

Miles Franklin Literary Award 2007
Longlist

Silent Parts
John Charalambous
University of Queensland Press

Harry is the Lambert family mystery. He was a soldier sent to the Great War who never returned to his country home town. No one quite knows what happened to him – although there are numerous rumours. Did he die at Gallipoli? Did he run away from the front line or did he marry a French woman and live out his life in France?

Silent Parts is a skilfully crafted novel set in two different time periods. In the 1960s, Julie, Harry's great niece, who remembers hearing conflicting stories and half-whispered tales about the family legend, sets about unravelling the truth.

Running alongside Julie's search is the story of what really happened to Harry, a fat, flabby, unmarried 40-year-old bachelor, who having cared for his dying mother, belatedly enlists.

Working as a military baker behind the lines at Rouen, Harry makes an unlikely soldier.

"...While almost wholly ignorant of warfare, he knows a thing or two about terror – how to hold it in, how to panic unobtrusively...Before long Harry was rehearsing the sensations of sudden death, because you can't hone a bayonet and not contemplate the damage it must do to a man's belly..."

When the Germans break through the Allied defences in the spring of 1918, he learns he is to be sent to the front and makes a decision that will change his life forever.

"It comes to him as something he has known all along. He will not die for them. He will not die for anyone."

Guided by misapprehension and half-knowledge, Harry runs away to the countryside and begs refuge at the home of a famous rose-grower. There is only one occupant, an older French woman who has just lost her only son and who speaks no English. The two form an unlikely bond, crossing language and cultural barriers. Together, they are able to shut out the dread and squalor of warring Europe. For Harry there is a surprising rejuvenation; for the Frenchwoman, all the troubles she expected from the beginning – plus hope.

Silent Parts is a moving and delicate portrayal of a relationship and finding oneself.

About John Charalambous

John Charalambous was born and grew up in Melbourne. His short stories have appeared in *Scripsi*, *Tamba* and the *Bulletin Literary Supplement*. He lives in Wangaratta, Victoria. His first novel, *Furies*, was published by UQP in 2004.