



En nos vertes années

Robert Merle

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1563-1567 : quatre années de paix entre catholiques et protestants de France. Paix fragile, mais suffisante pour que Pierre de Siorac, héros de Fortune de France, et son frère Samson soient envoyés par leur père étudier la médecine à Montpellier.

Voici nos deux frères huguenots sur les grands chemins du royaume, puis parmi les docteurs et apothicaires de l'Ecole de Médecine fameuse dans toute l'Europe. Dissections nocturnes, sorcellerie, amours de grandes dames ou de ribaudes, fréquentation des athées et des sodomites... Et puis de nouveau la guerre civile, les massacres, la fuite...

Roman historique, roman picaresque, En nos vertes années nous fait traverser, au rythme de multiples aventures, une époque où la mort et l'horreur quotidiennes n'empêchent ni la soif de savoir ni cette « gaieté d'esprit » chère à Rabelais, où se marque l'immense vitalité de la Renaissance.

En nos vertes années Details

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Author : Robert Merle

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Antonio Nunez says

This is volume 2 of Merle's Fortunes de France famous series. In the first one we read the backstory and early years of the protagonist Jean de Siorac, the younger son a recently minted aristocrat, soldier, farmer and Huguenot in mid-sixteenth century France. In volume 2 Jean is sent to study medicine to the famous university of Montpellier accompanied by his handsome, seemingly autistic halfbrother Samson and his page Miroul. University life at the time is beautifully rendered in all its gory, bawdy glory. Jean is a ladies' man, his loves cover the social spectrum. There is perhaps more sex than necessary but it is never raunchy, sometimes comedic and sometimes poetic. The book includes many references to actual events and characters, with the high point being Jean and his group barely surviving the Michelade, when radical Huguenot took over Nîmes and massacred dozens of priests, monks and lay Catholics. The reality of religious divisions in France's worst era since the fourteenth century, is very vividly rendered as well as the beginnings of the skepticism that will bloom two centuries later in the Enlightenment. The story's alternating lightness and darkness (including tortures, murder, executions, grave robbery and dismemberment) hide very well the author's deep learning and engagement with the ideas of the time. This is a book that touches all registers and is therefore very satisfying. At the end the stage is set for Catholic counterattack against the Protestants in the famous Saint Bartholomew massacres. I am looking forward to reading "Heretic Dawn".

Vít says

Druhý díl této rozsáhlé ságy nezkłame, dávám dokonce o hvězdu víc než první část. Pěkně a detailně popsané prostředí středověké univerzity s množstvím zajímavých postav, k tomu znovu propukající válka mezi katolickou a hugenotskou stranou, to všechno okořeně nějakou tou romantikou ... jeden z nejlepších dílů celé série.

Jonathan says

Not quite James Bond in 16th Century France, but that feels like the spirit. Rollicking adventure yarn with numberless wenches and little accountability for the hero's sins. Although no Bond girl ever said this to 007: "What! You did it with a witch? And on a gravestone?"

Eliane says

Le jeune héros, Samson, intelligent, aventureux et d'une gaité exceptionnelle, accompagné de son frère et de leur valet, quittent le Périgord pour Montpellier, pour y faire des études de médecine. L'écriture est belle, le langage est ancien, la fiction se mêle à la réalité de ce XVIème siècle où règnent mort, horreur et affrontements entre catholiques et huguenots.

Czarny Pies says

This is a well-intentioned book that failed to touch a cord with me. "En nos vertes années" is the second of a thirteen volume cycle on France's age of religious wars. It is hard not to agree with Merle who shows both sides being guilty of fanaticism, brutality and hypocrisy. The problem is ultimately the smug perspective of the author.

Pierre de Siorac who will be the protagonist for the first six volumes of the series has a Catholic mother of the old noblesse and a Protestant father who has earned his title during the siege of Calais in 1558. Obligated by his father to become a Huguenot, Pierre's greatest desire is for tolerance and an end to conflict between the two religious groups. During "En nos vertes années" Pierre is a medical student at the University of Montpellier where Rabelais also studied medicine. Our hero then becomes a proxy for the joie de vivre, good will and rationalism of Rabelais.

I found it all too comfortable. Today of course everybody has a horror of religious conflict. Similarly everyone admires the charming and brilliant Rabelais. Merle in the series always allows the reader to imagine that he or she like Pierre would be a partisan of reason in an age of murderous intolerance. Who would want to think otherwise?

"En nos vertes années" is a very well documented work of fiction about a dreadful time in history. Many people will enjoy reading because it encourages the reader to feel justifiable outrage. The book however never asks the reader to pose any questions about what he or she would have done in the situation.

Keith Currie says

‘Is this what your Calvin preaches?’

The second volume of Merle's Fortunes of France weighs in at a little short of 600 pages. This homage to Dumas focuses on the French wars of religion and its protagonists are Protestant Huguenots. In this novel the reader follows Pierre De Siorac's journey to Montpellier to study medicine and concludes with a sectarian massacre in Nimes.

The first half of the book focuses rather too much on Pierre's Rabelaisian amatory adventures, but the plot takes a much darker turn from the half way point following some injudicious grave-robbing and the subsequent consequences. The massacre at Nimes and Pierre's intercessions set things up nicely for the third volume in which the St Bartholomew's Day Massacre will feature strongly.

Characterisation, historical context and use of language all combine to make this an absorbing read.

Mark Ellis says

I hardly ever give up on a book but I have on this one. I enjoyed the first in the series but this, the second, I

found very hard going. Endless verbiage about beautiful women and tedious philosophical, medical and religious disputes of the time. The plot never seems to get going. I have the audio version for the car. Maybe I'll listen to a little more but for now I've had enough.

Mirella says

In Book 1, The Brethren, Robert Merle has written an intensive historical novel set in France during one of its most turbulent periods. In 16th century France, battle rages between the Huguenots and the Catholics with murderous results from both sides. At the heart of the story are two compelling protagonists - Siorac and Sauvterre who try to hide their Protestant roots from the world as they amass their fortune. They swore an oath to become brothers, hence the title of the first book - The Brethren.

Merle does an excellent job of interweaving accurate historical detail with an interesting plot. This is pure historical fiction - with a strong focus on historical fact! This novel teaches as well as entertains. There are violent scenes throughout, a testament to the times, as well as struggles each character faces.

Book 2 takes the reader a little further into the future. The point of view character is a Huguenot nobleman named Pierre. With his half-brother, Samson struggle to study in Montpellier which is predominantly Catholic. The religious battles and troubles continue in the second volume.

Robert Merle's strength is in his character development. His characters literally leap off the pages because they are so authentic, so complex, so human! And he likes to throw in the odd humorous scene which only serves to endear one to the characters more fully.

The main theme throughout the books is the religious conflict that plagued France during the 16th century. Merle's novels are very strong in historical detail which sometimes overpowers the plot/storyline. For those who love rich historical fiction, this series is definitely for you!

Thank you to the author and publisher. I received a free copy of this book in exchange for an honest review.

Lucardus says

Sehr schöner, französischer historischer Abenteuerroman aus der Zeit der Religionskriege in Frankreich, wobei die Abenteuer gleichermaßen amouröser wie kämpferischer Natur sind und ebenso zurückhaltend wie eindeutig in der Darstellung. Viel Witz und Ironie, liebevoll gezeichnete Charaktere, ein Ich-Erzähler, der sich selbst nicht so ernst nimmt und drastische Darstellungen bietet ebenso wie pointierte Dialoge über Gott, die Wissenschaft und die Welt, und die Liebe. Auch dieser 2. Band war toll geschrieben. Das macht Lust auf die weiteren Erlebnisse des Pierre de Siorac und seiner Familie.

Laura says

This is the second volume of the Fortune de France series.

Merle has a particular way to portray the French history which makes the plot flow naturally.

In this volume, the author covers the period of 1563 to 1567, when peace still exists between catholics (papists) and protestants (huguenots).

The brothers Pierre de Siorac and Samson are sent to Montpellier in order to study medicine. In the meantime, a new bloodily civil war erupts which calls what is coming next, St. Bartholomew's Day massacre.

The sequel of this book is Paris, ma bonne ville.

Roman Clodia says

In this second of the Fortunes of France series, Pierre de Siorac is now about 16 and sets off for Montpellier where he is to learn the art of medicine. With him is his half-brother Samson, handsome but disconcertingly moral when set against Pierre's own youthful spirits. The two young men take on the opposing roles of Jean de Siorac and Jean de Sauveterre in the first book with their blood-brother friendship and their opposing characters.

Alongside the 'wisdom' that the young men learn en route to adulthood is lots of 'blood': that of both the medical world but also, more importantly, the blood spilled through the religious wars that tore apart sixteenth century France: this book is set about 5-6 years before the infamous St Bartholomew Day Massacre, but Pierre's narrative is always looking forward to it – and this part of the story offers a Huguenot massacre to offer a neutral view.

Overall, though, this is a fairly light-hearted book which sees our young men, especially Pierre, romp in various women's beds. When we re-meet Jean at the end it's almost like seeing an old friend – and the novel offers a temporary closure which makes this fine to read as a standalone book. Like the first book, this is Rabelaisian in tone (and Rabelais gets a name-check via the Montpellier connection), a delightful romp that also has serious things to say about the politics of religion.

Clif Hostetler says

This is the second of a thirteen volume series of historical novels titled "Fortunes of France" written by Robert Merle. This book covers the years 1566 to 1567; the other books in the series go from 1547 to 1661. This period of history in France is the time of the French Wars of Religion (1562-98). It was NOT a good time to be alive. However, it provides a setting rich in potential drama for a historical novel.

This book begins with the main character's narration of his memories as a 15-year old traveling in 1577 with his half-brother and body guard from their home in the Perigord region of southwest France to the southern city of Montpellier to study medicine. This particular time was a period of truce in the war between the Huguenots and the Catholics. But feelings are tense on both sides with extremists on both side maneuvering for advantage.

The book weaves a complicated plot within the city of Montpellier and provides a thorough description of life at that time. The book portrays the tenuous positions of various minorities and social classes in society including Sephardic Jews, atheists, and prostitutes. Public executions are frequent for varied and often for

trivial reasons.

This is a long book that seems to go on forever. At one point I wondered if the author had introduced the variety of characters for the sole purpose of exposing the variety and complexity of city life at that time. However, all plot developments did converge and lead to a point where the main character and compatriots are forced to leave Montpellier and flee to Nîmes where they hoped to find a more peaceful setting.

Unfortunately, when they arrive in Nîmes it is the first day of the Michelade (September 29, 1567) which is the label given by historians to an uprising in Nîmes when protesters attacked and massacred Catholic laymen and clergy. The book provides a grim account of the killing spree.

Our novel's main characters consider returning to Montpellier, but within several weeks a similar rebellion occurs in Montpellier. It's obvious at this point that the religious wars are heating up so they decide to return to their home in Périgord. The book ends with them setting out for their return journey.

Jeremy Reppy says

The story is told by Pierre, the son of a baron, who, along with his half-brother Samson, travels to Montpellier to study medicine. The brothers are Huguenots (French Protestants) at a time when Catholicism is predominant in France and tension is great between the groups. This makes for an amusing adventure in the first part of the book when the brothers and their valet, Miroul (one of the most delightful characters in the book), join up with a group of Roman Catholic pilgrims on the travel to Montpellier as protection from brigands. The tension between the Catholics and Huguenots will continue throughout this very enjoyable work of historical fiction.

One of the strengths of the book is good character development. There are also numerous humorous moments in the tale of Pierre.

Discussion of religious beliefs and persecution due to religious beliefs is prominent in the book. It also is very important in character development and explaining why the characters behave in certain ways. If that does not interest you, this is not the book for you.

I have received an eBook version in exchange for an honest review.

E Vikander says

City of Wisdom and Blood continues the story of Pierre Siorac as he travels from his home, in the Périgord region of France, to study medicine in Montpellier. The tumultuous struggle between Catholicism and Protestantism plays an even greater role in this story set in the late 1500s. Pierre becomes more of an aesthete in this second book of the series, an “ardent student and an ardent lover” or—in a less kindly but frequently stated way—a “skirt chaser.” As with *The Brethren*, I was entranced by the language as well as the story, “My bed is more talkative and warmer than ten confessionals, and though my little ear hears secrets a plenty therein, my tongue never repeats a one.” However, I must confess getting a bit bored with the middle third of the story where the pace slowed. I very much would have liked to have read more about the character Miroul, who has intrigued me beyond comfort.

Teipu says

Let's be realistic, I'm not going to finish this.

The writing style is strange, there's no real story arch, nothing really happens.

Five years ago i read the first volume and really liked it, so I have no idea why this does not work for me.
