

the U.S. She captures her believable protagonists' thoughts and frames their circumstances in beautiful prose with a sharp eye for detail.

In "The Melting Pot," Sadka describes what life was like for Iraqi Jews after they made *aliya*, and the differences and conflicts they had with Ashkenazi Jews in the Holy Land. In "The Crossroad," Naiim, an Iraqi Jew in Israel, marries a younger woman and watches in frustration as she transforms herself from a dutiful wife who cooks, cleans, and irons his clothes, to one who enjoys going out and socializing with friends. The longest of Sadka's stories, "The Crossroad" clearly conveys the cultural differences between the Iraqi Jews and the Israelis living alongside them in Israel. The reader can feel Naiim seethe and convulse with anger as he considers that his wife and her friends are mocking him and robbing him of his honor.

Each story in this collection offers a peek into the mind of an Iraqi Jew. Sadka's ability transcends generations. Read *Farewell to Dejala* to catch a glimpse of Jewish Iraq with its wealth of traditions, foibles, and complexities. **LK**



**THE FRUIT OF HER HANDS: THE STORY OF SHIRA OF ASKENAZ**

**Michelle Cameron**

Pocket Books, 2009. 436 pp. \$25.00  
ISBN: 978-1439118221

This compelling first novel is based on the life of Rabbi Meir Ben Baruch. Rabbi Baruch, known best by his acronym, MaHaRaM, was a universally noted Talmud scholar who lived in 13<sup>th</sup> century Germany and France. While he wrote no one single large work, his commentaries on the Talmud were solicited throughout the Jewish world at that time. He was also a noted religious poet who wrote many *piyyut* (religious poems) for Jewish worship.

Cameron, a descendent of the MaHaRaM, has constructed a novel that blends history and private speculation on the life of Rabbi Baruch in a time of great anti-Semitism in Europe. Rather than revolve around the Rabbi, the story is a fictional account of his wife, Shira, who is portrayed as the daughter of one of Rabbi Baruch's teachers and a scholar herself. Shira's

father teaches her to read and write and study Talmud, something not common at that time. But Shira finds her life constricted by Jewish tradition and must struggle with her primary role as wife and mother, and only serve as a helpmate to her husband. While she can never be his equal, she finds happiness in this secondary role. The author places Shira at the center of some of Jewish history's great calamities, such as the burning of the Talmud on June 17, 1244 in Paris. We know from historical accounts that Rabbi Baruch witnessed the destruction of twenty-four cartloads of Talmudic volumes and through Shira's eyes and heart we come to understand the pain of this crime against Jews.

The novel gives the reader a unique and personal view of Jewish life in the Middle Ages and the adversities Jews faced as the power of the Inquisition spread throughout the world. **BA**



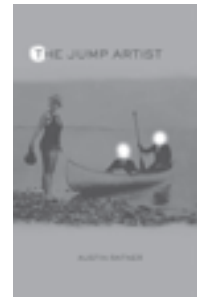
**THE GAME OF OPPOSITES**

**Norman Lebrecht**

Pantheon Books, 2009. 324 pp. \$24.95  
ISBN: 978-0-307-37725-8

Elie Wiesel has always insisted that a novel about the Holocaust is not a novel, or, if it is a novel, it is not about the Holocaust. Norman Lebrecht, winner of the 2003 Whitbread First Novel Award, proves Wiesel wrong with *The Game of Opposites*. In an unnamed country at the end of a unnumbered world war, inmate Paul Malinowski leaves a labor camp, which his captors have just fled in the face of approaching American liberators. Paul's task is to determine whether it is safe for his fellow incarcerated to flee, too. But his withering journey ends with his collapse in a nearby village whose residents had for years watched stone-faced as some of their neighbors were selected for eviction and death. Alice Hofman, a young woman, takes Paul in and nurses him back to health, by which time the war is over. His home and family destroyed, Paul decides to stay where he is, marries Alice, has a family, and eventually becomes the mayor of the village. In Lebrecht's hands all of this is perfectly credible to the reader. Paul, although adjusting to his newfound happiness, is haunted by guilt

over the inmates he left behind. And surrounded by people who ignored the evil in their midst, he is forced, in this poignant, morally challenging, and beautifully written novel, to make wrenching choices between vengeance and forgiveness. **GS**



**THE JUMP ARTIST**

**Austin Ratner**

Bellevue Literary Press, 2009. 252 pp. \$14.95 (pbk.)  
ISBN: 978-1-934137-15-4 (pbk.)

A young Latvian man and his father are hiking in the Tyrolean Alps when disaster strikes. The father is murdered out of sight of the son who is accused, tried, and found guilty of patricide. That the accused was a Jew had much to do with the injustices perpetrated by both prosecutor and judge in the anti-Semitic Austrian court. Philippe Halsman was jailed despite the intervention of such Jewish notables as Albert Einstein, Sigmund Freud, and other Jewish intellectuals in this Austrian version of the Dreyfus Affair, as it came to be known.

Weak, ill, guilt-ridden in spite of his innocence, and filled with anger, Halsman is pardoned after serving part of his sentence by the more sympathetic Chancellor Johann Schober, and then is released from the wretched jail that had housed and almost destroyed him. The foregoing part of the story occupies more than half of this historical novel.

Halsman's recovery in Italy, travels to France, love affairs, discovery of his penchant for photography, and escape to America, and then his rise to fame as a superb photographic artist, occupy the second half of this book, imparting a distracting imbalance to the treatment of Halsman's life. Only the last few pages touch on the significance of the title, explaining how Halsman has discovered the value of obliging his subjects to jump before the taking of their portrait.

Although the novel is based on the results of Ratner's considerable research into Halsman's life and times, it is clearly a fictional work, as the author himself has noted. His purpose has been to explore his subject's inner life, mirroring what Halsman has done visually in his portraits of the movie stars, politicians, and other notable performers on the world's stage. **CR**