



Gratz Insider, March 2017 - Story Continuation

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Two Purim Must-Reads

My first recommendation is “Purim Story” by [Adam Gopnik](#), who writes for The New Yorker. Gopnik is not an expert on Judaism, but he is an expert on Jewish jokes. In “Purim Story,” he writes a brilliant, funny meditation about Jewish jokes, and New York City, and being Jewish in America today, and about his grandfather, who would take him every Sunday to buy smoked whitefish at Zabar’s - so Gopnik claims. I’m not sure that he should be taken literally.

Anyway, “Purim Story” is really worth reading. There are a few different options for accessing it. You can contact [Nancy Nitzberg](#), director of library services at Gratz, about obtaining a copy of the essay from the Gratz Tuttleman Library. You can also access it through the archive on the New Yorker website. “Purim Story” originally appeared as [an article in The New Yorker](#) in 2002, and quite frankly, it would be worth buying a subscription to the magazine just to be able to access this masterpiece of Jewish humor. The essay also appears as a chapter in Gopnik’s book [Through the Children’s Gate: A Home in New York](#), and a substantial [preview](#) of this chapter is available online through Google Books.

The other Purim must-read is a brilliantly funny essay by [Maurice Samuel](#) on King Ahasuerus (Achashverosh) in the first chapter of “Certain People of the Book.” Samuel, who wrote this book in the 1950’s, was the first person ever - or at least in 1950 years or so - to realize that the Book of Esther is a comedy. Today, millions of people realize this, even Adam Gopnik. But until Samuel, no one believed that a comedy could be hiding in the Holy Bible. Samuel’s book is available in the Gratz library; it is also available for download [here](#).

In his essay, Samuel makes the case that Ahasuerus is a comic fool. But - this is Samuel’s important question - what kind of fool? Purim is not a time for serious political commentary, but obviously, many famous people are fools, and it is important to learn the different species.

Samuel explains that there are summer fools, and there are winter fools. The summer fool comes to dinner, but he is not wearing any clothes, because he is a fool, and it is plain for all to see. The winter fool is very different. He comes to dinner fully clothed. He does not look like a fool at all - see how beautifully he is dressed. He takes off his gloves. (It’s winter, as we said.) He takes off his scarf and his overcoat. He carefully takes off his right boot, and then his left boot. He slowly takes off his jacket, his tie, his vest. And then his pants, his shirt and his underwear, until he is not wearing anything, and his foolishness is laid bare for all to see.

King Ahasuerus, says Samuel, is a winter fool. But I disagree. I say drunken Ahasuerus is actually a summer fool. The winter fool is Haman. Read the essay; read the Book of Esther. Then tell me if you don’t agree.

Happy Purim!