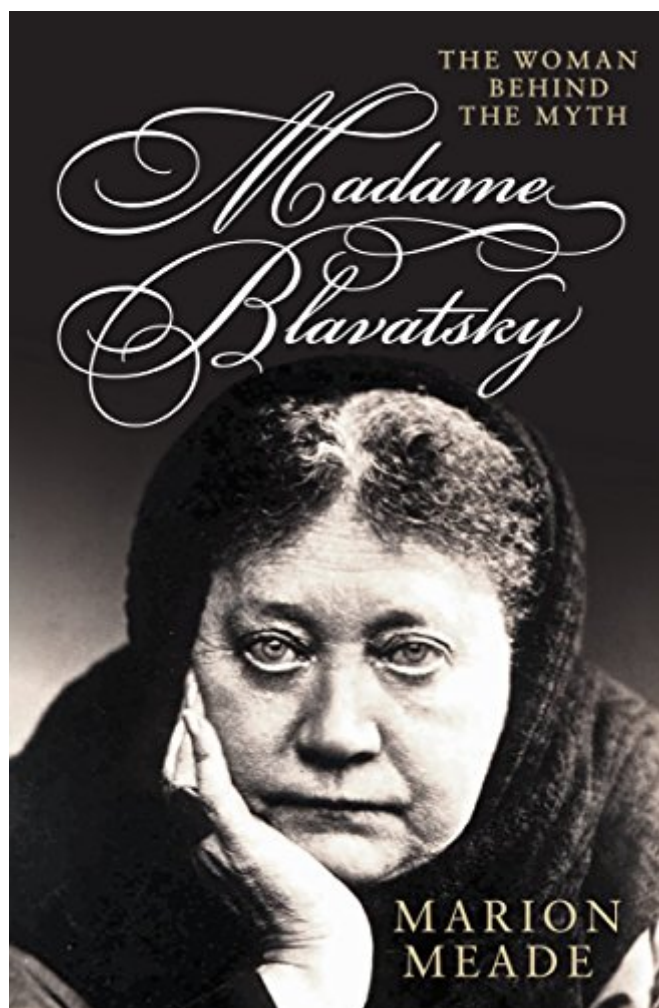


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Madame Blavatsky: The Woman Behind The Myth



Synopsis

Recklessly brilliant, Helena Petrovna Blavatsky scandalized her 19th century world with a controversial new religion that tried to synthesize Eastern and Western philosophies. If her contemporaries saw her as a freak, a charlatan, and a snake oil salesman, she viewed herself as a special person born for great things. She firmly believed that it was her destiny to enlighten the world. Rebelliously breaking conventions, she was the antithesis of a pious religious leader. She cursed, smoked, overate, and needed to airbrush out certain inconvenient facts, like husbands, lovers, and a child. Marion Meade digs deep into Madame Blavatsky's life from her birth in Russia among the aristocracy to a penniless exile in Europe, across the Atlantic to New York where she became the first Russian woman naturalized as an American citizen, and finally moving on to India where she established the international headquarters of the Theosophical Society in 1882. As she chased from continent to continent, she left in her aftermath a trail of enthralled followers and the ideas of Theosophy that endure to this day. While dismissed as a female messiah, her efforts laid the groundwork for the New Age movement, which sought to reconcile Eastern traditions with Western occultism. Her teachings entered the mainstream by creating new respect for the cultures and religions of the East "for Buddhism and Hinduism" and interest in meditation, yoga, gurus, and reincarnation. Madame Blavatsky was one of a kind. Here is her richly bizarre story told with compassion, insight, and an attempt to plumb the truth behind those astonishing accomplishments.

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Customer Reviews

This book is a fascinating study of the life of Helena Blavatsky. The author made the obvious effort to remain neutral as much as possible and seems to have a lot of respect for HPB despite her personal flaws. It remains a critical assessment, but every situation is thoroughly investigated and all aspects of the question are analyzed objectively. Meade does not seem to have a personal agenda and lets the facts speak for themselves. But she cannot avoid being cynical at times, so overwhelming are the evidences of fraudulent behaviour. The book covers the entire life of HPB and a lot of attention is paid to Henry Steel Olcott, the co-founder and first President of the Theosophical Society. The author is a professional biographer and displays an amazing ability to dissect and analyze her subjects. HPB's entire life is recounted here and her psychological profile is developed along the way. We get a sense of who Helena Blavatsky really was in real life, and not just as a public figure. This book is remarkably well written, almost to a flaw. I have the impression that she did not want to interrupt the flow and therefore elected to put some vital informations in the Notes and References section. In my opinion most of this information should have remained within the main text. But the result would probably have given us a more academic biography, and the author was obviously trying to avoid that. Another minor flaw of this book is the lack of an overall perspective on Blavatsky. The result is akin to someone trying to analyze a painting by going through all the details of the work without describing the picture as a whole. In order to deliver a broader view the author would have had to dwell a bit more on the evolution of the Theosophical Society. But the book is already over 500 pages long. With a character like Helena Blavatsky it is difficult to find a neutral story of her rich life. Many previous biographies have depicted HPB as a supernatural creature. Unfortunately many of those efforts are more caricatural than genuine. Other works can be viewed as single minded Blavatsky bashing. This is not only unfair, but also unproductive. Meade has given us a remarkably balanced treatment of HPB. But her approach is still not entirely neutral. For when confronted with the imposing figure of Madame Blavatsky it is almost impossible to remain completely detached.

Ms. Meade's biography of Madame Blavatsky is one of the few balanced efforts now available in print and, seemingly, the only one available as a eBook on .It is refreshing to experience a biographer who weighs the good with the bad and comes down somewhere square in the middle, and if not, precisely, square then close enough to being so. HPB, as Helena Petrovna Blavatsky preferred to be called, has not made a biography a simple matter for her personal historians and those following the Spiritualist and Theosophical worlds. That she suffered from deep-seated neuroses, which may well have been pathological, is difficult to deny. That she manufactured many of her so-called phenomena, most especially the Mahatma Letters as well as other "physical" phenomena, is hardly beyond doubt "excepting for those devoted to the cult of Blavatsky, or "pope Blavatsky". As well, many of her contemporary followers come off looking horribly gullible. Most notably Henry Olcott and Annie Besant "both were looking for a further purpose in life, or a greater meaning, and were drawn into the orbit of the Madame's charisma and long-con. The author, Ms. Meade, does not treat any of these adherents with anything less than sympathy, which is refreshing "though they hardly deserve it. HPB was one of the most interesting Spiritualists of the 19th Century and she continues to have many followers to this day, but taking her as a whole "and she was a considerable whole "the woman probably had some level of genuine PSI ability, if you are predisposed to believe in such matters, but she was also a Spiritual Grifter, a drama queen, emotionally unstable, an inveterate liar, and an emotional toxic dump. This, however, seems to be the norm, rather than the exception, for "sensitives". It is unclear whether or not this is an explanation of their behavior or an excuse for. The reader, as always, will have to make up their own mind about this. This was one of the best biographies available out there on the life of HPB. As a biography it deserves 5 stars, but the Kindle edition of the book has two serious flaws. 1. The endnote references are not activated. 2. The font cannot be changed, so the reader is stuck with the publisher font. As a result this book, eBook, gets 4 out of 5 stars. Still, taking the good with the bad, this biography is highly recommended for readers interested in the life of HPB and the world of 19th Century Spiritualism, as well as those readers who enjoy the world of gnostic dementia.

No novelist would dare create a character like Madame Blavatsky. She was definitely sui generis. Marion Meade has waded into the morass of myth and legends swirling around H.P.B. and emerged with a fairly cogent and wonderfully entertaining biography firmly in hand. Over a century after her death the good Madame remains a fascinating figure, even if her own books are largely incomprehensible.

If you can muster the strength to stick to reading all the way through, you will definitely know Mme. Blavatsky. Its a loooooooooong read, but worth it!!!

I'm not a book critic.

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