



BookMarks

Women's League for Conservative Judaism

This edition of BookMarks has been generously underwritten by friends of Deena Gordon in memory of Rabbi Bill Gordon, z"l in honor of his dedication to Jewish learning

From International Books Chair Illene Rubin

Ah summer... a time to rest, a time for vacation... and a time to catch up on your reading! Thank you so much for such positive feedback to the first issue of BookMarks. We are happy to publish this second issue in time for you to grab that stack of books and run to the beach! And even though most sisterhood programming stops during the summer, many groups take advantage of unstructured time to plan leisurely book club reviews over pitchers of sangria!

This issue of BookMarks has something for everyone:

Authors Corner featuring novelist Dara Horn (*All Other Nights*) and JTS librarian Professor David Kraemer (*Jewish Eating and Identity Through the Ages*).

Booklists: fiction (including forthcoming novels by three of your favorite authors, Faye Kellerman, Daniel Silva and Jennifer Weiner) and non-fiction (Jewish cookbooks with a focus on healthy recipes). We've included author websites where available – many authors avail themselves to their readers/book clubs via phone or skype!

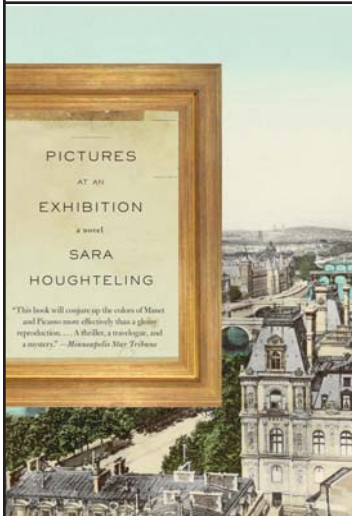
Orpah's selection: a sneak preview of our second multi-media selection!

Mark your calendar diaries/blackberries: we will conduct a Distance Workshop Book-Kit! (A Guide to Planning/Maintaining a Successful Book Club) with special guest Maggie Anton, author of the Rashi's Daughters series, via conference call on August 10 @ 8PM EST. Registration details are forthcoming.

Comments? Suggestions? You can contact me at illenerubin@aol.com.

We hope you continue to enjoy this Women's League Books Department publication and that you will find it helpful when planning your programming for next year – lots of food for thought. *Beteiavon! Bon appetit!*

Coming Soon: Orpah's List Selection



Look for the complete WLCJ Study Guide for first-time author Sara Houghteling's *Pictures at an Exhibition*, in November 2010.. Set in pre- and post-war Paris, Max Berenson, the emotionally fragile son of a successful cosmopolitan art dealer and his artistic and temperamental wife, must deal with the loss of his entire world. Woven throughout this gripping tale is the transcendent artwork, beloved by his family, plundered by the Nazi occupiers.

The study guide will include:

- story discussion questions
- overview of the Nazi looting of European art
- discussion of the book and PBS film that is one of Houghteling's primary sources, *The Rape of Europa*
- art works included in the story
- music from Mussorgsky's "Pictures at an Exhibition"

AUTHORS CORNER

DARA HORN

***All Other Nights* (Norton, 2009)**

In her third novel, *All Other Nights*, acclaimed author Dara Horn examines the intersections between race, ethnicity and morality during the American Civil War. Jacob Rappaport is the privileged son of a wealthy northern Jewish family. Against the wishes of his family he joins the Union army to escape an arranged marriage. When the authorities discover that his family's unique business and social connections transcend the Mason-Dixon divide, they send Jacob to New Orleans on the eve of Passover to assassinate his uncle, a man who is involved in a plot to assassinate President Lincoln. In the eyes of his superiors, Jacob's ethnicity alone ties him to Judah Benjamin, the Confederacy's secretary of state.

His next mission is equally formidable: to marry Eugenia Levy, a spy for the Confederacy. This unlikely and daunting match portends danger and betrayal, but is ultimately one of romance and redemption. The metaphor of their troubled union reflects that of

the larger stage on which it is carried out.

Metaphors and ironies abound in Horn's work. As Jews celebrate their redemption from slavery, Jacob sees himself in moral conflict with his ethnic kin, the Southern Jews who support their own society that enslaves Africans.

When asked to participate in acts that perhaps offend his convictions about loyalty and honor, Jacob, by now wise beyond his years, looks to his tradition for comfort and wisdom. Like those generations before him, he arrives at his own forgiving truth.

Discussion questions

How does the author develop the following issues in this Civil War story?

- escape and freedom from bondage
- family and ethnic loyalty
- deception and honesty
- personal courage
- love and redemption

Are Jewish notions of morality absolute?

[*The paperback contains a full discussion guide.*]

Interview with Dara Horn, by Illene Rubin

How long have you been writing and how did you start?

I think writing is less a career choice than a disease; it's like finding out you have asthma and then having to work your life around it. I have kept journals and written stories since the age of six. I am one of four children, and when we were growing up our parents took us on trips all around the world, to places like Cambodia and Peru. To prevent us from beating up the flight attendants, we each had to keep a journal or sketchbook. I took this very seriously, and when I was 14 I published my first article, in *Hadassah Magazine*, about Jewish historical sites in Spain based on my journal. My parents were quite

successful in encouraging our creativity, because today both of my sisters are published writers and my brother is a professional animator for television.

Who and what do you read? Genre? Favorites? What's on your nightstand right now?

My doctorate is in Yiddish and Hebrew literature (yes, I do speak those languages; someone always asks!) so I read a lot of that literature. When I read in other languages I like short stories and poetry where my attention is rewarded by focusing on every word. In English I prefer novels; I read almost no nonfiction and very few short stories. But right now I'm reading *The Possessed*, a hilarious essay

collection by Elif Batuman, ostensibly about Russian literature, but really about the unbridgeable difference between literature and life, and the possibility that literature might be preferable. Elif was my childhood best friend, and we're still very close. We began writing stories together in first grade, and her writing was brilliant then and is absolutely ingenious now. I'm not the only one who thinks so; the book's a bestseller!

What's your Jewish background and how has it impacted your writing?

I grew up in the Conservative movement. I went to public schools and attended afternoon Hebrew schools, Camp Ramah, and Prozdor high school (at JTS), among other programs. But my Jewish education mostly came from home, where my mother (who has a doctorate in Jewish education) and my father focused our family's attention around Mordecai Kaplan's concept of Judaism as a civilization, in which religious practice was just one component of Jewish life.

Reading Jewish literature, going to plays, concerts and museum exhibits of Jewish interest, and traveling to Jewish sites around the world were things my parents rigorously included in our informal education. And in my family, collective creativity was a major component of Jewish life. Every Shabbat, we created multipart harmonies for traditional *zemirot*. Every Passover, we wrote and performed entirely new material—plays, skits, Broadway show tunes, game shows, poetry—to retell the story of the Exodus to our seder guests. (We still do this for our own children.) For our parents' birthdays, we'd write poems or songs that were parodies of Jewish sources, like the "Book of Dad" for the "Book of Job." The warm irreverence of these occasions was really a side effect of a deep familiarity with these sources—and a sense of comfortable inti-

macy with holiness. That intimacy with holiness is what my family gave me, and in my academic studies of Jewish literature I saw that same intimacy with holiness, even among supposedly secular writers, as the animating force behind Jewish creativity for centuries. It's that kind of intimacy that I strive to bring into my books.

How did you research your books? Is it always the same process?

Books are like children; learning how to deal with one doesn't help you much with the next one, except that you have a little more confidence in your ability. (I have three children and three books, so this is the metaphor that springs to mind.) Generally I write and research at the same time. I get an idea and start writing, and when I get stuck or realize I need more information, I go back to researching and reading—until I discover some fact or anecdote or coincidence (like the fact that many American Jewish immigrants threw their *tefillin* overboard upon arriving at Ellis Island, or that Chagall once taught art at an orphanage for Jewish children orphaned by Russian pogroms, or that a certain female Confederate spy was able to dislocate her jaw at will) with the potential to send the story into a new direction. I don't plan my books; I really write them in the same way that you would read them—to find out what happens next!

What's your favorite part of the writing process?

Being deep into a novel in progress, at the point where the characters become people that I live with every day—but not yet at the point where I have to go back and edit and kill half of them off.

Do you base the characters on anyone you know?

One of my goals is to avoid getting sued, so if I base a character on a real person, I try to make sure that person is unambiguously dead. That way I only hear from their enraged heirs.

You were so young when In the Image was published; how do you see your career progressing?

When I look back at my first novel, it feels very much like a young person's novel (now that I am a hoary 32). I think all first novels wind up being a bit autobiographical no matter how hard one tries to avoid it. In subsequent books I've avoided autobiography entirely to focus more on creating page-turning plots. You don't really want to live the kind of life that makes for a page-turning plot, and I'm extremely fortunate to be living the kind of life that would make for a lousy novel!

When I read a book I love, I often go back to find other books by that author. But when I get to the third book, I am often disappointed to find that the author is writing the same book again and again. When it came time to write my third book, I realized that I was at risk of becoming the perpetrator of this crime against creativity. My first two books both involved multiple storylines and were told from multiple perspectives, so in the third I wrote from only one character's perspective with a more linear chronological plot. I wanted to focus on making the story the most important thing. In the next novel I'll try new challenges.

You are also an academic How have you found the process of modifying your interests and style for more popular audiences?

My second novel, *The World to Come*, deals a lot with Yiddish literature, which was the subject of my doctoral dissertation. In that book I worked very hard on making all of the details as accurate as possible, and it was only after the book was published that I realized that there were only about twelve people in the world who would notice whether Pinkhas Kahanovitsh was arrested by the Soviets in 1949 or 1950. But *All Other Nights* is about the Civil War. This book required

me to embark on a new Ph.D., because when you claim that a Civil War battle started at 9 AM instead of 10 AM, legions of enthusiasts will immediately correct you! Accuracy always matters, even in fiction. But in a novel you are building an imaginary world even if you are dealing with historical spare parts and you have to invite readers into that world. My novels never require the reader to know anything in advance, though the reader will probably wind up learning something inadvertently while along for the ride.

How do you define Jewish literature? What do you think is its value?

Historically, Jewish literature has been literature written in Jewish languages. No one ever asked Sholem Aleichem the question that I'm invariably asked: "Do you consider yourself a Jewish writer?" What made someone a Jewish writer was that they wrote in a Jewish language. The value of Jewish languages is that everything written in them resonates with the echoes of ancient Jewish texts, even in completely secular stories. It's built into the language itself, totally and unavoidably. When you are speaking a Jewish language, Saturday is Shabbat, whether you observe Shabbat or not—and the word "Shabbat" is going to have all of the resonances of Shabbat for your readers because, whether or not they observe the tradition (and even if they have actively rejected it), an awareness of the tradition is part of the way they unconsciously think. This matters for writers who care about every word they choose. And that's before we even get to idioms and metaphors and more conscious references to ancient words.

We're in a very unusual situation in America in that we have one of the largest Jewish communities in history, yet it is a community that primarily doesn't use a

Continued on last page

JEWISH FOOD/JEWISH EATING

Introduction

Even a quick review of the titles of these cookbooks makes it clear that Jewish cooks today are doing as Jewish cooks have always done — cooking the foods of the settings in which Jews find themselves with an occasional Jewish twist. But if this is true, then what about “Jewish foods?”

When one studies Jewish “foodways” (as I did for my book *Jewish Eating and Identity Through the Ages*) one quickly discovers that Jews through the ages were — like everyone else around them — what we today call “locovores.” That is to say, people have always been limited to eating the foods available in their local environments. Jews did the same, only making changes to conform to the restrictions of kashrut.

These cookbooks, then, represent the continuation of a very old Jewish tradition.

Several of them take seriously recent trends in cooking (healthy, local, vegetarian, etc.) and adapt them for the kosher kitchen. Others convey the culinary riches of other local environments where Jews have lived, recognizing that we have been Syrian and German-Polish-Russian — and many other things as well. What they all do is show how, even on the foundation of what stays the same (the fundamentals of kashrut), Jewish cooks always enthusiastically have joined the creativity of the latest cooking trends.

May we enjoy all of the best of the many “Jewish” recipes found here—and of all the new ones to come!

Professor David Kraemer
Joseph J. and Dora Abbell Librarian
Professor of Talmud and Rabbinics
Jewish Theological Seminary

Cookbooks

- Ansh, Tamar. *A Taste of Challah*. Feldheim, 2007 (Step-by-step procedures)
- Cohen, Nechama. *Enlited Kosher Cooking*. Feldheim, 2006 (health-conscious kosher recipes)
- Dweck, Poopa. *Aromas of Aleppo*. Harper-Collins, 2007 (Syrian Jewish cooking)
- Fein, Ronnie. *Hip Kosher*. DaCapo Press, 2008 (easy to prepare contemporary dishes)
- Fishbein, Susie. *Kosher by Design Lightens Up*. Mesorah Publications, 2008 (Contemporary)
- Geller, Jamie. *Quick & Kosher: Recipes from the Bride Who Knew Nothing*. Feldheim, 2007 (15-minute recipes)
- Gillett, Norene. *Norene's Healthy Kitchen*. Whitecap Books, 2007 (heart smart, diabetes, and weight loss)
- Gur, Janna. *Book of New Israeli Food*. Al Hashulchun Gastronomic, 2007 (basic Israeli recipes)

- Kancigar, Judy Bart. *Cooking Jewish: 532 Recipes from the Rabinowitz Family*. Workman, 2007 (Mostly traditional Ashkenazic recipes)
- Kirschenbaum, Levana. *Levana Cooks Dairy-Free: Natural and Delicious Recipes for your Favorite “Forbidden” Foods*. Skyhorse Publishing, 2007 (Recipes with dairy substitutes such as soy, rice, oat, coconut and almond milks, and tofu-based replacements)
- Phillips, Denise. *New Flavours of the Jewish Table*. Ebury Press, 2009 (Contemporary)
- Rothschild, Edith. *Nutrilicious: Food for Thought and Whole Health*. Nutcracker, 2007 (vegetarian kosher cuisine)
- Schechter, Doris. *At Oma's Table: More than 100 Recipes and Remembrances from a Jewish Family's Kitchen*. HP, 2007 (from the family that owns My Favorite Food restaurant)

Siegel, Don. *From Lokshen to Lo Mein: the Jewish Love Affair with Chinese Food*. Gefen, 2005 (kosher Chinese cuisine)

Tarn, Georgie and Tracey Fine. *The Jewish Princess Feasts & Festivals*. Sterling, 2009 (humor and appetizing Jewish recipes)

BOOK REVIEW

David Kraemer's *Jewish Eating and Identity Through the Ages*

Kashrut, one of the main tenets of Jewish belief and practice, has long distinguished Jew from non-Jew. Discussion of permissible (kosher) and non-permissible animals (treyf), food preparation – how it is prepared and by whom, separation of milk and meat are only broad categories. As we all know, the devil is in the details.

In the many attempts to comprehend why Jews observe these laws – from the traditional explanation that Israel was “a kingdom of priests and a holy people” to Rabbi Hertz’s mid-20th century pseudoscientific explanation that these laws reflect the ancients’ awareness of microorganisms, to that of modern biblical scholars and anthropologists – understanding remains elusive.

Into the fray jumps David Kraemer, professor of Talmud and Librarian at the Jewish Theological Seminary, with his erudite and original addition to the subject, *Jewish Eating and Identity Through the Ages* (Routledge, 2007). Kraemer suggests that the matter is indeed complicated: “Jews have always recognized that the foods they eat and the way they eat them symbolize who they are, over and against who they are not.” Observance of kashrut is a significant indicator of Jewish identity, but as Kraemer concludes, does not separate just Jew from non-Jew, but also one Jew from another.

Kraemer undertakes an ambitious agenda, tracing the history of eating from a few biblical injunctions to the kashrut wars beginning in the 1980s. He portrays an eating system that evolved over several thousand years, from a

relative handful of biblical injunctions to a systematic and ever-accreting body of laws that often prescribed more stringent practice, but that (more often than is thought) permitted leniency. He offers many engaging discussions and insights. For instance, the generally identical diets of Jew and non-Jew in antiquity suggest that mere separation was not the only intent of ancient food taboos. Why and how did the pig – only one of a myriad of forbidden foods – become the most forbidden and a symbol, par excellence, of gentile pollution? How did food preparation (who does it and how) and the separation of milk and meat become increasingly stringent? And how did adherence to kashrut become a tool of religious ideology, separating the more pious Jews from the less pious?

Kraemer’s approach, decidedly modern and critical, understands kashrut as one of development and change. Rather than viewing Jewish eating practices as ever-increasing in detail and stringency, he describes its history as one of “negotiations and renegotiations of boundaries.” *Jewish Eating* is not for those who believe that Judaism is (and should be) unchanging and univocal. For those who wish to better understand how the observance of kashrut evolved within various historical, geographic, social, cultural, and ideological contexts, Kraemer’s book is a veritable feast.

Lisa Kogen
Director of Education
Women’s League

READING LIST

Fiction

Ankori, Zvi; Evelyn Abel, trans. *As a Palm Tree in the Desert*. Gefen Publishing, 2008 (Ankori's second autobiographical historical novel set in pre-WWII Poland and the early years of Israel)

Cherne, Barbara. *Devora in Exile: Stories*. Fithian Press, 2009 (Four linked stories about an elderly widow who fled with her family from Russia to Southern California during the 1917 Revolution)

Dawid, Annie. *And Darkness Was Under His Feet*. Litchfield Review Press/Booksurge, 2008 (A family story told in 24 vignettes beginning in 1900 and ending in a millennial reunion in Paris)
www.anniedawid.com

Del Bourgo, David. *Prague Spring: A Simon Wolfe Mystery*. Mystere Press, 2009 (Inspector Simon Wolfe, San Francisco detective and Holocaust survivor, attempts to solve a congressman's son's murder)
www.daviddelbourgo.com

Edghill, India. *Delilah*. St. Martin's Press, 2009 (Sympathetic portrayal of Delilah and her part in Samson's downfall)
www.indiaedghill.com

Freed, Lynn. *The Servant's Quarters*. Houghton Mifflin, 2009 (Coming-of-age story of a 9-year-old Jewish girl growing up in the 1950s in South Africa)
www.lynnfreed.com/

Greanias, Thomas. *The Promised War*. Atria, August 2010 (An Israeli counter-terrorist agent blocks radical Palestinians from incinerating the Dome of the Rock mosque and blaming the Jews)

Gilmore, Jennifer. *Something Red*. Scribner, 2010 (Three generations of a Washington family, against the backdrop of history, the Rosenbergs, the Olympic boycott, and the Iranian hostage crisis.)
www.jennifergilmore.net

Guterson, Mary. *Gone to the Dogs: A Novel*. St. Martin's Griffin, 2009 (30-something is forced to analyze her life and relationships after breaking up with her long-time boyfriend) www.maryguterson.com

Jenoff, Pam. *Almost Home*. Atria Books, 2009 (Thriller novel about a veteran Jewish American intelligence officer who becomes involved with terrorism and organized international corporate crime in London)
www.pamjenoff.com

Kellerman, Faye. *Hangman: A Decker/Lazarus Novel*. William Morrow, August 2010 (20th novel in the mystery series)
www.fayekellerman.net

Kestin, Hesh. *The Iron Will of Shoeshine Cats*. Dzanc Books, 2009 (Shushan "Shoeshine" Cats takes a 22-year-old orphaned student under his wing and throws him into the 1960's New York crime scene)

Kleid, Neil and Nicolas Cinquegrani. *The Big Kahn*. ComicsLit, 2009 (His 40-year masquerade as a Jew is revealed when Rabbi David Kahn's brother shows up at his funeral)

Krieger, Elliot. *Exiles*. Soho Press, 2009 (Lenny Spiegel travels to Sweden to join a draft resistance movement during the Vietnam War)

Liss, David. *Devil's Company: A Novel*. Random House, 2009 (Liss' third thriller featuring an 18th century London thieftaker) www.davidliss.com

LeBrecht, Norman. *Game of Opposites*. Pantheon Books, 2009 (Story of Paul Malinowski who struggles with the psychological and moral dilemmas of living in the post-Holocaust world)

Phelan, Paula. *1939: Into the Dark*. ZAPMedia, 2009 (Fictional account of the cultural and political events of the year 1939; appropriate for teens and adults)

Pomerantz, Sharon. *Rich Boy*. Twelve Hachette, August 2010 (A young working-class Jew from Philadelphia makes it big in Manhattan and then questions his success) sharonpomerantz.com

Ratner, Austin. *Jump Artist*. Bellevue Literary Press, 2009 (Historical novel of a Latvian man who is wrongly accused and convicted of killing his father; an Austrian version of the Dreyfus Affair) www.austinratner.com

Sadka, Tova Murad. *Farewell to Dejla: Stories of Iraqi Jews at Home and in Exile*. Academy Chicago Publishers, 2009 (Short stories of Iraqi Jews in Israel and the US)

Schine Catherine. *The Three Weismanns of Westport*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2010 (*Sense and Sensibility*-like tale of an elderly mother and two grown daughters driven to penury by divorce and career reversals)

Silva, Daniel. *The Rembrandt Affair*. Putnam, July 2010 (latest installment in the Gabriel Allon series) www.danielsilvabooks.com

Spark, Debra. *Good for the Jews*. University of Michigan Press, 2009 (Contemporary story whose main characters are based loosely on biblical figures from the story of Esther) www.debraspark.com

Swersky, Beverly. *City of God: A Novel of Passion and Wonder in Old New York*. Simon & Schuster, 2009 (Fictional account of life in New York City from 1834 to 1857 through the stories of two notable New York families)

Weiner, Jennifer. *Fly Away Home*. Atria; S. & S., 2010. www.jenniferweiner.com


Wishnia, Kenneth. *The Fifth Servant*. William Morrow, 2010 (Mystery set in 16th-century Prague that begins with the discovery of the corpse of a seven-year-old girl) www.kennethwishnia.com

Yglesias, Rafael. *A Happy Marriage*. Scribner, 2009 (Heartbreaking joyous autobiographical novel that goes back and forth in time to describe the author's 30-year marriage) www.rafaelyglesias.com

Dara Horn, continued

Jewish language. So one of the things I've tried to do is to write as though English were a Jewish language—that is, to bring the resonances of ancient Jewish texts into a modern secular story for an English-speaking audience, and essentially to teach them those texts over the course of the book. My book titles are examples. The source of *All Other Nights* will be immediately obvious to most American Jewish readers—but there is nothing apparently Jewish about the title at all. Every reader will discover the source of this phrase and its many resonances in the novel's plot and beyond. Many of the references will be noticed only by a few readers, but the most important ones are explained through the plots themselves. My goal is not only to give English the status of a Jewish language, but also to enrich the American English reading experience by introducing these Jewish texts in an accessible way.

Are you available for Book Club conversations?
Yes, about *All Other Nights*. Book groups of 10 or more can sign up on my website at www.darahorn.com.



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