

LAUNDRY

By Suzane Adam

Translated by Becka Mara McKay

First published in Hebrew by Keter, 2000

English translation published by Autumn Hill Books, 2008

Study guide by Ilana Kurshan

ABOUT THE BOOK:

This novel is the story of Ildiko and her husband Ephraim, a young couple building their home in Israel in the wake of their parents' experiences in the Holocaust. At the novel's beginning, Ildiko is beset by hysteria, though no one knows why. Over the course of the novel, she tries to explain to her husband Ephraim the tragedy that has so deeply disturbed her. Her story takes us back to Transylvania of the 1960s, where as a five-year-old girl she is terrorized by her babysitter Yutzi, whom she idolizes. Soon after, her parents immigrate to Israel, where they begin their new lives in a transit camp in Ashkelon. Ildiko is given a new name, Chavatzet, and develops her interest in painting. Once her family moves to their own home, they hire a gardener named Ephraim, also the son of a survivor. Ephraim falls in love with Ildiko, takes her on a trip to the Kinneret, and then marries her, and the two begin their young lives together. The story comes full circle as Ildiko relates the mysterious, violent incident that has triggered her present hysteria, a culmination of the traumas of her past.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Suzane Adam was born in Satu Mare, Transylvania, and came to Israel at the age of ten. She studied medieval art, photography and etching, and later graphic art and multimedia. She has taught art and creative thinking, image consulting and computerized commercial presentation. Adam has worked as an illustrator and invented games for one of Israel's largest toy firms. She began writing seriously in 1996, and has since received the Kugel Prize for her novel, *Janis's Mother* (2006) and the Prime Minister's Prize (2007).



QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:

1. Ildiko relates that as a five-year-old child in Transylvania, she did not learn geography, except that she knew that “the Jews had Palestine” (p. 7). What else does Ildiko know about Palestine as a child? From whom does she learn? As a five-year-old child, what (if anything) did you know about Israel?
2. How does the young Ildiko understand the relationship between Jews and non-Jews? With whom does she spend most of her time? Is she more comfortable living in a place where Jews are in the minority or in the majority? Do you share her preferences? ?
3. How would you compare Ildiko’s experiences at school in Communist Transylvania with her experiences in school in Ashkelon?
4. What are you able to understand from Ildiko’s memories of her parents’ attempt to emigrate to Israel? What sort of process did they have to go through? Have you heard similar stories about people who tried to emigrate from Communist countries before the fall of the Iron Curtain?
5. How does Ildiko’s family travel to Israel? What are her earliest impressions, beginning with the airport at Lod (p. 89)? How are she and her family welcomed? If you have been to Israel, do you remember your first trip and how you were received when you arrived at the airport?
6. Ildiko relates that when they arrive in Israel, her father explains to her that it is a modern country. What does he mean by modern? Do you think of Israel as a modern country? Why or why not?
7. Ildiko relates that shortly after they come to Israel, “my parents were worried about how we were going to manage, they was a recession, and they also had heated discussions about money. Take it from the Germans, don’t take it” (p. 99). Ildiko’s parents are discussing the reparations that the German government paid to the families of Holocaust victims after World War II. Why are her parents unsure of how to deal with the situation? How much does Ildiko understand of this?
8. How does Ildiko’s family and school commemorate Holocaust Remembrance Day? Do you know anything about how this day is commemorating in present-day Israel? (How) do you mark Holocaust day in your life?



9. How would you describe Ildiko's experience in the Israeli army? Why is it so positive for her? Do you know anyone who was in the Israeli army? (How) do they speak of their experiences?
10. Ephraim speaks on several occasions of his love for the poetry of Rachel (1890-1931), a famous Israeli poet who immigrated from Russia to Palestine at the age of nineteen and lived in a kibbutz on the Kinneret. Why is her poetry so meaningful to Ephraim? What is he referring to by his "Kinneret test"? Does Ildiko pass this test? Can you remember ever having created a similar such test for the people who come into your life?
11. Why is Ephraim's mother so eager to hear about the experiences of Ildiko's parents in the Holocaust (p. 213)? In what way does the Holocaust cast a shadow over the events of this novel?

REVIEW QUOTES:

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

"Burns with feverish menace."
—*Zeek: A Journal of Jewish Thought and Culture*

"Suzane Adam has crafted *Laundry* as a study in deferral and a testimony to the power of the narrative. The book deftly balances the framework of a psychological drama with a deep lyricism.... A novel so compelling and beautifully wrought that we hardly notice when nearly two hundred and thirty pages have passed before we are brought to the dark heart of Ildiko's action, the climax of her story—which is, we realize, what got us here in the first place. *Laundry* is a quick-paced, intelligent novel and a nuanced reflection on love, obsession and the complex depths of memory."
—Diana Thow, *Words Without Borders*



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