

But Is He Jewish? And Other Quirky Tales

Daniel Wolf

Go To Publish

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But Is He Jewish? is a lively compendium of humor concerning everyday conundrums.

Taking on universal themes, Daniel Wolf's diverse and witty collection of stories, jokes, musings, and short plays runs the gamut from rough and bawdy to lofty and philosophical. In *But Is He Jewish?*, no topic and no one is safe from becoming the target of laughter—not even the divine.

The book opens with fifty vignettes on universal and sometimes sacrosanct themes in Jewish life, including family, food, and religion. Its second section, devoted to mishegas (craziness), is filled with rollicking stand-up comedy routines; the philosophical ruminations of an imaginary stereotypical rabbi; a guide to daily living for the confused; eighty weighty questions to muse upon; and a poem that, while devoid of common sense, makes the taboo topic of "quitting" funny. Four short plays in which animals take on traits that are stereotyped as Jewish to deal with complicated situations close the book; they are riddled with Yiddish terms and ridiculous situations, provoking laughter through self-recognition.

Dancing a thin line between rational and absurd, these earthy pieces feature sarcasm and complaints. Their lead characters often consider themselves to be a cut above the rest; the book treats them with colorful descriptions of their physical and character flaws, relieving the tension that their behavior provokes. Lighthearted, full-color illustrations (all colored between the lines) enhance the text.

The book's focus is wide-ranging, dealing with issues related to different socioeconomic levels, age groups, and genders. Still, the entries are uneven in tone and quality. While most provoke a good laugh, others fall flat. The pieces are best when they invite thoughtful reflections on their themes, as with those that take a hard look at antisemitism; this includes the brief, moving story of a lonely man who hopes to make friends by going to a bar and joining a group of men, only to find that the subject of their conversation is their negative stereotypes of Jewish people. But warmth and support are also found in the tight-knit communities highlighted throughout the book. Indeed, in "But Is He Jewish?", a woman who is loyal to her community is tasked with hiring a workman; the qualification that she leans on most is whether or not he is Jewish.

Making good use of Yiddish terms (translated for general audiences) throughout, *But Is He Jewish?* is a lively compendium of humor concerning everyday conundrums.

KRISTINE MORRIS (January 17, 2023)

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