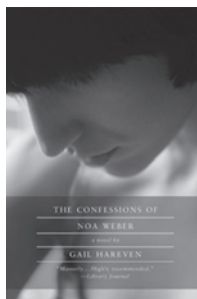


that it now has a teacher's guide.

In *Cassandra Misreads the Book of Samuel & Other Untold Tales of the Prophets*, Rothstein retells several Biblical stories in contemporary language that nevertheless retains the flavor of the period in which the stories take place. The Bible often leaves much unsaid, and the *Midrash* frequently fills in some of the gaps. Here Rothstein creates his own *midrash* for several Biblical episodes. Taking liberties with the text and inventing dialogue, he tells us what could have been said. What did Eli's sons say to their father? How does one train to be a prophet and how does a prophet get his books (i.e. scrolls) published? What was it like for a family to experience the episode of the Golden Calf? Rothstein's answers are fascinating. His stories feel authentic, despite the contemporary idiom. He blends deep knowledge and respect for the Biblical text with rabbinic and contemporary scholarship, resulting in an enchanting book filled with lessons about truth, courage, and meaning. **WG**



**THE CONFESSIONS OF NOA WEBER**

**Gail Hareven; Dalya Bilu, trans.**  
Melville House, 2009. 331 pp. \$16.95 (pbk.)  
ISBN: 978-1-933633-68-8 (pbk.)

More than halfway through this novel, Noa Weber says, "I never chose to love Alek." Does anyone ever choose to love someone? Novelists, poets, psychologists, and modern self-help gurus have written much on love, but no one can explain why we fall in love with a particular person. In this novel, Israeli author Gail Hareven tells the story of one woman's obsessive love for one man.

*The Confessions of Noa Weber* reads more like the two lives of Noa Weber, a woman who becomes a successful lawyer and then, a detective novelist. Noa's alter ego in her books is Nira Wolf, a strong willed and savvy detective whose personal life is quite the opposite of Noa's. From the age of seventeen, Noa has been obsessively in love with the Russian emigrant Alek, who fathers her child and then leaves her, only to take up with another woman and father two more children.

The novel is unapologetic about Noa's obsession with the narcissist Alek. Noa makes no excuses for loving a man who leaves her once she has had their baby daughter and seldom provides any paternal care for the child, a pattern he will repeat with his next lover. Noa waits for Alek to call or appear and she runs to him for sexual trysts that seem anything but lover's reunions. At times she tries to understand her obsession but eventually accepts her situation with Alek and lives the life of the mistress, even though she is legally married to him.

One wonders if Noa realizes that her detective novel character Nira Wolf is physically a copy of Alek's next lover and mother of his two sons. Does Noa have the capacity for insight and self analysis? What drives this bright, accomplished woman to enslave herself to someone who can never give her a complete life?

Against the backdrop of a modern Israel, Noa Weber is a player in a bigger drama. This is a personal story of struggle between the inner life and outer life and integration into a society that is also struggling to reconcile its changing identity. **BA**



**THE JERUSALEM FILE**

**Joel Stone**  
Europa Editions, 2009. 147 pp. \$15.00  
ISBN: 978-1-933372-65-5

Levin, a retired Israeli security services officer, is a loner. His marriage ended amicably. His children are grown and living abroad. Living in Jerusalem and acutely aware of the religious fervor and political conflicts in the area, he leads a self-contained life. When an acquaintance asks him to follow his wife, Deborah, and find out whether she is having an affair, he accepts the offer despite the fact that he considers the task rather unsavory. It is a chance to use his investigative skills and explore Jerusalem's rich history as he visits its colorful neighborhoods. It provides a stark contrast to the terrorist attacks and suicide bombings that he witnesses during his daily rounds. The case may actually have a solution. As he follows Deborah, he finds himself

assessing her as a potential lover. When the man that she was meeting is murdered, Levin wonders whether it was really a sniper's bullet that killed him. When Deborah approaches him with a strange request, his carefully constructed ethical foundation is threatened. This beautifully written character study will appeal to both mystery buffs and those who enjoy literary fiction. **BMB**



**A MAD DESIRE TO DANCE**

**Elie Wiesel; Catherine Temerson, trans.**  
Knopf, 2009. 274 pp. \$25.00  
ISBN: 978-0-307-26650-7

On Passover, we celebrate the transition from slavery to freedom, but there's more: we must strive toward redemption. There are big steps—the establishment of the State of Israel, the Civil Rights movement, the rescue of endangered Jews, etc. And then there are individuals.

Elie Wiesel's new book, *A Mad Desire to Dance*, is not about the Holocaust. Not on the surface. Doriel's mother, a Polish resistance fighter, survives the War, but dies senselessly, along with his father, in an automobile accident shortly afterward. The child, although raised by a loving uncle and aunt, is left with a "hole in his heart"—despair so profound and palpable that he personifies it as a *dybbuk*, possessing him and preventing him from interacting with others. The *dybbuk*, a demon from European Jewish folklore, is the disembodied soul of an ungodly person whose transgressions don't even deserve to be judged, and is therefore, unredeemable.

Doriel's hunger for meaning leads him to examine faith, religion, mysticism, Survivors' testimony and other records of the Holocaust, and finally, to psychoanalysis. With more than a nod to Papa (Sigmund) Freud, his story is presented through therapy sessions, dreams, and internal monologue, the analyst's notes, and letters he writes to his (dead) parents.

Elie Wiesel's writing is elegant, graceful, and precise. Words are very important here, and he chooses exactly, gently guiding the reader along Doriel's journey. **SS**