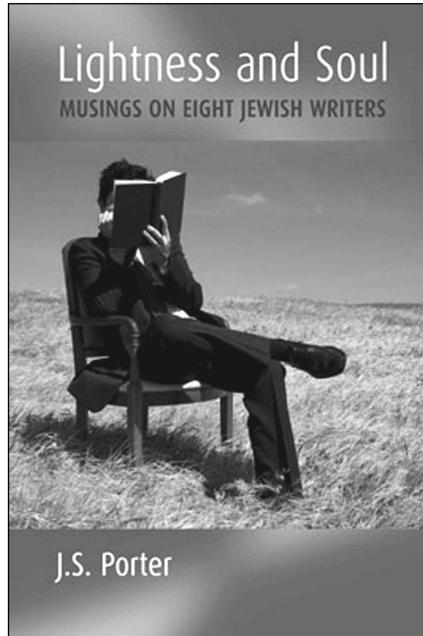


**LIGHTNESS AND SOUL:
MUSINGS ON EIGHT JEWISH WRITERS**

J.S. Porter. Seraphim Editions, Woodstock, ON, 2011.

*Reviewed by
Richard Kostelanetz*

More than once I've protested the limited sense of Jewish writing in America, noting for instance that Sephardic writers are routinely omitted, and that few publicists acknowledge Gertrude Stein as, yes, Jewish. The initial surprise of *Lightness and Soul*, subtitled *Musings on Eight Jewish Writers*, is J. S. Porter's selection: Alberto Manguel, Robert Lax, John Berger, Simone Weil, Muriel Rukeyser, Leonard Cohen, Harold Bloom, Susan Sontag, and, a greater surprise, Edward Said. (The last, a Palestinian



born in Jerusalem, don't forget, wrote about European Jewish thinkers toward the end of his life.)

Lax, a great minimalist poet, converted to the Catholicism of his college buddy Thomas Merton without ceasing to be Jewish. Though Sontag was born Susan Lee Rosenblatt, she

rarely mentioned Judaism anywhere in her voluminous writings. Manguel was born in Israel, the child of the Argentine ambassador. Residing in Canada for most of his adult life until his move to France, he has published many books reflecting his awesome literacy and gut enthusiasm for books, books, and more books. Since Porter is a Canadian, *Lightness and Soul* includes an obligatory chapter on Leonard Cohen, whose renown has always puzzled me, though I now credit Porter with discovering significances that previously escaped me.

Porter's real hero is the British art writer John Berger, born of a Jewish father, whom I'd not seen acknowledged as Jewish before. Another Porter chapter is devoted to Simone Weil, who like Lax converted to Catholicism, with an outcome quite different from Lax's.

Porter is a fluent and engaging writer, often aphoristic, who takes pride in staking unfamiliar intellectual territory. I reviewed this book initially because I liked it, but also because I doubt if anyone else south of the Canadian border will.♦

RICHARD KOSTELANETZ's books include The End of Intelligent Writing: Literary Politics in America (1974), Short Fictions (1974), More Short Fictions (1980) and Furthest Fictions (2007) and the anthology The Literature of SoHo (1981). A resident of New York, he appears in Outlook for the first time.

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partial to the use of the word *partially* in describing their Jewishness. Rather, it is a confluence of multiple traditions. It was observed that children of intermarriage are only as confused as their parents.

There are many reasons for intermarriage. Chalom believes that people should marry an individual, not a non-Jew and that marrying for love is a basic human right. Today, mixed marriages are not performed by

Orthodox, or Conservative rabbis. Reform rabbis are technically not permitted to do so, but it is believed that over forty percent of them do. Reconstructionist rabbis may perform mixed marriages, but will not co-officiate with non-Jewish clergy. All Secular Humanistic rabbis and Madrikhim (leaders) are authorized to perform mixed marriages and to co-officiate with non-Jewish clergy. A positive approach to both intermarriage and its heirs is essential for the growth and continuity of the Jewish people. As Rabbi

Chalom, said the "Oy Vey" should become "Mazel Tov!"

At the graduation ceremony Saturday evening, one Masters Degree was awarded and four Madrikhim (Vegvayzers, Leaders) were ordained. No Humanistic rabbis were ordained at Colloquium 2012. It is expected that two Humanistic rabbis will be ordained at the next Colloquium.♦

Selected videos from the Colloquium are available for free on the website of the IISHJ, www.iishj.org. The complete DVDs are also available for sale.