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Suite Française



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Synopsis

Beginning in Paris on the eve of the Nazi occupation in 1940. Suite Française tells the remarkable story of men and women thrown together in circumstances beyond their control. As Parisians flee the city, human folly surfaces in every imaginable way: a wealthy mother searches for sweets in a town without food; a couple is terrified at the thought of losing their jobs, even as their world begins to fall apart. Moving on to a provincial village now occupied by German soldiers, the locals must learn to coexist with the enemy in their town, their homes, even in their hearts. When Irène Némirovsky began working on Suite Française, she was already a highly successful writer living in Paris. But she was also a Jew, and in 1942 she was arrested and deported to Auschwitz, where she died. For sixty-four years, this novel remained hidden and unknown.

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Customer Reviews

Starred Review. HighBridge has chosen exceptional readers for these remarkable novellas.

Oreskes reads "Storm in June" in a clear, low storyteller's voice, changing tone to designate characters without trying to act out or be those characters. He handles Nemirovsky's black humor and irony with intelligence, and understates to great effect reactions from haughtiness to decency in the midst of panic and death as masses suddenly rush from Paris in the wake of Nazi bombings in 1940. Rosenblat has a husky Lauren Bacall voice that draws you into the dialectically complex relationship between French villagers and German occupiers in "Dolce." This is not a diary or a novel written years later in cool contemplation. These are historical novellas written while the author

lived through the events. Yet with the detachment of hindsight and the craft of a fine, experienced author (she had successfully published nine novels), Nemirovsky shapes into novel form the stories of a small gallery of French Parisians and villagers and occupying German officers and soldiers, each with his or her national and personal idiosyncrasies and destinies. This was to have been the first of five novellas in an ongoing war saga, but in 1942 the Germans discovered the Jewish writer living in a small village. She was arrested and shipped to Auschwitz, and died a month later.

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Nemirovsky wrote *Suite Française* as the events that inspired them unfolded simultaneously; that alone makes the work remarkable. The first two novels came to light in 2004 (and were published to great acclaim in France) after Nemirovsky's daughters revealed the existence of their mother's notebooks. With the author's notes about her next three novels (*Captivity*, *Battles*, and *Peace*?) included, it's clear that Nemirovsky intended to write a sort of *War and Peace*. Even without Nemirovsky's astonishing perspective, critics agree that the novels' witty characterizations, mesmerizing prose, cinematic scenes, and insightful observations make these novels short masterpieces. The *New York Times* expressed concern over characterization, and *Newsday* noted the absence of discussion about Jews. Still, *Suite Française* may be considered "the last great fiction of the war" (*Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*). Copyright © 2004 Phillips & Nelson Media, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

An air of melancholy pervades Irene Nemirovsky's '*Suite Française*', due both to the novellas themselves and to the circumstances in which they were written - and those that prevented the author finishing the suite. It is extraordinary to think that these novellas were being written as the events of WW2 unfolded, not with retrospect. The two novellas are loosely linked via one or two of the same characters. The first, '*Storm in June*' follows the exodus from Paris as the Germans invaded. This traumatic pageant has something of a documentary feel, as if the author is a journalist, observing the characters as they make their very human mistakes in the panic. The characters are mainly from the middle and upper echelons of Parisian society, and Nemirovsky's narrative is observational and insightful, yet unsentimental: 'Panic-stricken, some of the women threw down their babies as if they were cumbersome packages and ran. Others grabbed their children and held them so tightly they seemed to want to force them back into the womb, as if that were the only truly safe place.' The second novella, '*Dolce*' is of a different character: static,

focussed on a few characters, intense and bittersweet. The characterisation is superb and the uneasy relationship between the occupied and the occupier superbly portrayed. The atmosphere is wonderful: you can taste, smell and breathe the French summer days and nights. I liked the circularity of the story. Of course, the stories are fragments, maybe unedited to the author's satisfaction. One can only wonder at what might have been had she survived to complete the suite.

After the French defeat by the Germans in 1940, Nemirovsky began writing a sequence of five novels on the experience of the French under occupation. She completed only two before she perished in the anti-Jewish persecutions. But these two are enormously affecting. "Storm in June" describes the evacuation of Paris, as hundreds of thousands flee southward through the French countryside; Nemirovsky concentrates on a few, mostly middle-class families and their "adventures." This novel (about 200 pages in length) can seem quite episodic, but underlying it is a pervasive dread, at a time when the French were not yet looking to cast blame. (For that, see Marc Bloch, *Strange Defeat*, and many other subsequent scholarly books.) Nemirovsky has a wonderfully sympathetic eye as she describes the collapse of a complacent society; certain sequences, such as the death of a young priest at the hands of the boys he is escorting to safety, are narrated with extraordinary insight. "Dolce," the second novel, is considerably shorter; it describes the occupation of a small French town by a German unit, and the consequent "quasi-romance" of a young French woman with a German officer who is billeted in her house. This novel is linked to the first somewhat tangentially but importantly, since the son of one of the families in the first novel had hid out in the village previously, and other characters also play an incidental role. But the romance is told in extraordinarily delicate tones, and her description of village life, from the aristocracy down to the rather boorish farmers, is often lyrical. Presumably the three subsequent novels would have carried forward these stories, but (as appended excerpts from her notes suggest) Nemirovsky herself was uncertain what the end would have looked like: presumably, some sort of truce that would have ended the occupation. She gives no hint of the gathering Allied coalition (the U.S. is not yet in the war at the end of her second novel), or of any anticipation of the ensuing invasion. The French Resistance is only hinted at, but not yet fully formed. So Nemirovsky's main concentration is on the complex psychology of French defeat. Perhaps even Nemirovsky would have conceded, had she survived, that she gives far too little weight to the tragedy overtaking the Jewish population of France during these events. When "Suite Française" was rescued and published in the 1990s, this issue was widely discussed, since Nemirovsky was herself Jewish. But the two surviving novels are best read with a degree of understanding for her difficult position in those years.

I thought this was a clever and unusual story for a novel, and yet the theme is familiar to anyone who has dealt with the affects of inheritance on family members. When we have expectations of a "nest egg" coming our way sometimes we spend the money before we get it. At the very least we spend it virtually, so disappointments can be profound. How these four syblings adjust to changing prospects propels the narrative and influences our opinions of each of them. There is a message about greed and a thing or two about whether money can buy happiness. It was well written and fun to read.

It's 1940, in Paris on the night of the Nazi occupation. This is a story about extraordinary men and woman tossed collectively into situations outside their will. Society irrationality comes in any conceivable way. As Parisians escape the towns, a rich mom hunts for candies in a city deprived of food rations. While their realm starts to collapse, a couple is frightened at the alleged reality of losing their employment. The residents must learn to live with the adversary in their city, their households, even in their core beings. Irène Némirovsky was employed on Suite Française, she was previously an extremely popular writer. She lived in Paris and she was Jewish. This is a heart wrenching story that will leave you pondering the harsh realities of the past.

Absorbing view of the original story, a much wider view of WWII French civilians trying to survive the German occupation. A POW's wife suffers the treatment of her overbearing mother-in-law and finds solace in the attentions of a sensitive Nazi officer billeted in the home.

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