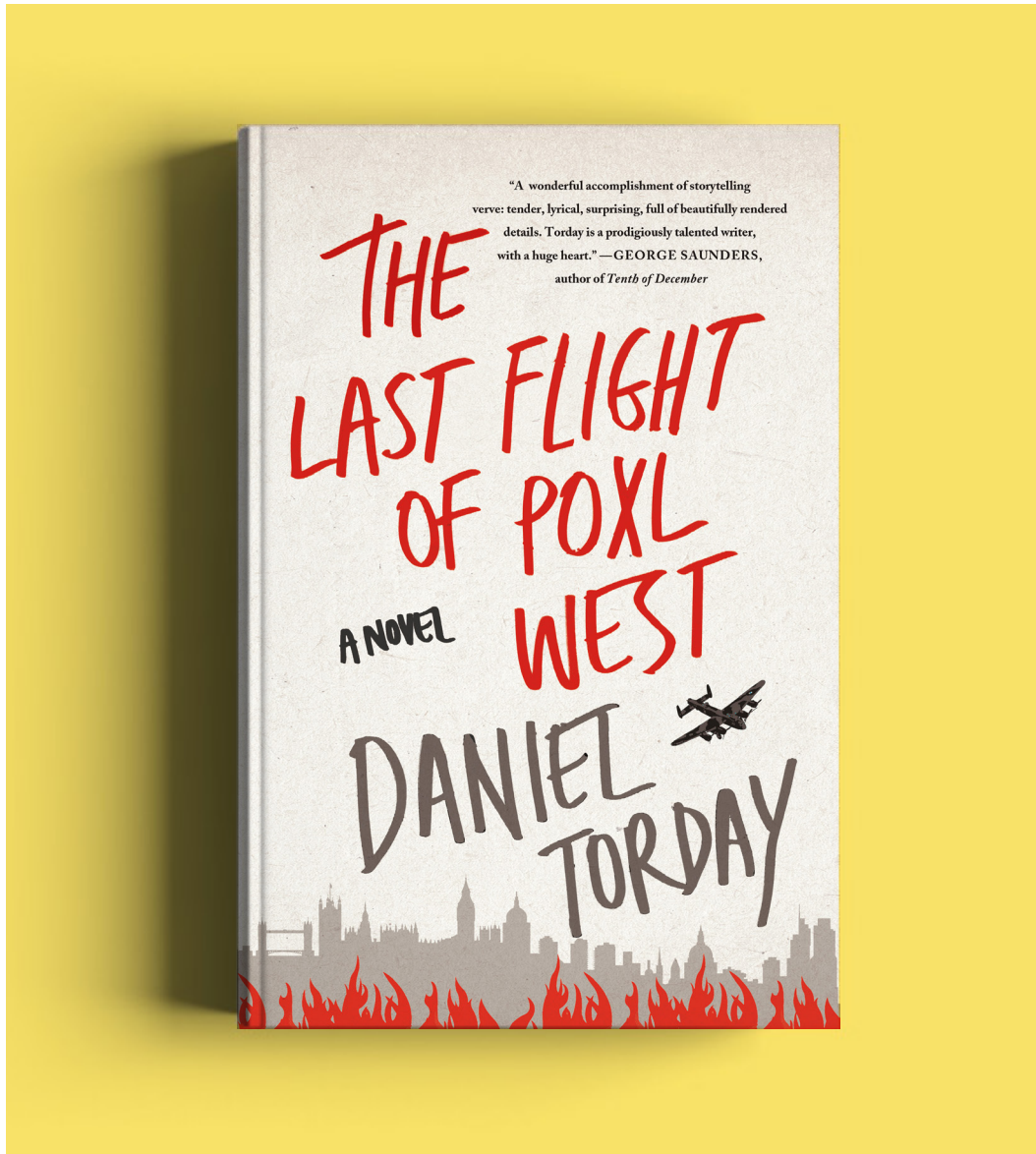


JBC Book Clubs Discussion Guide

Created in partnership with
St. Martin's Press
Jewishbookcouncil.org



Contents:

A Timeline of Poxl’s War Years.....	3
JBC Book Clubs Discussion Questions.....	5
Recipes Inspired by <i>The Last Flight of Poxl West</i>	6
Recommended Reads.....	11
About Jewish Book Council.....	13

A Timeline of Poxl's War Years

April 1938

Poxl departs from Leitmeritz, five months before the city, along with the rest of the Sudetenland, was annexed by Nazi Germany.

April 1940

Poxl leaves the Netherlands for England.

May 1940

On May 14, 1940, the German air force (Luftwaffe) launched a one-day campaign against the city of Rotterdam, despite the Netherlands desire to remain neutral and the establishment of a ceasefire. The Rotterdam blitz destroyed nearly all of Rotterdam's historic city center, killed approximately 1,000 people, and left nearly 85,000 homeless. The devastation was so severe that it, combined with a threat of a blitz against Utrecht, led the Dutch government to surrender the next morning.

**September 1940-
May 1941**

Though the Luftwaffe had been conducting bombing raids over Great Britain through the summer of 1940, they had been targeting air force bases, radar stations, and other key military sites. September 7, 1940 marked a drastic change in tactic, as the German air force began a campaign against London and other British cities. On that night, close to 1,000 German planes bombed London, the first of 57 consecutive nights of bombings. The Blitz lasted from September to May, with 16 cities targeted, over 40,000 civilians killed, and over a million homes damaged.

During the Blitz, many citizens were relocated out of the cities and over 100,000 took shelter in London's underground stations. Civilian Londoners played a large part in helping to defend their city, from those who served as firemen, to the Scouts who directed the fire engines and those that were tasked with salvage and clean-up.

Despite all of the destruction caused by the Luftwaffe's bombs, the Blitz was not considered a success as it did not damage British morale nor did it give the Germans a significant military advantage.

November 1941

Poxl joins the RAF and begins his training.

July 1943

The bombing of Hamburg was a joint venture between the U.S. Air Force and the RAF. Under the command of Air Marshall Arthur ‘Bomber’ Harris, Operation Gomorrah, as it was called, created the one of the largest firestorms of World War II.

The operation lasted about a week, during which over 42,000 civilians were killed, about 37,000 were injured, and the city was nearly flattened. The bombing of Hamburg severely damaged German armament production, dealt a significant blow to German morale, and buoyed the British who had seen their own cities attacked.

Various strategies and conditions—the weather for one—came together to make the campaign particularly effective. Also, to counter Hamburg’s strong defences, Window (chaff) was introduced. Tiny strips of shredded tin foil were dropped by the bombers which served to confuse the radar and allow them to conduct the raids without being detected. These are the “mysterious packages” that Gallsworthy drops on page 177, the silvery minnows that had fooled the Luftwaffe.

JBC Book Clubs Discussion Questions

These questions were created by JBC Book Clubs as a supplement to those in St. Martin's Press' reading group guide.

1. Who is the main character in the novel?
2. Poxl says he appropriated Herman Janowitz's story of flying over Hamburg because, without it, no one wanted to publish his work, even though all the rest was true. Do you think his story is less effective without the added fabrications? What happens when someone has suffered/lost/accomplished, but just not quite enough or in the "right" way to receive reparations or acknowledgment?
3. How is this story different from other Holocaust stories? Eli says that Poxl, as "a Jew who had killed Germans, who had sought the fight when others fled" was a "master of his own narrative," unlike other writers (p 68). Do you think this is a fair assessment? Is Poxl, as an RAF fighter, in a different category than the ghetto or resistance fighters?
4. Would you consider Poxl to be a Holocaust survivor?
5. What is Rabbi Ben's role in Eli's story?
6. Poxl writes about how, after the war, he and Percy Smith recalled the Hamburg bombings, and how POW Schlict's story of the burning women altered their perspective as men "more sinned against than sinning" (p 215). Poxl's response is to tell Percy the story of his parents and how he came to be an RAF pilot, of how his losses at the hands of Germans drove him to fight--though Percy asks if any of it changes anything for them. Do you think revenge ever provides a justification for an action? What does it mean that Shakespeare's line from *The Merchant of Venice*, "If you wrong us, shall we not revenge?", was spoken by a villain, not a hero?
7. When Eli's father buys him a baseball card, he realized that he had been gifted something that he didn't know he wanted (p 143), that, "We don't eat because there is food. We eat because there is hunger." What do you think about that statement? Eli later comes to understand that Poxl had been doing that as a surrogate for Eli's grandfather as well. What other gifts does Poxl give to Eli?
8. At Poxl's reading in Boston, a graduate student asks the question "Mr. West, with all due respect, isn't it possible we've reached a point of saturation with all of the first-person accounts of this particular war?" (p 68). Do you agree? Eli, looking back, says that he now understands that they all fought their own battles. Does every Holocaust story stand on its own or can they be grouped together as a genre with a "finite number of stories to tell"?

A Proper Cup

As transplants to London, Poxl and Françoise adopt traditional British foods, including a proper tea (p. 273).

Ingredients

Tea kettle

Tea pot (china is preferred)

Tea cups

Tea (bags or loose)

Water

Milk and/or sugar (optional)

Boil water in your kettle. Pour some water into your tea pot and tea cups and swirl it around to warm the china. Empty the tea pot and tea cups.

Place tea into the teapot. If you like strong tea, use one tea bag for each cup. Pour the boiling water (must be boiling!) over the tea bags. Allow to steep for 4-5 minutes before pouring tea into tea cups. Add milk and sugar as desired.

Cucumber Sandwiches

Makes 9 finger sandwiches or 6 triangles

Ingredients

6 slices of soft white bread

1 cucumber, peeled and thinly sliced into rounds

salt

softened, unsalted butter or cream cheese

ground white pepper

Place cucumber slices in a colander and lightly salt them. Let them sit for 20 minutes to drain excess water. Taste a slice to check for saltiness; if too salty, rinse the cucumbers in cool water; if too bland, add a touch more salt. Lay the cucumber slices on a towel and pat dry.

Spread butter or cream cheese on each slice of bread, then layer overlapping cucumber slices on half of the pieces of bread. Sprinkle with white pepper over the cucumber, then add more overlapping slices, if desired. Top with bread.

Press down on each sandwich, then cut off the crusts. Cut the sandwiches into thirds for fingers or on the diagonal for triangles.

Cream Scones

Makes 9 finger sandwiches or 6 triangles

Ingredients

2 cups all-purpose flour, plus more for working with the dough

3 tbsp. sugar, plus more for sprinkling

2 tsp baking powder

1/2 tsp. salt

6 tablespoons cold unsalted butter, cut into small pieces

1/2 cup heavy cream, plus more for brushing

1 large egg, lightly beaten

1 tsp vanilla

Optional additions: citrus zest, currants or other dried fruit

Preheat oven to 400 degrees. Line a baking sheet with parchment paper; set aside.

Sift flour, sugar, baking powder, and salt into a large bowl. Using a pastry blender, cut in butter until largest pieces are the size of small peas. Add in zest or dried fruits, if using. Note: adding the butter into the dry ingredients can also be done in a food processor with a few quick pulses. Whisk together cream, vanilla, and the egg. Make a well in the center of the dry ingredients, and pour in cream mixture. Stir with fork just until just combined (do not overmix). Dough should appear crumbly but not dry.

Turn out dough onto a lightly floured work surface. Knead dough briefly to pull it together, then gently pat dough into a rectangle for round scones or a circle for wedge-shaped scones, about

3/4-inch thick. Cut out 8 to 10 rounds with a floured cutter, 2 inches in diameter or cut your circle of dough into wedges. Transfer the scones to the baking sheet and brush the tops with cream. Sprinkle with sugar (optional but recommended).

Bake scones until golden brown, 16 to 20 minutes. Transfer scones to wire racks, and let cool. Serve warm or at room temperature. Recommended: serve with preserves and/or whipped or clotted cream.

Wiener Schnitzel

When Poxl first arrives in his cousins' London flat, Niny prepares Wiener schnitzel, just like they ate back home, along with some cucumber sandwiches (p. 80).

Ingredients

2 pounds veal, sliced into cutlets
1 cup all-purpose flour
4 eggs
3 tablespoons heavy cream
salt and pepper to taste
4 cups bread crumbs
3 tablespoons of butter
oil for frying
Lemon, cut into wedges

Preheat oven to 400 degrees.

Line a baking sheet with parchment paper; set aside.

Line a large baking sheet with paper towels. Set flour and breadcrumbs out on separate plates or in wide, shallow bowls.

Lightly whisk eggs, cream, salt and pepper in a dish that is shallow and wide enough to fit the veal. Pound veal slices between sheets of plastic wrap to 1/8"-1/16" thickness.

Dredge the veal slices in the flour, then dip in the egg mixture. Turn to coat on both sides, and allow excess to drip off. Then dredge in the breadcrumbs, making sure each side gets fully covered. Pat breadcrumbs down, then allow excess to fall off.

Heat oil in a heavy skillet over medium heat, then add butter to skillet (should be approximately 350°F). Fry veal until golden brown on each side. Transfer to the paper towels. Serve with lemon wedges.

Cabot's Ice Cream Sundaes

A hallmark of Poxl and Eli's time together is a trip to Cabot's for sundaes, where Poxl would read parts of his book to Eli. The recipes below are as authentic as possible, straight from the source, the real Cabot's Ice Cream in Newton, MA!

Classic Cabot's Old Fashioned Sundae

Start with a tulip sundae glass. First, place a small amount of hot fudge sauce in the bottom of the glass, then add in two or three scoops of vanilla ice cream, pushing the ice cream down to allow the fudge to marble through it. Top with more fudge, whipped cream, chopped walnuts and finish with a cherry.

Classic Cabot's Old "Banana Boat" aka "Banana Split"

Start with a banana split style dish. If you do not have one, use a long dish with some sides. Peel a fresh, ripe banana and split it lengthwise. Place the banana at the bottom of the dish.

Next, dip a large scoop of vanilla and one of chocolate ice cream, and place these side by side on top of the split banana. Then, dip a generous scoop of strawberry ice cream and place this on the top between the bottom two scoops, creating a triangle. Finally, top with strawberry and pineapple toppings and chocolate syrup. Finish off with a mound of whipped cream and chopped walnuts.

Cabot's Ice Cream, Newton MA, 2015
www.cabots.com

A Note from Cabot's: Cabot's is a family owned and operated old fashioned ice cream parlor & restaurant. We have been putting smiles on faces, one scoop at a time since 1969.

Recommended Reads

If You Liked One of These Novels, You'll Love Daniel Torday's Debut Novel!

THE PLOT AGAINST AMERICA
PHILIP ROTH

MICHAEL CHABON

The Invisible Bridge
Eric Lipton

THE HUMAN STAIN
MICHAEL ONDAATJE

THE LAST FLIGHT OF PAUL WEST
DANIEL TORDAY

THE ENGLISH PATIENT
MICHAEL ONDAATJE

THE LAST DAYS OF POMPEII
H. G. WELLS

THE BOOK OF DAVID
DAVID SHIELDS

This graphic was produced by Jewish Book Council in partnership with St. Martin's Press.
Read more about *The Last Flight of Paul West* A Novel at www.jewishbookcouncil.org
<http://us.macmillan.com/the-last-flight-of-paul-west/daniel-torday>, or
<http://www.daniel-torday.com/the-last-flight-of-paul-west/>.

JEWISH BOOK COUNCIL
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Recommended Reads

Fiction

Love & Treasure by Ayelet Waldman (Anchor, 2015)

A Replacement Life by Boris Fishman (Harper Perennial, 2015)

The Time of the Uprooted by Elie Wiesel (Alfred A. Knopf, 2005)

Non-Fiction

Churchill and the Jews: A Lifelong Friendship by Martin Gilbert (Holt Paperbacks, 2008)

Daring to Resist: Jewish Defiance in the Holocaust edited by David Engel and Eva Fogelman; Yitzchak Mais, ed. (Museum of Jewish Heritage, 2007)

Hanns and Rudolf: The True Story of the German Jew Who Tracked Down and Caught the Kommandant of Auschwitz by Thomas Harding (Simon and Schuster, 2013)

How the Jews Defeated Hitler: Exploding the Myth of Jewish Passivity in the Face of Nazism by Benjamin Ginsberg (Rowman & Littlefield, 2013)

Paper Love: Searching for the Girl My Grandfather Left Behind, Sarah Wildman (Riverhead, 2014)

A Thousand Darknests: Lies and Truth in Holocaust Fiction by Ruth Franklin (Oxford University Press, 2013)

Articles of Note: False Holocaust Memoirs

New Republic: [Yet Another Writer Has Admitted Faking Her Holocaust Memoir](#)

Daily Mail: [Could there be anything more twisted than these Holocaust fantasists? How more and more people are making up memoirs about witnessing Nazi crimes](#)

Slate: [Crying Wolf: Why did it take so long for a far-fetched Holocaust memoir to be debunked?](#)

Articles of Note: Jewish Fighters in World War II

Jewish Virtual Library: [World War II: Jewish Pilots and Aircrews in the Battle of Britain](#)

The History Learning Site: [Jewish Revenge Squads](#)

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum: [Jewish Fighters from Palestine](#)

JBC Book Clubs, a program of Jewish Book Council, provides resources and support for book clubs interested in reading books of Jewish interest. On the Jewish Book Council website, find thousands of book reviews, discussion questions and discussion guides, thematic reading lists, and more. JBC Book Clubs is a one-stop shop to build and enhance your book club's conversations—let us guide you on your literary journey.

Jewish Book Council, with roots dating back to 1925, is the only nonprofit dedicated to the promotion of Jewish-interest literature. For nearly 70 years, we have supported and celebrated Jewish authors and books, and used literature to bring people together for meaningful discussions around Jewish life, identity, and culture.

Visit us at www.jewishbookcouncil.org

