

The Family Morfawitz

Daniel H. Turtel

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Daniel H. Turtel's *The Family Morfawitz* is an original and striking multigenerational saga centered on a power-hungry family. Inspired by Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, it follows the determined rise of a family that immigrates to post-war New York City.

Hadassah, the family matriarch, arrives in the US after narrowly escaping a concentration camp fate. She marries Zev Morfawitz, a wily orphan. Thus begin the family's ambitions to conquer the city at any cost. Thanks to Zev's hard work and Hadassah's cunning, they start buying properties in Brooklyn. After giving away their first son, Hezekial, due to a deformity, they have a second son, Adam, whom they adore.

The family's story is complicated by Zev's philandering, which results in several illegitimate sons. Zev builds on his success by bringing these sons into his business. Through kidnappings, a journey to Vietnam, a bullfight in Lisbon, and a kibbutz in Israel, the family's story twists, deepens, and broadens. Then, on a Shabbat in the present day, in the Tower Morfawitz: aged Zev begins to tell Hezekial, who has returned to the family fold, the history that made them mythological in New York City.

Each person within the family is portrayed in candid terms, exemplifying ambition, lust, and deceit. They often believe that they deserve everything that they have, whether they earned or took it. Their exchanges are direct, biting, and full of Yiddish flourishes, complementing the colorful and earthy prose. And although there are hints of absurdity throughout the story, as with a buffalo chariot race in South Vietnam, the book assumes a tragicomic tone that makes its events plausible.

With themes of family honor, ambition, and power, *The Family Morfawitz* is an epic tale of greed and malice—an engrossing portrayal of a wealthy Jewish family.

MONICA CARTER (January / February 2023)

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