



this week

Readings & signings on LI

Sunday

Author **Jessica Soffer** reads from her novel "Tomorrow There Will Be Apricots" (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt). At 2 p.m., *BookHampton*, 41 Main St., East Hampton; 631-324-4939, bookhampton.com



Monday

Novelist **Jonathan Tropper** signs copies of his latest book, "One Last Thing Before I Go" (Plume). At 7 p.m., *Dolphin Bookshop & Café*, 299 Main St., Port Washington; 516-767-2650, thedolphinbookshop.com



Tuesday

Oceanside author **Marisa Berman** discusses her book, "Nunley's Amusement Park," part of the Images of America series (Arcadia Publishing). At 7 p.m., *Barnes & Noble, Country Glen Center*, 91 Old Country Rd., Carle Place; 516-741-9850

Friday

The Southampton Review launches its summer issue at a reception with readings by **Billy Collins**, former poet laureate of the United States, and **Roger Rosenblatt**, author of "Making Toast: A Family Story" (Ecco). Reservations required. At 7:30 p.m., *Avram Theater, Fine Arts Building, Stony Brook Southampton Campus*, 239 Montauk Hwy., Southampton; 631-632-5152, stonybrook.edu/southampton/mfa/avram/avram_events.html



Saturday

Peter M. Wolf speaks about his memoir, "My New Orleans, Gone Away" (Delphinium). At 5 p.m., *Canio's Books*, 290 Main St., Sag Harbor; 631-725-4926, caniosbooks.com



reviews

Novel rhymes? Don't be averse

LOVE, DISHONOR, MARRY, DIE, CHERISH, PERISH, by David Rakoff. Doubleday, 113 pp., \$26.95.

BY MARION WINK
Special to Newsday

The death from cancer of 47-year-old David Rakoff — bestselling essayist and contributor to public radio's "This American Life" — broke fans' hearts last summer. Fortunately, he left behind an unusual last book billed as a "novel in verse" and designed by Chip Kidd with illustrations by the cartoonist Seth.

But first — not to quibble — are we sure this is a novel and not an epic poem? One-hundred-plus pages of iambic tetrameter seems like the latter to me, as terrifying as that designation may be from a marketer's perspective.

Epic it certainly is — a series of vignettes taking us through more than a century of American life, moving through Chicago, Seattle, Burbank, Manhat-

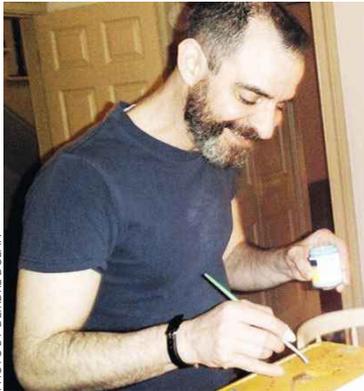
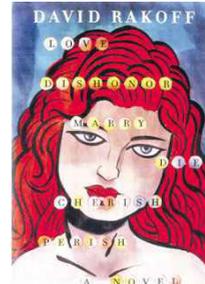


PHOTO BY DEIRDRE DOLAN



David Rakoff, author of "Love, Dishonor, Marry, Die, Cherish, Perish"

tan, San Francisco and points unnamed. The author's cleverly rhymed couplets bring to mind both Ogden Nash and Cole Porter, as we see in this excerpt set in the 1980s:

Susan had never donned quite so bourgeois

A garment as Thursday night's Christian Lacroix.

In college — just five years gone — she'd have abhorred it

But now, being honest, she . . . adored it.

Or this, from the time of AIDS in San Francisco:

And what could one say about poor lovely Marty?

Whose fever spiked high at his own dinner party

Between the clear soup and the rabbit terrine

By eleven that night he was in quarantine.

As the half-dozen main characters randomly cross paths, the story is carried forward by their interactions, sometimes gestures of kindness and other times its opposite. Twelve-year-old Margaret, brutalized by her

stepfather and rejected by her mother, rides the rails westward to start a new life. On the train, she briefly meets a hobo who wraps her in his coat and sings her to sleep in Yiddish. Clifford, introduced in the next section, is that erstwhile hobo's son. Young Cliffie takes a photograph of his cousin Helen that becomes a touchstone as it passes from one character to the next. Helen goes on to suffer in the sexist office culture of 1950s Manhattan; later Clifford finds himself artistically and sexually in gay San Francisco.

Then comes the fairly awful Susan, she of the Christian Lacroix, who will change her name to Sloan and then Shulamit and treat two different men badly before she's through. Then it's AIDS, and Alzheimer's and Zion — honestly, I had to read the book twice to follow all the threads. But because it was so amusingly made, that was no trouble at all.

Out loud it is even better: Try it and see.

Talking trash with Ava Gardner

AVA GARDNER: THE SECRET CONVERSATIONS, by Peter Evans and Ava Gardner. Simon & Schuster,

BY DOUGLASS K. DANIEL
The Associated Press

"I'm tired of remembering," actress Ava Gardner laments during one of many sessions with the ghostwriter working on her memoir.

Her spirit may have been unwilling, but Gardner needed the money. At 66 — her acting career over, and suffering from the effects of a stroke — the star of "The Barefoot Contessa" (1954) hoped that a tell-all book would bring her hundreds of thousands of dollars (or at least enough cash to keep her in her London flat).

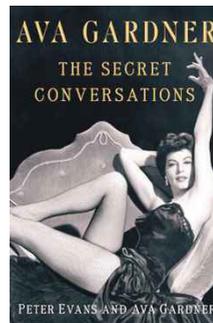
The project that began in 1988 fell apart after Gardner discovered that her chosen writer, Peter Evans, had once angered Frank Sinatra. Thirty years after their divorce, Sinatra still held sway over Gardner.

"Ava Gardner: The Secret Conversations" is not the book that either Evans

or Gardner had envisioned when they met at her apartment or when she called him at all hours of the night. It's less the story of Gardner's life than a memoir by Evans, who uses his decades-old tapes and notes to recount their short-lived partnership.

Fans will enjoy the randy banter about the men Gardner married. At 5-foot-2, Mickey Rooney was the shortest of her mates, the best dancer and an unconscionable cheat. Husband No. 2, composer and bandleader Artie Shaw, gave her a hard time for being a ragtag North Carolina girl, offered her books to read and gave her the boot after barely a year.

Sinatra matched her in jealousy, insecurity, combativeness — and loyalty. She told Evans that Sinatra always telephoned her on Christmas Eve, which



also was her birthday. But she never called him, she said, because "he's a married man, honey." She was less enchanted with Sinatra's pal Humphrey Bogart, her "Barefoot Contessa" co-star, whom she remembered as envious of her star status in their film.

Two other lovers loomed large. Wealthy recluse Howard Hughes wanted to marry her, even though she battered him with an ashtray during one fight, and he dislocated her jaw during another. Actor George C. Scott, her co-star in 1966's "The Bible" would awaken in their bed after drunken rages, unaware he had left Gardner bloody and bruised.

"The Secret Conversations" doesn't reveal much new about Gardner's life — she did turn out a memoir before she died in 1990 — and next to nothing about the movies she made, even popular films like "On the Beach" (1959) and "The Night of the Iguana" (1964).

Caught on tape being herself, Gardner comes off as she had feared — vulgar, cynical and trappy. Her words also carry the tones Evans had hoped for — funny, perceptive and genuine.