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Alexandrian Summer



Synopsis

Helps show why postwar Alexandria inspires nostalgia and avidity in seemingly everyone who knew it; The result is what summer reading should be: fast, carefree, visceral, and incipiently lubricious. The New Yorker Alexandrian Summer is the story of two Jewish families living their frenzied last days in the doomed cosmopolitan social whirl of Alexandria just before fleeing Egypt for Israel in 1951. The conventions of the Egyptian upper-middle class are laid bare in this dazzling novel, which exposes startling sexual hypocrisies and portrays a now vanished polyglot world of horse-racing, seaside promenades, and elegant night clubs. Hamdi-Ali senior is an old-time patriarch with more than a dash of strong Turkish blood. His handsome elder son, a promising horse jockey, can't afford sexual frustration, as it leads him to overeat and imperil his career, but the woman he lusts after won't let him get beyond undoing a few buttons. Victor, the younger son, takes his pleasure with other boys. But the true heroine of the story; richly evoked in a pungent upstairs/downstairs mix; is the raucous, seductive city of Alexandria itself. Published in Hebrew in 1978, Alexandrian Summer appears now in translation for the first time. Yitzhak Gormezano Goren was born in Alexandria, Egypt, in 1941 and immigrated to Israel as a child. A playwright and novelist, Goren studied English and French literature at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and Tel Aviv University. In 1982, he cofounded the Bimat Kedem Theater.

Book Information

Paperback: 200 pages

Publisher: New Vessel Press (May 12, 2015)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 1939931207

ISBN-13: 978-1939931207

Product Dimensions: 5.2 x 0.7 x 8 inches

Shipping Weight: 11.2 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 3.8 out of 5 stars 10 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #163,594 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #14 in Books > Travel > Africa > Egypt > General #23 in Books > Travel > Middle East > Israel > General #62 in Books > Literature & Fiction > World Literature > Middle Eastern

Customer Reviews

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Yitzhak Gormezano Goren was born in Alexandria, Egypt, in 1941 and immigrated to Israel as a child. He is a playwright and novelist. Gormezano Goren studied English and French literature at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and Tel Aviv University and has an MFA in theater directing from Brooklyn College. He cofounded the Kedem Stage Theater in Tel Aviv in 1982 and directed it for 30 years. Gormezano Goren received the Israeli Prime Minister's Prize for Literature in 2001. Yardenne Greenspan (translator) is a fiction writer and translator, born in Tel Aviv to a bilingual family. Her translation projects include works by Israeli authors Shemi Zarhin, Rana Werbin, Yaakov Shabtai and Gon Ben Ari. *André Aciman* (introduction) is the author of *Out of Egypt*, *Call Me by Your Name* and *Harvard Square*.

When you finish *Alexandrian Summer* you realize that the reader needs a good background in modern day history of the Egyptian Jews .to understand what had gone before, and what happened at the end of the summer. I felt empowered by other books I had read on the subject and having the friendship of people who lived through the situation Former Egyptians are saddened by the ouster

demanding by Nasser. The golden era for Egyptian Jews will never come back. A pity!

Absorbing book about Jewish families in Alexandria (apparently a summer resort for Cairenians) just before the diaspora caused by the Nasser government. Part coming-of-age, part family dynamic, it is, by turns, humorous and heart-wrenching. A worthy companion to *The Man in the White Sharkskin Suit* and the works of Andre Aciman.

Disturbing in its depiction of the youth's depravity. Graphic and gross in its assumption that the young boys will fall into corruption so readily. It's a random read at the beginning offering little introduction or depth to the characters. At times like Turgenev.

A delightfully told tale of an era and place now long gone. A precious memory, carefully preserved.

Whoever said this book was written in the vein of the Alexandrian Quartet either has not read Lawrence Durrell's poignant and moving epic. *Alexandrian Summer* is a snippet of the life of a middle class Jewish family living in Alexandria at a time when King Farouk was still on the throne and Egypt, or rather the two great cities of Cairo and Alexandria, were a cosmopolitan hub tented in a too comfortable colonialism. Mr. Gormezano Goren is too often misty-eyed when evoking his lost childhood, as if he were the only man or human being mourning for the child he was. He is an adult and now lives in Israel, a country where reality could not be more opposed to his sweet life in Egypt. But this is no reason to wax cloyingly and nostalgically on what his memory could recall and abruptly cut each chapter short, without caring to develop a connection to the next. The book ends in an equally abrupt manner as if the author just got tired of it all and hung up his pen to dry.

I particularly liked the character of David - the handsome jockey so vain he doesn't want to gain weight since it could cost him success with women and in the horse races. The poor guy can't lay off eating his favorite baba au rhum cakes, so what to do? But this novel is more than just a well told, exciting tale. It's full of insights into not only a bygone polyglot metropolis, but also sheds light on the tensions now plaguing Alexandria and Egypt as a whole. A fascinating book that I highly recommend.

A full plot combined with wonderful writing makes this book a pleasure to read. Egyptian Jewish society at leisure, only allowing itself a dim awareness of drastic impending social change is the

backdrop for several personal stories. The young boys awkwardly and gleefully discover their sexuality. The older teens manipulate each other for love, pride and control. The father aches to have the son fulfill his own thwarted ambitions. The women playing cards speculate and comment on all. And the servants always have their eyes open.

Wow. I read it in Hebrew, and found the language elegant and old fashioned. Wish there was a Look Inside feature so I could see what the translation is like. I was surprised to learn that the dessert known as "sabrina" was translated as "baba au rum", since they're similar, but not the same. Gives well-rounded picture of early 1950s Alexandria from the Jews' point of view, so it's part historical fiction, part family saga. The end made me want a sequel. The two families part ways, one going to Israel (which interestingly the characters still refer to as "Falestina" even though Israel had been established for two years), the other back to Cairo, presumably to not long afterwards be exiled. We also have to presume that David's career was over and done, having presumably missed the final race of the season. Lots of presuming, but recommended.

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