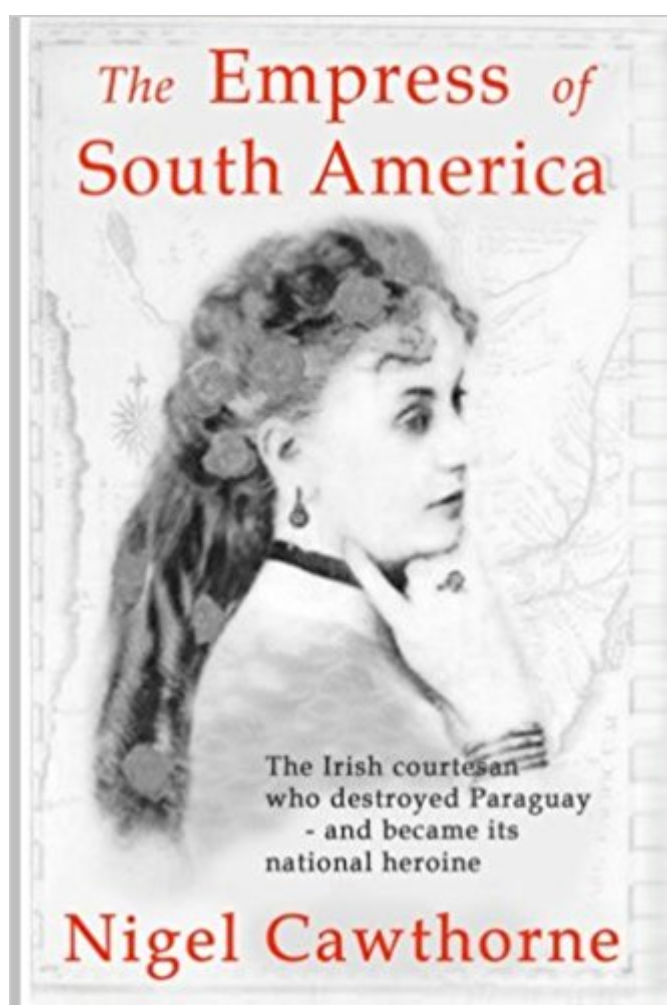


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# The Empress Of South America: The Irish Courtesan Who Destroyed Paraguay - And Became Its National Heroine



## Synopsis

The Empress of South America is the true story of the Irish woman who started the biggest war in the Americas. A redhead from County Cork, Eliza Lynch rose to become the highest paid courtesan in Paris before bedding the son of the Perpetual Dictator of Paraguay who promised to make her the Empress of South America. When he seized power in Paraguay, she cajoled him into attacking Brazil, Argentina and Uruguay – simultaneously. Not a good idea. She was seen riding at the head of the army. In the six-year war, over a million died. There was no male left in Paraguay over nine years old. Her boyfriend cut down by the Brazilian cavalry, she was captured fleeing through the jungle in a ball gown. A young Brazilian officer took pity on her and smuggled her out of the country. Back in London, she was a wealthy woman. During the war she had looted the country. She had stolen the entire Paraguayan treasury, stripped the churches of their gold and stolen all the jewels of the rich families. She returned to Paris where she lived in some style. Dying in 1886, she was buried in Père Lachaise cemetery. In 1961, a Lebanese drug dealer climbed over the wall, dug her up and smuggled her remains back to Paraguay where she now lies in the largest marble mausoleum in South America and is Paraguay's national heroine. Talk about get away with it. The Empress of South America is the true story of one of the most remarkable – and forgotten – women of the nineteenth century. You couldn't make it up. You would not believe it if it hadn't actually happened.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Nigel Cawthorne is the author of over 150 books – everything from The Iron Cage: Are British Prisoners of War Still Alive in Siberia? to Sex Lives of the Popes. When he was writing Sex

Lives of the Great Dictators, a fellow writer suggested that he include Francisco Solano López. Reading up on López, he quickly realised that the real story was his mistress, Irish courtesan Eliza Lynch. That was the beginnings of this book. He also claims to be the only man you will ever meet who has testified to the US Senate and stood in the dock of the Old Bailey.

Opening this book was like opening Pandora's box. All the evils came out, not to be spread through the world, but over Paraguay. The title of this book tickled my curiosity when I was offered a review copy from Endeavour press. The Empress of South America? Who could that be? It sounded impressive, but I had never heard about such a title or empress. It all started with Elisa Alicia Lynch, born in Ireland in 1833. Ten years later the family emigrated to Paris due to the Great Famine in Ireland. That was the beginning of a life that was to be anything but normal. She married at seventeen, separated from her husband three years later, and entered into the world of the courtesans. Through connections she managed to move into the highest circle; the one surrounding Princess Mathilde Bonaparte. It was in this circle that she met her fate; the Paraguayan general Francisco Solano López. But, let's start where the book starts. In Paris, one night in May 1861, when a Paraguayan of Lebanese descent, Teófilo Chammas, scaled the walls of the famous Père Lachaise cemetery in Paris, to steal the bones of Eliza Lynch. When he finally finds the mausoleum where she is buried, he reads the plaque, saying in Spanish: "Monument erected by Enrique, Federico and Carlos Solano López. To the illustrious memory of their always beloved and unforgettable mother Dona Elisa Alicia Lynch-López. Died 25 July 1886." Reading this, students of Latin American history would instantly recall the bloodiest war in the history of the Americas, a war which left more dead than the United States' bitter Civil War and all but destroyed a wealthy nation, through the weakness of a man and the ambition of a woman. It was this woman, Elisa Alicia Lynch - López - better known as Eliza Lynch - that Chammas had come for. "There are various versions how Eliza and Francisco met, but meet they did. She was looking for someone who could maintain her and he was "the princely munificence". Francisco, who had an eye for female beauty, became infatuated with her. They started a relationship and when he was bound to go back to Paraguay she accompanied him. Her unofficial reign as Empress of South America was to begin. Nigel Cawthorpe gives us a background to the history of Paraguay leading up to our main characters. It is a history filled with fighting, blood and killing. In May 1811, after a bloodless coup, the military deposed the governor in Asunción and Paraguay became an independent republic. "The history of Paraguay may seem like a terrible and bloody farce up to this point, but things would only get worse after independence." Francia Solano López became the first consul

and then the "Perpetual Dictator of Paraguay". He was known as 'El Supremo'. At the time of his death his alleged nephew Carlos Antonio López took over the reign. There was not much relief for the population and atrocities continued. He reigned for 21 years. As if things could not get worse, Francisco was waiting in the corridors to take over power."Of an unattractive family, the oldest son Francisco Solano López was undoubtedly the most unappealing. Although he was not the natural son of Carlos Antonio, he shared many of his father's unappealing characteristics. He was short, fat, ugly, barrel-chested and bandy-legged from learning to ride early in life. And like Carlos, he showed a predilection for extravagant uniforms, cut tight in a misguided attempt to disguise his corpulence."As the saying goes there was a strong woman behind Francisco Solano López. Not that he was weak in governing, he did govern with an iron fist. However, Eliza was the unofficial (they never married) wife and handled Francisco in the way she wanted. All to the benefit of they two. She was not accepted by the nobility in Asunción, and she let them pay for it. No opposition was accepted and those who carelessly dropped a word here or there found themselves in jail, being tortured to confess crimes they never did. Those who did not die in prison, died in the army. López fought continuous wars with his neighbours and conscripted anyone he could find. In the end the army was starving but still fighting for the dictator. Francisco himself died in the battle of Cerro Cora, on 1 March 1870. While the body of Francisco was treated badly after his death, Eliza Lynch somehow managed to land on her feet."All are agreed that during the war Madame Lynch has done her utmost to mitigate the miseries of the captives, and to make the so-called 'detenus' (prisoners) comfortable," wrote Sir Richard Burton. Which only goes to show that some people can fall in a sewer and come out smelling of roses."During the years of her "reign" she managed to transfer a fortune to banks in England and France. She and López treated the treasury of Paraguay as their private funds and had no problems taking money, jewellery and other valuables for their own benefit. She survived the last war and was allowed to go back to Europe. As if the money she had already taken was not enough, she spent the latter part of her life in court trying to extract even more money from Paraguay. She died in 1886, in Paris. She was lying dead for two days in her flat before she was found."Estimates of how many people died in the war vary considerably. The Encyclopedia Americana says that the male population was virtually exterminated. Of the Paraguayan population of 1,200,000 at the beginning of the war, it says, 200,000 women and 28,000 males survived - largely returned exiles and boys. Washburn reckons that, of 450,000 women at the beginning of the war, not 60,000 were left alive, and, of 350,000 men, only 20,000 survived - if you included boys under ten - and just 10,000 if you did not. Most of these died, not from gunshot wounds or fighting, but of disease and starvation. Two English

engineers caught up in the conflict - Percy Burrell and Henry Valpy - reckoned that 120,000 women and children died of hunger and exposure between the withdrawal from Pikysry on 27 December 1868 and their escape on August 21st 1869, after which the mortality rate increased. The Allies lost 300,000 men. So at the very least Eliza's war consumed over one million people, making it the bloodiest war in the Americas - the four years of the American Civil War cost the United States 618,000 lives."Nigel Cawthorne has written a well researched account of a violent part of the history of Paraguay. It is verified with numerous eye witness accounts, such as from American and French ambassadors, Sir Richard Burton (at the time posted in Santos as the British consul to Brazil), people who had been tortured and survived and various others. It is an exciting and horrifying story that put all fiction in the shadows. It seems impossible for any author to make up such a scenario of events. It is horrifying to read, and sometimes, I had to put down the book because I could hardly grasp the evils done by this couple. A fascinating account of a part of the world I did not know so much about. It is a truly amazing story! A short look at Nigel Cawthorne shows a remarkable productive author with over 150 books to his name. Among others, books on Alan Turing, Tesla, Edison, Tolkien, Kings and Queens of England, and many more. I received a copy of this book from Endeavour press in exchange for a fair & impartial review.

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