



The Map of Love: A Novel

By Ahdaf Soueif

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Booker Prize Finalist

Here is an extraordinary cross-cultural love story that unfurls across Egypt, England, and the United States over the course of a century. Isabel Parkman, a divorced American journalist, has fallen in love with a gifted and difficult Egyptian-American conductor. Shadowing her romance is the courtship of her great-grandparents Anna and Sharif nearly one hundred years before.

In 1900 the recently widows Anna Winterbourne left England for Egypt, an outpost of the Empire roiling with political sentiment. She soon found herself enraptured by the real Egypt and in love with Sharif Pasha al-Baroudi, an Egyptian nationalist. When Isabel, in an attempt to discover the truth behind her heritage, reenacts Anna's excursion to Egypt, the story of her great-grandparents unravels before her, revealing startling parallels for her own life.

Combining the romance and intricate narrative of a nineteenth-century novel with a very modern sense of culture and politics—both sexual and international—Ahdaf Soueif has created a thoroughly seductive and mesmerizing tale.

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

Ahdaf Soueif's *The Map of Love* is a massive family saga, a story that draws its readers into two moments in the complex, troubled history of modern Egypt. The story begins in 1977 in New York. There Isabel Parkman discovers an old trunk full of documents--some in English, some in Arabic--in her dying mother's apartment. Incapable of deciphering this stash by herself, she turns to Omar al-Ghamrawi, a man with whom she is falling in love. And Omar directs her in turn to his sister Amal in Cairo.

Together the two women begin to uncover the stories embedded in the journal of Lady Anna Winterbourne, who traveled to Egypt in 1900 and fell in love with Sharif Pasha al-Barudi, an Egyptian nationalist. To their surprise, they stumble across some unsuspected connections between their own families. Less surprising, perhaps, is the persistence of the very same issues that dogged their ancestors: colonialism, Egyptian nationalism, and the clash of cultures throughout the Middle East. The past, however, does offer some semblance of omniscience:

That is the beauty of the past; there it lies on the table: journals, pictures, a candle-glass, a few books of history. You leave it and come back to it and it waits for you--unchanged. You can turn back the pages, look again at the beginning. You can leaf forward and know the end. And you tell the story that they, the people who lived it, could only tell in part.

With its multiple narratives and ever-shifting perspectives, *The Map of Love* would seem to cast some doubt on even the most confident historian's version of events. Yet this subtle and reflective tale of love does suggest that the relations between individuals can (sometimes) make a difference. "I am in an English autumn in 1897," Amal confesses at one point, "and Anna's troubled heart lies open before me." Here, perhaps, is a hint about how we should read Soueif's staggering novel, using words as a means to travel through time, space, and identity. --Vicky Lebeau

From Publishers Weekly

CoincidenceApersonal, political and culturalArules in this burnished, ultra-romantic Booker Prize finalist. In 1997, Isabel Parkman, a recently divorced American journalist, travels to Egypt to research about the impending millennium. But her interest in Egypt has more to do with her crush on Omar al-Ghamrawi, a passionate and difficult older Egyptian-American conductor and political writer, than with her work. Once in Egypt, Isabel neglects her project for a more personal investigation. Lugging with her a mysterious trunk of papers bequeathed to her by her mother, Isabel turns up at Omar's sister Amal's house in Cairo and explains that Omar had said she might be interested in translating the papers. As the two soon discover, Isabel is Amal's distant cousin, and the papers belonged to their mutual great-grandmother, Anna Winterbourne. As a young English widow, Anna traveled to turn-of-the-century Egypt, then an English colony, and fell in love with an Egyptian man. "I cannot help thinking that when she chose to step off the well-trodden paths of expatriate life, Anna must have secretly wanted something out of the ordinary to happen to her," muses Amal, who begins to realize that the same applies to her own life. Soueif (*In the Eye of the Sun*) writes simply and, on occasion, beautifully. Anna's journal entries are particularly evocative. Sticklers for narrative detail might chafe at the number of incredible coincidences, including a bizarre twist involving Isabel's mother and Omar, and forsaken plot devices (Isabel's millennium project is never mentioned after her arrival in Egypt). On balance, however, Soueif weaves the stories of three formidable women from vastly different times and countries into a single absorbing tale. 6-city author tour. (Sept.)

From [Booklist](#)

In parallel love stories set nearly 100 years apart, Soueif combines politics and romance in something of an eternal spiral connecting two families and two cultures. Isabel travels from New York to Cairo with a trunk containing diaries and possessions of her great-grandmother, Anna Winterbourne. Omar, a conductor of international fame (and the man Isabel loves), refers her to his sister Amal for help in understanding the contents. What he fails to tell her is that they are distant cousins: Sharif, the man who becomes Anna's husband, is Amal and Omar's great-uncle. And so, in turn, we learn of Anna's life and love for Sharif and her adopted country and of Isabel and Omar. Amal, the link between the two worlds, untangles the old story and entangles a new one. By juxtaposing the past with the present, the prejudices and politics are contrasted with each other and are shown to be remarkably similar. This, a very romantic book with Anna as its most interesting character, offers insights into both historic and modern Egypt. *Danise Hoover*

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Users Review

From reader reviews:

Claude Gonzalez:

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Brandon Macdonald:

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Soledad Neeley:

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