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12-1-2018

December 1, 2018: "I Retired"

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Repository Citation

Ledewitz, B. (2018). December 1, 2018: "I Retired". Retrieved from <https://dsc.duq.edu/ledewitz-hallowedsecularism/1210>

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Title: "I Retired

Date: 2018-12-01T18:16:00.000-05:00

12/1/2108—I don't believe I've told this story on HallowedSecularism. A few years ago, I was visiting the Children's Museum in Pittsburgh with our grandchildren, when I was approached by a man who was clearly a Lubavitch on one of their Mitzvah Missions. "Excuse me," he said politely, but are you Jewish?" "I used to be," I answered. "You know," he mused, clearly intrigued, "I have asked that question thousands of times, but I have never before heard that answer." What followed was interesting in its own right, but it is not my point here. Rather, the point is the story itself. I assumed that I was the only one who might have such a tale to tell. Imagine my surprise today, therefore, upon read what was essentially the same story in a review of a novel. Francine Prose quotes the vignette in a review of three novels by the Guatemalan writer, Eduardo Halfon. Here is the story—Prose does not identify from which novel it originates: "I really remembered only three or four words and a random prayer or two and maybe how to count to ten. Fifteen, if I really tried. I live in the capital, I told her in Spanish, to show that I wasn't an American, and she admitted that she was confused because she hadn't imagined there were any Jewish Guatemalans. I'm not Jewish any more, I said, smiling at her, I retired. What do you mean you're not? That's impossible, she yelled in that way Israelis have of yelling." Talk about art imitating life—although, the same thing might have actually happened to Halfon—it is apparently not easy to tell where the novels leave off and real life begins, with him. This is going to be my way of telling my journey from now on—I'm not Jewish any more. I retired.