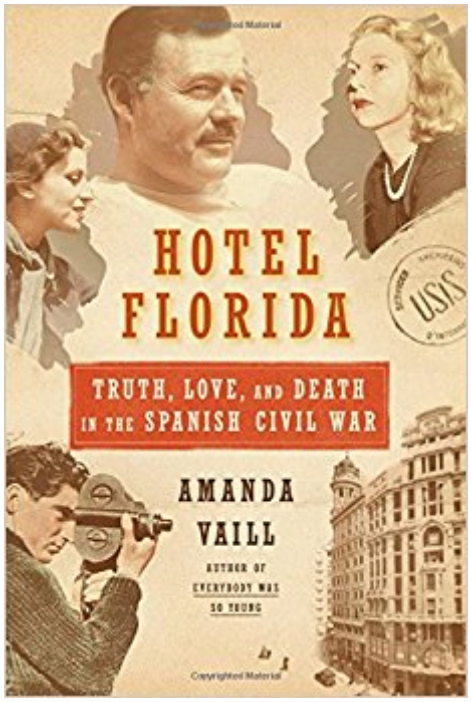
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Hotel Florida: Truth, Love, And Death In The Spanish Civil War



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Synopsis

A spellbinding story of love amid the devastation of the Spanish Civil WarMadrid, 1936. In a city blasted by a civil war that many fear will cross borders and engulf EuropeÃ¢â ¬â ¢a conflict one writer will call "the decisive thing of the century"Ã¢â ¬â ¢six people meet and find their lives changed forever. Ernest Hemingway, his career stalled, his marriage sour, hopes that this war will give him fresh material and new romance; Martha Gellhorn, an ambitious novice journalist hungry for love and experience, thinks she will find both with Hemingway in Spain. Robert Capa and Gerda Taro, idealistic young photographers based in Paris, want to capture history in the making and are inventing modern photojournalism in the process. And Arturo Barea, chief of the Spanish government's foreign press office, and Ilsa Kulcsar, his Austrian deputy, are struggling to balance truth-telling with loyalty to their sometimes compromised causeÃ¢â ¬â ¢a struggle that places both of them in peril. Beginning with the cloak-and-dagger plot that precipitated the first gunshots of the war and moving forward month by month to the end of the conflict. Hotel Florida traces the tangled and disparate wartime destinies of these three couples against the backdrop of a critical moment in history: a moment that called forth both the best and the worst of those caught up in it. In this noir landscape of spies, soldiers, revolutionaries, and artists, the shadow line between truth and falsehood sometimes became faint indeedÃ¢â ¬â ¢your friend could be your enemy and honesty could get you (or someone else) killed. Years later, Hemingway would say, "It is very dangerous to write the truth in war, and the truth is very dangerous to come by." In Hotel Florida, from the raw material of unpublished letters and diaries, official documents, and recovered reels of film, the celebrated biographer Amanda Vaill has created a narrative of love and reinvention that is, finally, a story about truth: finding it, telling it, and living itÃ¢â ¬â ¢whatever the cost.*INCLUDES 16 PAGES OF BLACK-AND-WHITE PHOTOGRAPHS

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Customer Reviews

Amanda Vaill Five Things I Learned About Hemingway While Writing Hotel Florida by Amanda Vaill 1) He was a classical music maven. Although I knew his mother had been an aspiring opera singer and had taught piano and voice in the Hemingways' Oak Park, Illinois home, I didn't realize that classical music was Hemingway's go-to soundtrack for relaxation and distraction. But when shells were whistling over the Hotel Florida in Madrid, where he and Martha Gellhorn were staying during the Spanish Civil War, what did Hemingway put on the Victrola to drown out the bombardment? Chopin's Opus 33 mazurka, number 4, and the ballade in A-flat minor, opus 47. 2) He was an agent of the KGB. In public Hemingway had always strenuously resisted the idea of writing anything from "a Marxian viewpoint" Ã¢â ¬â œ something he derided as "so much horseshit." But in 1937, when he was in Spain covering the Civil War for the North American Newspaper Alliance and writing the script for Joris Ivens's documentary film, The Spanish Earth, Ivens had tried to enlist him as a propagandist, and possibly more, for the Communist Party, which had been supporting the Spanish government against Franco's rebels. And according to internal KGB files studied by a former Soviet agent, Alexander Vassiliev, Hemingway was recruited by the KGB in 1941 and given the code-name "Argo." It was hoped he could report on Nazi activity in Cuba and the Caribbean during World War II, but he never generated any useful intelligence and his cover was terminated in 1950. 3) He couldn't cook paella. In April of 1937, at a Rioja-fueled lunch party at the Madrid restaurant Botin, a spot Hemingway loved (and had celebrated in The Sun Also Rises), the writer insisted on leaving the table Ã¢â ¬â œ where the company included the photographer Robert Capa and Capa's beautiful girlfriend and professional partner Gerda Taro Ã¢â ¬â œ- and going into the kitchen to help prepare paella. "Less skillful in the kitchen than at the typewriter," was the tactful verdict of the restaurant's owner, Emilio Gonzales. 4) His affair with Martha Gellhorn was less than a great romance. He might have run off with Gellhorn to Spain, beginning an affair that culminated in marriage three years later, after he divorced his second wife, Pauline; but apparently the Gellhorn-Hemingway romance could have used some couples therapy. Gellhorn later claimed her "whole memory of sex with Ernest [was] the invention of excuses and failing that, the hope that it would soon be over." Which it was, by 1944, when Gellhorn scooped her

husband by getting a ride on a hospital ship to the D-Day beaches while he gazed at the coast through binoculars from the deck of an attack transport. 5) He originally began the manuscript of his most successful novel, For Whom the Bell Tolls, which draws on his experience in the Spanish Civil War, in the first person. He changed his mind, choosing the detachment of a narrative in which the protagonist is "he," not "I." It was the best and most truthful decision he could have made. To understand why, of course, you have to read the book. Or books. His, and mine.

As if civil war wasnÃ¢â ¬â„¢t torturous enough, the Spanish Civil War had the misfortune to become entangled in larger global issues of ideology on the eve of WWII. That subtext added to the complexity of deciphering who was friend or foe as Francisco Franco overthrew the government and leftist rebels fought back. Thousands of miles away, Ernest Hemingway saw the war as a way to revive a flagging career and get back his zest. Martha Gelhorn, an ambitious young journalist, also saw a career opportunity and a chance to make a lover of Hemingway. In Paris, Robert Capa and Gerda Taro, lovers and idealistic photographers, saw a chance to capture history in the infancy of photojournalism. Arturo Barea and Ilsa Kulcsar were press officers torn between telling the truth and struggling to support their crumbling cause. Vaill taps unpublished letters and diaries as well as official documents to bring intimacy and immediacy to a new look at the war from the perspective of three couples whose paths crossed. This is high drama and an assemblage of characters uniquely suited to appreciate and record it. --Vanessa Bush

The Spanish Civil War, a prelude to WW2, began in 1936 and ended almost three years later. In the war years, Spanish cities and towns were turned into battlegrounds and hundreds of thousands of Spaniards were killed. Also killed in the fighting were foreigners sympathetic to one or the other sides in the war and had traveled to Spain to take part in the war. The "International Brigades" were made up of men from the US, Britain, and European countries, wanting to help the Republicans, fighting off Franco and his Nationalist troops. The Germans sent men and materiel as well; looking forward to their own coming war, they tested out new weapons on the hapless Spanish. In addition to the fighters, the press came to Madrid and other Spanish towns. Writers and photographers hoping to both let the world in on what was happening in Spain. And if they also gained a bit of fame while covering the war, well, that was good, too. Certainly many war correspondents who became famous in the following big war, gained experience in covering the Spanish Civil War.Amanda Vaill, author of two other superb works of non-fiction, looks at three "couples" who were part of the press coverage of the war in her new book, "Hotel Florida: Truth, Love, and Death in the Spanish Civil

War", Two of the six were writers, Ernest Hemingway and his soon-to-be third wife, Martha Gellhorn. Two were photographers, Hungarian Robert Capa (he changed his name from Endre Friedmann when he began his career) and his companion and photographic partner, Gerda Taro. The other two highlighted by Vaill, were Spaniard Arturo Barea, who ran the press office in Madrid. He was joined by an Austrian woman, Ilsa Kulcsar. The Hotel Florida was the main hotel in Madrid, used by the correspondents and photographers covering the war.Vaill does an excellent job at looking at all six main characters, as well as secondary-to-the-story characters. She doesn't only write about what was happening in Spain; she puts her subjects in Madrid only after telling how they got there. In most cases, their lives were building to the point of covering the battles, and most enjoyed success after the war was over. And by writing in shortish chapters, giving month, year, and place, she is able to control the narrative.She writes with a bit of a cutting edge, but that makes her book even more interesting. Amanda Vaill has written a superb look at people and places in a certain time.By the way, if the Spanish Civil War is of special interest, you might like to look into the work of Rebecca Pawel, who has written four mysteries starring a Nationalist police officer in Madrid, at the end of the war. The first book is called, "Death of a Nationalist" and is a great book about a man who fought for a cause he believed in. Most of the readers would not be sympathetic to the character but Pawel writes with such nuance that her characters and plots are excellently drawn.Also, Amanda Vaill refers to the International Center of Photography in New York City. Begun by Robert Capa and continued after his death in 1954 by his brother, the museum is filled with the photographic work of Robert Capa and other war photographers. A great place to spend a few hours.

Amanda Vaill deserves better from . She has written an engrossing book about an important time and some of the individuals whose lives were changed by it. Two of those individuals were photographers yet has chosen not to include any of the photos from the print version in the e-book. Whoever made this decision needs to be told to find another job and needs to fix this and send revised copies to those who mistakenly opted for the e-book version. If the photos had been included this would be a 5 star book.Update: I have had an exchange of e-mails with the author over the missing photos and she is as apalled as I am that they were not included. She did point out that a poor rating is more likely to affect her than the screw-ups at so I have changed my rating. I cannot give it five stars, though the writing deserves that. So - a five star book with the photos, not a five-star book without the photos. I doubt anyone at cares about this, since they don't seem to care anything anymore about books.

Amanda Vaill has written a terrific book about the romantic attachment the western Left during the heyday of the Popular Front period had for the loyalist cause in the Spanish Civil War (1936-39). She tells her story through the eyes of three couples: the writers Ernest Hemingway and Martha Gellhorn, the war photographers Robert Capa and Gerda Taro, and the chief censor of the foreign press Arturo Barea and his Austrian companion Ilsa Kulcsar. They are all people of the Left who utilized their exceptional skills to promote the loyalist cause. In their zeal, with the notable exception of Barea, the truth was sometimes shaded, bent or completely distorted to present the Republic in the most favorable light.Little do they realize that despite all of their zeal they are pawns in a titanic struggle between Hitler and Stalin. Spain is a proxy war designed to further their respective foreign policy interests and when Stalin had a need to cozy up to Hitler he cut his Spanish pawns loose and kept SpainÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s gold reserves. Along the way the purge trials then underway in Moscow found their way to Spain where all too many loyalist supporters were summarily executed or simply disappeared. Vaill, to her credit, is very clear about all of this.Although ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“Hotel FloridaÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• is not a history of the Spanish Civil War, there is much history to be learned. Its locus of attention is on the Hotel Florida where many of the journalists along with NKVD operatives hung out and it was there where the ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“warÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• tourists of the Left would pass through. Think Lillian Hellman, for example. In a way the book is analogous to OrwellÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s classic ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“Homage to CataloniaÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• where the locus of action was Barcelona; here most of the action takes place in and around Madrid with side-trips to Paris, New York and Key West.The most interesting character, all of 26, is the blond crop-haired Gerda Taro. She was always where the action was trying to get the best photograph and showed little concern for her own personal safety. She had both grit and verve to overcome the very real hardships faced by a war photographer. Unfortunately she dies in what can be characterized as a battlefield accident and is given a martyrÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s funeral in Paris.For all of this and much more, including appearances by the Soviet Spy Kim Philby and the future German Prime Minister Willy Brandt, I highly recommend ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“Hotel FloridaÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• to readers interested in Spain and the prelude to World War II.

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