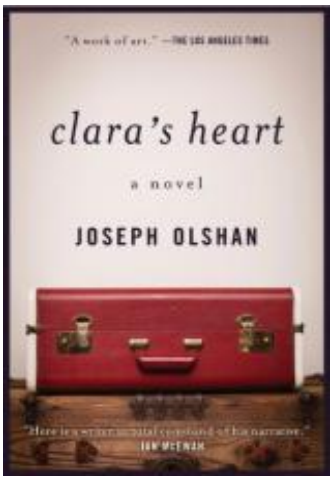
ReadingGroupGuides
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Clara's Heart

by Joseph Olshan



About the Book

Clara's Heart, the prize-winning, international bestselling novel, charts the tender and intense relationship between a Jamaican housekeeper and a boy whose well-being is entrusted to her. The book won the *London Times* /Jonathan Cape Young Writers' Competition and was made into the much loved feature film starring Whoopi Goldberg and Neil Patrick Harris.

Discussion Guide

1. Joseph Conrad wrote that the differences between two races of people could produce a mysterious element of sympathy. How does this play out in CLARA'S HEART.

2. The novel tells the story of a relationship that is defined by employment that must come to a natural end. How does this affect the behavior of the two principal characters.

3. How does David?s adoption of Clara?s special Jamaican patois add and sometimes threaten their intimacy.

4. How could one compare CLARA'S HEART to THE HELP?

5. The racist slur uttered at the end of the novel: should this be forgivable or unforgivable?

Author Bio

Joseph Olshan is the author of 9 critically acclaimed novels. He has contributed articles and essay and reviews to such publications as *The New York Times, The New York Times Magazine, The Washington Post, The Wall Street Journal, The Times of London, The Guardian, The Independent (London)*. He taught creative writing at New York University and is currently the editorial director of Delphinium Books (distributed by HarperCollins).

Critical Praise

"An impressive novel. . . . "An impressive novel. . . . CLARA'S HEART is notable precisely because of the risks Joseph Olshan has taken that do succeed, not the least of which is its sensistive and often comical treatment of the unique love between a precocious American boy and a wise, if tormented Jamaican woman."

? *The New York Times* Book Review

"Olshan?s achievement is to have created a separate and entirely believable world, carefully, comically and humanely drawn. It is held together by much tension and contains many excellent and recognizable scenes and embarrassments. . . A fine debut."

? *The Times Literary Supplement* (London)

"Joseph Olshan skillfully juxtaposes two very different cultures, the financially successful but emotionally deficient Harts, the products or victims of a modern ago, and the relatively poor in money, but rich in warmth and spirit, Jamaicans."

? *The Washington Post*

"An exceptionally fine study of love and growing pains."

? The Guardian

"Intelligently conceived and psychologically convincing. . . [Olshan is] someone to read and watch."

? The Financial Times

"In CLARA'S HEART lies a depth of feeling that is rarely told so well."

? *The Times (London)*

"Terrific. Joseph Olshan is clearly enormously talented. He has an almost extra-sensory understanding of the characters he writes about, and he writes magnificently well. He is funny, too."

? *The Daily Telegraph*

"Clara is a triumphant creation, with all her provocative richness and scariness. The gently perceptive novel about coming of age in suburbia maintains a high level of narration in unfolding a relationship that is as delicious as it is fleeting. After the book is closed its fragrant intensity lingers."

? New York Newsday

"With its intricate characterization, a plot that weaves together two very different cultures, and a narrative enriched by fresh, often poignant dialogue, this is an extraordinary first novel. The intensity of their friendship, and the dark secret of her past that Clara is determined to hide from David, creates an emotional chaos that is skillfully portrayed and finally resolved in this wonderful novel."

? *Publishers Weekly*

"Joseph Olshan has achieved the rare distinction of crafting a brand new plot."

? *The New York Daily News*

"In language that is devastatingly accurate in tone and intensity, Joseph Olshan has painted a complex portrait on an unusual couple meeting under unusual circumstances and very often clashing, as their cultures clash, but emerging triumphant in an ending that will satisfy even the most hard-boiled reader. Olshan is a remarkably gifted writer whose novel will be lovingly remembered."

? *San Diego Tribune*

"A fresh and involving novel. Joseph Olshan has remarkable empathy with his characters, and he writes some scathingly funny and perceptive scenes. As I read this novel I kept thinking, ?this is a story I have never read before, but I believe these people totally.?"

? Gail Godwin

"I was constantly moved, both to laughter and to tears, by this extraordinarily sensitive love story of two mismatched people."

? Dominick Dunne

"A rich and compelling work, an extraordinary first novel by a writer that gives voice to a generation many of us prayed would never speak. Clara?s Heart glitters with an honestly and with a story to tell."

? Israel Horowitz

"A remarkable writer."

? Grace Paley

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