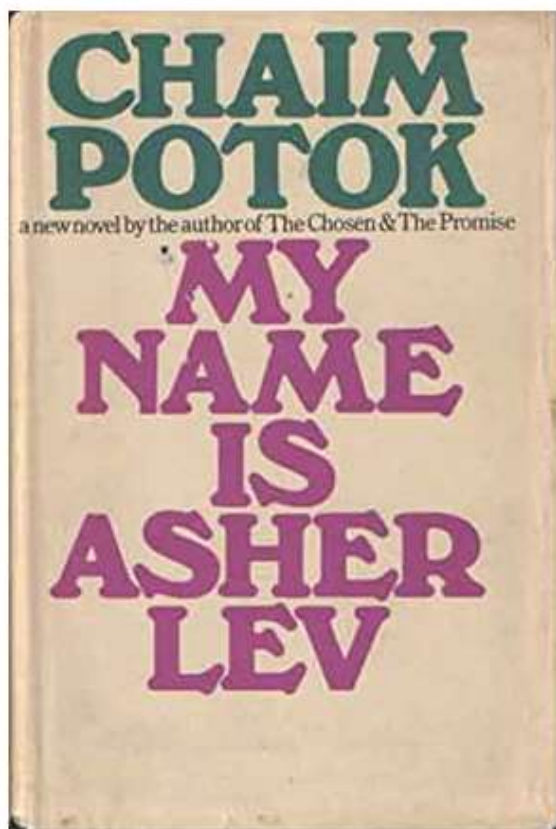


Gold Coast Book Lovers

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January 2023



My Name is Asher Lev by Chaim Potok was our book for February. It was first published in 1972 which makes it 50 years old but the novel has kept its relevance and modernism. The story is set in the 1950s and follows the emotional, spiritual and artistic journey of the story's title character, Asher Lev.

Asher was born both a Hasidic Jew and an artistic genius. The Hasidic faith do not value art as a gift and Asher's calling brings him into direct conflict with his father, Aryeh Lev who is highly educated and deeply committed to his work for the Rebbe of saving Jews from persecution in Russia and building yeshivas in Europe. If Asher is the protagonist of the story his father is the antagonist.

The story centres around the slow deterioration of their father-son relationship.

Asher is committed to his faith but can't control his urge to draw it is too much a part of his being. His father refuses to understand Asher has a gift and feels Asher is shaming him by choosing his art over everything else. Aryeh's resentment towards Asher is compounded by the support Asher receives from other significant people in the community including his wife, Rivkeh, his brother, Yitzchok but more importantly the Rebbe, the spiritual leader of the Hasidic faith. Aryeh feels betrayed and that drives his anger towards Asher and his art. Asher witnesses the suffering of his both his mother and his father and their different reactions to it. His mother Rivkeh, becomes severely depressed when her brother dies in a car accident when Asher is 6. Her illness lasts for a many months and Asher is deeply impacted by her suffering. He finds more comfort in drawing than in his father who is struggling to support his family while needing to be doing the work of the Rebbe. His father has his own trauma to manage and Asher's often alone as a child and finds solace in his drawing. When his mother recovers and Aryeh is asked by the Rebbe to go to Europe, Asher refuses to go. His parents turn to Rebbe for help and after meeting with Asher decrees Asher cannot go and Aryeh must go alone. This drives another wedge between him and his father. Every time his father returns, he finds Asher more and more absorbed in his art having been taken to museums by his mother and introduced to the Christian faith through the paintings he sees at this time. Asher struggles to commit to his education and finds school a place of torment where he is an outsider. On his return from Europe Aryeh is disappointed that Asher has become even more committed to his art and his hostility towards Asher causes their relationship begins to unravel from both sides.

Eventually, Rivkeh can no longer cope with being away from her husband and leaves Asher with his uncle and goes to join her husband and support him in his work in Europe. Asher continues to explore his art and is apprenticed to Jacob Khan a non-practicing Jew who is a friend of the Rebbe. Through Jacob Asher develops into a great artist but again finds himself in conflict with his father through learning to draw nudes and to reproduce the great masters

in drawing of the crucifixion.

When Asher's parents return to Brooklyn, Asher decides to go to Europe and it is here in Paris that he paints his masterpiece two paintings which depict the suffering of his mother. The Brooklyn Crucifixion. These paintings are shown in an Art Show in New York and when his parents attend the show they are so offended by the paintings that Asher is asked to leave the community. Asher returns to Paris to begin his life as an artist.

Most of the group enjoyed the book. They loved the deceptively simple language and appreciated the showing not telling style of the author. The slow build of tension through the story, to the climax of his art show, where his parents see themselves represented in the Brooklyn Crucifixion was noted as emotionally engaging by the group with some finding the tension hard to read through. The group commented on how they appreciated the reader being able to view the closed community of Hasidic Jews with their inflexibility and obsession with tradition laid bare. Some of the group found it a slow start and struggled with the parts of the book which they described as conflicted, painful and distressing, especially the father/son relationship. The control the religion had over the characters made it forced reading for some. However, most group members felt it was a book that they would remember long after this reading.

Ratings: Lynda, 2; Sandy, Hetta and Margie 3.5; Nicola, Janet, Pauline, Viv, Jenny and Di 4; Dianne and Suzy, 4.5.

Our next meeting will be Tuesday 14/03/2023 at 6:30pm at the QCWA Mermaid Beach Centre located in 43 Ventura Rd, Mermaid Beach.

Come and join us to discuss *Crying in H Mart : a memoir* by Michelle Zaune. Hope to see you there and Happy Reading!

Other Books We Read

February 2023

Heart of Darkness by Joseph Conrad, 3

The Death of Ivan Ilyich by Leo Tolstoy, 4

Runt by Craig Silvey, 4

Afterlives by Abdulrazak Gurnah, 4

By the Sea by Abdulrazak Gurnah, 4

Paradise by Abdulrazak Gurnah, 3.5

The Blackwater Lightship by Colm Tóibín, 3.5

House of Names by Colm Tóibín, 3.5

The Heather Blazing by Colm Tóibín, 3.5

On Chesil Beach by Ian McEwan, 3.5

Sweet Tooth by Ian McEwan, 3

Nutshell by Ian McEwan, 2

Glory by NoViolet Bulawayo, 4

Seeing Other People by Diane Reid, 2.5

The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lax by Rebecca Skloot 4

The Returns by Philip Salom 3.5

The Chancellor: The Remarkable Odyssey of Angela Merkel by Kati Marton, 3.5

Whereabouts by Jhumpa Lahiri, 3.5

Demon Copperhead by Barbara Kingsolver, 3

Lessons in Chemistry by Bonnie Garmus, 2.5

The Seven Moons of Maali Almeida by Shehan Karunatilaka, 4.5

Return to Uluru by Mark McKenna, 4

The gate of angels by Penelope Fitzgerald, 4

Death in Venice by Thomas Mann, 4