



VINTAGE

UNTO DEATH

AMOS OZ

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About the Book

Unto Death contains two beautiful short novels linked by death and destruction. *Crusade* is set in 1096 – a year of sinister omens. Count Guillaume of Tournai sets out on a crusade to Jerusalem and on the way he serves his God by killing any Jews he meets. But will the Count find the peace of mind he seeks when he faces the terrible realities of war in the Holy Land? In *Late Love* Oz portrays an elderly professor living alone in Tel Aviv, a man neither loving nor loved. His last mission is to expose the plight of his fellow Russian Jews and alert the people of Israel to the conspiracy that threatens them. But nobody wants to listen...

About the Author

Born in Jerusalem in 1939, Amos Oz is the internationally acclaimed author of many novels and essay collections, translated into thirty languages. His novels include *My Michael*, *Black Box*, *To Know a Woman* and *The Same Sea*. His most recent book is *A Tale of Love and Darkness*. He has received several international awards, including the Prix Fémina, the Israel Prize and the Frankfurt Peace Prize. He lectures at the Ben Gurion University of the Negev. He is married with two daughters and a son, and lives in Arad, Israel.

ALSO BY AMOS OZ

Fiction

My Michael

Elsewhere, Perhaps

Touch the Water, Touch the Wind

The Hill of Evil Counsel

Where the Jackals Howl

A Perfect Peace

Black Box

To Know a Woman

Fima

Don't Call It Night

Panther in the Basement

The Same Sea

Non-Fiction

In the Land of Israel

The Slopes of Lebanon

Under this Blazing Light

Israel, Palestine & Peace

Help Us To Divorce

A Tale of Love and Darkness

For Children

Soumcht

To the Memory of
My Father
Yehuda ArieH Klausner

Unto Death

Amos Oz

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de Lange in collaboration with the author

Woodcuts by Jacob Pins

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Crusade

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IT ALL BEGAN with outbreaks of discontent in the villages.

Day by day bad omens began to appear in the poorer areas. An old farmer of Galland saw the form of a fiery chariot in the sky. In Sareaux an ignorant old woman croaked out oracles couched in the purest Latin. Rumors went around of a cross in an out-of-the-way church which burned for three days with a green flame and was not consumed. Our Lady appeared to a blind peasant beside a fountain one night, and when the priests fed him wine he described the vision in scriptural language.

The faithful seemed to detect a kind of malicious joy fermenting throughout the winter in the dwellings of the accursed Jews.

Strange things happened. Bands of dark wanderers, huge and black as bears, appeared simultaneously in several places. Even educated folk could sense at times a murmur gnawing inside them. There was no peace to be had.

In Clermont, in the year of the Incarnation of Our Lord Jesus Christ 1095, Pope Urban II summoned the flocks of God to an expedition to liberate the Holy Land from the hands of the infidel, and to expiate their sins through the hardships of the journey—for spiritual joy is achieved through suffering.

Early in the autumn of the following year, four days after the end of the vintage, the noble Count Guillaume of Touron set out at the head of a small troop of peasants, serfs, and outlaws from his estate near Avignon and headed toward

the Holy Land, to take part in its deliverance and so to find peace of mind.



Besides the blight which had afflicted the vines and the shriveling of the grapes, and besides gigantic debts, there were other, more immediate reasons which moved the noble Count to set out on his journey. We are informed of these in the chronicle of an extraordinary young man who himself took part in the expedition, Claude, nicknamed "Crookback." He was a distant relative of the Count and had grown up on his estate.

This Claude was perhaps the adoptive heir of the childless Count, perhaps a mere hanger-on. He was literate and almost cultivated, though prone to violently alternating fits of depression and enthusiasm. He would give himself over by turns, restlessly and without any real satisfaction, to ascetic practices and to the delights of the flesh. He was a great believer in the power of the supernatural: he kept company with half-wits, fancying he found in them a holy spark, and much-thumbed books and peasant women alike fired him with a wild desire. His excesses of religious fervor

and gloomy melancholy inspired feelings of contempt and loathing in others and consumed the very flesh from off his bones, kindling an evil flame in his eye.

As for the Count, he treated Claude Crookback with sullen toleration and ill-suppressed rudeness. Some uncertainty, in fact, prevailed at court about the status and privileges of this young but silver-haired fellow who had, apart from everything else, a violent and ridiculous love of cats and who was a passionate collector of women's jewelry.

Claude mentions in his chronicle, among the factors which prompted the Count to set out on his journey, certain events which occurred in swift succession in the course of the preceding year. "At the beginning of the spring," he writes, "in the year of Our Lord's Incarnation 1096, the sin of arrogance raised its head among the peasantry. There occurred on our estate several cases of insolence and insubordination, such as the destruction of part of the meager crop, motivated by anger at its very meagerness; daggers were stolen, the river flooded, barns were fired, falling stars were seen, sorcery was practiced, and mischievous pranks were played. All this within the confines of our domain, apart from numerous crimes in the neighboring districts and even across the river. Indeed, it was found necessary to oil the torture wheel once again, and to put to the test several rebellious serfs, so as to quell the rising fever of violence, for suffering begets love. On our estate seven peasants and four witches were put to death. In the course of their torture their crimes came to light, and light purges all sin.

"In addition, during the spring our young mistress Louise of Beaumont showed the first signs of falling sickness, the very disease which had carried off her predecessor two years earlier.

"On Easter Day the Count carried his drinking beyond all reasonable limits, and on this occasion he did not succeed in

soaring above the state of tipsy rage to the heights of drunken joy. There occurred episodes," continues the chronicler in a rather veiled tone, "such as what happened that night, when the Count smashed six valuable drinking vessels, family heirlooms; he hurled these gorgeous objects at the servingmen in reprisal for some fault whose nature was not clear. Injuries were done; blood was spilt. The Count made reparation for his error with constant silent prayers and fasting, but the fragments of the shattered goblets could not be pieced together—I have them all in my keeping still. What is done is done, and there is no going back."

Claude also writes as follows:

"In the early days of the summer, in the course of the barley harvest, the Jewish agent fell under suspicion. He was put to death in consequence of his fervent protestations of innocence. The spectacle of the burning of the Jew might have served to dispel somewhat the anxiety and depression which had caught hold of us since the spring, but it so happened that the Jew, as he was being burnt, succeeded in upsetting everything by pronouncing a violent Jewish curse on Count Guillaume from the pyre. This terrible event occurred in the presence of the whole household, from the ailing lady down to the most ignorant servant girls. Obviously it was impossible to punish the wretch for his curses: it is in the nature of these Jews to burn only once.

"In the course of the summer our lady's condition grew worse and she began fading toward death. Without grace even love is of no avail. It was a pitiful spectacle. So grievous were her agonies, so loud her screams in the night, that the Count was finally compelled to shut up in the tower the most delicate of the flowers of his garden. Therefore was the Son of God meek and mild when He bore our sufferings upon Himself, that we might know and remember that the finest harvest of all is this, when the harsh scythe bites into the tenderest crop in God's world, and this was a sign for us.

By night, by day, and by night the Count gave orders for vigils of prayer by the cell of our ailing lady.

“Our lady was young in years and her pale face seemed ever filled with wonder. Her limbs were delicate and she seemed completely transparent, as if made of spirit, not of base matter. She floated away downstream from us before our very eyes. Sometimes we could hear her voice raised in song; sometimes we secretly gathered up her tear-soaked handkerchief, and in the small hours of the morning we heard her cry out to the Blessed Virgin. Then her silence would rend the air. These days saw a severe deterioration in the affairs of the estate. The creditors were arming themselves, and even the peasantry nursed a muttering rebelliousness.

“All speech was hushed in our halls. So frail and white-faced did our lady appear that, kneeling at the foot of the cross, she seemed to us like Our Lady Herself. She was flickering and dying away. Meanwhile the Count withdrew into silence, and merely kept on buying more and more fine horses—far in excess of the needs of the fields and vineyards. He paid for them with parcels of woodland and orchards, since the money we had borrowed was being steadily eaten up.

“Early one morning our lady suddenly heard the gentle sound of the bells of the village church. She put her golden head out through the lattice, and when the sun rose she was found gathered into the bosom of the Saviour. I still keep her sandals in the chest in my room, together with two tiny bracelets and a green cross of pearls which she wore round her neck, a gorgeous object.”

The chronicle of this relation of the Count also contains some turbid musings, fraught with confusion, written in troubled and disconnected Latin. Some of them may be quoted here: