



Reverend Katz Library

New Book Reviews

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Clayton, Meg Waite, *The last train to London.* F CLA

A heart-rending story of the WWII-era Kindertransport and the brave Dutchwoman who led it. Following Germany's annexation of Austria in March 1938 and the violence of Kristallnacht the following November, an extraordinary attempt to bring 10,000 children to safety in Britain began. A similar operation to the United States was attempted, but the opposition of the American Congress and public opinion convinced Franklin Roosevelt to decline action.

Although fiction, *The Last Train to London* is based on the real Vienna Kindertransport effort led by Geertruida Wijsmuller of Amsterdam ("Tante Truus" to her young charges). She began rescuing small groups of Jewish-German children as early as 1933, although the book spans a December 1936 to May 1940 timeframe.

It deftly weaves the story of how this brave and committed woman went about her mission and, in particular, the impact she had on two Austrian teenagers: Stephan Neuman, the son of a wealthy Jewish chocolatier, and Zofie-Helene Perger, the Christian daughter of the anti-Nazi editor of a small newspaper.

I say "weaves" because of how the story is presented — planes of action spun on a loom that form a complete tapestry. As seems to be the author's signature style, there are no chapter numbers, just headings that give a date and location or a topic. I don't recall a chapter longer than five pages, and there are a few totaling only one paragraph, presenting, in their totality, many different viewpoints.

We meet Stephan's and Zofie-Helene's various family members, Tante Truus and her husband, and even the infamous Adolf Eichmann, who developed methods of pillage and destruction that became a tragic pattern throughout the Reich. This kind of structure could be confusing and choppy, but it runs without a hitch under Meg Waite Clayton's deft handling. It doesn't hurt that her writing is so rich yet economical.

Anita Abriel, *The light after the war* F ABR

Inspired by the true story of one woman's extraordinary journey to forge a new life after escaping a train bound for Auschwitz.

In 1946 two young Hungarian refugees arrive in Naples after losing everyone they loved before the war. Vera Frankel and her best friend, Edith Ban, are haunted by their terrifying escape from a train headed for Auschwitz after their mothers threw them from the carriage, promising they would follow. But instead the girls find themselves alone in a frozen, alien land. They manage to find refuge and barter for their lives by working on an isolated farm in Austria until the end of the war.

Armed with a letter of recommendation from an American general, Vera finds work and new hope at the United States Embassy and, despite her best intentions, falls in love the handsome and enigmatic Captain Anton Wight. But when Anton suddenly disappears, Vera is forced to drastically change course. Their quest to rebuild their lives takes Vera and Edith from Naples to Ellis Island to Venezuela and finally Sydney as they carve out careers – and find love.

Heartbreakingly moving and compelling, *The Light After the War* is inspired by the true story of the author's Holocaust survivor mother.

Rachel Barenbaum, *A bend in the stars* F BAR

This is at once an epic love story and a heart-pounding journey across WWI-era Russia, about an ambitious young doctor and her scientist brother in a race against Einstein to solve one of the greatest mysteries of the universe.

In Russia, in the summer of 1914, as war with Germany looms and the Czar's army tightens its grip on the local Jewish community, Miri Abramov and her brilliant physicist brother, Vanya, are facing an impossible decision. Since their parents drowned fleeing to America, Miri and Vanya have been raised by their babushka, a famous matchmaker who has taught them to protect themselves at all costs: to fight, to kill if necessary, and always to have an escape plan. Can they bear to leave the homeland that has given them so much?

Before they have time to make their choice, war is declared and Vanya goes missing, along with Miri's fiancé. Miri braves the firing squad to go looking for them both. As the eclipse that will change history darkens skies across Russia, not only the safety of Miri's own family but the future of science itself hangs in the balance.

Heather Dune Macadam, *The nine hundred: the extraordinary young women of the first official transport to Auschwitz*

The untold story of the 999 young, unmarried Jewish women who were tricked into boarding a train in Poprad, Slovakia on March 25, 1942 that became the first official transport to Auschwitz.

'Books such as this are essential: they remind modern readers of events that should never be forgotten' - Caroline Moorehead

On March 25, 1942, nearly a thousand young, unmarried Jewish women boarded a train in Poprad, Slovakia. Filled with a sense of adventure and national pride, they left their parents' homes wearing their best clothes and confidently waving good-bye. Believing they were going to work in a factory for a few months, they were eager to report for government service. Instead, the young women—many of them teenagers—were sent to Auschwitz. Their government paid 500 Reichsmarks (about 160) apiece for the Nazis to take them as slave labour. Of those 999 innocent deportees, only a few would survive.

The facts of the first official Jewish transport to Auschwitz are little known, yet profoundly relevant today. These were not resistance fighters or prisoners of war. There were no men among them. Sent to almost certain death, the young women were powerless and insignificant not only because they were Jewish-but also because they were female. Now, acclaimed author Heather Dune Macadam reveals their poignant stories, drawing on extensive interviews with survivors, and consulting with historians, witnesses, and relatives of those first deportees to create an important addition to Holocaust literature and women's history.