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**Anton, Maggie. *The Choice: A Novel of Love, Faith, and the Talmud*. Los Angeles: Banot Press, 2022.**

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Maggie Anton's *The Choice: A Novel of Love, Faith, and the Talmud* brings forth questions of compromise and marriage within the Orthodox religion. Set in the 1950s, Hannah Eisin, a journalist, and Nathan Mandel, an Orthodox rabbi, unite over a rebellious interest of learning the Talmud together, which leads them to fall in love. The book revolves around several topics, including gendered ideas of *mikvah* and *niddah*, patriarchal ideas of the Orthodox Church, and love in the face of adversity. Anton describes the book as "commenting on and criticizing Jewish women's unequal and inferior legal status" (vii). Ultimately, Anton successfully achieves her goal of placing Jewish women's struggles at the forefront of her book. The topics result in a layered description of the Jewish community.

Anton centers her book on the love story of Hannah and Nathan. Along with learning the Talmud, Hannah and Nathan find comfort in each other. Although scandalous, Hannah and Nathan cannot escape their infatuation with one another, so they put aside other's opinions and become engaged. Through a blending of the Talmud and Kinsey, their love story unfolds with the progression of the modern age and the traditions of their religion. Ending with fraternal twins and marriage, Hannah and Nathan must navigate the challenges of a relationship being dominated by patriarchal norms.

To balance the male and female perspectives, Anton created a strong female career woman: Aunt Elizabeth. The choice to connect Aunt Elizabeth and Hannah helped to drive away from the stereotypical, submissive women of the 1950s since Elizabeth wields power of both money and a company. Instead, Aunt Elizabeth represents a woman who leads with wealth and a foundation under her belt. With her mind-shifting advice for strong womanhood, Elizabeth becomes Hannah's mentor. Elizabeth's impact extends past her death at the end of the novel, as she leaves Hannah her foundation to run. The foundation and Elizabeth's legacy allows Hannah to become a published author while granting her the opportunities as an inheritor.

Not only does Anton bring in a strong female role model for Hannah, but she also discusses controversial topics, such as sexual assault, trauma, and domination. The novel interweaves a subplot about Jewish boys being sexually assaulted in the Hasidic Church. Even though this plotline at first feels out of place in the narrative, the connections to the storyline are present as the book goes on. Benny, a friend of Nathan, is a psychologist for the boys who were sexually abused, but he comes to realize that abuse is happening more frequently in the Church, even to him as a boy by his father. The theme of abuse elicits a strong emotional connection, especially once Anton reveals that Hannah was drugged and raped by her previous boyfriend. With Hannah revealing to Nathan her traumatizing past, Anton brings up how Judaism makes women feel shame and guilt. Although it isn't their fault for the sexual assault, they feel that they cannot say anything to the police or their relatives about the assault. Hannah represents internalized guilt as a woman, but also as a Jewish woman who supposedly violated her religion, even though it is not by choice. Hannah fears rejection more than rape, exposing the problematic nature of Judaism for women in a legal and emotional sense.

The driving force in Anton's novel is the idea of compromise and choice, which shows in the marriages of Benny and Sharon as well as Nathan and Hannah. Unbeknownst to Benny, Sharon has been abused by the other women of their Church and Benny's mother for not being a good Orthodox Jewish wife. After a final straw, Sharon leaves Benny because she feels confined by the strict tradition of Orthodox Judaism. As Hannah and Nathan try to help their friends back together, Anton highlights how marriage needs compromise in order to succeed, not domination over others, especially when it comes to Jewish women. Benny decides to compromise on many of the older traditions that he is used to, so that he can save his marriage with Sharon. Although Nathan and Hannah see the struggle Benny and Sharon have in their marriage, including domination and compromise, they, too, discover similar struggles in their relationship. After a heated argument, Hannah and Nathan find themselves at odds due to *mikvah* and *niddah* practices. Hannah feels that *mikvah* and *niddah* are too harsh for the modern day while Nathan feels he needs to set an example with these traditions as an Orthodox rabbi. Ultimately, Nathan and Hannah come to a compromise at the end of the book once Hannah gives birth to twins that they need to turn to Conservative Judaism with personal compromises. Again, Anton emphasizes the need to communicate and choose the best path in Judaism as a couple, not as individual practitioners of the religion.

Through realistic characters, the novel explores womanhood, marriage, abuse, domination, and many important topics both in Judaism and in everyday life. However, it is a slow read and at times, the writing seems to only touch the surface of a lot of these issues instead of going deeper into their storylines. To help the slow pace, Anton pushes us to fill in the gaps and deepen our understanding of the Jewish culture in the 1950s.