

FBF 2025
International Fiction & Non-fiction

Ralph Stern
ARCHITECTURES OF COINCIDENCE
More than a Family Memoir

Architectures of Coincidence is a journey — a movement across space, time, and memory. At its core lies the story of the Stern family, whose path traces a delicate arc through the last centuries: exile and return, loss and rediscovery. A story inseparably bound to the broader contours of German history. And it is also a narrative of a young man who traveled the world to find reconciliation with his history, one that reminds us that the past is prologue to who we are.

In the early 1990s, Ralph Stern arrives in Berlin as an architect — drawn by exciting design competitions, a vibrant nightlife, and the intellectual echoes of Walter Benjamin. Yet his family roots lie not in Berlin, but in Cologne, Frankfurt, and Soest. What starts as a professional new beginning gradually transforms into an existential search for identity and belonging.

At first, Stern knows little about his family: a few names, no photographs, no letters, no addresses. The turning point comes in the form of a Leitz folder, compiled by his grandmother in the 1960s and labeled: “*For Ralph, so that he may learn the sad story of his family.*” Inside, a note speaks of 32 relatives murdered by the Nazis — but not a single name is recorded.

As Stern begins to piece together his family’s story, a larger historical narrative unfolds. What begins as historical investigation soon takes on a life of its own. Names, places, and connections resurface — often closer than expected. In his Berlin neighborhood, Stern uncovers traces of relatives he never knew existed.

Above all, this is a story shaped by serendipity — by fleeting encounters, fractured inheritances, and the quiet voices of the past. A chorus of recovered voices and disappearances made visible. Stern masterfully weaves these elements into a literary mosaic, blending family narrative, his formative journey, and urban reflection. What at first seems incidental gradually reveals deeper truths: we are surrounded by history, and the present — and we ourselves — are made of stories, both remembered and nearly forgotten.

- Ms: Nov. 2025
- Approx. 224 pp, option to include photos



Ralph Stern is the Dean of Architecture at the University of Manitoba/Canada. He has taught in the US and Europe, including at Harvard, Yale, Columbia, MIT, the Bauhaus University Weimar, as well as the Technical University and the University of the Arts Berlin. After moving to Berlin, Stern began researching his German-Jewish heritage—a history that had

never been passed down to him. His family's past is both deeply personal and reflective of the broader experiences of German Jews. A portrait of his sixth great-grandfather, Süßkind Stern, dating to 1671, hangs in Frankfurt's *Museum Judengasse*, while letters between Süßkind's son, Jacob, and the Berlin courts of Friedrich I and Friedrich Wilhelm I are preserved in the Geheimes Staatsarchiv Preußischer Kulturbesitz.

His family's history is also documented in literature: extensive excerpts from a cousin's memoir appear in Erica Fischer's *Aimée und Jaguar*, while another cousin's memoir is archived in Dachau. *Stolpersteine* commemorating family members are found throughout Germany. The intersection of personal, familial, and German-Jewish history remains the focus of his current research.

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Volker Heins **SANCTUARY CITIES**

An impressive analysis of migration, solidarity and the future of open societies.

At a time when wars, environmental destruction, and arbitrary governments are forcing more and more people to flee, the borders of many countries are closing, more and more strictly. But are there alternatives to isolation? In his essay, political scientist Volker Heins sheds light on a promising approach: Sanctuary Cities, cities as places of refuge. Using examples from Chicago, Kampala, Sheffield, Palermo, and Berlin, he examines how municipalities can offer protection to refugees – regardless of national tendencies toward isolation. He addresses the opportunities and challenges of this model. A new concept of urban freedom might be emerging here.

Cities and municipalities vary in their openness to regular and irregular migration, and there's no indication that this will change anytime soon. The homogeneous nation-state is an illusion of modernity that is continually nurtured, but repeatedly bursts before our eyes. But if national homogeneity in migration issues proves futile, it's worth taking a look at attempts to accept and mitigate irregular and inconsistent development within nation-states. Total isolation remains a reactionary fantasy that cannot be realized, even if majorities may soon favor it. The only way out is to establish cities of refuge where there are majorities for them.

Based on field studies on three continents, Heins portrays selected cities whose common denominator is the promise of welcoming and protecting immigrants and refugees, regardless of their origins and residence status. What exactly does the promise of protection consist of? What consequences does this promise have in practice for the migrant population with precarious or no residence permits, and for the peaceful coexistence of all? Who supports the idea of the city as a safe haven and who opposes it? What can we learn from other cities? Is the idea of a radically inclusive city a dying breed, or does it have a future still? Is a new concept of urban freedom emerging here?

- About 180 pp.
- English World Rights available, all other territories via Nautilus Verlag
- Publ. March 2026

Volker Michael Heins, b.1957, is a political scientist and author. He is a member of the Institute for Advanced Study in the Humanities (KWI) in Essen and currently a visiting fellow at the University of Illinois at Chicago. His German publications include *Der Skandal der Vielfalt. Geschichte und Konzepte des Multikulturalismus* («The Scandal of Diversity: History and Concepts of Multiculturalism», 2013) and *Offene Grenzen für alle. Eine notwendige Utopie* («Open Borders for All: A Necessary Utopia», 2021), which was nominated for the 2021 NDR Non-Fiction Prize, among others.

His most recent publication with Suhrkamp Verlag is *Hinter Mauern. Geschlossene Grenzen als Gefahr für die offene Gesellschaft* with Frank Wolff («Behind Walls: Closed Borders as a Danger to the Open Society», 2023), which was on the SPIEGEL bestseller list.

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Meret Michel

BEIRUT

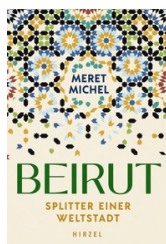
Fragments of a World City

“In Beirut, the air is filled with poetry and gunpowder, with love and despair.” Etel Adnan

On August 4, 2020, a massive explosion shattered Beirut. In a city already worn down by crisis, hundreds lost their lives, thousands their homes—and the disaster became a symbol of both fragility and resilience. This moment is the starting point for *Beirut. Fragments of a World City*. With a storyteller’s eye, Meret Michel follows the city’s arc: from 19th-century trade hub to glittering intellectual center, through years of war, the rise of Hezbollah, and new conflicts that still shape daily life.

Woven into this history are intimate portraits and stories: the Sursock family, once merchants turned power brokers; Bassam al-Sheikh Hussein, reclaiming his own savings at gunpoint; Monika Borgmann, demanding justice for her murdered husband Lokman Slim. Their stories echo a timeless question: what makes a place home? And how can one survive amidst the ruins of a state?

Beirut, once hailed as a crossroads of East and West, is today a city of contradictions—restless, fractured, yet endlessly alive. Michel’s portrait opens a window not only onto Beirut, but onto the heart of the Middle East itself.



- About 228 pp.
- Germany: Hirzel Verlag, English World, Spanish and French Rights available
- Publ. Oct. 2025



Meret Michel lives in Beirut and works as a freelance reporter in the Middle East, focusing on Syria, Lebanon, and Iraq. Her work has appeared in *WOZ Die Wochenzeitung*, *Republik Magazin*, *NZZ am Sonntag*, *SRF*, *Die Zeit*, and *Greenpeace Magazin*. She has twice been awarded the real21 Media Prize (2018 and 2021), was twice nominated for the Zurich Journalism Prize (2019 and 2021), and once for the German Reporter Award (2021).

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Kirsty Bell
MOTHER'S MOTHER

All silences are the same, and each silence contains anything you can imagine.
Anne Enright

Mother's Mother is about the seepage of matriarchal ancestry. Set in the Lowlands of Scotland, it follows three generations of working women backwards through a century and a half, into the mid 1800s. Each woman – Kirsty Bell's grandmother, great-grandmother and great-great-grandmother – appears entangled in the attitudes, prejudices and limitations of their time, as a cross-generational trajectory is plotted out, leading up and out of working-class illiteracy, poverty and precarity and into the stable property-owning merchant classes. A trajectory which stalls in the 1950s with Kirsty's grandmother as the limits placed on post-war social emancipation become apparent.

As the lives of these three ordinary women are delineated, assumptions about progress and freedom are dislodged. In their place arise questions about indebtedness, revealing secrets twisted into the DNA of successive generations, a matriarchal lineage that ends with the author, the final female offspring.

Piece by piece, an episodic narrative of female lineage is unearthed and surveyed in relation to the entrancing Lowland landscape, in thrall to daily weather patterns. The assembled facts are embellished with the aid of contemporaneous literature as well as social histories, urban analysis, local mythology and speculative imaginings, drawing correspondences between inner states and the outer world.

- About 210 pp., Ms. Nov.2025
- World English: Fitzcarraldo Editions, German: Kanon Verlag



Kirsty Bell is a British-American writer and art critic living in Berlin. She has published widely in magazines and journals including *Tate Etc.* and *Art in America*, and was a contributing editor of *Frieze* from 2011-2021. She was awarded a Warhol Foundation Grant for her book *The Artist's House*, and her essays have appeared in over seventy exhibition catalogues for major international museums and institutions.

Her recent publication *The Undercurrents. A Story of Berlin*, a hybrid narrative of memoir, cultural history and literary biography, was published in 2022 by Fitzcarraldo Editions (UK), The Other Press (US), Errata Naturae (Spain), EDT (Italy) and Kanon Verlag (Germany).

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Hamza Abu Howidy **SEASHELLS AT THE SHORES OF GAZA**

I criticize Hamas. I criticize Israel. Sometimes I feel like the loneliest Palestinian in the world.

Hamza Abu Howidy

Raised in Gaza amidst religious extremism and indoctrination, Hamza Howidy's yearning for freedom put him on a collision course with Hamas. In 2019, he co-organized protests against their rule and paid the price: imprisonment, torture, and forced exile.

Now 27, he is a vital voice from the Palestinian exile community, refusing to be co-opted in a world defined by polarization. His story defies easy labels, chronicling a journey from indoctrinated youth to a peace activist who mourns victims on all sides. By courageously condemning the violence and corruption of Hamas while also challenging Israeli attacks on civilians, he champions empathy as an act of resistance.

His memoir, *Seashells at the Shores of Gaza*, serves as a powerful bridge. It is a rare testament to the cost of speaking truth to power that forces readers to confront the complex humanity behind the headlines and offers an urgent plea for a democratic, peaceful future.



- About 224 pp.
- Germany: S. Fischer Verlag, publ. March 2026
- Translation rights: Elisa.Diallo@fischerverlage.de

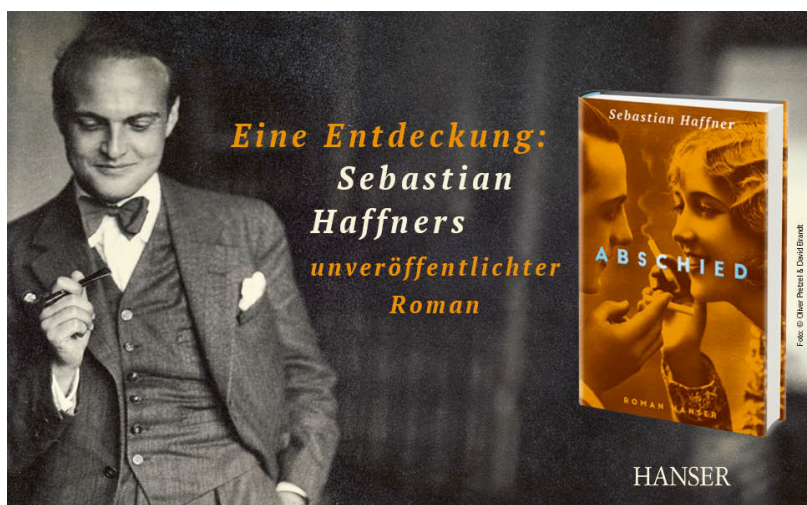


Hamza Howidy, born in Gaza in 1997, is a Palestinian journalist and activist living in exile. As part of the "We Want to Live" protest movement, he was arrested and tortured before fleeing to Germany in 2023. He now works as a free-lance writer and commentator, known for his non-violent, pragmatic approach to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, criticizing both Hamas and the Israeli occupation. His work has been published in *taz*, *Times of Israel*, *Newsweek*, and *AsiaNews*, and he has spoken at the Bundestag and various conferences.

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Sebastian Haffner PARTING

A lighthearted yet melancholic love story set in 1930s Paris – a discovery: an unpublished novella by Sebastian Haffner



"What a literary treasure!"
Uwe Sauerwein, Berliner Morgenpost

"A breathtakingly fast-paced, light, vivid, and airy text."
3sat Kulturzeit,

"A wonderful discovery"
Frankfurter Allgemeine Sonntagszeitung

"Once again we encounter that heightened historical consciousness that already amazed and fascinated readers in Haffner's *Defying Hitler*. A profoundly clear-sighted novel."
Süddeutsche Zeitung

"A beautiful book full of youthful freshness and great emotional intensity. The euphoria and carefree spirit in *Parting* are just as palpable as the feelings of desolation and melancholy."
Deutschlandfunk Büchermarkt

"... it contains the entire aroma of those last years of bourgeois freedom in Europe. ... Haffner's youth novel is a discovery, not just because it adds a fresh, youthful tone to the biography of this great essayist and interpreter of the times. *Parting* is a powerful piece of *Neue Sachlichkeit* literature."
Süddeutsche Zeitung

"What a farewell to love! So heartbreaking and yet so coolly written. Haffner has hidden a novel from us for ninety years that is as graceful as it is magnificent."
Uwe Wittstock, author of *February 1933: The Winter of Literature* and *Marseille 1940: The Flight of Literature*

"The brilliance of clarity in thought, the fluttering of a poetic butterfly in the narration, the inkdrawn dialogues – how can all of this come together? Anyone who wants to know should urgently read *Parting*. Then they will understand how it's done. The author's name is Sebastian Haffner. That's why it works." Michael Köhlmeier, author

"No one says what they think, no one thinks what they say. And they say nothing that can be used against them, yet they do not use each other either. In the coming realm of darkness, they will all be used and consumed."
Elfriede Jelinek, Nobel Laureate, author of *The Piano Teacher*

- About 192 pp.
- Germany: Hanser, NL: Arbeiderspers, France: R. Laffont, Italy: Sellerio, Denmark: Politiken, Sweden: Norstedt, UK/US: W&N, Croatia: Ljevak, Armenia: newmag, Türkiye: Iletisim, Norway: Bonnier Norsk Forlag, Israel: Am Oved

Sebastian Haffner (1907-1999) was a German historian, journalist, and author. He earned a doctorate in law before emigrating to England in 1938, where he worked as a journalist and writer. In 1954, he returned to Germany as a correspondent for *The Observer* and later wrote for *konkret*, *Die Welt*, and *Stern*. He published several bestsellers, including *Notes on Hitler* and his memoir *Defying Hitler*. With his linguistic and analytical talent, Haffner became one of the most influential public intellectuals in post-war Germany.

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