

The Nativity of Bloodshed

Moshe Levin

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Set in the Middle East, The Nativity of Bloodshed is a historical novel that reveals the senselessness of war.

Moshe Levin's historical novel *The Nativity of Bloodshed* explores Israel's history across three centuries.

In 1593, a Franciscan monk travels to the Holy Land on an important fact-finding mission. In the 1920s, a British surveyor contemplates the end of his career and his own World War I service. And in the twenty-first century, a young Israeli soldier interrupts his Passover celebration to fight terrorists who are hiding in a church in Bethlehem. Each man claims his own kind of ownership over the region, which is plagued by violence in each of their ages, and with no end in sight. Each leaves a lasting mark on the turbulent, fascinating land.

The men express conflicting feelings about their jobs, faiths, futures, and personal relationships. Their stories intersect in interesting ways, emphasizing the notion that all human beings have more in common than they are often willing and able to admit. And each man lives through an important era in Israel's history, from its days as a nigh-unreachable pilgrimage site, to its time as part of the British empire, to its contemporary, costly conflicts.

Thick with metaphors, the prose is intriguing, if sometimes abstruse. It features beautiful descriptions of local landscapes: the soldier thinks back on happier times spent exploring his homeland; the monk undertakes a dangerous journey across the sea and the land to fulfill his divine mission. The soldier's Passover celebrations, which are cut short by orders to take on his dangerous assignment, are also touching in their joy and brevity.

The men cite Bible passages often, reflecting the setting, as well as their individual upbringings and backgrounds. Their personalities also serve clear narrative purposes. But beyond their roles, the men do not stick in the audience's mind. They are too constrained by social and professional expectations, and they struggle to separate what they really want out of life from what others tell them that they should be doing. Still, they work to reconcile their consciences with their senses of duty, and their personal decisions have profound implications—not just for them, but for the futures of their nations. However, improper punctuation and superfluous footnotes that are devoted to defining common terms undermine the story somewhat.

Set in the Middle East, *The Nativity of Bloodshed* is a historical novel about the senselessness of war, which claims too many innocent lives.

EILEEN GONZALEZ (July 1, 2022)

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