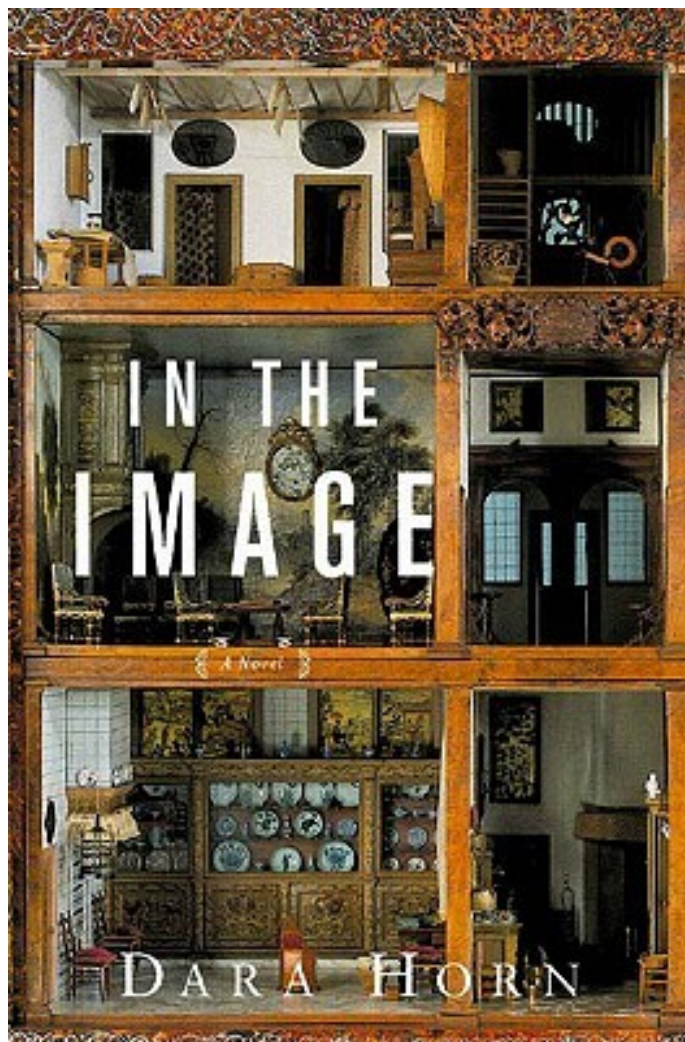

Dara Horn

In the Image: A Novel



Title: In the Image: A Novel

Author: Dara Horn

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Description

In the Image is an extraordinary first novel illuminated by spiritual exploration, one that remembers "a language, a literature, a held hand, an entire world lived and breathed in the image of God." Bill Landsmann, an elderly Jewish refugee in a New Jersey suburb with a passion for travel, is obsessed with building his slide collection of images from the Bible that he finds scattered throughout the world. The novel begins when he crosses paths with his granddaughter's friend, Leora, and continues by moving forward through her life and backward through his, revealing the unexpected links between his family's past and her family's future. Not just a first novel but a cultural event; a wedding of secular and religious forms of literature; *In the Image* neither lives in the past nor seeks to escape it, but rather assimilates it, in the best sense of the word, honoring what is lost and finding, among the lost things, the treasures that can renew the present. Reading group guide included.

Insightful reviews

Ron Charles: The most successful novel of 2002, indeed the most successful debut novel in many years, began with the murder of a teenage girl. To a nation bathed in grief from Sept. 11 and terrorized by stories of child abductions, "[The Lovely Bones](#)" offered a voice of bittersweet reassurance about the immortality of our loved ones.

Is there room, at this moment, for another intensely spiritual novel that opens with the murder of a teenage girl? If not, make room. "In the Image," by Dara Horn, is a work of raw genius.

Whereas "[The Lovely Bones](#)" glimmers with New Age faith in the ongoing presence of our dearly departed, Horn's novel storms with the crosscurrents of the Old Testament: the trials of exile, the burdens of orthodoxy, the inexplicable nature of evil, and the awesome power of God.

What interests Horn most, though, is the perplexing function of images -- from the divine image that the Hebrew Scriptures first sanctify as man to the graven images later forbidden in the Commandments.

When a young man hits Naomi Landsmann in the first paragraph of "In the Image," she and her killer vanish from the pages of this novel. Her parents move away before we learn anything about them. If the driver suffers the effects of guilt or receives punishment, we never hear. If Naomi's parents find comfort in their faith or sever their marriage on the razor of grief, we never know. If Naomi awakens in heaven or returns to haunt her murderer, we never see. This is not a novel about them.

Instead, Naomi's death brings together an unlikely pair: her best friend, Leora, who reacts by becoming mute, and Naomi's grandfather, Bill, who attempts to capture everything on earth, past and present, in thousands and thousands of carefully organized slides.

Eleven months after his granddaughter's murder, Bill calls Leora and asks her to come see his photos of the Holy Land. It's a peculiar invitation -- young Leora, after all, has never met this old

man -- but she and her parents go along for a pleasant if somewhat boring evening at the Landsmanns' house.

Later, he invites her alone, and she feels strangely inclined to keep viewing his well-narrated travelogues. Leora and Bill are both tourists, after all. Naomi's death has dislodged them from the continuum of normal life and forced them to look at their surroundings as a series of separate frames or panels in a long, foreign journey. But their mutual loss never develops into mutual affection, and eventually, Leora grows uneasy with his attempts to cast her as his missing granddaughter. In response to his increasingly uncomfortable revelations of past disappointments, she finally tells him off and they never meet again.

But their stories continue to mingle in this remarkable narrative that's by turns tragic and inspiring. Leora moves on to a lonely college experience and then a meaningless job as a magazine writer, where she can continue to treat life as something to be observed and described from afar.

Though not devout, she finds herself tutoring her boyfriend in the traditions and practices of their Jewish faith, until, ironically, he abandons her as insufficiently orthodox.

While telling Leora's story, the novel keeps looping back to describe the struggles of Bill's childhood and even further back to his ancestors. We move through the archetypal experiences of 20th century European Jews: the panic of roaming the continent, the search for opportunity in America, and the challenge of retaining one's culture in a consumerist melting pot. From the beauty of Vienna to the cramped streets of Amsterdam, from the trenches of World War I to the garment district of New York City, Horn creates such compelling stories that my reluctance to leave each behind was quelled only by my fascination with new revelations about Bill's family.

Moving alternately along these two paths -- Leora's present life and Bill's past -- sounds annoyingly complex, but Horn handles this structure with such dexterity that it never seems arduous. Indeed, she crosses events in these stories and links them symbolically in ways that are wonderfully evocative.

Perhaps the most striking images are the tefillin that catch Leora's eye and capture her heart in an antique shop in New York City. Tefillin are small leather boxes containing lines from the Hebrew Scriptures about the unity and supremacy of God. They're strapped to the arm and around the head in obedience to instructions in Deuteronomy.

During another scene, from another time, new immigrants arrive at the Port of New York after a horrendous voyage. Seeing the Statue of Liberty, they begin throwing their tefillin into the ocean, covering the surface of the water with these symbols of devotion.

It's a typically unsettling image in a novel as capable of sorrow as joy, as ready to ponder the essence of God as to swoon over a new romance. Horn can satirize easy subjects like super-sized grocery stores or dangerous ones like Holocaust movies. She can pull off sweet romantic comedy or an unsettling imitation of the book of Job.

Book clubs done with "[The Lovely Bones](#)" -- or shying away from its grisly subject matter -- would do well to consider this exuberant novel about the tenacity and mystery of faith. With its enormous emotional range, its whirlwind of Hebrew legend, Yiddish folklore, modern tragedy, and tender romance, this is a book to press into other people's hands and pester them to finish so you can talk about it together.

<http://www.csmonitor.com/2002/0912/p1...>

Leslie: I liked this book a lot, it's one of the books in which you are following different threads, not knowing for quite a while how they will be woven together. I feel like I can't give it justice in this review since I had surgery and read several books since I finished this one. I like how the author jumps around in time and place and takes us on a journey. She doesn't lose control of the story or lose my interest through out the entire book. I did not like how the author ended the book with a dream. I liked the dream, but not as the end of the book. I think that was the one unsatisfying part of the book.

Marian: This book grew on me very slowly. Very.

But by the end, I cared about all the characters. I wished them all well. I loved their growth and warmth.

The end does not meet the beginning well --- Horn needed a better editor. But the book has a lovely story, a lovely merging of places and people. I loved the threads of the novel - never forced, just beautifully captured - the tefillin, the slides, the dollhouses.

I find Horn a beautiful writer and she tells fascinating stories. I will be reading more.

Joanne: I loved the area to return rather a lot that I wished to return and decide up this one. It stocks Horn's dependent writing, interweaving of families, and Jewish history, yet seriously isn't as beautiful a story. The protagonist is quite angst-ridden and that I wasn't within the temper for angst.

Jean Kelly: there has been quite a bit solid approximately this booklet - plausible characters that grabbed my cognizance yet I felt stressed every now and then by means of the switching from side to side and the trouble to attach the characters with their grandparents story.

Danielle: This e-book was once nice however it did not rock me to the bone like "The Global to Come" was once capable to. If I did not have that to check this to, it will most likely be 5 stars? Really appealing descriptions and with ease inter-generational, multi-lineal storytelling that leaves you feeling like, "Yes, it's going to all be ok." Particularly wondrous. did not want it to end. READ IT.

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