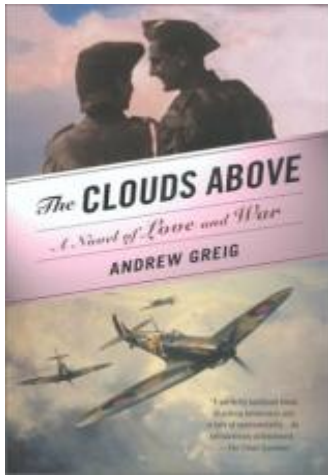

The Clouds Above: A Novel of Love and War

by Andrew Greig



About the Book

A Boston Herald Book Club Pick

Set against the Battle of Britain, **The Clouds Above** evokes the extraordinary summer when Great Britain's survival lay in The Royal Air Force, two thousand very young men, are thrown directly into the fierce struggle with the Luftwaffe. Len, an RAF Sergeant pilot, and Tadeusz, a Polish pilot serving in the RAF, become close friends despite their obvious differences, each aware that neither of them is likely to survive.

In this tumultuous and uncertain time, Len falls in love with Stella, a young Women's Auxiliary Air Force radar operator. She is trying to endure her own war: making the transition from a sedate middle-class English life to service life. She tries to adapt to sharing crowded barracks with other young women, watching her fellow WAAFs die, listening to the battles in the air on her headset, and trying to find an intense, if brief, happiness with a young man who risks his life daily.

In chapters alternately narrated by the two young lovers, Len and Stella wrestle with the foolhardiness of a romance in wartime, even as the battle in the sky intensifies.

Drawing from his mother's diaries chronicling her own experiences as a nurse during the World War I, Andrew Greig has written a novel that is as compelling a love story as it is a war story. **The Clouds Above** deftly portrays both the adrenaline-rush horrors of aerial combat and the fragile but heightened romantic passions of wartime.

Discussion Guide

1. This is essentially the story of four unlikely friends: Len, Tad, Stella, and Maddy. What draws the four of them together? How does each of the relationships change as the war progresses?
2. Len, Stella, and Tad are all involved in the war effort, Len and Tad as pilots and Stella with the WAAF. Why, for each of them, is it so important to be fighting? In what ways do their reasons change after they get to know each other?
3. Why is Stella hesitant to get involved with Len? Discuss the difference between Stella and Maddy's wartime philosophy of living.
4. From the beginning Stella sees Len as very young and naïve. Considering what you know of her past boyfriends, do you believe that she was really in love with Len? As the war progresses, do her feelings change? Why?
5. Consider Len and Stella's holiday in the country. How does their relationship change over those days? How do they each find their worlds changed when they return?
6. How does the death of Stella's father effect her? In what ways do Stella and Len cope with the daily casualties of war? How do Tad and Maddy cope?
7. Do you think being a pilot changed Len? Does having Stella to protect make him a better or worse pilot?
8. Discuss Len's trip to Scotland. How does the time away change him? How does meeting the two old veterans motivate him?
9. Why do Stella and Maddy go to London even though it is being bombed? How do Stella's feelings for Maddy change during the trip? What is the significance of her evening with John G.?
10. How does Maddy's death effect Tad? Was he in love with her? In what ways, if at all, do you think Maddy's death is responsible for Tad's?
11. In the end, why does Stella suddenly seem so eager to have Len's baby? Do you think that, if Len had lived, he and Stella would have gotten married? Do you think they were truly in love or just afraid of being alone during the war?
12. Discuss the ways in which this novel shows different aspects of war. Consider the descriptions of Len as a fighter pilot and Stella reading radar. How are their stories different than other war stories you may have read or seen in the movies? How is Stella's character different than the role women traditionally play in war stories?
13. How do you think the experiences of Len and Stella compare to those involved in today's war efforts around the world?

Author Bio

Andrew Greig is the prize-winning author of five poetry collections and several novels. **The Clouds Above** is his first novel to be published in the United States. He lives in the Orkney Islands, Scotland.

Critical Praise

"Greig's craftsmanship gives the couple's story the poignancy it deserves."

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