



# The Tree of Forgetfulness

*Pam Durban*

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## **The Tree of Forgetfulness Pam Durban**

In *The Tree of Forgetfulness*, writer Pam Durban, winner of the Lillian Smith Book Award, continues her exploration of southern history and memory. This mesmerizing and disquieting novel recovers the largely untold story of a brutal Jim Crow--era triple lynching in Aiken County, South Carolina. Through the interweaving of several characters' voices, Durban produces a complex narrative in which each section reveals a different facet of the event. *The Tree of Forgetfulness* resurrects a troubled past and explores the individual and collective loyalties that led a community to choose silence over justice.

## **The Tree of Forgetfulness Details**

Date : Published October 12th 2012 by Louisiana State University Press

ISBN : 9780807149720

Author : Pam Durban

Format : Paperback 171 pages

Genre : Fiction, Historical, Historical Fiction

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## From Reader Review The Tree of Forgetfulness for online ebook

### **Nancy says**

I really enjoyed the characters and the different views of reality described in the book. The writing is amazing and at the end I felt I understood both the good and bad of each one. Would definitely recommend if.

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### **Anne says**

An excellent story, but not a book to read if you expect clear resolution or a happy ending. It is interesting to hear the perspective of these brutal killings from several different individuals and how they justified the act. I never really got a good sense of the level of guilt the Long's actually had in the illegal whiskey trade, but that may be because I missed small details! I read the first quarter of this book in really small increments.

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### **Terri Steffes says**

Enjoyed this book. Looking for a good historical fiction, Civil rights era, this is a good read for you!

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### **Vanessa says**

This is not a book that can be read in bed at 11 o'clock after three glasses of wine. I tried. I'll have to try it again on a road trip or some other time it can have my undivided attention. Felt very heavy for such a thin book.

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### **Donna Trump says**

Great use of multiple third-person points of view to tell a story unique to each point of view. I liked the narrative of one character from his fever-ridden death-bed.

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### **Liz says**

This story is based on an actual event. It takes place in Aiken County, South Carolina. It tells of the lynching of three people in a horrific manner more in by what is not described as what is slowly revealed. The main essence of the story is cleverly told through the voice of a dying man as he speaks to his unborn granddaughter. As the crime is revealed the reader is given the opportunity to think about guilt, blame, and responsibility as well as the keeping of secrets and the hurt they can cause. The characters are well developed. The character that disappointed me most was Zeke as he was left the south but never really resolved his feelings for the family for whom he and his mother worked even at his mother's death.

## **Avary says**

Not a new topic, but well done -- telling the story from several viewpoints over a period of years. I selected it for it's local interest:Aiken, SC, where my brother lives.

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## **Ann says**

This is a book that tries to capture the chaos and distortion after a lynching in South Carolina. Each chapter switches between points of view--the Northern reporter/WWI medic who is appalled by the horror of the lynching, one of the men who was involved, both from his point of view during 1926 when it happened and on his death bed twenty or thirty years later, a Black woman who worked as a maid in the house of the before mentioned white man, the white sheriff, etc. It flashed back and forth between past and present and real and imagined. It does not deal directly with the victims of the lynching itself (one woman and two men), the crime they allegedly committed, or the first trial (where they were convicted) and the second trial (where they were let off), but deals with the aftermath of the lynching itself. Some of the characters are better and more completely drawn than others, but the fact that book does not settle for easy answers around who was guilty and who was not is satisfying. It's not a conclusive book, and this feels to me like fiction that gets closer to the truth of events than a nonfiction account might get. Well worth a read. (Also short--although not fast--because the switching of characters points of view keeps the reader on his or her toes keeping track of who is who.)

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## **Tony says**

To be honest, this isn't the kind of subject matter I'm normally drawn to. Southern town torn apart by brutal lynching in the early 20th century. But for some reason I picked it up. And I was hooked. Durban tells the story by switching back and forth among a handful of main characters, as well as between 1926 when the lynching occurred and 1943 when one of the characters is on his death bed. She writes beautiful spare prose that succeeds in humanizing each character without ever making excuses for them. This is especially impressive considering that the story is based on actual events involving her own family.

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## **H Theikos says**

This is woven narrative; there are a set core of characters whose own narratives or like pieces of a patchwork quilt that is slowly being constructed as you read. The stories, each distinct, unique, clear, authentic, are pieced together non-linearly but thematically, and soon the whole story begins to take shape. This is the kind of storytelling that is told carefully, slowly, but also purposefully unclearly. If you enjoy the slow and careful pace of a well-crafted narrative that brings forth aspects of the human condition that are real but are also painful--cowardice, pride, classism, racism, shame--then this is the kind of story that will grab you. Have a pen and paper and keep track of the characters and who they are, as the author isn't spoon-feeding anything to you: it requires active reading and critical reading to keep track of who's who and how they're connected.

Ultimately, this is a meditative work on family, class, friendship, racism, the South, and personal authenticity. The lead characters have participated in the horror of a lynch mob, and their own acceptance of their own culpability is delivered to the reader in bits, as they come to terms with it themselves. This is a lovely telling, artful and careful, about what is horrific yet all too common among the human condition. This is the sort of story that humanizes what can be dismissed as monstrous: the monsters are us, we have wives and children and regret, and all of that unfolds slowly enough that we empathize, learn and grow with the characters and their reckoning with their own (monstrous) humanity.

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### **Brenna says**

Such a well written book. Very impressive with the research that went into this also. Want to read more of her books. Interesting also, for me as I recognized some of the streets & names of characters.

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### **Chrissy says**

This book was a little confusing at first. I didn't understand who was who or what was going on. But once I figured it out, it was a very compelling book about racism, particularly in the 1920s South. It was hard to know who the "good guy" was, because everyone was just a little bit shady. Overall a great book.

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### **Gayle says**

This book by established author, Pam Durban, is a fine piece of work. I like most southern writers and she is near the top of the list now that this book lead me to her.

Fiction, based on actual events, The Tree of Forgetfulness is a story that tells of racial tensions that lead to bad stuff and how an entire town pulled the shades down and pretended that nothing much had happened.

We can see through the eyes of several of the characters, all of whom are well developed. You'll like this if you have any interest in South Carolina history, post-slavery blacks and how some things that should have, but didn't, come with their "freedom".

I give this book five stars.

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### **Linda and David Thompson says**

The central event, a horrible lynching in South Carolina in the 20's, is pieced together little by little through various characters: a reporter from NY, a maid who finds bloody shoes in the house where she works, the husband on his dying bed trying to tell his version to his granddaughter...some details are not told until the end, which left me a little unsettled. It jumps ahead to the future and seems disjointed. One of NPR's best summer reads for 2013, which is why I downloaded it.

## Claire says

This is another book I read for my Southern Women Writers course, with the added bonus that I got to hear the author speak when she came to my class to discuss the book. I always feel a little bit of guilt when I say negative things about authors I've actually met or talked with, but I guess I'll go to bed with a guilty conscious tonight.

The novel takes place in 1923, the year of a brutal race related triple lynching in South Carolina and in 1946, when one of the characters apparently involved in the lynching is on his death bed. We get the story through several characters' eyes and slowly unravel exactly what happened that night, and the effect it had on the two separate communities.

Overall this wasn't a horrible novel. I actually enjoyed it for the most part. The writing for the most part was actually quite lyrical and flowed very well. The characters were very real to me and I was interested in the story for almost the entire book (almost is the key word here.) My issue was that it was really too long. Unfortunately the book didn't even get to 200 pages so that seems to me to be a problem.

I actually found out from the author that this novel is based on experience with her family, based on her grandparents, which was extremely intriguing to me. I feel like that aspect of it could have been explored more, but instead Durban simply writes herself into the story as a bystander (in a really self righteous way in my opinion.)

So it's a meh story. I wouldn't really urge anyone to read this, but if you have time and you want a fairly interesting story go for it.

3/5 stars

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