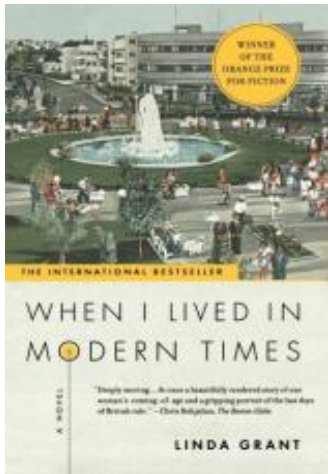


When I Lived in Modern Times

by Linda Grant



About the Book

It is April 1946. For a weary and exhausted Europe, it is a time to begin picking up the pieces of the past, and for the armies of displaced persons on the move to slowly return home-if they still have one. But for Evelyn Sert, a young twenty-year-old woman from London standing on the deck of a ship bound for Palestine, it is a time of adventure and a time of change when anything seems possible. Evelyn is quickly caught up in the spirited, chaotic churning of her new, strange country. Unsure of herself and where she belongs in this exotic world whose only constant is change, she will first join a kibbutz, then move on to the teeming metropolis of Tel Aviv to find her own home, and a collection of friends as eccentric and disparate as the city itself. Ultimately, she will find love with a man who is not what he seems to be, as she is swept up as an unwitting spy in an underground army for a nation fighting to be born.

Discussion Guide

1. Discuss the idea, as reflected in the title, of the past being more modern than the present.
2. The novel opens with the words "When I look back I see myself at twenty. I was at an age when anything seemed possible." How different, if at all, would this novel been if Evelyn had been twenty-five? Thirty-five?
3. How is art in its many forms, including music, painting, and architecture, used to express the concept of modernity in this book?
4. What are possible motives for Evelyn's "Uncle Joe" to arrange her emigration to Palestine?
5. Evelyn's life-both in England and Palestine-is shaped by four very different men. Discuss the viewpoints of Palestine as shown in the characters of "Uncle Joe," Meier, Johnny, and Herr Blum.

6. How alike or different are Evelyn's encounters with anti-Semitism in England and in Palestine?
7. Mid-novel, Evelyn states that she "discovered there are two countries called Palestine." Do you agree, and if so, what are the two?
8. How do the people she meets and her experiences change Evelyn: in England, at the kibbutz, en route to Tel Aviv, and in Tel Aviv?
9. On page 180, Evelyn says that "Because I was English and not American, came from a place with a continuous past, I did not understand then that when immigrants settle, they try to rebuild the land of their origins." Do you agree with Evelyn's observation?
10. As the novel draws to a close, the author creates a conversation between the younger and the older Evelyn. The young Evelyn asks the elder "Why are you so interested in the past? It's the future that counts," to which the elder replies, "The past is everything. You'll see." Both in the context of the novel and out of it, which Evelyn Evelyn do you agree with?

Author Bio

Critical Praise

"A beautifully written, passionate novel. "

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