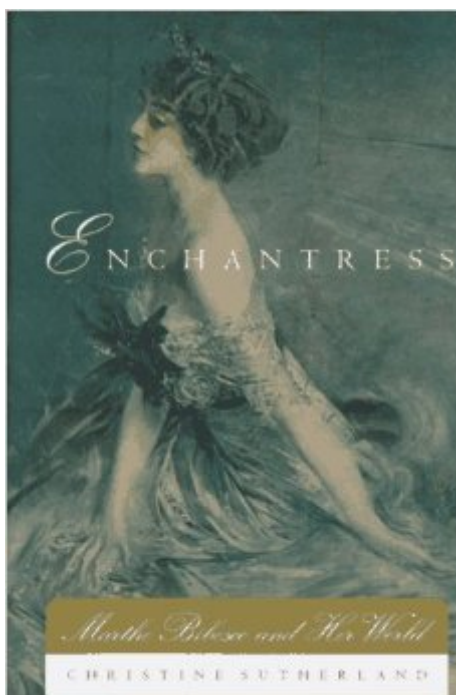


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Enchantress: Marthe Bibesco And Her World



Synopsis

A study of the life of Marthe Bibesco, the Romanian princess whose many admirers and friends included Proust, Gide, Cocteau, Alphonso XIII of Spain and Ferdinand of Romania. After the Communist invasion of Romania she was forced to flee for Paris, where she supported her family by writing.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Marthe Bibesco was member of the Romanian nobility. Acquainted with the vast network of aristocracy that existed before its demise in World War I, she was celebrated in the pre-war Salons of Paris for her literary talent and her beauty. Marthe partook of Proust's world and knew many of those who influenced characters in his great opus. During the first world war she worked as a red cross volunteer in Bucharest. She became a friend and advisor to British Prime Minister Ramsay MacDonald and supported Romania's support of the Allied forces in both World Wars. In later life, she lost her wealth and her family in the communist take over of Romania. Marthe continued to support herself through her prolific writing and became a confidante to De Gaulle in the last part of her life. Marthe's life is worth a close examination because it spans the decaying world of monarchy and princelings to the Cold War of communism and democracy. Despite the turbulence of her life, her literary fame and awards, and her involvement with European politicians she is virtually unknown today in the West. This book is the first English language biography of her and will, with hope, redress that problem

Like Romania, her country of origin, Marthe Bibesco was beautiful, complex, and hard done by. A truly gifted intellectual, adored by aristocrat and adventurer alike, she also inspired loyalty with her courage in wartime. Yet as I read through this pleasant, well written biography I realized that perhaps the lion's share of Marthe's charm was her privilege and access. It isn't that her life isn't interesting, although she herself at this remove of time can only come through as a whisper of her full force. But take away the palaces and noble lovers and this tale loses a deal of its individual flavor. I'd have enjoyed more excerpts from her writings; perhaps it's time for those to be rediscovered, and she can be celebrated as writer not princess. They're both hard lives to lead, in a way, and at least the former role wouldn't smack of fairy-tale.

The life story of this remarkable Roumanian writer, Marthe Bibesco - a muse present at the theater of major events in 20th century Europe - unfolds a vivid picture of the aristocracy, the refined belle Époque and the exquisitely cosmopolitan intelligentsia to which she belonged and in which she flourished. The reader will certainly relish the impeccable account of events, the love stories, the war stories, the society gossip of celebrities and the descriptions of social and political gatherings where history was shaped and, although he might come to love and admire this intelligent, courageous and successful woman, he will not get to know her as a writer who covered a vast range of subjects (and at times wrote under a different name for a different public) because very few quotes from her work are to be found in this biography and excerpts from her diary and from her letters reveal more facts than feeling. It remains to be seen whether the nostalgia of the old or the curiosity of the young are sufficiently roused through Sutherland's book and whether Bibesco will be read and acclaimed again.

In November, 1920, my grandfather was born, son of the cousin of Princess Marthe's husband, Prince Gheorghe Bibescu. I found 'Enchantress' an absolutely fascinating book, as Sutherland has managed to open a gateway of knowledge about my family history, much of the personal details previously unknown to me. I never truly realized the fame in literary circles that my grandfather's aunt held. Princess Marthe Bibescu led a fascinating life. She experienced extreme wealth, power and fame, as well as that where she was forced to write to earn a living for her family, under the devastating regime of communism. Brought into a world of glittering jewels and fine titles by her fun loving princely husband, Marthe had to dismiss her natural humbleness, but failed, leading to a stormy marriage. Christine Sutherland's work should be commended. She has entered the minds of Romanian elite, and brings to us a look in at the lives of some of Europe's most influential people.

The details within the book are astounding, everything is described as if the author was standing with the princess, almost as a hand maiden every step of the way. Only she has the ability to provide us a gateway into a life of desperation, a life of privilege, and a life wasted with a quest to find eternal happiness. A truly dramatic life, both blessed and cursed, is uncovered within 300 pages of prose that intrigues the mind. After the first magical page, you would be mad to not see why the book is titled "Enchantress". I'm not a critic. I'm just a relative of this extraordinary princess, who thoroughly enjoyed a compilation of humorous, dramatic, and tragic tales of a life of one of Europe's most substantial ladies. A book that will open the eyes and the mind.

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