



The Iron Tracks

Aharon Appelfeld

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How does one live after surviving injustice? What satisfaction comes from revenge? Can the past ever be left behind?

Masterfully composed and imbued with extraordinary feeling and understanding, "The Iron Tracks" is a riveting tale of survival and revenge by the writer whom Irving Howe called "one of the best novelists alive today."

Ever since he was released from a concentration camp forty years earlier, Erwin Siegelbaum has been obsessively riding the trains of postwar Austria. His days are filled with drink, his nights with brief love affairs and the torments of his nightmares. What keeps him sane is his mission to collect the menorahs, kiddush cups, and holy books that have survived their vanished owners. And the hope that one day he will find the Nazi officer who murdered his parents--and have the strength to kill him.

A haunting exploration of one survivor's complex, wrenching, inner world, "The Iron Tracks" is distinguished by the depth of insight and the distinctively stark, elegant style that have won Aharon Appelfeld recognition as one of the world's great writers.

The Iron Tracks Details

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From Reader Review The Iron Tracks for online ebook

Ted says

I can't say I was profoundly moved by this short novel, but it was a very unusual and satisfying story. Made me think.

Goska A says

I do appreciate camp/post camp literature very much. In that one, I just didn't feel connected, I didn't feel the depth of the main character and I disliked him for his behaviour towards women. Also, I don't feel the book had that something, that sparkle that makes reading interesting.

Lorri says

It is a slow-moving read, yet an intense one. It moves along the tracks of time, taking the reader through Erwin Siegelbaum's emotional conflicts. He and his parents were laborers in a Nazi camp, and that is where his parents were killed.

As we begin *The Iron Tracks*, time and place have moved forward four decades. As he travels closer to specific cities and towns on the train, he reflects on his life, remembering past years in those specific places. Time stands still, momentarily as he remembers the women he lusted with, the men he made small talk with, and those who he finds a sense of friendship with.

Aharon Appelfeld has a story to tell, and he tells it with magnificent prose and imagery. The emotional impact is not light and airy, but one that is depressing and disturbing. It is an intense study in one man's thought process, emotions (or lack of), inner conflicts/world and passions. It is a study on displacement of the heart and mind. I recommend *The Iron Tracks* to everyone.

Peter says

This fine novel follows a mostly-unnamed narrator who travels by train during the 1980s through Austria, collecting Jewish religious relics (either discarded or completely devalued) which he sells to wealthy benefactors for eventual return to Israel. But as the story progresses he slowly reveals the real purpose of his travels - to track down a WWII work camp officer whom he blames for the murder of his parents. The overall tone of the novel is joyless and grim, as the narrator repeatedly connects and disconnects with old acquaintances at each station along the line, broods endlessly over memories of his tragic childhood, and faces his ultimate mission of revenge. Yet even that act of revenge brings him no emotional lift or redemption, and as his life goes on mostly as before he realizes that the atrocities of the past can never be corrected - just as the small-town Jewish culture can never be restored to Austria, which warrants the removal of the relics to Israel and the hope of a brighter future there. *The Iron Tracks* is a deeply contemplative and satisfying novel, and my first exposure to Appelfeld, a writer I'm sure I will be returning to.

Juan Hidalgo says

Tras leer "Tzili, historia de una vida" del mismo autor, sentí curiosidad por esta otra novela, en la cual vuelve a circunvalar lo más trillado de la segunda guerra mundial y a explorar caminos poco conocidos, creando un gran mundo en torno a pequeñas vidas anónimas.

Jim says

Ever since he was released from a concentration camp forty years earlier, Erwin Siegelbaum has been obsessively riding the trains of postwar Austria.

Roger Brunyate says

The Wandering Jew

Since the end of the war, I have been on this line, as they say: a long, twisted line stretching from Naples to the cold north, a line of locals, trams, taxis, and carriages. The seasons shift before my eyes like an illusion. I have learned this route with my body. Now I know every hostel and every inn, every restaurant and buffet, the vehicles that bring you to the remotest corners.

The writer, Erwin Siegelbaum, as we shall later discover, travels the rails obsessively. He is more at home in railroad dining cars (where he bribes the waiters to put on classical music) or in station buffets, than in his own home, wherever that may be. The station settings and night journeys reminded me at first of the opening chapter of Italo Calvino's *If on a Winter's Night a Traveler*, and that strange dreamlike atmosphere remains to some extent throughout. But bit by bit, the scale of the book shrinks. So far from the long international train journeys from Naples to points north, it appears that Erwin is pottering around rural Austria, traveling between villages (all made up, I think) so small that you could hardly imagine them having stations, let alone service by trains with dining cars. Towards the end, a journey of a mere 100 kilometers gets interrupted three or four times, as he stops off at yet one more familiar village or inn. It is like Zeno's Paradox, where the distance is always halved, but the goal remains elusive.

For a European Jew, of course, the state railways have associations more powerful than their practical use. And (like the author) Erwin is a Holocaust survivor, emerging from sealed cattle car mysteriously abandoned on a remote siding. By traveling now, he is in a sense recovering the lives of his people. Wherever he goes, he collects lost Judaica, menorahs and kiddush cups that he picks up in town fares. But he also carries a gun in preparation for an encounter with the camp commandant who murdered his parents, an old man named Nachtigel, recently returned from asylum in Uruguay.

"Reparation and retribution" says a review on the cover; I am not sure that I found either. The encounter with Nachtigel disturbed me when it finally came, falling out rather differently from what I had expected. But almost throughout the book, despite Erwin's success at rescuing the treasures of his people, I felt not restoration but the terrible weight of loss. Again and again, as village follows village, and Erwin stays with people who once has been good to him, I got an increasing sense of estrangement: the oldest friends passing

on, others becoming suspicious or cold, the rising tide of anti-Semitism everywhere. Not so much a nightmare out of Calvino as a wasting disease, the slow drawing down of blinds. And that, I suspect, is the point.

Baran ????? says

Ruhun Kuytusu'ndan sonra okuduğum ikinci Appelfeld romanı, ilki beni o kadar etkilemedi okurken ama zamanla onun da etkisini yüreğimde hissediyorum. Ama Demir Raylar'la insanın kötülüğü, sonsuz yalnızlık, ölüm, arayış ve acı damarlar kadar sızdı, Appelfeld bundan sonra en sevdiğim yazarlardan, öyle ki onu branice okuyabilme arzusunu bile bende uyandırdı... Keşke dünyada bu kadar kötülük olmasaydı, ama iyi ki edebiyat var da ruhumuz paklanıyor, insan olduğumuzu hep hatırlıyoruz....

Maryska says

I love how abstract this particular holocaust novel was. It is unlike any other of the books within this particular subject. Wonderful book; intriguing story. I may read this one again soon because I enjoyed it so much.

Nicholas Kopp says

It was a great book! I randomly picked it off the book shelf and started reading. If you want a book to read before you go to bed that will put you to sleep not because its boring but because of the peaceful and beautiful imagery Appelfeld uses describing his voyage on the trains this is a book for you.

Anna says

Rather average book, but it's not very boring. Not to read on short bus or tram ride.

Riet says

Moeilijk om dit boek te beschrijven. Het gaat over een Joodse man, die de holocaust overleefd heeft. Hij reist nu per trein voortdurend door Oostenrijk, het land waar de Nazi's de baas waren. Hij koopt hier en daar Joodse spullen op, vooral uit oude synagoges en verkoopt die door aan iemand, die ze naar Israel zal sturen. Ergens in het boek blijkt, dat hij op zoek is naar een oud-nazi, die weer gewoon in zijn dorp woont na een poosje in Zuid-Amerika gewoond te hebben. Deze man zou zijn ouders hebben vermoord of de dood in gejaagd in een kamp. Uiteindelijk vindt hij hem en doodt hem. Alles blijft wat vaag in dit boek. Wel heel onderkoeld geschreven.

Holly says

Beautifully written. The author communicates sadness, emptiness and loneliness in such a lovely way that I could not help but feel deeply for the main character Erwin. A revenge tale like no other. Highly recommend.
