

THREE WOMEN AND ONE CENTURY



Genre(s):

- roman-fleuve (3 generations)
- personal testimonial narratives

Keywords:

- History (20th century, anti-Semitism)
- Jewish identity
- Male-female relationships
- Feminism
- Integration

Audience: suitable for all audiences and all ages; readers interested in Jewish culture and history

Right sold abroad: /

Concept

A fictional tale inspired by true stories: three women, three mothers, three eras over the course of the 20th century; three variations on intimacy, femininity, and relationship with God. A fictionalized portrait of the modern Jewish woman.

Universe and references

- Film *A secret* (Claude Miller)
- Novel *The Women of Lazarus* (Marina Stepanova)
- World War II and deportation
- Ashkenazi communities (Eastern France and Germanic countries)

Pitch

When her mother passes away, a woman evokes her family's story: three generations of Jewish women born in three very different eras. Three mothers. Three daughters.

Their story begins in the rural Jewish communities of Alsace in which they lived peacefully with their neighbors. The story continues with the horror of World War II before ending in the present day of our sometimes gray and sometimes bright cities.

The lives of these three women, their love stories, and their mother-daughter relationships are also the stories of their men who were either not present or otherwise occupied, and of conflicts between tradition and modernity... This is the story of three different ways to be a woman and to love, and above all, about the challenge of understanding oneself.

Author

Janine Elkouby is a classics specialist. She has worked on women in Judaism for a long time and is the author of three novels. She regularly contributes to the publication *Information Juive*, is actively involved in interreligious dialogue, and is the President of the Strasbourg branch of “Amitié judéo-chrétienne” [Judeo-Christian Friendship].

At a glance

- Novel
- Word count: 860,000 characters including spaces
- Available material in English: this presentation (including an overview of the work’s characteristics) and a translated excerpt

Excerpt

Our life as a rabbinical couple in this small community near Paris was no bed of roses. Being a rabbi, as I quickly learned, is all-consuming. Benjamin is constantly dealing with expectations, requests, and unrealistic hopes. All of the problems and every source of distress, solitude, or despair eventually end up at his door. Benjamin has often told me in private that among these challenges, one of the recurrent problems is the refusal of a *get* which some husbands request for their ex-wives. This practice would make them *agunah*, prohibited from making a new life and therefore running the risk of adultery and giving birth to *mamzérin*. The husband, on the other hand, is legally allowed to marry another woman and any children would have a perfectly normal status. More than once, he has expressed his revulsion and disgust regarding the behavior of such husbands who, he said, used the law to act like bandits and crooks.

But he also must deal with the dishonesty and power lust of certain notable individuals. He was particularly marked by an episode that took place a few years after his nomination when he was working to bring a second rabbi into the community, which had developed remarkably under my husband’s leadership. He often told me how the president, with rare cynicism, had successfully manipulated the synagogue’s committee members.

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