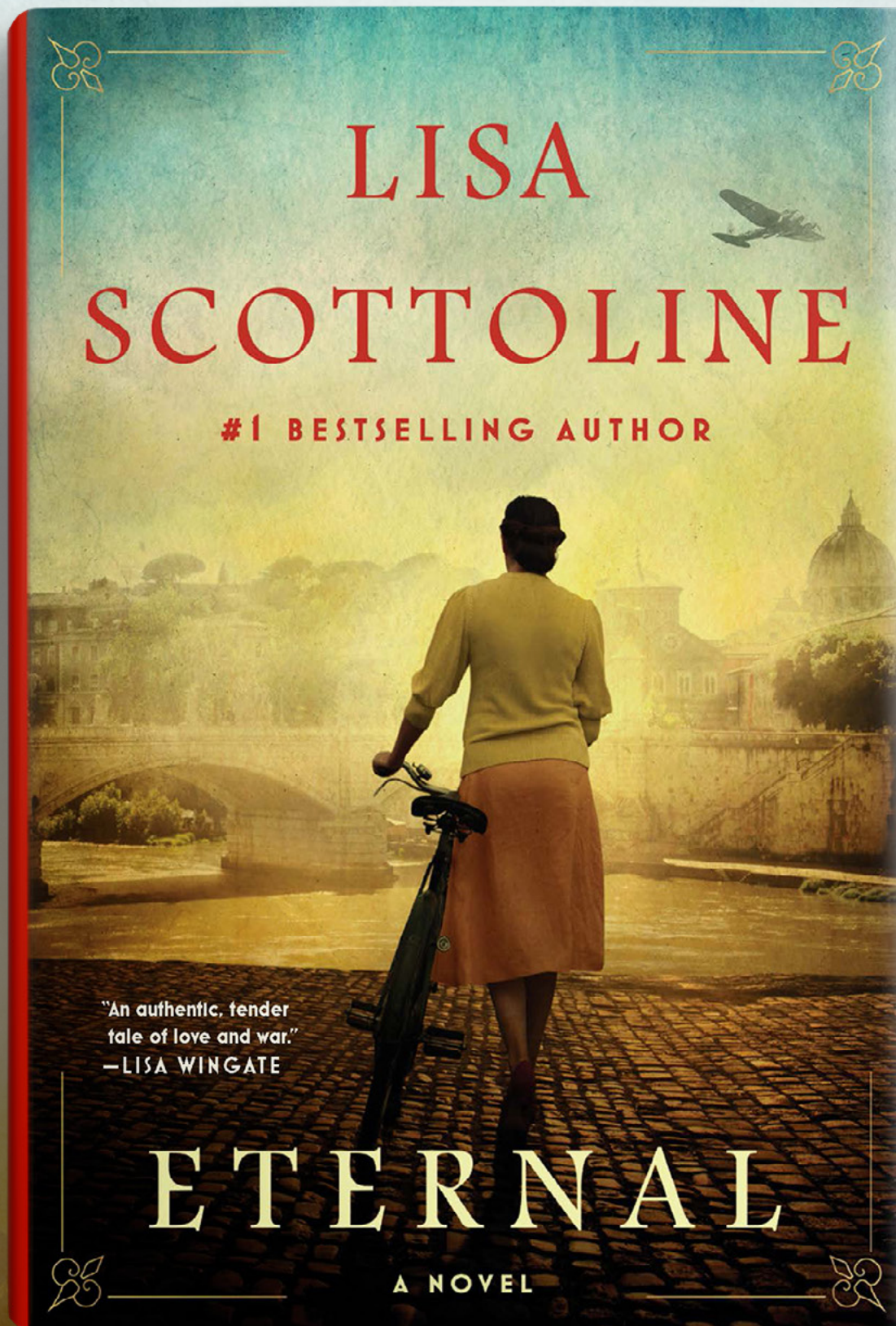


PUTNAM

## BOOK CLUB KIT



# DISCUSSION QUESTIONS



1.

*Eternal* opens with Elisabetta's story, and the prologue raises the question of the paternity of her son. Did that matter to you as you read along and, if so, how? Did you keep it in mind or forget about it? What do you think happens to Elisabetta and her family after the novel's end? How do you think her son will react to learning his mother's and father's secrets?

2.

At the beginning of *Eternal*, Scottoline quotes the late Italian novelist Ignazio Silone, who said, "Let everyone, then, have the right to tell his story in his own way." Why is it so important for Elisabetta to tell her own story—and, particularly, to write it? Isn't everyone's life story compelling in some way? Did you ever have the urge to write or tell yours, if only for yourself and your family? Do you ever wish you knew more about the life story of your own parents?

3.

If you read the Author's Note, you learned that some of the incidents in *Eternal* were inspired by true events that took place in Mussolini's *ventennio* and World War II. This applies to the horrific events as well as the inspiring ones. Were you aware of these events before reading the novel? Did any of the historical events surprise you? Did knowing that many of the novel's events are true shape the way you felt about what you had read? And how about the characters based on actual historical figures? Did they interest you and, if so, why?

4.

How do Sandro's and Marco's feelings for Elisabetta transform over the course of the novel? Why do you believe that each of them fell in love with her? What was their ultimate expression of this love? Do you think that Elisabetta ended up with the "right" person? Whom would you choose?

5.

*Eternal* is a novel about families, too. Compare and contrast the parents of Marco, Elisabetta, and Sandro. Each parent faced their own struggles and made what could be considered mistakes while raising their children, as all parents do. How were the three main characters affected by them? Why do you think their parents each made the decisions that they did?

6.

How does Marco's attitude toward the Fascist party change? What attracted him to their ethos? Or do you think he was indoctrinated into their belief system? Love of country is beautiful, but when does it turn ugly? When does fandom turn into a cult of personality? Why did Marco's brothers take a different view? Take a look at the different events that bring about the transformation in Marco's loyalties during *Eternal*.

7.

The father/son conflict between Beppe and Marco, and between Massimo and Sandro, helps and hurts all four men, and the mother/daughter conflict between Serafina and Elisabetta shapes Elisabetta in many ways. Is that still true, or have modern psychology and times affected our view of the parent/child relationship?

8.

Rome is practically a character in *Eternal*; we get to experience the culture, atmosphere, and feel of the city. Discuss your impressions of the setting, and of how Rome impacts each of the characters. How is the story influenced by a feeling of community—or, at other times, of isolation? How is “community” built in the novel?

9.

Is there a hero in *Eternal*? Is there a villain? How do our perceptions of “heroes” and “villains” change throughout the read? How do each of the main characters show bravery during the occupation of Rome or at other times? What do you think constitutes heroism during wartime?

10.

So much has been written about World War II in fiction, but how is *Eternal* different? Did you learn anything new about the Holocaust? Additionally, why is it so important to tell the stories of the Jewish families who died during the Nazi raid on the Ghetto and the subsequent deportations?

11.

A major difference between Fascism in Italy and Nazism in Germany is that Fascism did not begin as anti-Semitic, as the novel shows. What other similarities and differences do you see? Were you surprised to learn that Hitler imitated Mussolini and not the other way around? How can an entire population lose its way so profoundly? Do you understand it better as a result of the book, or not?

12.

Discuss the meaning of the quote near the end of *Eternal*: “Hate was eternal, but above all, so was love.” Take a look at this quote in the context of each of the surviving characters’ lives and actions.



# A CONVERSATION *with* LISA SCOTTOLINE

## Why did you write *Eternal*, and why now?

I have wanted to write this novel ever since my college days as an English major at the University of Pennsylvania, where I took a yearlong seminar taught by the late Philip Roth. One semester was “The Literature of the Holocaust.” He introduced us to the books of Primo Levi, an Italian Jewish chemist who was deported to Auschwitz during World War II, but survived to write the heartbreaking memoir *If This Is a Man*, published here as *Survival in Auschwitz*. Mr. Roth thought Levi was one of the most talented writers the world has ever produced and that the Italian Holocaust wasn’t well-enough known, worldwide. When I learned of a singular horror that took place in the Jewish Ghetto of Rome in October 1943, I knew I had a story that needed to be told.

## Describe your seminar with Philip Roth. Do you have any anecdotes from your time with him?

I remember Mr. Roth’s seminar very well, because every class was almost exactly the same. We fifteen or so students arrived early and sat down in our chairs, the kind with a half-desk attached, and the chairs were arranged in a U shape around his little wooden desk.

Precisely when it was time for class, which I seem to remember was two o’clock, Mr. Roth entered the room. He was a very tall, lanky guy with an insanely intellectual air, and he walked in a stooped way, his face appearing through

the doorway before the rest of him lurched in, leading with his head like a well-read giraffe. He always wore a lightly starched oxford shirt, pressed khaki pants with a brown leather belt, and brown wingtips, an outfit he would wear to almost every class. He barely looked at us or made eye contact, but murmured a hello, then sat down in his chair, crossed one long leg over the other, and slowly unbuckled his watch.

His watch had a leather strap, and he took it off and set it face-up on his desk. He asked us to call him Mr. Roth, though every other seminar professor had us call them by their first name, in those let-it-all-hang-out days. Then he began to talk about the novel assigned for that week, taking us through its pages and pointing out its various themes, relationships, details, or particularly terrific sentences. He never consulted his notes, which were handwritten and kept in a slim black binder, but he spoke extemporaneously, making point after point, giving us insight after insight, as if he apprehended the entire novel, all of a piece.

Imagine taking physics from Einstein. It felt like that.

He spoke, and we listened. We hung on every word. We wrote down whatever he said. It was an English-major fever dream.

At the end of every class, he would ask us if we had any questions. I was insecure and never said a word, but in truth, I had no questions. On the contrary, what I had were answers: namely, his insights into writing, plot, character, structure, and narrative.

Other students would ask questions, and he answered each one succinctly. His tone was polite, and he barely made eye contact; he never cracked a joke, though he was brilliantly funny writer. And if a student asked him how he himself would have written the sentence or structured a paragraph, he would deflect the question by answering: “But that’s not what Levi did.”

He didn't give us prompts for our writing assignments, but required us to devise our own, and when he graded our papers, he wrote no comments, only the letter grade on the last page, in red flair pen.

I got an A from Philip Roth.

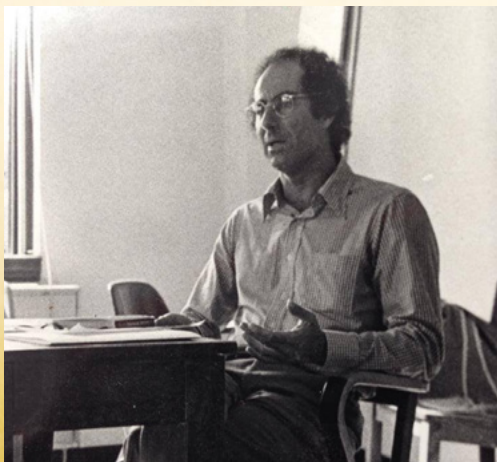
Just saying.

I saved my notes and books from class, though God knows where they are, but I was able to find a photo of him teaching, which I took myself. I was a photographer on the yearbook staff, and they needed a photo of him, so I went to him before class and asked his permission to photograph him. He hesitated, then nodded, lips pursed.

It was the moment when I realized that his distance in class wasn't a lack of warmth, but a form of self-protection. I went back to my chair, took a shot while he was speaking, and put the camera away. The photo shows him exactly as he looked every day of class, never moving from the chair, his legs crossed and his hands gesturing, long fingers aflutter. I attach it here.

Looking back, I've come to understand that he was the best professor I ever had, not only because of his genius, but also because of his distance. We were a group eager to please, to perform for him, to guess at what he wanted us to say, and to say that for him. We all wanted to hear about him, or have him tell us how to write, but that was something he steadfastly denied us. He didn't want it to be about him, and by withholding his own opinions, he forced us back on our own.

The best advice you can give to any writer is to find her own voice. He knew he couldn't tell us that, but like any great writer, he showed us.



Philip Roth in the classroom, 1975.  
Photograph by Lisa Scottoline.

## How is *Eternal* like or unlike your previous novels?

Everything I've ever written, whether series, standalone, fiction, or nonfiction, has explored themes of family, justice, and love. I truly believe that *Eternal* is the culmination of a lifetime of my work. The novel is the epic story of a love triangle set against the *ventennio*, the twenty years of Mussolini's rise and fall. In the meantime, Mussolini and the Fascists are promulgating a barrage of discriminatory Race Laws against Jews like Sandro and his family, systematically stripping away their rights, even before Italy entered World War II. I also think *Eternal* is the first popular fiction novel covering the Italian Holocaust.

## How is your Italian-American heritage reflected in the novel?

*Eternal* is a tale of love and loyalty, family and food, a portrait of one of the world's greatest cities in its darkest moment. Every sentence in this novel reflects my heritage, especially its powerful and unapologetic emotionality. And my very own feisty Italian mother found her way into Nonna. . . .

## What were some of the specific locations in Italy you visited that informed the novel? Did you speak to anyone that lived in Italy during that time period about their experience?

Rome struck me as the best location for the novel, since its so-called Ghetto is home to the oldest continuously existing Jewish Community in all of Western civilization. And during my research, I learned about a horrific event that took place in the Ghetto in October 1943, which historians have termed the "Gold of Rome." It was part of the Nazis' plan to eradicate Rome's Jews, but it wasn't well-known outside the scholarship, and it needed to be.

I loved doing the research for the novel and visited all of the neighborhoods of Rome in which the scenes take place, and even traveled to Carpi to see the remnants of the transit camp that appears in the novel. Lots of details about the research can be found in the Author's Note and on my website, along with videos filmed on location.

# SCOTTOLINE FAMILY'S ETERNALLY GREAT RAVIOLI RECIPE

You can't write a novel set in Rome without food, family, and love, and *Eternal* is chock-full of all three! Growing up in an Italian-American family, Lisa always associated love with pasta, especially in the form of Mother Mary's homemade ravioli. So here it is, in Mother Mary's own words, the Scottoline Family's Eternally Great Ravioli recipe, and as you read *Eternal*, see if you can tell which character was based on Mother Mary!

## DOUGH

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### INGREDIENTS:

2 eggs  
One small bowl  
½ cup warm water  
1 Tbs. olive oil  
3 cups all-purpose flour  
One large bowl  
Dash salt

### DIRECTIONS:

1. Stir the eggs in the small bowl.
2. Add a little (¼ cup) warm water to the eggs and stir gently.
3. Add the olive oil.
4. Put the flour in the large bowl and make a “ditch” in the flour.
5. Add a dash of salt to the flour.
6. Pour the egg mix into the center of the flour and blend everything. Add water if needed.
7. Knead the dough in the bowl until it forms a smooth ball.
8. Cover the mixture with a lid and cloth napkin so no light or air gets to the dough.

## FILLING

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### INGREDIENTS:

1 lb. ricotta cheese  
One medium bowl  
2 eggs  
One small bowl  
½ lb. parmesan cheese,  
freshly grated  
16 oz. chopped mozzarella  
8 oz. shredded white cheddar  
1 tsp. salt  
1 tsp. onion powder  
1 tsp. garlic powder  
1 tsp. oregano  
1 Tbs. basil  
1 tsp. black pepper  
1 tsp. nutmeg (secret ingredient!)

### DIRECTIONS:

1. Put the ricotta in the medium bowl.
2. Beat the eggs in the small bowl and put them in the center of the ricotta and mix gently.
3. Add the parmesan, 8 oz. of mozzarella, and 4 oz. of cheddar.
4. Add the salt, onion powder, garlic powder, oregano, basil, and black pepper.
5. Add the secret ingredient (1 tsp. of nutmeg!) and mix.
6. Add more cheese if it feels very damp—should be moist, not wet. If needed, add the other 8 oz. of mozzarella.
7. Mix and refrigerate the filling for half an hour.



## PASTA MAKING

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### DIRECTIONS:

1. Set up the pasta machine to the desired width.
2. Sprinkle flour generously on working area.
3. Cut the blob of dough in half and flatten one half with your hands, continuing to add flour to prevent sticking.
4. Roll flat and roll the dough over the rolling pin, wrapping the dough around the pin. Stretch gently on the bar to increase width.
5. Make the dough into a square shape and cut it into 2" wide strips—do not pull apart.
6. Cut through the center, halving the strips.
7. Feed the strips gently through the machine—don't hesitate.
8. Cut the now longer and flatter strips into 2"x4" (approx.) rectangles.
9. Repeat steps four through eight to the other half of the dough.



## RAVIOLI CONSTRUCTION

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### DIRECTIONS:

1. With a teaspoon, get a small scoop of filling and place it in the center of your pasta rectangle.
2. Fold half of the rectangle over the filling, making a pocket.
3. Take a fork and firmly press the prongs of the fork around the outside of the ravioli. This seals the ravioli so it doesn't come apart when you cook it. Check the underside of the ravioli to see if you can see the lines through from where you pressed. If you can, you pressed hard enough, otherwise press harder.
4. Repeat these steps for every square. (If you're not ready to cook them, remember ravioli are great even after they've been frozen. But you must handle your precious babies carefully and be sure to put plastic wrap covered with flour between each layer of ravioli.)



## COOKING

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### DIRECTIONS:

1. Fill a large pot with water, leaving 5" at top, and boil the water.
2. When the water boils, add 1 tsp. of salt and 1 Tbs. of olive oil.
3. Lower the flame to medium heat and cook only five or six ravioli at a time. Do not cover the pot.
4. Stir gently and use only plastic utensils for stirring. The ravioli are fragile.
5. If the ravioli were frozen, boil for 10 to 15 min.
6. Cover with your favorite tomato sauce and serve!

## POCKET GUIDE: BASIC ITALIAN

**HELLO** ~ Ciao (informal);  
Salve (formal)

**GOODBYE** ~ Ciao (informal);  
Arrivederci (formal)

**GOOD MORNING** ~ Buongiorno

**GOOD EVENING** ~ Buonasera

**LET'S GO** ~ Andiamo

**PLEASE** ~ Per favore

**THANK YOU** ~ Grazie

**YOU'RE WELCOME** ~ Prego

**BEAUTIFUL** ~ Bello (masculine);  
Bella (feminine)

**GOOD** ~ Buono (masculine);  
Buona (feminine)

**FRIEND** ~ Amico (masculine);  
Amica (feminine)

**FAMILY** ~ Famiglia

**WINE** ~ Vino

**CHEESE** ~ Formaggio

**BOOK** ~ Libro

## WHAT PASTA SHOULD YOU MAKE ACCORDING TO YOUR MOOD?

*"Their game was to guess which type  
of pasta Nonna would be making that night.*

*In a good mood, she would make  
pasta ripiena, which were stuffed pastas like  
ravioli, tortellini, and caramelle, as festive  
as a gift wrapped with fresh dough. In a  
bad mood, she would make easy types like  
spaghetti, bigoli, and tagliatelle."*

### IF YOU'RE FEELING CELEBRATORY . . .

You should make ravioli.

### IF YOU'RE FEELING CONTENT . . .

You should make gnocchi.

### IF YOU'RE FEELING SAD . . .

You should make spaghetti.

### IF YOU'RE FEELING STRESSED . . .

You should make tagliatelle.

VISIT [SCOTTOLINE.COM](http://SCOTTOLINE.COM) FOR MORE BONUS CONTENT!