

A. B. Yehoshua

Born: December 09, 1936 in Jerusalem, Israel

Other Names : Yehoshua, Abraham B.; Yehoshua, Avraham B.

Nationality: Israeli

Occupation: Novelist

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#### PERSONAL INFORMATION:

Given name is sometimes spelled Avraham; born December 9, 1936, in Jerusalem, Israel; son of Yakov (an Orientalist) and Malka Yehoshua; married Rivka Kirsnski (a psychoanalyst), June 14, 1960; children: Sivan, Gideon, Naum.

**Education:** Hebrew University of Jerusalem, B.A., 1961; graduate of Teachers College, 1962. **Military/Wartime Service:** Israeli Army, paratrooper in Nachal unit, 1954-57. **Addresses:** Home: Haifa, Israel.

#### CAREER:

Writer and educator. Hebrew University of Jerusalem High School, Jerusalem, Israel, teacher, 1961-63; Israeli School, Paris, France, director, 1963-64; World Union of Jewish Students, Paris, secretary-general, 1964-67; Haifa University, Haifa, Israel, dean of students, 1967-71, senior lecturer, 1971-77, professor of literature, beginning in 1977, now retired. Lecturer on tour of American college and university campuses, 1969; visiting fellow, St. Cross College, Oxford University, 1975-76; visiting professor, Harvard University, 1977, University of Chicago, 1988, and Princeton University, 1992. Member of board of art, Haifa Municipal Theatre.

#### AWARDS:

Akum Prize, 1961; Municipality of Ramat-Gan Prize, 1968, for short story collection, *Mul ha-ye'arot*; University of Iowa fellow in international literature program, 1969; Prime Minister Prize, 1972; Brenner Prize, 1982; Alterman Prize, 1986; Bialik Prize, 1989; National Jewish Book Award, 1990 and 1993; Israel Prize for Literature, 1995; Koret Prize, 2000; Napoli Prize, 2003; Lampedusa Prize, 2003; Giovanni Boccaccio Prize, 2005; Viareggio Prize for Lifetime Achievement, 2005; *Los Angeles Times* Book Award (first prize), 2006, for *A Woman in Jerusalem*; Prix Médicis étranger, 2012, for French translation of *The Retrospective*; *Three Days and a Child* was chosen to represent Israel at the Cannes Film Festival.

#### WORKS:

#### WRITINGS:

#### FICTION

*Mot ha-zaken* (title means "The Death of an Old Man"), ha-Kibuts ha-me'uhad (Tel Aviv, Israel), 1962.

*Early in the Summer of 1970* (novella), Schocken (New York, NY), 1972.

*Me'aveh* (novel), Shoken (Jerusalem, Israel), 1977, translation by Philip Simpson published as *The Lover*, Doubleday (New York, NY), 1977.

*Gerushim me'uharim* (novel), ha-Kibuts ha-me'uhad (Tel Aviv, Israel), 1982, translation by Hillel Halkin published as *A Late Divorce*, Doubleday (New York, NY), 1984, revised edition published as *Kantatat ha-gerushim* (title means "Divorce Cantata"), ha-Kibuts ha-me'uhad (Tel Aviv, Israel), 1991.

*Molkho* (novel), ha-Kibuts ha-me'uhad (Tel Aviv, Israel), 1987, translation by Hillel Halkin published as *Five Seasons*, Doubleday (New York, NY), 1989, reprinted, Harcourt (Orlando, FL), 2004.

*Mar Mani* (novel), ha-Kibuts ha-me'uhad (Tel Aviv, Israel), 1990, translation by Hillel Halkin published as *Mr. Mani*, Doubleday (New York, NY), 1992.

*Ha-Shivah me-Hodu: roman be-arba'ah halakim* (title means "Return from India"), ha-Kibuts ha-me'uhad (Tel Aviv, Israel), 1994, translation by Dalya Bilu published as *Open Heart*, Doubleday (New York, NY), 1996.

*Masa el tom ha-elef: Roman bi-Sheloshah Halakim*, ha-Kibuts ha-me'uhad (Tel Aviv, Israel), 1997, translation by Nicholas De Lange published as *A Journey to the End of the Millennium*, Doubleday (New York, NY), 2000.

*Ha-Kalah ha-meshaheret*, ha-Kibuts ha-me'uhad (Tel Aviv, Israel), 2001, translation by Hillel Halkin published as *The Liberated Bride*, Harcourt (Orlando, FL), 2004.

*Shelih uto shel ha-memuneh al mash'abe enosh: pasyon bi-sheloshah perakim* (title means "The Mission of the Human Resource Man"), ha-Kibuts ha-me'uhad (Tel Aviv, Israel), 2004.

*A Woman in Jerusalem*, Harcourt (Orlando, FL), 2006.

*Esh yedidutit: du'et*, ha-Kibuts ha-me'uhad (Tel Aviv, Israel), 2007, translation by Stuart Schoffman published as *Friendly Fire: A Duet*, Harcourt (Orlando, FL), 2008.

*Ahizat moledet: 'esrim ma'amarim ve-rishum ehad*, ha-Kibuts ha-me'uhad (Tel Aviv, Israel), 2008.

*Masa'ha-erev shel Yatir: shalosh novelot*, ha-Kibuts ha-me'uhad (Bene Berak, Israel), 2009.

*Gerushim me'uharim: roman*, ha-Kibuts ha-me'uhad: Zemorah-Bitan (Kineret, Israel), 2010.

*Masa'el tom ha-elef: roman bi-sheloshah halakim*, ha-Sifriyah ha-hadashah: Yedi'ot sefarim (Tel Aviv, Israel), 2010.

*Hesed Sefaradi*, ha-Kibuts ha-me'uhad (Bene Berak, Israel), 2011, translation by Stuart Schoffman published as *The Retrospective*, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt (Boston, MA), 2013.

## SHORT STORY COLLECTIONS

*Mul ha-ye'arot* (title means "Over against the Woods"), ha-Kibuts ha-me'uhad (Tel Aviv, Israel), 1968.

*Three Days and a Child*, translation by Miriam Arad, Doubleday (New York, NY), 1970.

*Until Winter*, Hakibbutz (Tel Aviv, Israel), 1974.

*The Continuing Silence of a Poet: The Collected Short Stories of A.B. Yehoshua*, Penguin (New York, NY), 1991.

*Kol ha-sipurim*, ha-Kibuts ha-me'uhad (Tel Aviv, Israel), 1993.

*Hatunatah shel Galya* (title means "Galia's Wedding"), Keter (Jerusalem, Israel), 2000.

*Selected Stories*, Gesharim (Moscow, Russia), 2002.

## PLAYS

*Two Plays: "A Night in May" and "Last Treatments"* (*A Night in May* was produced in Tel Aviv by the Bimot Theatre, 1969, and *Last Treatments* was produced in Haifa, Israel, by the Haifa Theatre), Shoken (Jerusalem, Israel), 1974.

*A Night in May* (also see below), translation by Miriam Arad, Institute for the Translation of Hebrew Literature (Tel Aviv, Israel), 1974.

*Hafatsim* (title means "Possessions"; produced by the Haifa Theatre), Shoken (Jerusalem, Israel), 1986.

*Tinokot lailah: Mahazeh bi-shete ma'arakhot* (title means "Night's Babies"; produced by the Habima National Theatre), ha-Kibuts ha-me'uhad (Tel Aviv, Israel), 1992.

*Ha-Yelkhu shenayim yahdav: mahazeh bi-shete temunot* (title means "Can Two Walk Together: A Play in Two Acts"), ha-Kibuts ha-me'uhad (Tel Aviv, Israel), 2012.

## NONFICTION

*Bi-zekhut ha-normaliyut*, Shoken (Jerusalem, Israel), 1980, translation by Arnold Schwartz published as *Between Right and Right*, Doubleday (New York, NY), 1981.

*Israel*, photos by Frederic Brenner, translation by Philip Simpson, Harper (New York, NY), 1988.

*Hakir V-H-Har* (title means "The Wall and the Mountain"; political essays), Zmora Bitan (Tel Aviv, Israel), 1989.

*Kohah ha-nora shel ashmah ketanah: Ha-Heksher ha-Musari shel ha-tekst ha-sifrut* (essays), Yedi'ot aharonot (Tel Aviv, Israel), 1998, translation by Ora Cummings published as *The Terrible Power of a Minor Guilt*, Syracuse University Press (Syracuse, NY), 2000.

*Essays*, Wereldbibliotheek (Amsterdam, Holland), 2006.

## OTHER

*Ad horef 1974: Mivhar*, ha-Kibuts ha-me'uhad (Tel Aviv, Israel), 1975.

Also author of *Mai-erev, lailah ve-shahar: Mahazeh/Rishumim: Dani Karavan*, Bimot (Tel Aviv, Israel), *Shelosha yamin ve-yeled*, ha-Mahlakah (Jerusalem, Israel), and *Shene Sipurim*, ha-Mahlakah (Jerusalem, Israel). Author of the play *Israeli Babies*, 1991, and the radio script *The Professor's Secret*. Member of editorial board, *Keshet*, 1965-72, *Siman Kria*, 1973--, and *Tel Aviv Review*, 1987--. Advisor to drama editorial board, Israeli Television Network. Yehoshua's works have been translated into twenty-eight languages, including Korean, Japanese, Russian, and Swedish.

## MEDIA ADAPTATIONS:

*Three Days and a Child* and *Early in the Summer of 1970* have been adapted as films.

## Sidelights

A.B. Yehoshua is "generally regarded as Israel's best living novelist," wrote Alan Mintz in a review of *A Journey to the End of the Millennium* in *Commentary*. In his novels and short stories, Yehoshua deals in fictional form with the political and moral questions that have arisen out of Zionism, the Jewish Diaspora, and the Arab-Israeli conflict. His early short stories were in many cases surrealistic and allegorical. In a review of *Early in the Summer of 1970*, *New York Times Book Review* contributor Anatole Broyard called Yehoshua's stories "a brilliant evocation of one face of life in Israel," namely, the tension between the generation of Israelis born in Europe who fled from Nazism and the generation that, like Yehoshua himself, was born in the state of Israel.

Yehoshua's first novel, *The Lover*, was controversial in Israel because of its criticisms of Israeli society--its "disappointment with the dream's implementation," in the words of *Midstream* contributor Nili Wachtel. One of the novel's main characters, the old woman Veducha, suffering in a hospital from degenerative diseases, symbolizes the distortion of Zionism by "messianic" aims, according to Wachtel. He summarized: "Yehoshua's greatest disappointment ... [is] that it [Israeli society] lives in Zion like a lover from afar."

*A Late Divorce*, Yehoshua's second novel, examines questions about the Diaspora, the worldwide Jewish exile. The main character, Yehuda Kaminka, is an Israeli intellectual who has moved to Minneapolis, Minnesota. He must return to Israel briefly to obtain his wife's consent to a divorce so that he can marry his pregnant American girlfriend. Kaminka's nine-day return is narrated in Faulknerian style by a series of different relatives and by Kaminka himself. Harold Bloom, in the *New York Times Book Review*, noted that *A Late Divorce* is "authentic storytelling, acutely representative of current social realities in Israel and marked by extraordinary psychological insight throughout."

In *Five Seasons*, Yehoshua explores the life of his main character, Molkho, in five chapters, each of which is set in a specific season and concerns Molkho's psychological relationship with a woman. Beginning with the death of Molkho's wife from cancer in autumn, it ends as his mother-in-law is dying in a later autumn. Tova Reich, in the *Washington Post Book World*, observed that "the novel comes together in Molkho's struggle to snatch some illumination and release from death." Reich asserted that Yehoshua's effort is "a wonderfully engaging, exquisitely controlled, luminous work." Bryan Cheyette, writing in the *Times Literary Supplement*, maintained that the novel is "a series of delightful set-pieces" that because of its facile comedy, in the reviewer's opinion, cannot sustain its more ambitious themes.

*Mr. Mani*, Yehoshua's next novel, covers six generations of Jewish history, from 1848 to 1982, through the medium of five separate conversations that go backward chronologically. It "spirals in upon the origins of Israel's current malaise, offering a kaleidoscopic view of Jewish history filtered through the events of one family," according to *New York Times Book Review* contributor Jay Parini. Explaining his method in an interview with *New York Times Book Review* writer Laurel Graeber, Yehoshua stated that the novel is "intergenerational psychoanalysis," and added: "I wanted to understand the present by digging through the layers of the past." Mark Miller, in the *Chicago Tribune Books*, wrote that *Mr. Mani* "takes on serious issues of Judaism, understanding it as more than a trial run for Zionism."

Yehoshua turned away from contemporary society in *A Journey to the End of the Millennium*, a historical novel set in the year 999. In this complex story of a medieval merchant's travels and marriages, Yehoshua illuminates a rich moment in Jewish history. The main character, Ben Attar, is a wealthy merchant who works in partnership with his nephew, Abulafia. Their lucrative teaming is threatened when Ben Attar takes a second wife, a custom approved of in his North African Jewish community but unheard of in the European communities from which Abulafia's wife has come. She renounces her husband's uncle, which spurs him to begin a journey to her homeland in the hopes of converting the Jews there to his way of thinking. In his review in *Commentary*, Mintz noted that during the era in which the story is set, "contrary to many of our own received historical notions, the rage of the nations against the Jews was a less burning issue than the differences of the Jews among themselves. And indeed the best part of this novel lies in its evocation of the disparate worlds of its Jewish characters: the vividly colored robes and veils of the southern visitors and their worldly brand of piety against the marshy drabness of the Rhineland towns whose Jews wear peculiar horn-shaped hats and practice a more pinched form of religion." Mintz advised that "despite the exotic spell cast by Yehoshua's writing, we are never unaware that this novel, like all historical novels, is in the end not really about history, or at least not about history of the dead-and-buried kind. Contemporary Israel and its own fraught brand of identity politics is never far from the surface."

In his native Israel, Yehoshua's short stories are as well known as his novels. His collected works first appeared in English in 1991 in *The Continuing Silence of a Poet: The Collected Short Stories of A.B. Yehoshua*. Francine Prose, reviewing the book for the *New York Times Book Review*, noted that she was "struck by its daring absence of authorial

vanity and self-protection." She divided the stories into two genres: realistic stories of urban Israelis and "parablelike fictions with metaphysical and political overtones." "At its best," Prose wrote, "*The Continuing Silence of a Poet* makes us feel we are seeing ourselves at the first moment of awakening, before we've had time to reinvent the face we show to the world."

*The Terrible Power of a Minor Guilt* contains essays about a wide gamut of writers who span the centuries. They include Euripides, Old Testament authors, Fyodor Dostoevsky, William Faulkner, Shmuel Yosef Agnon, Albert Camus, and Raymond Carver. In his examination of the authors and their works, Yehoshua delves into a variety of moral and social issues, including love, desire, and guilt. For example, in his examination of Faulkner's short story "A Rose for Emily," Yehoshua reads the story as being about Emily's relationship with the local people. "The reader and the townspeople revere Emily for her aristocratic behavior and conspire to maintain the social and emotional distance between her and themselves," wrote *World Literature Today* contributor Eric Sterling about Yehoshua's reading of the story. "They also repress their knowledge of her refusal to accept death because of their adherence to Southern values." Sterling went on to note that in his essays the author "provides insightful commentary regarding morality in literature." Writing in *Library Journal*, Gene Shaw noted that "Yehoshua's close reading and moral commitment [make] this an invaluable work." In a review in *Shofar*, Naomi Sokoloff opined: "This is a highly readable book, whose spirited writing invites spirited response on the part of its readers."

In his novel *The Liberated Bride*, Yehoshua tells the story of an Israeli historian's attempt to unravel two dilemmas: the reasons behind his son's divorce, and the reasons behind the troubles in Algeria following the civil war of 1990. The historian, named Rivlin, delves into Algeria by studying published works and by speaking with an Algerian student who is ultimately killed. In an interview with *Queen's Quarterly* contributor Elaine Kalman Naves, Yehoshua explained why he focused on Algeria as part of the plot for his book: "I was a little bit shocked, like everyone else, over the past ten years at all this violence in Algeria. And I was asking, What are the sources of this violence? And none of the experts could give me an answer. So I tried to give it as an academic question to Rivlin." In the novel, Rivlin's search for the reasons behind his son's failed marriage leads him to a Jerusalem hotel owned by the family of his former daughter-in-law and in which Rivlin suspects something happened that is at the root of the divorce, a suspicion confirmed later through an encounter with his son's ex-wife.

Commenting on *The Liberated Bride* in her *Queen's Quarterly* article, Naves called it "a sprawling, immensely moving, hugely entertaining and provocative novel of ideas, action, and tragically missed opportunities." A *Kirkus Reviews* contributor commented that the novel is "a splendidly realized search for the causes of ruptures that rend families and nations: both timely and timeless." Another reviewer, writing in *Publishers Weekly*, stated that Yehoshua is "a keen observer of social and political realities, and a subtle writer." The reviewer went on to call the novel a "quietly provocative and deeply important consideration of how the desire for liberation ... is inescapable in human nature." Reich, writing in the *New Leader*, commented that "it is the search for truth that palpably pulls together the trajectory of his narrative and its conception." In a review for *Library Journal*, Robert E. Brown wrote: "This is a great read from one of Israel's premier authors, by turns profoundly funny and simply profound."

*A Woman in Jerusalem* was awarded the 2006 *Los Angeles Times* Book Prize. In the novel, a cleaning woman in a bakery named Yulia Ragayev is killed in a bombing. However, when her body goes unclaimed, a newspaper reporter takes up the cause, goading the owner of the bakery into sending a human resources man to go out and look for her family. The novel follows the man (who remains unnamed, as do all the characters except for the dead woman) as Yulia's life unfolds before him, making him reflect on his own life and family, which includes an ex-wife and a daughter he barely sees. A *Kirkus Reviews* contributor referred to *A Woman in Jerusalem* as "a moving, unsentimental reckoning with death and renewal." Another reviewer, writing in the *Economist*, opined that "Mr Yehoshua's *A Woman in Jerusalem* is a sad, warm, funny book about Israel and being Jewish, and one that has deep lessons to impart--for other people as well as his own."

Originally published in Hebrew as *Esh yedidutit: du'et*, *Friendly Fire: A Duet* has two narrators: Amotz and Daniela, a Jewish married couple in their fifties who have spent most of their time together during their thirty-seven years of marriage. The book opens with the couple at the airport as Daniela gets ready to embark on a trip to Tanzania on her own. She is traveling there to try to work through the death of her sister, Shuli, by visiting her widower, Yirmi, who is the financial administrator of an archaeological dig in Tanzania. She is anxious to talk with him about the death of her sister three years prior, as well as the tragic death of the couple's son by Israeli friendly fire a few years before that. Meanwhile, Amotz, who is not accustomed to being without his wife, manages the family and their home back in Israel while she is away. The author charts the separation of the couple during the eight-day Hanukkah festival of lights through short chapters narrated by Amotz and Daniela separately.

Some reviewers had mixed feelings about the novel. For example, Avraham Balaban, reviewing the book on the Web site *Haaretz*, commented that "Yehoshua is an experienced writer. He uses a variety of techniques to weave together his parallel plots, and sometimes adds an original insight or two (the way grief affects sexual desire--or the length of telephone calls). But the novel never takes off, and the central motifs disappear in a dense thicket of amusing plot turns, although literary critics and students of literature will probably find it fertile ground for interpretations." Balaban went on to say: "If there is anything genuinely interesting, it lies in hidden corners: for example, Yirmiyahu's story about the Arab

family on whose doorstep his son is shot. As he tells the story, Yirmiyahu drops a veiled hint about his attraction to the young pregnant woman he meets on visiting the house, with her 'sweet Hebrew.'" *Curled Up with a Good Book* reviewer Damien Kelleher felt that the novel "is an infuriating piece of writing. By turns brilliant and dull, too often what should be the best bits are the most boring, and what in another novel would be scenes of lethargy are lifted high on the strength of Yehoshua's characterization." Kelleher concluded: "What, then, to make of *Friendly Fire*? It is neither poor nor overly remarkable and at times seems to be a poor novel interwoven with something very good, or perhaps a good novel riddled with patches of bad."

However, many other reviewers, unlike Balaban and Kelleher, had high praise for the novel. *Mostly Fiction* reviewer Mary Whipple was impressed with *Friendly Fire*: "Intensely realized, thoughtful, and stunning in its unique imagery and symbolism, this unusual novel deals with seemingly everyday issues, offering new insights into the human condition--life, love, and death--while fire serves throughout as a universal symbol of man's humanity and his evolutionary differences from the rest of the animal world." A reviewer on the *Jew Wishes* Web site noted that "Yehoshua brings us a thought-provoking book on many levels. He gives us food for our soul, emotionally, mentally and spiritually speaking. He is masterful at delving into, and describing the internal facets and the minds of others, and bringing believable characters of substance into a novel. From the deepest recesses of Africa, a country in turmoil and a country still developing, to Jerusalem and Tel Aviv in Israel, a developed country, the novel flows with the essence of war, family, identity, and spirituality." Reviewer Rayyan Al-Shawaf wrote in the *St. Petersburg Times* that the author "deftly lays out the social and geographic landscape of contemporary Israel. This includes winningly conveying the cultural particularities of cosmopolitan Tel Aviv and traditional Jerusalem through his characters' behavior." *Washington Post Book World* reviewer Ruth Kluger was also impressed with this novel: "This is a haunting book about mankind's unity in diversity that will resonate for a long time in the minds of its readers."

In *The Retrospective*, Yehoshua explores some themes echoed in his own life. "The book," said Michal Shmulovich, writing in the *Times of Israel*, "tells the story of an elderly filmmaker, Yair Moses, who travels to Spain." The occasion is an exhibition of some of his experimental films from the 1960s. Accompanying him is Ruth, the actress with whom he made many of those films. "In a demonstration of Yehoshua's own storytelling gift," wrote Robert Pinsky in the *New York Times Book Review*, "the novel convincingly describes several movies created by the two men before their rupture. These are fictional movies in at least two senses: They are not documentaries, and they exist only in this novel. The movies' invented plots are symbolic rather than strictly realistic, more Luis Buñuel than Vittorio De Sica. The occasion for telling them is a retrospective of the Israeli director's early work, presented in the Spanish cathedral town of Santiago de Compostela, where the director and his actress companion are guided by a Hebrew-speaking, cinema-loving monk."

Missing from the scene, however, is his collaborator Shaul Trigano, the screenwriter. The exhibition offers "a retrospective of Moses's early films," said a *Publishers Weekly* reviewer, "that forces him to relive his collaboration with ... Trigano." As the book's conclusion approaches, Moses has to seek out Trigano for the first time in years to enlist his help in persuading Ruth to get the medical testing he is sure she needs. "Yehoshua entangles dignity and humiliation, repugnance and rapture, showing us how difficult they become to distinguish," opined Cynthia-Marie O'Brien in *Booklist*.

Critics celebrated Yehoshua's accomplishment in *The Retrospective*. The novel, declared Donald Macintyre in the London *Independent*, is "a compelling meditation on art, memory, love, guilt. A hugely pleasurable read, it shows that in his seventies, A.B. Yehoshua is still producing some of his best work." In *The Retrospective*, stated a contributor to the *New Yorker*, Yehoshua achieves "an autumnal tone as he ruminates on memory's slippery hold on life and on art." "Yehoshua's intelligent and refined novel," wrote a *Kirkus Reviews* contributor, "recalls once again Faulkner's famous dictum that 'the past isn't dead. It isn't even past.'"

Yehoshua once told CA: "I think that my earliest sources [of entertainment] were De Amici's collection of short stories, *The Heart*, which were read to me by my father. When I was a child there was no television and we rarely went to the cinema. Thus the stories that were read to me were my only inspiration. My father had an implacable albeit somewhat sentimental literary taste, and he cherished reading these sad tales to me.

"As he was reading the stories I would totally identify with the suffering of the hero and would wallow in tears. My family used to make fun of my emotional outbursts; especially when I cried anew every time a story was retold. I had to fabricate fresh pretexts for my emotional upheaval: an insult inflicted by a sister, the pain caused by a recent fall and so on.

"It seemed to me then that the ability of a writer to generate emotions in readers by means of a fictional tale was a most wondrous gift; and since I did not lack in imagination, I said to myself: 'I'll give it a try.'

"I read much and learned a lot from many books. As I was a lecturer at the university for many years, where I interpreted many excellent texts to my students, I was fortunate to learn from each text something valuable which permeated my own writings. I have never tried to conceal the traces of such influences. I believe that culture is an open system. Being affected is not a sign of weakness. What is important is to let yourself be influenced by worthwhile works of art and to internalize them fully before you adapt them into your own writing.

"Amongst the writers whose works have been a fruitful source of inspiration to me I always mention Shay Agnon, Faulkner, Camus, and Kafka. I have learned something different and important from each of them.

"I view myself as a writer who usually has a preconceived structure on which the work evolves. At a very early stage, after I identify the psychological and ideological core of the work, I begin to plan its structure. *Mr. Mani*'s structure was conceived in the course of a single night, and the same is true for many of my other books. Normally I know where the work is heading and how it will end, shortly after I begin writing. I then decide on the structural details, i.e., how many chapters the book will have and how the story will divide into them.

"Once the framework is complete, and the direction of the story is more or less clear, creative freedom takes over: the characters take on a life of their own and events begin to develop organically. When I am sure of the structure, the correct 'musical key' begins to clarify in the course of writing the first chapter. Styling the first chapter (usually the first thirty pages), typically takes me a quarter of the time it takes to write the whole novel, as I am painstakingly looking for the correct 'tone' of the work.

"I must admit that I have often been surprised as a writer. Let me recount one: in my book *Open Heart*, I planned for the hero, Benji, to commit suicide at the end of the novel because Dori, an older woman with whom he had fallen in love, rejected him for good. Several major nineteenth century novels end with the suicide of the rejected heroine, and I felt that it was appropriate, at the end of the twentieth century, for at least one man to commit suicide because of scorned love. However, as I neared the end of the novel, I sensed that Benji was not ready to commit suicide. He strongly opposed his preconceived destiny and would not take his life in a credible fashion. I could have used my authorial rights to force him, but as I did not endow him with sufficient self destructive forces early in the novel, he was not ripe for suicide. And so his mother appeared and began to accompany him so as to prevent him from committing suicide. It was then that I realized that sometimes a fictional character may be stronger than its creator.

"The two books I am fond of above all others are *Mr. Mani* and *Molkho*. These books were written close to one another, at the end of the eighties, but their poetics are very different. As far as I know in *Mr. Mani* I used an entirely original form. The novel is composed of five conversations, at five historical juncture. The five dialogues follow the chronology of one family: the Manis. In these conversations only one side of the dialogue is 'heard' while the other one must be guessed. This is an ecstatic novel with a wide epic historical span combining personal and national perspectives. Upon its publication the novel was followed by a surge of research papers.

"*Molcho*, on the other hand, is a most intimate novel, told in the third person. It describes one year in the life of an accountant in the ministry of interior affairs. In this year he mourns the death of his wife who has just died after a long battle with cancer. Even though the topic is gloomy, and the hero is anything but a comic man, the book makes me laugh every time I read it. It seems that the juxtaposition between conscious and unconscious has succeeded in this novel, and has endowed it with a certain depth. This must be one of the reasons why it has become a favorite amongst my more discerning readers."

FURTHER READINGS:

## FURTHER READINGS ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

### BOOKS

*Contemporary Literary Criticism*, Gale (Detroit, MI), Volume 13, 1980, Volume 31, 1985.

Horn, Bernard, *Facing the Fires: Conversations with A.B. Yehoshua*, Syracuse University Press (Syracuse, NY), 1997.

Itzjaki, Yedidya, *Ha-Pesukim ha-semuyim min ha-ayin: al yetsirat A.B. Yehoshua*, Universitat Bar-Ilan (Ramat-Gan, Israel), 1992.

Trevisan Semi, Emanuela, *Morte del senso e sense dalla morte nel primo racconto di A.B. Yehoshua*, Guitina (Florence, Italy), 1989.

### PERIODICALS

*Booklist*, May 1, 1996, Nancy Pearl, review of *Open Heart*, p. 1490; July 1, 2006, Donna Seaman, review of *A Woman in Jerusalem*, p. 35; November 15, 2008, Donna Seaman, review of *Friendly Fire: A Duet*, p. 17; March 1, 2013, Cynthia-Marie O'Brien, review of *The Retrospective*, p. 20.

*Boston Globe*, January 1, 2009, Saul Austerlitz, review of *Friendly Fire*.

*Commentary*, July, 1999, Alan Mintz, review of *A Journey to the End of the Millennium*, p. 84; April, 2004, Hillel Halkin, "Politics and the Israeli Novel," p. 29.

*Economist*, August 5, 2006, "Atonement; New Fiction," review of *A Woman in Jerusalem*, p. 73.

*Entertainment Weekly*, November 7, 2003, Michael Endelman, review of *The Liberated Bride*, p. 74.

*Independent* (London, England), March 16, 2013, Donald Macintyre, review of *The Retrospective*.

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