



Chaim Potok: A Critical Companion (Critical Companions to Popular Contemporary Writers)

By Sanford Sternlicht

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Since the publication of his first novel, *The Chosen*, Chaim Potok has been regarded as one of the most important Jewish-American writers of our time. In that 1967 landmark work, in its sequel *The Promise* (1969), and in the other works that followed, Potok has explored the conflict between Jewish values and the secular American culture against which these enlightening stories are set. This full-length critical study introduces students to the powerful fiction of Potok. By examining in depth not only the spiritual elements but also the literary components that make works such as *My Name Is Asher Lev* (1972) best-sellers, this Critical Companion helps readers gain an appreciation for the considerable literary achievements of Potok. A close reading is given for each of Potok's eight novels, including his most recent work set in the Korean War, *I Am the Clay* (1992). A full chapter on each title examines character and plot development, major themes, and stylistic features. A discussion of the historical context as well as a close critical reading further enhances the understanding and appreciation of each work.

This Critical Companion provides an up-to-date, detailed biography of Chaim Potok, examining his life as a man, as a rabbi, and as an artist. A literary heritage chapter explores the influences on Potok's writings, both literary and spiritual. This section helps students of all backgrounds understand the basic tenets and the important distinctions within contemporary Judaism. This discussion also examines what it means to be a Jewish-American writer. Full literary analysis of Potok's eight novels is provided, each book with its own chapter. A specially selected bibliography of reviews, criticism, and biographical information completes this volume.

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Editorial Review

About the Author

SANFORD STERNLICHT teaches in Syracuse University's English Department and Judaic Studies Program. He is a series editor for Syracuse University Press. His recent books on modern writers include *Stephen Spender, Jean Rhys, and All Things Herriot: James Herriot and His Peacable Kingdom*. He also frequently writes on poetry and Irish literature. His essay on Padraic Colum appeared in *Modern Irish Writers: A Bio-Critical Sourcebook* (Greenwood 1997). He has contributed articles to many periodicals including *College English, Harvard Magazine, Writer's Digest, Calcutta Review, and Renaissance Quarterly*.

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