FOREWORD REVIEWS THE INDIE WE LOVE.

Dearest Anne: A Tale of Impossible Love
Judith Katzir
Dalya Bilu, translator
The Feminist Press
978-1-55861-575-5
(April 30, 2008)

Through the medium of diaries addressed to Anne Frank, Israeli novelist Katzir portrays a passionate relationship between an adolescent girl and her married female literature teacher, as well as offering a glimpse of life in 1970s Israel. The author has written several books, including *Matisse has the Sun in his Belly*, winner of Israel's Prime Minister's prize and the French WIZO prize, and her work has been translated into several languages. Prolific translator Bilu has received the Jewish Book Council award for Hebrew-English translation.

At thirteen Rivi Shenhar embarks upon her two-year affair with twenty-six-year-old Michaela Berg, resulting in a sexual and cultural awakening. Frequent falling into bed is interspersed with listening to Debussy, discussing Leah Goldberg poetry, and reading *The Magic Mountain*. "Your love," Michaela tells Rivi, "Gives me the strength to get up every morning and go to teach gladly, and I would like my love to give you too the strength to study and write and develop." With Michaela's doctor husband often working and Rivi's divorced parents uninvolved with their daughter, the two enjoy plenty of uninterrupted time together.

In addition to detailing the relationship, the author provides a snapshot of an era both familiar and foreign to American readers. Rivi's mauve maxi skirt patterned with tiny flowers and Michaela's Marianne Faithfull record easily would be right at home in the US. Conversely, the Holocaust Day memorial ceremony at Rivi's school and the National Service Week outing at the kibbutz picking grapefruit are experiences unique to Israel. Political highlights such as Egyptian president Saadat's visit to the Israeli Parliament appear in Rivi's diary, too.

Free love abounds in 1970s' Israel, and rarely is the morality of this relationship addressed. Michaela admits to sometimes wondering whether she is affecting her husband, and Rivi's later lover suggests the dark side of pedophilia. Rivi responds defensively, "She isn't a lesbian at all, it hit us both like a bolt of lightning. We were a private and unique case of love." The overall tone is often casual and innocent, such as when Rivi begins a relationship with a boy her own age, believing that it has no impact on what exists between her and Michaela; in fact,

she thinks, “Michaela loves me so much that I’m sure she’ll understand, and she’ll even be happy for me.”

Readers might balk at the high volume of explicit sex appearing throughout the book. Beyond that potential hurdle are multiple literary allusions, lessons about choices, and a distinctive coming-of-age story.

Beth Hemke Shapiro