

by Nadine Olonetzky
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Fiction

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Where Does the Light go when the Day is Over?

Wo geht das Licht hin, wenn der Tag vergangen ist

review

Impressively researched auto-fiction, ‘Where Does the Light Go When the Day is Over’ tells the story of the persecution of the author’s family during the Nazi period and of her own upbringing in the shadow of her father’s suffering.

Olonetzky’s grandfather and aunt were murdered in the Holocaust. Her father’s other siblings escaped to Palestine before the war began, and he managed to escape Germany by crossing the Swiss border in 1943. Olonetzky pieces together the complicated history of this persecution and weaves it into her father’s post-war attempts to receive restitution from the German government. Covering many distinct periods in her father’s and grandfather’s lives (and those of other family members), it sheds important light on lesser-known aspects of the Shoah and details just how hard it was for victims of Nazi persecution to obtain compensation in the decades after the War. Through it all, her voice – sometimes expressing harsh judgement, sometimes seeking the nuance in a person’s behaviour or a historical event – remains a constant presence.

The history is punctuated with observations from Olontezky’s garden. These sometimes chime with and sometimes jar against the details she is discussing, but the metaphor operates as a counterweight to

the bureaucratic detail of both the Shoah and her father's later attempts to secure restitution. The image of the garden contrasts the history of displacement and industrial murder with the beauty of nature and Olonetzky's rootedness in this part of it. She also draws in observations from her life and from the war in Ukraine, which began as she was writing the book.

Switching between tone and genre, some of the book reads like a mournful academic essay, some like an emotionally engaging derring-do adventure story, and some like a deeply painful personal memoir. Olonetzky's voice is strong enough to bind together these disparate strands, however, reflecting on memory, photography (her father was a passionate amateur photographer and she a photography critic), and the nature of home/belonging alongside her historical subjects.

'Where Does the Light Go When the Day is Over' is original in its intertextuality and the wider themes it looks at. It is a powerful, highly moving and profound Shoah memoir that stands head and shoulders above many books dealing with comparable subjects. Its approach recalls Daniel Lee's *The SS Officer's Armchair* and its tone Penelope Lively and Laura Cumming.

Find out more here:
https://www.fischerverlage.de/verlag/rights/book/nadine-olonetzky-wo-geht-das-licht-hin-wenn-der-tag-vergangen-ist-9783103975901

press quotes

> *A multi-layered and complex exploration of belonging, family and memory told through the persecution of Olonetzky's father and his family during the Shoah. At times poetically beautiful in its language, it is a moving and powerful addition to the canon of Holocaust literature.*

John Owen, NBG Reader

about the author

Nadine Olonetzky was born in Zurich in 1962. She is an author, editor

and publisher of books on photography. She writes both non-fiction and fiction for a variety of publishing houses and publications, and her subjects include photography, art and cultural history.

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