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REVIEWS

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Yossel Birstein

And So Is the Bus: Jerusalem Stories

**Trans. Margaret Birstein, Hana Inbar, &
Robert Manaster**

Foreword by Clive Sinclair

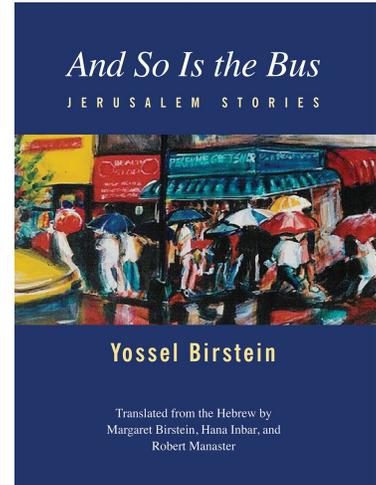
AN ANTHOLOGY OF EVOCATIVE STORIES—fortified with beguiling asides, full of unforgettable absurdities—collected on bus rides through Jerusalem. The spate of Jerusalem violence that began last fall prompted grave warnings to stay away from the city's buses, but it is those very conveyances, plying streets with formidable names like Kings of Israel and Prophet Isaiah, that provide the movement in this brisk little volume. Some men walk the streets of Paris' Left Bank but Birstein rides the buses of Jerusalem, harvesting stories and then serving them up in bite-sized morsels, sometimes

comprising as few as three pages. The result is a bus-level view of one of the most vibrant and violent cities in the world: crossroads of faith, trade, passion, and politics, all played out amid the most pungent smells on Earth. But in this winsome collection—populated by his

*"Yossel Birstein is a born flaneur. He is to Jerusalem as Baudelaire is to Paris, Dickens to London, Joseph Mitchell to New York."
-- Vivian Gornick, author of The Odd Woman and the City*

seatmates, the mad, the maddening, the misanthropic, and the just plain miserable—the pungency comes from the people, not the spice bins of the souk. One of them yells an insult from Genesis, another speaks fondly of his prosthetic leg from Russia, a third keeps a postcard close to her bosom. And when Birstein tells us that "the outside between neighborhoods wasn't standing still," he's not only speaking of the illusions prompted by motion—for illusions are at the very heart of this book—but he's also presenting us with a Jerusalem metaphor with muscle. Birstein once met a man who, in the time it took

for the traffic light to turn from red to green, told him his whole life story—so it is no surprise that so much emerges from simple one-way bus rides. You might strain to see the world in Blake's grain of sand, but you see Birstein's world with clarity in a short hop aboard a Jerusalem bus.



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