

THE LOVER

By A.B. Yehoshua
Translated by Philip Simpson
First published in Hebrew by Schocken, 1977
English translation published by Harcourt, 1985
Study guide by Ilana Kurshan

ABOUT THE BOOK:

In this novel, set in Haifa in 1973, a husband is searching for his wife's lover, who is lost in the turbulence of Israel's Yom Kippur War. The story is narrated from the alternating perspectives of five major characters: Adam, the husband, who owns a successful garage employing many Arab workers; Asya, his wife, a high school teacher; Dafi, their teenage daughter; Na'im, an Arab employee in the garage; Veducha, the mother of the elusive lover; and Gabriel Ardit, the lover himself. As the novel proceeds, we witness Adam's intensified search, Na'im's growing romantic attraction to his boss' daughter, and Asya's increasing distance. Casting the personal against the backdrop of the political, this story is not just one of complex family dynamics, but of the complex national dynamics of the Arab-Israeli conflict.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

A.B. Yehoshua was born in Jerusalem in 1936, the fifth generation of a Sephardi Jerusalemite family. After studying Hebrew literature and philosophy at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, he started a teaching career. From 1963 to 1967, he lived and taught in Paris; he is now Professor of literature at Haifa University. Yehoshua has published numerous novels, short stories, plays and essays and is one of the best internationally-known Israeli authors. He has received several literary prizes both in Israel and abroad: the Brenner Prize, the Bialik Prize (1989), the Alterman Prize, England's "Best Novel of the Year" for *Mr Mani* (1992), the Koret Jewish Book Award, the National Jewish Book Award, the Israel Prize for Literature (1995), the Giovanni Boccaccio Prize (Italy, 2005) and the Viareggio Prize for Lifetime Achievement (Italy, 2005). His work has been published in 28 languages.



QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:

1. How did the war affect Adam's garage business? Why do so many women start coming to the garage? What are some of the other ways in which the war disrupts regular life, according to Yehoshua's account?
2. In thinking about Gabriel, Adam muses, "What does he know about the real Israel?" (p. 5). After reading this novel, do you feel you have a better sense of what he means by the "real Israel"? How might the Israel that Adam knows be different from the Israel that Gabriel knows? Do these perspectives on Israel shed light on your own, and if so, in what way?
3. Does anything surprise you about the scene in which Dafi's class is told that their math teacher was killed in the war? How do you think this news would have been presented in an American school? How do the students react to the news, and what does this teach you about Israeli society? (p. 23)
4. The relationship between Adam and Asya is influenced by several wars: the Second World War, the War of Independence, and then the Yom Kippur War. How does this backdrop affect their courtship and marriage? Does this novel teach you anything about the relationship between love and war in Israel? (p. 37)
5. What are some of the subjects that Dafi describes learning in school? Which would be taught in an American public school, and which would not?
6. What does Adam's description of his beard (p. 73) reveal about the culture of which he is a part? Is he religious, or is he simply a Jew living in Israel?
7. How is Tali's mother different from the other parents in this novel? What is unusual about her background, and how is it reflected in the way she relates to her daughter and to her daughter's friends? (p. 78)
8. Na'im claims that the Jews don't hate the Arabs: "We're beyond hatred; for them we're like shadows" (p. 121). What does he mean by this statement? Do the characters in the book support his claim?
9. What do Na'im's various brothers do? Are any of them "typical Arabs," and if so, who?
10. How does Adam relate to his Arab workers? To what extent does he let himself become involved in their lives?



11. How does Na'im "pass" as a Jew when he goes to Carmel to buy pajamas? Why does he then throw away his book of Alterman poems? What does this anecdote teach you about Na'im and about Israeli society? (p. 158).
12. What do we learn about Gabriel's family from his mother's semi-lucid reminiscences? Why does she feel that their "great Jerusalem family" came to such a sad end? (p. 208).
13. All three members of the family—Adam, Asya, and Dafi—have an illicit relationship of sorts. Describe each relationship. How do they differ from one another? Which taboos or conventions does each violate? Which is the most illicit, in your opinion?
14. How does Yehoshua describe the religious Jews whom Gabriel encounters during his army service? How tolerant and open do they seem? Does anything surprise you about the way they are depicted?
15. What is the significance of the passages from Peer Gynt that Dafi keeps rereading (p. 323, 327)? How do they serve as a comment on the land of Israel, and on the book as a whole?
16. Although this book is primarily set in Haifa, the characters travel to several other cities as well. What are some of these cities, and what happens in them? With which places were you familiar previously, and which are new to you?
17. Who becomes a lover at the end of the book? Does this surprise you?
18. Do you think Be'er chose to title his book in this way?



REVIEW QUOTES:

Consider these quotes individually. What does each add to your understanding of Yehoshua and his work? Do you agree with the claims they make?

"Mr Yehoshua's inventiveness and hallucinatory intensity should be vividly evident. He is a writer who exhibits the rigorous fidelity to his own perceptions that produces real originality."

--Robert Alter, *New York Times*

"We see an Arab and an Israeli locked into a debate of proximity, likeness, mental hatred, that Yehoshua's superb ability to render both presences relieves of all sentimentality. What I value most in *The Lover* is a gift for equidistance – between characters, even between the feelings on both sides."

--Alfred Kazin, *New York Review of Books*

"Yehoshua's psychological novel is complex and fascinating, his voices – distinct and striking – represent more than themselves."

--*Publishers Weekly*

"Delicate shifting tensions between political surface and elemental depths...elusive, haunting."

--*The New York Times Book Review*

"One of Israel's world-class writers."

--Saul Bellow

"It is a disturbing, brilliantly assured novel, and almost thirty years after its appearance it retains a startling originality."

--NatashaLehrer, *TLS*

"In place of the unifying and optimistic passions of Zionism, [Yehoshua's] skilful, delicate prose depicts a darker country of insomnia, claustrophobia and disconnectedness, while the clever contrast of perspectives emphasises the vast gulf that can exist between people who supposedly love one another."

--Francesca Segal, *Jewish Chronicle*

"In this profound study of personal and political trauma, Yehoshua... evokes Israel's hallucinatory reality."

--*The Daily Telegraph*



OTHER BOOK BY A.B. YEHOSHUA AVAILABE IN ENGLISH:

Friendly Fire (Harcourt, 2008)
A Woman in Jerusalem (Harcourt, 2006)
The Liberated Bride (Harcourt, 2004)
A Journey to the End of the Millenium (Harcourt, 2000)
Open Heart (Doubleday, 1997)
A Late Divorce (Dutton, 1993)
Mr. Mani (Harcourt, 1992)
The Continuing Silence of a Poet (Peter Halban, 1991)
Early in the Summer of 1970 (Doubleday, 1977)
Three Days and a Child (Doubleday, 1970)

