



Aimée & Jaguar: A Love Story, Berlin 1943

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Unique, moving, and true - this radiant love story is set against the horrific backdrop of World War II Nazi Germany. When Lilly "Aimee" Wust, a gentle mother of four and wife of a Nazi officer, met Felice "Jaguar" Schragenheim, a Jew living underground in Berlin, neither could have guessed that their brief initial encounter would develop into a blazing, devoted love. As the Nazi stranglehold closed in on them, Lilly and Felice found themselves fighting insurmountable odds to stay together. Extraordinarily passionate and heartrending, this is a rare and personal look at the love and strength of two women whose commitment to each other defied the brutality of their time.

Aimée & Jaguar: A Love Story, Berlin 1943 Details

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From Reader Review Aimée & Jaguar: A Love Story, Berlin 1943 for online ebook

Eva says

Although I agree with all the criticisms lobbed at this book by other reviewers below, I nonetheless give it 5 stars because it fascinated me, due simply to the heartbreaking, scandalous, and improbable tale underlying it.

As others have written, Aimee may be flighty and appear not take the plight of her lover seriously, but I feel it is easy to judge her retrospectively. I don't believe she behaves differently than many people in the throes of a deep infatuation; however, given that she is infatuated with a Jew living underground in Nazi Germany, her foibles seem much more weighty to the reader. The book is heavy on quotes from love letters, which I skimmed as they became repetitive. I agree that the author has a bias against Lilly Wust- as she herself states in the epilogue- and this colors her tone throughout the book. The author is allowed to have a point of view, though, even if she is writing non-fiction. She presents the facts in such a way that I was able to draw my own conclusions about the characters' motivations.

All in all, I felt the book lent yet another valuable perspective in the larger body of personal stories of the Holocaust. It was difficult to not to feel Felice's personality shining through.

Inga says

Erica Fischer (*1943) ist Journalistin, Schriftstellerin und Übersetzerin und eine Mitbegründerin des österreichischen Feminismus. Bekannt wurde sie durch ihr Buch *Aimée und Jaguar*, das erstmals 1994 erschien.

Untertitelt ist das Buch mit "Eine Liebesgeschichte, Berlin 1943" - es ist eine dokumentarische Erzählung der Beziehung von Lilly Wust und Felice Schragenheim während der Zeit des Nationalsozialismus und gegen Ende des zweiten Weltkriegs. Lilly hat einen nationalsozialistisch eingestellten Ehemann und vier Kinder, Felice ist eine untergetauchte Jüdin. Nach einer kurzen, intensiven Zeit des Zusammenseins wird Felice 1944 verhaftet und kommt im Konzentrationslager Bergen-Belsen kurz vor Kriegsende um.

Mit großem Aufwand hat Erica Fischer nicht nur die Überlebende Lilly Wust interviewt, als diese bereits 80 Jahre alt war, sondern auch zahlreiche Zeitzeugen befragt, Dokumente und Fotos zusammengetragen. Darin liegt auch der große Unterschied zu zahlreichen Romanen, die Thematik und historischen Hintergrund gemein haben. Es ist eine wahre Geschichte, das ist das eine, aber gleichzeitig bemüht Fischer sich sehr um eine facettenreiche Darstellung, die eben nicht nur eine rosarote Liebesgeschichte zeigt, wie Lilly Wust sie in Erinnerung haben wollte. Kritisch wird Lillys Beziehung zum Nationalsozialismus gezeigt, ihre Reaktionen nach Kriegsende - die Ablehnung von allem Deutschen und eine fast seltsam anmutenden Hinwendung zum Judentum - bleiben nicht unerwähnt, obwohl dies möglich gewesen wäre. Die Tatsache, dass man sich nie ganz Klarheit über den Lillys Charakter verschaffen kann, spiegelt die Komplexität der Situation, in der sich die Frauen historisch und gesellschaftlich befunden haben. Der umfangreiche Anhang mit Fotos, Briefen und Dokumenten belegt das Streben nach Genauigkeit und Authentizität.

Zusammen ergibt dies ein beeindruckendes Buch und Zeitzeugnis mit einer anrührenden Geschichte zweier sehr unterschiedlicher Frauen.

Das Buch wurde in 20 Sprachen übersetzt. Max Färberböck verfilmte die Liebesgeschichte 1998 unter demselben Titel.

Anja says

it was amazing.. I came to this book from the movie, and while I started to read it imagining the actresses of the movie as the characters in the book, I ended up with having the real pictures of Aimée and Jaguar in my head while reading (there are heartbreakingly good photos of them at the end of the book). at times it was tough, cause even though I knew how this tragic story was gonna end, I was still hoping, together with Aimée. the most tragic thing about this book though is that Jaguar's fate was the fate of so fucking many people - excuse the swearing. their letters and diary entries often made me smile inside, cause they are such good prose. and their poetry is fab as well. oh and the book also taught me A LOT about Nazi Germany and concentration camps, even though I thought I knew quite something already. also to hear about the war from the perspective of a Nazi woman was interesting.. I still feel so sorry for Aimée and I know that this should not have happened. read this book, guys, it will make you a better person.

Ruthiella says

This was an interesting, non-fiction account, of two women in love, one Gentile, one Jewish in Nazi Germany during the last years of WWII. I think it was particularly good at showing how pervasive National Socialism was among the “normal” folk of Germany. I think Americans often assume “it couldn’t happen here” or “it couldn’t happen again” and they don’t understand that Hitler’s rise and the subsequent atrocities happened neither overnight nor in a vacuum. I did find the structure of the book a little difficult to follow at times, but definitely this is a worthy true-life account of the period and its complexities as focused on two lives and I am glad I read it.

Matthew says

As with any WWII story involving a Jewish person living in Germany, it's bound to be sad. I felt connected to the characters, but the author's style really made this a tough read. The story was set up like a documentary, only in book form. There would be bits of prose, excerpts of diaries and letters and then straight dialogues from interviews. These elements were not synthesized in a way that made reading it enjoyable.

This is a story of a young German mother who meets a Jewish woman and begins to house her. They fall in love rather quickly, since Elisabeth (or Lilly, or Aimée) was unhappy in her marriage to a Nazi soldier. Felice (or Jaguar), the illegal Jew, lives happily with her lover until, of course, she is captured by the Gestapo. The struggles that follow, and Lilly's brave attempts to help Felice make up the bulk of the story. Reading about the lives of Jews in Nazi-era Berlin was of course depressing, but the most chilling part of this read came at the very end, where the author describes the living conditions of a hopeless, possibly deranged Lilly in her old age.

Perhaps a WWII enthusiast would better enjoy this book, but again the writing style just didn't do it for me.

Joshie says

I've never felt engrossed in a book for a long time until I entered the world of Aimée & Jaguar. Set in WWII, a Nazi mother and a Jewish woman fall in love in bleak and horrific Nazi Germany. Women's stories during the war tend to be ignored and they seem to be rather non-existent. How much more a story between two women, on opposite grounds, falling in love? It is a breath of fresh air to read something that recounts this. Surprisingly, the copy I bought from a book sale only have 362 pages which had the Author's infamous Epilogue cut (other reviewers rated it low because of it). I guess this preserved its impacting and memorable story without tinging Aimée's actions and experiences but it can be somehow confusing and you lose yourself whilst reading because the timelines tend to jump. The wonderful yet painful thing about this biography is how I still hoped together with Aimée even though I know how it ends after watching the film years back. There are letters, poems and scanned tickets and photos in the book. The letters between them are heartbreaking and you see the longing and the love travel in each word just to reach one another. Moreover, as it further unfolds you realize that they are just humans too, especially Aimée and Jaguar, with flaws and all. Pages away from the characters, you get knocked down and be reminded how the war affected everything and how people sometimes do things which doesn't make any sense but they do it nevertheless and you think to yourself whilst reading, 'How about its repercussions?' yet you can't entirely blame anyone at all. Love can only do so much and sometimes that includes doing foolish things. I cried a few pages before I finished this book, went back to look at the pictures once more and felt closer to emotions I've never felt for a long time, and therefore this book has a special place in my heart.

I'll spend the day thinking about them, re-watching the film and watching the documentary.

Favorite Quotes

- "I got nothing from all my men. Men took their pleasure with me and I felt used."
 - "Why am I writing all of this -- I love you so much, in a way I have never felt, never known before. Now I am tormenting you and me. Why does one torment that which one loves? Because one loves."
 - "It is strange that when I think of the future, I never think of the children, it is always as if we will be alone together."
-

Christina (A Reader of Fictions) says

The World War II time period is one of my favorites to read about and study, so I was very curious to read this title. While I do not think the author's writing was very good (quite dry and boring), the story was astounding. In none of my other reading, courses or film watching have I heard a story from a similar lens. The lesbian angle is new of course, but so were all of the details about the Jews who managed to keep living underground (as it were) in Berlin throughout the conflict.

Much of the story, thank goodness, is told in snippets from Aimée's diary, Jaguar's poems, letters and interviews with the people who were still alive when this book was being constructed in the early 1990s. The number of primary sources included in the tale is unique, as well.

The epilogue of the book consists of Erica Fischer's comments on the creation of the book, most of which is a diatribe of Lilly. She does not trust Lilly, the main source for most of the recounted memories, because Lilly apparently knew her story too well and left gaps of time out. I cannot help but wonder if this is why her writing is so stilted and I did not care much for Aimée or Jaguar on a close level; I wanted them to live, of

course, but I was not emotionally invested. I think Fischer's mistrust and judgment came into her writing and storytelling. For all that the cover names this a love story, she has her own opinions about that and it is quite evident.

After the war, Lilly wanted to convert to Judaism and thought of herself as a Jewess, about which Fischer has this to say: "I do not grant her the status of victim. I guard the line that runs between her and Felice, my mother, and myself obdurately, protective of my small piece of identity" (271). I leave this book skeptical of Erica Fischer as a historian, as she seems to be biased, in this tale at least. Still, I am happy to have read it, if only for its unique historical perspective.

Alaina says

I put off reading this book for six years, because I expected to be emotionally devastated. The story *should* be devastating. I'm not sure why, when I finally read it, I more or less responded with an emotional shrug. Is it the poor translation? Perhaps the original author was a less-than-compelling writer? I cannot pinpoint it. I suspect the answer may lie in the epilogue, where Erica Fischer tells about her experience researching the book. She was frustrated, eventually even hostile towards the elderly Lilly (who does, I admit, sound like a person I would not care for). Lilly clung all her life to that year with Felice, and seemed to forget or ignore everything that didn't fit into her neat personal narrative. Initial Nazi sympathies, the fact that Felice was too good and too vibrant for her, and, most frustrating of all, her unwillingness to move past her wartime experiences and live in her present.

These days we would most likely put Lilly in therapy for PTSD. What moves me most is not Felice's death, though the circumstances are so narrow that throughout the book I was thinking "surely, she will not be taken away and exterminated *in the last months* of the war." What are the chances! No, what made me saddest was the lifelong depression that Lilly suffered. For that, she got little sympathy. Not even the person who cared enough to write about her life gave her much sympathy. I feel sympathy for her, and wish- oh, don't we all- to rewrite that history.

I preceded this book with *In the Garden of Beasts* by Larson. Larson's book is well-written and fascinating, and I am sorry to say that in direct comparison, *Aimee & Jaguar* pales.

P.S. I do think the Aimee & Jaguar love story is great. Lesbians in the 40s! In that aspect it was totally fascinating.

Stacey (wanderlustforwords) says

3.25-3.5

A book whose content is worthy of reading. Aimee and Jaguar is a true story, and a fascinating, it records a love story between two women in the middle of WWII Berlin. It's crazy just to think about that without hearing any particular, but when one discovers that one woman is married to a Nazi and one is a Jewess. Lilly Wust (Aimee) is married to a Nazi officer, and a mother of 4, Felice (Jaquar) is a Jewish woman living

underground (they were referred to as Uboats). They meet through a mutual friend and Felice tells their friend she wants to see if Lilly "can smell Jews," like she proclaims, so she starts coming around. Not only can Lilly not "smell" Felice, but her presence in Lilly and her children's lives will forever be changed. Felice is the one true love of Lilly's life, but this is not a happily ever after story.

Jaguar decides to stay in Berlin, even though all the Jewish left were underground. That was certainly her undoing, and inflicted damage that Lilly never recovered from. Erica Fischer interviewed Lilly in 1991, when she was 80 years old. She said Lilly was so accustomed to telling the story in the same way "mechanically," with emotions at the same points, that it took her months to break down rote memory and touch their lives deeply.

I rated the book low because I felt Erica's writing was "mechanical." Much of the book felt like reading a dry history book. I believe it's an author's responsibility to take the given information and form an informative but also enjoyable book. In the beginning, the dates of the journal entries and letters jump around making it difficult to establish a memorable time line. Later in the book the journals and letters are chronological.

The history in this book, taken directly from letters and journals, was enough to keep enough of my interest to finish the book. I thought the love story wasn't well developed, and I felt it wasn't written in an inspiring fashion.

April says

"I would rather experience great unhappiness and be destroyed by it than live in moderate happiness to a moderate end."

I am deeply unnerved by this book and sadly disappointed.

First, I absolutely *adored* this story, and I hate myself for hyping it up so much after watching the movie. After hunting down the English edition for so long (sadly my Deutsch is, admittedly, too *scheiße* to read the original German, despite my many years of study), I suppose I simply had too many great expectations.

Fundamentally, this is an extremely significant story that simply *had* to be told. I thank Fischer for this, but I would've strongly suggested she approached the writing of *Aimée and Jaguar* a lot differently. The tragic love story of two women in Nazi Germany should not, in my opinion, read like a fact book. Consequently, I felt little-to-no empathy towards the main characters--our protagonists Lilly and Felice--for most of the story, despite this improving in the latter half of the book. I felt the most for Felice and however little fault this is of the author, I left this book wanting to know more about her. Otherwise, this book read very much like a documentary; it compiles transcripts from various characters while stringing together letters, excerpts and a on top of it all: a narrative. It was far too muddled and it stifled the emotions I expected to feel during this novel. Although this may very well be the harsh consequences of the translation, it nevertheless does not change the format.

I don't want to blast this book apart, because I really do find the story a very fascinating one and it is collected well. I'm sure most of the book is based upon fragments of fact and Wurst's recollection, so in this instance Fischer does quite well to piece everything together. I'm also a huge fan of luscious lesbian Berlin and the lives of lesbians throughout history, therefore I found this a very fascinating read in terms of how people handled it back then and how the protagonists themselves reacted to having such feelings. On a

lighter note, it did fill me with happiness to see the way the family and relatives within the book reacted towards Lilly and Felice's relationship. It was a heart-warming thing to read about, especially given the time period.

I suppose what I'm most unnerved about is the author's treatment of Elisabeth (Lilly) Wurst. I'm not so much upset, more *confused*, simply by the epilogue. I understand Wurst may not have been wholly truthful in her recollections (after all, some things are quite hard to admit; we've all made mistakes) but this was no reason to react so harshly. It seemed very strange and peculiar, as if she were saying Lilly deserved no sympathy due to her heritage being that of strict German and not Jewish. It just read wrongly.

Overall, I will pocket this book for years to come. It is a significant story I will keep with me for a long time. Meanwhile, however, I will delight in the movie more times than I ever will the book.

Rachael Eyre says

I've wanted to read this for years- I came across the story in a magazine and found it heartbreaking. So to say I feel disillusioned is something of an understatement.

My 3 star rating is solely for the love story and the girls themselves. What I found very difficult to swallow was the author's clear dislike/disdain for Lily- a nice attitude for a biographer! Yes, I can understand her anger towards Germans of the period, but seeing as Lily went some way towards redeeming herself, I found her hostile attitude (plus the clumsy way she linked it to the situation in Bosnia) insufferable. I thought her speculations about the relationship not lasting were tasteless in the extreme- who made her God?

It's such a shame, because in the hands of a better, less biased author, this could've been great. If anybody else writes a book on the subject, I intend to read it- and I'll try to catch the film too.

Linn says

I don't even know where to start with this. But all I can say that this story was both so beautiful, heartbreaking and terrifying! I actually started it this summer, and then had to take a break because it made me feel too much, seriously. I highly recommend it and it's such an important story, and these women deserve to have their story told. But I also have to say that reading about what all these people went through during this time, all the loss, hate and fear, made me sick. So I needed to take a break while reading, for 2 months... But yeah, it's such an important story and very beautifully told! ♥? And I actually think everyone should read it once in their life...

Ry Herman says

This is a story that remains heartbreakingly relevant. It's first and foremost about ordinary people in all their complexity -- sometimes petty and sometimes heroic, sometimes passionate and sometimes cruel. But it's about those people during a time of evil; genuine evil, when it was taken as a fact by far too many that some people were not people, and deserved to be hated, robbed, enslaved, and murdered. At a time when many countries are again (or still) turning away refugees and a sickeningly familiar brand of racism is on the rise,

this is one of many stories that needs to be remembered.

The writing of this book, unfortunately, is not always up to the power of the material. Whether because of the translation or because of the original text, some of it is presented confusingly. In addition, there are as many irrelevant details as there are illuminating anecdotes about these people and their lives. Some of it also seems too slanted to the author's own viewpoints. This is still an important story, but the storytelling sometimes let it down.

Bill says

Wonderful! 3.5/5 STARS

How fortuitous that I should read this book three weeks before the United States Supreme Court's landmark decision on same sex marriage! I'm unclear how it landed on my To Read shelf ... I think Amazon's (Goodread's parent company) algorithms suggested it to me while I was reading the Miseducation of Cameron Post. (I loved that story too!)

Anyway, I'm usually not drawn to love stories or romances but this one piqued my interest with great earnest. My unending fascination with all things WWII lured me in for a closer look at this wonderful story about boundless and passionate love during one of the darkest times in human history; a true story of unbridled love in a time of inhumane cruelty and genocidal hatred.

The story takes place in Berlin 1943 through the end of WWII. Nazi Germany is well into the prosecution of the Final Solution, systematically, relentlessly and ruthlessly moving the Jewish population out of Berlin, herding them into rail cattle cars destined for concentration camps far from the capitol of the Third Reich. The Allies begin to make periodic bombing runs near the city, and the German Wehrmacht has suffered a crushing defeat in the Battle of Stalingrad, but the Nazi propaganda machine reassures the German population that victory is only a matter of time. As the tide of the war turns from German blitzkrieg, conquest and repression to retreat, defense, defeat, and surrender, life in the once prosperous German city becomes harsh and unforgiving under the onslaught of relentless bombing and eventual conquest by the converging Allied forces.

Under these extreme, desperate and violent conditions, Elizabeth Wust and Felice Schragenheim fall deeply in love.

Elizabeth Wust, also known as Lilly and Aimee, is the wife of Nazi officer Gunter Wust and mother of their four boys. She resides in downtown Berlin and has made many female acquaintances while her husband is away in military service. Her apartment is seemingly endlessly active with the comings and goings of her friends, many of whom are Jews living underground or as inconspicuously as possible from Nazi authorities. (In 1981 at age 68 Lilly was awarded the Federal Service Cross for sheltering and caring for four Jewish women in her apartment in Berlin)

Felice Schragenheim, also known as Jaguar, 'Lice, Fice and Putz, is a Jewish "U-Boater" living underground in Berlin constantly eluding and evading the ever tightening grip of the Gestapo and Nazi SS.

By Lilly's ninth wedding anniversary in March 1943, her marriage with Gunter is empty and tenuous.

Gunter's infidelity is frequent and public. Lilly has an affair with a former co-worker at Deutsche Bank that results in one of her four children. Her emotional connection to her children remains strong despite her eventual divorce from Gunter.

Inge Wolf, completing her government ordered compulsory one year of domestic service working for Lilly Wust, is one of Felice's many friends. While Felice waits on the sidewalk outside Lilly's apartment for Inge to finish her work, Lilly invites her inside out of the cold. Their attraction is instant and intense!

"I got nothing at all from my men. Men took their pleasure with me and I felt used. With Felice it was totally different. She was my counterpart, my complement, literally. I felt I was both myself and Felice. We were a mirror image. She needed only to touch me and I ... When she kissed me I surrendered to her completely. Sex was pleasing for the first time in my life. I had never found men attractive. I was built wrong somehow, but I didn't know that...with Felice I myself could be the one who loved. And then this sense of belonging together unconditionally ... Though I was the older one, I always had the feeling I was the younger one. She controlled me completely, she did. But it was wonderful! She always wore the pants. After all, it was she who had seduced me."

While the core of the story is a straight forward historical account of a lesbian love affair in the 1940s in Nazi Germany of all places, the pages are filled with passionate poems and love letters written by Aimee and Jaguar to each other, interviews with Lilly, her children and friends of Lilly and Felice and black and white photographs dating back to 1919 through 1993.

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My emotional investment in the story grew in size and scope as the intensity and passion of their love constantly collided with the dark, horrifying omnipresence of Nazi pursuit and prosecution of the Jews in Berlin. Felice is forever on the run or in the shadows to elude capture and Lilly is ever vigilant of suspicious and informant neighbors. Despite the great risks of arrest, physical abuse and deportation, the attraction between the two is undeniable and relentless, leaping off each page at me as I wended my way to the sorrowful ending.

Many reviewers have criticized the book for some awkward translation from German to English. Others criticized Lilly's naiveté and recklessness in loving ergo mortally endangering Felice and the author's apparent negative and critical opinion of Lilly.

Honestly, I didn't dig that deep for any philosophical or moral judgments of the people in this story. I took it at face value – an emotional and heartbreaking lesbian love story in a place and time where Jews and homosexuals were deemed subhuman and disposable. While this book certainly is not for everyone, it resonated with me in a very emotional and heartfelt way.

Chueca says

A summer read that did not disappoint. I loved loved loved Aimee and Jaguar's dedication to one another through the medium of letters. I am so thankful these survived to give the story the unique taste of the past. LETTERS! I wish more people wrote letters, they are such a real declaration of the present moment whatever that moment maybe. I have to go further and say they the movie that is based on this book is also really great. But, the book is a MUST. What brave women they are to have loved eachother so much during that particular time and place in history. Truly a unique story.
