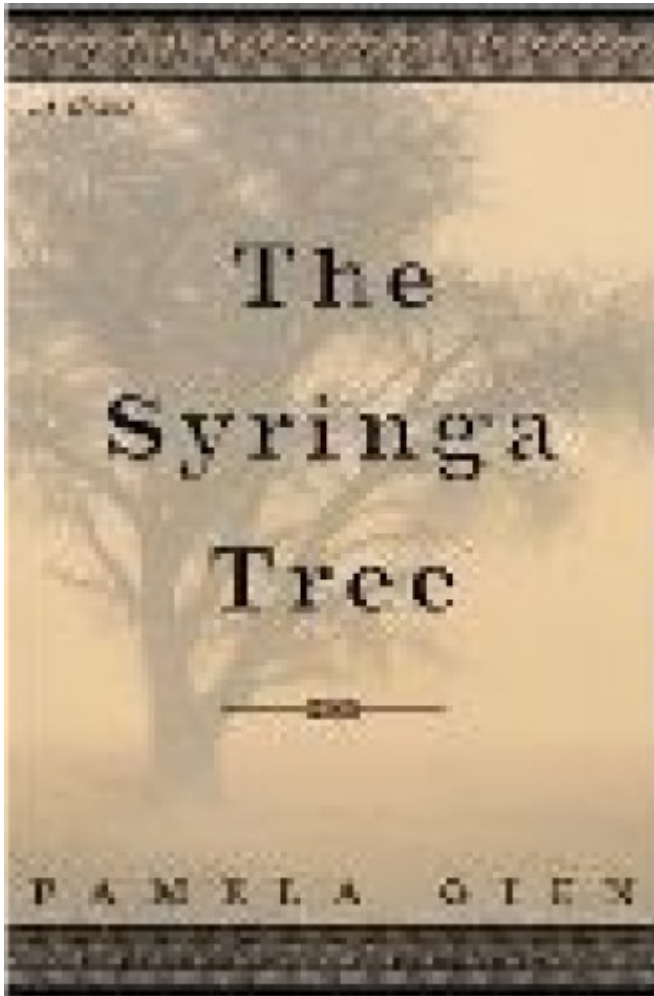


BookMarks

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In Review



The Syringa Tree: A Novel

Pamela Gien
Random House



The Yale Book of Quotations

Fred R. Shapiro, ed.
Yale University Press

The Syringa Tree began as a one-woman Broadway play, which won the 2001 Obie Award, and then flowered into a beautifully written novel. Most of Gien's largely autobiographical story is set in apartheid South Africa, told from the perspective of Elizabeth, the daughter of English-speaking parents whose father is a partly Jewish doctor and whose mother is melancholy. The family bonds with their black servants like family, and even harbors the infant daughter of Elizabeth's nanny—an illegal act that endangers their own safety. Elizabeth escaped her troubled homeland as a young adult, but her father aptly told her, "Every place is part of you . . . and you're part of every place." Symphony-like, *The Syringa Tree* is written in four parts, beginning with a long, slow-paced movement. But it climaxes with a heartrending yet hopeful ending after the dissolution of apartheid rule.

While this book of quotations stands on the shoulders of standards in the field—*The Oxford Book of Quotations* and *Bartlett's Familiar Quotations*—it is distinctly more American. The sources for its quotes include not just American literature but also pop culture (from Bob Dylan to Tupac Shakur), and it has sections on advertising slogans and film. Still, Samuel Johnson and William Shakespeare have two of the longest sections, outdone only by the Bible. Unfortunately, other than quotations from the Bible and the Qur'an, religion is underrepresented. Nonetheless, this is a useful resource for writers, speakers and preachers who can often identify with Dorothy Sayers's sentiment: "I always have a quotation for everything—it saves original thinking."