



## Coco Chanel: An Intimate Life

*Lisa Chaney*

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**Coco Chanel: An Intimate Life** Lisa Chaney

**The controversial story of Chanel, the twentieth century's foremost fashion icon.**

Revolutionizing women's dress, Gabrielle "Coco" Chanel was the twentieth century's most influential designer. Her extraordinary and unconventional journey—from abject poverty to a new kind of glamour—helped forge the idea of modern woman.

Unearthing an astonishing life, this remarkable biography shows how, more than any previous designer, Chanel became synonymous with a rebellious and progressive style. Her numerous liaisons, whose poignant and tragic details have eluded all previous biographers, were the very stuff of legend. Witty and mesmerizing, she became muse, patron, or mistress to the century's most celebrated artists, including Picasso, Dalí, and Stravinsky.

Drawing on newly discovered love letters and other records, Chaney's controversial book reveals the truth about Chanel's drug habit and lesbian affairs. And the question about Chanel's German lover during World War II (was he a spy for the Nazis?) is definitively answered.

While uniquely highlighting the designer's far-reaching influence on the modern arts, Chaney's fascinating biography paints a deeper and darker picture of Coco Chanel than any so far. Movingly, it explores the origins, the creative power, and the secret suffering of this exceptional and often misread woman.

## Coco Chanel: An Intimate Life Details

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# From Reader Review **Coco Chanel: An Intimate Life** for online ebook

## **Le Phi** says

This book is a very comprehensive bibliography, thorough research on Gabrielle Chanel - a mystic public figure who hardly left traces of anything personable.

It was also quite astonishing to know that once Chanel herself had this thought on fashion: "She declared that fashion should be discussed 'without poetry, without literature. A dress is neither a tragedy, nor a painting; it is a charming and ephemeral creation, not an everlasting work of art.'" We could see in her the familiar humility of a highly successful person - the more you know, the more you know you don't know: "She insisted that while couture may have an awareness of art, it is only a technique, a business. Whatever the success of their creations, Gabrielle believed that did not 'justify couturiers persuading themselves or thinking of themselves as artists."

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## **SuzAnne King** says

We recognise the symbols and think we know the “rags to riches” story behind the linked Cs, the Perfume No. 5 and the “Little Black Dress” that hangs in every woman’s closet, but the designer who created such icons was, is, and forever will be an enigma.

Most books about Chanel only uncover the surface of the story, yet Coco Chanel was far more than the “Lorna Jane” or “Lulu Lemon” of her day, dressing women in casual wear for the very first time.

Biographer Lisa Chaney has taken the approach of an investigative journalist to go deeper into the radical and secretive life of Gabrielle Chanel and reveals far more than was previously known of her. Based on interviews, letters and reminiscences of friends, Chaney has meticulously separated Coco’s self-perpetuated myriad of contradictions, some of which have draped and disguised her story for over a century.

“Chanel” An Intimate Life is about the daring, the indifference and the very hard work of a controversial personality. Our era praises non-conformity and until you read this biography it’s difficult to appreciate how very radical Coco was in her own time and how much she gave up in following her passion. “Chanel” An Intimate Life is available at the Noosaville Library. @SuzanneKing

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## **Ariadna73** says

This book is a fascinating journey through the life of one true muse of our time. She was the inspiration for so many artists and women and men of great talent, and she had an amazing life, full of relations with the most dazzling intellectuals and cultural icons of her time.

This is the book I read:

The parts I enjoyed the most, were the pages with all those pictures showing this remarkable woman at

different stages of her life. She was a truly independent person, and she fought for what she obtained with the weapons nature gave her: her feminine ways. She was intelligent and valiant. Here are some pictures portraying her at her youth:

[image error]

Here are pictures of some of her love interests, and there is one of one of her “competitors” in the business of finding the love of her life.

There is also photographic evidence of her relationships with artists such as Igor Stravinsky, and with famous names of her time such as Dimitri Pavlovich. There is also a rare photograph with Misa Sert, a remarkable woman believed to be Chanel’s lover as well. As you can see, she was really a serious woman when coming down to the business of love and survival.

These are photos with her jewelry designer, also with Dali and other personalities. I couldn’t help to notice that she smoked during all her long life. That was probably a contributing factor for her demise at 87 (just joking!)

And here are some depictions of her lavish lifestyle. Her luxurious apartment in the Ritz. Although she lived in a hotel room for 30 years, that did not prevent her to make it her home in every way.

Finally, in page 390 we find a description of her death, just as anyone else’s, she stopped breathing after feeling a little ill one Saturday.

Her headstone was marked with her name and two years: born and dead. It is simple and elegant.

In summary, very interesting and well-told story from the standpoint of Gabrielle Chanel, the muse, the inspiratory, the artist Maecenas, instead of the very well-known fashion icon.

If you have some spare time, you can always visit my blog at: [lunairereadings.blogspot.com](http://lunairereadings.blogspot.com)

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### Nate says

Interesting at times, but overall a dull read that I wouldn't recommend. The author doesn't do a good job of providing historical information that would be relevant to the time period. Sure a little here and there, but I noticed myself consistently wanting more of the background painted for the events in her life. Instead this

lengthy biography chooses to drone on about whatever affair she was carrying on at the time-and there were a lot of them.

Cut out the middle third of the book and it would be a much easier (and enjoyable) read. If you want to quit after ~150 pages, I'd recommend fast forwarding to the last hundred pages and picking up there. She goes thru the latter decades of her life quickly, and although it's lacking depth, it's still interesting to see how her life turned out.

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### **Shannon Vincent Nelson says**

Much of the details of Chanel's life are hard to pin down as she was prone to exaggeration and falsification at times. However, the truth would have been much more exciting. Chanel overcame quite a lot to establish herself as an independently wealthy woman, and her rise to fame is quite interesting. The book not only describes Chanel's life but also offers glimpses into the myriad of personalities she associated with in pre-war Paris.

With little to no knowledge of Chanel before I read the book, I found Chanel's life and experiences intriguing. Chaney does at times become a little apologetic about Chanel's actions and often infers quite a bit into her motivations. Due to the lack of information available to her, this does help sketch a better picture. How accurate the picture could be hard to say. Overall, I would say *Coco Chanel: An Intimate Read* is worth picking up, especially if you are unfamiliar with Chanel herself. You might be surprised about what you learn.

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### **Asho says**

When I finished this book, my first thought was, "Oh thank goodness, I'm finally finished with this thing!" I just couldn't get into this, although I didn't dislike it quite enough to give up on it entirely. It took me over month to slog through it.

When I read non-fiction or biographies, I want them to be blatantly written for a popular audience: exciting page-turners, ala Erik Larson's *Devil in the White City*. If I can't have that, then I want the opposite: a book clearly written for an academic audience, usefully footnoted, notable for its rigorous research. The problem with this book is that it didn't fit either of those criteria. It had footnotes, sure, and it appears that Chaney turned up some new info on Chanel, but it also had far too much unsupported conjecture on the part of the author. There was far too much filler here, too. Page after page of background information on Chanel's various lovers didn't often do anything to really illuminate the woman for me and so ended up feeling like the sort of fluff you stuff into a document when you need to reach a particular page count. The bigger problem, though, was that there was so much juicy stuff about Chanel's life that was just glossed over. Things like her drug addiction, her abortion, and her affair/collaboration with a Nazi during WWII were glossed over or not explained fully.

I did learn some fascinating facts about Chanel, and this book led to some inspiring conversations at my book club, so I don't entirely regret reading it. I just kept thinking that in the right hands Chanel's story could have been such a page-turner, but overall I found his dull and convoluted.

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## **Mina Jade says**

We see an intimate life story of Chanel from the very beginning to the end of her days and the legacy she left behind. What made Chanel Chanel? Beside the glamour and luxury that comes with her name, her brand of perfume that we're most familiar with at the moment. The book give details about her past lovers, who she rubbed shoulders with (Salvador Dali, Winston Churchill etc.), the politics and destructiveness brought on by the World War 1 and so on that Chanel had to persevere through.

If I can sum her up in one brief sentence is that Chanel was never apologised or stood in the way of becoming the person she wanted to be. She was proud to be her own person and brave enough to do what she most believed in, whether it is her lifestyle or the clothes that she created. I recommend this as a read if you're looking for memoirs or people from the past to be inspired by.

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## **Arielle Walker says**

I think I have to admit defeat - I am probably more likely to become queen of Persia than ever finish this book. The subject is fascinating but the writing... Oh, god, the writing. Lets just say it's easier to write on melted butter than to stop your attention sliding away from every word.

I will have to discover Chanel's fascinating life through other books, I'm afraid. Any recommendations are welcome!

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## **Alexandra says**

At first it was really hard to get into the book. It wasn't until the middle of the book that i started enjoying it and i couldn't put it down during the last 100 pages because i couldn't wait to finally read it and move on. It was a very very detailed research. I remember reading the book and coming across Hitler and his dream to go to Paris. And i had to go back a page to see what the connection between Hitler and Chanel was. Then again if you spend 3 years on research you would want to add everything you find. I was simultaneously reading Tamara Mellon's memoir -which i read way faster- and found it much more easier to read. A have set hours for reading and i was looking forward to reading In My Shoes and postponed reading An Intimate Life as much as possible.

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## **Chrissie says**

I really liked this book, so four stars it is. I wanted to read it because I have always agreed with Chanel's basic philosophy about clothes. When you look at a person you should not see the clothes but rather the person. Clothes should not restrict you; they should be comfortable and let you live your life to the utmost. To achieve all this you need simplicity in design and materials that allows movement. My wardrobe consists of comfortable black stretchy shirts and pants, black shoes and the "little black dress". That is all you need. You don't have to spend hours matching or planning or changing purses. With little effort and time you can get dressed, and still look neat. Traveling is easy, with just a few things to pack! So you see I wanted to know more about this woman. Also, she was French, and I personally love France. Finally, who doesn't love

Chanel No. 5?!

She was born in 1883 in Samur, France, and died in 1971 at the ripe old age of 87 years. She had a terrible childhood, please see below. What she makes of herself is .....admirable, but at what cost? She has a fascinating life, and she knew such fascinating people - artists, authors and politicians. Who should I name? Churchill and Dali and Colette and Picasso and so many others. All the fashion designers between the wars and after the Second World War. These designers were hard for me to keep track of; this is new territory for me. More importantly you learn how she shaped the modern woman, and you come to understand how her ideas were a result of the times she lived through. History and people they shape each other. History, both WW1 and WW2 are essential elements of this book. If historical events bore you, then do not read this book. It is detailed, both concerning history and fashion.

Chanel didn't write - neither diaries nor letters. However, the author has used previous biographies and letters written by others about Chanel, i.e. those who knew her. Chanel contradicted herself; she could say one thing one day and the opposite the next. So which is the truth? You can only see by studying all that is available. Chaney's research is thorough. She both questions what seems false and presents contradictory views. She counters one person's statement against others. I feel now, at the conclusion of this book, I DO understand who she was. I understand her fears, where they came from and how she combated those fears. She feared abandonment and loneliness. She sought to escape through work. Work brought her independence. As I read the book I occasionally questioned some of the author's views, but by the end when I saw all parts of her life and all the choices she made, and where she ends up, I agreed with the conclusions drawn by the author. I wanted to read this book to understand the woman Chanel. This book answered that for me, AND what a very interesting ride it was following this amazing woman.

She was buried in Switzerland, NOT France! Why? Did you know that some saw her as a German collaborator in WW2? Did you know that she had a German lover and he was a spy? You need to know more to understand, to decide for yourself why she did what she did.

I absolutely detested the narration of the audiobook (by Carole Boyd)! As usual, my star rating is based on the content of the written book, not the narration. I am not lowering the stars for the narration. I detest the dramatics with which the lines are read. Boyd plays with accents. Her French is impeccable - I am talking about the pronunciation of French words and names and places - but the tone she uses is highbrow and downright snobbish. Stuffy! The only accent I enjoyed was that she used for the American characters. Others may like that she uses different tones for different nationalities, but since most is in this fake French tone, it drove me absolutely crazy. I like narrators to just slowly and clearly read the text. I don't want to hear the voice but rather the content of the author's lines. That is me, maybe you are different.

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After three chapters:

Oh, this is one of those books I have to immediately tell others about, AS I read the book. I will say it right out - I love France, more specifically Brittany. I am always blabbing about *The Discovery of France: A Historical Geography from the Revolution to the First World War* because it gives such a nuanced view of the land. It isn't one land and one people but many. Did you know that French people don't first of all see themselves as French but French of a particular region. Each region is so different. Money(in the past), language, foods, customs - all vary. You must ask, "Which area exactly are you speaking of?" Nothing is homogeneous about this country! Anyhow, my point is that this book about Chanel has all the ingredients of the named book and how it relates to the Chanel family, her paternal ancestors coming from Cévennes. The

description of this area, the nature and the landscape is just so very beautiful. Then we told of the change from agrarian to urban life and industrialization. All is told as the background to the choices and decisions made by Gabrielle Chanel's paternal ancestors. You SEE how history shapes individual lives. This is exactly how I want history to be told, through its people. So...this is even better than Robb's book!

After the moving historical introduction the book moves on to her great grandfather, Joseph, and proceeds down to Gabrielle's own parents, Albert Chanel and Eugénie Jeanne Devolle, and herself and her four surviving siblings. Gabrielle was illegitimate; only later was her father coerced into marriage. Her mother dies when she is eleven. Her paternal aunts want nothing to do with her or her siblings, so the girls are pushed off into the cloister Aubazine. Her two brothers were sent to work as tenant farmers for their keep. Her father, well he never showed any interest and just disappeared, but no he probably didn't flee to America. Separated from her brothers, abandoned by her father, life in the cloister was stifling - a shock to a child who had always been on the move. Her father's occupation was an itinerant market trader. This is all very important if one is to understand why Chanel became who she was. Imagination and fantasy allowed her to escape reality. Stubbornness and protest were survival tools. This is all in only the first three chapters. I had to tell someone. I am loving this so MUCH! I hope I am not jinxing the book. Will it now go downhill?

No, I don't like the narration of the audiobook by Carole Boyd, She reads it too emotionally, but I knew I would have to ignore her reading style and focus on the author's words. Why can't narrators just read the lines in the book and skip all the dramatics?!

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## Gail says

I have read two previous books on Coco Chanel, one which was terrific and the other not at all. This latest tale started out to be quite promising (I was actually raving about it) but after 186 pages, I called it quits. There is quite a bit more information on Chanel than in the other books plus the people that she was involved with. One thing that really began to get on my nerves was Lisa Chaney's boasting about how she was able to get information that the other biographers were not (she seems full of herself). There's also tons of name-dropping in the book and after so much of this, it became quite tedious and I could no longer stand reading it.

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## Stephen says

"Aging is Adam's charm and Eve's tragedy." Gabrielle "Coco" Chanel made some good quips in her day, and her day was a long one, influencing the way women dressed from the first decade of the 20th century until her death in 1971. She worked hard to escape the poverty of her youth and had a knack for what we would call "networking" today. Some criticize the author for bragging about her new sources, but if you haven't got any new sources why bother with a new book? Somewhere between Gabrielle's sanitized portrait of herself, other biographers versions and recently uncovered diaries lies a truth we can never know but still have a good time speculating over. I began knowing little about Coco Chanel except that she'd made suntans fashionable. (Not strictly true, but close enough.) She did concoct Chanel N° 5 (the best selling fragrance of all time) invent the "little black dress" and have a list of lovers including Picasso, Stravinsky and a Nazi spy. A fascinating woman. Not entirely sympathetic, but fascinating.

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## **Rhonda says**

I love history so I found this book impossible to put down as the background of Chanel's life was so interspersed into the book. The writing is difficult to follow as there are so many places and names that I wasn't familiar with, so I had to check on the internet for more information to understand the context better. What a rich and sad life all at the same time. She was a new generation person living in an old generation time, it seems. She changed the face of fashion, thank goodness -- or we'd be wearing corsets yet! I wish the writer hadn't injected so much of the work she did to find the information: that could have been a book unto itself. Even with the difficult writing I am glad to have the knowledge of Coco's life.

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## **Ellyn Oaksmith says**

I had to run over to my stack of library books to remember the last book I had read. That tells me something about this book. I am not all that interested in fashion history but I do have a thing for the French, having lived there for a year a few eons ago. That being said, this is a book that digs into Chanel's life, however, she is a woman who loved to cloak herself in mystery. So no matter how diligently Ms. Chaney dug and dig she did, there is a veil of mystery that one feels in reading to the point where you finish the book and have a hard time saying much about Chanel. I didn't learn much more than I already knew. A string of affairs, dubious wartime conduct, anti-semetic leanings that were confused by deep friendships with Jews. All in all, a woman who freely acknowledged that she was bundle of contradictions. Ms. Chaney is a good writer and knows how to present Coco in a fashion that brings out both her charms and ugliness. She has a very sad background, which was one of the best parts of the book. Most of her life bounced from man to man without any great discovery or revelations and that, perhaps is this books downfall. Most of Coco Chanel's life was lived in success. And sometimes that is not the most interesting story. It's worth checking out though. I did enjoy returning to it while I read and finished the whole book.

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