

SCHWARTZ, Howard 1945-

PERSONAL: Born April 21, 1945, in St. Louis, MO; son of Nathan (a dealer in jewelry and antiques) and Bluma (Rubin) Schwartz; married Tsila Khanem (a calligrapher and illustrator), June 25, 1978; children: Shira, Nati, Miriam. Nationality: American Education: Washington University, St. Louis, MO, B.A., 1967, M.A., 1969. Politics: "Pro-human." Religion: Jewish.

ADDRESSES: Office--Department of English, University of Missouri--St. Louis, 1 University Blvd., St. Louis, MO 63121; fax: 314-997-3066. Email-- hschwartz@umsl.edu.

CAREER: Forest Park Community College, St. Louis, MO, instructor in English, 1969-70; University of Missouri, St. Louis, MO, from instructor to professor of English, 1970--.

AWARDS, HONORS: First place award, Academy of American Poets, 1969; poetry fellow, St. Louis Arts and Humanities Commission, 1981; selection as one of the 100 best children's books of the year, New York Public Library, 1983, for Elijah's Violin and Other Jewish Fairy Tales, and 1996, for The Wonder Child and Other Jewish Fairy Tales; American Book Award, Before Columbus Foundation, 1984, for The Captive Soul of the Messiah: New Tales about Reb Nachman; notable book selection, American Library Association, 1991, nomination for National Jewish Book Award, children's literature category, 1992, and Sydney Taylor Book Award, 1992, all for The Diamond Tree: Jewish Tales from around the World; honorary doctorate, Spertus Institute of Jewish Studies, 1996; notable book for children selection, Smithsonian, 1996, for Next Year in Jerusalem: 3,000 Years of Jewish Stories, and 2000, for The Day the Rabbi Disappeared: Jewish Holiday Tales of Magic; Aesop Prize, American Folklore Society, 1996, for Next Year in Jerusalem, and 2000, for The Day the Rabbi Disappeared; National Jewish Book Award, children's literature category, 1996, for Next Year in Jerusalem, and 2000, for The Day the Rabbi Disappeared; Anne Izard Storytellers' Choice Award, 1998, for The Wonder Child and Other Jewish Fairy Tales, and 1998, for A Coat for the Moon and Other Jewish Tales; finalist for National Jewish Book Award, Jewish Thought category, 1999, for Reimagining the Bible: The Storytelling of the Rabbis; Young Adult Book Award, Keystone State Reading Association, 2001, for Ask the Bones: Scary Stories from around the World; inducted into University City High School Hall of Fame, 2001; National Jewish Book Award finalist in children's literature category, 2002, for Invisible Kingdoms: Jewish Tales of Angels, Spirits and Demons; Aesop Accolade, American Folklore Society, 2003, for Invisible Kingdoms; National Jewish Book Award in the Reference category, 2005, for Tree of Souls: The Mythology of Judaism..

WRITINGS:

FICTION

A Blessing over Ashes, Tree Books (Berkeley, CA), 1974.

Midrashim: Collected Jewish Parables, Menard Press (London, England), 1976.

The Captive Soul of the Messiah, Cauldron Press, 1980, published as The Captive Soul of the Messiah: New Tales about Reb Nachman, illustrated by Mark Podwal, Schocken (New York, NY), 1983.

Rooms of the Soul, illustrated by T. Schwartz, Rossel Books (New York, NY), 1984.

Adam's Soul: The Collected Tales of Howard Schwartz, J. Aronson (Northvale, NJ), 1992.

The Four Who Entered Paradise: A Novella, illustrated by Devis Grebu, J. Aronson (Northvale, NJ), 1995.

POETRY

Vessels, Unicorn Press (Greensboro, NC), 1976.

Gathering the Sparks: Poems 1965-1979, Singing Wind Press (St. Louis, MO), 1979.

Sleepwalking beneath the Stars, illustrated by John Brandi, BkMk Press (Kansas City, MO), 1992.

FOR CHILDREN

(With Barbara Rush) The Diamond Tree: Jewish Nursery Tales from around the World, illustrated by Uri Shulevitz, HarperCollins (New York, NY), 1991.

(With Barbara Rush) The Sabbath Lion: A Jewish Folktale from Algeria, illustrated by Stephen Fieser, HarperCollins (New York, NY), 1992.

Next Year in Jerusalem: 3,000 Years of Jewish Stories, illustrated by Neil Waldman, Viking Children's Books (New York, NY), 1996, reprinted as Jerusalem of Gold: Jewish Stories of the Enchanted City, illustrated by Neil Waldman, Jewish Lights (Woodstock, VT), 2003.

(With Barbara Rush) The Wonder Child and Other Jewish Fairy Tales, illustrated by Stephen Fieser, HarperCollins (New York, NY), 1996.

(With Barbara Rush) A Coat for the Moon and Other Jewish Tales, illustrated by Michael Iofin, Jewish Publication Society (Philadelphia, PA), 1999.

(With Arielle North Olson) Ask The Bones: Scary Stories from around the World, illustrated by David Linn, Viking (New York, NY), 1999.

The Day the Rabbi Disappeared: Jewish Holiday Tales of Magic, illustrated by Monique Passicot, Viking (New York, NY), 2000.

A Journey to Paradise and Other Jewish Tales, Pitspopany Press (Jerusalem, Israel), 2000.

Invisible Kingdoms: Jewish Tales of Angels, Spirits, and Demons, HarperCollins (New York, NY), 2001.

Before You Were Born, illustrated by Kristina Swarner, Roaring Brook Press (Brookfield, CT), 2005.

EDITOR

Imperial Messages: One-hundred Modern Parables, Avon Books (New York, NY), 1976, revised edition, Overlook Press (Woodstock, NY), 1992, third edition published as Tales of Modern Wisdom, Random House (New York, NY), 1996.

For a Few Hours Only: Selected Poems of Shlomo Vinner, Singing Bone Books, 1976.

(With Anthony Rudolf) Voices within the Ark: The Modern Jewish Poets, Avon Books/Pushcart Press (New York, NY), 1980.

Elijah's Violin and Other Jewish Fairy Tales, illustrated by Linda Heller, calligraphy by wife, Tsila Schwartz, Harper (New York, NY), 1983, revised edition, Oxford University Press (New York, NY), 1994.

Gates to the New City: A Treasury of Modern Jewish Tales, Avon Books (New York, NY), 1983, second edition, J. Aronson (Northvale, NJ), 1991.

Miriam's Tambourine: Jewish Folktales from around the World, illustrated by Lloyd Bloom, Free Press (New York, NY), 1986.

The Dream Assembly: Tales of Rabbi Zalman Schachter-Shalomi, illustrated by Yitzhak Greenfield, Amity House (Amity, NY), 1987, second edition, Gateways (Nevada City, CA), 1990.

Lilith's Cave: Jewish Tales of the Supernatural, illustrated by Uri Shulevitz, Harper (New York, NY), 1987.

Jerusalem as She Is: New and Selected Poems of Shlomo Vinner, BkMk Press (Kansas City, MO), 1990.

Gabriel's Palace: Jewish Mystical Tales, Oxford University Press (New York, NY), 1993.

(With Barbara Raznick) First Harvest: Jewish Writing in St. Louis, 1991-1997, Brodsky Library Press (St. Louis, MO), 1997.

Tree of Souls: The Mythology of Judaism, illustrated by Caren Loebel-Fried, Oxford University Press (New York, NY), 2004.

(With Barbara Raznick) New Harvest: Jewish Writing in St. Louis, 1998-2005, Brodsky Library Press (St. Louis, MO), 2005.

OTHER

Dream Journal 1965-1974, Tree Books (Berkeley, CA), 1975.

(Translator) Lyrics and Laments: Selected Translations from Hebrew and Yiddish, BkMk Press (Kansas City, MO), 1980.

Reimagining the Bible: The Storytelling of The Rabbis (essays), Oxford University Press (New York, NY), 1998.

Contributor to books, including Heartland II: Poets of the Midwest, edited by Lucien Stryk, Northern Illinois University Press (DeKalb, IL), 1975; A Big Jewish Book, edited by Jerome Rothenberg, Doubleday (New York, NY), 1978; Wandering Stars II, edited by Jack Dunn, Doubleday (New York, NY), 1981; Voices from the Interior: Poets of Missouri, edited by Robert Stewart, BkMk Press (Kansas City, MO), 1982; Missouri Short Fiction, edited by Conger Beasley, Jr., BkMk Press (Kansas City, MO), 1985; First Love: An Anthology, edited by Roy Finamore, Stewart, Tabori & Chang, 1986; Reading Between the Lines: New Stories from the Bible, edited by David A. Katz and Peter Lovenheim, Jason Aronson (Northvale, NJ), 1996; Jewish American Poetry: Poems, Commentary and Reflections, edited by Jonathan N. Barron and Eric Murphy Selinger, Brandeis University Press, 2000. Editor, "Hebrew Poetry Translation Series," Cauldron Press, 1979-83. Contributor of articles, poems, and stories to literary journals, including American Poetry Review, Parabola, Midstream, Judaism, and Literary Review. Former coeditor, Reflections and Tambourine. Guest editor, Natural Bridge, issues 9 and 15.

ADAPTATIONS:

The Sabbath Lion: A Jewish Folk Tale from Algeria was adapted as a cartoon feature, broadcast by BBC-TV in 1996. The stories in Gabriel's Palace: Jewish Mystical Tales were adapted as a play, Gabriel's Place, performed in England by the Besht Tellers, 1996. Six stories from the book Lilith's Cave: Jewish Tales of the Supernatural were adapted as a play, Kabbalah: Scary Jewish Tales, produced in Los Angeles, CA, at the Lex Theater, 2000, and later in Chicago, where it was permanently retitled The Speaking Head: Scary Jewish Tales. Folk tales "The Sabbath Lion," "The Bird of Happiness," and "Drawing the Wind" from Schwartz's various collections have been selected for the radio series One People, Many Stories, KCSN-Radio, Los Angeles, CA.

SIDELIGHTS:

Howard Schwartz is a prolific writer who has published fiction, nonfiction, and poetry. In searching for themes and images for his work in various genres, he has often found his inspiration in biblical, midrashic, and kabbalistic lore. Many of his works retell ancient folktales, reflecting his belief in the importance of passing cultural lore from one generation to the next. His poetry frequently reflects the dreamlike and mysterious elements of Jewish mythology.

Schwartz's fictional works, as typified in the collection of parables titled The Captive Soul of the Messiah, "are in part original, in part recreations of ancient legends, a conjunction of personal search and dreaming with mythical or timeless patterns or cycles," reported Francis Landy in the Jewish Quarterly. As a result, Landy explained, Schwartz's stories "are at once familiar, filled with the aura of the sages, giving the impression of a blind and insatiable predilection for the alleyways of tradition, and at the same time being wholly pertinent, incisive metaphors for our own predicament."

The author's anthologies of Jewish literature are some of his best-known work. They arise from his belief that it is vital to pass on the love of the Jewish literary heritage to upcoming generations. Poems from forty countries, translated from more than twenty languages, fill the pages of Voices within the Ark: The Modern Jewish Poets. Tales gleaned from oral traditions and written sources around the world are collected in Elijah's Violin and Other Jewish Fairy Tales. The latter book is "is a feast of images, characters, places, wonderment--all fused together by the sense that all these stories have been told for many years--some for as long as 1,000 years--by Jews wherever they have lived," explained Peninnah Schram in a review for the Melton Journal. She continued: "By retelling and compiling all of these fairy tales … Howard Schwartz has reestablished certain powerful themes in our Jewish tradition which are not widely known in our time."

The role of tradition in modern identity is also a subject of the poetry anthology Voices within the Ark: The Modern Jewish Poets, which Schwartz edited with Anthony Rudolf. "The concern with being perhaps the last Jews is one of the thematic elements that pervades 'Voices within the Ark'," wrote New York Times Book Review contributor Harold Bloom. He saw this especially in the poetry from the United States, "where more and more [the Diaspora] seems not to be a Diaspora at all, but where the price of being deeply at home seems to be an increasing process of cultural extinction …. The dilemma seems to be either too much tradition or too little." Writing in the St. Louis-Post Dispatch, Carolyn McKee noted that though some of the poems in Voices within the Ark express Jewish themes, many do not; in fact, the influence most evident in the poems written in English is that of American, not Jewish, literary traditions. In her view, some of the poems were included specifically to answer "a need to hold the ark together, to create harmony in a ship whose passengers are singing a multitude of tunes." Therefore, she asserted that "modern Jewish poetry is not a literary category, although it may be a useful social and intellectual one."

Many of the author's works are intended to help make Jewish cultural traditions accessible to young people. In The Diamond Tree: Jewish Tales from around the World, for example, Schwartz offers fifteen short tales that, while specifically Jewish, are also expressions of stories that are found in many cultures. Aimed at readers between the ages of seven and ten, the stories include "splendid" explications of ideas or characters that might be unfamiliar for readers, blending these sections "smoothly" into the text, according to a Publishers Weekly reviewer. Schwartz also showed his interest in similarities among world cultures in his anthology Imperial Messages: One Hundred Modern Parables. In this collection, the authors range from the very famous to the more obscure; some of those included are Bob Dylan, Paul Bowles, Italo Calvino, and Isak Dinesen. A reviewer for Publishers Weekly stated that the careful organization, diverse authors, and wide range of story types make this book "a valuable reference as well as a delight." A similar format was used in The Wonder Child and Other Jewish Fairy Tales, in which traditional tales passed down by oral

tradition in countries such as Egypt, Morocco, and Libya are presented in an "upbeat" style, according to Stephanie Zvirin in Booklist.

Another similar collection is Ask the Bones: Scary Stories from around the World, edited with Arielle North Olson. It features twenty-two stories from diverse cultures, all having in common a dark tone and some grisly events unfolding. A reviewer for Horn Book noted that Ask the Bones was suitable for introducing young readers to a variety of stories concerning horror and the supernatural, in which, "satisfyingly," the villains often meet up with justice for their dark deeds. Schwartz brought together many other collections for young readers, including A Journey to Paradise and Other Jewish Tales, which features magical stories illustrating the traditional humor and morals of the Jewish people.

Invisible Kingdoms: Jewish Tales of Angels, Spirits, and Demons is a short collection of just nine stories, all focused on the mysterious. Divided into sections on the Kingdom of Angels, the Kingdom of Spirits, and the Kingdom of Demons, the stories are told in "language both spare and rhythmic" that conjures up "a haunting and haunted mood," according to Horn Book reviewer Susan P. Bloom. Stories include a Polish tale about Samuel, an infant entrusted with the memories of the world by an angel named Lailah, and a rabbi whose violin music releases a ghostly presence. The angel Lailah is again seen in the book Before You Were Born, which uses a Rabbinical legend to explain the indentation above the upper lip on the human face. The story states that before a child is born, it is told the secrets of the world, but just prior to its earthly birth, the angel Lailah seals its lips so that it will not tell all it knows, erasing the child's memory of all it has learned before birth, keeping this knowledge instead locked within its soul. A Publishers Weekly reviewer praised this book as a "sweet exegesis of an intriguing phenomenon." Julie Cummins, commenting on the story in Booklist, stated that this tale, told in "spare, serene language," would be comforting to many young children.

Schwartz introduces the idea of Jewish mythology in his book Tree of Souls: The Mythology of Judaism. The term mythology frequently implies stories of interaction between a pantheon of deities, and so Judaism, which has but one God, would seem to be outside the realm of traditional mythology. Schwartz argues that there is much room for interpretation in the Bible, and that interpretation gives rise to mythology. He brings some seven hundred Jewish myths into his book, organizing them into thematic categories. Some are familiar, but most are not, even though they have ties to well-known Bible stories. Tree of Souls is a "remarkable" work that will be of interest to scholars and casual readers, stated Ilene Cooper in Booklist. Library Journal reviewer David B. Levy also recommended Tree of Souls as an "excellent book of wondrous stories."

In relation to Tree of Souls, Schwartz told CA: "How did I end up writing a 700 page book about Jewish mythology? It all goes back to fourth grade, when I discovered those great children's books of world mythology, the ones with pictures of Zeus throwing lightning bolts. I read them with great fascination but I noticed that while they had Greek and Roman and Norse and Indian and Chinese and many other mythologies, they didn't include Jewish mythology. So I raised my hand in class and asked my teacher why. And the teacher said, quite definitively, 'Because there is no Jewish mythology!' This answer perplexed me. It didn't seem fair. So being the persistent type, I kept asking this question all the way through high school and always got the same reply. By college I started reading the great masters of mythology--C.G. Jung, Joseph Campbell, Mircea Eliade--but they also had little or nothing to say about Jewish

mythology. So by the time I had edited four collections of Jewish folklore and encountered such powerfully mythic figures as Lilith and the Shekhinah, I decided that I would set out to prove that there was such a thing as Jewish mythology. I worked on this book--Tree of Souls: The Mythology of Judaism--for twelve years--far longer than I had anticipated--and I regard it as the major book of my career."

The author more recently told CA: "When I was sixteen, I worked at a camp in the Ozarks, and when I had my first a day off, I spent it in the state library in Jefferson City reading old stories of J. D. Salinger's from The Saturday Evening Post on microfilm. They weren't as good as the ones in Nine Stories, but they were full of hints of the glories to come. I found the whole experience thrilling, and as I walked out of the library that day I made to a decision about what to do with my life: I decided to be a writer, because that way I could leave some part of myself behind. I can remember that moment vividly, standing on the stairs outside of the library. I didn't tell anyone about my decision, but my life was changed forever. I had a secret purpose, and I carried it with me wherever I went.

"In 1965, when I was twenty, my girlfriend broke up with me. One day not long after that I was sitting at home in front of my typewriter when I started banging out angry lines about her. I would write a few words and hit the carriage return. After writing a few pages this way, I looked at them and realized, with amazement and disbelief, that I had just written a poem. My very first one. From at that instant, I forgot about my girlfriend and started writing poems. I must have written a hundred poems in the next few months. I was filled with inspiration, and thrilled, at the age of twenty, to finally be fulfilling my destiny as a writer.

"In 1967 I began to keep a journal of my dreams, and I have continued to do so ever since. I have always been vividly aware of my dreams, and now I began to recognize the possibilities of using dream images and subject matter in my poems. This turned out to be a very fruitful decision for me, as dreams have proven to be one of my primary sources of inspiration.

"From 1965-1968 I wrote poems exclusively. During that time my only ambition was to be a poet. But in 1968 something happened that caused me to change my mind. I had a very powerful dream in which I played a bamboo flute and became one with the music. I wanted to write a poem based on this dream, but no matter how many times I revised it, it didn't seem to work. At last, out of desperation, I tried to write it as prose, and I was astonished to find that it worked perfectly that way. But I didn't want to include any prose pieces in my book of poems, and I didn't know what to do with it. So, being of an obsessive nature, I decided to write a book of parables to go along with it. These were eventually collected in my first book, A Blessing Over Ashes, published in 1974. And ever since, I divided my creative efforts between poetry and fiction."

BIOGRAPHICAL AND CRITICAL SOURCES:

BOOKS

Gitenstein, R. Barbara, Apocalyptic Messianism and Contemporary Jewish-American Poetry, State University of New York Press (Albany, NY), 1987.
Schwartz, Howard, and Barbara Raznick, editor, First Harvest: Jewish Writing in St. Louis, 1991-1997, Brodsky Library Press (St. Louis, MO), 1997.

Shatzky, Joel, and Michael Taub, editors, Contemporary Jewish-American Dramatists and Poets: A Bio-Critical Sourcebook, Greenwood Press (Westport, CT), 1999.

PERIODICALS

Booklist, September 15, 1996, Stephanie Zvirin, review of The Wonder Child and Other Jewish Fairy Tales, p. 236; April 15, 2000, Ellen Mandel, review of A Journey to Paradise: And Other Jewish Tales, p. 1549; October 1, 2001, Ilene Cooper, review of The Day the Rabbi Disappeared: Jewish Holiday Tales of Magic, p. 333; October 1, 2004, Ilene Cooper, review of Tree of Souls: The Mythology of Judaism, p. 306; May 15, 2005, Julie Cummins, review of Before You Were Born, p. 1662.

Commentary, July, 1981, review of Voices within the Ark, p. 55.

Horn Book, May, 1999, review of Ask the Bones: Scary Stories from around the World, p. 344; November, 1999, Susan P. Bloom, review of A Coat for the Moon and Other Jewish Tales, p. 751; November-December, 2002, Susan P. Bloom, review of Invisible Kingdoms: Jewish Tales of Angels, Spirits, and Demons, p. 769.

Jewish Book Annual, 1995-96, Marc Bregman, "The Art of Retelling," p. 177.

Jewish Quarterly, summer, 1977, Francis Landy, review of The Captive Soul of the Messiah: New Tales about Reb Nachman.

Library Journal, September 1, 2004, David B. Levy, review of Tree of Souls, p. 160.

Melton Journal, summer, 1984, Peninnah Schram, review of Elijah's Violin and Other Jewish Fairy Tales.

New York Times Book Review, January 4, 1981, Harold Bloom, review of Voices within the Ark: The Modern Jewish Poets.

Present Tense, winter, 1985, Gerald Jonas, review of Rooms of the Soul, p. 63.

Publishers Weekly, October 18, 1991, review of The Diamond Tree: Jewish Tales from around the World, p. 62; April 6, 1992, review of Imperial Messages: One Hundred Modern Fables, p. 52; May 25, 1998, review of Next Year in Jerusalem: 3000 Years of Jewish Stories, p. 92; February 8, 1999, review of Ask the Bones, p. 215; October 28, 2002, review of Invisible Kingdoms, p. 69; June 30, 2003, review of The Day the Rabbi Disappeared: Jewish Holiday Tales of Magic, p. 76; April 18, 2005, review of Before You Were Born, p. 61.

School Library Journal, June, 2000, Marcia W. Posner, review of A Journey to Paradise and Other Jewish tales, p. 136.

St. Louis Jewish Light, May, 1980, Joseph Schraibman, review of The Captive Soul of the Messiah.

St. Louis Post-Dispatch, January 4, 1981, Carolyn McKee, review of Voices within the Ark.

ONLINE

America's Jewish Bookstore, <http://www.judaism.com/> (May 8, 2006), biographical information about Howard Schwartz.

Howard Schwartz Home Page, <http://www.howardschwartz.com> (June 20, 2006).