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Your Death Would Be Mine: Paul And Marie Pireaud In The Great War



Synopsis

Paul and Marie Pireaud, a young peasant couple from southwest France, were newlyweds when World War I erupted. With Paul in the army from 1914 through 1919, they were forced to conduct their marriage mostly by correspondence. Drawing upon the hundreds of letters they wrote, Martha Hanna tells their moving story and reveals a powerful and personal perspective on war. Civilians and combatants alike maintained bonds of emotional commitment and suffered the inevitable miseries of extended absence. While under direct fire at Verdun, Paul wrote with equal intensity and poetic clarity of the brutality of battle and the dietary needs (as he understood them) of his pregnant wife. Marie, in turn, described the difficulties of working the family farm and caring for a sick infant, lamented the deaths of local men, and longed for the safe return of her husband. Through intimate avowals and careful observations, their letters reveal how war transformed their lives, reinforced their love, and permanently altered the character of rural France. Overwhelmed by one of the most tumultuous upheavals of the modern age, Paul and Marie found solace in family and strength in passion. Theirs is a human story of loneliness and longing, fear in the face of death, and the consolations of love. *Your Death Would Be Mine* is a poignant tale of ordinary people coping with the trauma of war.

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Customer Reviews

Starred Review Paul and Marie Pireaud were a young couple from a small village southwest of Paris. They had been married only six months when World War I began, in 1914, and Paul was

called up to serve in the army for almost five years. He saw action in some of France's bloodiest battles. Marie joined her parents and in-laws to tend the farm that had been left in their care, and she sometimes traveled long distances to spend time with her husband behind the lines. Their letters chronicle their daily lives, their innermost anxieties, and their abiding love. Topics as momentous as the Battle of Verdun and as mundane as the availability of dairy cattle mattered to them. They interspersed such subjects as intimate confessions of sexual longing with discussions of crop prices. Anticipating the birth of their first child (who was born in July 1916), they discussed how best to care for a pregnant woman. Their letters are a remarkable source for observing World War I from the vantage point of the French peasantry, for analyzing the impact of the conflict on rural France, and for resurrecting the human face of war. Drawing on hundreds of letters, Hanna offers a fascinating look at one peasant couple separated and in love, compelled to carry on their marriage by correspondence. George Cohen Copyright © American Library Association. All rights reserved --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

Martha Hanna achieves the remarkable feat of connecting the lives of two people to the events of a world war. This accomplishment is all the more impressive for her ability to never lose sight of either the small or big picture. This deftly written and elegantly crafted book reminds us of how war deeply affects everyone, from the front line to the home front. (Michael S. Neiberg, author of *Fighting the Great War*) We have any number of collections of letters from soldiers of the Great War, but none that comprises letters from both spouses. This allows Hanna to illuminate the relationship between the front and the interior in a unique way. Her work is an important contribution to our understanding of how the French fought the Great War in separate spheres, but as a people. Most of all, however, Hanna brings to life two extremely interesting individuals. She has empathy with her subjects, but never condescends toward them. I recommend this very fine book with great enthusiasm. (Leonard V. Smith, author of *Between Mutiny and Obedience*) [Paul and Marie Pireaud's] letters are a remarkable source for observing World War I from the vantage point of the French peasantry, for analyzing the impact of the conflict on rural France, and for resurrecting the human face of war. Drawing on hundreds of letters, Hanna offers a fascinating look at one peasant couple separated and in love, compelled to carry on their marriage by correspondence. (starred review) (George Cohen Booklist 2006-09-15) A vivid picture of the Great War seen from below which illustrates the view, popular now for a generation or so, that it is not events but people who make history... Most of all, Hanna is struck by the way Marie and Paul reflect the modernizing impact of the war on the rural psyche... The practice of writing letters stimulated self-reflection and self-awareness and left both

husband and wife better able to communicate with each other. The postwar transformation of rural France was made possible by this enforced wartime correspondence course in self-discovery.
(David Coward London Review of Books 2007-06-21)

When I ordered this book I expected it to be translations of the letters between Paul and Marie Pireaud. Instead, the book is about the SW French countryside during the First World War with few extracts from the letters. While it is informative and definitely worth the read, I had a different impression from the book description than what the book contains. And would have preferred to see the transformation of the country from first hand witnesses instead of having the letters interpreted through the author's modern viewpoint.

Astonishingly, this book covers fresh material in the study of World War 1: not just the home front; not the French military front; but the effects of the war on a rather ordinary--but extraordinary--newlywed couple, French peasants. It is as much Marie's story as it is Paul's story, and author Hanna is wise enough to let their voices carry the story for us. That is not to say she doesn't provide context and explanation and historical perspective; she does, and excellently. The story is moving and this book is valuable and enlightening. One could wish that there were more photos or maps, but the fact that the letters themselves were preserved, and that Hanna found them and brought their value to light is really enough. This book is a finalist for the Colorado Book Award, and if there is any justice, it will win.

Hanna's narrative Paul and Marie Pireaud's marriage during the turbulence of WWI will not disappoint readers. It is accessible to academics as well as casual readers of history. I first read the book as a graduate student in history, but I continue to assign various chapters to my high school seniors, who always seem to enjoy reading about their difficulties and trials in the war. Echoing numerous scholars' arguments that the private is always political, Hanna lends a new angle of inquiry into the Great War.

I had to read this book for a history of war class (college) and I have to say it was awesome. The story gives you great details on how it was to be a part of World War I. The story was also interesting, and very easy to read. I would definitely recommend this book to anyone looking for a first hand experience of WWI, or anyone who loves romantic love novels

Martha Hanna's excellent YOUR DEATH WOULD BE MINE is the 2008 Society for Military History Distinguished Book Award winner for Biography and Memoir.

I ordered this book for a class on October 6th and today is November 8th and it still has not arrived. I am returning the book when, or if, it gets here. I no longer have a need for it.

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