cine as a specialty because he had done enough of that in his youth in *yeshiva*!

But, of course, this form of study is about something more than "training the mind"— it's also about a spiritual nourishment, a focus on meaning and meaningfulness. It is reading in the deepest sense of the word. It is reading in the heart. What could be a better preparation for a child's future? Or a better way for any of us to read?

Barry W. Holtz teaches at the Jewish Theological Seminary of America. His book Back to the Sources: Reading the Classic Jewish Texts, *is used in many university and adult education courses. He has recently completed a book about teaching and learning the Bible.*

What Is Jewish Poetry?

Rodger Kamenetz

"Jewish" in Jewish poetry is a feeling, not a *halakha.* It is a certain rootedness and connectedness in terms of sensibility, language, identification — perhaps all of these. Jewish has to go deep — it has to get into the rhythm of the poem. As my friend, the late poet, Rose Drachler wrote in a review, "a person walks black, a person jokes Jewish." You can't fake it.

Anthologists are provisional canon makers. Some anthologists take the exterior approach. Jewish poetry is poetry written by Jews. This, however, immediately embroils you in the "Who is a Jew? question." And the exterior approach is trivial. Allen Ginsberg died a Buddhist, but can we really deny he was a Jewish poet? His "Kaddish" actually borrows Aramaic rhythms. Can you go any deeper in a poet's guts than rhythm? Jewish practice has nothing to do with the question. And despite what New York thinks, neither does locale. Great Jewish poets live all over: Jacquie Osherow in Salt Lake City, Rick Chess in Asheville — all part of the academic Diaspora.

My friend Steve Stern proposes a direct test, a Jew-o-meter. Like the old applause-o-meter on "Queen for a Day." It's purely intuitive. You attach electrodes to the poems and see where the needle swims. Gerald Stern — buried. Irene Klepfisz — off the charts. Maxine Kumin — maybe the needle quivers a *bissel*. The Jew-o-meter experiment suggests that Jewish poetry is not about the author. What makes a poem Jewish? There must be some inner structure of Jewish poetry beyond nostalgia for Shabbes candles, or bubbe and zadye, something tougher, more enduring, more inward.

One mark of Jewish poetry is metonymy as opposed to metaphor. Technically, metonymy is when a part refers to a whole, e.g. "the pen is mightier than the sword." Metonymy is when the plain humble object contains sufficient meaning and resonance that it doesn't have to do double duty by referring to another plane of reality. Rather, the humble object, the particular bush, hill, or subway station is already seen as somehow intrinsically connected to a great depth. There aren't two planes of reality as in metaphor. It's all one. It's like how we bless our bread: In one sentence, we address a humble crust drawn out of the earth and *Melekh haOlam*. The bread isn't a metaphor — as when Jesus tells his disciples, "this is my body." No, the bread is an example of how we are connected to God.

Another instance, in a poem by Yehudah Amichai: "I walked through the iron door marked Emergency." It is an actual steel door he's pushing through in an auditorium, and yet the larger meaning is also present. Compare that to Andrew Marvell's "to tear with rough strife/ through the iron gates of life." The iron gates here are purely symbolic, mythical. No real gates.

Jewish thought is profoundly anti-mythic, and therefore the metaphor, which is a sort of mini-myth, is less valued than the metonym. This metonymic tendency is rooted in the Torah and Torah culture. It's a certain *tam*, a certain taste. It accounts for the plainness of Charles Reznikoff and Philip Levine, the wild humor of Gerry Stern and Allen Ginsberg, the out-and-out bluntness and directness of many Jewish poets. The love of fact, the love of truth even if the truth hurts.

Jewish thought distrusts metaphor as a pagan flight of fancy: our Mt. Zion is a hill, our valley of the giants is at most a boulevard in Jerusalem. Even our theophanies — Mt. Sinai excepted — are pretty low key. Avram meets an angel, who might just be a person. Moses first sees God in a burning bush, a humble *sneh*. Compare that to the ancient Greeks,

where Zeus appears, on a simple adulterous mission, as a shower of gold.

There are, then, many marks of Jewish poetry: bluntness, humor, metonymy, prose rhythms. They indicate a central impulse. The seal of Jewish poetry is truth. It goes back to the fact that our national epic, the Torah, is written largely in prose and presents itself as nonfiction. We like it plain, not fancy — real, not exaggerated.

The question, "what is Jewish poetry?" does not concern only poets. In fact, I would say we tend to state the proposition backwards. Jewish literature is not literature written by Jews. Rather, we are Jews — all of us — only insofar as there is a Jewish literature. This is really the significance of Jewish poetry. The Jews, as Muhammad observed shrewdly, are the "People of the Book." We are a people because of a book, a particular book with a particular compressed metonymic style. This gives us, as we say in our prayers, a unique destiny, a unique fate. It gives our ethnicity a distinctly literary quality. And it means our poetry can renew our sense of being Jews. That's why it's a shame so few Jews read Jewish poetry.

The French poet Stephane Mallarm dreamed of writing a grand work he called "*le livre*," a book so grand he imagined that "everything in the world exists to end up" in it. No Jewish poet would have such a dream because if there is such a book, we believe, our God has already written it. That leaves us with different work to do. Whether we accept or reject the Torah, believe or disbelieve, we know our efforts come at the tail end of thousands of years of tradition. Whatever Jewish poets write "exists to end up"— as *midrash*.

Rodger Kamenetz is a widely anthologized poet, author of The Missing Jew: New and Selected Poems *(Time Being). He's at work on a new book of poems,* Grandfather Clause. *He is poetry editor of the* Forward.

What's In and What's Not: Anthologizing Jewish Literature

Samuel Apple

As most American liberal arts students know, a Norton Anthology is not just another anthology. More than any other imprint, the Norton name gives a collection canonical status. If a work is included in a Norton, it's not just good literature; it's literature that defines a historic moment; literature that will last.

And, as most American liberal arts graduates of the past two decades know, the very idea of a literary canon has become highly contentious in academic circles. Frustrated by having to teach primarily the works of white men, a growing number of English professors on the left began to question the usefulness of an institutional literary hierarchy. Others acknowledged the inevitability of a canon but asked not only who decides which books become canonical, but also on what criteria these decisions are made. How, these critics wanted to know, could a collection of literary works claim to define a historical epoch while leaving out the voices of women and minorities?

For better or for worse, then, the appearance of a new Norton anthology has become as much a political as a literary event. Caught in the middle of canon wars, the editors at Norton came up with a creative solution: Rather than dwell on the inadequacies of previous volumes, they would create new canons (and new sources of revenue, of course) by putting the Norton seal of approval on anthologies of writing by minorities. The strategy seemed to be working. In 1997, Norton published a volume of African American literature to much fanfare and rave reviews. After all, who needs to be a part of the "Great Western Canon" when you can have your own great canon?

On the heels of the success of the African American anthology, Norton released *Jewish American Literature: A Norton Anthology* in 2001. Edited by four Jewish academics, Jules Chametzky, John Felstiner, Hilene Flanzbaum, and Kathryn Hellerstein, the 1,221-page tome spans four centuries and includes a wide array of works by lesser-known Jewish writers who have never before been anthologized. And so in addition to the contemporary giants, such as Roth, Bellow, and Malamud, we also have newly translated Yiddish short stories and obscure letters, such as Rebecca Samuel's late-18th-century notes to her parents on Jewish life in America.

And yet, unlike the African American anthology, almost no one seems to have noticed this in-