

Megillat Esther, Lesson 12:

Esther Imagined, Esther Illustrated, Part 2

We now move to two contemporary megillot by two prominent artists.

Gadi Pollack is a Russian-born artist who lives in Israel and has published many Torah books with distinctive bold illustrations. JT Waldman is an illustrator and designer from Philadelphia who has illustrated Jewish-themed books.

Each published an illustrated edition of Esther, and each is very distinctive. Waldman's is black-and-white; Pollack's is full of bold colors. Waldman's is challenging, visually and conceptually, while Pollack's is simpler to engage. Waldman's has a bibliography including a large number of modern scholars whose readings he captures in his art, in addition to some midrashic interpretations, while Pollack relies on Hazal to bring Esther to life.

More about Waldman's project can be seen at his site: <http://megillatesther.com/>. Pollack maintains his anonymity and so has no website and there are no photos publicly available of him.

Image 1: Pollack cover

Image 2: Waldman cover

Image 3: Pollack, Mordecai's introduction

Images 4-5: Waldman, Mordecai's introduction

There is a lot to comment on in each of these master illustrator's works, individually and in comparison with one another. Some points to bring up:

- The way the text and the images interact
- The effect of color
- The mood of the illustration
- The density of illustrations (i.e., how many illustrations per section of text)
- How the Hebrew and English texts co-exist
- What sections of the text are illustrated
- What in the illustrations is *not* from the text

Image 6: Waldman, Mordecai angers Haman

- How does the illustrator imagine the geography of the "bowing"? Where is Haman, and where is Mordecai?

[One can imagine a "provocative" reading, where Mordecai stands proudly tall quite close to Haman, and a less provocative reading, where Mordecai moves off to the side to simply avoid being near Haman.]

- What do Mordecai's dress and facial expressions suggest about him as a character?
- How does Mordecai's colleague reveal his non-bowing to Haman?

Image 7: Pollack, בלילה ההוא

Images 8-9: Waldman, בלילה ההוא

While Pollack chooses to illustrate the whole city during the king's sleepless night, Waldman shows us inside the king's restless head. What is swirling there?

Note: I can't show this, but from this point on, Waldman's entire megilla is *turned upside down*, to illustrate very graphically the "reversal" theme discussed earlier.

Image 10: Waldman, conclusion

Waldman takes the opportunity at the end of the megilla to draw a somewhat serene royal court, but there is more here than a simple illustration.

- What symbols does he include on the page? What do those represent?
- What comments are made by the people at the bottom of the page? What do these accomplish for the reader?