an Orthodox family lives through a complete year. While reading it, I wasn't sure I'd live through it! Before we get to the bottom of the second page we have said *Modeh ani*, we have on our *kipah*, our *tsitsit*, *tefillin*, and *talit*. We've read the Talmud, the Torah, the *sidrah*, the Mishnah. We are on our way to *shaharit*, *minḥah* and *ma'ariv*. By the time we get to the end of the 258 pages, we will have celebrated every Jewish holiday, gone to a wedding, a bar mitzvah, a funeral, sat shivah, had a brit, said kaddish for our departed relatives, made havdalah, said every prayer, eaten gefilte fish, practiced every custom. It's a real mitzvah marathon, and I'm pretty sure all 613 of them are present. The only thing that doesn't happen, I'm sad to say, is the coming of Mashiah. I'm not trying to make fun of the book; it is truly thorough, radiant with the love of Judaism, and full of good intentions, written from within the firm conviction and certainty of a happy rebetzin. As a yeshiva girl myself, the book gives me a sense of warmth and well-being. It's like going home, except that home, in this case, isn't necessarily literature.

I shall not discuss the Lubavitch publications along the same lines, which are translated directly from Brooklyn and remind us of propaganda pamphlets. In contrast, an excellent French contribution to Jewish scholarship is *Contes et fêtes juives* (Jewish Tales and Holidays), by Colette Estin (Beauchesne). She has gathered stories and legends about Jewish holidays from around the world. Each holiday is explained intelligently. The book is well written, thorough, and amusing—certainly the best document of this genre in French, but all the source books were published in the U.S.

Adult Authors and Younger Readers

In the realm of bestsellers, there are a number of Jewish writers whose novels can be read by children, and certainly by young adults. Joseph Joffo, a fashionable hairdresser, was projected into literature with his autobiographical novel, *Un sac de billes* (A Bag of Marbles), about surviving in hiding with his brother in France during the war. All his books are connected to some Jewish catastrophe: pogroms in *Anna et son Orchestre*, persecution in *Simon et l'enfant*, and general tsores in *La vieille dame de Djerba*. Other popular Jewish writers are Jacques Lanzmann (*Qui vive*; Denoël), Martin Gray (*In the Name of all My Loved Ones*), Marek Halter (*The Memory of Abraham*). The highly acclaimed novels of Patrick Modiano all have an undercurrent of Jewish affiliation. Anna Langfus, André Schwartz-Bart, Jean-François Steiner, Roger Ikor, Albert Memmi, Roman Gary under the pseudonym Emile Ajar, Joseph Kessel, and, of course, Elie Wiesel are contemporary French Jewish writers.

When I visit readers in libraries and schools, they always ask me who my favorite writer is, and I always say Albert Cohen. Albert Cohen, a French writer who died in 1981, is our great treasure. *Mangeclous* is a Rabelaisian extravaganza set in a semi-mythical Jewish Orient peopled by grotesque but innocent, lovable inhabitants. One thinks of the Marx Brothers, Charlie Chaplin, Woody Allen. Under the burlesque absurdity, a profound Jewish wisdom is brought to the fore. It's a unique, complete, overwhelming, and hilarious testimony on existence in the Diaspora, but also an immense, poignant, and always funny reflection on the misfortunes of being a human being subjected to the farce of destiny. All his extraordinary novels—*Solal*, *Belle de*

Seigneur, Les yaleureux—demonstrate his extreme love for his people, his extreme satire. His work is original, varied, rich, humorous, tragic, and tender. *Le livre de ma mère* (1954) is dedicated to the author's mother, who died in occupied France, and to the simple grandeur of maternal love. A children's edition of this book exists.

Going back in time, Edmond Fleg was a writer, poet, and militant, who sought to increase knowledge and pride in Jewish heritage. *Le chant nouveau* (Albin Michel) and *L'enfant prophète* (1927) are the stories of a child's return to Judaism.

Four Jewish Children's Writers

This brings us to the four brave, poor, lonely writers for children. Michèle Kahn, steeped in Judaism and also in the French literary world, has a vast production of about seventy books, including picture books, stories, non-fiction, nature books, manual activities, and novels. She claims six of these as Jewish books, among them a series of four volumes of stories and legends of the Bible: *Stories from the Garden of Eden*, *From the Desert to the Promised Land*, *Judges and Kings*, *David and Solomon*. She says,

This Biblical series came to me because of the frustration I felt one day while reading the Bible. I had the strange impression that something was missing. What? The Midrashim of my childhood.

I grew up in Strasbourg, under the regime of the Concordat, and because of this, there were compulsory religious classes in school. We were taught the Holy Book with the Midrashim. I still have a warm recollection of these religious classes.

That's why I wished to bring back the Bible as it had enchanted me, and give it to Jewish and non-Jewish children. It is an approach for those who find reading the Bible a bit difficult, a way to familiarize them with the Biblical world.

The series has been well received. The first volume was translated into Italian, with the Pope's imprimatur, which was a big reward.

To give you an idea of the style of these stories I translated one, "The First Tear":

Sadly, Adam and Eve went around like vagabonds on the desolate earth. Their hands were ruined searching for edible roots, and pain streaked their limbs and backs. The cold made them shiver. And the hungry howling of ferocious beasts echoed in their frightened ears.

God looked into the hearts of Adam and Eve and saw that they sincerely regretted their mistake. "Miserable children," He said, "I chased you from Paradise and now you are burdened with worries. Know, then, that My love for you hasn't dried up. Since you will always meet with worries to weigh you down on your path, I took from my treasury this pearl. It is a tear. Whenever misfortune finds you," continued the Eternal One, "whenever your soul and your heart swell with agony, tears will flow from your eyes and relieve your pain.

At these words, Adam and Eve's eyes misted over, tears rolled down their cheeks, fell on the ground, and wet the soil. Appeased, they understood that no pain would be eternal and hope came back to them.

In *Rue du roi doré*, Michèle Kahn recorded the experience of deportation and concentration camp for a friend of hers. He didn't want to write it himself, but desired that it be known, considering it his duty to tell what he had lived through. She became his spokesman to resist the forces of forgetfulness. Michèle Kahn's last book, *La vague bleue* (The Blue Wave), also covers the period of the Second World War and a Jewish teenager's struggle to hide, her capture, and survival in a concentration camp.

Alain Finkielkraut, in *Le Juif Imaginaire*, writes, "The wandering Jew, that's me; the famished prisoner in the striped pajamas, that's me; the tortured Jew of the Inquisition, me; Me, Dreyfus on Devil's Island. . . . I loved myself through my Jewish identity. . . . But the Genocide is not an event one can keep for oneself. Taking it over in this case means usurping the place of the victim." On the other hand, writers born after the war can feel the events with total involvement. I believe in the sincerity and passionate involvement of everyone who writes about this period. It is very

difficult to have a critical eye towards these books—how can a book that tears your heart out be bad? There are periodic awakenings that reactivate this desire to identify directly with the victims. The Klaus Barbie trial in Lyon triggered at least two books about the children of Izieu. Claude Gutman's *La Maison vide* (The Empty House) refers to the Jewish home for orphaned children in Izieu, near Lyon. The children were arrested and deported by order of Klaus Barbie. None of them survived.

In narratives based on the personal sensitivity of the writer, a subjective sense attributed to living history is expressed. These novels are not simply instruments of entertainment, but transmit the values that act as the guarantors of a civilization. Claude Gutman relates the consequences of the war for a Jewish family settled in Paris. The narrator, David, is 15. He wants these pages to bear witness against forgetting, thus fulfilling a sacred duty to his parents, who were taken in a raid in Paris. His father, whose name is symbolically Lazarus, had survived a pogrom in Poland, in which he lost his first wife and children. Emigrated to France, the land of liberty, he feels secure and proclaims, "French law always protected the Jews, except Dreyfus maybe, but that was a historical error. And they corrected it." The father rejoices in the perfect integration of his son. The mockery of destiny has it that this man, too credulous and respectful of order, would be taken in a repetition of the absurdity of history. The narrator, by telling of these terrible events, transmits his father's message of pogroms but enlarges it in a plea for humanism opposed to the folly of the Holocaust. The originality of his fiction also comes from the reserved technique and the way the secret of the narration is maintained until the end. The notebook we are reading is composed in an empty classroom in the last house where David lived, right in the heart of the French provinces. He writes the book to exorcise the phantom of the ogres, and the void of existence, and to give back to history the fullness that the Nazis took away. An American publisher would do well to bring this book to English-speaking readers.

The third French Jewish writer for youth is Gil Benaych. He and I are the only ones to write about present-day Jews living everyday lives. Gil Benaych has written a series of three novels about Simon, a French-Algerian Jewish child living in France.

Strangely enough, the three books about Simon and his family, although on the same register, have been published as a children's book, a young adult book, and (the last in the series) an adult book, respectively.

The first book, *Le voyage de Mémé* (Granny's Trip), tells of the journey of an old Jewish lady from Tlemcen, Algeria, to Paris, for a reunion with her children. The grandmother crosses the capital with her grandson and there, with a sense of permanent astonishment, she discovers the urban world. She gets carried away—at times to approve, at times to criticize this new world. Granny can't bear any kind of public transportation. She won't hear of the subway—the train scandalizes her and fills her with anguish: "In the train, we move without moving! Well, that's not for me. I can't do it!" she exclaims. And so they must walk across Paris to the suburb of Champigny. But this person accustomed to Algerian villages can't imagine the anonymity of big cities and can't help saying hello to everyone she meets, to the consternation of her grandson. "But, my son, these people aren't just anybody, they're neighbors! We have to say hello! They live near us." Granny moves across Paris as if it were the heart of the desert, where each encounter is an oasis. This tale of a Parisian nomad could well have ended with a shipwreck, had the sense of belonging to a privileged group not guided the lost old woman. The narration develops mythologically, like a burlesque epic, expressing a solidarity founded on a law remembered and extolled by the ancestor:

"Our ancestors, they died twice! . . . Because of the rotten Catholics! . . . Once, because they really died, and another time because we can't go visit their graves like we always have! That's not a hardship—that they took the land and the remembrance at the same time! Memory, my son—don't ever forget to remember! Listen to what your grandmother is telling you! Don't ever forget to remember, my son! Those miserable Catholics aren't nice to us! The farther away they are, the better off we are! Myself, I prefer the Arabs by far; with them, at least we can get along! If it weren't for the French—with Arabs we get along fine. . . . Why? What's the difference? They're like us, the Arabs, but the French: they're the ones who came to mess up Algeria! And you

have the nerve to call them nice! They're not nice at all! Listen to what your grandmother is saying to you. And don't ever forget to remember! . . ."

"But . . ."

"There's no but, my son. There's no but in there. If you think they're so nice, why don't you go kiss them! Yeah, go, go kiss them! When you find a beautiful girl—Jewish like you . . . you are not to cause pain to your father and mother and Granny and the whole family . . . Jewish like you, my son—may your name be blessed."

If I were to recommend only one book for translation, it would be this one, with its panoramic view of Paris dominated by the grandmother as if she were Moses crossing the desert.

Gil Benaych told me why he is a Jewish writer: *"Love: love of reading and writing (that's Jewish!), love of writing and history (that's Jewish), love of the history of my own (that means Jews), love of the history of others (those who are not Jews)."*

The last living author I should talk about is myself, and I am indeed a strange case, because although I was born in Newark, New Jersey, I live in France and write in French. Out of my vast production of stories and novels, five are Jewish. Oddly enough, I have a secret production of Jewish stories in English. I feel that these stories, more than any of my others, contain my whole heart and soul. They are slightly too heretical for Orthodox publishers and too Jewish for general publishers. Since I'm not a total stranger to the U.S., I have timidly shown my Jewish novels to American publishers but have had no answers. Contrary to France, the U.S. is a seller's market. Publishers have not shown great interest in any general French children's literature, except Babar. What's more, American publishers don't read French, which means that one has to translate a book in order to have it read, if ever it is read. I have done this with my two Jewish novels, *First Love*, *Last Love* and *The Two Worlds of Friendship*. My own mother reads my books, looking up every word in a French-English dictionary. For her alone, I would love to see them published in English. I'm sure I'll keep writing Jewish books, published or not—it comes from an uncontrollable source. And I'm sure there

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are others like me, but a certain climate of encouragement for this type of endeavor is lacking in France, the Jewish community gives no moral support, and we writers are too tired from just writing the books to go out and promote them. I think a lot could be done, if someone with the *koah* [energy] could pick himself up and do it!

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Dr. Susie Morgenstern is an American who has resided in France since the late 1960s. She completed her doctorate at the Faculté des Lettres et Sciences Humaines (Nice), where her dissertation was on "Phantasms of Contemporary Jewish Writers in France and the USA." Author of twenty-six children's books published in France, she has won "Le Grand Prix du Livre pour la Jeunesse" for C'est pas juste!, the "Prix Loisirs-Jeunes" for Un anniversaire en pomme de terre, and the "Prix 1000 Jeunes Lecteurs" for Oukélé la télé and Les deux moitiés de l'amitié. Her books La sixième and Les deux moitiés de l'amitié were selected as top non-sexist books by the Ministère des droits de la femme. Although her books have been translated into many languages, only one has been translated into English (It's Not Fair), and another into Hebrew (Ima, Aba, ha-Musikah ve-Ani).

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