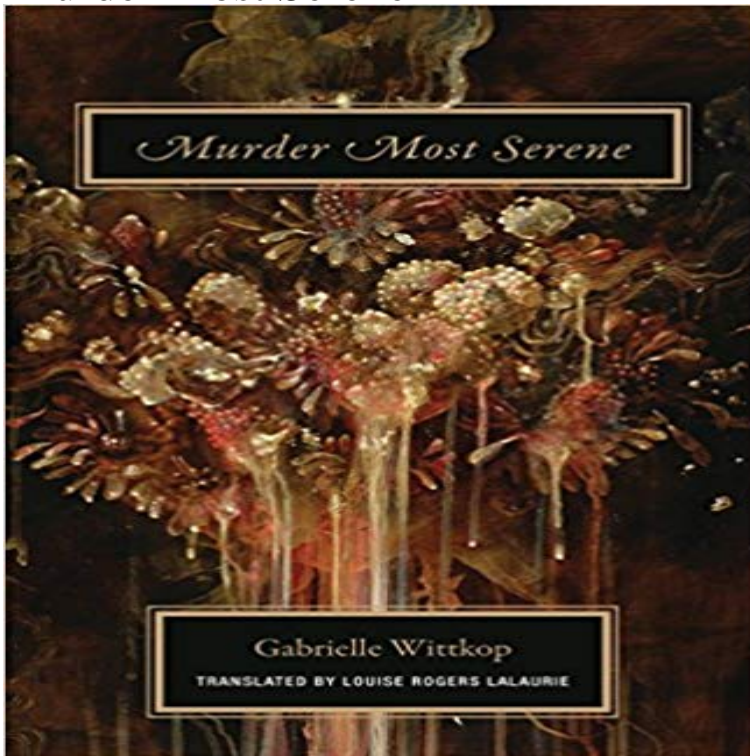


## Murder Most Serene



In the last days of the Venetian Republic, the successive wives of Count Alvise Lanzi suffer mysterious, agonizing deaths. *Murder Most Serene* offers a cruel portrait of a beautiful but corrupt city-state and its equally extravagant and corrupt inhabitants. Redolent of darkness, death, poison and transgression, it is also an over-the-top, tongue-in-cheek Venetian romp. Rich in historical detail and bursting with bejeweled putrescence, Gabrielle Wittkop's chilling memento mori eschews the murder mystery in which it is garbed for a scintillating depiction of physical, moral, societal and institutional corruption, in which the author plays the role of puppeteer--present, masked as convention dictates, while in a Venice on the brink of downfall, women gorged with venom burst like wineskins. Self-styled heir to the Marquis de Sade, Gabrielle Wittkop (1920-2002) was a French author who wrote a remarkable series of novels and travelogues, all laced with sardonic humor and dark sexuality, with recurrent themes of death, disease and decrepitude. After meeting Justus Wittkop, a German deserter, in Paris under the Occupation, she hid him from the Nazis and then married him after the war, in what she described as an intellectual alliance, given he was homosexual. He would commit suicide in 1986, with her approval, after being diagnosed with Parkinsons. Her first novel, *The Necrophiliac*, appeared in 1972, but a number of her books have only been made available since her own suicide in 2002, after she was diagnosed with lung cancer.

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