after auschwitz:
a love story
Brenda Webster
AFTER AUSCHWITZ: A Love Story

by Brenda Webster

"When we're young we tend to think of memory as something belonging to us. There are good memories and bad ones, but aside from forgetting names occasionally, it is hard to imagine what ceasing to rely on your memory means. My mind still functions enough for me to be frightened and feel diminished. Someday, I hope not too soon, I'll cease to be alarmed...."

-- Renzo, from AFTER AUSCHWITZ: A Love Story

Two of the 20th century's terrible A's collide in this powerful novel -- Alzheimer's Disease and the Auschwitz death camp. Brenda Webster brings to bear her considerable knowledge of Jewish and Italian history and culture, personal acquaintance with the families of luminaries like Primo Levi, and a lifetime of psychological insight as she observes the intellectual decline of Renzo, a once brilliant writer and filmmaker.

The novel is set entirely in Rome in 2010, and benefits from the author's comfortable familiarity with the city's haunts, both hidden and famous. Renzo, aware that he is slipping deeper and deeper into the haze of Alzheimer's, keeps a journal in which he grapples with his complicated marriage to Hannah, who survived the death camps as a child and went on to become a chronicler of that experience. Renzo knows how painful it is for Hannah to lose yet another loved one -- himself -- as he chronicles his own failing grip on reality.

This story of enduring love -- a love that makes the pain bearable -- inspires hope where there appears to be despair, and allows humor to leaven the loaf of existence. As Renzo's rich memories of the artistic and intellectual currents of the 20th century begin to fade, highly lyrical passages elucidate his sophisticated anguish and his child-like wonder.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Brenda Webster was born in New York City, and educated at Swarthmore, Barnard, Columbia, and Berkeley, where she earned her Ph.D. A top-rated author on Redroom.com, she is a novelist, freelance writer, playwright, critic and translator who splits her time between Berkeley and Rome. For many years she has been President of PEN West American Center.

She is the author of four previous novels, SINS OF THE MOTHERS (Baskerville; 1993), PARADISE FARM (SUNY; 1999), THE BEHEADING GAME (Wings Press; 2006), which was a finalist for the Northern California Book Award, and VIENNA TRIANGLE (Wings Press; 2009). Her memoir, THE LAST GOOD FREUDIAN (Holmes and Meier; 2000) received considerable critical praise. In 2007, the Modern Language Association published Webster's translation (from Italian) of Edith Bruck's Holocaust novel, LETTERA ALLA MADRE.

Her forthcoming play, "The Murder Trial of Sigmund Freud," was inspired by VIENNA TRIANGLE but goes beyond the story of Tausk and Freud to chronicle Freud's relationships with women patients, disciples, and his family. It was written in collaboration with Meridee Stein, who conceived the idea of a play and brought to the table many stimulating ideas and twenty years of experience in the theater.

Additionally, Webster has written two controversial and oft-anthologized critical studies, YEATS: A Psychoanalytic Study (Stanford) and BLAKE'S PROPHETIC PSYCHOLOGY (Macmillan). She translated poetry from the Italian for THE OTHER VOICE (Norton) and THE PENGUIN BOOK OF WOMEN POETS. She is co-editor of HUNGRY FOR LIGHT: The Journal of Ethel Schwabacher (Indiana; 1993), which reveals the life of an abstract expressionist painter, her mother.

More information about the author can be found at http://www.BrendaWebster.com
PRAISE FOR
AFTER AUSCHWITZ: A Love Story

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This one-of-a-kind novel depicting love between an aging Roman film director suffering from the onset of dementia and a Holocaust survivor is not for the faint-hearted. It takes you to places you don't want to go, but the voyage is not just searing but also transcendent. AFTER AUSCHWITZ: A Love Story will remain with you long after you have put it down.

-- Marilyn Yalom, Senior Scholar, Clayman Institute for Gender Research, Stanford University; author: HOW THE FRENCH INVENTED LOVE: 900 Years of Passion and Romance

Webster's new novel blends the horrors of the holocaust with the redeeming power of love. The plot traces the lives of Hannah, a child survivor of Auschwitz, and her caretaker then husband, the Italian filmmaker Renzo, through the years as he becomes increasingly crippled with age and Alzheimers and dependent on her. If this sounds grim, it is not -- thanks to Webster's marvelous writing, deft touch, and her own love for her characters. I found the depiction of the characters psychologically acute and the relationships real and touching. All in all, a wonderful read that I can strongly recommend to everyone.

-- Louis Breger, Ph.D., Professor Emeritus, Psychoanalytic Studies, Caltech; author: FREUD: Darkness in the Midst of Vision

Brenda Webster's new novel is a brave and haunting love story. The narrator's struggle with the ravages of old age, his strain to hang onto mental coherence, are rendered with unblinking persuasiveness, and his sheltering in the care of the woman he has long loved, left, and to whom he has finally returned, is imagined unsentimentally and movingly.

-- Robert Alter, author: THE PLEASURE OF READING IN AN IDEOLOGICAL AGE

AFTER AUSCHWITZ: A Love Story is without a doubt the most profound, moving and important of Webster's novels. The level of complexity and insight is remarkable. I was deeply moved by her exploration of relationships and long term love and commitment in the face of aging, parenting, dealing with loss, illness, ambivalence, ambiguity, and the prospect of imminent death.

-- Alan Rinzler, legendary editor of Toni Morrison, Tom Robbins, etc.
QUESTIONS FOR

Brenda Webster, author of

AFTER AUSCHWITZ: A Love Story

1. How did the idea originate?

2. Hannah is a childhood survivor of the concentration camps. What special research did your novel require?

3. The book takes place in Rome. Please talk a little about your personal relationship to Italy.

4. Does the book entail any unusual places?

5. Is there a school of writing that has influenced you?

6. Why do you believe the "sandwich" generation and their parents will be interested in this novel? Won't the fact that Renzo, the narrator, is aware he is slipping deeper into Alzheimer's be perceived as a "downer"?

7. For many years you have been the President of the northern California chapter of PEN. What are your accomplishments with that organization?

8. You are also a founding member of www.redroom.com, a site for writers. How do you believe that such organizations help authors?

9. You have mentioned that your memoir, THE LAST GOOD FREUDIAN, helped you understand why people did things, which has served you well as a writer. Please explain.

10. Finally, how was the writing of this book different from your nine other books which have included four novels, a translation, a book you edited, and two books of criticism, plus the memoir already mentioned?
Brenda Webster, author of
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