



Reverend Katz Library

New Book Reviews

November 2023

As the end of the year approaches, the library committee will not be receiving any more new books this year. Take the opportunity to visit the library this month to select books from our inspiring collection for your holiday reading.

Michael Gawenda, *My life as a Jew* BIO GAW

A multi-award-winning journalist and former editor-in-chief of a major Australian newspaper searingly explores his Jewish identity at a time when a substantial — and growing — part of the left is opposed to the very existence of Israel as a Jewish state. Born in a displaced persons' camp two years after the end of the Holocaust, Michael Gawenda spent his childhood and teenage years in a left-wing non-Zionist Jewish youth group in Melbourne. This shaped the sort of Jew he became — a secular Jew who loved the Yiddish language and Yiddish culture.

Gawenda went on to become a public figure during his 40 years as a journalist, including his role as editor-in-chief of *The Age* — the only Jewish editor-in-chief in the newspaper's history. Throughout this time, and since, he became dismayed and pained by the growing hostility of the left to Israel and to Jews like him who were not prepared to declare themselves as anti-Zionists. This has also forced him to examine his own Jewish identity and his relationships with his Jewish friends, and to forensically examine the basis of the critiques of Israel.

At a time of rising anti-Semitism and anti-Zionism, *My Life as a Jew* is a controversial book. It is also a vital book. It should be read by activists for Israel and Zionism, as well as for the Palestinians. It should be read by readers of all political stripes. It should be read by journalists, as it is in part about journalism and its failings. And it should also be read by people interested in the remarkable life and career of its author, Michael Gawenda.

Anne Sarzin, *The angel of Kings Cross: the life and times of Dr Fanny Reading* BIO REA

Dr Fanny Reading arrived in Australia in 1889 as a migrant child and felt the loneliness of the newcomer. A brilliant musician and compassionate medical doctor, she created the National Council of Jewish Women of Australia, mentoring thousands of women, bringing them out of their kitchens into the worlds of public debate and policies. A leader on Australia's home-front during World War II, she was a trailblazer, feminist, and courageous activist for the disadvantaged at home and abroad.

'This illuminating biography makes a significant contribution to Australian history, politics and culture.' — Emeritus Professor Konrad Kwiet, Resident Historian at the Sydney Jewish Museum

'Few leaders are endowed with the vision and ability to transform their society. One such catalyst of change was Dr Fanny Reading ...' — Professor Andrew Markus, Emeritus Professor of Monash University's Australian Centre for Jewish Civilisation

‘Sarzin’s book, a labour of love, is a precious gift – not only to a great woman whose legacy has justly been restored but especially to readers, who will emerge with a greater knowledge of critical chapters in Jewish and Australian history, and an appreciation for someone they can cherish as a role model and source of inspiration.’ —Dr Daniel Polisar, Executive Vice-President, Shalem College, Jerusalem.

Justus Rosenberg, *The art of resistance: My four years in the French underground.* A Memoir BIO ROS

A gripping memoir written by a 96-year-old Jewish Holocaust survivor about his escape from Nazi-occupied Poland in the 1930's and his adventures with the French Resistance during World War

In 1937, as the Nazi Party tightened its grip on the city of Danzig (now Gdansk, Poland), Justus Rosenberg’s parents made the wrenching decision to send their son to Paris, where he would have the hope of finishing high school and going on to university in safety. He was sixteen years old, and he would not see his family again for sixteen years more.

Even after war broke out in 1939, life in France was peaceful for a time—but when the Nazis pushed toward Paris in the spring of 1940, Justus was forced to flee south to Toulouse. There, a chance meeting put Justus in contact with Varian Fry, the American journalist who ran a refugee network that aided several thousand Jews in escaping Nazi Germany and the Holocaust. With his German background, understanding of French cultural, and fluency in several languages, including English, Justus was ideally positioned to thrive in Fry’s network, coming to master an underworld of counterfeit documents, whispered passwords, black market currency, opportunistic gangsters, and clandestine mountain passes. Justus would spend the rest of the war working for Fry and later the French Resistance, helping to provide safe passage for many intellectuals and artists on the run from the Nazis, among them Hannah Arendt, Marc Chagall, Andre Breton, and Max Ernst. Along the way, he would have a number of close scrapes of his own: on one occasion, he was rounded up to be sent to a labour camp in Poland, and had to make a daring escape to save his life; on another, he narrowly survived after his jeep hits a landmine.

An epic saga of survival, with the soul of a spy thriller, *The Art of Resistance* is also an uplifting story of personal triumph.

Hadley Freeman, *House of Glass: the story and secrets of a twentieth – century Jewish family* BIO GLA

Writer Hadley Freeman investigates her family’s secret history in this “exceptional” (The Washington Post) “masterpiece” (The Daily Telegraph) uncovering a story that spans a century, two World Wars, and three generations.

Hadley Freeman knew that her Grandmother Sara lived in France just as Hitler started to gain power, but rarely did anyone in her family talk about it. Long after her grandmother’s death, she found a shoebox tucked in the closet containing photographs of her grandmother with a mysterious stranger, a cryptic telegram from the Red Cross, and a drawing signed by Picasso.

This discovery sent Freeman on a decade-long quest to uncover the significance of these keepsakes, taking her from Picasso's archives in Paris to a secret room in a farmhouse in Auvergne to Long Island to Auschwitz. Freeman pieces together the puzzle of her family's past, discovering more about the lives of her grandmother and her three brothers, Jacques, Henri, and Alex. Their stories sometimes typical, sometimes astonishing—reveal the broad range of experiences of Eastern European Jews during the Holocaust.

This “frightening, inspiring, and cautionary” (Kirkus Reviews) family saga is filled with extraordinary twists, vivid characters, and famous cameos, illuminating the Jewish and immigrant experience in the World War II era. Reviewers have asked: “is there a better book about being Jewish?” (The Daily Telegraph) Addressing themes of assimilation, identity, and home, *House of Glass* is “a triumph” (The Bookseller) and a powerful story about the past that echoes issues that remain relevant today.

Steven Levitsky and Daniel Ziblatt, *Tyranny of the minority: How to reverse an authoritarian turn and forge a democracy for all.* HIS LEV

An urgent follow-up to the international bestseller *How Democracies Die*, by two world-leading experts on democracy. In this razor-sharp analysis of one of the most important issues facing us today, leading Harvard professors Steven Levitsky and Daniel Ziblatt draw on their combined expertise of over 40 years to offer a dire warning about right-wing efforts to undermine multiracial democracy. Exploring the 2024 American election and the Capitol riots, as well as global examples from history including post-1945 Germany and Brazil and Chile during the '60s and '70s, the authors show how certain political institutions can be pernicious enablers of minority rule, creating a situation in which partisan minorities can consistently thwart and even rule over popular majorities. With its urgent call for a radical reform of our politics to balance the need for majority rule with the need for minority protections, and a citizens' movement to put enough pressure on lawmakers to act before it's too late.

Nora Gold ed, *18 Jewish stories translated from 18 languages* LIT GOL

This is the first anthology of translated multilingual Jewish fiction in 25 years: a collection of 18 splendid stories, each translated into English from a different language: Albanian, Croatian, Czech, Danish, French, German, Greek, Hebrew, Hungarian, Italian, Ladino, Polish, Portuguese, Romanian, Russian, Spanish, Turkish, and Yiddish. These compelling, humorous, and moving stories, written by eminent authors that include Shmuel Yosef Agnon, Isaac Babel, and Lili Berger, reflect both the diversities and the commonalities within Jewish culture, and will make you laugh, cry, and think. This beautiful book is easily accessible and enjoyable not only for Jewish readers, but for story lovers worldwide.

Dr. Nora Gold, previously an Associate Professor, is currently the Founder and Editor of the prestigious online literary journal *Jewish Fiction .net*. She is also the prize-winning author of three books of fiction, as well as the recipient of two Canadian Jewish Book/Literary Awards and praise from Alice Munro.

Naomi Ragen, *The enemy beside me* F RAG

Inspired by true events, Naomi Ragen's *The Enemy Beside Me* is a powerful, provocative novel about two people fighting for reconciliation over unforgivable crimes of the past. Taking over from her father and grandfather as the head of the Survivor's Campaign, an organization whose purpose is to bring Nazi war criminals to justice, Milia Gottstein has dedicated her life to making sure the voices of Holocaust victims will never be silenced. It is an overwhelming and heartbreaking mission that has often usurped her time and energy being a wife to busy surgeon Julius, and a mother and grandmother. But now, just as she is finally ready to pass on her work to others, making time for her personal life, an unexpected phone call suddenly explodes all she thought she knew about her present and her future.

In the midst of this personal turmoil, Milia receives an invitation to be the keynote speaker at a Holocaust conference in Lithuania from Dr. Darius Vidas, the free spirited, rebellious conference head. Despite suspecting his motives—she is, after all, viewed as a 'public enemy' in that country for her efforts to have them try war criminals and admit their historic responsibility for annihilating almost their entire Jewish community, including her own family—she nevertheless accepts, having developed a secret agenda of her own. But as Milia and Darius begin their mission, shared experiences profoundly alter their relationship, replacing antagonism and suspicion with a growing intimacy. However, this only ramps up the hostile forces facing them, threatening their families, livelihoods, and reputations, and forcing them into shocking choices that will betray all they have achieved and all that has grown between them.

Anne Berest, *The postcard* F BER

A moving novel based on the true story of a family's endurance and pain, and a heartfelt exploration of Jewish identity in a secular society. In January 2003, The Berest family receive a mysterious, unsigned postcard. On one side was an image of the Opera Garnier; on the other, the names of their relatives who were killed in Auschwitz: Ephraim, Emma, Noemie and Jacques. Years later, Anne sought to find the truth behind this postcard. She journeys 100 years into the past, tracing the lives of her ancestors from their flight from Russia following the revolution, their journey to Latvia, Palestine, and Paris, the war and its aftermath. What emerges is a thrilling and sweeping tale that shatters her certainties about her family, her country, and herself.

At once a gripping investigation into family secrets, a poignant tale of mothers and daughters, and an enthralling portrait of 20th-century Parisian intellectual and artistic life, *The Postcard* tells the story of a family devastated by the Holocaust and yet somehow restored by love and the power of storytelling.

Andre Winkler (Cantor) *Sing unto him: liturgical and traditional memories in Hebrew and Yiddish (Record)* MUS WIN