

Abraham B. Yehoshua

Born: December 09, 1936 in Jerusalem, Israel

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

Nationality: Israeli

Occupation: Novelist

**Contemporary Literary Criticism.** Ed. Jeffrey W. Hunter. Vol. 243. Detroit: Gale, 2008. From *Literature Resource Center*.

Full Text: COPYRIGHT 2008 Gale, Cengage Learning

Table of Contents:

Introduction

Biographical Information

Major Works

Critical Reception

Writings by the Author

Further Readings about the Author

## Introduction

Yehoshua is recognized as one of Israel's best novelists. His short stories, novels, and essays focus on the important political and moral issues surrounding the Arab-Israeli conflict, Zionism, and the Jewish Diaspora. Over the past four decades, critics have praised him as a keen observer of political and social realities in contemporary Israel as well as one of the country's most innovative and insightful writers.

## Biographical Information

Yehoshua was born on December 9, 1936, in Jerusalem, which was located in what was then British-occupied Palestine. His father was a writer, and published thirteen books on Jerusalem's Sephardic culture, material that would later figure prominently in his son's novels. Yehoshua comes from a Sephardic family that has lived in Jerusalem for five generations. As a young man, he served as a paratrooper in the Israeli army for three years in the mid-1950s. In 1961 he received his B.A. from the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, and a year later he graduated from the Teachers College. After a few years of teaching at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem High School, he became director of the Israeli School in Paris in 1963. A year later, he accepted a position as secretary-general of the World Union of Jewish Students. Also in 1964 he was awarded second prize in the Kol-Yisrael competition for his radio script, *The Professor's Secret*. In 1967 Yehoshua moved back to Israel to become dean of students at Haifa University; today he is a professor of literature at the university. In 1968 his short story collection, *Mul ha-ye'arot*, was published. The volume received the Municipality of Ramat-Gan Prize. He was awarded a University of Iowa fellowship in 1969. He has been a visiting scholar and professor at several universities, including Harvard University, University of Chicago, Princeton University, and St. Cross College, Oxford. In addition, he has won several prestigious awards for his contribution to modern Israeli literature, such as the Prime Minister Prize in 1972, the Brenner Prize in 1982, the Alterman Prize in 1986, and the Bialik Prize in 1988. *Shlichuto shel hamemuneh al meshave enosh* (2004; *A Woman in Jerusalem*) won the *Los Angeles Times* Book Prize in 2006. His short stories have been published in numerous anthologies and his work has been translated into fourteen different languages.

## Major Works

The complexity of the Israeli condition is at the heart of Yehoshua's novels. *Me'avev* (1977; *The Lover*), Yehoshua's first published novel, was controversial in Israel for its depiction of Israeli society. The story chronicles the deterioration of an Ashkenazim family through the failing health of the family matriarch and focuses on themes of cowardice, responsibility, trust, and relationships. As in several of his works, Yehoshua did not shy away from examining the discrepancy between idealistic and realistic depictions of modern-day Israel. In 1982 he published *Gerushim me'uharim* (*A Late Divorce*), which chronicles the return of an Israeli intellectual to Israel to obtain a divorce from his wife so that he can marry his pregnant American girlfriend. Yehoshua uses this storyline to explore the issue of the Jewish Diaspora as well as provide an absorbing depiction of the political and cultural state of modern-day Israel. His next novel, *Molkho* (1987; *Five Seasons*), tells the story of Molkho and his relationship with several women. Organized into five chapters, each of which is set in a different season, the novel begins with the death of Molkho's wife from breast cancer after a seven-year struggle. Commentators have perceived the central theme of the book to be man's struggle with his own mortality. Viewed as an epic novel, *Mar Mani* (1990; *Mr. Mani*) begins in 1848 and chronicles six generations of Jewish history told through the story of a Sephardic family, the Manis. The novel is structured as a series of five conversations that reaches

further back into history as the novel progresses. Reviewers have deemed this work a visionary and compelling study of Zionism and the ambiguities of Jewish identity.

Published in 1994, *Shivah me-hodu* (*Open Heart*; also translated as *The Return from India*) follows the life of Benji Rubin, a doctor at a Tel Aviv hospital who is sent to help his boss's daughter, who is dangerously ill in India. While on his mission, Benji falls hopelessly in love with the girl's mother, his boss's wife. Set in the year 999, *Masa el tom ha-elef* (1997; *A Journey to the End of the Millennium*; also translated as *Voyage to the End of the Millennium*) chronicles the loves, travels, and adventures of Ben Attar, a wealthy Sephardic merchant whose lucrative business partnership with his nephew is threatened when his nephew marries a European Jew, Esther-Mina. When she denounces Ben Attar for taking a second wife, Ben Attar embarks on a journey to justify his polygamous actions and religious beliefs. Reviewers have commended Yehoshua's vivid contrast of the cultural and social divisions between the Sephardic and Ashkenazi traditions in the book. *Ha-kalah ha-meshaheret* (2001; *The Liberated Bride*) focuses on the attempts of a middle-aged professor at Haifa University in Israel to find answers regarding his son's sudden divorce and an outbreak of violence in Algeria. Reviewers have praised the novel as a humorous comedy of manners and a provocative exploration of the relationship between class, race, and belief in modern Israel. In *A Woman in Jerusalem* Yulia Ragayev's body rests in a Jerusalem morgue after she is killed by a suicide bomber. Yulia had worked in a local bakery as a cleaning woman. Her corpse remains unidentified for a period of time until the owner of the bakery is forced to investigate due to a newspaper article denouncing the bakery's ownership as callous and uncaring. The bakery owner assigns his director of Human Resources the task of delivering Yulia's body to her mother and son in her native Soviet village.

Yehoshua is also considered a well-known short-fiction writer and essayist. A selection of his most accomplished short stories, *The Continuing Silence of a Poet* (1988) embodies Yehoshua's insights into the formation of Israel and explores the relationship of artists to the state. Reviewers have contended that the volume provides an opportunity for the reader to trace the development of Yehoshua's short fiction. Classified more as Kafkaesque parables, his early stories eschew realism and emphasize the existentialist plight of people who find purpose in dealing with chaos and disaster. In "The Yatir Evening Express," for example, remote villagers derail a passenger train in order to make contact with the outside world. Yehoshua's later stories, characterized as more naturalistic in tone, revolve around the duality of human nature and such themes as alienation, community, and responsibility. In "Three Days and a Child," a man contemplates the murder of his ex-lover's son in order to finagle his way back into her life.

As an essayist, critics have described Yehoshua as an eloquent defender of Zionism and opponent of the Jewish Diaspora. His first few collections of essays, *Bi-zekhut ha-normaliyut* (1980; *Between Right and Right*) and *Ha-kir veha-har* (1989; *The Wall and the Mountain*) reflect on relevant and controversial political and social issues. In his collection of critical essays titled *Kohah ha-nora shel ashmah ketanah* (1998; *The Terrible Power of a Minor Guilt*), Yehoshua laments the lack of moral discussion of literary texts. He addresses this problem by analyzing nine literary works, such as Albert Camus's "The Stranger" and the story of Cain and Abel from the Bible, and examines psychological issues found in the texts as well as the moral development of the protagonists of these stories.

## Critical Reception

Yehoshua is regarded as a major Israeli novelist, short-fiction writer, and essayist. Critics have contended that he has skillfully chronicled the changing tenor of Israeli society during the later years of the twentieth century. They have also admired his exploration of the challenges facing a divided society in which Arab and Jewish factions attempt to forge an uneasy truce. Praised as a bold and innovative writer, Yehoshua veered from the prevailing style of somber realism in Israeli fiction in the 1950s and introduced surrealist elements imitative of S. Y. Agnon and Franz Kafka. Correspondingly, scholars have commented on this departure from mainstream literature in his early work and have traced his artistic development which ranges from an author of symbolic and surrealist fiction to a practitioner of realism in his later stories and novels. Several of Yehoshua's works consider the relationship between Sephardic and Ashkenazim Jews, and commentators have maintained that his Sephardic heritage plays an integral role in his fiction. Recent studies have examined his portrayal of Arabs and his preoccupation with history, particularly the subject of the Holocaust. Commentators have also investigated the profound influence of William Faulkner on Yehoshua's work, particularly his use of multiple narrative voices and perspectives, stream-of-consciousness technique, and interior monologue.

WORKS:

## WRITINGS BY THE AUTHOR:

*Mul ha-ye'arot: Sipurim* (short stories) 1968  
*Three Days and a Child* [translated by Miriam Arad] (short stories) 1970  
*Bi-tehilat kayits--1970* [*Early in the Summer of 1970*] (short stories) 1972  
*Until Winter* (short stories) 1974  
*'Ad horef 1974: Mivhar* (short stories) 1975  
*Me'ahev* [*The Lover*] (novel) 1977

*Bi-zekhut ha-normaliyut [Between Right and Right]* (essays) 1980  
*Gerushim me'uharim: Roman [A Late Divorce: A Novel]* (novel) 1982; revised as *Kantatat ha-gerushim: Roman*, 1991  
*Hafatsim: Mahazeh [Possessions]* (play) 1986  
*Molkho: Roman [Five Seasons]* (novel) 1987  
*The Continuing Silence of a Poet: The Collected Stories of A. B. Yehoshua* (short stories) 1988  
*Ha-kir veva-har: Metsi'uto ha-lo-sifrutit shel ha-sofer be-Yi'sra'el [The Wall and the Mountain]* (essays) 1989  
*Mar Mani: Roman sihot [Mr. Mani]* (novel) 1990  
*Tinokot lailah: Mahazeh bi-shete ma'arakhot* (play) 1992  
*Kol ha-sipurim* (short stories) 1993  
*Shivah me-hodu [Open Heart; also translated as The Return from India]* (novel) 1994  
*Masa el tom ha-elef: Roman bi-sheloshah halakim [A Journey to the End of the Millennium; also translated as Voyage to the End of the Millennium]* (novel) 1997  
*Kohah ha-nora shel ashmah ketanah: Ha-heksher ha-musari shel ha-tekst ha-sifrutit [The Terrible Power of a Minor Guilt: Literary Essays]* (essays) 1998  
*Ha-kalah ha-meshaheret [The Liberated Bride]* (novel) 2001  
*Shlichuto shel ha-memuneh al mash'abe enosh [A Woman in Jerusalem]* (novel) 2004

#### FURTHER READINGS:

## FURTHER READINGS ABOUT THE AUTHOR

### CRITICISM

Band, Arnold J. "Mar Mani: The Archeology of Self-Deception." *Prooftexts* 12, no. 3 (September 1992): 231-44.

Identifies the dominant theme of *Mr. Mani* as Sephardic identity and investigates Yehoshua's treatment of this issue in the novel and in several of his other literary works.

Bayley, John. "Answers without Questions." *New York Review of Books* 39, no. 18 (5 November 1992): 18-20.

Offers a thematic and stylistic overview of *Mr. Mani*.

Devir, Nathan P. "Sexuality, Confrontation and Religiosity: The Aesthetics of Israeli Society in *The Lover* of A. B. Yehoshua." *Rivista di letteratura moderne e comparate* 55, no. 2 (April-June 2002): 163-81.

Analyzes the relationship between the individual and society as reflected in the subtextual commingling of war and sexuality in *The Lover*.

Donoghue, Denis. "Haggling Presences." *New York Review of Books* 36, no. 15 (28 September 1989): 39-43.

Favorable review of *Five Seasons*.

Feld, Ross. "The Restlessness of Souls Drives a Story of Love and Illusion." *Chicago Tribune Book Review* (7 July 1996): 3.

Notes the plodding pace of *Open Heart*, but praises Yehoshua's complex and compelling characters.

Gorenberg, Gershom. "Last Year in Jerusalem." *Washington Post Book World* 22, no. 10 (8 March 1992): 4.

Finds *Mr. Mani* to be "a compelling epic that delves deeply into the link between family and identity, and that challenges the standard Israeli myth of the country's past."

Grafton, Anthony. "The Jew from Tangier." *New York Review of Books* 46, no. 11 (24 June 1999): 24-6.

Examines the portrayal of northern and southern Jews in *A Journey to the End of the Millennium* and calls the novel "a slightly mechanical allegory about the role of European and Sephardic Jews in Israel today."

Handelzalts, Michael. "A. B. Yehoshua." *Publishers Weekly* 239, no. 13 (9 March 1992): 37-8.

Offers a brief overview of Yehoshua's life and work.

Hever, Hannan. "Israeli Fiction and the Occupation." *Tikkun* 18, no. 1 (January-February 2003): 63-8.

Survey of several contemporary Israeli fiction writers, including Yehoshua.

Hoffman, Anne Golomb. "Oedipal Narrative and Its Discontents: A. B. Yehoshua's *Molkho* (*Five Seasons*).\" In *Gender and Text in Modern Hebrew and Yiddish Literature*, edited by Naomi B. Sokoloff, Anne Lapidus Lerner, and Anita Norich, pp. 195-216. New York: The Jewish Theological Seminary, 1992.

Utilizes feminist and Oedipal theory to provide an analysis of *Five Seasons*.

Horn, Bernard. *Facing the Fires: Conversations with A. B. Yehoshua*. Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1997, 198 p.

Collection of interviews with Yehoshua.

Levi, Jonathan. "Trading in Medieval Religious Pluralism." *Los Angeles Times* (4 January 1999): 3.

Contends that *A Journey to the End of the Millennium* "forces us to confront issues at the end of our current millennium that are more important than the lives of any fictional characters."

Mintz, Alan. "The Counterlives." *New Republic* 206, no. 26 (29 June 1992): 41-5.

Focuses on the growing role Yehoshua's Sephardic heritage plays in his work, and views *Mr. Mani* as a Sephardic novel.

Morahg, Gilead. "Testing Tolerance: Cultural Diversity and National Unity in A. B. Yehoshua's *A Journey to the End of the Millennium*." *Prooftexts* 19, no. 3 (September 1999): 235-56.

Addresses questions of national solidarity and cultural diversity in *A Journey to the End of the Millennium*.

Reich, Tova. "Journey through Snow." *Washington Post Book World* (5 February 1989): 7.

Calls *Five Seasons* "a wonderfully engaging, exquisitely controlled, luminous work."

Yehoshua, A. B., and Elliot Perlman. "A. B. Yehoshua Talks to Elliot Perlman." *Meanjin* 55, no. 3 (1996): 437-50.

Yehoshua discusses the Kafkaesque nature of some of his stories, the influence of Anton Chekhov and William Faulkner on his fiction, and the role of myth in Israeli culture and literature.

#### Source Citation (MLA 8<sup>th</sup> Edition)

"Abraham B. Yehoshua." *Contemporary Literary Criticism*, edited by Jeffrey W. Hunter, vol. 243, Gale, 2008. *Literature Resource Center*, go.galegroup.com/ps/i.do?p=GLS&sw=w&u=ucinc\_main&v=2.1&id=GALE%7CH1119300000&it=r&asid=9a765d8578b95696a4172fa7919df833. Accessed 24 Jan. 2017.

**Gale Document Number:** GALE|H1119300000