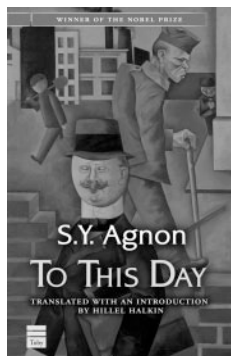


structed novel, not necessarily connected to historical fact, even though it is based on a diary. AS



TO THIS DAY

S.Y. Agnon; Hillel Halkin, trans.

Toby Press, 2008. 200 pp. \$24.95

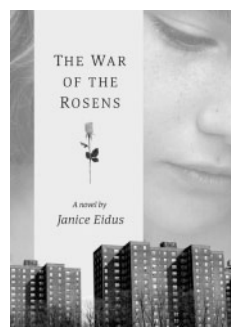
ISBN: 978-1-59264-214-4

When reading Agnon one must put aside any traditional ideas of novel, plot line, story telling, or literary construction. One must also have a good understanding of Talmud, Bible, Jewish folklore, history, and customs. In other words, Agnon is not easy to read. But, he is well worth the effort and this last novel of his is a must read in the Jewish canon.

To This Day was first published in Hebrew in 1951 and only recently translated into English by long time Agnon translator, Hillel Halkin. The last of Agnon's six novels to be translated must be read to fully appreciate the entire body of work of one of the greatest of Jewish writers. A slim book, but filled with metaphor, humor, and human drama, it tells the story of Shmuel Yosef, stranded in Germany during the first World War. He suffers the deprivations of war time like his fellow Jews and German citizens, and wanders about the streets of Berlin in search of a proper apartment that will fit his particular needs as a writer.

What may seem a humorous and sometimes frustrating journey to find the perfect apartment is in reality a metaphor for the homeless Jew seeking a place to call his own in a world that is not all that welcoming and often times hostile. Agnon writes a "Talmudic novel," in that there is a central

point around which are told many stories and fables that circle round and round and may or may not come back to the original point of the story. Sometimes one is left wondering if the incident described really happened in the story or if it is a device to elaborate one of his many familiar themes of exile, faith, and God's providence. The book can be read quickly, but it will not be quickly forgotten. BA



THE WAR OF THE ROSENS

Janice Eidus

Behler Publications, 2007. 232 pp. \$15.95

ISBN: 978-1-933016-38-2

It took all of about thirty seconds for me to be drawn into this beautifully written family saga set in the 1960's in the Bronx. Janice Eidus gives us a young protagonist who is an aspiring poet but the author is something of a poet, herself, in her construction of a world you can feel, hear, taste, and touch. These multi-dimensional characters might have been your classmates or neighbors or cousins or friends; that's how tangible and real they seem. Their complicated and fascinating inner- and outer lives are achingly human and thoroughly accessible. Eidus pushes every empathy button in a writer's repertoire. Who doesn't remember being a child and grappling with existential issues far too complex to understand at that level of maturity? Eidus taps right into this very young, though sophisticated, thought process and the child's valiant attempt at understanding the world is both poignant and touching. We care about these characters and ache for them from the first page until long after the book has been closed

and returned to the shelf. There's the brooding and angry father, overwhelmed by responsibility, the overworked and little-understood but caring mother, the jealous, frightened, insecure sister and the golden child, at the center of it all who, while searching for answers, tries to make sense of the world around her. The tragedy

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It took all of about thirty seconds for me to be drawn into this beautifully written family saga.
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is wrenching yet, written with a fine touch, it contains no artifice, excessive drama, or cloying emotion. What we feel as we read line by line is life lived hour by hour and day by day. So spend a few hours or days with the Rosen family. It will be time well spent. MHM

HISTORY

THE ART OF DIALOGUE IN JEWISH PHILOSOPHY

Aaron W. Hughes

Indiana University Press, 2008. 234 pp.

\$24.95 (pbk.)

ISBN: 978-0253219442 (pbk.)

This is a fascinating book about the historic role of dialogue as a literary device in the works of five Jewish philosophers, spanning the 11th-18th centuries. Hughes contextualizes this genre both globally, with regard to what was occurring for the Jews in the larger non-Jewish world in which they resided, as well as particularly for each of the five philosophers and their seminal dialogue literary work. Particularly interesting was the chapter on Judah Abravanel's *Dialoghi D'Amore*, which enjoyed widespread popularity in the non-Jewish world and involved as its two protagonists—rather uniquely—a man and a woman, presented as co-equals. Hughes'