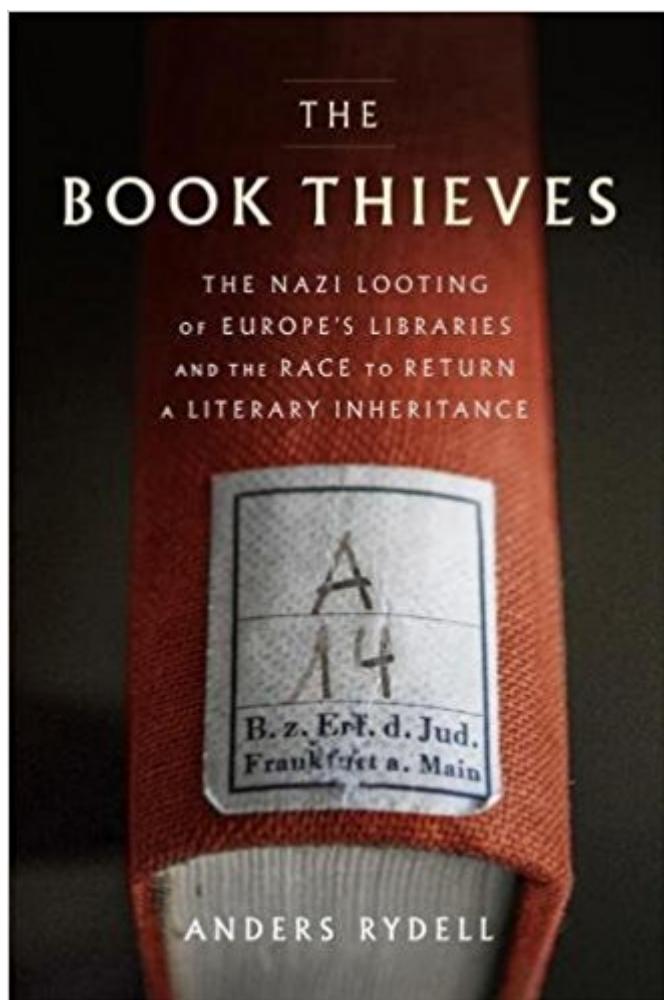


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The Book Thieves: The Nazi Looting Of Europe's Libraries And The Race To Return A Literary Inheritance



Synopsis

"A most valuable book." — Christian Science Monitor For readers of *The Monuments Men* and *The Hare with Amber Eyes*, the story of the Nazis' systematic pillaging of Europe's libraries, and the small team of heroic librarians now working to return the stolen books to their rightful owners. While the Nazi party was being condemned by much of the world for burning books, they were already hard at work perpetrating an even greater literary crime. Through extensive new research that included records saved by the Monuments Men themselves — Anders Rydell tells the untold story of Nazi book theft, as he himself joins the effort to return the stolen books. When the Nazi soldiers ransacked Europe's libraries and bookshops, large and small, the books they stole were not burned. Instead, the Nazis began to compile a library of their own that they could use to wage an intellectual war on literature and history. In this secret war, the libraries of Jews, Communists, Liberal politicians, LGBT activists, Catholics, Freemasons, and many other opposition groups were appropriated for Nazi research, and used as an intellectual weapon against their owners. But when the war was over, most of the books were never returned. Instead many found their way into the public library system, where they remain to this day. Now, Rydell finds himself entrusted with one of these stolen volumes, setting out to return it to its rightful owner. It was passed to him by the small team of heroic librarians who have begun the monumental task of combing through Berlin's public libraries to identify the looted books and reunite them with the families of their original owners. For those who lost relatives in the Holocaust, these books are often the only remaining possession of their relatives they have ever held. And as Rydell travels to return the volume he was given, he shows just how much a single book can mean to those who own it.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

"A chilling reminder of Hitler's twisted power." —BBC "This history can still startle and surprise us; that, as researchers ask new questions and follow new leads, revelations are still possible . . . Rydell's passion for the subject is undeniable. Serving as a courier, he manages to convey the emotional power of returning even a single book to a grateful descendant who has lost so much else." —The Chicago Tribune "Reader-friendly and a riveting account, the book deserves a large readership." —Jack Fischel, The Jewish Book Council "An erudite exploration of the systematic plundering of libraries and book collections by Nazi invaders. Looting books by mainly Jewish owners, collections, and libraries was an effective way of stealing Jewish memory and history, as this thorough work of research by Swedish journalist and editor Rydell attests . . . An engrossing, haunting journey for bibliophiles and World War II historians alike." —Kirkus Reviews (Starred Review) "Fast-paced and well-written." —Haaretz "A fascinating and untold story about the greatest book theft in history." —Dagens Nyheter (Sweden) "Anders Rydell has written a compelling book about [the Nazis'] attempt to author a cultural history without any influence from the Reich's enemies. Rydell's book is a gripping read that fills a big gap in the field of research." —Svenska Dagbladet (Sweden) "Anders Rydell has written an as harrowing as it is riveting book about the Nazis' plunder of Europe's libraries, a large-scale attack on its cultural heritage. One can only praise the expert work Rydell has done, resulting in a book that can be read as an educative thriller." —Boråfyllt Tidning (Sweden) "Anders Rydell has written a fascinating cultural history account of the Germany that was transformed from the country of Goethe and Schiller, to that of Nürnberg, the Crystal Night, and the Holocaust." —Aftonbladet (Sweden) "An engaging work on the Nazis' book theft." —Rydell's work is dedicated and constitutes a solid mapping of the quiet work being done in Berlin, Vilnius, Prague, Paris and other cities. The author tells of the monstrosities committed in the best possible manner. He mixes his library visits and historical background with a consistently confident tone. It might appear cynical to talk about tone here, but Rydell's writing is at times beautiful, at times matter-of-fact and restrained writing does wonders for the reader's engagement. Reality as it has been and is today does not have to be added

to with emotionally loaded pointers. Å“ One can only state that [Anders Rydell] has done it again / Å“ The presentation has a depictive momentum and objective lucidity. The Book Thieves is a historical commentary of the highest quality. / Å“ The symbolism is as arresting as it is appropriate. This makes The Book Thieves into something much more than just a gripping tale of Europe’s darkest years. Å“ Just like in Rydell’s August Prize nominated book The Looters from 2013, wherein the Nazis great art thefts were uncovered, The Book Thieves opens the way for a multitude of fascinating perspectives and angles. Å“ Upsala Nya Tidning, Sweden Å“ Dante had Virgil as his guide in the Inferno. Rydell guides the reader through the different circles of the Hell on Earth that the Nazis created. Å“ Rydell is an extremely effective popular history expert who solidly maps not only the book plundering, but also summarizes its long history. Å“ GÄfteborgs-Posten (Sweden)

Anders Rydell is a journalist, editor, and author of nonfiction. As the Head of Culture at a major Swedish media group, Rydell directs the coverage of arts and culture in 14 newspapers. His two books on the Nazis, The Book Thieves and The Looters, have been translated into 16 languages. The Book Thieves is his first work published in English. Å“ Henning Koch was born in Sweden but has spent most of his life in England, Spain, and Sardinia. Most recently he translated Å“ A Man Called Ove by Fredrik Backman. He has also written a short story collection, Love Doesn’t Work, and a novel, The Maggot People.

The book is so much more than the systematic acquisition of Europe’s libraries by the Third Reich. The conflicts between different departments for the material and why are detailed and the geographical approach (the western vs the eastern areas) makes for easy reference. The Reich was not about destroying books but the control of the knowledge in them. Ironic that the efforts involved actually preserved much that could have been lost due to war damage. Highly recommend for that period of history and for book history itself.

wonderful informative book

very well written and researched

Superb investigative history. Compelling reading!

The Book Thieves: The Nazi Looting of Europe's Libraries and the Race to Return a Literary Inheritance by Anders Rydell, Henning Koch (Translator) is a very highly recommended well researched account of the Nazis' systematic pillaging of Europe's libraries and the librarians that are now working to return the books to their rightful owners or heirs. This is a well-written, fascinating look at crimes of the past and how some people are working to rectify them. Rydell visited many of the libraries that are still in the process of sorting through the stolen books. The Book Thieves is a story of the looting and dispersal, as well as the burning and destruction, of thousands of libraries and millions of individual books during WWII. As the description of The Book Thieves says: "In this secret war, the libraries of Jews, Communists, Liberal politicians, LGBT activists, Catholics, Freemasons, and many other opposition groups were appropriated for Nazi research, and used as an intellectual weapon against their owners. But when the war was over, most of the books were never returned. Instead many found their way into the public library system, where they remain to this day." Libraries that were built up over generations helped form "the cultural, linguistic, and identity-defining heart of communities, families, and individuals. Libraries that were irreplaceable in their own right - a reflection of the people and societies that once created and nurtured them." When these collections were stolen, and dispersed or burned, it was stealing the cultural identity of families and groups. "Robbing people of words and narrative is a way of imprisoning them. Books are rarely unique in the same way as works of art, but they have a value that so many more people can understand. In our time, the book has retained a symbolic value that is almost spiritual. Discarding books is still considered sacrilegious. The burning of books is one of the strongest symbolic actions there is, correlating with cultural destruction. While mainly identified with the Nazi book pyres of 1933, the symbolic destruction of literature is as old as the book itself." The Nazis understood that to control people and their beliefs, they needed to control the literature. Mind control, the quest for a hive-mind mentality, and punishing those who don't comply is nothing new. In contrast, there were people who risked their lives to try and save parts of their literary inheritance. They understood that "the theft of their literary culture was a way of robbing them of their history, their humanity, and, in the final analysis, any possibility of remembrance." These people hid old manuscripts, important religious works, and even diaries. While this is about the history of the Nazis' looting, burning, and control of millions of books, it is also a hopeful account about the people who are currently trying to catalogue the vast number of these stolen books and find a way to return those they can (because of identifying marks, plates, notes, names, etc.) to their original owners. It

is a daunting task, especially since over the years it is clear that librarians have cut out identifying pages or deface marks identifying original owners. It was heartening to see that Google is helping this effort - when people are searching for ancestors, they can come across information about their family's confiscated books. Even though many of the books have little monetary value, the personal value can be priceless. Disclosure: My review copy was courtesy of Penguin Random House/Viking.

Interesting from a Judaica perspective, telling the history of Jewish libraries and collections but not very informative in covering the mechanisms by which the Nazis sought out, confiscated, catalogued and removed these valuable works. Little is practically discussed on the end use of these works.

Very well written and researched book, providing information about the unknown impact the Nazis had in their attempt to control the memories and history of the victims of their persecution.

An interesting discussion of an aspect of Nazi looting that is relatively unknown.

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