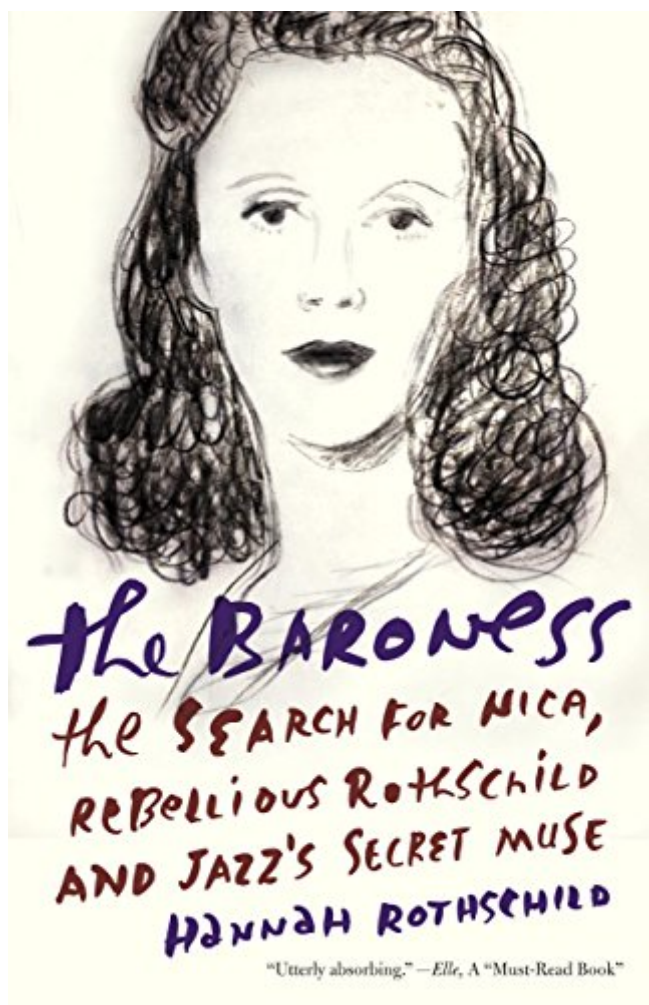


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# The Baroness: The Search For Nica, The Rebellious Rothschild



## Synopsis

Beautiful, romantic and spirited, Pannonica, known as Nica, named after her father's favorite moth, was born in 1913 to extraordinary, eccentric privilege and a storied history. The Rothschild family had, in only five generations, risen from the ghetto in Frankfurt to stately homes in England. As a child, Nica took her daily walks, dressed in white, with her two sisters and governess around the parkland of the vast house at Tring, Hertfordshire, among kangaroos, giant tortoises, emus and zebras, all part of the exotic menagerie collected by her uncle Walter. As a debutante, she was taught to fly by a saxophonist and introduced to jazz by her brother Victor; she married Baron Jules de Koenigswarter, settled in a chateau in France and had five children. When World War II broke out, Nica and her five children narrowly escaped back to England, but soon after, she set out to find her husband who was fighting with the Free French Army in Africa, where she helped the war effort by being a decoder, a driver and organizing supplies and equipment. In the early 1950s Nica heard "Round Midnight" by the jazz pianist and composer Thelonious Monk and, as if under a powerful spell, abandoned her marriage and moved to New York to find him. She devoted herself to helping Monk and other musicians: she bailed them out of jail, paid their bills, took them to the hospital, even drove them to their gigs, and her convertible Bentley could always be seen parked outside downtown clubs or up in Harlem. Charlie Parker would notoriously die in her apartment in the Stanhope Hotel. But it was Monk who was the love of her life and whom she cared for until his death in 1982. Hannah Rothschild has drawn on archival material and her own interviews in this quest to find out who her great-aunt really was and how she fit into a family that, although passionate about music and entomology, was reactionary in always favoring men over women. Part musical odyssey, part love story, *The Baroness* is a fascinating portrait of a modern figure ahead of her time who dared to live as she wanted, finally, at the very center of New York's jazz scene.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

One of the Rothschilds has written a very sensitive and loving, though quite objective, biography of another member of her famous family. It must not be easy to write about someone in your [extended] family when you are a member of the same one. Nevertheless, Hannah Rothschild has created a story with wide reach into the political and social worlds of the early 20th Century, as well as the idiosyncrasies of some of the Rothschilds. Pannonica really became "Nica" when jazz tunes were written for her; and she must have reveled in that, since Nica seems to have been a much happier person than Pannonica. The fearlessness, and even recklessness, with which Nica immersed herself into what was really a totally different culture to the one she grew up in, is wonderfully told; a subtle but powerful testament to the draw of timeless musical art. She might have been "the rebellious Rothschild", but she was also an important patron of an original art form. If you enjoy the book, you should also seek out "Straight, No Chaser", the Monk documentary where she appears, all too briefly. In the end, Nica was as quirky a character as the writer of the music she loved so much - Thelonious Sphere Monk.

Hannah Rothschild perhaps, at times, feels impaired by her own Rothschild legacy, but, she is an amazing talent! -A friend of mine was in London and purchased a more recent book by Ms Rothschild, "The Improbability of Love". Had I seen this paperback at my local Barnes & Nobles I would not have picked it up because the cover makes it appear to be a trashy modern romance. But that little paperback was simply delightful embracing the art world through one historical painting, and capturing the contemporary London scene. I was so enthused that I searched for other books by this author (whom I'd never heard of). Thus I found "The Search for Nica". After reading it, I am

totally in awe of Ms Rothschild's talent! I'm sure it was cathartic for Ms Rothschild to trace her own family history through her great-aunt's life, but, she did it beautifully and in a balanced way. I'm grateful that she took the enormous time to do the interviews and documents research, and I am deeply grateful that she allowed the book to go to print. It allows us to understand the richness and tragedy of one person's life. -- Thank you Ms Rothschild. Please write more; you have a wonderful gift.

My interest in music is extremely eclectic and my interest in Thelonius Monk has happened slowly over the last decade. I am ambiguous about labelling Monk a genius but acknowledge his importance in the evolution of music (jazz if you must apply a label) So the main reason for buying the book was to learn more about Monk and the music that he composed, played and also influenced in the period of the 1940's and 1950's. What I experienced in the reading was much more than an insight into Monk and that period. The majority of the book focuses on the period from the mid 19th century to the mid 20th century. The succinct history of the Rothschild Empire is mixed with the landscape of Europe, United Kingdom, America and other countries impacted by in particular the great wars. Overlaying this is the evolution of Jazz music set in context of the era and the geography. It is not limited to but flows from Louis Armstrong through Duke Ellington onto Monk, Miles and Bird. Yet whilst it is an excellent historical summary on many levels it also is an emotionally engaging read. I connected with Nica and her family and the musicians - the connections with Nica and the musicians was more often than not uncomfortable. The connection however was raw and real. I came away with an ambivalent feeling about Nica - suspended with feelings of admiration, empathy and frustration but still wanting to know more. Highly recommended

This is a well written very interesting story of the Rothschilds, and especially of Nica. The history of this wealthy and influential family was interesting, as well as the apparent dissolution of the wealth as generations were less interested in making money. The author thinks it may have been interbreeding that affected the mentality of the clan. I suspect since the original Rothschilds were extremely limited in what they were allowed to do by anti-Jewish laws, and future generations didn't have those restrictions and plus they grew up rich, they had more paths available than their ancestors. Since I'm a jazz fan, The story of her years in NY were of special interest to me. I think most of the world didn't realize the privations these very famous, even loved, jazz musicians were faced with. The Baroness literally supported a generation of Jazz Greats!

I bought this book with minimal expectation. I expected a book about a wealthy family who had opportunities that possibly most people don't have. What a surprise this book turned out to be. Even though this book is about Nica, the rebellious Rothschild, the branch of the family discussed in this book were all amazing people who are to be admired, especially Nica, the main protagonist. Sure they had money to follow their dreams and pursuits, which most of us don't have, but they had courage to defy expectations. I found this book beautifully written, I could not put it down. I read it on my kindle, but I found it unsuitable for the kindle because I could not follow the family tree, which I often needed to refer back to.

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