



Book Club Book of the Month - November 2019

***The Palace of Angels*, Mohammed Massoud Morsi**

(Wild Dingo Press)

Summary

The Palace of Angels comprises three novellas, all dealing with the Palestinian/Israeli conflict. The first is titled *What is Past is Dead*. It is the story of a group of Palestinian boys who do drug and gun runs at the Egyptian border patrolled by Israeli troops. A surreal sense of the gothic hangs over this part which ends in tragedy for the boys. The second novella is titled *Twenty-Two Years to Life* and tells the story of a couple whose lives are irrevocably altered because they are Palestinians living on the West Bank under Israeli occupation. Their daily humiliations are catalogued, as is the brutality of life for a people deprived of land, food and work under occupation. The third novella is *The Palace of Angels*. Longer than the other two, this novella brings together the conflicts, rage and despair evident in the rest of the narrative, but also outlines hope in the shape of dialogue between Israeli and Palestinian people, and the possibility, remote though it sounds, that love may be the answer to collaboration and peace.

About the author

Mohammed Massoud Morsi is a former journalist and photographer with a passion for forgotten people and conflicts that are often not publicised. Morsi was

born in Copenhagen of Egyptian heritage and has worked at a variety of jobs around the world. He is the author of several fiction and non-fiction pieces, as well as three novels and five non-fiction books. Having lived previously in Denmark, Egypt, and several places in Africa and Asia, he now calls Australia home. He lives in Perth with his son.

Questions for discussion

1. How much did you understand about the complexities of life for Palestinian people under Israeli occupation before you read this book?
2. If literature is meant to bring us to a place of empathy and a sense that there are lives being lived about which we know nothing, do you think this book achieves that objective? Provide some instances from the book in support of your response.
3. How much of the author's previous occupation as a journalist is evident in the unfolding of these narratives?
4. Comment on the idea that this narrative is "written with the urgency of breaking news", in the words of Geraldine Brooks.
5. Do you think this interlinked series of narratives is an effective way to tell multiple but similar stories?
6. Which novella is your favourite and why?
7. Discuss the sense of discomfort (if any) a Western and/or Jewish reader might feel while reading depictions of Israeli brutality and violence in these narratives.
8. Do you believe there is hope for the future in conflicts of a political, religious and ideological nature? What can we do as human beings to draw attention to atrocity without blaming the other and still keeping hope alive?
9. Do you think this presents a balanced viewpoint about a complex conflict by highlighting the difficulty of daily life under occupation, especially when the Israeli girl soldier is introduced in the last part? What is your opinion about the love story that cannot be imagined in these circumstances?

10. Has reading this book changed your opinion about the Middle-East in any way and if so, how?

If you liked this book, you may also like...

The Enlightenment of the Greengage Tree, Shokoofeh Azar, Wild Dingo Press

Anatomy of a Disappearance, Hisham Matar, Viking Books

Always Another Country, Sisonke Msimang, Text Publishing

Driving into the Sun, Marcella Polain, Fremantle Press