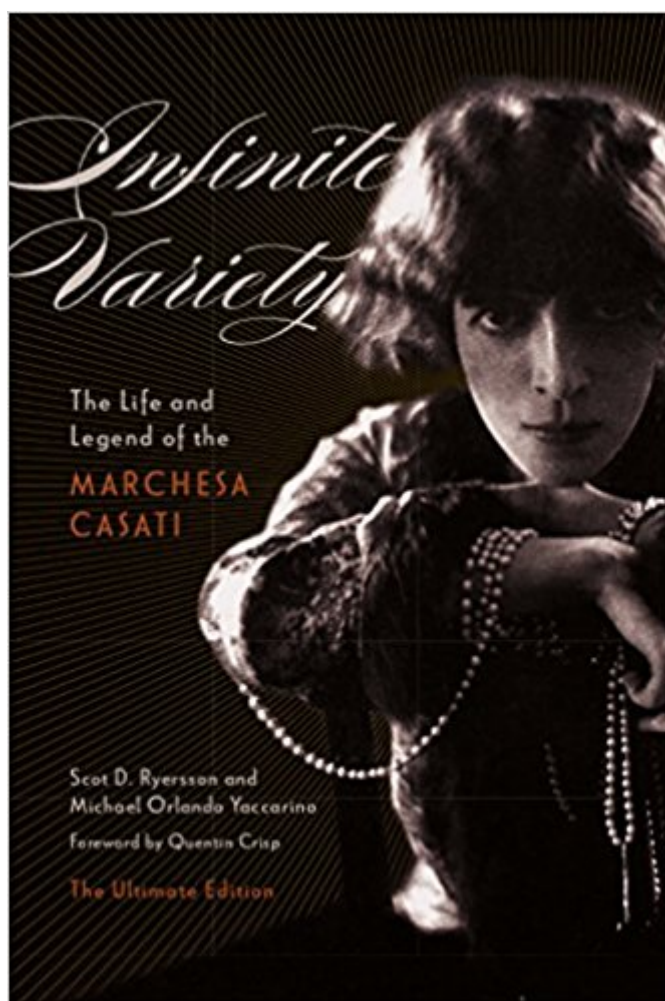


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# Infinite Variety: The Life And Legend Of The Marchesa Casati The Ultimate Edition



## Synopsis

For the first three decades of the twentieth century, the Marchesa Luisa Casati astounded Europe. She was infamous for her evening strolls "naked beneath her furs, parading cheetahs on diamond-studded leashes." Artists such as Man Ray and Augustus John painted, sculpted, and photographed her; writers, including Jean Cocteau, Ezra Pound, and Jack Kerouac, praised her strange beauty; celebrities and royalty from around the world were amazed and awed by her lavish parties and spectacles at her homes in Italy and France. The extravagance ended in 1930 when Casati was more than twenty-five million dollars in debt, but she continued her iconoclastic and creative pursuits until her death in London in 1957. Her legacy continues, especially in contemporary fashion, with John Galliano, Tom Ford, Alexander McQueen, Karl Lagerfeld, and other designers inspired by her remarkable style. Fully authorized, completely updated, and richly illustrated, this is the fantastic story of the Marchesa Casati.

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## Customer Reviews

The Marchesa Luisa Casati (1881-1957) cultivated celebrity through morbid eccentricity in dress and lifestyle, becoming, before 1920, a darling of portraitists, photographers, designers and gossip columnists. With her androgynous figure, bizarre makeup and disorderly dyed hair, she was the "naked sorceress" to one observer, "the Medusa of the Grand Hotels" to another. She was mistress to many, including author and adventurer Gabriele D'Annunzio, who was her great love; she pursued him as obsessively as she pursued notoriety, her exhibitionist mania her only talent. Her extravagant oddity proved expensive and carried with it an inevitable obsolescence. The authors

describe her unnaturally red hair, cadaverous pallor and scarlet lips as giving her in middle age "the unsettling appearance of a Kabuki performer." By the time she was 50, she had gone from immense wealth to bankruptcy and from tantalizing and demanding muse to a lurid Miss Havisham on the edge of a diminishing clique of admirers. At the end she was forced to constantly change her addresses in London, her fame in Italy and France having run out. To one English acquaintance, then, her attire resembled "the plumage of a shabby raven." The chapel at nearby Harrods handled her funeral. Ryerson and Yaccarino strain to astonish the reader, but the empty excess of Casati's life quickly palls. Despite the authors' efforts, the overwrought Marchesa remains a forgettable figure. 42 b&w illus. and 8 color plates not seen by PW. Author tour. Copyright 1999 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to the Paperback edition.

She strolled Venice's Piazza San Marco clad only in a fur cloak, escorted by pet cheetahs on jeweled leashes; she adorned herself with snakes, live and stuffed, and accessorized an evening costume with chicken blood. She was a Belle Epoque eccentric, big time. Luisa Casati was also extraordinarily wealthy in her own right, heir to a Milanese cotton fortune and wife of an Italian noble. Her marriage began to disintegrate after just a few years, when she began an affair and a lifelong friendship with Italian poet and writer Gabriele D'Annunzio. Here she began to re-create herself, evolving from a rather shy, conformist young woman to the flamboyant pale-faced redhead, her remarkable green eyes rimmed by kohl, who would be the subject of more than 130 portraits, many by famous artists. She decorated a villa in Rome, refurbished a Venetian palazzo (now the Peggy Guggenheim museum), and threw extravagant parties and costume balls, mingling socialites and her newfound artist friends. As illustrator/graphic designer Ryerson and film critic Yaccarino describe it, her behavior grew increasingly bizarre: life-size wax replicas of herself and others were seated as guests at dinner parties but she continued to intrigue serious artists like Man Ray, Jean Cocteau, and Augustus John, who was her lover briefly and a friend until she died. Eventually, her self-indulgent life style left her \$25 million in debt; in 1932 her personal possessions were auctioned off. She resettled in England, sinking into poverty so acute that it was a choice between food for herself or for her dogs. (The dogs won.) Her life was the inspiration for a play starring Vivien Leigh and an Ingrid Bergman film. Casati died in 1957, her tombstone inscribed: "Age can not wither nor custom stale her infinite variety." In essence, a predictably superficial superstar bio-Cher at the turn of the century, as it were. (42 b&w, 8 color illustrations) -- Copyright ©1999, Kirkus Associates, LP. All rights reserved. --This text refers to the Paperback edition.

If you have ever wanted to learn all about Marchesa Casati this is your opportunity. The wild, wonderful and definitely "going against the grain" life of a woman who lived life on her terms is captured within the pages of this well written book. Casati wanted to be a "living work of art" and she achieved her goal with the help of an unlimited inheritance, friends who helped cater to her every whim, designers, those willing to look the other way and her own imagination that knew no bounds. She took eccentricity to new heights and no whim was too severe to complete. Casati most assuredly lived life on her terms until eventually her money ran out and creditors became her constant companions, chasing every last bit of money she possessed. Her expansive and wild way of living, as though things would never end, had finally caught up with her. Sadly, she eventually died a pauper in London. Put on your seat belts, envision your wildest thoughts and prepare yourself for a wild rollercoaster ride as you open this book. This woman lived a wild life! I can't recommend this book highly enough!

The Muse of Venice and artists of her generation . A must read if you want to know what life was like in Venice during 1910. Marchesa Casati was a fabulous personality and her casa is now the Peggy Guggenheim museum, another eccentric in her time.

I enjoyed this biography very much. I knew almost nothing about Luisa Casati before I read this book, but it was fascinating. I especially found her influences on so many varied people interesting to learn.

Looking forward to the read.

Quite interesting; it's Always good to know more about old-time vintage divas.

Very dry book about a fascinating person. A book about the Marchesa Casati could be a lot of things- but the authors chose to make it rather dull and boring. A pity.

This book is fantastic. I cannot even imagine all the hours of research that went into it. Very detailed, very approachable-- easy to get sucked in, there were times I could not put it down. I admit, a third of the way through the book I realized I despised the Marchesa for her shallow, arrogant vanity, monumental waste of wealth and total lack of courtesy, but her world was so engrossing I loved the rest of the book. I kept pausing to google names and places, and this one

book will become an odyssey into dozens of other books about the artists and culture of the period. Sadly, most of her portraits in various mediums have been lost to time and war bombings, but the ones that exist are referenced by name and eloquently described-- so much more than just seeing the picture in passing. My one complaint is that there aren't more photos of people/art/places, and that the ones that were provided aren't in color. Perhaps for budget or layout reasons, but I felt like for a person who strove to depict herself as a living work of art there would be more examples included. Strangely, while she loved to be idolized in various mediums, she seemed to not care very much about retaining the art as a legacy and what survived was either sold off, destroyed or forgotten somewhere.. perhaps limiting what pictures exist at this point. Still, there were some I found online that were not included in the book, whether for copyright or other reasons, I don't know. If you like history, culture, fashion and/or biographies at all, I cannot recommend this enough. It's the first work on Casati I've read, but it's done a masterful job of marrying detail with scope and painted a vast mental panorama of the spectacles she created. I dog-eared every page that had something or someone I wanted to go back and research after I finished, and half the book is marked. Loved it.

To read this book is to enter another world. It plunges the reader headfirst into the world before, then after World War 1 through the character of one fabulous woman. A woman ahead of her time, and possibly even our time. The Marchesa Luisa Casati set out to invent herself at a time when most women only sought the protection of marriage. The writers present this complicated woman without making judgements or trying to force the reader to make judgements. There is little or no psychologizing of the sort that makes many biographies tedious reading. It is a case of "Here is the story of this one woman whose life touched practically every great artist, writer, dancer, and of the time in which she lived. Make of it what you will, but she provided a hell of a ride." I have just read it and am looking forward to reading it all over again. Some of what I read I MUST read again, just to assure myself it is true. I highly recommend it for anyone interested in the arts of the first half of the twentieth century and to anyone who simply wants a damn good read.

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