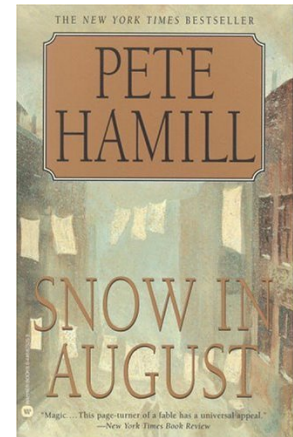


Snow in August by Pete Hamill

About the book

In Brooklyn in 1947, Michael Devlin, an 11-year-old Irish kid who spends his days reading Captain Marvel and anticipating the arrival of Jackie Robinson, makes the acquaintance of a recently emigrated Orthodox rabbi. In exchange for lessons in English and baseball, Rabbi Hirsch teaches him Yiddish and tells him of Jewish life in old Prague and of the mysteries of the Kabbalah. Anti-Semitism soon rears its head in the form of a gang of young Irish toughs out to rule the neighborhood. As the gang escalates its violence, it seems that only being as miraculously powerful as Captain Marvel—or a golem—could stop them. Strongly evoking time and place this coming-of-age tale serves up a hearty dose of magical realism mixed in. (from *Library Journal* review)



About the author

Pete Hamill is a novelist, essayist and journalist whose career has endured for more than forty years. He was born in Brooklyn, N. Y. in 1935, the oldest of seven children of immigrants from Belfast, Northern Ireland. He attended Catholic schools as a child. He left school at 16 to work in the Brooklyn Navy Yard as a sheet metal worker, and then went on to the United States Navy. While serving in the Navy, he completed his high school education. Then, using the educational benefits of the G.I. Bill of Rights, he attended Mexico City College in 1956-1957, studying painting and writing, and later went to Pratt Institute.



For several years, he worked as a graphic designer. Then in 1960, he went to work as a reporter for the New York Post. A long career in journalism followed. He has been a columnist for the New York Post, the New York Daily News, and New York Newsday, the Village Voice, New York magazine and Esquire. He has served as editor-in-chief of both the Post and the Daily News.

As a journalist, he has covered wars in Vietnam, Nicaragua, Lebanon and Northern Ireland, and has lived for extended periods in Mexico City, Dublin, Barcelona, San Juan and Rome. From his base in New York he has also covered murders, fires, World Series, championship fights and the great domestic disturbances of the 1960s, and has written extensively on art, jazz, immigration and politics. He witnessed the events of September 11, 2001 and its aftermath and wrote about them for the Daily News.

At the same time, Hamill has written much fiction, including movie and TV scripts. He has published nine novels and two collections of short stories. His 1997 novel, *Snow in August*, was on the New York Times best-seller list for four months. His memoir, *A Drinking Life*, was on the same New York Times list for 13 weeks. He has published two collections of his journalism (*Irrational Ravings* and *Piecework*), an extended essay on journalism called *News Is A Verb*, a book about the relationship of tools to art, a biographical essay called *Why Sinatra Matters*,

dealing with the music of the late singer and the social forces that made his work unique. In 1999, Harry N. Abrams published his acclaimed book on the Mexican painter Diego Rivera. His latest novel, *Forever*, was published by Little, Brown in January 2003 and became a New York Times best-seller. In 2004, he published "Downtown: My Manhattan", a non-fiction account of his love affair with New York and received much critical acclaim.

Hamill is the father of two daughters, and has a seven-year-old grandson. He is married to the Japanese journalist, Fukiko Aoki, and they divide their time between New York City and Cuernavaca, Mexico. He is a Distinguished Writer in Residence at New York University and is writing a new novel.

Discussion Questions

1. What are the themes of the novel? If you were to put the main theme in a sentence, what would you say?
2. Is Michael an authentic eleven year old boy? How does Hamill flatter his childhood self?
3. How does chance affect important events in the book? How are these events "acts of God"? Why are Michael and the Rabbi brought together?
4. Why is baseball so important to Rabbi Hirsch? Why does he relate so strongly to Jackie Robinson?
5. What do the American veterans bring home from the War? How are their attitudes and lives changed from what they have experienced? How do these attitudes change from those of the refugees and immigrants from Europe?
6. Does Hamill write as if he wants these Brooklyn days to return? Does he see the past through rose-colored glasses? Is this a nostalgic or sentimental novel?
7. What is the significance of the "magic words" (Shazam, the secret name of God) in the book? What other magic words are there for the characters? For us today?
8. Hamill describes reading as a "creative act." What did you create in your mind when you read *Snow in August*? What role does the author play in this creative act?
9. An online fan of the novel, himself a Rabbi, described *Snow in August* as "the latest work by Chaim Potok . . . written under the pen name of Pete Hamill." What is your response to this comment?
10. There are many mythological elements in the novel: comic books, Irish and Jewish magic and myth, even baseball mythology. How do these elements fit in with the ending?
11. If you didn't like the ending, how would you have rewritten the final chapter? How would that change the feel and the message of the book? What bothered you about the ending?