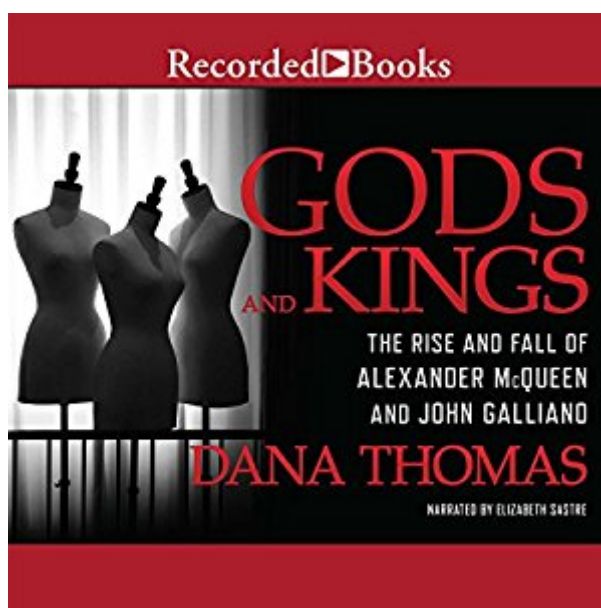


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# Gods And Kings: The Rise And Fall Of Alexander McQueen And John Galliano



## Synopsis

In February 2011 John Galliano, the lauded head of Christian Dior, imploded with a drunken, anti-Semitic public tirade. Exactly a year earlier, celebrated designer Alexander McQueen took his own life three weeks before his women's wear show. Both were casualties of the war between art and commerce that has raged within fashion for the last two decades. In the mid-1990s, Galliano and McQueen arrived on the fashion scene when the business was in an artistic and economic rut. They shook the establishment out of its bourgeois, minimalist stupor with daring, sexy designs and theatrical fashion shows. They had similar backgrounds: sensitive, shy gay men raised in tough London neighborhoods, their love of fashion nurtured by their doting mothers. By 1997 both had landed jobs as creative directors for couture houses owned by French tycoon Bernard Arnault, chairman of LVMH. Galliano's and McQueen's work not only influenced fashion; their distinct styles were reflected across the media landscape. With their help luxury fashion evolved from a clutch of small, family-owned businesses into a \$280 billion-a-year global corporate industry. Executives pushed the designers to meet increasingly rapid deadlines. For both Galliano and McQueen, the pace was unsustainable. The same week that Galliano was fired, Forbes named Arnault the fourth richest man in the world. Two months later, in the wake of McQueen's death, Kate Middleton wore a McQueen wedding gown, instantly making the house the world's most famous fashion brand, and the Metropolitan Museum of Art opened a wildly successful McQueen retrospective, cosponsored by the corporate owners of the McQueen brand. The corporations had won, and the artists had lost. In her groundbreaking work *Gods and Kings*, acclaimed journalist Dana Thomas tells the true story of McQueen and Galliano. In so doing she reveals the relentless world of couture.

## Book Information

Audible Audio Edition

Listening Length: 15 hours 47 minutes

Program Type: Audiobook

Version: Unabridged

Publisher: Recorded Books

Audible.com Release Date: February 17, 2015

Whispersync for Voice: Ready

Language: English

ASIN: B00TQ9FDLC

Best Sellers Rank: #28 in Books > Audible Audiobooks > Arts & Entertainment > Design

#155 in [Books > Audible Audiobooks > Biographies & Memoirs > Business Leaders](#) #156  
in [Books > Business & Money > Industries > Fashion & Textile](#)

## Customer Reviews

The great thing about this book is that it brings back the days when fashion was this inventive and creative - especially the work of Alexander McQueen - and fortunately, the Web has all of his shows, so you can go back and view them again. Unfortunately, the writing is a slog. So many potentially great stories were suggested and then never followed up on. This was written by a journalist with an eye for details, who, what, when and where and she lists them all, but fails to develop anything beyond the surface. Unfortunately, both men come off looking like monsters although the writing makes one more sympathetic toward McQueen. Unless you are a dedicated fan of fashion, this book will bore you.

bought first copy as a gift. started reading it, then bought a second copy. if you want to learn more about the two designers, great. if you want to learn more about the innards of the high fashion industry, even better. it isn't all thin models in fashion shows, celebrity filled audiences, trendy parties, and art. "gods and kings" provides a perspective of the raw and sometimes inhumane exploitation of designers in the high fashion industry.

This is not a book to be breezed thru in an afternoon or two. In fact, I spent a good two and a half weeks with it, as I kept having to put it down and hit my computer to look up who people were and spent hours on youtube watching Galliano and McQueen shows, which thank Heaven nearly all the shows described in such wonderful detail in the book are archived there. Dana Thomas does the customary dedication to her folks and gives a gracious thanks to all who helped her with resources and interviews, but she has not turned out a dry report on how fashion has become big business with no patience for artists, but a true and dedicated labor of love. She writes so that we know who these men are, what inspired them, who they liked, who they hated, what they drank, ate and ultimately what they put up their noses. And they are presented, truthfully yet raw and with respect. She presents Galliano and McQueen, so well that I found myself developing full on opinions and even taking sides. Halfway thru the book I found myself loving one collection over another even before I logged on to see it just because I was either intrigued or moved by the details that developed them. Being a child of the 80's I reflected fondly on the New Romanticism of Gallianos work and the dreamy fantasy in his illustrations (Had to look those up too.) and then I was won over

by the proud, no-shame working-class attitude of McQueen and his remarkable structure of his Goth/Rock aesthetics. Her anecdotes, trivia and behind the scenes details are colorful and engaging. And she writes also of the history of fashion design and their famous houses: Givenchy, Dior, Yve Saint Laurent, Chanel, Louis Vuitton, etc. French fashion houses that have been around for decades and are institutes unto themselves. Of course this story begins with their take over amongst other luxury goods (moet hennesy, etc.) by businessman and real estate "acquirer" Bernard Arnault, who buys up every fashion house he can get his hands on, offends and then runs off any surviving family members and then re-assigns new up and coming designers to the established houses under the guise of modernizing them. But really it is a rape of sorts becoming nothing short of a draconian deal with the devil in the name of big business and big money. Ironic that what should be the beginning of great things for both Galliano and McQueen was, in many ways their demise. All fashion designers, unless independently wealthy (HAH!) must find sponsors to finance their vision. And from the very beginning Arnault is not the rescuing prince on a white horse as he might initially appear to be. For starters he is less interested in establishing a new design house under a new designer and more interested in re-enforcing an established design house like Givenchy and Dior. The two respective labels McQueen and Galliano were recruited to save. The development of their own labels was merely a carrot dangled in front of their noses, and even then they were expected to sign over the copyrights to their own names to receive financing. So yes, integrity is immediately on the line. The new business plan for Fashion is a brutal read, I found myself really cheering on Tom Ford and Domenico de Sole when they were able to subvert Arnault's sneaky take over attempt of Gucci. Arnault's big move was to quietly buy up stock options until he had at least a third share of a company then he would want to appoint his own board members, etc until finally the whole pie was his. Ford and de Sole not only saw the writing on the wall, but had quite a bit of business savvy of their own and immediately turned Gucci into an employee owned operation thus watering down Arnault's shares to 22% and voiding all attempts of getting on the board since he was not an employee. Beautiful. With Galliano and McQueen things did not go so swimmingly. They pumped new life into their respective charges, but at a high cost. Galliano, despite all the advice he had ever gotten went ahead and sold all share to his Name Brand to Arnault for an unlimited blank check. It is pretty obvious from his behavior that he saw in Arnault and LVMH the ultimate sugar daddy and could be as naughty as he wanted believing himself to be the ultimate precocious yet charming spoilt child. McQueen was much more savvy in that his own brand was truly his dream and he held on to it at all costs. This of course meant that he had to pull everything he did for both Givenchy and McQueen on a shoestring budget in comparison and a fair

share of disdain from Arnault. I found myself, so utterly involved in the lives of these men I was wringing my hands over Galliano's thoughtless recklessness while my heart soared when McQueen stuck it to Arnault by going behind his back to wheel and deal with Ford and de Sole to free himself from Givenchy and establish McQueen as a solid house on its own. But of course, there is the end. With Galliano his fall was not only predictable by miles and could have been preventable it is still humbling. But with McQueen to see how hard he fought, how greatly he succeeded only to be taken down by the black dog of depression. Well, I can't help but grieve. I found myself crying for McQueen and concerned for Galliano's future well-being. Because in the end, in the world of big business it is not what they created that counted but what and how often they produced. My one complaint for this book: MORE PICTURES!!! of course I realize that for the book to have the photos that would really do it justice would push it from a 400 page book to roughly a 1000 page book, but it would have save me multiple trips online. But as for the experience, I really enjoyed this book in a way I have not in a long time.

Gods and Kings is an excellent chronicle of the lives of two fashion superstars and the toll it took on their lives. Recognized as wunder kinds for their vision and crafting abilities, they never grew beyond their fame to quiet their personal demons. McQueen silenced his by committing suicide and Galliano through career suicide. Their stories are interesting because their lives intersected at school in a similar path to fame and success. They crashed at the same time with Galliano left standing, more or less. Left me with the impression that while true creativity is a little crazy it destroys when it is all crazy or certainly did in the case of these two men. All in all an interesting book.

Couldn't stop reading. A fascinating and compulsive read offering an intimate look into the lives of two of the most famous men in fashion today. I am not an avid follower of fashion and both men were known to me only in name prior to reading this book. The genius of Dana Thomas is that as a full-on fashion insider, she is able to not only share that world through her words, but to make you truly care for these two men and their tumultuous and ultimately tragic life stories.

Insightful.

Great read!

Very informative.

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