Book report The Romance Reader

General information:

Title: The Romance Reader

Writer: Pearl Abraham

Publisher: Lijsters

Year of publishing: 1995

Edition read: 2004

Summary:

Rachel Benjamin is the Rabbi’s oldest daughter, in a household of 7 children. Rachel is set to be an example for her brothers and sisters and she and her sister Leah have to do a lot in household like cleaning and babysitting. Her parents are very religious (Chassidic) and Rachel isn’t allowed to things like wearing sheer stockings without seams of reading English books. Her mother doesn’t really like living in America and being a Rebbetzin (the Rabbi’s wife). She and her husband have some tensions. When Rachel is 15 years old, her mother goes to Israel for a couple weeks. At the same time, her father goes to Brazil to sell the book he has written, so Rachel and Leah run the household. They take lifeguarding classes, which their parents absolutely would have forbidden. When they come home and found out, they at first forbid it, but lifeguarding gives extra money, so they accept. When Rachel is 17 years old, the prospect of an arranged marriage draws nearer. Rachel doesn’t want to marry so young, she first want to work a couple years and she doesn’t want to marry a man she doesn’t know. But she realises that when she is married, she could be free. She meets two times with a young man called Israel. She doesn’t know if she is ever going to love him, but she agrees to marry him, afraid of the next guy being worse than Israel. Israel isn’t what she expected. He is very obedient and Rachels father tries to influence her through him. Israel tries to have sex with Rachel, but he can’t. after almost 3 weeks of marriage Rachel and Israel take the bus and Israel falls asleep. Rachel runs away and stays in a hotel for 2 days. She is afraid and goes to her parents. She says she wants to divorce and they agree. They think that Israel wasn’t the right man for Rachel. Rachel has for the first time in her life the idea that she controls her own life.

Analyse:  
setting: the story is mostly set in Ashley, United States in the ’80. The story begins when Rachel is about 13 years old and ends when she is 18.

Characters:

*Rachel:* Rachel is the oldest child of the Benjamin family, daughter of an Rabbi. She has to be an example for her brothers and sisters and has to do a lot in household. Rachel doesn’t want to be an normal Yewish girl, what her parents want, she wants to be an ordinary girl doing ordinary things. Her parents don’t like Rachel americanize. Rachel is rebels, she eats things she isn’t allowed to, she reads English books, she goes to the library, wears sheer stockings without seams, and takes lifeguarding classes. Her goal in life is to be free. She thinks she can be free if she marries, but unfortunately, she isn’t. Rachel is a flat character, because she is the main character in the book and you read her story.

*Leah:* Leah is the second daughter and third child of the Benjamin family. She and Rachel share one room and are best friends. They tell each other everything and help each other, like not betraying Rachel when she goes to the library. Leah is also rebels, but not so much as Rachel.

*Father*: never called Dad, always called Father. He is a Rabbi and his dream is to have a modern synagogue. For him his religion is very important (what else, he is a Rabbi). His children has to be perfect Yewish kids. He tries to control Rachel, but he can’t. In the beginning of the book, he seems like he doesn’t really care about his family, but in the end, he understands Rachel a little better and he only wants to have the best for his children. Because you get to know why he acts like he does, Father is a round character

*Mother (ma) :* Rachels mother and father love each other, but her mother yells a lot to her husband and threatens to go away. She goes to Israel for a couple weeks. She loves her children very much and wants the best for them, that’s why she wants them to be perfect and is the reason why she is very strict.

*Israel Mittelman:* Israel is an young man (21 years old) who marries Rachel. He is very obedient, tells his parents (and Rachels father) everything. He doesn’t really know how to treat a wife. Rachel agreed to marry him because she wanted to be free, but with Israel she isn’t, so she divorces him.

Title explanation:  
the book has the title ‘The Romance Reader’. This is related to the books Rachel reads. She isn’t allowed to read English novels, like love stories, but she does it secretly.

Theme:  
the main theme in the book is rebelling against your parents. Rachel rebels against her parents, she doesn’t want to be the person they’d like her to be. She also rebels against traditions. Rachel is Yewish and has to behave like a Yewish girl should (tradition), but she wants to be an ordinary girl (breaking with it).

Personal reaction:  
this book was the first in the library on the English section. The title was attractive to me, and the text on the back also, so I choose to read The Romance Reader. At first, I did not understand the book. many characters, Yewish words and customs I don´t understand, and, the most important, the story starts in the middle of a happening, without introduction about the main character or the story. But the further you read, the better you understand. I liked very soon Rachel and her problems with her wanting to control her life, and her parents wanting her to be different, to be a perfect Yewish daughter she ought to be. I really felt sorry for Rachel and I was continually during reading hoping it would get better. I think that this book is very good. It shows the story of a girl struggling, something we teenagers can all understand. I am not Yewish, but thanks to Rachel I do understand this religion better. I can really recommend this book to my classmates. The story is quite interesting and isn’t hard to follow, the English is simple. I really think this is the best book for English I’ve read.