

Reviews of The Myrtle Tree

24 January 2008

Reviewed by **Cecile Yazbek**

The Myrtle Tree reflects the author's love of the Lebanese countryside and its peoples, in an accessible and captivating story using characters that live on the page and live on in the reader's mind.

It could be located anywhere and at any time but as a reader of long-ago Lebanese origin, I was particularly moved to find a familiarity of thought and feeling in his language.

El Hage quietly leads the reader into the secret places of the culture as well as the hearts and minds of people carried unwittingly into war: the consequences, therefore, have a powerful impact.

His other novel in English, The Last Migration, 'a novel of love and diaspora' – the word diaspora evoking so much of the pain that Lebanese migrants carry as the country regularly experiences tumults and tragedies – sows the seed of terrible loss in every encounter of love.

He is an author who subtly, through lyrical multi-layered writing, grabs his reader's guts. **Cecile Yazbek is the author of Olive trees around my table -Growing up Lebanese in the old South Africa.**

cecile yazbek

07 July 2007

Reviewed by **Miriam Shlesinger**

It's an incredibly beautiful book. The ability to portray the behind-the-scenes atrocities of war and the beauty of the human spirit with equal skill is a gift that so few authors have.

The fictional setting of Wahdeh comes to life through your vivid and beautiful – and tragic – depiction of the "ordinary people" whose lives are forever marred by the insanity all around them. It is a book that deserves to be translated into as many languages as possible

Miriam Shlesinger,
Tel Aviv

Miriam Shlesinger

17 June 2007

Reviewed by: **Denise Baraki Mack**

The Author's skill in blending the political, the personal, the sense of place and the deep essence of Lebanon and its people made the book a page turner.

The characters and the landscape stayed with me long after I reached 'the end'.

Thank you.

Denise Baraki Mack

16 May 2007

Reviewed by: **Michel Verdon**

It is a very masterly demonstration, a spell-binding book, a mixture of dreams and dreadful reality, the creation of a very good artist.

Michel Verdon

Montreal

Michel Verdon

29 March 2007

Reviewed by: **georges salameh**

...What is seized in this novel is just a presence and nothing else. What matters is not to describe Adam's memory of a civil war but to experience with him the immersion, in the present and the past, of a personal rural space and dream, to also outline a narrative net between his memory and us, and to finally surrender to the challenge of participating in what we discover to be the living memory of Lebanon.

Georges Salameh

Palermo

georges salameh

The book, *The Myrtle Tree*, took me back to where I haven't had the courage to go to since years.

Since the years of innocence, integrity, pride, selflessness and sense of belonging, a sense I lost since

I stepped for the first time of my life on a plane to desert all the places and people I loved and that

have shaped me the way I am today.

Before I read your book, I have gone through lots of panic, anxiety and sadness attacks that I am

going to leave this world without being able to deliver the sense I felt about my childhood and the younger years of my life, that I will never be able to explain to my husband and my son the way things were before the war, that we were never meant to be only beasts and we are not the reflection of the media, the way the whole warns on websites not to visit our country; for a while I consulted those warning websites myself, forgetting who I am. The truth is Jad, is that I was hiding my head in the sand and I thought that if I do so, I will forget the likes of the Afendi, Abu Takka and Nimer and the thousands like them. What is scary is that each one of us had encountered hundreds of those through a maddening daily life that pushed us by force towards the airport, and at certain times I believed that I am the only one that stood in empty rooms trying to squeeze every little item in suitcases, and trying to carve scenes in my mind that for a split of a second I thought I will never see again.

You my friend, in this marvellous book have unveiled the truth that you too and so much more of us feel the same way I do. Sitti, Jiddi, Amteh, You'borni, Sana, Faour, the Mokhtar, the Hakim, Yousra's cute intelligent ways of making Adam do what she wants, the way life was introduced to Mariam and the way her exposed to war, the sadness of her encountering the feeling of loss at an early age.

The truth is that every place you mentioned in your book, I mean our book, ours as in us the people that were forgotten and lost among all the (abou's and the afendi's and the weapon-logists and the ones that were given birth by war) those that we would have never raised an eye to throw a glance at them, let alone give them the Castle keys, I was saying, there was not one time of my life that I haven't visited through days of feeling that I must have lost my identity while I was escaping the death traps of my country, those places and times like our little garden in Marjoun, the pomegranates tree, the figs of all kinds, the olive trees and the vineyard that produced arak, green red and yellow grapes, Mr. El Hage in your book, you ensured me that I didn't stay trapped in my childhood and memories, that I have really evolved as I am supposed to do, but that I have lived all my life without losing my identity, that I have cherished all the values that my parents have taught me, that the world I ache for did exist and that it is a hallucination of my nostalgic mind, that there really truly Muslims that exist that think like me, and Christians that really truly lived that their parents did not teach them to hate, that they were kids once and they for a fact exchanged Crosses pendants with Koran pendants with other kids without thinking

what does this exchange involve.

OH YES! Jad,there are lots of our species,that are hungry for the philosophy of the simplicity that was wrapped around our lives. Lots of us want to go back,want to squeeze olives and want to run to help a neighbour in need,it is just like we are afraid that our new neighbourhood and society will think we are mad,so we burry all this beauty in our corners of nostalgia to get it out in a sigh or tear or a word. Thank you Jad.

سنا جرداق



sana

07 March 2007

Reviewed by: **joseph camilleri**

Deeply personal, yet passionately engaged with society and politics, the Myrtle Tree is a memorable account of Lebanon's recent history. Through the lives of its main characters, sketched with an engaging blend of realism and empathy, we see how the approaching violence is about to engulf the country. We follow these events through the eyes of the principal character and narrator, who paints for us a vivid picture of village life in Wahdeh, its customs and traditions, its hopes and the ominous clouds that threaten its future. In a subtly crafted narrative, we live through the deeply felt tensions, both personal and social, between the pull of the city and attachment to the land, between love and hatred, between violence and the yearning for peace, between the 'home' country and the attractions of a 'new world'.

joseph Camilleri

professor of international relations at Latrobe University, Melbourne

joseph camilleri

02 March 2007

I truly enjoyed reading the Myrtle Tree; I was looking forward to the evening so that I could read on ... the village, the characters and basically the vision inhabited my day. For me, what makes a good book is when I have a glimpse of the author's profound, naked wishes and desires even if for a fleeting moment; that's what makes me connect and it takes only one scene & I am hooked.

In The Myrtle Tree, I found such a scene; won't tell you which though and I guess you understand why!

Lina Baker-Montreal

lina baker

07 February 2007

Reviewed by: **Kylie Peterson**

I attended the book launch of the Myrtle Tree in Melbourne in January 2007 and I have just finished reading it. My best friend is Lebanese and she often talks about how misjudged the Lebanese are in Australia but the book revealed the true essence of Lebanon. It's beauty, rich culture and hospitable spirit. Yes as Patrick Seale wrote on the book cover 'It is a MUST read'.

Kylie Peterson