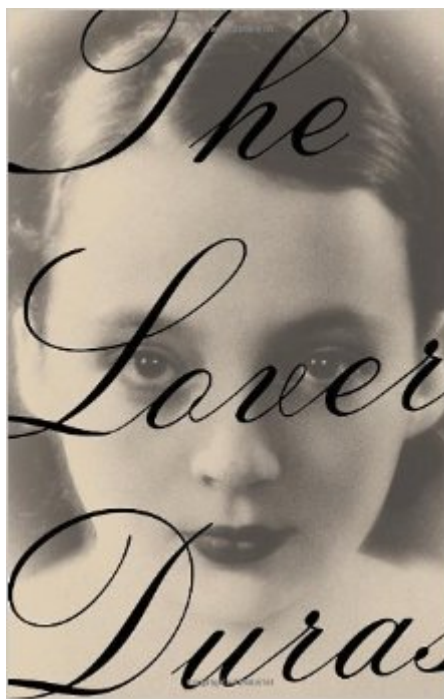


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The Lover



Synopsis

An international best-seller with more than one million copies in print and a winner of France's Prix Goncourt, *The Lover* has been acclaimed by critics all over the world since its first publication in 1984. Set in the prewar Indochina of Marguerite Duras's childhood, this is the haunting tale of a tumultuous affair between an adolescent French girl and her Chinese lover. In spare yet luminous prose, Duras evokes life on the margins of Saigon in the waning days of France's colonial empire, and its representation in the passionate relationship between two unforgettable outcasts. Long unavailable in hardcover, this edition of *The Lover* includes a new introduction by Maxine Hong Kingston that looks back at Duras's world from an intriguing new perspective—that of a visitor to Vietnam today. (With an introduction by Maxine Hong Kingston; translated from the French by Barbara Bray.)

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

The Lover by Marguerite Duras is a well written book, structured like dreams and memories rather than a chronological or logical sequence of events and impressions. The book is short, a little over a 100 pages, and is written in short impressionistic paragraphs that move from present to various days in the past. A French family in Indochina is reduced to working-poor status due to the death of the father and the mother's attempts to maintain the family while working as a school administrator. Yet this family is full of tensions since the mother favors the worthless older brother at the expense of the middle-child sister and younger brother. This mother barely can keep food on the table while trying to rescue the older son from debts, fights, and other problems. This allows the daughter to

grow up too fast, acting as the mother for the emotionally neglected younger brother. The young woman sometimes is the narrator and sometimes the story is told in third person. Duras pulls this off with ease. What happens to girls that are forced to grow up too fast? This is really the theme of this wonderful book. For girls that are put in this position make bad choices and are exposed to too much adult pain too soon. Living in a boarding school with little supervision, she wears make-up too soon and dresses provocatively too soon. Duras hints that the young woman, though still a virgin, is contemplating prostitution. Wearing her mother's tight rust colored silk dress, with gold lame high heels, and a floppy man's hat, she is spotted by the son of a Chinese millionaire. This man is 12 years older than she, making her 15 and thus making him 27. Their affair begins with her first act of intercourse. She is so naive that she is surprised that she bleeds when penetrated.

I read this book in one day. This was my first introduction to Duras. What an incredible story! Her writing is like poetry, like a song, filled with lyrical descriptions of her surroundings as well as her feelings, filled with gorgeous imagery and constant foreshadowing towards the demise of her own family. The story itself would be totally unacceptable by today's (or the entire 20th century's) standards, being that of an illicit love affair, set in prewar Indochina (today's Vietnam) between a 15-year-old French girl and a 27-year-old Chinese son of a millionaire. However, it is what it is, it happened, and the way the story is told is beautiful and impassioned. What's most amazing here is the evolution of the girl's psyche. In many ways, she was obviously mature way beyond her years, fatalistic and dark, all brought on by the loneliness and frustration of life with her mother and brothers. At the same time, she was naive in the sense that she thought she was strong enough to handle this affair without falling in love. The girl tried to convince herself that money was the only objective in this affair (when in fact, money was the only reason why her mother(!) allowed her to continue see her lover--ouch!). Duras' writing reminds me of that of Maxine Hong Kingston's (or is it vice versa?). Many thoughts are repeated throughout the pages, like refrains or choruses. She switches the narrative from first to third person. She switches time frames from past to present and back again. It's as if the whole novel was written completely stream-of-consciousness, or possibly a parallel to the unpredictable horrors of her own mother's madness.

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