

Just a dream



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

“[She] starts to sort it out, to turn over the day, scraps, feelings, words and laughter, all are like a thin layer of rubbish that [she] gathers up and throws into the basket” (9). In A. B. Yehoshua’s novel *The Lover*, Asya utilizes dreams to release her inner-tensions. Yehoshua employs Asya’s dreams as symbolic, prophetic mechanisms that parallel the subtle, emotional conflicts within the characters and her self. Once Asya is deprived of her lover, Gabriel, she is consumed by his absence and immediately begins to dream about him. The first of Asya’s dreams described in the novel reflects her unconscious desire to reunite with Gabriel and abandon her family. The dream places Asya within a military encampment as an educator on a fieldtrip, paralleling Gabriel’s own military excursion (14). Like the dreamer, the reader is also unable to make the connection between the dream and Gabriel, because both are uncertain of Gabriel’s military career at the novel’s onset. “The faces of children from Dafi’s class” that Asya encounters are analogous to the “young, boyish faced” men in Gabriel’s platoon (14, 297). While Dafi’s class attends compulsory education, the soldiers have been forced into military service. Dafi’s class also creates a commentary on the Zionist movement. Though the Zionist movement recently catalyzed the creation of an Israeli state, the Israeli’s must now defend their independence in the Yom Kippur War. The field trip in Asya’s dream exposes the young children to war, corrupting their naivety and innocence. These children must be prepared; they must sacrifice their childhoods for war, because most Israelis believe their independence will continually be contested, regardless of the outcome of the Yom Kippur War. Like Gabriel, Asya is lost within the encampment; she does not understand her purpose, but eventually understands her position with the guidance of a superior. Asya is teaching “

the importance of history” to war-weary adults who have had their educations cut short by war (15). The fact that Asya is teaching history’s importance in her dream, presents another remark on Israeli independence. Israel is a multiracial Jewish state, an oasis within a desert of intolerant Arab nations. Asya, like most Israelis, believes there will never be a decisive victory for Israeli independence; there is a seemingly innate hatred between Arabs and Jews, as evidenced by their historical tensions. Asya’s search for a missing piece of her past parallels the quest of her father. While Asya searches for Gabriel, her father searches the radio “ for the mention of Israel or his own name in the distant void” (47). Asya’s first dream gives the reader insight into the cause of her father’s ignominious deposal as head of the Ministry of Information and the rationale behind his search to re-link himself with his past. Again, the dream occurs before Asya’s father’s former occupation is revealed, thus inviting the reader to ignore the description. “ It’s an old man wearing a hat and he’s walking down the wadi with such determination, receding in the distance toward the enemy lines. My heart stands still. He looks like my father. Is he here too? Does he belong here or not? Walking erect and excitedly down the rock-strewn ravine” (15). The fact that her father is wearing a hat would suggest he is attempting a clandestine operation. The hat will cover his face, thus helping him to conceal his identity. Asya’s father is crossing enemy lines alone, with determination; this suggests he may be sharing sensitive intelligence information with the aggressing nations for compensation, because the head of the intelligence department would not cross enemy lines alone during wartime, that is the task of a low level operative. After his removal from office, Asya’s father is convinced “ that he is right, that an injustice has been done to him” (46).

Perhaps he had hoped to end the war through peaceful, diplomatic means. Then, fear within a dream created by fear. Asya is overwhelmed with anxiety as her heart “stands still.” This suggests that Asya noticed her father’s illegal actions in real-time, and she is now haunted by their replay within her dreams. Her father is excited, implying that he believed he would not be caught, though he was. Asya’s father walking down a ravine is symbolic of the difficult path he was forced to take to share intelligence secrets with other nations. War does not leave Asya’s thoughts. Asya’s second dream portrays the unconscious guilt she suffers from neglecting Dafi during wartime. Asya is trapped within her dream world after Gabriel’s departure; this causes harm to Dafi’s health as she becomes an insomniac. War creates civil disobedience. “A gang of murders settles private scores within the city,” and Asya is afraid for her daughter (29). This coincides with real-time, where Dafi is often alone but not forgotten. Despite Asya’s worries, Dafi arrives safely, and the final segment of the dream becomes predictive of Adam eventually finding Gabriel. A murderer follows Dafi into the home; the murderer’s uninvited arrival parallels Gabriel’s unwelcome arrival from Dafi. Adam eventually subversively expels Gabriel from the home by making him register for the military; this is symbolic of Adam killing the murderer with a screwdriver. While Gabriel is a threat to Adam, Gabriel also deprived Dafi of a segment of her childhood by depriving her of her mother. By expelling Gabriel, Adam benefits Dafi as well. Asya screams at Adam, their “lives are ruined” (30). Asya’s reaction foreshadows Adam’s eventual use of a screwdriver to find Gabriel and end his wife’s “ruined life” (30). The screwdriver may also foretell Adam’s eventual affair with Tali and the murderer may actually signify Tali, who has come to disrupt Asya’s home.

The screwdriver may be phallic. The fact that Adam “ is trying to hide the big screwdriver” may foretell how he attempts to cover-up his relationship with Tali (30). In Asya’s next dream, she involuntarily explores her strained and loveless marriage. Asya is driving Adam’s car, which likely represents her marriage with Adam. The seat in the car is low, restricting her visibility. Like a marriage, Asya is forced to “ drive [both the marriage and car] on instincts” (57). When Asya gets out of the car, she observes “ the vague dents,” but believes Adam will repair them (57). This implies their marriage is repairable, but Adam must take initiative. When Asya finally arrives at home, her dream becomes prophetic. There “ are people in the house,” they represent mourners (57). Yigal has died, which catalyzes the sudden chain reaction that destroys Asya’s relationship with Adam. Upon closer inspection, the car is destroyed, foretelling the marriage’s destruction after Yigal’s unexpected death. Throughout the novel, Adam attempts to solve problems with money; a wrecked car would not cause “ pain in his face” (58). His loveless marriage has consumed him, “ he has torn out his beard by the roots, scalped himself” (58). The self mutilation of Adam’s beard symbolizes his loss of identity within his confused state after Yigal’s death. Asya’s inability to look at the remnants of Adam’s beard reflects an unconscious blame. Asya blames Adam for Yigal’s death since Adam made the special hearing aide and Yigal is under Adam’s care when he is killed. The dream could also represent Asya’s affair with Gabriel. There are obstacles to overcome within the affair, but like the car, “ nothing could stop [them]” (57). Then the war comes, and the car comes to a halt. The “ people in the house” may reflect that people within the community know of the affair, but are unwilling to become involved in the matter (57). “ The capsized car”

foreshadows the destruction of the affair (58). The car's destruction also indicates that Adam knows of the affair and foresees its end with the onset of the Yom Kippur War. Adam "repairs the car himself" by sending Gabriel to enlist in the military (57). Asya's inability to look at Adam's changed physique echoes that Asya unconsciously wishes that Adam were fighting instead of Gabriel. Asya's next dream, like several of her other dreams, foretells Adam's affair with Tali. Asya is alone in a classroom, paralleling the solitary setting of the hospital where Adam and Tali consummate their affair. There "is a pile of sand still in the corner," suggestive of the inability of Adam and Tali to make love on the beach (83). Asya "is getting nervous," eager to begin her lesson, just as Adam is anxious to sleep with Tali (84). The pubescent boy, the only student in Asya's class, "takes down his trousers" and "stands in the corner naked," just as Tali "stands in the corner like a trapped animal," "exposing her little naked body" for Adam (84, 261). Yehoshua attempts to make the parallel more obvious when Asya wants to tell the boy to "come here," which is what Adam says to Tali to catalyze the affair (84, 258). Asya's inability to escape her dream world causes her husband to feel insecure. Adam's affair with Tali is an achievement of manliness and lust as he "becomes a lover, in search of a lover" (262). The student's "sickly face," which is also used to characterize Gabriel, leaves the possibility that the student represents Gabriel and Asya's helpless desire for his love (84). Even though Asya is married, she feels "a mixture of repulsion and desire" for the boy; Asya experiences this same lust when she encounters Gabriel (84). When the boy finally leaves, Asya feels "completely empty;" the same way she feels after Gabriel's departure (84). Asya's inability to escape her dream world makes her lust for Gabriel blatantly

apparent to Adam and Dafi, who are victimized by her selfishness. Asya's subsequent dream provides insight into her affair with Gabriel. Adam, an expert mechanic who cares for Asya but is unable to fulfill her emotional and physical needs, parallels the "wonderful dentist," who is unable to perform for Asya after falling asleep. While Adam provides the site for Asya's affair, the dentist supplies the office for Gabriel to use his "instruments" on Asya's mouth (110). While Gabriel is hired by Adam as a metaphorical prostitute who is supposed to "assist his wife with translations," he is also hired by the dentist in an assistive capacity. While Adam is blind to his wife's affair, the dentist is asleep to his assistant's actions. Gabriel's instruments are undoubtedly phallic. Through his use of language such as "his face tense with concentration" and "sliding gently into the hollow," Yehoshua makes Asya's dental experience metaphoric of sex (110). Dental assistants such as Gabriel would not touch a patient, yet Asya "is overwhelmed by the sweetness of his light touch" (110). In the final lines of the dream, Asya questions why she has come to the dentist's office, which reflects her inner tension over the affair. The final lines may also reflect that Asya is unsatisfied by Gabriel but fears his departure. She fears "disappointing him," but has no qualms with being a lifeless amoeba towards her husband's sexual desires. Asya's dream's portrayal of Adam as a sleeping dentist is also predictive of his affair with Tali. Tali arouses the sleeping dentist and inspires him to utilize his instruments. The hospital that Adam and Tali make love in parallels a dentist's office. Everything in each room is sterile. Like a skilled dentist, Adam mechanically and methodically performs on Tali's "little naked body" (261). Tali is paralyzed, she lies there like a dental patient, waiting for the pain to end. In Asya's sixth dream, Yigal, whose death

precipitated Asya's affair and left an emotional void within the family, is being displaced by Na'im, who is also assisting Asya in finding her lover. Asya is haunted by the memory of Yigal, but Na'im has provided Asya with the physical imagery and personality to create an adolescent projection of Yigal within her dreams. In Asya's dream, Yigal "rides back and forth on the broad pavement" with his bicycle, "he is tall and thin," unknowingly taunting his mother who has been emotionally troubled since his death (180). This parallels Na'im, who tests the patience of a Jewish family that has been conditioned to hate him and his people. While Na'im is hindered by race, Yigal is hindered by his disability. Asya's family accepts both of them despite each of their social stigmas. Yigal's bicycle is "very colorful, shining, loaded with gears, cog wheels and coils of wire," reflecting Yigal's desire for social acceptance and paralleling Na'im's quest (180). Na'im has adapted to Jewish culture through subtractive assimilation. Na'im blends in amongst Jews, they no longer recognize that he is an Arab while Yigal attends regular school and people sometimes forget that he is deaf. Then, in the middle of the dream, Asya "realizes that it isn't Yigal but some kind of replacement that Adam has brought for [her]," which is obviously Na'im (180). This reflects Asya's unconscious resistance to forgetting her lost son while also further emphasizing Na'im's ability to blend in amongst Jews. Asya then calls after "Yigal's replacement," signifying her unconscious desperation for a son, a legacy. On the surface, Asya refuses Adam this legacy, for fear of losing another son or perhaps because she is too old, and suffers from barrenness. "[Na'im] hears her and understands, but takes advantage of his deafness to ignore" Asya, this is representative of the special bond between Adam and Yigal that has now vicariously survived through Na'im (181). The

dream shows that even though Asya would like to penetrate this obscure relational bubble, her attempts are unsuccessful. The conclusion of Asya's dream foretells Na'im's eventual, unexpected departure from the family and the impregnation of Dafi. When Na'im leaves the family, it is unexpected, much like the death of Yigal. Na'im resigns from his position as caretaker while Yigal resigns from life. The seed that Na'im leaves in Dafi's womb is symbolized by the departed "replacement" that leaves behind a transistor that picks up a newscaster saying "life... she has come to life" (181). The dream that follows this one drifts from the genres of the previous dreams. In Asya's next dream, she parallels the formation of African republics with the formation of Israeli. Like Israelis, the African brags of his "renewed land" (222). "The new settlements are being built" in Africa and Israel even though the rest of the world will not invest in either land (222). Yehoshua explicitly describes the African man as "a giant negro," eliminating the possibility of the man representing Libya or Egypt from the Yom Kippur War (222). The "giant negro" is likely from central Africa, where Africans are generally looked at with condescending sneers by their neighbors, just as Israeli's are generally despised throughout the Middle East (222). Asya is dreaming about this because she is obviously troubled by this "renewed land," because its preservation has caused Gabriel's departure. Then the African shows her a "long, obstinate and definitive line" within a picture (222). The line is symbolic of several things. One possibility is that the line represents the equality Israel and Africa are striving for. The other possibility is that the line represents the senseless arbitrariness of the lines that make up the boundaries of countries. Wars are generally over boundaries; the Yom Kippur War is no different. Israel expanded its borders in the Yom Kippur

War, and this may be upsetting to Asya, whose lover is fighting in the war. In Asya's subsequent dream, she once again becomes consumed by Gabriel's disappearance. Asya's dream takes place in the kitchen, where she is preparing fish. The vivid imagery of Asya "slicing the white bodies to remove the inner organs, [her] hands covered with blood and guts," metaphorically parallels the atrocities of war experienced by Gabriel (232). The reader is made clear of this symbolism when Gabriel is suddenly placed within the dream. Then, the dream foreshadows Gabriel's discovery. Asya is angry, desperate for his love, she is hoping that "perhaps he will touch" her (232). Gabriel's appearance in the dream prophesizes that he is still alive and that Adam will find him. In her dream, Gabriel has a "matured face," symbolic of the atrocities of war catalyzing his aging process (232). When Gabriel leaves, Asya viciously attacks the unchanging "calendar with blood stained hands" (232). The blood on Asya's hands is symbolic of her guilt for allowing Gabriel to enlist; she would feel responsible for his death. The immutable calendar is symbolic of the unending search for Gabriel that has seemingly halted the progress of Asya's life. In her final dream, Asya prophesizes the impregnation of Dafi while simultaneously emphasizing her fear of interminable war. The dream begins with Asya and her family trapped within Afghanistan, amongst "fields of corn (wheat)," even though Afghanistan is generally characterized as a desert land where irrigation is difficult (265). Wheat symbolizes life, even though the historical context of the dream places the family within an intense military conflict between the Soviet Union and the Taliban regime that has left only twelve percent of the region capable of cultivation. "Not a seed of man but a seed of corn (wheat)" has impregnated Dafi; this signifies Dafi's susceptibility to

pregnancy as a teenager (265). Dafi will “conceive a field mouse, something frightful,” representing the “poison” of Na'im's Arab seed within Dafi's body. “Adam settles the entire business without consulting” Asya, this parallels the final scene, when Adam takes Na'im back to his village without asking for opinions. Asya's dreams provide readers with a glance into the future direction of the storyline while subtly addressing otherwise unanswerable questions within the novel and attacking two principles that were responsible for Israeli independence: Zionism and war. Dreams operate on the unconscious. Asya's dreams attack the reader's unconscious. Without conscious and unconscious critical analysis of Asya's dreams, the reader is left with many ambiguous answers and character connections that can only be solidified through her dreams. The reader's only access to Asya's character is through her subconscious and her interaction through the eyes of other characters. This creates a slanted perspective. Perhaps Asya never had an affair with Gabriel and she is simply a victim of the paranoia of her husband and daughter – we never learn of Asya's actions in real-time. Perhaps all of Asya's dreams are simply taboo impulses that she never intends to act upon.