



Reverend Katz Library

New Book Reviews

July 2024

Roxanne De Bastion, *The Piano Player of Budapest: a true story of Holocaust, survival, music and hope* HOL DEB

This is a story about a piano and its most prodigious player - how it, along with him, survived. When her father died, singer songwriter Roxanne de Bastion inherited a piano she knew had been in her family for over a hundred years. But it is only when she finds a cassette recording of her grandfather, Stephen, playing one of his compositions, the true and almost unbelievable history of the piano, this man and her family begins to unravel.

Stephen was a man who enjoyed great fame, a man who suffered the horrors of concentration camps in WWII, a man who ultimately survives - along with his piano. By piecing together his cassette recordings, unpublished memoirs, letters and documents, Roxanne sings out her grandfather's story of music and hope, lost and found, and explores the power of what can echo down through generations.

Michael Goldfarb, *Emancipation: How liberating Europe's Jews from the ghetto led to Revolution and Renaissance* HIS GOL

The first popular history of the Emancipation of Europe's Jews in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries—a transformation that was startling to those who lived through it and continues to affect the world today.

Freed from their ghettos, Jews ushered in a second renaissance. Within a century Marx, Freud, and Einstein created revolutions in politics, human science, and physics that continue to shape our world. Proust, Schoenberg, Mahler, and Kafka redefined artistic expression.

Emancipation reformed the practice of Judaism, encouraged some to imagine a modern nation of their own, and within decades led to the dream of Zionism.

Tess Scholfield – Peters, *Dear Mutzi: A story of love, escape and finding the forgotten* HOL SCH

Harry Peters - formerly Hermann Ludwig Pollnow, known to his family as Mutzi - was born in Berlin in 1920. As a teenager, he fled Nazi Germany and landed in rural Australia. Harry's parents, Max and Edith, stayed and perished in Nazi camps.

This story, of forced migration, assimilation, loss, resilience and determination despite the odds, is one that has been lived countless times throughout history and continues to be a common human experience. Harry's particular experience also tells the history of refugee farmers in rural Australia and migrant labour companies during WWII.

Scholfield-Peters tells her grandfather's story with three intertwining threads: a sketched-out history based on Harry's testimony and documentary history; her engagement with this personal history from a third-generation perspective; and the present story of Harry's growing infirmities and eventual death in early 2021 at age 100.

Through the hybrid narrative non-fiction form, Scholfield-Peters investigates her family history and seeks to share an ethical historical account of Harry's life. This work necessarily skirts the edges of

fiction and non-fiction, as Scholfield-Peters weaves her deep research with Harry's recollections and imagines the unknown details.

Lihi Lapid, *On her own: A novel* F LAP

A moving, page-turning story of two families in crisis and the unexpected places from which love can grow.

Nina, a teenage runaway, wakes up in the unfamiliar stairwell of a Tel Aviv apartment in a torn minidress. As her memory starts to resurface—the abusive older man she’s running away from, the crime she witnessed—she knows one thing: she needs to find a place to hide.

When one of the building’s tenants, Carmela, a lonely old widow suffering from memory loss, mistakes Nina for her granddaughter she hasn’t seen in years, Nina jumps at the opportunity for a safe haven. Soon, the two strangers become each other’s lifeline as Nina settles into the apartment with sweet, reassuring Carmela.

Meanwhile, Irina, a Russian immigrant, is living a parent’s worst nightmare: her only daughter has gone missing. She knows Nina got involved with the wrong men and will do anything to find her.

Across the ocean, Itamar feels that something is happening to his mom, Carmela. The guilt over having left Israel for his pursuit of the American dream stirs childhood memories in him and a longing for the family that once was complete.

Set between the eve of Passover and Israel’s Independence Day, *On Her Own* is a tense and immersive psychological read about two families looking for redemption and the transformative bonds between strangers. (Translated from Hebrew)

Scott Nadelson, *While it lasts: Stories* LIT NAD

This award-winning short story collection brings us moments of tenuousness, in which characters seek out or struggle to hold on to what’s most precious in the face of change and loss.

The stories take us from suburban New Jersey to prewar Vienna to Western Oregon, chronicling the lives of, among others, a suburban teenage boy taking revenge with a stolen Revolutionary War bayonet; a woman adrift, literally and figuratively, amid a workplace affair; a nearly forgotten and destitute musician attempting to reclaim his creative spark; and a young Mark Rothko finding his way after several early failures.

While It Lasts speaks to how we are all bound by limited time to achieve what we must despite our own knowledge of how everything is fleeting.

Lily Brett, *Treasure (Previously published as Too many Men)* F BRE

Winner of the Commonwealth Writers’ Prize

Ruth Rothwax, a successful woman with her own business, Rothwax Correspondence, can find order and meaning in writing words for other people – condolence letters, thank-you letters, even you-were-great-in-bed letters. But as the daughter of Edek Rothwax, an Auschwitz survivor with a somewhat idiosyncratic approach to the English language, Ruth can find no words to understand the loss her family experienced during World War II.

Ruth is obsessed with the idea of returning to Poland with her father, but she doesn't quite understand why she feels this so intensely. To make sense of her family's past, yes. To visit the places where her beloved mother and father lived and almost died, certainly. But she knows there's more to this trip. By facing Poland, and the past, she can finally confront her own future.