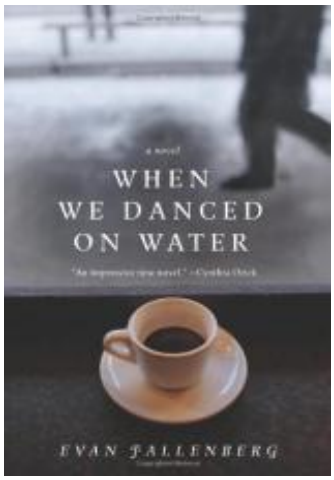
When We Danced on Water

by Evan Fallenberg



About the Book

At 85, Teo is ready to retire from the bombast and romance of life as one of the world?s most influential choreographers. But when he meets Vivi, a fortyish waitress at a Tel Aviv cafe, the fires of his youth flare back to life --- his passion for a woman?s touch, his long-buried anguish at his wartime experiences, and his complex engagement with dance. Vivi?s life will change, too, as the warmth of Teo?s affection counterbalances her harrowing time as an Israeli soldier in an illicit relationship. For both, their investment in art, and indeed in life itself, will reawaken as the ghosts of their suppressed pasts --- from Warsaw to Copenhagen, Berlin to Tel Aviv --- cry out for forgiveness and healing.

With lustrous prose capturing the grit and fury of history and the breathtaking power of passion, **When We Danced on Water** is a compelling novel of intimacy and identity, art and ambition, and how love can truly transcend tragedy.

Discussion Guide

1. Discuss Teo?s arc as an artist, and Vivi?s. Where do they intersect? In what way are their artistic paths similar/dissimilar?

2. The line between passion and obsession is an issue with which **When We Danced on Water** grapples on several levels. Discuss.

3. Teo is characterized as someone who delves deeply into one art, while Vivi opts for breadth. Do you identify with one of these characteristics more than the other?

4. Time and place are very nearly characters in this book: 1920s Warsaw; pre-war Copenhagen and the Royal Danish Ballet; Berlin during World War II and in the 1980s; modern Tel Aviv. How did these settings affect your experience of reading **When We Danced on Water**?

5. In an early version of the novel, the scenes with Teo and Vivi together were written as a play (HE:, SHE:, stage directions instead of narration). Can you still feel something of that in the novel?

6. Did you find the writing about dance enriching or offputting?

7. Of all the main characters in this book (Teo, Vivi, Freddy, Margo, Nelly, Pincho) only Freddy is involved in a traditional family relationship. Discuss.

8. Do you consider Teo a victim of the Holocaust? Why/Why not?

9. In your opinion, who got more out of their relationship --- Teo or Vivi?

10. On love: do you think that Freddy loved Teo? That Teo loved Freddy? That Teo loved Vivi? That Vivi loved Teo?

11. About Freddy, the writer Cynthia Ozick wrote that ?together with all his ceaseless predatory impulses, many of them graphically and nightmarishly frightening, there is something rounded and human in Freddy: he is a complex villain.? Discuss.

12. Novels, like life, do not provide the ending to every aspect of every story and sub-plot. Of all the characters in **When We Danced on Water**, whose story-after-the-story most intrigues you?

13. Do you think this book has a happy ending? Why/Why not?

Author Bio

Evan Fallenberg is the author of three novels and a translator of Hebrew fiction, plays and films. His work has won or been shortlisted for numerous awards, including the American Library Association Barbara Gittings Stonewall Award for Literature, the Edmund White Award for Debut Fiction, and the PEN Translation Prize. He teaches at Bar-Ilan University and is faculty co-director of the Vermont College of Fine Arts International MFA in Creative Writing & Literary Translation. Fallenberg is the recipient of residency fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts, MacDowell Colony, Banff Centre for the Arts, Fondation Ledig-Rowohlt and Sun Yat-sen University, and is the founder of Arabesque: An Arts and Residency Center in Old Acre.

Critical Praise

"Fallenberg?s precise prose moves fluidly between the delicate and the bold, much like the aging dancer whose story he tells with such elegance. His spare style sneaks up on the reader, enhancing the emotionality inherent in his subject."

When We Danced on Water

by Evan Fallenberg

Publication Date: May 17, 2011
Paperback: 256 pages
Publisher: Harper Perennial
ISBN-10: 0062033328
ISBN-13: 9780062033321