



The Blue Beast: Power and Passion in the Great War

Jonathan Walker

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Consider the rubicund, tired portraits of Field Marshal Lord French, 1st Earl of Ypres by John Singer Sergeant, or the earlier image of the walrus-moustached here of the Siege of Kimberley; then remember that this stuffed, this villain of *Oh! What a Lovely War*, had a mistress. It doesn't seem possible. In investigating the amours of three extraordinary women - Winifred Bennett (lover of Sir John), Emilie Grigsby and Sylvia Henley - author Jonathan Walker provides us with an entirely new and astonishing perspective on British leaders in the Great War. It puts flesh on the bones of 'the hollow men, the stuffed men'. The aristocratic Sylvia Henley stepped into her sister Venetia's shoes after her marriage in 1915 as confidante to Prime Minister Herbert Asquith. As the British suffered 400,000 casualties at the Battle of the Somme in July 1916, who is the first person he writes to about the awful offensive? Sylvia. The American adventuress Emilie Grigsby was the lover of Sir John Stevens Cowans, the Quartermaster General, *The Times* military correspondent, and Rupert Brooke. Using contemporary diaries, letters and intelligence reports, *Power and Passion* exposes the realities of London society whilst men died in France and how these women, through their lovers, affected the course of the war.

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Kevin Miller:

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