

How do you commemorate what you can't forget?

Nineteen Nineteen

ALINE SAX

'Nineteen Nineteen' follows young Henry Bennett, a former British soldier, as he returns to Flanders in 1919, only months after the Armistice. Driven by guilt as much as by necessity, he travels back to Ypres in the hope that confronting the place where he fought to breaking point might help him get a grip on his traumas.

Henry is overwhelmed by memories of battles, comradeship and above all the loss of friends such as Archie, with whom he had a close bond. At home he cannot settle, his parents no longer recognize him, and he is a stranger even to his fiancée Sarah.

Along with a diverse group of travelling companions – each with their own reasons for visiting the former battlefields – Henry discovers that the ravaged landscape is slowly turning into a kind of sightseeing destination. For some the front is almost a tourist attraction, the horror a souvenir. For others, such as young widow Mrs Cartwright, the confrontation with the past is every bit as painful as it is for Henry.

'Nineteen Nineteen' confronts and moves but at the end permits a glimmer of hope. ****

HET NIEUWSBLAD

The trip reopens many of Henry's old wounds and ultimately takes him back to the aid post where he watched Charlie die. The reader, like Henry, is given a glimpse of hope when he thinks he can see Charlie there again.

With empathy, sensory power and an almost cinematic style, Aline Sax weaves together past and present to create an intense psychological portrait. Her vivid, immersive writing pairs historical precision with literary sensitivity and poignantly shows how deeply war can lodge inside a person.

Sax builds the story expertly, before inflicting a swingeing sledgehammer blow near the end.



AUTHOR



Aline Sax (b. 1984) wrote her first book when she was fifteen, about two German child soldiers at the Normandy beaches on June 6, 1944. Many years and a PhD in history later, Sax is well-known in Flanders as a historical novelist. With her in-depth research and sober language, she brings the past to life like no other. Photo © JuttaArt241

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