



# Evita: The Life of Eva Peron

*Charles River Editors*

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\*Includes pictures.

\*Comprehensively covers Evita's life and legacy, including the ways she has been depicted in media over the last 60 years.

\*Includes a Bibliography for further reading.

Maria Eva Duarte de Peron, known to the world as Evita, stands with Jesus Christ as a highly influential historical figure who lived only 33 years. The similarities do not end there: as Argentine novelist Tomas Eloy Martinez has observed, Evita came to “symbolize certain naive, but effective, beliefs: the hope for a better world; a life sacrificed on the altar of the disinherited, the humiliated, the poor of the earth . . . myths which somehow reproduce the image of Christ.” During her life she was elevated to the status of “spiritual leader” of her country, Argentina, and after death she was regarded there as a martyr and a saint by her many followers. A visit to the museum dedicated to Evita’s legacy in the Botanico neighborhood of Buenos Aires reveals the spirit of quasi-religious devotion that surrounds her: more than simply a collection of historical displays, the museum stands as a shrine to her legacy and intends to imbue its viewers with the spirit and beliefs of the deceased First Lady. In one of the rooms, the visitor stands in the presence of one of her most famous dresses in a centrally placed glass case, with the scent of roses artificially pumped into the air. Like many of the other objects, the dress is presented much as were the relics of medieval saint. Evita’s tomb in the same city’s Recoleta cemetery, constantly garlanded with fresh bouquets and notes of gratitude from pilgrims who have come to pay their respects, provides further evidence of her revered presence in Argentine culture.

At the same time, the presence of the major artifacts of Evita’s person in these particular locations is also ironic and revealing of the great social divisions over which she presided. Botanico is a prestigious and wealthy neighborhood, and the Recoleta is the burial place of Argentina’s oligarchy; Eva Peron prided herself on having antagonized and earned the hatred of precisely these social classes. Over 50 years after her death, Peronism, the political philosophy devised by her and her husband Juan Domingo Peron, remains a potent force in Argentine politics (the current president identifies herself closely with the Perons and their legacy), but it also continues to inspire deep enmity. While a large portion of the country sees Evita as a symbol of national pride, there is also a significant sector that sees her as an impostor and a demagogue whose brilliant but irresponsible manipulation of mass politics helped sink the country into chaos. Whereas some controversial political figures tend to become more broadly and neutrally admired as the distance from their lifespan grows, within her own country Evita remains as much a lightning rod as ever.

Since her death, the mythology and legend of Evita have grown monumentally. Though millions worshipped Eva, who nearly became the Vice-President of Argentina before her premature death, opinions of her still vary between two extremes. While some think of her as an angelic woman who sought to uplift women and the poor, others view her as a self-serving, egotistical, and embittered woman who used sex to rise up Argentina’s social and political ladder and seek vengeance on the upper classes. *Evita: The Life of Eva Peron* humanizes the youngest of 5 siblings who once had more modest ambitions as Eva Duarte, and it explores the mythology and legacy that have grown around Evita, examining her representations in literature, film, and theatre to uncover the truth behind her enigmatic existence.

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