



## **The Gendarme**

*Mark Mustian*

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# The Gendarme

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**What would you do if the love of your life, and all your memories, were lost- only to reappear, but with such shocking revelations that you wish you had never remembered...**

Emmett Conn is an old man, near the end of his life. A World War I veteran, he's been affected by memory loss since being injured during the war. To those around him, he's simply a confused man, fading in and out of senility. But what they don't know is that Emmett has been beset by memories, of events he and others have denied or purposely forgotten.

In Emmett's dreams he's a gendarme, escorting Armenians from Turkey. A young woman among them, Araxie, captivates and enthralls him. But then the trek ends, the war separates them. He is injured. Seven decades later, as his grasp on the boundaries between past and present begins to break down, Emmett sets out on a final journey, to find Araxie and beg her forgiveness.

Mark Mustian has written a remarkable novel about the power of memory-and the ability of people, individually and collectively, to forget. Depicting how love can transcend nationalities, politics, and religion, how racism creates divisions where none truly exist, and how the human spirit fights to survive even in the face of hopelessness, *The Gendarme* is a transcendent novel.

## The Gendarme Details

Date : Published September 2nd 2010 by Penguin Adult HC/TR (first published January 1st 2010)

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Author : Mark Mustian

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## From Reader Review The Gendarme for online ebook

### Carol says

I so wish this rating system was different, but I loved this book and learned so much from it. Mainly, I was deeply moved by Emmett Conn's story, told through his dreams that took place 70 yrs. earlier. Emmett is now 92 yrs. old and ready to die, but his dreams return him to a time during W.W.I when his Turkish Gov. commits genocide against millions of Armenians. His true love, Araxie, was a deportee then, & the plight of these people is vividly described. The extermination of Jews was not the only unbelievably cruel injustice that occurred. Thank you, Mark Mustian, for a job well done. Why, after 70 yrs., is Emmett remembering things he had forgotten for so long? That's a good question, best answered by any survivor of cruelties so indescribable, or the perpetrators of that violence. I would want to forget, too. Emmett's unflinching will to reconnect with his true love is a beautiful story of love and commitment, and strength.

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### Laura ????? says

Per non dimenticare

Ci sono libri che sembra siano loro a sceglierci. Mi è capitato di recente con questo romanzo che, mentre mi aggiravo tra gli scaffali della biblioteca alla ricerca di nuove letture, mi guardava attraverso gli occhi di una ragazza il cui volto è stato enigmaticamente diviso tra la prima e la quarta di copertina. Incuriosita, come rispondendo a quello sguardo, ho allora afferrato il volume dal ripiano sotto l'etichetta "letteratura americana": titolo accattivante, nome dell'autore sconosciuto. Leggendo poi la sinossi sul risvolto, mi sono state sufficienti poche parole – prima guerra mondiale, gendarme turco, colonne di deportati... – per comprendere quale fosse l'argomento, subito confermato dalla nota biografica dello scrittore che sottolinea le sue origini armene.

Al genocidio del popolo armeno mi interessai in modo particolare all'epoca in cui mi ero imbattuta ne "La masseria delle allodole" di Antonia Arslan, libro che ricordo ancora con un senso di grande dolore. Penso che ogni singola opera, sia pure di narrativa, che tocchi tale questione sia molto importante poiché contribuisce ad alimentare la memoria, a far sì che questa schifosa pagina della storia, non certo meno grave di quella della successiva Shoah, non cada irrimediabilmente nell'oblio, come preferirebbe la Turchia; per esperienza diretta, so bene che parlare con un turco del genocidio armeno è pressoché impossibile!

Ecco, l'originalità di questo romanzo consiste nel fatto di affrontare l'argomento facendo addossare un penoso mea culpa alla figura di una delle guardie che scortavano i deportati armeni fuori dal paese tra abusi e sofferenze di ogni tipo. Emmett Conn, cittadino americano, ha più di novant'anni, ma la sua vita è iniziata intorno ai venti; fino ad allora si chiamava Ahmet Kahn ed era un gendarme dell'esercito ottomano. Ferito in battaglia durante la guerra, si era risvegliato privo di memoria in un ospedale inglese sotto le cure di una infermiera americana, la quale, sposandolo, lo portò con sé negli Stati Uniti dove lui poté cominciare una nuova vita, sebbene non avesse più ricordi di quella precedente. Ma il passato è destinato a riemergere proprio quando l'uomo è ormai molto vecchio e malato, riportando a galla il pentimento per ciò che aveva commesso e l'amore nei confronti di una giovane armena, Araxie, a cui, nonostante tutto, aveva cercato di salvare la vita.

Una storia avvincente per tre quarti del libro (mi sono piaciuti, in particolare, i capitoli che rievocano il periodo trascorso ad Aleppo); ho trovato invece l'ultima parte un po' troppo frettolosa e con un finale che non mi ha convinta del tutto, ecco perché non attribuisco all'opera quattro stelle piene. Comunque, nel complesso, la valutazione è positiva, anche perché il libro, come racconta lo stesso autore nella sua nota

conclusiva, è stato scritto a seguito di uno scrupoloso lavoro di documentazione, compreso un viaggio fra Turchia e Siria lungo i tristi percorsi di morte di oltre un secolo fa. Alla fine, immancabilmente, mi sovengono sempre queste parole:

«Voi che vivete sicuri/ nelle vostre tiepide case,/ voi che trovate tornando a sera/ il cibo caldo e visi amici:/ considerate se questo è un uomo [...] Meditate che questo è stato:/ Vi comando queste parole./ Scolpitele nel vostro cuore [...] Ripetetele ai vostri figli.» (Primo Levi)

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## Jane says

The Armenian Deportations of 1915 as presented by "the other side", a young Turkish man, who is a gendarme, or paramilitary policeman, guarding a convoy of Armenians headed to Aleppo, Syria. The story flashes from the past to the present--back and forth: After this stint, Ahmet Khan, the protagonist, now in the Turkish army, is wounded, mistaken by the British for one of theirs, taken to a hospital and meets and marries Carol, an American nurse, taking an Anglicized version of his old name, Emmett Conn. She brings him to the States where he has a fulfilling career as plumber then builder. After a prolonged illness and his caring for her, Carol dies. Emmett has a brain tumor and only remembers his past life in flashes. He remembers meeting an Armenian girl, not much younger than he and falls in love, although he does his share of cruel things on the brutal trek. Now 92 years of age, he searches for his past as a young man in Turkey; he doesn't remember much before the British hospital. How much is true; how much are dreams or visions through seizures? He searches for Araxie, whom the dreams have brought to life again for him.

This beautifully-written novel was depressing but a page-turner. The ending seemed a little too pat. And I disliked his daughters. Some of the present-day incidents seemed a bit implausible, especially his drive to New York. I did wonder about a 17-year old as leader of a group of gendarmes; I thought that was very young for a position of responsibility.

Highly recommended. I felt it showed the endurance of love amidst obstacles.

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## Felice says

The Gendarme  
Flower!

Why do you pick up a book? What makes that book alluring as opposed to the one next to it? Everyone has their sucker points. I'm a sucker for: maps, unique type styles, fabrics, patterns, shoes with no feet in them (But never, never ever feet with no shoes on them!), dishes, tea kettles and tea pots, partially revealed figures and the just plain pretty. Since I buy lots of books there must be an awful lot of covers that peak my interest. Of course you may judge a book worthy of picking up by it's cover but you don't always buy it. I did touch and then buy The Gendarme by first time author Mark Mustian. I had not heard anything about this novel prior to seeing it displayed in an independent bookstore but the cover is so striking (shades of the National Geographic Afghan girl) and so simple that I was compelled to grab it and have a look. If my local chain store was stocking this title at all it was not in one of the many piles of books nor was it faced out in the new fiction section so it did not get my attention.

The gendarme is Emmett Conn. Emmett is a World War I vet near the end of his life. Although he's suffered

from memory problems since being injured during the war that prevent him from remembering much of that experience and his life before it, the war has defined his life. Now strange dreams that may or may not be hidden memories from that time are intruding on his life. In these dreams his status as a soldier is confused. He is a gendarme escorting Armenians out of Turkey. He is 'Ahmet Kahn' and he is desperately in love with a young refugee named Araxie. In Emmett's 'real' life his relationships with his grown daughter and grandson are typically complicated and in need of repair. To heal, understand and forgive himself for what may have been his participation in the Armenian Genocide, Emmett must extract the truth of his life from within these illusive and disturbing memories and dreams.

This was an excellent novel. The different periods were brought off beautifully. It was appealing to my love of historical fiction and the contemporary setting was successful as well and so did not suffer by comparison. This is not a history of the genocide but the elements of it that are incorporated into the plot are written with enough authority to capture the level of horrors of that experience. Mustian also writes movingly and believably about Emmett's two lives. The book is told in the first person so our travels with Emmett could very easily have become a tiresome litany of I, I, I and that does not happen. Emmett stays a provocative character throughout the book. Not every character is as fully realized as Emmett and Araxie are but the strength of your interest in the two of them makes up for that lack. Good job Mark Mustian!

Congrats to the wily cover designer of *The Gendarme*. You tempted me with your mad skills and it paid off big. And. By the way, how much do you love the word gendarme anyway? Don't you want to keep saying it? Gendarme. Great title choice. That makes *The Gendarme* a triple threat: terrific novel, gorgeous cover and wonderful title.

P.S. That cover art reminded me of another recent triple threat novel, *The Heretic's Daughter*. Look here my friend. They are practically twins.

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### **Carly Thompson says**

I gave this book around 100 pages before finally giving up. I usually really like historical fiction & the topic (the lasting effects of the Armenian genocide) seemed interesting but I really disliked the author's style and the presentation of the story. The structure of the book alternates between the current events of Emmett Conn's life--he is diagnosed with a brain tumor and has a distant relationship with adult daughters--and the dreams/flashbacks Emmett has of himself escorting Armenian prisoners from Turkey during WWI. Emmett is unsure if his dream are really or if they are just effects of the brain tumor (he remembers very little of his life in Turkey because he was severely injured in Gallipoli). The scenes in Turkey aren't realistic as dreams or memories. A person doesn't dream of an on going narrative in detail each night nor do memories work that way. The prose strains to be poetic and seems instead just flat and conveys only description not emotion. Emmett is an unlikable and uninteresting narrator/protagonist in both the contemporary story and the historical one. His fixation on Araxie (the Armenian girl who he attempts to rape before becoming her protector) is unsettling and not romantic or noble. I think the story would have been much stronger if it focused on the experience of the Armenians during the genocide and eliminated the contemporary framing story. This book can be easily skipped.

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### **Tori says**

Eh. Story of an old Turkish man who worked as a gendarme (basically the police) for the Ottoman Empire during the Armenian genocide. Trick is, he doesn't remember anything due to a past head injury and current brain tumor. Switches between present-day Georgia (the state) and Anatolia around 1915.

Enjoyed the parts where the character (Ahmet Khan, anglicized to Emmett Conn) explored his memory, you know, because I'm kinda into this collective memory, politics of forgetting in relation to war crimes business. But then when we got back to Georgia, it was pretty boring. Other characters were assholes and not even well written ones at that.

Basically, the whole switching settings and trying to get Ahmet/Emmett to remember the role he played during World War I and his search for the love of his life who he almost raped but decided not to, is just a ploy to disguise Mustian's mediocre writing. I thought of the Time Traveler's Wife when I read it... but he's not as bad as Audrey, so don't think I'm trying to say that. It's just similar in that they both use strange switches to disguise the fact that the story is pretty boring and the writing is lacking.

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## Camille says

I found *The Gendarme* equal parts interesting and disturbing. I knew nothing about the Armenian genocide, and although I was glad to be enlightened to those events, it was definitely a tough read. But, this book left such a lasting impression that I'm glad I kept enduring.

Emmett Conn fought in WWI and was injured. Through some sort of twist of fate, he ends up recovering and moving to the United States, and he gets married and has children—a normal, unremarkable life by many. However, in his old age, as he's becoming ill, he is beset by strange dreams where he's remembering a past life. At first, he can't understand how the cruel gendarme from his dream, ushering suffering Armenians out of Turkey, could be him. But the dreams begin to paint a picture that he knows must be true. And at the center of these memories lies a beautiful woman.

I thought this was a creative plot line, and although not a page turner, it kept my interest as I was shifted back and forth between present and past. With the amnesia, we were able to get inside a war criminal's head without the inherent evil and hate. This fact leaves the reader with a difficult conundrum: what to do with Emmett? Do we hate him, or *can* we forgive him? By all accounts, Emmett led an ordinary life after his accident, even a benevolent one, considering that he faithfully took care of his ailing wife for so long. But, after he comes to know of his past, and us too, it's hard to look at him in the same way. And yet, he's still the same person. That dichotomy is what makes him such an intriguing character. I wonder that the author is somehow illustrating that piece of human nature—that we all have this part of our personalities there, ready to be activated . . . or deactivated, as with Emmett. Are we *all of us* capable of such heinous crimes? No matter what good a person does in the world, could that same person be capable of the same level of action on the opposite, the evil, side of the spectrum?

And then there's Araxie, this arrestingly beautiful Armenian woman. Emmett somehow comes to believe he must protect her at all costs. And his dreams do not put his mind at rest about what's happened to her. What should he do with this information now, that he's in his 90s? What could he hope to do for her now? How could he go his whole life long, practically, as one person, to find out that he's someone else entirely. Someone who probably should have spent his life in prison. He is decent enough to know that. He hasn't abandoned all the values and morals that govern human decency just because he once had none. And yet there are sparks in his character, in his sordid past, that make you stop and wonder where in fact he went

wrong. What along his path led him to be vicious, when he is capable of compassion, at least in Araxie's case. Perhaps compassion could only be compelled from him in the face of a strong and beautiful woman. Although if he was to be as he *should* have been, as a gendarme I mean, a pretty face should have only made him the more cruel. It is his love for Araxie that becomes his saving grace. It redeems him as a character. When normally I would find him repulsive, in fact it is hard *not* to do so, I find his determination to save one woman very courageous.

By the book's description, I was expecting the main part of the text to be somewhat of a travelogue. For Emmett/Ahmet to find out his true identity and make for Turkey in search of Araxie. To spend weeks and months there, leaving no stone unturned, and then learn of himself and his past as he went from place to place. But, I have to say that I find Mustian's creation much more realistic and meaningful. What Emmett spent his whole life looking for, his past, is both terrible and beautiful. It's a perfect puzzle, one which he will never be able to untangle. One he can only vaguely believe. One he will always regret. Perhaps that is the reason his dreams make him act crazy.

I have to say, this book took dedication to finish. It's none of it easy to read. I enjoyed the pace, although I found some parts starting to lag. Overall, I found it a very thoughtful read, and I'm sure I'll be thinking about it for some time still.

[www.makniks.blogspot.com](http://www.makniks.blogspot.com)

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## E says

*The Gendarme* appears to be Mark Mustian's first foray into the novel and the book is not a bad first effort. The book describes the ninety-year-old Emmett Conn's struggle with a brain tumor and a series of dreams that follow the forced deportations of Armenians from Turkey during WWI. The narrative flows back-and-forth between these two stories, which eventually overlap as Emmett tries to find Araxie, a young Armenian woman he encountered while escorting deportees to Aleppo, Syria.

Mustian's narrative is clear and concise, but I struggled throughout to believe the vividness of the dreams Emmett experienced. The voice through which they were told was detached--say, not as if Emmett were actually dreaming but as if he were writing in a dream journal after the dreams. In a way, the narrative structure of the book reminds me a great deal of Sarah Gruen's *Water for Elephants*, which also tells two stories -- one present, and one past -- from the point of view of a ninety- (or ninety-three)-year-old patient in an assisted living facility. The characters in Gruen's novel were undoubtedly much more vivid and the tension established between the two narrative lines propelled Gruen's book forward. Mustian's work lacks the clarity of voice and the individuality of character to establish a similar effect.

Nevertheless, despite the weaknesses of Mustian's narrative, the *The Gendarme* sheds interesting light on not only an interesting element in history that has yet to receive proper recognition but also examines, in fragments, the experience of hardworking American immigrants and the all-too-necessary story of an old man trying to retain his dignity and sanity in old age.

Received through goodreads First-Reads program.

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## **Jill says**

First of all, thank you, Goodreads First Reads, for the opportunity to preview this book! With the one hundredth anniversary of the Armenian deportations only a few years away, author Mark Mustian has set himself a daunting task: to follow his character's footsteps and to serve as a gendarme, a guide in the wilderness. For the most part, he succeeds admirably.

As Mr. Mustian writes in the epilogue, "Genocide perhaps represents the ugliest of human deeds, the mass killing of often defenseless fellow beings....Saying it didn't happen is a mere recipe for recurrence."

The focus is on one gendarme – a 92-year-old Turkish man named Ahmet Kahn on the verge of senility with a non-operable brain tumor – who must examine memories of events that he has previously denied or purposely forgotten. Many years ago – in World War I – he was a gendarme, charged with escorting Armenians across the border from Turkey to Syria. Many died from the grueling march and the lack of proper food and shelter and medicine.

Women, in particular, had a tough time of it: they were frequently used as the playthings of the Turkish men who have grown hard and bored and demand women to do their physical bidding before killing them. One woman captures Ahmet's attention: her name is Araxie and her eyes are her exotica, one nearly turquoise, one greenish-brown. Ahmet falls head over heels for her, sheltering her from the excesses of the trek that become, for all intensive purposes, a true genocide.

Araxie demands of him, "Why not just shoot us all now? What is it about us you hate so?" And he must answer impotently, "I am only a small piece of the puzzle. I have a job to do. I did not ask for it, nor have I questioned its rationale." As in books from the past – Sadie Jones' *Small Wars*, for example, or the more famous *A Separate Peace* – Ahmet must eventually realize that his answer is non-satisfactory and that his love for Araxie outweighs the senseless slaughter.

The novel is divided into two portions: the present day, where Emmett Conn suffers through mental disorientation, hospital confinement and the coldness of his grown daughter, and the past, where Ahmet Kahn – same person – struggles to survive amidst swollen corpses, monstrous murders, and clannishness, duplicity, and trickery. As the memories swell in intensity, the reader must ask, "How much of his memory is true and how much is a product of extreme guilt? What happened and what didn't?"

There are no clear answers. But as Mr. Mustian writes, "The point of the story seemed to be that to think is to forget, to filter from the mind the unnecessary, I have told myself this, repeated it to myself. I have called it our gift from God. This headstrong, heedless survival." At the end of the day, love does survive...and so do the never relenting memories. Mr. Mustian states in his epilogue, "Decades on, even centuries on, our shared history remains vital..."

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## **Lainie says**

As a 2nd generation Diasporan Armenian, I typically dread reliving stories about the Armenian Genocide that took place around 1915 in Western Turkey. Growing up, I heard enough stories from elderly relatives



who survived, many of whom lost wives, husbands, children, parents, and friends. But my sister's avid recommendation of this book prompted me to try it.

Mark Mustain uses an ingenious plot device: a brain tumor that spurs recollections from many decades before. The protagonist would just as soon keep the memories buried until bits and pieces start coming together to provide a compelling reason for him to follow up in the present day.

The characters are well drawn and the story moves along quickly. The Gendarme in the title reveals enough moral complexity to elicit a measure of empathy from this reader despite his worst actions. He is, above all, a human being with a conscience, as we would hope all people are--even those who perpetrate horrors on others.

After evil has occurred the clock cannot be turned back. The most we can hope for is that the perpetrators come to understand the effects of their actions and seek whatever resolution they can--if not forgiveness, at least acknowledgment.

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## **Diane says**

The haunting cover art, portraying a lovely young girl with two different colored eyes, is what first attracted me to this debut novel, *The Gendarme*. Trust me, once you finish this story it will stay with you for days to come.

In 1990, Emmett Conn is a 92 year old Turkish-American man, who is recovering from surgery for a brain tumor. In Georgia, to his family and friends he seems confused or senile. However, what has happened to Emmett is that after his surgery he is experiencing vivid dreams of World War I events he had previously or purposely forgotten. Memories that were lost, perhaps due to a war injury, have now returned some 70 years later.

The novel goes back and forth in time to when Emmett was a Turkish Gendarme who brought Armenians from Turkey in a death march to Syria.

"The original two thousand deportees have dwindled now to three hundred, many of these suffering from dysentery. A number of the guards are gone, too, leaving only three gendarmes, including myself to prod our group on its way. Our progress has been slower than before, maybe six or seven miles per day. At this pace it will take four or five days to reach our destination. Food is scarce, water even scarcer. The dead and dying increase daily. At the current rate of loss, only fifty or so of the deportees might actually make it to Aleppo."

Araxie is a lovely Armenian girl that Emmett becomes obsessed with and tries to protect. In his dreams he is reunited with his captive who he thought of as the love of his life. He is desperate to find her, and to beg her forgiveness for his sins of the past.

MY THOUGHTS - Even though this story is a work of fiction, I feel like I was given a painful lesson in history. Sadly, Armenian Genocide is a subject that I knew nothing about. The story is sad and haunting and tough to read in parts, but it is so well done that most readers will find themselves effortless and eagerly finishing the novel quicker than anticipated. It is clearly a story that demonstrates the evil that good people

are capable of. The ending is not what I anticipated, but in some ways that was a good thing. I think this story would make an excellent movie.

RECOMMENDED - 4.5/5 stars

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### **Natania says**

While I was riveted from the start, and rushed through the final chapters to know the ending, I had somewhat mixed feelings about the quality of the prose and the storytelling. On the whole the book was moving and well written, but some prose quirks kept recurring, and the character was not finally as developed as I would have liked him to be. Still, people need to read about the Armenian genocide, and it was a daring and mostly successful strategy to write about it from the point of view of an amnesiac former perpetrator. I'm impressed by the project.

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### **Juliana Philippa says**

**The Armenian Genocide, an old man just beginning to remember, a young soldier falling in love, and the search for forgiveness (4.5 stars)**

This book was haunting and beautifully written - this last being all the more noticeable and affecting given the utter ugliness and horror that the language is often portraying. Mustian brings to life with searing vividness the squalor, disease, and everyday violence that made up the caravans, tent cities, and refugee destinations of the Armenian Genocide. He uses the same blunt simplicity to describe both the rape of a woman trying to save her child in wartime Turkey and the seemingly unbridgeable gap existing between a daughter and her dying father at the end of the 20th century in America. There were many passages that I marked off as I read through, thinking that I would choose one or two to quote in my review, but now having finished the book I find myself unable to pick just a couple.

*The Gendarme* is a novel about the two very different stories that make up one man's life. Emmett Conn (Ahmet Khan) is a man at the end of his life. He's 92-years-old, a widower, and has two daughters, neither of whom he is very close to. After being diagnosed with a brain tumor, he starts to dream about another life during another time in another land: that of a young 17-year-old gendarme in charge of driving a caravan of Armenians out of Turkey and into Syria.

Ahmet has very few memories of anything before his early twenties, when he was found by the British on a battlefield and taken to a London hospital to be treated. This life that comes to him in pieces and fragments is not one that he remembers, yet as the story of it begins to unfold, he recognizes it as his own and hungers for the complete picture and for the self-knowledge that has so long alluded him. This other tale is one filled with violence, confusion, anger, guilt, and love bordering on obsession. Central to it is the young woman Araxie, one of Ahmet's Armenian prisoners, and their meeting seems fated, with both lives irreparably and irrevocably changed as a result.

Through this novel, the reader is given a stark look at the Armenian Genocide and Mustian takes an incredible chance by portraying it all through the eyes of one of the perpetrator's. This is a heavy responsibility and a careful balance must be achieved, but the author is able to pull it off and the book, as well as its message, are all the stronger because of it. With his choice of heroes, Mustian leaves the reader

conflicted from the beginning, for while we are able to relate to and sympathize with elderly Emmett Conn, the young Ahmet Khan is a rapist and murderer.

His actions are not described in a vacuum, however, and as we are shown the atrocities he witnesses and commits, we are also given insight into his own confusion and questioning over why this is all taking place and what the purpose is. He is not an unwilling actor and should by no means be seen as such, but the truth is that he is also a young man - almost a boy - who seems to be swept along by the events surrounding him, doing what he's been told to do, accepting the reasoning behind it, and not questioning at first whether it's right or wrong. As the full of Ahmet's story is revealed to Emmett, he is left with the pressing and urgent need to find the woman whom he loved so profoundly and to beg her forgiveness.

One criticism I can't go without mentioning is that I could never quite figure out Emmett's feeling towards and relationship with his wife, Carol. She remained something of an enigma to me throughout the book and although she's not actively present in either the main story or the flashbacks, I thought she should have nonetheless been more fully developed. I'm also not certain how I feel about the conclusion in the second-to-last chapter; it brought me to tears, but I think the story might have been served better and the reader left more satisfied if it had been written in a different manner. (It would be a spoiler if I wrote anything more or included my suggestion).

I'm curious to see what the reaction to *The Gendarme* will be, given the political tensions and continued sensitivity that surround the Armenian Genocide, including even using the word "genocide." I think the book would make an excellent book club selection and might be further enhanced by being read alongside a non-fiction account. One that the author mentions is Peter Balakian's *Black Dog of Fate: An American Son Uncovers His Armenian Past*, and there is also *The Burning Tigris: The Armenian Genocide and America's Response* by the same author, both of which are highly rated. (I myself have not read either).

Overall, I would highly recommend this book: it is a well-written, emotionally involving, and deeply moving story. Mustian seeks to highlight the importance of seeking forgiveness and the necessity of remembering, and he succeeds wonderfully. *The Gendarme* is about forgiveness and guilt, memory and forgetting, acknowledgement and denial, love and hate, and the strength of the human spirit and the complexity of human beings. It reinforces the undeniable truth that we can never be just one thing or one act, but that we are defined by a culmination of all aspects of our character and all the actions and decisions that we make throughout our life.

In one of the last pages, a character remarks: "A few things remain, seared so deep as to defy alteration. ... Maybe there are some things that should be passed on, that should never be forgotten" (p.283). This is echoed in Mustian's *Author's Note*, where he writes: "Remembering is living. Forgetting, as Ahmet Khan learns, has its costs. ... We want to *know*. Sometimes that knowledge is painful, or inconvenient, or even damning. But it is essential. It exposes us for what we have been, and can be."

[This review is of an advanced copy format of the book:]

(Written on August 5, 2010)

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## Barbarac says

I'm torn, and don't know how to rate this book. I liked it, don't take me wrong. The first half of the book, through dreams/memories, we get parts of the story Emmet/Ahmet, and his part on the Armenian "transport"

to Syria from Turkey during WWI. Yeah, "transport". Note of sarcasm here.

The story is interesting, but slow, and I didn't care much for the present story of Emmet, and his uncomfortable relationships with everybody around him. Specially with his daughters and grandson. The book starts picking up halfway, when we start meeting other characters at the hospital, in present time, which add to the story. By this part of the book I debated whether I should abandon it, but of course, I couldn't, I wanted to know what happened to Araxie, and the only way that would happen was to keep reading. The book picks up speed towards the end and I really had to extend my lunch past the 1/2 hour I get to be able to finish it. No way I was waiting till tonight. The ending was satisfactory, with closure, can't discuss much without giving anything away.

The best part of the book for me was the Author's Note in the back. In it, Mr. Mustian explains the research that went into writing this book, and the problems he encountered along the way. I'm no expert in wars, definitely no expert in WWI and what did or didn't happen to the Armenians. But when I read this book, and think about all the times humans have done something similar, I can't wrap my head around it. All I can think is, why do we let this happen again and again?. So in the end I'm completely horrified at all human kind, and in turn depressed. Which is why I can't figure out how to rate this book. Again, Mr. Mustian's note is definitely food for thought. Sometimes the knowledge "exposes us for what we have been, and can be". Well put.

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## **Naomi says**

I can remember when this book first came out and all the hype about it..to me, it seemed like an over-rated book that had hit gold with feel good reviews. My immediate response to reading it was "Meh~it seems overhyped."..Skip forward six months and it was announced that this was the choice for the live book club I am a part of. I was less than thrilled. I WAS SO WRONG, IT ISN'T EVEN FUNNY. This book is so much more than what I thought it was going to be. Normally, in reading, I am one to make judgements re: the characters/situations very quickly. What I love most about this book is that I am ambivalent re: the main character..part of me thinks he is disgusting excuse of a human being as he is coming to the end of his life and reflecting on things done in the past and part of me feels empathy for him. I know for me that is a good book. I read so quickly, that one of the things I periodically miss is being sucked into the story. I didn't have the chance to escape that with this book. The one piece of advice I can give the reader of this review is that if you choose to read this book, either do it in one sitting or have no other books going at the same time. As one who normally has numerous books going at one time, this is not a book which you can do this with.

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