

Then Again – Travels in search of my younger self by Irma Kurtz.
4th Estate, 2003.

Irma Kurtz, for many years an illustrious contributor to Cosmopolitan magazine, has in Then Again produced that rare work, a memoir that is also a work of philosophy and that is characterised by an honesty at various times poignant, humorous, and deeply affecting.

The kernel of this book, the retracing as a mature woman of a journey taken by her younger self through the major European cities in 1954, is intriguing in itself, but it is what Kurtz does with it that makes it so powerful, and at times quite haunting.

The means by which Kurtz converses with her younger self is the diary she kept during the Study Abroad trip, from which extracts are cited and then responded to; she teases herself as both an adult and a teenager, and in the course of so doing reveals much about her adult life and the way she has lived it, particularly with regard to the momentous decision, following the 1954 journey, to leave the United States and live, an at times quite bohemian, life in Europe.

Irma Kurtz's Jewishness takes a while to emerge but when it does it is a theme that is significant but not dominant, though it throws up some interesting reflections, particularly in Germany.

Perhaps the dimension of the book that I found the most poignant were the reflections on 'old age', even though Irma Kurtz is hardly in her dotage and the picture on the inside back cover of the book is hardly one of a person about to meet her Maker! There is a sadness, and almost a melancholy that is touching and full of pathos.

This is a book to be read and re-read, as well as being a memoir of such intensely personal reflections as to leave the reader feeling privileged to have had the insights it has granted into another's life.

Rabbi Dr Charles H Middleburgh