



# Grandes Horizontales : The Lives and Legends of Four Nineteenth-Century Courtesans

Virginia Rounding

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A fascinating portrayal of the lives of the great nineteenth-century courtesans.

Marie Duplessis, Cora Pearl, La Païva and La Présidente, the four women whose lives and legends are examined in this fascinating book, were all representatives of the golden age of the French courtesan. In the reign of Emperor Napoleon III the opulent and pampered demimonde became almost indistinguishable from the haut-monde, with mythical reputations growing up around its most glittering and favored celebrities.

Marie Duplessis became the prototype of the virtuous courtesan when Alexandre Dumas Fils portrayed her as Marguerite Gautier in *La dame aux Camélias*. Apollonie Sabatier, known as La Présidente, put men of letters and other arts at ease amidst the gracious manners and bawdy talk of her salon and was immortalized by sculptor August Clésinger and poet Charles Baudelaire.

To prejudiced eyes, the Russian Jew La Païva appeared intent on exploiting the rich young men of Paris. Covetous onlookers resented her ability to amass and display great wealth, most notably in the design and building of her opulent hotel in the Avenue of the Champs Elysées. The English beauty who called herself Cora Pearl was another "foreign threat", with her athletic physique, sixty horses and ability "to make bored men laugh", including Prince Napoleon.

Virginia Rounding disentangles myth from reality in her lively, thought-provoking study. Nineteenth-century Paris comes to life and so do its most distinguished and déclassé inhabitants.



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