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General

The Loves of Judith
Meir Shalev
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In his third novel, Shalev has composed a story that moves with the awesome and natural authority of a river. A master of his craft, Shalev spins words into swirling eddies, lulls sentences past grassy embankments and hurls entire chapters over thunderous waterfalls. Well known as a television and radio moderator, a columnist for a leading Israeli newspaper, and for his widely translated novels, Blue Mountain and Esau, Shalev has already gained international recognition.

The story takes shape through the mouth of Zayde, a boy whose mother, Judith, died when he was ten and whose father's name no one knows. Three men claim Zayde as their son and each contributes to his welfare as well as his physical attributes: from Moshe, he inherits a farm and blonde hair; from Jacob a house, empty canary cages and drooping; and from Globerman, money and very large feet.

The events that give rise to Zayde's peculiar beginnings are revealed to him over a period of thirty years and four elaborate meals hosted by Jacob. Dozens of fantastic and unexpected characters pass through the history of Judith, each mixing their own mythic stories into the stew. The reader meets an albino bookkeeper who appears mysteriously in the village and begins breeding canaries, an elder woman who is eternally pregnant and never able to give birth, and an Italian POW who convinces the village he is a Jew from Galilee by using his talent for imitating others. Through all of these stories woven into the novel, three couples appear over and over again: love and loss, grief and regret, and hope and fate. All of these characters are revealed to the reader brilliant imagery: In a moment of tragic death Shalev writes, "But on that rainy day, on the fall of the overturned wagon in the wadi, time didn't pay attention to … conjectures—it didn't slow down and it didn't speed up, it just passed by in its path, huge and nonchalant."

The Loves of Judith is an exquisite novel that measurees its time with the phases of the

moon, of the seasons, of birth and of death. It is a woman's story and a man's story, and is recommended to anyone who loves literature.

Jennifer Sperry