

## Book Review

### , Tear in the Other

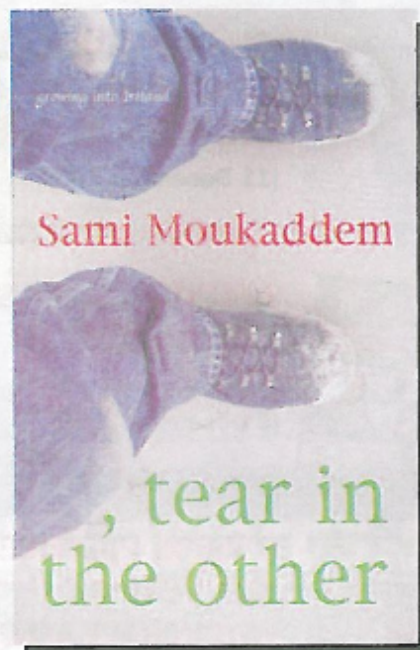
By Sami Moukaddem  
(ColourBooks)

IN MY HOMELAND it is said that when another person's corpse is carried past, it always looks like a log of wood. In other words, it is usually difficult to appreciate other people's despair because we are removed from their experience. But some people cannot escape despair, even when physically separated from it.

Omar, the protagonist of this unusually titled book, is only eight years old when civil war breaks out in his country, Lebanon. As he grows up, he knows nothing else but the unrelenting noise of gunshots, shelling and mortars pounding the streets of his land, killing indiscriminately – his friends, his classmates and ultimately his father.

However, in 1985 there is a reprieve for Omar when, at the age of 18, he leaves the war-torn land for London to join his big brother Khaled, before starting university at Trinity College Dublin.

Author Sami Moukaddem tries to present the story of a young man struggling to create a new meaning



of life away from the familiar. The joys, sorrows and many hardships that Omar experiences in creating these new alliances form the bedrock of the story.

Being a teenager, Omar's new life and friends conform to type, but as the novel progresses and Omar gets older, he seems not to be growing – stunted by the psychological effect of the horrors he lived through in his formative years – and he struggles to shed the past and forge ahead. Even though the details of his trauma are absent, the reader can identify with his sufferings.

by Ifedinma Dimbo

Now the bad parts. The narrative, though evoking harrowing feelings, is convoluted and the flow is interrupted by a surplus of detail. The language is refreshingly unusual, but tough to understand at times, which I suspect is as a result of direct translation from the author's native tongue.

I also believe that Omar is purposely made too naïve to afford Moukaddem the platform to delve into the many themes and aspects of the novel, which makes him irritating at times. I do not know whether it is as a result of the mental torture he suffers from or what, but Omar is too often too detached from his experiences. At the same time, the bantering and frivolous way Moukaddem presents the characters makes them seem uncaring in the face of serious subject matter.

But despite these flaws, this book should be read at least to rekindle our humanity and to awaken our compassion in reaching out to those who suffer in these days of cynicism.



Ifedinma Dimbo, originally from Nigeria, is the author of *She Was Foolish?* More details about her work and the Irish Writers' Exchange can be found at [www.irishwritersexchange.com](http://www.irishwritersexchange.com)