

A Tale of Love and Darkness by Amos Oz. Chatto and Windus 2004.

There are few superlatives that do this memoir by Amos Oz justice, but suffice it to say that A Tale of Love and Darkness confirms him as one the truly great writers of the 20th century.

517 pages is quite long for a memoir of childhood, but this is about so much more than Oz himself and the pace never flags.

Amos Oz tells the story of his family history going back into the past as far as detailed records allow him, and brings to life characters from that past who amuse and touch the reader deeply. Foremost among these are his formidable paternal grandmother, Shlomit and his equally awe-inspiring uncle Joseph, a world-renowned academic, and his parents, especially his mother.

Amos Oz vividly recreates the Jerusalem of the 1930s, 40s and 50s, and of pre-State of Israel Palestine, with the eye for subtle detail that is among his greatest attributes, but also brings to life the way members of his family lived in various parts of Europe, the *heim*, before coming to Palestine.

Some of the detailed, apparently verbatim conversations that Oz records owe as much to his novelist's creativity as to an extraordinary memory, but they are so engaging as to promote speedily a suspension of disbelief. The purpose of the book, a reconciliation not only with childhood beginnings but most specifically the suicide of his mother when he was 12 and a ½ years old, takes the reader on a painful journey, but one that is unmissable for all that.

Oz' regular translator Nicholas de Lange has, as always, done a fantastic job in rendering the author's Hebrew manuscript into English, and A Tale of Love and Darkness is a credit to him, as it is to Amos Oz himself.

Rabbi Dr Charles H Middleburgh