The 1929 Bunion Derby
by Charles B. Kastner

“This almost forgotten story is told in an enthralling new book . . . . It’s a story of the heroic aspiration of 77 men, mostly from near-poverty, who set out from New York in hopes of a share in the promised $60,000 prize.”

—Running Times

Watch booktrailer on YouTube

The Ideal Refugees
Gender, Islam, and the Shrill Politics of Survival
by Elena Fiddian-Qasmiyeh

“The Ideal Refugees exemplifies why gender continues to matter in international politics and in the image making of authoritarian regimes dependent on financial and political aid. . . . this well-researched book, which draws on a wide range of primary material, is a must-read for academic, activist, and lay audiences concerned with women’s rights in the Global South.”

—Elna Hajighazi, International Journal of Middle East Studies

Dolph Schayes and the Rise of Professional Basketball
by Dolph Grundman

“Readers will learn about one of the game’s first stars and the zany universe he inhabited. Dolph Schayes had to tape up his own ankles on the road and yet, at one point, still managed to play in 764 consecutive games. Its anecdotes like this that make the history of the NBA so wonderful and Grundman’s book is full of them.”

—Slam Magazine

Chronicles of Majnun Layla and Selected Poems
by Qassim Haddad and translated from the Arabic by Ferial Ghazoul and John Verlenden

“The cycle of thirty-nine poems is not just compelling and controversial, but also moves beautifully from Arabic into English. The joint effort of a significant Egyptian scholar-translator and an American writer-translator, is beautifully done. Ghazoul and Verlenden are not chained to the dictionary, but spend their effort recreating the poetry’s fine details and epic-realistic tone.”

—Asian Review of Books

Light within the Shade
Eight Hundred Years of Hungarian Poetry
edited and translated by Zsuzsanna Ozsváth and Frederick Turner

“The present collection soars on two levels. First, the poetry is exquisite and draws readers in, thanks to the editors’ wise selections and the enchanting translations. Thus, the volume is invaluable for those interested in creative writing: developing poets can learn about forms and the esteem in which poets are held and their sense of mission: ‘a poet / Sacred, the prophet of the human’ (a poem by Jeno Heltai). Second, the volume as a whole affords insight into the psyches of people striving for freedom and the excesses to which they can be driven. . . . Essential”

—Choice
I chose to illustrate the text primarily with cartoons and prints for a variety of reasons. In these media, artists found ways to provoke discussion, to engage with and relate directly to mass audiences through their explorations of society in general and of human-interest subjects in particular, and to overlay their works with religious and political content (Meyers 2003, 47). Ordinary people with whom the public could easily identify were often the centers of attention. As historian Edward Portnoy has observed about cartoons, “More than anything, they are a form of commentary, a type of visual editorial that offers comic or acerbic interpretations of current events or situations. [They] lie at the intersection of art, literature, politics, and culture. And, important from my point of view, Yiddish cartoons often rely on “traditional Jewish religious motifs and textural references used to comment on current issues” (2008, 5, 10–11). The artists also appreciated the value of cartoons. For example, William Gropper stated, “Cartoons are a medium of expression that has a wide audience and an immediate effect; [this medium] interprets the situations of our life [sic] in the simplest forms so that many people can understand them at a glance” (qtd. in Epshteyn 1927, 139–40). Maurice Becker (1892–?) believed that “the one who loves to paint everyday people and who has the ability as [a] cartoonist, should speak up for them in his cartoons” (qtd. in Fitzgerald 1973, 199). Becker’s contemporary Anton Refregier (1905–79), who was not Jewish, said: “Doing cartoons was not a separate activity from our painting or from our lives” (qtd. in Hemingway 2002, 48). And this observation was made about the cartoons of Louis Ribak (1902–79): “He felt that the only kind of work which would harness his ability as an artist to his emotional desire to make this a better world and give him, in return, a living wage was that of cartooning” (Salpeter 1942, 154). But there are other reasons today to look at these old cartoons and prints. First, because of Jewish communality based on immigrant experiences at the turn of the twentieth century; second, because of the political affiliations of the midcentury period; and third, because of the disappearance of cohesive Jewish neighborhoods after World War II except in Orthodox enclaves, it is quite possible that these old and largely forgotten images will become a form of primary documentation, “identificatory texts,” for Jews in America (Leavitt 2000, 65; see also Heilman 1998, 78; Keniston 1965, 178). The cartoons and prints as well as the various comments by artists and critics provide a way to maintain a connection both to the past and to the Jewish heritage of social concern. Quite probably, they will become mementos and artifacts of Jewish communality and perhaps provide a sense of Jewish continuity and Jewish identity formation in what is now an increasingly fragmented Jewish space.

—From Social Concern and Left Politics in Jewish American Art 1880–1940

Matthew Baigell

Social Concern and Left Politics in Jewish American Art 1880–1940

From the book:

Social Concern and Left Politics in Jewish American Art 1880–1940

by Matthew Baigell

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How and where did you get the inspiration for *All Dressed Up*?

My mother-in-law was a city-dweller. She lived all of her life in Newark, New Jersey. In her forties, after the death of her husband, she took up square dancing, an activity closely associated with rural America. On July 4, 1976, she appeared on national television in an elaborate square dancing costume on the deck of an aircraft carrier as part of the festivities that celebrated the bicentennial of the founding of America. Along with millions of others, I watched. I was even able to catch a glimpse of her. She was delighted to perform and her family and friends were thrilled to see her, but the possible irony of an often-chauvinistic urban-dweller appearing as a country girl wasn’t lost on me. When people get all dressed up they can do surprising things.

Like most people, I experienced pageantry from a young age. Like many, I first became aware of pageantry when I participated in it. I participated in First Communion processions, parades, and Christmas pageants. I have home movies of these events where I can see myself in my First Communion dress, my Brownie beanie and uniform, and my Tin Soldier costume. I distinctly recall watching my blond, blue-eyed younger sister as the child selected to place a floral crown on a larger-than-life-sized statue of the Blessed Virgin Mary on May 1, 1957 before the...
assembled parishioners of St. Mary’s Church. That remains my earliest and most vivid memory of envy.

In the broadest sense of the term, pageantry involves a display of an identity or affiliation. Pageantry is typically a public, open-air event, often free or at modest price, in which large numbers of participants hope to attract even larger numbers of viewers. Participants wear special, usually symbolic, clothing on select dates that are connected with holidays, annual observances, or anniversaries.

In my research there was another impetus to explore pageantry when I was working through the financial records for the Theatre of Ireland, which ended up in the P.S. O’Heagarty Collection at the University of Kansas. I knew how few people were attending some of these performances and began to ask myself if there wasn’t another way in which ordinary Irish people experienced “theatre.” Was there something like a Cirque du Soliel, a very popular, accessible theatrical genre, early in the twentieth century? And the answer was yes: pageantry.

For readers who might not be familiar with the Irish culture, what can you tell them about the Irish aesthetic standards?

Early in the twentieth century Irish historical pageantry shares with other visual idioms an impulse to draw on an older, sometimes ancient or pre-historic, but most important non-British, aesthetic.

It’s important to appreciate that the vogue of historical pageantry was not confined to Ireland. The 1939 World’s Fair in New York had a pageant, so did St. Louis for its centennial and hundreds of other towns and cities. In the early decades of the twentieth century, not least because of the expansion of the franchise, pageants hope to educate and inspire patriotism in the US and in Britain as well as in Ireland.

If you could tell us something surprisingly interesting about Irish pageantry and its history, what would it be?

The number of visual artists who, especially early in the twentieth century, were deeply involved in pageant making and promotion: Austin Molloy, John P. Campbell, Micheál macLiammóir, Jack Morrow, and to a lesser extent people like Paul Henry, Harry Kernoff, Art O’Murnaghan, William Conor, Mabel Annesley, and a score of others. Ireland has produced more than its fair share of writers, but the visual artists are certainly less widely recognized.

In All Dressed Up, the notion of popularity is heavily embedded in your research? How does that concept of popularity compare with our contemporary understanding of it?

The cliché tells us that everyone loves a parade. As a kid I certainly did, particularly drum and bugle corps, although they carry a very different resonance in Ireland than they did in a small town in upstate New York. The operative aesthetic that cuts across time and place can be summarized in one word: epic. Think about the opening ceremonies of the Olympic Games. In 2008, China celebrated four great inventions: paper, movable type, gunpowder, and the compass. Four years later, Danny Boyle (who directed Slumdog...
All Dressed Up: Modern Irish Historical Pageantry by Joan FitzPatrick Dean

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Millionaire) developed an extravaganza of British history, Isles of Wonder, in London for the Games; both aspired to stage a nation’s past and remain memorable for their epic scale. Several of the pageants I discuss drew enormous audiences, audiences that dwarf those drawn by many of the plays central to the canon of Irish drama; some were revived and even toured.

Can you tell us about the process of weaving in mythical elements and cultural references into a history book?

I’m not a historian, but All Dressed Up aspires to be theatre history. I hope the book also suggests how the Irish came to create and to understand their history in the twentieth century. Early in the twentieth century, the recourse was to mythical figures like Cuchulainn and Fionn. By the 1940s, the time frame of the Irish historical pageants had become a moving wall pressing toward the present: while in 1927 the pageants reached back to an ancient past and proscribed everything after 1800, those in the 1940s began in 1867 and moved right up to the present. By the 1960s, the story of Cuchulainn in the Tain as staged by Macnas is the story of Irish people killing other Irish people that resonates with the Troubles in Northern Ireland.

Plus, the relationship between myth and history moves in both directions in pageants: In the 1920s, myth could be historicized as when Fionn mac Cumhail was described as “an undoubtedly historical personage,” but throughout the century, historical events, such as the Easter Rising, were mythologized in pageants.
The Tumble Inn was included in Reader’s Digest list of “Ten Great New Books from Small Presses.”

“Loizeaux’s novel about two high school teachers who pull up stakes to run an inn in the Adirondacks is a crystalline evocation of marriage, family life, and community.”

Compassionate Stranger: Asenath Nicholson and the Great Irish Famine was included in Foreword Review’s list of “Top 10 University Press Picks.”

“In Compassionate Stranger, we meet Vermont-born Asenath Nicholson, a battle tested crusader against slavery, alcohol, meat eating, and other social issues of the early–mid 1800s in New York City, who boarded a three-masted schooner and sailed to Ireland as a woman in her fifties to help the poor.”

Gay is Good: The Life and Letters of Gay Rights Pioneer Franklin Kameny was selected for the Bay Area Reporter’s list of “Top 10 Gay Nonfiction Books of 2014.”

“Long succeeds in restoring Kameny’s vital voice during today’s ecstatic period when a 50-year struggle for equal rights is finally bearing so much fruit. Based on the compelling testimony Long uncovers, a convincing case could be made that Kameny’s name should be uttered in the same breath as Harvey Milk’s.”

Khalid Mattawa, recipient of a 2015 MacArthur Genius Grant and author of Mahmoud Darwish: The Poet’s Art and His Nation, was interviewed on WBUR’s Here and Now. Mattawa joined Jeremy Hobson to share some of his poems and translations, and to talk about the problems and process of his craft, the evolution of Arabic poetry from political to personal, and what it’s like to bridge the gap between two cultures.

Watch booktrailer on YouTube.