



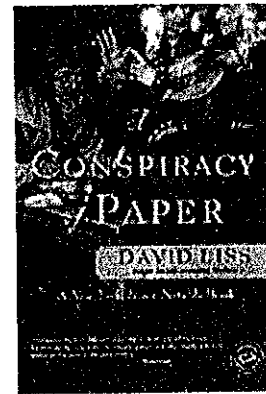
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Reading Group Guide

- About This Book
- Discussion Questions
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- Author Biography
- Author Interview
- Excerpt

A Conspiracy of Paper
by David Liss

List Price: \$14.95
Pages: 480
Format: Paperback
ISBN: 0804119120
Publisher: Ballantine Books



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About This Book

Benjamin Weaver, a Jew and an ex-boxer, is an outsider in eighteenth-century London, tracking down debtors and felons for aristocratic clients. The son of a wealthy stock trader, he lives estranged from his family—until he is asked to investigate his father's sudden death. Thus Weaver descends into the deceptive world of the English stock jobbers, gliding between coffee houses and gaming houses, drawing rooms and bordellos. The more Weaver uncovers, the darker the truth becomes, until he realizes that he is following too closely in his father's footsteps—and they just might lead him to his own grave. An enthralling historical thriller, **A Conspiracy of Paper** will leave readers wondering just how much has changed in the stock market in the last three hundred years. . . .

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Discussion Questions

1. Do you think Weaver should have constantly bailed Miriam out of trouble? What do you think about him not getting the girl in the end? Did you want to see them together or was the books' ending more believable?

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(optional):

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2. Did this novel make you change your sentiments about the current stock market? Did it make you want to become more cautious in your own investments? Did you read it as a cautionary tale?
3. For many centuries orthodox Jewish communities have lived inside European societies but also outside of them. In what ways did Lienzo's fear harm his son? In what ways did it protect him? Do you think the Jews of the eighteenth-century London did themselves a service or disservice by closing themselves off?
4. The "gentlemen" at Sir Owen's club put Weaver in the uncomfortable position of having to speak for his entire culture. Have you ever been in a situation where you were the only minority (religious, racial, economic, etc.)? How did it feel to have a group looking at you as the spokesperson for your community? Can you think of any modern parallels?
5. Instead of praising his son, Benjamin, for defending the elderly Mrs. Cantas from anti-Semites, Lienzo strikes him? What did you think of Lienzo's behavior? What would it be like to live in constant fear of drawing attention to your community? Can you think of any modern parallels?
6. Who do you think was more honorable in his ways of doing business: the criminal Jonathan Wild, or Nathan Adelman? Why?
7. Near the end of the book, Adelman says to Weaver about the murder of Sir Owen, "You need only to believe, Mr. Weaver." And Benjamin answers, "Like the new finance . . . it is true only so long as we believe it is true." What do you think the author is trying to say about the future of the stock market by letting Weaver believe someone he knows is unreliable?
8. Have you ever been caught up in a mania like the South Sea Bubble? What did it teach you about fads? Would you allow it to happen again?
9. As a child, Benjamin idolized boxers for their ability to fight. Compare his physicality to his relatives' intellectual and financial pursuits. Do you think Weaver's attraction to boxing was a response to the precariousness of his community?
10. At the end of the book the powerful Adelman comes out on top. Yet he is a member of a disempowered group. Do the many conspiracies in this book ultimately benefit the disenfranchised, or the powerful?
11. Discuss the title **A Conspiracy of Paper**. Do you think the author used the word "paper" to evoke written histories and novels as well as money? Do you believe that history is written by those who come out on top? How do you think "paper" will fare in our increasingly electronic age?

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Critical Praise

"Tremendously smart, assured, and entertaining . . . An intricate mystery, a colorful rogues' gallery and, improbably, a

Biography Resource Center

David Liss

1966-

Birth: 1966

Source: *Contemporary Authors Online*, Thomson Gale, 2006.

Entry updated: 10/12/2006

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"Sidelights"

Novelist David Liss was a Columbia University doctoral candidate when he combined his study of capitalism and the early English novel to write *A Conspiracy of Paper*. R.Z. Sheppard, a reviewer in *Time*, noted that Liss "put his researches to imaginative and profitable use." Sheppard stated that "appreciators of authenticity should be pleased with Liss's graphic venues." Set in London in 1719 at the time of the South Sea Bubble, the first market crash in English-speaking history, the novel follows the exploits of a swashbuckling detective named Benjamin Weaver. According to David Rynecki, a reviewer in *Fortune*, Liss uses this historical period as "a backdrop for a detective novel about a pugilist-turned-gumshoe on the trail of his father's killer." Brian Kenney, critiquing *A Conspiracy of Paper* in *Booklist*, observed that "the language is a charming eighteenth-century lite, but the pacing is completely modern; the book crackles with period detail, yet the immense research never shows." A reviewer in *Publishers Weekly* similarly thought that "the period detail is authentic but never obtrusive; the dialogue is a marvel of courtly locution masking murderous bluntness; and the plot ... never becomes opaque." Analyzing the novel in the *Library Journal*, Cynthia Johnson considered *A Conspiracy of Paper* appropriate "for a modern audience" and commended Liss for doing a "superb job" in bringing to light the critical topics of eighteenth-century London.

Liss returned to the character of Benjamin Weaver in *A Spectacle of Corruption*. Weaver escapes prison and must prove his innocence of the crime for which he was convicted.

Liss turns to the contemporary with *The Ethical Assassin*, which begins with seventeen-year-old Shakespeare-quoting Lem Altick scamming the residents of a Florida trailer park by selling them supermarket encyclopedias. While pitching to a poor couple, Lem witnesses their murder by a vegan animal-rights activist, who then engages the young man in his plot to assassinate evil pig farmers. Other characters include a despotic sheriff, a methamphetamine dealer, a Siamese twin, and a number of others whose bodies end up in the hog farm's lagoon of manure. *Library Journal* reviewer Ronnie H. Terpening wrote that "readers will enjoy this wild and highly entertaining ride." A *Kirkus Reviews* contributor wrote: "Imagine David Lynch's bizarre masterpiece *Blue Velvet* scripted by Edna Buchanan and Carl Hiaasen. It's a blast."

PERSONAL INFORMATION

Born 1966; married; wife is a professor; children: one daughter. **Education:** Syracuse University, B.S.; Georgia State University, M.A.; Columbia University, postgraduate studies. **Religion:** Jewish. **Addresses:** Home: San Antonio, TX. Agent: Ros Perrotta, Darhansoff, Verrill, Feldman Literary Agents, 236 W. 26th St., Ste. 882, New York, NY 10001. **E-mail:** davidliss@sbcglobal.net.

AWARDS

Columbia president's fellow; A.W. Mellon research fellow; Edgar Award for Best First Novel, Mystery Writers of America, 2001, for *A Conspiracy of Paper*.

CAREER

Writer.

WRITINGS:

- *A Conspiracy of Paper*, Random House (New York, NY), 2000.
- *The Coffee Trader*, Random House (New York, NY), 2003.
- *A Spectacle of Corruption* (sequel to *A Conspiracy of Paper*), Random House (New York, NY), 2004.
- *The Ethical Assassin*, Ballantine Books (New York, NY), 2006.

Contributor of short stories to anthologies, including *Men Seeking Women*, Random House (New York, NY), 2002.

WORKS IN PROGRESS

The Devil's Company, for Random House.

FURTHER READINGS ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

PERIODICALS

- *Booklist*, January 1, 2000, Brian Kenney, review of *A Conspiracy of Paper*, p. 834; December 1, 2005, Bill Ott, review of *The Ethical Assassin*, p. 6.
- *Business Week*, February 28, 2000, review of *A Conspiracy of Paper*, p. 16.
- *Fortune*, April 17, 2000, David Rynecki, review of *A Conspiracy of Paper*, p. 596.
- *Kirkus Reviews*, November 1, 2005, review of *The Ethical Assassin*, p. 1161.
- *Library Journal*, January, 2000, Cynthia Johnson, review of *A Conspiracy of Paper*, p. 160; November 15, 2005, Ronnie H. Terpening, review of *The Ethical Assassin*, p. 63.
- *New York Times Book Review*, February 20, 2000, James Polk, review of *A Conspiracy of Paper*, p. 34.
- *Publishers Weekly*, December 13, 1999, interview with David Liss and review of *A Conspiracy of Paper*, p. 62.
- *Time*, February 28, 2000, R.Z. Sheppard, review of *A Conspiracy of Paper*, p. 98.

ONLINE

- *David Liss Home Page*, [http:// www.davidliss.com](http://www.davidliss.com) (March 19, 2006).*

SOURCE CITATION

Contemporary Authors Online, Gale, 2007. Reproduced in *Biography Resource Center*. Farmington Hills, Mich.: Thomson Gale. 2007. <http://galenet.galegroup.com/servlet/BioRC>

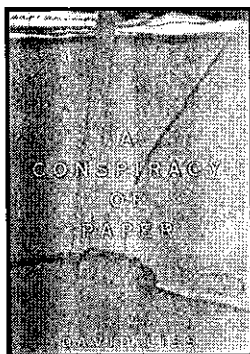
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NovelList



Conspiracy of paper, A

Author: Liss, David, 1966-

An outsider in eighteenth-century London, Jewish pugilist and hired thug Benjamin Weaver prowls the city's mean streets in the service of England's gentry tracking down debtors and thieves.

New York: Random House, copyright 2000, 442 p.

Popularity: ★★☆☆

Level: Adult

Series Name, Volume:

Benjamin Weaver novels, 1

Subject Headings:

Weaver, Benjamin
 Ex-boxer-detectives -- London, England
 Jewish detectives -- London, England
 Jews, English -- London, England
 Murder -- London, England
 Speculation -- London, England
 Stock market -- Great Britain
 Alienation in men -- London, England
 Capitalists and financiers -- London, England
 Deception in men -- London, England
 Conspiracies -- London, England
 Mystery stories, American
 Historical fiction
 Historical mystery stories
 Jewish fiction
 London, England -- History -- 18th century

Notes:

Illustrated with endpaper maps

Reviews for this Title:

Booklist Review: /*Starred Review*/ Set in a vividly realized eighteenth-century London, detective Benjamin Weaver, a Jew, former prizefighter, and a bit of a wise guy, an inspired creation, is such an outsider he can credibly go anywhere, from a seamy tavern to raucous Exchange Alley, the Wall Street of its day, to the snuff-and-wig set of a gentleman's club. Here Weaver takes a break from tracking down thieves (his bread and butter) to investigate the death of his father, a stock trader from whom he has long been estranged. As with all great mysteries, Weaver's search takes him deep into places both new, such as London's burgeoning financial markets, and personal, such as the Jewish community, which he long ago abandoned. Although a financial boom fueled by a new economy or a personal struggle with ethnic identity may seem awfully contemporary, Liss keeps us firmly in another time. A first-time novelist and doctoral candidate, Liss made a lot of smart choices: the language is a charming eighteenth-century lite, but the pacing is completely modern; the book crackles with period detail, yet the immense research never shows. And if the reader gets a bit confused with the plot at times, that's OK--the company is terrific. One can only hope that Liss isn't finished with Benjamin Weaver. A must for all public library collections. ((Reviewed January 1 & 15, 2000)) -- Brian Kenney

Publishers Weekly Review: This remarkably accomplished first novel, by a young man still completing his doctoral dissertation at Columbia, has a great deal going on. It is at once a penetrating study of the beginnings of stock speculation and the retreat from a mineral-based currency in early 18th-century London, a sympathetic look at the life of a Jew in that time and place and a vision of the struggle between the Bank of England and the upstart South Sea Company to become the repository of the nation's fiscal faith. If all that sounds daunting, it is above all a headlong adventure yarn full of

dastardly villains, brawls, wenches and as commanding a hero as has graced a novel in some time. He is Benjamin Weaver, a Jewish former boxer who had once abandoned his family, and virtually his faith, too, for a life on the fringes of criminal society as a kind of freelance bailiff who brings debtors to book for their creditors. When his uncherished father dies suddenly, however, and he has reason to suspect the apparent accident was actually murder, he plunges himself into a hunt for those responsible, and in the process changes his life. With his native cunning and his brawling skills, he soon finds himself deeply embroiled with the villainous Jonathan Wild, thief-taker par excellence, who has institutionalized criminal mayhem. He also becomes the pawn of some powerful financial giants lurking in the shadows (much like the corporate villains in contemporary thrillers), comes to suspect his glamorous cousin Miriam of actions unbecoming a lady and employs the wiles of his philosophical Scottish friend Elias to decode the mysterious ways of finance and the laws of probability. The period detail is authentic but never obtrusive; the dialogue is a marvel of courtly locution masking murderous bluntness; and the plot, though devious in the extreme, never becomes opaque. It seems clear that Weaver is being set up as a series hero, which can only be good news for lovers of the best in dashing historical fiction. Agent, Liz Darhansoff. (Feb.) Copyright 1999 Cahners Business Information.

Library Journal Review: London in 1719 is full of prostitutes and bankers, thieves and stock-jobbers who rub shoulders in the convoluted alleys and coffee houses around the Royal Exchange. Then and there, it's not impossible that a merchant suffering reverses kills himself or that a day later a Jewish stock-jobber is run down by a carriage. However, when the merchant's son asks the stock-jobber's son, Benjamin Weaver, to look into both deaths, these fatalities begin to look related and deliberate. As Weaver investigates his father's death, he finds himself deeply embroiled in the bitter political and economic wrangle between the Bank of England and the South Sea Company and the thieves, merchants, stock-jobbers, noblemen, and financiers who all have myriad competing claims. With the exception of some confusing flashbacks that slow the pace, first novelist Liss does a superb job of bringing to life 18th-century London and illuminating the issues of the day--e.g., tension between Christian and Jew--for a modern audience. Highly recommended. [Previewed in Prepub Alert, LJ 11/1/99.]--Cynthia Johnson, Cary Memorial Lib., Lexington, MA Copyright 2000 Cahners Business Information.

Author Web Sites:

1. <http://www.davidliss.com/> - David Liss' Web Site

ISBNs Associated with this Title:

0375502920
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0375410112
0375415580

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