Clarion Review

General

Anna's Ring
Anni Bodmer
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Four Stars (out of Five)

Israel and Palestine appear regularly in the news but American readers may know little about the embattled region. *Anna's Ring* a historical fiction novel by Anni Bodmer aims to make the current Holy Land crises comprehensible and to make people on all sides of the struggle sympathetic.

A grade-school teacher with thirty years' experience Bodmer brings firsthand historical knowledge to *Anna's Ring* which spans the time period from the 1940s through the present. Born during World War II in Germany Bodmer lived under Nazi rule and its aftermath an experience that informed the stories of her WWII survivor characters. Her later trips to Israel and Palestine gave her ideas upon which to base the Middle Eastern cast members.

Bodmer addresses the Holy Land's troubled history through a multi-generational cast. In the present day Jewish student Rebecca Golden meets German medical student Joachim Flut when he is studying in the Ukraine. Joachim's father gives him a wedding ring for Rebecca that coincidentally belonged to Rebecca's great-grandmother. Rebecca and Joachim become immersed in the story of Rebecca's grandfather Joshua Warsef who safeguarded the ring after his mother died in a concentration camp and Peter Flut Joachim's father who helped Joshua escape from the camps. The German family and the Jewish family along with the Allips a devoutly Muslim family in Palestine must deal with their past and present experiences of betrayal and forgiveness.

Though *Anna's Ring* switches between many characters and settings Bodmer's facility for differentiating voices assures that readers never lose the story's many threads. Characterization is particularly vivid for two reasons. First the author uses detailed historical research to ground her characters' WWII experiences. Second Bodmer's deft descriptions of her

cast's strong emotions give readers a connection to the history described. For example Peter Flut recalls his stint as a German army medic based in an abandoned church; he watches the invading Russians kill a wounded soldier:

> *[W]e were just in time to see another infantry man raise his gun to bring the butt down on the head of the [legless man]. Wilhelm has his eyes fixed on the statue of the Holy Mother. The sculptor had done a great job capturing her half smile so full of compassion and motherly love. One of her hands reached out into the void in a welcoming gesture and I was sure that the sinner who was about to die took it as a personal invitation.*

The empathy exemplified in this passage by Peter Flut may well be that of Bodmer herself and this empathy is one of the book's greatest strengths. *Anna's Ring* is solidly factual emotionally engaging and smoothly written. Furthermore its humane portrayal of all characters may instill in readers a charitable perspective toward people once dismissed as cruel or self-righteous. Recommended for those interested in historical fiction Judaica WWII Middle Eastern history love stories or fiction with an uplifting message *Anna's Ring* is most appropriate for readers of high school age and older.

Elizabeth Allen