



Reverend Katz Library

New Book Reviews

November 2019

As we approach the end of the year and look forward to the summer holidays we invite you to come to the library to make your reading selection for the holiday season.

Edith Eger, *The Choice*. BIO EGE

In 1944, sixteen-year-old ballerina Edith Eger was sent to Auschwitz. Separated from her parents on arrival, she endures unimaginable experiences, including being made to dance for the infamous Josef Mengele. When the camp is finally liberated, she is pulled from a pile of bodies, barely alive. The horrors of the Holocaust didn't break Edith. In fact, they helped her learn to live again with a life-affirming strength and a truly remarkable resilience.

The Choice is her unforgettable story. It shows that hope can flower in the most unlikely places.

Daniel Silva, *The new girl*. F SIL

From #1 New York Times bestselling author Daniel Silva comes a stunning new thriller of deception, betrayal, and vengeance.

At an exclusive private school in Switzerland, mystery surrounds the identity of the beautiful raven-haired girl who arrives each morning in a motorcade fit for a head of state. She is said to be the daughter of a wealthy international businessman. In truth, her father is Khalid bin Mohammed, the much-maligned crown prince of Saudi Arabia. Once celebrated for his daring social and religious reforms, he is now reviled for his role in the murder of a dissident journalist. And when his only child is brutally kidnapped, he turns to the one man he can trust to find her before it is too late.

What's done cannot be undone ...

Gabriel Allon, the legendary chief of Israeli intelligence, has spent most of his life fighting terrorists, including the murderous jihadists financed by Saudi Arabia. Prince Khalid—or KBM, as he is known—has pledged to finally break the bond between the Kingdom and radical Islam. For that reason alone, Gabriel regards him as a valuable if flawed partner. Together they will become unlikely allies in a deadly secret war for control of the Middle East. The life of a child, and the throne of Saudi Arabia, hang in the balance. Both men have made their share of enemies. And both have everything to lose.

Filled with dark humor, breathtaking twists of plot, and an unforgettable cast of characters, *The New Girl* is both a thrilling, page-turning tale of entertainment and a sophisticated study of political alliances and great-power rivalries in a dangerous world. And it is once again proof that Gabriel Allon is “one of fiction’s greatest spies” (Kirkus) and Daniel Silva is “quite simply the best” (Kansas City Star) writer of foreign intrigue and suspense at work today.

Bram Presser, *The book of dirt*. F PRE

They chose not to speak and now they are gone...What's left to fill the silence is no longer theirs. This is my story, woven from the threads of rumour and legend.

Jakub Rand flees his village for Prague, only to find himself trapped by the Nazi occupation. Deported to the Theresienstadt concentration camp, he is forced to sort through Jewish books for a so-called Museum of the Extinct Race. Hidden among the rare texts is a tattered prayer book, hollow inside, containing a small pile of dirt.

Back in the city, Františka Roubíčková picks over the embers of her failed marriage, despairing of her conversion to Judaism. When the Nazis summon her two eldest daughters for transport, she must sacrifice everything to save the girls from certain death.

Decades later, Bram Presser embarks on a quest to find the truth behind the stories his family built around these remarkable survivors.

The Book of Dirt is a completely original novel about love, family secrets, and Jewish myths. And it is a heart-warming story about a grandson's devotion to the power of storytelling and his family's legacy. Winner of many awards internationally and in Australia.

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

In 1914, Russia was on the brink of war, and Albert Einstein was on the brink of proving his theory of relativity.

These two threads intertwine in a new novel called *A Bend in the Stars*. The story centers on Vanya and Miri, Jewish siblings who might be able to avoid Vanya's certain death on the front lines — if he can prove that gravity bends light.

A Bend in the Stars is Rachel Barenbaum's first novel, and it's somehow a history of science, a story of injustice, a romance novel, and an adventure tale all at once. But Barenbaum says what first attracted her was the science. "I was reading this blurb in *Scientific American* in 2014, and it said a hundred years ago this month, Einstein was on the verge of proving relativity, and if he had only gotten to Russia or his team had gotten to Russia to photograph the total solar eclipse, he would have had his final piece of proof. He could have shown that gravity bends light. And I just thought before I even put the magazine down that that was a brilliant story idea. What if someone beat Einstein?"

Karen B Stern, *Writing on the wall: Graffiti and the forgotten Jews of antiquity*. HIS STE

Few direct clues exist to the everyday lives and beliefs of ordinary Jews in antiquity. Prevailing perspectives on ancient Jewish life have been shaped largely by the voices of intellectual and social elites, preserved in the writings of Philo and Josephus and the rabbinic texts of the Mishnah and Talmud. Commissioned art, architecture, and formal inscriptions displayed on tombs and synagogues equally reflect the sensibilities of their influential patrons. The perspectives and sentiments of nonelite Jews, by contrast, have mostly disappeared from the historical record. Focusing on these forgotten Jews of antiquity, *Writing on the Wall* takes an unprecedented look at the vernacular inscriptions and drawings they left behind and sheds new light on the richness of their quotidian lives.

Just like their neighbours throughout the eastern and southern Mediterranean, Mesopotamia, Arabia, and Egypt, ancient Jews scribbled and drew graffiti everywhere — in and around markets, hippodromes, theatres, pagan temples, open cliffs, sanctuaries, and even inside burial caves and synagogues. Karen Stern reveals what these markings tell us about the men and women who made them, people whose lives, beliefs, and behaviours eluded commemoration in grand literary and architectural works. Making compelling analogies with modern graffiti practices, she documents the overlooked connections between Jews and their neighbours, showing how popular Jewish practices of prayer, mortuary commemoration, commerce, and civic engagement regularly crossed ethnic and religious boundaries.

Illustrated throughout with examples of ancient graffiti, *Writing on the Wall* provides a tantalizingly intimate glimpse into the cultural worlds of forgotten populations living at the crossroads of Judaism, Christianity, paganism, and earliest Islam.

Steven Fine. *The Menorah: From the Bible to Modern Israel*. HIS FIN

The menorah, the seven-branched candelabrum, has traversed millennia as a living symbol of Judaism and the Jewish people. Naturally, it did not pass through the ages unaltered. *The Menorah* explores the cultural and intellectual history of the Western world's oldest continuously used religious symbol. This meticulously researched yet deeply personal history explains how the menorah illuminates the great changes and continuities in Jewish culture, from biblical times to modern Israel.

Though the golden seven-branched menorahs of Moses and of the Jerusalem Temple are artefacts lost to history, the best-known menorah image survives on the Arch of Titus in Rome. Commemorating the Roman destruction of Jerusalem in 70 CE, the arch reliefs depict the spoils of the Temple, the menorah chief among them, as they appeared in Titus's great triumphal parade in 71 CE. Steven Fine recounts how, in 2012, his team discovered the original yellow ochre paint that coloured the menorah—an event that inspired his search for the history of this rich symbol from ancient Israel through classical history, the Middle Ages, and on to our own tumultuous times.

Surveying artefacts and literary sources spanning three thousand years—from the Torah and the ruins of Rome to yesterday's news—Fine presents the menorah as a source of fascination and illumination for Jews, Samaritans, Christians, and even Freemasons. A symbol for the divine, for continuity, emancipation, national liberation, and redemption, the menorah features prominently on Israel's state seal and continues to inspire and challenge in surprising ways.