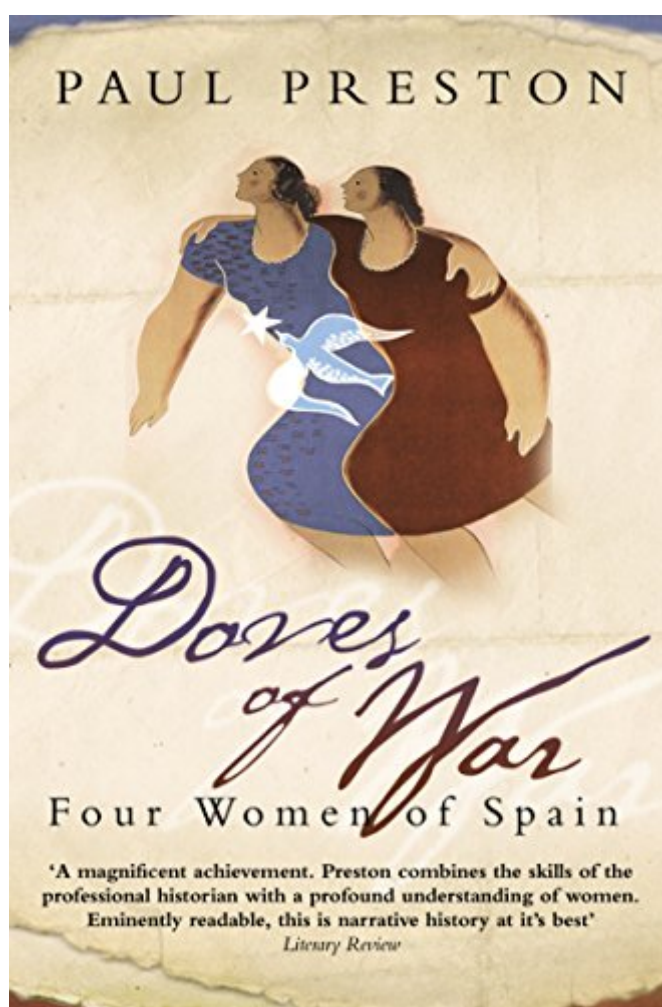


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Doves Of War: Four Women Of Spain (Text Only) (Five Women Of The Spanish Civil War)



Synopsis

Love, war, duty, faith, betrayal and belief – a revolutionary new view of the Spanish Civil War through the eyes and experiences of the women who endured it, by the greatest historian of Spain: Passionate and deeply moving when Preston writes about these women, you feel as if you are in their company. Scotland on Sunday – Four extraordinary women whose personal histories should dispel any illusions that the Spanish Civil War was an all-male war. Written with a shrewd eye and a sure touch, the book is full of wonderful stories and acute observations. Above all, these are compellingly human dramas in which moral issues, right and wrong, Fascism and Communism, melt away. Sunday Telegraph The Aristocrat: PIP SCOTT-ELLIS fell in love with a Spanish prince and set off for Madrid in a chauffeur-driven limousine. She ended up nursing in front-line Francoist hospitals. The Communist: NAN GREEN, by contrast, travelled to war third class. Leaving her children behind in England, she went to fight for the International Brigade. The Intellectual: MARGARITA NELKEN was an art critic and novelist, who had translated Kafka into Spanish. Denounced as a whore by the Catholic Right, she became a radical politician. The Fascist: After her husband was killed in the fighting and miscarrying her baby on hearing the news, MERCEDES SANZ-BACHILLER set up a welfare organisation that was to change the face of Spain. Preston has harnessed biography to serve history by vividly telling the stories of four very different women whose lives were starkly altered by the conflict – a significant, tragic and remarkable – Irish Times

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Customer Reviews

This book really helped me understand the Spanish civil war a lot better. Seen through the eyes of four different women made it great. I loved that the author followed up on these women to the ends of their lives.

Writers of fiction are often accused of forcing their characters to jump through ever more fanciful hoops to satisfy a presumed need for engaging plot. The fact that reality often amplifies the unlikely to the near incredible regularly reminds any reader that considered fiction rarely overstates any issue that derives from our usually random human recklessness. Rarely, for instance, when dealing with war, does fiction place women in the front line. And equally uncommon is the recognition that women are also often in the front lines of politics, even when they might continue to be under-represented amongst the professional practitioners of the art. And so we often need the kind of reality check that a balanced historical account can provide. Paul Preston's *Doves Of War* is precisely the kind of book that can provide comment on all these themes and thus bring us back to earth with an eye-opening bump. *Doves Of War* presents contrasting biographies of four women who were directly involved in the hostilities of the Spanish Civil War. Priscilla Scott-Ellis is born of the English upper crust and supports the Nationalists. Nan Green is also English, but motivated by a commitment to left-wing politics. She lines up with the Republic. Mercedes Sanz-Bachiller, a Spaniard, marries into the political life of Vallolid. Margarita Nelken, Spanish-speaking and Spanish-born, but Jewish and branded a foreigner by her enemies, becomes a significant actor on the political left. And so we follow the lives of four women, two on the left and two on the right, two outsiders and two insiders, two who celebrated victory and two berated in defeat. Their stories thus contrast. It is much to the author's credit that these lives are presented in a fair and unbiased way. Paul Preston's personal take on the history of Spain's war is well known. But in *Doves Of War* he consistently ducks opportunities to make points about the politics of the struggle, except when the politics are lived out in the lives of his subjects. Committed readers on either side of the argument might feel frustrated at this, but the overall result is that *Doves Of War* avoids polemic and lets the detail of these four

women's stories demand the reader's uncomplicated attention. The first subject, for instance, was born into privilege and wealth, thus making political points easy to score. The second is very much the nineteen-thirties pro-Soviet apologist and activist, and caricature might thus beckon. The third is a long-suffering wife dragged into the limelight and the fourth is the driven polymath intellectual. In some way or other, all four could be presented as caricatures or used as vehicles to score other associated historical and political points. Aspects of all four lives could be stressed to demolish them as people or belittle their contribution and commitment. But the author always shies away from cheap shots, even consciously avoiding them, always preferring to analyse rather than judge. What happens to these four women is the meat of *Doves Of War*, so this review will avoid reference to the detail of the individual stories. What the review can do, however, is note that each of these lives presents a series of events that is stranger, more heroic, more tragic, more convoluted, more complicated and much more profound than anything a writer of fiction might implausibly create to impose on a character. The twists and turns of these lives, each one pummelled by events and scarred by war leave the reader breathless just trying to keep up. The style, however, is not easy. Paul Preston is an historian, not a sensationalist or indeed a sentimentalist, and these tales, as presented here, are more documentary than Hollywood. Their content may be stranger than fiction, but the material is considered, discussed, referenced, sourced and checked. Nothing is ever over-stated. *Doves Of War* displays immense scholarship and, whatever the author's obvious sympathies, he offers tremendous respect for these four differing women who, in their different ways, gave their lives to the causes they supported.

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