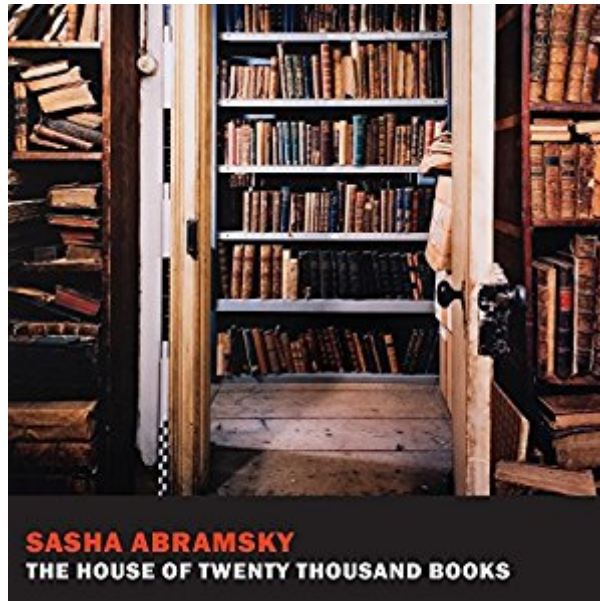




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The House Of Twenty Thousand Books



Synopsis

The House of Twenty Thousand Books is the story of Chimen Abramsky, an extraordinary polymath and bibliophile who amassed a vast collection of socialist literature and Jewish history. For more than 50 years, Chimen and his wife, Miriam, hosted epic gatherings in their house of books that brought together many of the age's greatest thinkers. The atheist son of one of the century's most important rabbis, Chimen was born in 1916 near Minsk, spent his early teenage years in Moscow while his father served time in a Siberian labor camp for religious proselytizing, and then immigrated to London, where he discovered the writings of Karl Marx and became involved in left-wing politics. He briefly attended the newly established Hebrew University in Jerusalem, until World War II interrupted his studies. Back in England, he married, and for many years he and Miriam ran a respected Jewish bookshop in London's East End. When the Nazis invaded Russia in June 1941, Chimen joined the Communist Party, becoming a leading figure in the party's National Jewish Committee. He remained a member until 1958, when, shockingly late in the day, he finally acknowledged the atrocities committed by Stalin. In middle age, Chimen reinvented himself once more, this time as a liberal thinker, humanist, professor, and manuscript expert for Sotheby's auction house. Journalist Sasha Abramsky re-creates here a lost world, bringing to life the people, the books, and the ideas that filled his grandparents' house, from gatherings that included Eric Hobsbawm and Isaiah Berlin to books with Marx's handwritten notes, William Morris manuscripts and woodcuts, an early 16th-century Bomberg Bible, and a first edition of Descartes' Meditations. The House of Twenty Thousand Books is a wondrous journey through our times, from the vanished worlds of Eastern European Jewry to the cacophonous politics of modernity. Cover photo copyright Jane and Louise Wilson, courtesy 303 Gallery, New York

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Customer Reviews

Outstanding biography of an amazing polymath historian and scholar of Jewish history and socialism along with important historical perspectives of last centuries' major historical upheavals.

I love books, i love history at all and like very much history of books. This book is perfect. Loved.

One of the finest books I have ever read. It is a book to share but then ask for it to be returned because you will want to treasure it. The house that was a center of community, friendship, family and captured the essence of humanity.

Fantastic book, great story. Must read.

The concept is interesting: write a biography/memoir about a person who came from an Orthodox Jewish background in the Ukraine, emigrated to England via Palestine, became an expert in rare Judaica and Socialist literature, joined & left the Communist party, finally becoming a Professor at UCL. How to tell the story: use the rooms in his House of 20,000 Books as the focal point for the people who congregated there over the years. Problems:- there is no sustained chronological storyline for longer than a page or two. This jumping back and forth in time wears on you, trying to keep it straight.- there are too many characters to keep track of. A person is mentioned in an early chapter amid 20 other characters, then 100 pages later they're referenced by their first name as if they were an old friend. Again, very hard to keep straight.- badly in need of editing. Several times, the same phrasing is repeated from chapter to chapter.- becomes turgid prose at times, making forward progress an effort.

Very interesting book. I would recommend it to anyone who wants to see how wars and rejection of someone because they are Jewish - and how the world wars affected the Jewish people - and how they were able to survive and move forward in their life.

While I have been a fan of most of Mr. Abramsky's books (particularly those on poverty in modern

America and the inequities of our broken criminal justice system), I was absolutely blown away by this book. It is beautifully written and takes the reader back to a time and place which exists nowhere but in the memories of people (like Mr. Abramsky) who were fortunate enough to know the wonderful characters who populate this work. If a novelist had attempted to create a character like Chaim Abramsky, no one would have believed he could have existed. I cannot recommend "The House of Twenty Thousand Books" strongly enough.

This saga attests to the personal enrichments of reading, of culture, of the acquired love of books.

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