

Book Review: THE LEMON GROVE by Ali Hosseini
BLOG POST BY [PAUL BATES](#) - AUG.01.2012 - 5:43 PM



Ali Hosseini's *The Lemon Grove* begins with a jolt and weaves back and forth through time telling a story of innocence lost, and love lost and found. Upper middle class identical twins, Ruzbeh and Behruz, grow up in Iran prior to the Islamic revolution. The lemon grove at their summer home was a happy place where the brothers and their childhood companion, Shireen, came of age.

Years later, Behruz, who has gone to the USA to study receives word from his sister-in-law, Shireen, that his brother has been injured in the Iran-Iraq war. He returns home after six years abroad to find nothing is as he remembers it. Ruzbeh is shell shocked, missing, wandering the streets and desert for months at a time; the country is devastated by revolution and war; and all of Behruz's friends are either dead, jailed, or have fled the country.

Behruz is disillusioned, stranded, misses America. He and Shireen involve themselves in an illicit love affair that has dire consequences for them both during this time of repressive religious authoritarian rule. The new Islamic government has abolished civil rights in general and women's rights in particular, replacing them with religious laws that include severe punishments for love affairs between unmarried couples.

Shireen is captured by the Islamic zealots, and Behruz, filled with self recrimination for his inability to come to her rescue, returns to his family's lemon grove to commit suicide. He is saved by an old man, Musa, a family friend and shepherd, and must now come to grips with his cowardice. *The Lemon Grove* is the story of redemption, love and courage to survive in the face of chaos, calamity and loss.

The Iran of *The Lemon Grove* is not the Iran of the evening news or Hollywood. It is a far more complex place, filled with diverse ethnic factions, a culture that still spans the centuries, a place of friendship and generosity, as well as a religious zealotry that is as often as not a thinly veiled opportunism.

Hosseini's writing is fluid, simple, playing to the mind and heart of his readers. His Persian works published in Iran include a novel, *Sangriz (Avalanche)*, and two collections of short stories *Sweet Maryam* and *Sand and Shade* dealing with the immigrant experience in the U.S. This is his first novel written in English.

<http://redroom.com/member/paul-bates/blog/book-review-the-lemon-grove-by-ali-hosseini>