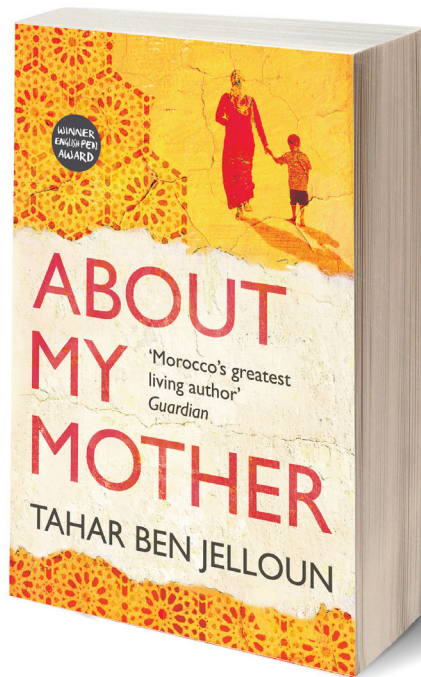


About My Mother

by TAHAR BEN JELLOUN

Translated by Lulu Norman and Ros Schwartz



Themes:

Find and discuss what you think are the key quotes illustrating the following themes in *About My Mother*:

- Illness and death
- Memory
- Love
- Motherhood

Further reading:

The Bear Came Over the Mountain, Hateship, Friendship, Courtship, Loveship, Marriage by Alice Munro, Vintage (2002)

The Wilderness by Samantha Harvey, Vintage (2010)

Turn of Mind by Alice LaPlante, Vintage (2012)

We Are Not Ourselves by Matthew Thomas, Simon & Schuster (2014)

Questions for discussion:

1. Throughout the novel, the same memories keep returning to confuse Lalla Fatma, such as believing that she is in Fez instead of Tangier. What do you think the effect of this repetition is on the reader?
2. Lalla Fatma is a deeply religious woman, and frequently reiterates this to her son. 'I see the magnificent light, it's our Prophet's face, a dazzling light'. Do you think the author gives a favourable portrayal of his mother's religious faith?
3. 'In any case I know what I need to know, which is that we have no choice.' Lalla Fatma is often fatalistic about the end of her life. Do you find this a pessimistic attitude, or is it rooted in her hopes for the afterlife?
4. From the book's description of Moroccan family life, how do you think mother-son relationships are enacted differently there to in your own culture?
5. Lalla Fatma's condition often reveals how lonely illness is: 'It's as if I'd been left on a station platform and I'm waiting for the train. But I have a feeling the station's closed down, there are no more trains coming through.' Which image of loneliness in the book did you find most poignant?
6. Lalla Fatma once asks her son: 'Don't you think the room's got narrower? It's like a grave. Maybe that's what death is.' Find and discuss other examples of the ways in which Lalla Fatma imagines death over the course of the book.
7. What does Ben Jelloun's novel reveal about the situation of women in traditional Morocco?
8. What do you think Keltum and Rhimou's greedy stealing of Lalla Fatma's possessions shows about modern attitudes to the elderly?
9. Has *About My Mother* changed the way that you understand and empathise with Alzheimer's disease?
10. How does *About My Mother* compare to other artistic depictions of Alzheimer's disease that you have read or seen?

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