



Courtesans (Text Only)

Katie Hickman

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‘Irresistible...history at its most human. Elegant and addictively readable.’ William Dalrymple

During the course of the 18th- and 19th-century a small group of women rose from impoverished obscurity to positions of great power, independence and wealth. In doing so they took control of their lives – and those of other people – and made the world do their will.

Men ruined themselves in desperate attempts to gain and retain a courtesan's favours, but she was always courted for far more than sex. In an age in which women were generally not well educated she was often unusually literate and literary, courted for her conversation as well as her physical company. Courtesans were extremely accomplished, and exerted a powerful influence as leaders of fashion and society. They were not received at Court, but inhabited their own parallel world – the demi-monde – complete with its own hierarchies, etiquette and protocol. They were queens of fashion, linguists, musicians, accomplished at political intrigue and, of course, possessors of great erotic gifts. Even to be seen in public with one of the great courtesans was a much-envied achievement.

In ‘Courtesans’ Katie Hickman, author of the bestselling ‘Daughters of Britannia’, focuses on the exceptional stories of five outstanding women. Sophia Baddeley, Elizabeth Armistead, Harriette Wilson, Cora Pearl and Catherine Walters may have had very different personalities and talents, but their lives exemplify the dazzling existence of the courtesan.

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