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**Reverend Katz Library**

**New Book Reviews**

**May 2024**

**Penny Olson, Artful lives: The artful lives of the Cohen Sisters BIO COH**

The Cohen sisters lived frugally, enjoyed mischief and flaunted their bohemian lifestyle. Raised in the Melbourne suburb of Elwood and then drawn to the tropics, their winters were spent painting, fishing and gardening on their tropical island in Far North Queensland—then an undeveloped part of Australia. Far from the gaze of civilisation, life was simple and bronzed. Artistic men were a temptation. They mixed with prominent artists, writers, designers and academics longing for a more progressive, independent Australia. Lina Bryans, Jock Frater, Arthur Boyd, Clif Pugh, Noel Wood, Roy Dalgarno, Roger Kemp, Ian Fairweather, Clem Christesen, Alan Marshall and Alistair Knox were among their friends and associates. The sisters’ lives spanned the twentieth century, two World Wars, the Great Depression, and the making of modern Australia. Beginning as wealthy, young Melbourne socialites, they gradually shed their skin to become bohemians, painting and writing—more than anything, enjoying the milieu. Part family history, part social history, part art history, as the sisters’ extraordinary story unfolds, so too does an art heist.

**Diane Armstrong, The wild date palm** **F ARM**

From a bestselling Australian author comes a gripping novel of espionage, passion and sacrifice set in the Middle East during World War I. Based on an astonishing true story, it asks what are you willing to die for?

During a train journey across Turkey's Anatolian Plain in 1915 during World War I, Shoshana Adelstein witnesses the slaughter of the Armenians and knows she has just come face to face with her destiny. Convinced that her Jewish community in a small outpost of the Ottoman Empire will soon meet a similar fate, she is desperate to save her people. With Turkey and Britain locked in a global conflict, she orchestrates an audacious plan. Enlisting a group of co-conspirators who include her charismatic lover Eli and her impetuous brother Nathan, this young woman forms a clandestine spy ring. Conquering almost insurmountable obstacles, they risk betrayal, torture and death to spy on the Turks and pass on intelligence to the British to help them win the war. This epic novel explores the fate of ordinary people whose mission collides with the secret agenda of powerful countries, people ready to risk everything to rescue their communities. But can individuals affect the fate of nations? And when life is at stake, how far will we go to reach the limits of our dreams?

Julia Levitina, The girl from Moscow F LEV

Moscow, 1983. Twenty-one-year-old Ella dreams of playing Natasha Rostova in War and Peace at the Moscow Theatre Academy. But when she meets her good friend Vlad at a city square, Ella finds herself in the middle of a protest and attracts the glare of the KGB. Labelled a traitor, she must withdraw from the Academy, and she soon yearns to escape the cruel and oppressive Soviet regime. However, her hopes of leaving the country are smashed when her husband, Roman, is sentenced to two years’ labour camp. As she looks for another way out, Ella is drawn into a dangerous game of cat and mouse with a KGB general, who has the power to secure her freedom. Will she risk everything and leave behind those she loves to pursue a life in the West?

‘A stunning debut novel. Julia has beautifully crafted characters and given us a tale of intrigue set against the backdrop of 1980s Russia. She has created a thrilling atmosphere of the insidious threat communist Russia posed, not to its enemies, but its own citizens. I lost sleep devouring this page-turner.’ Heather Morris

**Joe Reich, Beyond Bergasse: A novel F REI**

In late nineteenth century Vienna, Moritz, a young man from a well-to-do Jewish family, lives in the shadow of his older brother. Afflicted by a birthmark which in ancient times would have seen him left out for the wolves, he tries to retreat into a world of reading and writing. But unable to escape the ‘target on his face’, as his father calls it, Moritz is forced by his impatient nation into war. A story that takes the reader deep into the heady world of war, Zionism, salons, writers, artists, sexual awakening and the randomness of tragedy and redemption that follow.A masterful captivating piece of faction which did not drag at any point!

**Alex Ryvchin, The 7 deadly myths: Antisemitism from the time of Christ to Kanye West HIS RYV**

The 7 Deadly Myths traces antisemitism from its earliest origins to the present day and uncovers the dangerous conspiracy theories that have corrupted reasoning and led people and nations to diabolical acts. Exploring some of the most significant events in history and uncovering little-known villains, this book answers the questions of how antisemitism takes hold, how it is transmitted and how it inspires violence to the present day. Written in a clear and compelling style, this book is essential to understanding why this ancient hatred continues to plague society, inspiring pop stars, athletes and demagogues alike. It is a crucial resource for policy makers, students and the reading public seeking to understand racism and how it can be stopped.

**Banipal 72: magazine of Modern Arab Literature: Iraqi Jewish Writers LIT SHI**

This unique feature on Iraqi Jewish writers includes short stories, excerpts from novels, and poems – written by 17 authors – all of whom are of Iraqi descent.

For several centuries, Iraqi Jews were key contributors to Iraq’s rich social and cultural tapestry – active in all areas of life as novelists, poets, essayists, journalists, musicians, composers, singers, and artists. Sadly, all this came to a tragic end with the massive transfer-emigration and forced displacement of Iraqi Jews in the 1950s to Israel.

The feature also includes introductory essays about the authors and poets, who are of different generations, traversing a wide range of languages – from the poetry of the Mani brothers at the turn of the 20th century to the works of Almog Behar and Shimon Ballas. The texts raise universal questions of belonging, exile, diaspora, cross-national affinities, and cross-linguistic possibilities. All texts were either translated directly from Arabic (approximately two-thirds) or from Hebrew, with one written originally in English.