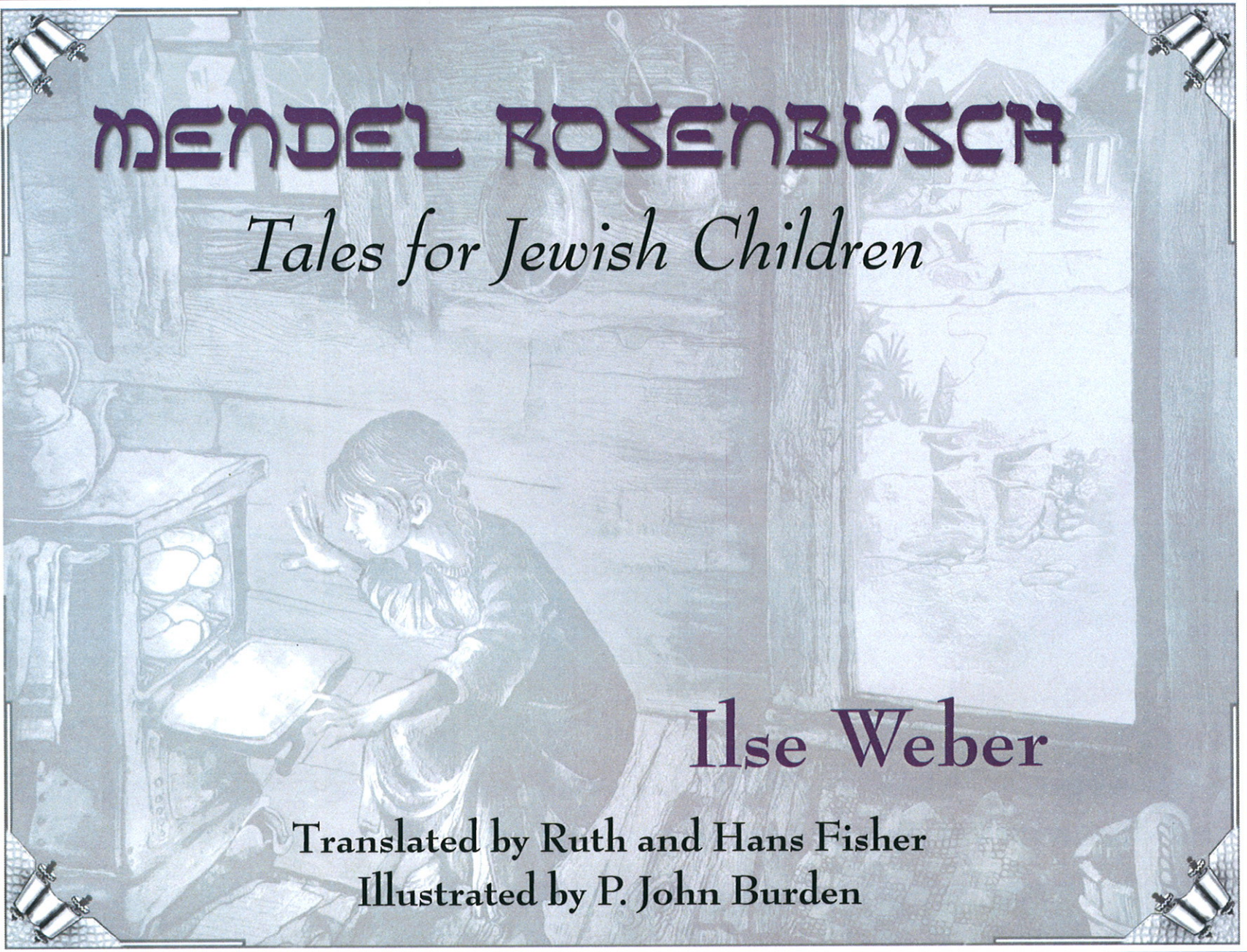




MENDEL ROSENBUSCH

Tales for Jewish Children

Ilse Weber

Translated by Ruth and Hans Fisher

Illustrated by P. John Burden

MENDEL ROSENBUSCH

Tales for Jewish Children

by Ilse Weber



Ilse Weber

How has this neglected collection of folk-tales for Jewish children, published in German early in the twentieth century, come to be translated into English for a new audience?

The story begins in 1998, in Santiago, Chile, where a New Jersey couple were going through the possessions of Ruth Hirschberg Fisher's mother. As Ruth's husband, Dr. Hans Fisher, recalls:

"After my mother-in-law's funeral, the daunting task of sorting through her considerable book collection fell to me. Some of the books had come with her when her family had fled Berlin, Germany, to escape the Holocaust. Over the five decades during which she had lived in Santiago, Chile, the collection had grown to fill the bookshelves in her small home. As I began pulling the titles down one by one, I fully expected to journey back through her life. I did not expect that within minutes I would be holding my own childhood in my hands.

"The book was slim and gray, and, judging by its condition, I had gotten to it just in time. Portions of the cover, pages, and binding had been devoured by mice, insects, or both, but the title could still be read: *Mendel Rosenbusch: Geschichten für Jüdische Kinder*, or, in English, *Mendel Rosenbusch: Tales for Jewish Children*. Opening the cover, seeing again the stories flowing across the pages, transported me to my own boyhood in Breslau . . . It seemed like a small miracle that I had found this particular book and over the next few hours, I devoured its contents as if in a trance. The charm, insight, and moral grounding that had made it one of my favorites more than a half-century earlier were just as I remembered."

Translated into English by the Fishers, *Mendel Rosenbusch* can now enter the lives of new generations of children.

Bunim & Bannigan, Ltd.

NEW YORK
CHARLOTTETOWN

www.bunimbannigan.com
© 2012 Bunim & Bannigan, Ltd.
Printed in Canada



U.K. £15

Publication date 11 October 2012

Mendel Rosenbusch
Tales for Jewish Children

by Ilse Weber

Translated by Ruth and Hans Fisher

Illustrated by P. John Burden

These eleven tales take place in eastern Europe at the end of the 19th century, mostly in a shtetl, a Jewish settlement. A village elder, Mendel Rosenbusch, uses his magic invisibility to teach moral behavior to children and adults alike.

First published in Czechoslovakia, in German, in 1929, they were re-discovered by the translators, Hans and Ruth Fisher, in 1998.



Ilse, Thomas, Hanus & Willi Weber, 1939, shortly before Hanus left for London.

About the author

As a young girl in Witkowitz, Ilse Herlinger was already composing fairy tales, poetry, and theatrical sketches for children, published in journals and newspapers. She also worked in her mother's restaurant. Pre WWI Witcowitz, situated in Moravia, was in a border region alive with Czech, Polish, Jewish and German culture and political disharmony. Ilse's three children's books were published between 1927 and 1930.

Willi Weber, whom Ilse married in 1930, had recently returned from Palestine where he had pioneered for nine years before invalided home with malaria.

Their son Hanus was born on New Year's Day, 1931, and Thomas, named after Czechoslovakia's president Thomas Masaryk, on May 3, 1934. Hanus was sent to England in 1939 to live with Lillian von Loewenadler, the daughter of a Swedish diplomat with whom Ilse had been corresponding since childhood. When war began, Lillian took Hanus to Sweden where he stayed with her mother.

In 1942, three years after Hanus' departure, Willi, Ilse and Thomas were sent to Theresienstadt. Eventually, the family was transported to Auschwitz. Ilse, forty-one, and Thomas, ten, were gassed in 1944. Willi Weber, survived Auschwitz and was reunited Hanus in Prague in 1945.

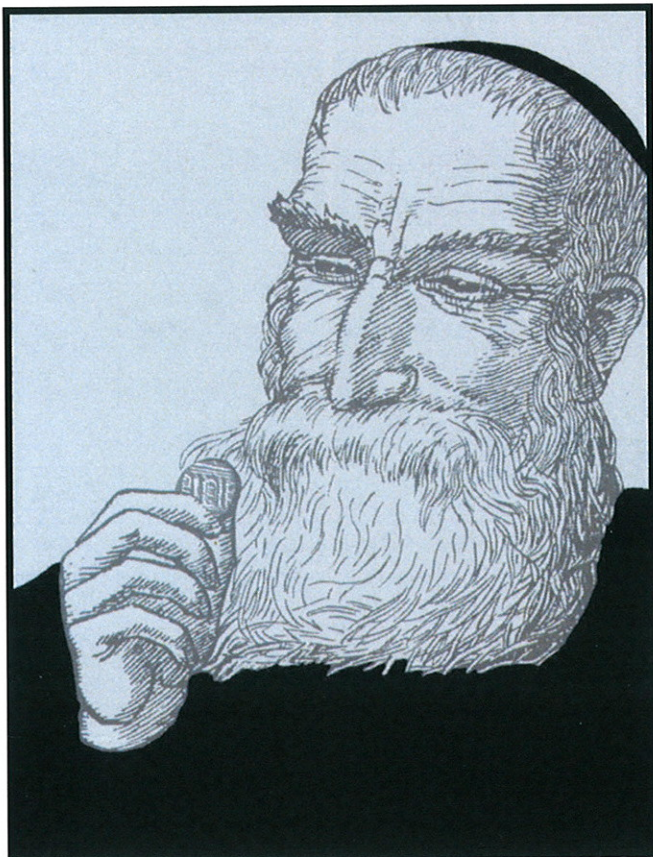
After the war, the sheets of words and music of songs Ilse composed and sang in the camp, were dug up from the floor of a shed by Hanus and Willi Weber. They had been hidden there by Willi shortly before his own deportation to Auschwitz.

Four of these songs, *I Wander Through Theresienstadt*, *Farewell, My Friend!*, *And the Rain Runs*, and *Lullaby*, are performed by Swedish mezzo-soprano Anne Sofie von Otter, on the CD, *Theresienstadt*, issued by Deutsche Grammophon in 2007.

Ilse's songs may also be heard on the recording of Bente Kahane's monodrama, *Voices of Theresienstadt*.

Photographs courtesy of Hanus Weber





This portrait of Mendel Rosenbusch appeared on the cover of the original *Geschichten für Jüdische Kinder*, published in 1929.

"It seemed like a small miracle that I had found this particular book, and, over the next few hours, I devoured its contents as if in a trance."

—Hans Fisher, translator

The translators, the Fishers, visited Terezin in 1999. The former camp has been preserved as a Holocaust museum and memorial. On display were a remarkable number of photographs of Ilse Weber, some of which included the children whom she had cared for, and many references to her poems and music. When Ilse came to the children or to the elderly with her mandolin, noted one, the prisoners briefly forgot their desperate lot and terrifying future and lost themselves in bittersweet song.

When the cattle cars came for the children, Ilse volunteered to accompany them to their unknown destination in the East—Auschwitz. This compassionate and talented young woman had brought grace to a terrible place.

"I drew the illustrations as dark, with always a light shining through."

—P. John Burden, artist

To obtain a review copy email

SalesUS@bunimbannigan.com

or

SalesCANADA@bunimbannigan.ca

Bunim & Bannigan, Ltd.

New York and Charlottetown

www.bunimbannigan.com