



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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CONTEMPORARY MULTICULTURAL ISSUES FOCUS OF NEW ANTHOLOGY

The Schocken Book of Modern Sephardic Literature

BOOK SIGNING AND DISCUSSION

Thursday May 12, 2005 at 7:00pm
American Sephardi Federation with Sephardic House
15 West 16th Street, New York, NY 10011

Admission: \$10.00/\$5.00 for American Sephardi Federation with Sephardic House members.
Box Office: 917-606-8200

New York, NY – April 6, 2005 – The **American Sephardi Federation with Sephardic House** at the **Center for Jewish History**, 15 West 16th Street, New York City, will present a book signing and lively discussion of *The Schocken Book of Modern Sephardic Literature* with its editor **Ilan Stavans** and contributing author **André Aciman** on Thursday, May 12, 2005 at 7:00 pm. Books are available at the event for purchase and signing. Reservations are suggested.

The Schocken Book of Modern Sephardic Literature, edited and with an introduction by **Ilan Stavans**, is an extraordinary, never-before collected anthology of fiction, memoir, essay, and poetry from 28 writers in 18 countries spanning a period of more than 150 years. The various works deal with issues that resonate within any contemporary multicultural society: the status of minorities within the larger society, the opposing forces of religion and secularism, the tension between a civil, democratic tradition and the anti-Semitism ready to undermine it, and the opposing forces of religion and secularism.

The expulsion of the Jews from Spain in 1492 led to a growth in number of rich, thriving Sephardic sub-cultures in the Diaspora of the Balkans, North Africa, Asia Minor, Europe, South America and eventually North America. The works in this anthology celebrate the diverse literary and artistic forms that grew out of the melding of Sephardim's Judeo-Spanish legacy with the cultures of their host countries, a process that continues today. While this melding of influences resulted in rich and varied stories and opportunities, the process has not been without

its difficulties, and the pieces collected here resonate with the opportunities and challenges experienced by the Sephardic Jews in their travels.

In addition to the excerpt *The Last Seder*, by **André Aciman**, this collection includes works from American poet **Emma Lazarus**; Bulgarian Nobel laureate **Elias Canetti**; Italians **Natalia Ginzburg** and **Primo Levi**; memoirists **Victor Perera** from Guatemala and **Gini Alhadeff** from Egypt; Israelis **A.B. Yehoshua** and **Yehudi Burla**; **Danilo Kiš** from Yugoslavia, and many more.

Ilan Stavans, is the Lewis-Sebring Professor in Latin American and Latino Culture at Amherst College. A descendant of Eastern European Jews who settled in Mexico, Stavans has been called by the *New York Times* “the czar of Latino culture in the United States,” while *The Forward* portrays him as “a virtuoso critic with an exuberant, encyclopedic, restless mind.” His best-selling books include *The Hispanic Condition* (1995), *On Borrowed Words* (2001), and *Spanglish: The Making of a New American Language* (2003), and he is the editor of *The Oxford Book of Jewish Stories* (1998), *The Poetry of Pablo Neruda* (2003), and the 3-volume set of *Isaac Bashevis Singer: Collected Stories* (2004). Stavans is the recipient of numerous awards, among them a Guggenheim Fellowship and the Latino Literature Prize.

André Aciman was born in Alexandria, Egypt into a Sephardic family that arrived there from Italy, via Turkey. Aciman and his family left Egypt in 1965 as anti-Semitic harassment intensified after the Israeli-Arab conflicts of 1948 and 1956. Traveling to Rome, then Paris, before finally settling in New York, the predominant themes in Aciman’s work are exile and displacement. He is the author of *Out of Egypt: A Memoir* (1994), and editor of *Letters of Transit: Reflections on Exile, Identity, Language and Loss* (2002), as well as the acclaimed *Proust Project* (2004). Aciman lives in New York City, and teaches at the CUNY Graduate Center.

About the American Sephardi Federation with Sephardic House

The American Sephardi Federation with Sephardic House is a national organization dedicated to strengthening and unifying the American Sephardic community and promoting its history, cultural and social traditions. Since its arrival at the Center, ASF’s archival holdings and library have been enriched with valuable records of personal and community history. Sephardic House celebrates the uniqueness of the Sephardic culture through its annual International Film Festival, publications and exhibition.

About the Center for Jewish History

In 2000, the Center for Jewish History, located in the heart of the historic Chelsea district, became the home of five distinguished partner institutions—the American Jewish Historical Society, the American Sephardi Federation, the Leo Baeck Institute, Yeshiva University Museum, and the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research. Sharing a common vision of preserving and presenting Jewish culture and history, the five partner institutions in coming together, have created a meeting place where intellectual inquiries are exchanged and freely explored, and where the general public can find cultural programs devoted to a wide variety of themes and concerns. The combined holdings of the Center’s partners include over 100 million documents, books, art, artifact, photos, and other materials, making the Center the largest repository of Jewish history and culture outside the State of Israel. Other features of the building include a 250-seat auditorium, a gift shop, and the glatt kosher Date Palm Café. For current information and a schedule of programs visit www.cjh.org.