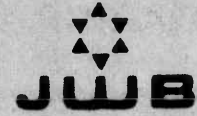


## Jewish Books in Review

is a service of the JWB Jewish Book Council,  
15 East 26th St., New York, N.Y. 10010



*Invisible Mending.* By Frederick Busch. David R. Godine, 306 Dartmouth Street, Boston, MA 02116. 1984. 277 pages. \$14.95.

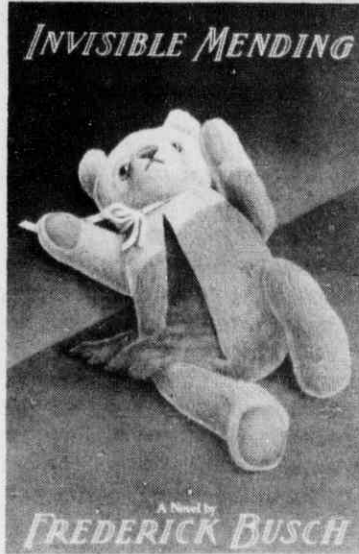
Reviewed by Diane Levenberg

In line with taking the classic approach to Jewish Books, one should read this novel from right to left. You will want to read more about Zimmer, its main character, only after you have begun to like him. And, it is not until the novel's conclusion, that you realize how much he has grown on you.

Zimmer has just turned forty. An editor at a New York publishing house, he is pushing to publish a book of Celine's poems it does not want, his wife has recently asked him to move out, and his eight-year-old son, like a berserk terrorist, has slashed his room to bits with a Swiss knife Zimmer has bought him for his birthday.

The patient reader will soon discern that Frederick Busch is adept at playing with the structure of his narrative. Zimmer, says his old girl friend, is "always in more than one place, Time I mean." The novel opens in the present. Then, like a half-empty subway car in the wee hours of a Manhattan morning, it shuttles back and forth between Zimmer's first important love affair and his present lonely life. If we grab a strap and hang on for the ride, it's an interesting though sometimes discomfiting trip.

Zimmer was raised in Brooklyn as secular Jew — Christmas tree and all. At his



Lutheran College, he discovers his Jewishness when on a drunken spree some fraternity brothers beat him up. Giving them a good fight, he is proud of how he has battled for something larger than himself.

His Jewishness is again resurrected when his girlfriend, Rhona Glinsky, takes him on a zany search for a murderous Nazi. When Zimmer realizes that Rhona is really trying to save his soul, he feels betrayed. As he understands their relationship, instead of love — like the impossible promise of invisible mending — he's been offered only lies. At a crucial moment, he abandons her.

Eventually, he marries a beautiful Christian woman and though we're not exactly sure what bothers her, Zimmer doesn't seem able to love her the way she would like him to. "I love you," Zimmer tells his wife. "Sweetheart," she answers, "we don't give medals for that. Not right away. Do it all the time, all the

good ways, and then..."

"Avoid shiksies," says Rhona. "Didn't I teach you anything?" When Rhona reunites with him, years later, her love teaches him how much he misses his wife and longs for his son. Abandoning Rhona one more time, a loyal husband and father, he returns home.

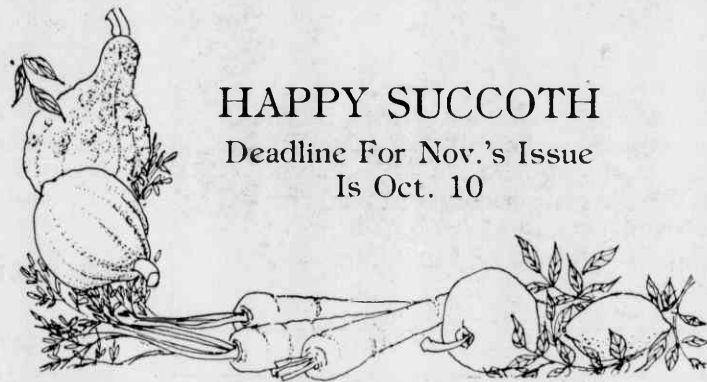
*Invisible Mending*, Busch's ninth book, recently won the 1985 National Jewish Book Award for fiction. It's such a modern, humanistic post-Holocaust, American work that we feel compelled, like an obsessive Talmudist, to ask some probing questions about the nature of Jewish writing.

Is it enough that the protagonist be born Jewish? Is it Zimmer's desire to be a good family man which makes him Jewish? In that case, despite his ethnic palaver, Zimmer is as Jewish as all the sad and lonely men who people the stories of Updike and Cheever. In the end, in a highly imaginative and controlled scene, he learns to play the game on the family team — fielding a baseball with his wife and son. Good editor that he probably is, Zimmer tries to correct his mistakes and thereby comforts himself.

Rhona takes risks. She suffers for others and though wit-

ty, wise and strong, her ultimate mistake is that she keeps searching for the wrong man. It is the very Jewish Rhona who mends Zimmer's broken heart and holds this novel together. Just for having invented her, Busch deserves his literary award.

Diane Levenberg is a freelance writer and literary critic who lives in Philadelphia and works as a Public Relations Associate at Touro College. Her book of poems, *Out of the Desert* was published by Doubleday in 1980.



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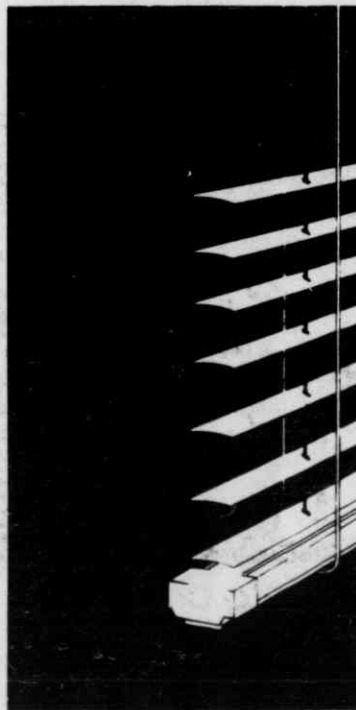
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