

BOOK CLUB QUESTIONS

The Legacy of Grazia dei Rossi by Jacqueline Park

1. How does Danilo apply the lessons in his late mother's secret book to his own life? Do you think he has a good understanding of the secrets of the heart?
2. The era of the Ottoman Empire that Park's novel traces is historically known as "the Sultanate of Women," a 130-year period, that saw the Empire ruled or greatly influenced by the women of the harem. How does Park convey the sense that the women were the ones truly at the helm of the Empire?
3. What did you make of the tone and content of the *bailo's* letters? In what ways do their "outsider" perspective on the goings-on at court enhance your understanding of events?
4. Danilo and Saida come from different worlds and initially speak different languages, but they find common ground in the world of stories. How do the stories they so love — *The Thousand and One Nights*, *Orlando Furioso*, and others — cross boundaries and hint at the universal elements of humanity throughout the novel?
5. Aside from Danilo and Saida's fledgling love, perhaps the most touching relationship in the novel is between Danilo and his horse, Bucephalus. Why do you think Bucephalus is so important to him? What does Danilo get from this relationship?
6. How did Danilo and Saida's interactions as children most notably their fantasies of the Princess and the Paladin, shape their relationship? Do you think Danilo and Saida's love is based on infatuation? Does it ever evolve into a mature love?

7. Judah del Medigo is described as “an observant though not a believing Jew.” What does it mean to observe, but not believe, a set of rules? Who else in the novel observes the rules without believing in them?
8. Danilo’s credo of “fortune favors the bold,” becomes almost a mantra for he and Princess Saida as they carry on their illicit relationship. Do you think it’s true that fortune favors the bold? What other characters might this maxim apply to?
9. Discuss the ways Park uses setting to enhance the themes of the book? How do Park’s descriptions of the spaces in which women’s lives play out (the harem or the *hamam*, for instance) differ from the spaces men typically inhabit (the hippodrome or the battlefield, for example)?
10. What do you make of Hürrem and her intentions, both with regard to her own place in the kingdom and Saida’s place? Is she, at her core, a good person?
11. In the complex interactions between the many players in the Ottoman court, many things are hinted at but not explicitly said. What does this say about the time and culture in which the novel takes place?
12. A theme that arises throughout the book is the tension between individuals’ public and private selves: Danilo, the eager horseman and reluctant scholar; Hürrem, the lovesick concubine and shrewd power player; the all-powerful Sultan and his love-poem-writing alter ego, Muhabbi. Why do these and other characters live these double lives? What are the stakes of maintaining these split personalities?
13. Do you think Danilo and Saida will ever see each other again? What do you think the future holds for Danilo now that he has returned to Italy, to the Jewish ghetto where he began his life?