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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 a masquerade that took her to Europe, America and Australia and attracting admirers and scandal wherever she went. When she died in 1861 at age 40, 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 biography of Lola Montez reveals the facts of her 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 Drawing on unpublished archives from four continents, Bruce Seymour describes Lola's disastrous early marriage to her mother's admirer, her many romantic liaisons after she left her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 ageing king, how she was driven from the kingdom by an enraged mob, and how Ludwig ultimately abdicated because of her. Seymour presents a portrait of a woman of contradictory parts - a woman who was beautiful, intelligent, and courageous but also egocentric and manipulative, and who was above all an independent woman ahead of her time.

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Customer Reviews

The editorial blurbs give the basic facts of Lola's life, but what they cannot convey is the verve with which Bruce Seymour tells her tales. A prefatory note acknowledges the game show Jeopardy as enabling him to write the book thanks to his winnings. His four years were well spent. Seymour, therefore, is no ordinary scholar on the tenure track. As a lawyer, he brings skill in analyzing documents and developing contexts within which Lola and her conquests could act within and beyond the force of the law. He has certainly done his research, but this book wears it lightly and elegantly. Elegance for a girl from Cork who in less globalized times of instant celebrity and social networking could pose as a Spaniard, dance her way into the wallets and beds of countless besotted swains, and then, once dumped or dumping, move on to her next conquest seemingly for decades little the worse, at least on the surface, for wear. Lightly, or so she seemed, over years of unpredictable liaisons within the turmoil of 1848 and a Europe that threatened to topple the monarchies within which Lola worked her machinations and maximized her share of the winnings. While not the dour, earnest, or sharpish stereotype of the early feminist, nonetheless she pioneered the right of a woman to be heard and her power--in and out of the boudoir being formidable--to be taken seriously by those in quite influential positions of celebrity and/or acclaim themselves. Lola early perfected her ability to live by her quick study of her suitors, her rivals, and their relative positions vis-a-vis her own advantage.

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