



Coco Chanel: The Legend and the Life

Justine Picardie

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In *Coco Chanel*, Justine Picardie peels away the layers of romance and myth surrounding the legend of Coco Chanel, revealing the true history of the incredible woman who shaped modern fashion and created an empire of haute couture. Picardie's unprecedented research illuminates Chanel's path from little-known seamstress to the aristocracy of style in this stunning look at the fashion icon, illustrated with more than sixty color and black-and-white images.

Coco Chanel: The Legend and the Life Details

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From Reader Review Coco Chanel: The Legend and the Life for online ebook

Ancestral Gael says

Why did I read it? I've always had a fascination with this self-made woman, and I remember reading a review of the paperback version of this book on a blog a few years back, and thinking I must read it. When I saw it was available in audio form, I took the opportunity to select it for my commute.

What's it about? It's a factual biography of Gabrielle Bonheur Chanel, better known as Coco Chanel, the orphaned girl who rose to be one of the most famous names in fashion, if not the most famous; credited for the creation of simple, elegant, comfortable designs, most notably the "little black dress" now considered an essential item in any wardrobe.

What did I like? It was a book focussed on revealing truth and facts, and I learned *some* things about Chanel I had not known before. It's always a good thing when an author attempts to avoid speculation, even if not always successful. The audio version of the book, which was downloaded from Audible, was clear and without fault.

What didn't I like about this book? Where to start? This audio book annoyed me immensely, and I think it may have started with the narrator Cassandra Harwood, whose voice droned through each sentence making it hard to concentrate on the information being presented. I don't speak French, but I can only hope the times she employed that language she did better than with the English, when words were mis-pronounced (e.g. subsidising, instead of subsiding) and there was no attempt at emphasis, or any kind of tonal variance in her speech. Had the text been more interesting, perhaps her voice might not have grated as much, alas ...

The book was full of facts, but much of the book seemed to stray into the lives of those around Chanel. At one point, it seemed as though quite a few pages had been dedicated to the wife of a lover and, try as I might, I failed to grasp as to why this information was necessary to the book, as it apparently had no bearing on Chanel's life itself.

I think that was the focus of my dislike of the book: very little on the woman herself, with far too much about friends, family, business associates, and acquaintances. I felt the book really could have been considerably shorter, with the cutting of extraneous information.

The way the information was presented was also rather tedious; with no nuance to the writing. It might as well have been a text book.

Would I recommend it? I wanted to enjoy this book; I really thought I would; but I didn't, and I feel any reader would think their time better spent on other books.

Jennifer (JC-S) says

'Legend is the consecration of fame.'

The name Coco Chanel is synonymous with style. But what of the woman behind the name: what do we

know about the woman who designed simple yet sophisticated clothes, practical but elegant bags and shoes, and presented Chanel No 5 perfume to the world?

There is little simple about Coco Chanel. She was born Gabrielle Chanel on 19 August 1883 – a date that she later changed by hand in her passport. Gabrielle Chanel was born in a poorhouse; her parents were unmarried and, according to Chanel, her mother Jeanne died of tuberculosis when Chanel was aged six. Justine Picardie suggests that Jeanne died of ‘poverty, pregnancy and pneumonia’ when Chanel was aged 11. According to Chanel, her father left her in the care of two unmarried aunts when he actually placed her in a convent orphanage in the village of Aubazine, where she was raised by nuns.

When World War One began in 1914, Chanel moved from Paris to Deauville, and built up a business. Chanel’s personal life was also interesting and unconventional. She had a succession of glamorous lovers but it seems likely that the real love of her life was Arthur ‘Boy’ Capel who died in a car accident in 1919.

I picked up this book knowing very little about Coco Chanel and wanting to read a little more about the woman who had such an influence on style during the 20th century. It’s an interesting read, beautifully illustrated and informative without being exhaustive. It intrigued me to read that Coco Chanel’s favourite novel was ‘Wuthering Heights’, and that the austerity of the convent was a major influence on her design. By all accounts, Coco Chanel (19 August 1883 – 10 January 1971) lived a remarkable life.

Jennifer Cameron-Smith

Kerry says

This book tried to strike a dreamy tone and just ended up being a boring disappointment. This book commits various transgressions. It begins with a long-winded description of Chanel’s rooms instead of with the topic of the biography, Chanel herself--involved descriptions of inanimate objects can never replace the human character or historical figure. Such a chapter is then followed by tall tales woven by Chanel herself, hearsay, and supposition. Those who read biography typically want facts, and they want the character to come to life. They want hard research to reveal truths about the subject. However, this book leaves Chanel a ghost. It is self-indulgent and poorly conceived.

Georgina says

I wish that I hadn’t persisted with this book. For a relatively short book (with pictures!) it was a very slow read. It was frustrating, leaden and inconsequential. Chanel blurred her past so successfully that large swathes of the book were essentially saying ‘but of course, nobody really knows...’ OVER AND OVER AGAIN.

Lisa Rogers says

I wanted to like this book but it just didn’t make sense. A biographer should know better than to throw all her research at the reader, bit by unimportant bit, and then leave the reader to sort it out. The author is content to

tell Coco Chanel's story by listing the things she says about herself, what others say about her, then never clears up the incongruence by telling us what her research turned up on the matter. As a result, I know less about Chanel than when I began! The photos are small, poorly captioned, and dull. How this book was an "international bestseller" as the cover claims is beyond me.

Kate Snow says

Like many other reviewers who gave this a poor rating, I wanted to like it. However, the book was rambling, lacking in facts and I got no insight into the creative side of Chanel's life (apart from her creativity with her life story). Only at the close of the book was there a glimpse of her at work with her scissors. Hagiography at its worst and disappointing.

Yoonmee says

It's probably pretty interesting if you're a huge Chanel fan and/or really into fashion, but I'm neither of these. I guess I'm not the book's target audience! =P That said, it's just a little bit dry. I got tired of hearing how pretty much everything reported about Chanel is up for debate because she lied so much about her life. I realize things were different back then, but the fact that Chanel lied about her life really turned me off to her. (Not that the brand Chanel really cares because it's not like I can afford her stuff anyways! haha) Great selection of pictures. This is sort of a coffee table book, but not really because it's very much a narrative of her life. Hard to say.

Ghost of the Library says

Chanel as always been - and will remain - an enigma, no matter how many attempts are made, book or movie form, no one will ever get a real understanding of the woman behind the myth.

And frankly that is how it should be...even in an age of massive oversharing of information, some things are best left a secret, a mystery..as Mademoiselle would have preferred no doubt.

What did i know of Coco before this book? Number 5, her pearl necklaces, her love of fashion, her commitment to elegance and style, her devotion to her Maison, a love story with an Englishman and rumours of nazi sympathies.

Now what do i know? all of the above and a little bit more...yes i admit all the info on her love life was very fun to read...the rumored nazi preference, not so much...but still, as in all bios one must read things with a grain of salt...no matter how much we may agree or not with a choice in a person's life, we weren't really there and neither was the author to know exactly what happened that day in that place.

This isn't an easy book to read, mostly because at times the author seems lost on which direction to take, so quotes from everyone who knew her pop up all over the place, slowing down the pace and making one a tiny bit bored..however Coco's life is fascinating and draws you in so much that you can forget the style of writing. Frankly i was wondering if JPicardie didn't get bored/tired/fed up of her subject halfway through the book...a certain partiality in the way she treats some events of Coco's life, and her decisions, can be felt in some parts of the book.

Still, if for no other reason that the pics she shows us and the info she presents on Chanel's childhood, it is a

must read!

....even if you dont like Chanel n°5 ;)which I don't btw.

Happy Readings!

Audrey Gorden says

First and foremost, I thoroughly enjoyed this book. Being as familiar with fashion as I am, it was in fact an honor to go that deep into Chanel's life by reading this book. By reading this book the readers can not only get a sense of how the major label "Chanel" began, but this book takes us deep into Coco's thought process and emotions; a sort of behind-the-scenes look.

A main reason why I enjoyed the book is that we as the readers are taken back to Chanel's early days, and we realize that her life was not a breeze from the beginning. While this story is in fact true, as I read this book I found myself in an alternate "book world" that is often acquired while reading fictional books. Her story is not a fairytale, but with the faults, the mistakes, the events that happened in her life that are not ideal, she emerged to be one of the most well known women of all time. This book is not only inspiring but completely captivating and engages the reader in a way rarely found with nonfiction books.

I believe that the author's purpose for writing this book is to not only inform the readers of Chanel and her life, but to provoke their minds, maybe subliminally into complete mystification and lust of the beautiful mess that was Coco's life. As themes go, this book has many; love, lust, despair, death, coming of age. To put one tag on Chanel's life is near impossible, and that is exactly the word I would use for it. Her story is original, incredible, and inspiring. It is almost as if this book is a gateway for inspiration from the reader, as this book gave me inspiration through every single chapter. This book is not particularly chronologically organized, events are scattered throughout and we are left jumping about through time when learning of her life. This style kept my attention without bore and left my mind to wonder and want to keep reading. The author of this book so very clearly aspires to have some significance in her life reminiscent of Chanel's. The author portrays her as a hero while yet not covering up the faults of Coco's life that aren't so glamorous. Through analyzing this book I am even more intrigued, but though I have gained all the knowledge through this biography that I can on her life, I am left craving even more than words can explore of such a fascinating woman.

Rebecca Grace says

The author's sycophantic tone nearly turned me off the book in the first chapter. Yet, as fascinated as I am with women's studies and the cultural changes of the early 20th century, AND French history, AND art history, AND Russian revolutionary history, I've grown enthralled with the story of this fascinating life. Millions of girls were born in poor houses and raised in convents in the late 19th century, and most of them lived and died in the squalor and obscurity of their origins. Somehow Gabrielle "Coco" Chanel was able almost single-handedly to reinvent not only herself, but also to recreate entirely the way women dressed, inventing modern women's clothing that both recognized and enabled the new role of women in society. Bankrolling the Ballets Russe? Hiring an exiled Russian Archduchess to embroider for the House of Chanel? I'm not even halfway through the book and I can't put it down. I see in Chanel the same spirit as strong, entrepreneurial women such as Oprah, Madonna, and Martha Stewart -- women who largely invented a

market for their talents and abilities that didn't exist before them, and whose success resulted chiefly from their ability to seize the cultural current of their time and create a persona that millions of other women could either identify with or aspire to.

Debbie says

I had to read this for book club and what a chore - it is a white washed piece of crap - poor indexing and it mostly seems to be quotes for two others who attempted to write Chanel's bio. This author does EVERYTHING she can to soften, blur, and confuse Chanel's antisemitism, homophobia, drug use, all round bitchy-ness, and especially the facts about her Perfume and spying.

Love Fool says

Sleek. Chic. Notoriously guarded. Welcome to the secret world of Gabrielle Chanel.

I LOVE fashion and Chanel is the woman who started it all for me. Chanel is the symbol for class and I wanted to know all about the woman who changed the fashion world. This book was well written and very interesting. I learned so much about Coco I feel like I personally knew her. She is truly amazing.

Narwhal says

I loved learning about coco Chanel but I felt like as much as I learned about her I also did not, if that makes sense. I wish I could've learned more about the way she thought, her inner life.

I liked the book for its content, not necessarily writing style.

I enjoyed the quotes from coco Chanel and the fact that the narrative covered her whole life.

O yes, now that I have skimmed some other reviews, I realized what it was that was bothering me-- there was so much focus on all of her affairs, and barely any on her actual contributions to the fashion world. Or of HER as a PerSOn. Maybe it's been too long since I've read it, but that's what it felt like to me. Lack of real meat/substance.

Ruth says

It took me a while to decide on the rating I should give this book. It is an interesting well written book.. So why three stars? When I was looking for a book about Chanel I was looking to find information and inspiration, as a young professional woman, a designer in a male dominated industry I wanted to hear her voice, to understand her creative vision, to learn more about her business decisions and how a woman from a plane background managed to create an empire in an era when women had to fight for the right to do business. I found very little of this in the book. It is a book about a woman who had a string of romantic affairs with interesting men.. And it does not do her justice.

She is not famous today for having an affair with Duke of Westminster or a Russian Grand Duke Dmitri Pavlovich. She is famous today for building a Fashion Empire. But after reading this book you might

mistakenly think that fashion was secondary, tiny part of her life while her main occupation was looking for the next high profile lover jumping from one scandal to another.

My feeling after reading this book is one of a miss.

If you have a recommendation of a book about her that speaks more about her business acumen and creative vision please leave a note in the comments.

Bridget Casey says

This book made me an even greater fan of Chanel, but I did not like the author's style at all. I found it quite convoluted and it was often difficult to keep track of characters as Picardie went on tangents about their personal histories, irrelevant to their relationship with Chanel. The narration kind of jerks and jolts the reader along, consequently the book lacks fluidity. The collection of photographs is impressive, but they're placed all over the place and more often than not, completely unrelated to the passage you are reading. While I appreciate the detail and research that went into this book, the presentation is lacking, which is a disservice to the subject.
