



The Spy

Paulo Coelho , Zoë Perry (Translator)

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When Mata Hari arrived in Paris she was penniless. Soon she was feted as the most elegant woman in the city. A dancer who shocked and delighted audiences; a confidant and courtesan who bewitched the era's richest and most powerful men.

But as paranoia consumed a country at war, Mata Hari's lifestyle brought her under suspicion. Until, in 1917 she was arrested in her hotel room on the Champs Elysees and accused of espionage.

Written as a series of letters, THE SPY tells the unforgettable story of a woman who dared to break the conventions of her time, and paid the price.

The Spy Details

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From Reader Review The Spy for online ebook

Sara Bow says

Ich weiß jetzt schon, dass dieses Buch ein Jahreshighlight 2018 wird !

Aditi says

“Death is nothing, nor life either, for that matter. To die, to sleep, to pass into nothingness, what does it matter? Everything is an illusion.”

----Mata Hari

Paulo Coelho, the international bestselling author, pens a gripping and part fictional tale on the life of a legendary dancer cum falsely accused as a spy, Mata Hari in his new novel, *The Spy* that opens with the execution of this exotic and talented dancer by the French, but then the author spins a riveting autobiographical account of the dancer's life through a fictional letter penned by the dancer herself addressing to her lawyer. She is an epitome of grace, individuality, extravagant lifestyle, exquisite and unique fashion style, independence and her erotic dance moves in the early 20th century in Paris.

Synopsis:

*In his new novel, Paulo Coelho, best-selling author of *The Alchemist* and *Adultery*, brings to life one of history's most enigmatic women: Mata Hari.*

HER ONLY CRIME WAS TO BE AN INDEPENDENT WOMAN

When Mata Hari arrived in Paris she was penniless. Within months she was the most celebrated woman in the city.

As a dancer, she shocked and delighted audiences; as a courtesan, she bewitched the era's richest and most powerful men.

But as paranoia consumed a country at war, Mata Hari's lifestyle brought her under suspicion. In 1917, she was arrested in her hotel room on the Champs Elysees, and accused of espionage.

*Told in Mata Hari's voice through her final letter, *The Spy* is the unforgettable story of a woman who dared to defy convention and who paid the ultimate price.*

Margaretha Zelle, a Dutch girl born into a middle class family in Holland, but in her high school she gets raped by the school principal and after her parents' divorce, she moves with an uncle to get teacher's training in order to work as a teacher in a kindergarten. One fine day, she replies to a matrimonial ad in the newspaper for an army man looking for a wife, and within three months of meeting the man, she gets

married to that army personnel and moves to Indonesia, but sadly her life turns tragic as she soon becomes victim to sexual and physical abuse by her husband. But her painful ordeal with marital life soon comes to an end, when the suicide of another army's wife irks her up and fills her with promise and strength to leave her husband. She makes her way to Paris, where her talent of dancing is spotted by a wealthy man, who gives her the opportunity to showcase her talent in the opening of his museum. And within few months she reaches the top as she performs in one lavish party to another posh hotel auditorium, until she becomes a household name in all of Paris. Her exquisite taste for fashion earned her the hearts of many wealthy men from bankers to industrialists who only provided extravagance lifestyle for her, but she had little idea about the approaching war in the background. Soon she gets caught up in the crossfire of the war, as she is asked to work as a German spy, but after traveling back to Paris from Berlin, she works as a double agent from the France government, and within months, she is arrested by the French officials who threw her up in the prison, finally meeting her inevitable end of execution by the French in Paris, the city where she became Mata Hari.

The author has resurrected this remarkable and legendary dancer and spy through this book, although he fails to explore into the depth of the great persona of Mata Hari thereby leaving her an incomplete portrait of her. The historical facts accurately syncs with the story line, and it proves that the author has done his research thoroughly. Not only that the readers will be carried away to that world before the Great War in Paris where glitters, extravagance and exquisite artistic qualities gave a definition to the then Paris. The author strikingly captures the backdrop and the readers will be bound to time travel top that era when everything shimmered golden and people were defined by their rich tastes in art, music and dance. From the clothes to the food to the streets to the hotels to everything depicted that French flair that the author has managed to portray through the tale of Mata Hari.

The author's writing is okay and not that great unlike his previous books, although the writing is laced with way too historical facts and less emotions, that will be difficult for the readers to contemplate with the story line. The narrative is lucid laced with the aristocratic flair that sync well with the demeanor of the central character. The pacing is really fast, but that does not support a biographical book like this one, as it lacked depth thoroughly.

The character development is not that good, although the readers will get a thorough and vivid look into the life and style of Mata Hari, the woman who was accused as a spy based on meager evidence. In one word, Mata Hari's life is painful and sad even though she drowned herself in an exorbitant means of life, always found in the arms of her wealthy married men, and her indifference to the war became her enemy. Mata Hari was a daughter, lover, wife and a hopeless mother who could not save her children from the wrath of the her husband's enemies. Her beauty and grace is the only thing that comes first into the minds when people remember her name, and not to mention her boldness from stripping her clothes while dancing Java-*nese* dance style.

In a nutshell, this accurate autobiographical story penned by Coelho is highly compelling and enlightening enough to give the readers a taste of the notorious dancer and spy of the twentieth century, Mata Hari.

Verdict: *Vivid, bright and colorful account of Mata Hari's life but alas it lacks depth.*

Rebbie says

This book reminds me that I shouldn't read historical fiction novels that are based on specific people, rather than a general time period. I'm too critical, and no doubt I expect too much from authors who are brave enough to take on the daunting task of getting inside another person's mind.

I'm of the belief that if you dare to feel that you have the insight into someone else's inner workings and what makes them tick, you better make damn sure that your instinct of human nature is sharp and on point. Otherwise, you have exactly what happened with this story.

Coelho allowed his personal political feelings of feminism to cast a shadow over the book, which undermines the integrity of Mata Hari's true story. Regardless of how he feels, a modicum of extra research would have enlightened him to the fact that Mata Hari was a prostitute out of sheer necessity; it was either that or starve to death.

It was NOT to explore some raging undercurrent of sexual desire that she felt entitled to explore at the expense of her daughter's safety. How Coelho fails to see how this would actually make MH seem less sympathetic truly boggles the mind.

She also didn't leave her daughter with a violently abusive man so easily, especially to chase some pipe dream (at the time) of female liberation and equality. These very specific frame of thoughts were not actively investigated with such gusto until decades later, when women had the emotional support of other women, just so they could avoid the exact situation MH was in: prostitution, because there were precious few other choices for a woman.

To think otherwise is nothing more than a slap in the face to all of the women and children who have been adversely effected by the lack of options for women to leave an abusive husband, and earn the income it takes to provide for their children well enough to escape severe poverty.

And that's why I gave it 2 stars, even though it was painful for me to do so. His heart might have been in the right place, but his agenda should've been left out of this story. This is the wrong platform to use for it, especially as it does not apply here. However, I do love Paulo Coelho, and I look forward to reading more of his books.

Lina Ahmad says

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Heidi The Hippie Reader says

The Spy is the story of Mata Hari, told first in her voice and then from the point of view of one of her male admirers.

Paulo Coelho isn't at his best in this novel.

He prefers and excels at metaphorical stories. For example, in this tale, Coelho has Mata Hari comparing herself to the nightingale that impaled itself on a thorn to grow a bright red rose for a young man in love.

I get what he was reaching for- but I think this tale would have been told better through details rather than metaphors.

Also, it's so short. The audiobook was only a couple hours long.

It wasn't nearly long enough to do Mata Hari's life justice.

I first learned about the fascinating life of Mata Hari in *Inspired!: True Stories Behind Famous Art, Literature, Music, and Film* by Maria Bukhoninia. There were enough unbelievable things that happened in Mata Hari's life to make a compelling historical fiction.

Sadly, this didn't quite fit the bill for me.

If you're going to read a Coelho novel, may I recommend *The Alchemist*. (Which is also a novel people love or hate. I fell on the side of love.)

Jennifer says

Mata Hari...was she a spy or wasn't she? Did she serve as a double agent for Germany and France throughout World War I or did a malicious allegation with zero evidence destroy her life? In this re-imagining based on nonfiction accounts, author Paulo Coelho says no. Her only crime was her choice to be an independent woman, exposing the world to feminism for the very first time, and for that she lost her life by firing squad.

As Mata Hari waited for execution, one of her last requests was for a pen and paper to write letters. Over the past two decades, Germany, Holland, and the U.K.'s MI5 released their files on Mata Hari which provided tons of insight and information into her life. Mr. Coelho combined information from these letters, a researched timeline, along with creative liberties to write a first-person account of Mata Hari's life starting

from about age sixteen.

I loved Mr. Coelho's summarized portrayal of this amazing woman. I wish this novel was longer because I wanted to know her much more. However, I highly respect that Mr. Coelho didn't just make stuff up to fill the pages. I'd like to think that *The Spy* is as fact-based as possible and if the book feels too short it's because you can't write what you don't know. Fairly recently, I read another re-imagining about nonfiction characters where the opposite was done and I have lost all respect for that particular author. *The Spy* is the first book I have ever read by Paulo Coelho and I look forward to exploring his other work. But most importantly, I look forward to doing my own research about the amazing Mata Hari. If you enjoy stories about strong women who push the boundaries for our gender, then do some research for yourself...and consider checking out *The Spy*!

My favorite quote:

"The Greeks have a word full of contradictory meanings: metanoia. Sometimes it means repentance, contrition, confession of sins, the promise not to repeat what we did wrong. At other times it means going beyond what we know to stand face to face with the unknown without recollection or memory, without understanding how it will be to take the next step. We are bound to our lives, to our pasts, to the laws of what we consider right or wrong, and suddenly everything changes. We walk the street without fear and greet out neighbors. But moments later they are no longer our neighbors. They put up fences and barbed wire so we can no longer see things as they were before. So it will be with me. With the Germans. With men who decided to find it easier to let an innocent woman die than to recognize their own mistakes. It is a shame that what happens today already happened yesterday and will happen again tomorrow. It will continue to happen until the end of time or until man finds out he is not only what he thinks but mostly what he feels. The body tires easily but the spirit is always free and will help us get out one day from this infernal cycle of repeating the same mistakes every generation. Although thoughts always remain the same, there is something stronger, and this is called love."

Abrar Hani says

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Issa Deerbany says

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Nat says

“I am a woman who was born at the wrong time and nothing can be done to fix this. I don’t know if the future will remember me, but if it does, may it never see me as a victim, but as someone who moved forward with courage, fearlessly paying the price she had to pay.”

I picked this one up randomly at the library at the very last second, after spending over half an hour looking for the perfect read. And I’m pleased to say that Paulo Coelho impressed me and then some.

The Spy has brilliant starting point with the first chapter starting on Mata Hari's execution by firing squad. I was nearly impossible to put it down after; it set just the right tone for the rest of tale.

When Mata Hari - born Margaretha Zelle - arrived in Paris she was penniless. Within months she was the most celebrated woman in the city.

As a dancer, she shocked and delighted audiences; as a courtesan, she bewitched the era’s richest and most powerful men.

But as paranoia consumed a country at war, Mata Hari’s lifestyle brought her under suspicion. In 1917, she was arrested in her hotel room on the Champs Elysees, and accused of espionage.

Told in Mata Hari’s voice through her final letter, **The Spy** is the unforgettable story of a woman who dared to defy convention and who paid the ultimate price.

Also, these next quotes are all I've thinking about since reaching the last page:

“Flowers teach us that nothing is permanent: not their beauty, not even the fact that they will inevitably wilt, because they will still give new seeds. Remember this when you feel joy, pain, or sadness. Everything passes, grows old, dies, and is reborn.”

“But women are able to understand one another without exchanging a word.”

“When we don’t know where life is taking us, we are never lost.”

I'm still in limbo after finishing this book.

The writing truly made me feel Mata Hari's passions, enthusiasm, loneliness, shame, pride, betrayal, and sadness. A short but impactful read, the narrative structure of **The Spy** shifts among the perspectives of Mata Hari, her attorney, and factual source documents. But I do have to say that ending the story from the point of view of her attorney was quite a disappointment to me. I mean, we left Mata Hari at such a crucial point, she had just recited Oscar Wilde's **The Nightingale and the Rose** in such beautifully tragic way, and I was starting to feel that more attached to her.

“That was my life; I am the nightingale who gave everything and died while doing so.”

But then we move on to her lawyer, and all my love was gradually forgotten. I'm still contemplating as to why this phenomenal book was ended with his point of view. However, I am eternally grateful that *The Spy* introduced me both to Paulo Coelho's fast-paced writing and the history behind Mata Hari, who I'll be researching for the next few hours.

To put it simply, this was an educating, insightful and unputdownable read that puts everything in perspective. I started and finished this in the same day. SO GOOD.

Also, I really appreciated the pictures scattered throughout this novel:

This part of the history is something that, I’m sure, will haunt me for the rest of my life. I can't wait to explore more of Paulo Coelho's works and novels next.

Note: I'm an Amazon Affiliate. If you're interested in buying **The Spy, just click on the image below to go through my link. I'll make a small commission!**

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This review and more can be found on my blog.

Hussain Hamadi says

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<https://youtu.be/kVTEHz4itmw>

Tonstant Weader says

Mata Hari really deserves better than she has been getting in the literary department. First there was Mata Hari's Last Dance by Michelle Moran that made her inexplicably obtuse and naive considering her accomplishments. Now Paulo Coelho gives us *The Spy* which seems to be nothing more than a contrivance for some New Age aphorisms. He sees her as someone who was an emancipated woman, that freedom was her crime, but ignores the reality that made her "free".

The real Mata Hari is more interesting. Margaretha Zelle MacLeod was a brave woman who fled sexual abuse and rape by a school headmaster by marrying a man she met by answering an ad. She moved with her husband to Indonesia and discovered that she went from the frying pan to the fire.

He was an abusive man whose gave her syphilis and nearly killed her on more than one occasion. His syphilis likely infected their two children. Their son died, and their daughter, Non, survived. They alleged that a nanny poisoned the children, but historians think it was a cover story as no one was charged. They divorced and she got custody but he refused to pay child support and she eventually gave her daughter back to her ex-husband because he could afford to care for her. Coelho reveals the abuse and the cheating, but ignores that she tried many “respectable” careers for women, trying to support herself and her daughter, before becoming Mata Hari. She did not leave her daughter lightly or ever forget her. She wrote to his cousin confessing that she slept with men for money, “Don’t think that I’m bad at heart, I have done it only out of poverty.”

From this desperation, she forged a career as a dancer and as woman who slept with men for money and favors. Coelho presents her as a libertine, a free-love free spirit, emancipated. She was not. In reality, she wrote, “My own husband has given me a distaste for matters sexual such as I cannot forget,” That of course is not in this book because it contradicts his story of a free woman. Reality was more complicated, a woman who did not so much choose her profession as accept it, and once accepting it, pursued it to the heights of fame and celebrity. To me it seems that using men for fame, wealth, and power came from rage at how they had used her, not vanity and greed. If greed were her motivation, she would not have tried many other occupations first.

It's been ninety-nine years since Mata Hari was executed. As confidential documents have been declassified, the evidence make clear she was innocent, convicted as a scapegoat for military failures. World War I was a bloodbath, a war of attrition that slaughtered 60% of the men of a generation. Those who made the decisions could not pay, but a foreigner, a prostitute, a nude dancer, she could pay, and pay with her life. Her story is

dramatic and oh-so-very moral. A woman transgresses and climbs high but then is brought low, punished for her transgressions, punished for being independent and greedy and vain and for sleeping around. The story of Mata Hari is pure slut-shaming.

Unless the story is real and tells the truth about where she came from, what her motivations were, and how determinedly she dragged herself up from poverty and desperation. Coelho does not do that at all. He makes it sound like she did it easily, she goes to Paris, meets the right people and she's rich. She never misses her daughter or agonizes over her loss. She's shallow and stupid, meeting Freud and Stravinsky and others and forgetting their first names, a name dropper who can't remember the name...pathetic.

With her recently released letters that reveal her own thoughts about her career and her daughter, it seems inexcusable to me that she is still presented as a sexual libertine seeking fame and money, rather than the far more nuanced and complicated woman she really was. Worse, to have her struggle exploited as a vehicle for pabulum like "when we don't know where life is taking us, we are never lost" or "an artist who desires very little and achieves it has failed in life"

Part One of the book is a letter written by Mata Hari to her lawyer and it does not feel authentic, but it is tolerable next to the histrionic letter written by her lawyer that makes up Part Two. It was only because the book is short, closer to a novella than a novel, and I was so close to finishing, that I kept reading through Part Two. Consider this gem when speaking of the injustice of her fate, "it will continue to happen until the end of time, or until man finds out he is not only what he thinks, but mostly what he feels. The body tires easily, but the spirit is always free and will help us get out, one day, from this infernal cycle of repeating the same mistakes every generation."

I don't recommend this book. It's an inauthentic story by a writer who prefers to push his own philosophy rather than seek the real woman hiding behind the myth. It seems unjust that this woman who was abused her school, her husband, many men and her adopted country, used and betrayed and executed as a scapegoat continues to be exploited and abused by writers who deny her complexity and the very real grit and courage she had.

<https://tonstantweaderreviews.wordpress...>

Mohammed Arabey says

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