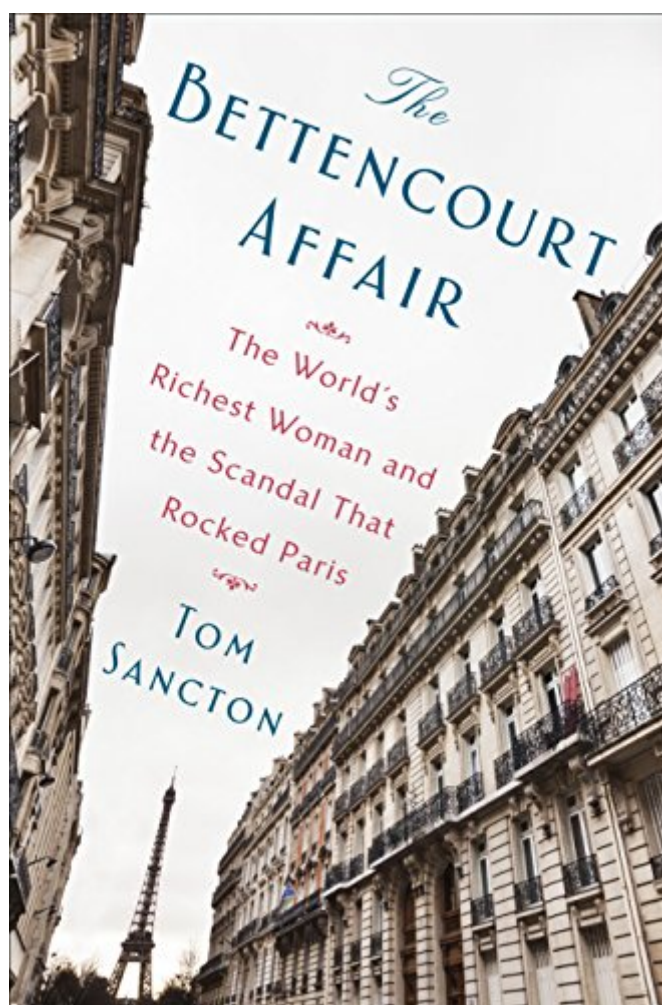


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# The Bettencourt Affair: The World's Richest Woman And The Scandal That Rocked Paris



## Synopsis

Heiress to the nearly forty-billion-dollar L'Oréal fortune, Liliane Bettencourt is the world's richest woman and the fourteenth wealthiest person. But her gilded life has taken a dark yet fascinating turn in the past decade. At ninety-four, she's now embroiled in what has been called the Bettencourt Affair, a scandal that dominated the headlines in France. Why? It's a tangled web of hidden secrets, divided loyalties, frayed relationships, and fractured families, set in the most romantic city—and involving the most glamorous industry—in the world. The Bettencourt Affair started as a family drama but quickly became a massive scandal, uncovering L'Oréal's shadowy corporate history and buried World War II secrets. From the Right Bank mansions to the Left Bank artist havens; and from the Bettencourts' servant quarters to the office of President Nicolas Sarkozy; all of Paris was shaken by the blockbuster case, the shocking reversals, and the surprising final victim. It all began when Liliane met François-Marie Banier, an artist and photographer who was, in his youth, the toast of Paris and a protégé of Salvador Dalí. Over the next two decades, Banier was given hundreds of millions of dollars in gifts, cash, and insurance policies by Liliane. What, exactly, was their relationship? It wasn't clear, least of all to Liliane's daughter and only child, Françoise, who became suspicious of Banier's motives and filed a lawsuit against him. But Banier has a far different story to tell... The Bettencourt Affair is part courtroom drama; part upstairs-downstairs tale; and part character-driven story of a complex, fascinating family and the intruder who nearly tore it apart.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Liliane Bettencourt, heir to the L'Oréal cosmetics fortune, is one of the world's richest women. Married to Andre Bettencourt, a politician, Liliane became tired of her bourgeois life. She met and was attracted to Francois-Marie Banier. Banier was an artist and photographer and a member of artistic society that fascinated Liliane. Infatuated with him, she presented him with hundreds of millions of euros worth of real estate, paintings, and cash. Andre didn't complain about the money. He said it was her's to do as she wished. Liliane's daughter, Francoise, thought differently about Banier and the family fortune believing that he was taking advantage of her mother. She had not been particularly close to her mother, probably because Liliane was not a maternal person and was absent during the early years of Francoise's life taking a tuberculosis cure. The rupture never healed. When Liliane started becoming confused. (She is presently suffering from Alzheimer's.) Francoise filed a law suit against Banier. The lawsuit devolved into a major scandal involving corporate secrets, WWII relations with the Nazis, Swiss Bank accounts, and political payoffs. This is a fascinating book. The unusual characters, tangled emotions, and high level political maneuvering makes the book read more like fiction than history. The book is very well researched, going in depth on the background of the characters as well as the trial. For me, the book started rather slowly with the history of the L'Oréal Company founded by her father Charles Schueller, a brilliant chemist and business man. This history is important to the rest of the story, so it's necessary in order to understand the later trial, but it did make the early chapters slow when you're interested in the scandalous trial. I received this book from Net Galley for this review.

I thought Tom Sancton's THE BETTENCOURT AFFAIR would be another interesting and intimate look at a family embroiled in their own greedy, bitter, long, drawn out dispute over money. While it was that and more, I learned that the Bettencourts, namely the French heiress to the L'Oréal fortune were Anti-Semites, dating back to Liliane Bettencourt's (the heiress) father who founded the company, the heiress herself and her husband Andre as well. Her

daughter and only child, Françoise, who instigates the lawsuit, that becomes known as the Bettencourt Affair, is however married to a Jewish man and they raised their two sons to be Jewish, much to the dismay of her parents. After learning of the history of these men who were Nazi sympathizers and their hatred of the Jews, it was truly hard to enjoy their story as I would have liked. Sancton is a terrific writer and his research lends to an insightful book not only about what prompted Liliane's daughter to sue her mother's friend photographer Françoise-Marie Banier, but about the French political and legal systems and this shameful scandal that aired the family's dirty laundry. Banier was the recipient of massive gifts given to him by way of real estate, major works of art, and more by Liliane and those bequeathed to him in the millions including life insurance policies, upon her death. (She is still living.) In total, nearly a billion dollars. Mais, quand m'en parle! What I took away from the book, apart from the sad relationship between the mother and daughter, is learning of the corruption that a family of such great wealth was able to pass along to the French government and the rampant anti-Semitism that went from one generation to the next. In light of this past weekend's violent display of hatred and bigotry, I was even more saddened.

Well written, and very well documented. Tom Sancton provided an in depth analysis while maintaining an objective position without being dull or too analytical.

merci

This book offers the reader tons of fun. It is literally the best drama/reality show and soap opera I've ever read. The names involved are at the peak of French society, fashion and art. So many names (that I knew) were dropped. It's like a history lesson of the ways of the fashion, business and political elite. I would think it was a marvelous work of fiction, if it weren't so well-researched and documented. It's a lot to digest, but I will definitely go back and read it again. A thoroughly juicy tale!

The book has lots of gossip. I started out reading, curious about the lady and her daughter and the con man. It started to remind me of Tennessee Williams' play *The Roman Spring of Mrs. Stone*. The woman wasn't in her senses. She was older and she had more money than is good for any human and she was bored. Sometimes women in menopause go a little off the wall (or at least used to more before hormones started being prescribed) and this woman sounds like she was past that. Banier was and is a con man. A billion dollars is quite a hefty price to pay to make him feel loved.

The author of this book was too taken with Banier for my taste. He sounded like Truman Capote who got a kind of crush on one of the guys he wrote about in *In Cold Blood*. I had not read about this affair before and did not know all the dirt brought up about l'Oreal's founder or about Sarkozy. It's an interesting book but it really grated on my nerves the way the author justified Banier. He didn't seem to justify Liliane as much as he did Banier. She was too rich and used to getting her way and there's no telling who all she'd been mean to besides her daughter but I still didn't like the idea of Banier conning her and her family so much. Maybe I'm just too L7 (square) to appreciate Banier's "fondness" for Liliane but I have a feeling if she'd been an older lady without a fortune he wouldn't have found her to be nearly so charming. Although when you think about all those folks on Wall Street who bombed the world economy and got off with bonuses Banier's not any worse than they are. And there were other more powerful folks who wiggled out of the penalties.

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