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Lola Montez: A Life



Synopsis

The exploits of Lola Montez—onstage as a dancer and an actress, in politics as a power behind thrones, and in bedrooms around the world—made her one of the best-known women of the Victorian era. Born Eliza Gilbert, daughter of British and Irish parents, she transformed herself into an aristocratic Spanish dancer, carrying on an audacious masquerade that took her to Europe, America, and Australia and attracting admirers and scandal wherever she went. When she died in 1861 at age forty, her obituary appeared in papers around the world. Yet her true story has always been obscured by the web of lies she constructed about herself. This absorbing and entertaining biography of Lola Montez is the first to reveal the facts of her incredible life. Drawing on unpublished archives from four continents, Bruce Seymour describes Lola's disastrous early marriage to her mother's admirer, her many romantic liaisons after she left her husband, her disappearance to Spain when she was about to be sued for divorce, her reappearance as a Spanish noblewoman and dancer, and her love affairs with, among others, Franz Liszt. Seymour has been able to use the recently discovered intimate correspondence between Lola and King Ludwig I of Bavaria to recount how she won the heart of the aging king, how she was driven from the kingdom by an enraged mob, and how Ludwig ultimately abdicated because of her. Seymour presents an unretouched portrait of a woman of contradictory parts—a woman who was beautiful, intelligent, and courageous but was also monstrously egocentric and manipulative, and who was above all an independent woman ahead of her time.

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Customer Reviews

The author Bruce Seymour is a bit of a mystery man, formerly an attorney who won a bunch of money on Jeopardy and used it to stop working and write Lola Montez. But that story pales next to the wild, inimitable Lola's. If Seymour weren't such a straight shooter, who said one of his goals with writing this version of the Montez saga was to clear up the misconceptions and rumors, I would suspect half of this was made up. I mean how many women have brought a kingdom to its knees without firing a single shot? Say what you will, I considered Lola an inspiration for her passion and determination to have her own way with life and live it with gusto. Seymour did an excellent job of creating an entertaining narrative as well--he didn't just dump out a bucket of facts the way so many biographers do. Highly recommended.

I love this very well-written book about a fascinating subject. Thanks also to the excellent review by John L Murphy, which does full justice to all but my personal feelings about the book. Biography appeals to me, and I insist that biographers be thorough in their research, as Bruce Seymour is. Yet nothing guarantees that an important person will be provided with a good biographer. I regret to say that there is no good biography of the important and engaging artist George Braque. He led a life as interesting as Lola Montez, but since he was a man of strong moral character, friends like Picasso provided much of the color in the story of his life. Not so Lola! Bruce Seymour brings life to his descriptions of places, as well as his characterizations of the important people in Lola's life. His description of Lola's boarding school is wonderful, and he found a letter from a society lady that had interesting things to say about Lola and her mother during a visit to Simla in the Himalayas. The unique and great film by Max Ophuls made me curious about Lola Montez, partly since there are huge gaps in the story of her life as told in the film. Earlier bios were apparently unsuccessful at finding the truths about Lola's life, hidden underneath layers of her fictions. It is interesting to learn that the wonderful tracking shot in the opera, after which Lola runs off with her mother's lover - is fictitious, yet the film sequence communicates the emotional and moral aspects of the truth even better than the facts. I'll repeat that this bio is a pleasure to read, but shall add that it inspires a fresh look at Lola, whose life had plenty of material for another film.

It came on time, looks good-almost like new. I thought I would like like the topic more, but Lola frankly seemed like a huge pain in the ass borderline personality.

I started reading this gem of a book and got to page 120 in the first sitting. Can't wait to get back to

it. Very well researched and entertainingly written.

I picked this book in the local library to read about how King Ludwig I of Bavaria's lover ended up in a circus, according to the film by Max Ophuls. It was to my astonishment to learn that Lola Montez never performed in any circus and that she died quite a wealthy person; and that much of Ophuls film was a fantasy, a fact that the author promptly addresses on the last pages of the book. However, the book is truly great and turned out much more than I had expected. I found pages on King Ludwig I of Bavaria extremely informative, providing great insight in the times and morals of Bavaria, Germany and overall Europe of mid 19th century. My particular fascination with Wittelsbachs was grown from the grandson of Ludwig I, i.e. the notorious Ludwig II, and having been to Nymphenburg some years ago and seeing the Gallery of Beauties (Schönheitengalerie) there, remotely hearing the famous story of the overwhelming passion of the King for the dancer was enough to keep me glued to the pages of this book. For those who want to find the origins of Ludwig II extravagance, particularly his devotion to Richard Wagner, so immortally depicted in Visconti's "Ludwig", this book about his grandfather gives all the answers. I have discovered that Ludwig I was already a complete autocrat, incredibly stubborn and foolhardy, at a point of self-destruction; needless to say, he passed the disposition to his grandson Ludwig II. Yet Munich and Bavaria owe their reputation of architectural and artistic beauty and prestige to these monarchs, to places, among many others, as Nymphenburg Palace where Ludwig I lived and Ludwig II was born, to famous Schloss Neuschwanstein, where male-loving Ludwig II retreated to live the dreamy life with his minions. The grandfather, after all, was much more modest since he was content with only one female lover, 38 years his junior, on whom he spent a minuscule amount, compared with Ludwig II, who almost bankrupted the state. It is interesting to see how German/Bavarian state officials did not hesitate to resist the King, as Lola's naturalization affair clearly shows - the King's government preferred to resign instead of signing her naturalization certificate. There was a constitution, and they used it fully in their disagreement with the King, asserting their independence as citizens. Such resistance and dignity are completely unthinkable in Latin countries and in a period of Louis XV, who is mentioned here as a comparison of a dissolute behavior that dug a pit for the social revolution. One can contemplate further that there must be such a dramatic difference on the aspect of love between Latin and Germanic countries. We have examples of monarchs and persons of Royal blood following their heart passion: in Germany: Ludwig I, losing his kingdom over the passion to Lola; in Austria: Francis Ferdinand, Archduke of Austria, whose desire to marry Sophie, countess von Chotek, a lady-in-waiting, brought him into sharp conflict with the emperor, and the marriage

was only allowed after he agreed to renounce his future children's rights to the throne; in England: King Edward VIII who abdicated the throne in December 1936 to marry Mrs. Simpson, "the woman I love

Excellent. I've been a fan of Lola Montez ever since she ran into Flashman. I have browsed this fine book on her many times over the years but I have only recently had an excuse to sit down and read it properly. Thoroughly enjoyable and superbly researched, it gallops along at a pace befitting a woman as remarkable as Lola.

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