

NVHC Book Club Fall 2019 Selections

August 3. ***Katalin Street*** by Magda Szabo, translated by Len Rix. Fiction. 235 pp. Three families, whose lives are inextricably linked by the street they inhabit, grapple with love and morality amid political upheaval. In prewar Budapest three families live side by side on gracious Katalin Street, their lives closely intertwined. Their lives are torn apart in 1944 by the German occupation as they struggle to come to terms with social and political change, personal loss, and unstated feelings of guilt. *Katalin Street*, which won the 2007 Prix Cévennes for Best European novel, is a poignant, somber, at times harrowing book, but beautifully conceived and truly unforgettable.

September 7 ***Letters to My Palestinian Neighbor*** by Yossi Klein Halevi. Mid-East Relationships. 204 pp. Halevi is an Israeli writer, journalist, scholar and public intellectual who ventured into disputed territory a few years ago. He was looking for common themes that Jews, Christians and Muslims share – a spiritual language that defies the language that separates them. Listening to people in the West Bank and Gaza, he had hoped to find some answers to the questions that bedevil his small area of the world. It's an area smaller than Vancouver Island that occupies world news.

October 5. ***Judas*** by Amos Oz. Fiction. In Jerusalem in the winter of 1959 and 1960, a young graduate student takes a job as a companion to an elderly intellectual. In exchange for room and board and a modest paycheck, he agrees to talk and argue with the old man from 5 to 11 o'clock every evening. Beyond that, he must only feed the fish, bring in a cup of tea and swear never to reveal anything he hears within these walls. This novel of ideas presents Judas as misguided idealist who inadvertently triggered the salvation of mankind. That idea that -- not original to the character or to the author -- has a certain appeal regardless of its theological complications..

November 2. ***Dinner at the Center of the Earth*** by Nathan Englander. Short Stories. 252 pp. A prisoner in a secret cell. The guard who has watched over him a dozen years. An American waitress in Paris. A young Palestinian man in Berlin who strikes up an odd friendship with a wealthy Canadian businessman. The General, Israel's most controversial leader, who lies dying in a hospital, the only man who knows of the prisoner's existence. From these vastly different lives Nathan Englander has woven a powerful, intensely suspenseful portrait of a nation riven by insoluble conflict, even as the lives of its citizens become fatefully and inextricably entwined--a political thriller of the highest order that interrogates the anguished, violent division between Israelis and Palestinians, and dramatizes the immense moral ambiguities haunting both sides.

December 7. ***The Genius of Judaism*** by Bernard-Henri Levy. Relig. 230 pp. This breathtaking new vision and understanding of what it means to be a Jew is rooted in the Talmudic traditions of argument and conflict, rather than biblical commandments, borne out in struggle and study, not in blind observance. At the very heart of the matter is an obligation to the other, to the dispossessed, and to the forgotten, an obligation that Levy has sought to embody over decades of champions "lost causes," from Bosnia to Africa's forgotten wars, from Libya to the Kurdish Peshmerga's desperate fight against the Islamic State.