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Edeet Ravel

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TEN THOUSAND LOVERS is a heartbreaking story of love in an impossible world.

Ten Thousand Lovers Details

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From Reader Review Ten Thousand Lovers for online ebook

Jessica says

I remember reading this book quite a while ago...grade 8 or 9, so roughly 9 or 10 years ago. But it has stuck with me for quite a while. I forgot the title for a long time, and have often tried to remember what it was called. And today, it just came to me.

i don't remember much about this book, but I remember how sad and desperate it made me feel. And I think that is the sign of a good book...that the feelings it inspired in you are still there, 10 years later.

Shannon (Giraffe Days) says

This was a random buy the other week; the author's new book caught my eye and since it was the third book in a sort-of trilogy, I picked up the first one, this one, and was interested enough to take it home with me. For some reason, it was just begging to be read, so it didn't have to wait the usual waiting period of books I take home (which is anywhere between five months and five years). However, now that it's time to write the review, I find myself stuck. Every time I try to summarise it, it just doesn't sound right. So I'm ditching my usual review structure and will just talk about the book, revealing necessary bits of the plot-light story as I go.

The premise, in brief, is about a young woman, Lily, studying linguistics and language at the university in Jerusalem who meets a man, Ami, who works as an interrogator for the army. It is a story of their love for one another, a story of horror and heartbreak in a war-torn country, of a people persecuted - and I'm not talking about the Jews here. It's a powerful story, set in the 70s, that is inherently relevant today.

I'm always interested in reading books about other countries and people, especially when I've been immobile in one place for too long. I love to get a sense of that other place, I want to taste it and touch it and see it - I can practically *smell* it, if the book works for me. That was one of the biggest disappointments about Joe Speedboat, which was set in the Netherlands but seemed to be trying to *hide* its Dutch qualities rather than explore, highlight, celebrate them. There was none of that problem here, in *Ten Thousand Lovers*. Because Lily is Canadian-Israeli, and spent the first seven years of her life on a Kibbutz with her parents, she has a history with the place and understands the people. She speaks fluent Hebrew. Why she returned to Israel to do her university degree isn't very clear, but since it's a story of shadows and things unsaid, it fits.

In fact, I can't go any further without talking about the prose style. If you start this book expecting a fairly typical style of writing, you could be alienated by what you do get. This is a very dialogue-driven story, fit into a fine mesh net of sparse description, and even the dialogue is stripped bare of flourishes. There are few descriptors, very little adjectives, so that Ami, especially, sounds formal, distant, even aloof. Yet also not, because Lily also includes explanations on the people and the language - on certain words, their meanings and history and implications - that are fascinating and revealing. Be prepared to read of a people and culture different from your own. You cannot place your own expectations and moral code onto them. It gives it a faint touch of Fantasy, because they sound alien, yet their story is so human the lack of description and adjectives just drives it home all the more powerfully.

Lily meets Ami when she's hitchhiking from Jerusalem to Tel Aviv. Ami falls for her almost instantly, and is

always open and frank with her. He doesn't try to hide what he does for a living, and Lily doesn't hide how much it scares her, how she doesn't trust him or *know* him - through it all he persists and holds true, and eventually she moves past her fears. Ami is an incredibly charismatic character, totally believable, and it's understandable that he can interrogate prisoners without an ounce of violence and find out everything they want to know. He hates his job but every time he quits they offer him more money to come back - plus, I think he feels that if he weren't doing it, the way he does it, the other interrogators would step in and they are, in Ami's words, sadistic. He explains his technique to Lily, and as we get to know Ami - who, really, is the true hero and protagonist of the story - and learn more about his personal views, it feels like Ami vs. the whole crazy world.

Things were rough in Israel during the 70s, and they're probably worse now. *Ten Thousand Lovers* gives honest insight into the situation at the human level, yet you won't learn much in terms of facts and figures. This isn't that kind of historical fiction. I wasn't even sure, for most of the book, when it was set. I guessed 80s, based purely on how old Lily's daughter seemed to be. See, the story has two parallel time lines. In one, present-day Lily is writing the story of meeting Ami and what happened there, while her daughter and her daughter's boyfriend flit in and out of her home. In the other is the story itself. The third part of the novel is the small sections explaining quirks of Hebrew, which were the most factual, informative parts of the novel and really interesting too. You'll learn more about the language and culture than you will about what the hell is going on in the country.

Actually, that's not true either. You will learn about it, just not at the political and economic level. Fear and prejudice is explored, but never baldly. The shadows move softly throughout this novel, and I found myself leaning closer, trying to peer through them to the "truth". But there is no simple, straight-forward truth, only interpretations and perspectives of it. I wouldn't want a simple, straight-forward story anyway, I wouldn't want to be *told*.

It did take me a while to adjust to the prose, though. It's quite different, and it won't work for everyone. It was frustrating at times, because it made the characters and story seem almost elusive, but it was also highly effective. For a while I was scared of Ami too. I didn't trust him, I was suspicious of him, I thought bad things would happen to Lily if she got into a relationship with him. He's so magnetic, so controlled and calm and intelligent, I knew he'd outwit me no matter what. I worried about his sincerity. I worried about his motives. I worried that he really was involved in torture. In short, I absorbed all Lily's fears and made them my own - and then I absorbed her growing love and trust in Ami, and loved him too.

It's this kind of emotional connection that I look for in a book, that makes a book a perfect fit for me. I can see that some readers would have an opposite reaction to mine, because of the prose style, but for me the sparsity of words made it all that much closer, more intimate, stripped bare of the usual descriptions that can in fact protect you from getting too close. I can see I need to give an example, so I've picked a more-or-less random passage:

"It's funny how we met. Such a fluke. If I hadn't lent my roommate money. If I hadn't bought a chocolate on the way to the bus. If I'd been there ten minutes earlier or later."

"I thought about that too."

"I suppose God had it all planned out."

I didn't mean it literally, but Ami underwent a transformation when I said that. He became fierce. "Don't bring God into it," he said.

"I was just joking. What's the matter? You're scaring me."

"I don't like religious people," he said. I saw how intimidating he could be if he felt like it.

"Well, I'm not religious. I'm an atheist, I was born on a kibbutz, remember? The first time I

heard that word, 'God', was when we went back to Canada, and I went to Hebrew school. You can be scary."

"Sorry."

"Don't scare me like that again. The next time you scare me like that I'm leaving."

"I didn't mean to scare you. You're very sensitive, Lily."

"Why do you hate the religious?"

"It's psychotic to say this is what God wants, because that's what you want. This is what's written in the Torah, God said we should have this land, and the Arabs, who don't have a soul anyway, who are subhuman anyway, should just be demolished, because that's what God wants. Who can argue with *yehova*? I wish the ground would just open up and swallow them."

"In my fantasy they don't die, they just all move to New York."

He pulled me towards him and rolled me so that I was lying on top of him. He smiled at me.

"Yes, that's much more *humane*," he said, in English. [pp. 77-78:]

I loved Lily too, she's very identifiable - no doubt from all her years living in Canada (she writes her story from her home in London, not Canada, but that just adds to her Western feel). Politics does come up, of course - how could it not? - and religion too; I was far more offended than Lily even by the Jewish wedding traditions. She wasn't even required to *speak* during the ceremony! And I loved Ami all the more for hating it all. I guess he's very modern.

If you're interested in reading about Israel during the 70s, if you're interested in that area at all, or if you feel in the mood to read a heart-breaking love story; if you like stories that are written *differently*, if you study creative writing and are drawn to books that try out different prose styles - or from some reason of your own, I really recommend this book and I'm eager to read the other two books in Ravel's Tel Aviv trilogy.

Diane says

I just could not get into this book. I didn't like any of the characters, and it just seemed to drag on and on. Definitely not my kind of book. I will not be reading the other books in the trilogy.

Angela Modany says

This could have been a really good book with an interesting story line, but I couldn't get past Lily and Ami's relationship. The dialogue just didn't sound natural to me. It was so choppy and broken. It was also hard to believe that they were in love. The sentiments just seemed very out-of-the-blue to me.

Zarya Rubin says

Although it can be difficult to choose a "favourite" book, this may very well be it. The first in a trilogy about life, love and loss in Israel, this book is a masterpiece of human emotion and tragedy. The characters are so involving and real that you wish they would stay with you long after the final pages. This is a love story, in the true sense of the word, but also incorporates linguistic elements and political history of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in the 1970s. A friend of mine read it and when she wanted to discuss it days later could

not stop sobbing! Another friend (a lawyer, who "doesn't know how to read") borrowed it and read it in two days. You will not be able to put it down.

Sara Smith says

A peek into the lives of 2 Israelis who meet and fall in love. A bit strange, but it's quite different from anything I'm used to growing up in the U.S. I didn't love their relationship, which seemed motivated by the wrong things at times, but it didn't seem like their relationships with other people were what I'd consider healthy either.

Brian says

Set in one of the most dangerous and tragic and potentially exciting landscapes on the globe, *Ten Thousand Lovers* manages to say almost nothing about love or peace or war in prose that is both flat and stilted. With an uncanny disdain for plot or character, the book, a Governor General finalist by the way, is neatly spaced with entomology lessons and Biblical notations. It reads very much like the memoir of a person surrounded by drama but somehow unable to relate to it.

Lily says

Ten Thousand Lovers by Edeet Ravel is an intriguing story of a forbidden love set in Tel Aviv, Israel. The main character, Lily, is a young woman from Canada studying and learning about the wonders and terrors of her home land. As a young adult in Israel in the 1970s, she, and all of her peers, were very opinionated about the issues in such a conflicted area. Because of these opinions she has, which are shared with the reader so we too understand her views, it creates internal conflict when she falls in love with an army interrogator. For me personally, being Jewish and having just returned home from Israel, this book hit very close to home and felt as though it could almost be the story of my future. I liked the way it was written in flashback because I got to understand how she had changed and been effected by what happened in her past. However, I was disappointed with how it ended because Ravel left so much up to the readers ability to understand the hints dropped in the sections in the present time. But overall, it was a fun, quick read that mixed both story and real-life issues well.

Barbara Avgoustidis says

I really enjoyed this book.

It was clean and it was very informative on matters I was not aware of. For example. Israeli culture and political matters. The author also increased her reliability with biblically accurate references. I found the story to be relatable. And realistic. Real love doesn't have any guidelines on what it is or how it should develop or evolve in one's life. And I found it very realistic given its time frame and environment...

David says

I am really disappointed with this book. My expectations of this novel were completely off as far as the content and style. I guess I was expecting more of a mystery/social commentary...but instead I found an unrealistic, laughable romance novel sprinkled with a linguistic course of the Hebrew language, which was perhaps the only part I did find interesting about the book.

The relationship between Ami and Lily is a joke...I felt their characters were flat, and found nothing substantial between them. The only realistic thing I could imagine holding them together was their sexual relationship (described hilariously...unintentionally).

I feel like I've learned only about the history of certain Hebrew words, which does not redeem the novel in my eyes...the "spirit" of Israel and the characters' roles in it are lost to me.

Danyel says

The plot to this novel was interesting enough but the characters were 1 dimensional, awkward and uninviting.

Tracy says

A love story that also provides more insight into the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Louise says

A beautifully written love story set in 1970's Israel. Lily and Ami wrestle with their love, the tragedies of the time, Ami's job as an army interrogator, the possibility of war and their future life together. Wonderful novel!!

From back cover:

"Lily is a young emigrant student exploring the wonders and terrors of her new land when she meets the man of her dreams. Ami, a former actor, is handsome, intelligent and exciting-but, like his beautiful, disintegrating country, he has a terrible flaw-he is an army interrogator.

As Lily and Ami's unexpected passion grows, so too does the shadow that hangs over them-the atrocities which Ami's work forces him to face.

In today's world, where danger, terrorism and the possibility of war are a part of all our lives, no novel could be more brilliantly, terrifyingly contemporary. Yet 'Ten Thousand Lovers' is set in Israel in the Seventies: a dazzling backdrop to a universal story of passion, suffering and the transcending power of love."

Marina L Reed says

Took a while to figure this book out. Rather disjointed. The sections to educate on the Hebrew language felt awkward and I began to skip by them to get back to the story. Characters were a bit hard to keep track of, but the main characters became very alive. Oddly, they were emotionally there, but I could never picture them physically. The style of writing is very simplistic and direct, sometimes that worked, sometimes it was just too minimal. The ending was well done. I wondering how she would do it.

In terms of subject matter, the main theme here is the Israeli- Palestinian conflict, and that is brilliantly explored. It is worth reading just for that aspect.

All in all, a unique book, intriguing, and worth the read.

I'm not sure how easy it will be to find, I picked it up at a used book store, and it is signed by the author at her launch. Cool!!

Josey says

This book is so beautiful. It speaks of new love, familiar love, good love so truthfully. I read it as I was falling in love and saw myself and my love reflected in the pages. I flew through it and think of it fondly. It's certainly not a perfect book, but it is lovely and full of love and I recommend it highly.

K says

Instant love. Nearly perfect for Ami and Lily. Israel and its many contradictions. Well done.

Deb (Readerbuzz) Nance says

Don't let the title fool you; this is not a Harlequin, this is not a gentle Sunday afternoon read. Ten Thousand Lovers, the story of Lily and Ami, is really the story of Israel today, a country that is in the difficult position of trying to figure out a way to both be good and to survive. A book that is wonderful on two levels, appealing to both heart and mind.

kirkesque says

The author's structure and style kept her voice at the forefront of the novel instead of allowing her fictional self and other characters to move us along through the tale. Using devices to accomplish what is intended is, of course, what authors do. However, if you see the strings at the marionette show when you aren't supposed to, it takes something away from the beautiful illusion. Ravel showed herself behind the curtain too often to ignore the fact that in reading this novel, I was never fully involved in the story, I was always reading the words that Ravel carefully typed.

Great stories should leave questions in the reader and not always supply them with answers. That said, there is a difference between unanswered questions in a novel, and unresolved answers.

Ten Thousand Lovers left far too many things unresolved, incoherent, and inexplicable to rate it higher. I appreciate and admire what Ravel was attempting to do with her this story, but I think she wanted us to know what she was doing far too much to stop bashing us over the head with how important and insightful she was being.

Kylie Agarand says

A tragic love story that will also make you think. This is not your typical romance novel.

A little slow moving, Ravel focuses more on developing the characters and discussing the social and political issues surrounding Israel.

I am not educated at all in the goings on in that part of the world and though I believe that I have picked up the basic idea from this novel I did find that I felt a bit out of the loop in certain parts. Ten thousand lovers makes me want to learn and understand more about the political situation in Israel.

I loved the character Ami, he was well developed and had a lot of depth. Although the POV was Lily, I felt like she was just there to narrate and ask questions. There were a few spots where she showed some personality, but I felt she was mostly used as a tool to discuss different topics.

All in all a good read, I enjoy books that show multiple perspectives to a social issue and make you think about something new.

Susan says

I just finished the book last night. Reading it, I kept thinking—as I'm sure the author intended—about the debate and horror in the US at torture and abuse at Abu Gharib, at rendition, a "torture memos" and all that stuff.

It's a well put together book and the suspense works. There are two time periods—a present where the main character, Lily, a Canadian who was actually born on an Israeli kibbutz, is living in London. Her daughter is grown and visits with her boyfriend. The reader soon learns that Lily is writing, not her usual academic book, but one about her own experience in Israel as a student in the 70ies. In that other "present"—where the book begins and ends—Lily meets her lover while hitchhiking. He's handsome and caring and she falls for him (as he does for her) completely. The problem is he's an interrogator who works for the army and sometimes for the security services, interrogating Palestinian prisoners. Lily is turned off by the violence implied in his job. She soon learns that he is as turned off as she and accomplishes his "miracles"—for his bosses find him more effective than anyone else—without violence. But he hates the army and the growing violence—even

torture—that is not only condoned but encouraged. He senses that the oppressed have become the oppressors.

The suspense comes because of the mature Lily writing in her London flat—obviously living alone, telling her story. The lover, Ami, is no longer in the picture and the reader reads on to learn what happened to him and to their relationship. There's a third element in the narration and that is the discussion of the Hebrew language and how it has become adapted from the language of the Bible to modern life. These sections are very well done, interesting, not too long and always connected thematically to the action of the novel.

I wonder if this book is popular in Israel? I had to refresh my memory about Israeli history since the '67 war which I watched on TV (Vietnam was NOT the first televised war). I wasn't sure about the "territories", but learned that the West Bank and Gaza were the areas won in that war and not, like Sinai, given back. I've never been to Israel, but my sister had several times and she gave me a quick history refresher. Besides she had also lived in Egypt and a bit in Syria and Jordan too, so had the Middle East perspective.

It really never dawned on me before to think about Israel's desire to have a "Jewish majority" or to consider how unrealistic that is. Or to consider the difference in the positions of the Palestinians who stayed as Israeli citizens and those who left and lived in camps. My sister said her impression was that though ethnically Jewish most Israelis were more like Europeans than Americans in terms of their religious practices—pretty secular. Sort of like the reaction of Lily and Ami to the fact that the only way to get married was in a religious ceremony. My sister also said that many of the Russian immigrants to Israel in the last 30 years or so have also been ethnically Jewish but not "religious" or even familiar with religious observances. Issues the novel touches upon are the difference between a Jewish state and a democratic one and the difficulty of marrying the two concepts.

I enjoyed the novel and didn't figure out the title till the end (unfortunately had I not been told otherwise I'd have assumed it was a romance novel). But I can't explain the title without giving away the plot.... Posted by Picasa
