



Reverend Katz Library

New Book Reviews

September 2023

Nearing the end of our celebration of all the Festivals at this time of year, we can now look forward to having time to enjoy some interesting reading. These are some of the new books received during the month of September.

Jorg Springer and Manuel Aust, *The Synagogue project* ART SPR

Germany is currently experiencing an intense debate about the reconstruction of synagogues that were destroyed under Nazi rule in the 1930s, and the related search for an appropriate architectural expression of Jewish life and culture in the country's major cities today. This book, which results from a collaboration between the Technical Universities of Darmstadt and Dresden, Hamburg's Hafencity University, and the Bauhaus-Universität Weimar, vividly contributes to this discussion.

The Synagogue Project features designs for new synagogues replacing the lost buildings on Berlin's Fraenkelufer and on Joseph-Carlebach-Platz and Poolstrasse in Hamburg by students at the participating universities. They illustrate the search for a structural expression that can provide space for Jewish life and worship in the future. In conversation, members of Jewish communities and Franz-Josef Höing, representing the City of Hamburg's department of urban development and housing, explain their views on the past and future of synagogues in Hamburg and Berlin. Mirjam Wenzel, director of the Jewish Museum in Frankfurt, Salomon Korn, former vice-president of Germany's Central Council of Jews, Rabbi Edward van Voolen, and Swiss architect Roger Diener also contribute to the discussion on the history and significance of spaces for Jewish life, culture, and religion in German cities.

National Council of Jewish Women, *A century of loving-kindness: Centenary Timeline 1923-2023* HIS NAT

Many thanks to Robyn Lenn for her generous donation of this wonderful book to the Reverend Katz Library. We are proud to have it in our Library. Your donation is greatly appreciated, Robyn!

Robyn Lenn OAM, Research and Editing; Victoria Nadel, OAM Research and Editing; Zara Young OAM, Research and Editing; Deirdre Hart, Design and Layout.

For a century National Council of Jewish Women of Australia NSW has worked to make a positive difference to the lives of others. The vision of our founder, Dr Fanny Reading MBE, was to establish a women's organisation as an active force within the Jewish community. The organisation was to place its emphasis on service and advocacy in the Jewish and wider Australian community, concentrating on issues that concern 'common humanity'. At the inaugural meeting in 1923 the goals – service to our religion, to our people and to the country in which we live – were promulgated, along with a pledge to work for Eretz Israel, while also providing a social network for Jewish women. Throughout our research we have been continually impressed and inspired by our members' commitment and achievements. From one hundred years ago until today Council women have advocated, initiated, set up and maintained projects to help and support others. We thank every Council member who

has contributed her skills and gifted her time to our organisation. NCJWA NSW's work continues to empower and improve lives, in this way paying homage to Founder Dr Fanny Reading.

Luiz Schwarcz, *The absent moon: A memoir of a short childhood and a long depression* BIO SCH

'A beautiful work that is in turn haunting, touching and redemptive' SIMON SEBAG MONTEFIORE

When Luiz Schwarcz was a child, he was told little about his grandfather Láios, a Hungarian Jew. Only later would he learn that Láios had ordered his son, Luiz's father, to leap from a train taking them to a Nazi death camp, while Láios himself was carried on to his death.

What Luiz did know was that his father's melancholia haunted the house he grew up in. As many children of trauma do, Luiz assumed responsibility for his parents' happiness, and for a time blossomed into the family prodigy. But then, at a high point of outward success, he was brought low by a devastating mental breakdown.

This astonishing memoir interrogates a personal story of mental health through a family history of murder, dispossession, silence and the long echo of the Holocaust across generations – animated by the love and compassion of a master storyteller.

Isabel Kershner, *The land of hope and fear: Israel's battle for its inner soul* ISR KER

Despite Israel's determined staying power in a hostile environment, its military might, and the innovation it fosters in businesses globally, the country is more divided than ever. The old guard—socialist secular elites and idealists—are a dying breed, and the state's democratic foundations are being challenged. A dynamic and exuberant country of nine million, Israel is now largely comprised of native-born Hebrew speakers, and yet any permanent sense of security and normalcy is elusive.

In *The Land of Hope and Fear*, we meet Israelis: Jews and Arabs, religious and secular, Eastern and Western, liberals and zealots—plagued by perennial conflict and existential threats, citizens who remain deeply polarized politically, socially, and ideologically, even as they undergo generational change and redefine what it is to be an Israeli. Who are these people and to what do they aspire?

In moving narratives and with on-the-ground reporting, Isabel Kershner reveals the core of what holds Israel together and the forces that threaten its future through the lens of real people: a son of Zionist pioneers, cynical about what is to come and his people's status in it; a woman in her nineties whose life in a kibbutz has disintegrated; a brilliant poet caught up in the political maelstrom; an Arab gallery owner archiving a lost Palestinian landscape; and a descendant of the Russian aliyah; representing millions of culturally and religiously different Jews, laying bare the question Who is an Israeli? *The Land of Hope and Fear* decodes Israel today at its seventy fifth anniversary.

Leah Kaminsky, *Doll's eye* F KAM

Germany, 1933. Anna Winter returns home to find a note from her father, warning her of grave danger. She flees overnight, taking her precious doll collection with her, and sets sail for Australia. She lands a job at the Birdum Hotel and carves a new life, hiding her past from the world – until a chance encounter with an eccentric stranger, Alter Mayseh, changes everything.

Australia, 1938. A Yiddish poet fleeing persecution, Alter has seen the writing on the wall for his people. Armed with a letter of introduction from Albert Einstein, he manages his own escape from Europe and arrives in Australia in search of a safe place to call home. When fate leads him to Anna, he's convinced he's found his future with her. But a disturbing clue to her dark past threatens to unravel the delicate life she has built on top of the secrets left behind. Shifting in time and place, *Doll's Eye* weaves an intriguing story of love, loss and survival against a backdrop of war and displacement. Evocative and compelling, it brings into question the gap between what we see, and what we don't.

Kirsty Manning, *The Hidden book* F MAN

From the bestselling author of *The Jade Lily* comes a compelling novel based on a true story of a WWII European heirloom that brought down war criminals and travelled through history ... to be found in an Australian country shed in 2019.

Europe, 1940s: Imprisoned in the Mauthausen concentration camp in Austria, Spanish fighter and photographer Mateo Baca is ordered to process images of the camp and inmates for a handful of photo books being made for presentation to top Nazi figures. Just five books in total, or so the officials think ...Mateo manages to make a secret sixth book and, with the help of a local woman, Lena Lang, it remains hidden until the end of the war.

Australia, present day: When thirteen-year-old Hannah Campbell's Yugoslavian grandfather, Nico Antonov, arrives in Australia to visit his family, one of the gifts he brings with him is an intriguing-looking parcel wrapped in a flour sack, which Roza, Hannah's mother, quickly hides. Later, Hannah sneaks off in search for the mysterious package. She is horrified to find in it a photo book full of ghastly historical photographs of a terrible place full of people suffering.

Elise Esther Hearst, *One day we are all going to die* F HEA

'A compelling, immersive, utterly absorbing read. Hearst's arrival on the literary scene is a triumphal one. I cannot wait to see what she writes next.' Dr Lee Kofman

At 27, Naomi is just trying to be a normal person. A normal person who works at the Museum of Jewish Heritage, who cares for lost things, found things, sacred things and her family. A person who finds herself going on bad blind dates, having cringe-worthy sex, a tumultuous, toxic affair, and falling for a man called Moses. Being a normal person would be easy and fine if she didn't bear the weight of the unspoken grief of Cookie, her Holocaust-survivor grandmother. It would all be fine if she just knew how to be, without feeling the pull of expectation, the fear of disappointing others (men, friends, her parents, humanity), and that pesky problem of being attracted to all the wrong people (according to her parents, anyway).

By endlessly trying to please everyone around her, Naomi can't seem to figure out what she wants for herself, or how to get it. With echoes of the dead and dying all about her, in objects, in story, in her grandmother's firm grasp, Naomi isn't quite sure she knows how to be a normal person, but she is going to try. This fiercely honest, funny and fearless novel is a deep dive into the complex questions that surround culture, identity politics and generational trauma in contemporary Australia. Both a sadly affectionate and brilliantly unsparring examination of the glorious, awkward, messiness of life.

