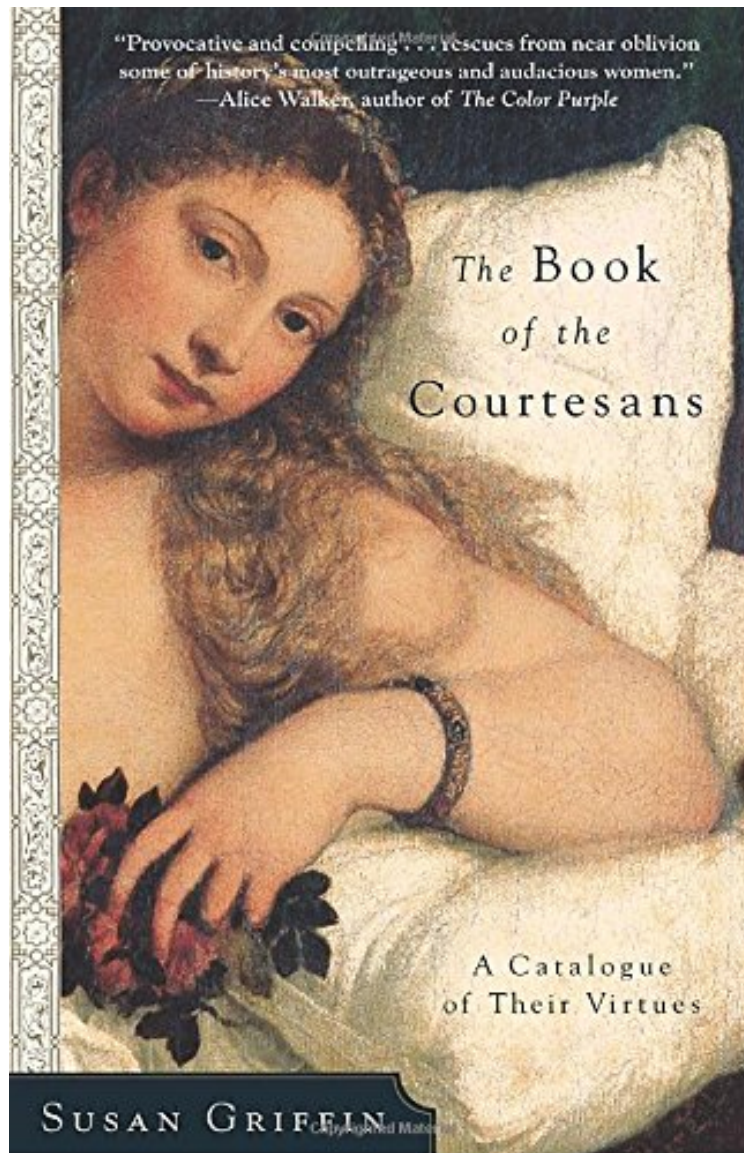


The Book of the Courtesans: A Catalogue of Their Virtues

Susan Griffin

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Susan Griffin : The Book of the Courtesans: A Catalogue of Their Virtues before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Book of the Courtesans: A Catalogue of Their Virtues:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. What an eye-opener about women's history written in profoundly intelligent and deeply sensual proseBy MDyakI adore Susan Griffin - her book, *Woman and Nature*, is one of the most important books of the 20th century - but somehow I had never gotten around to reading this book before. What an eye-opener about women's history written in profoundly intelligent and deeply sensual prose! I'm sadly getting to the

last chapter as I would happily keep reading more for months, and I've gotten at least 3 or 4 other people turned on to it. 1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. women before their time By Lisa LeBlanc I learned and did not realize how much these women influenced my independence. I have this independence in today's society such as a right to an education, right to own property, right to receive a decent wage, and to live independently because they dared to demand these rights for themselves. If they had not gone before us living their lifestyle with these rights we would have a much longer road to travel towards women rights as human beings. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Interesting but . . . By D. Alighieri Interesting read but not nearly as scholarly as I had hoped.

They charmed some of Europe's most illustrious men, honing their social skills as well as their sexual ones, and accumulating wealth, fame, and power along the way. Unlike their geisha counterparts, courtesans didn't live in brothels or bend their wills to suit their suitors. They were the muses who enflamed the hearts of our most celebrated artists--Raphael, Manet, Dumas, and Proust, to name just a few--as well as becoming artists in their own right. Offering the first comprehensive tour of their worlds, Susan Griffin celebrates these first feminists and hails their virtues: Timing, Beauty, Cheek, Brilliance, Gaiety, Grace, and Charm. From Veronica Franco, who graced the palazzos of sixteenth-century Venice, and Madame de Pompadour, the arbiter of all things fashionable at Versailles during the reign of Louis XV, to La Belle Otero of the grand boulevards of Paris in the Gay Nineties and Marion Davies, who took Hollywood by storm in the 1920's and 1930's, *The Book of the Courtesans* enticingly illustrates the intricacies of their lavish lifestyles and incredible life stories. Fascinating true tales and enlightening snippets from courtesans' memoirs further reveal how these cunning women seized their opportunity to become the West's first liberators, free to choose their own lovers and command remarkable respect. Delving into his scintillating world, *The Book of the Courtesans* is an impeccably researched, beautifully crafted portrait of some of the most intriguing figures in women's history.

.com Poet and writer Susan Griffin is famously provocative, though her provocation takes very different forms, ranging from her classic feminist treatise, *Women and Nature*, which linked patriarchy with the oppression of women and nature, to her well-received *A Chorus of Stones*, which weighed in on the nature of war. But in *The Book of Courtesans*, Griffin is downright scintillating. Courtesans, she writes, were not prostitutes nor even kept women, though certainly they used their sexuality to financial gain. Rather, they were personages and celebrities, friends to royalty and the most famous writers and artists of their time, the subjects of gossip, the charismatic epicenter of the Second Empire, the Gay Nineties, the Belle Epoque, "Gay Paree." Their faces were immortalized in paintings by the Renaissance masters, by Degas, Renoir, and Toulouse-Lautrec, their lives by Proust, Balzac, Zola, Flaubert. They lived in splendor, set fashion standards, owned fabulous jewelry collections. And they were talented authors, poets, actresses, and singers. In a time of prescribed roles for women, they turned the tables, creating lives of remarkable intellectual and financial freedom. Griffin sings the praises of these women and enunciates their virtues, which, ironically, are the sort popularly thought to be made anachronistic by feminism. With her impeccable timing, the French dancer Mogador achieved legendary status the first time she danced on stage and later became a countess. Harriet Wilson seduced the Duke of Wellington with her cheek, and delivered him from boredom. Marion Davies' gaiety enlivened all those who saw her, Madame Pompadour was the embodiment of grace, and Sarah Bernhardt exuded so much charm she acted her way straight out of the role of courtesan. Griffin imagines herself into her subjects' lives with sensitivity and sensuality--the rags to riches stories that characterized them and their creative responses to often dire circumstances. In the end, she not only immortalizes these feminist precursors, but reminds us that "the capacity to take pleasure in life is no less a virtue than any other." --Lesley Reed From Publishers Weekly Hard on the heels of the film *Moulin Rouge* comes this idiosyncratic meditation on that 18th- and 19th-century curiosity, the courtesan, the woman who, though usually from limited means, parlayed her beauty, sexuality and talent into a position of luxury and celebrity as the mistress of one or several men of means. Readers looking for a sober social history of the world portrayed in the film will not find it here, for Griffin's approach is almost as kaleidoscopic as the movie's. In a series of brief chapters, each devoted to a particular "virtue," that is, a talent central to the courtesan's success (such as "Gaiety," "Charm," "Cheek"), feminist critic, playwright and poet Griffin (*What Her Body Thought*; *Women and Nature*; etc.) mines the memoirs of her subjects for stories illustrating their ability to vault beyond the constraints of their age and gender. Some of her courtesans have slipped into obscurity; some are remembered chiefly for their associations with artists and eminent men; a few, like Colette and Chanel, achieved fame in a different endeavor. At least one, Nijinsky, was not a woman at all. What they all share, however, and what Griffin admires in them, is the daring to transgress the boundaries of a rigid code of prudery and hypocrisy and so exchange the poverty and toil they were condemned to at birth for champagne, diamonds and extraordinary lingerie. Griffin's writing is lively, and her stories are engaging. Agent, Katinka Matson. (Sept. 11) Forecast: An acclaimed writer *A Chorus of Stones* was a Pulitzer Prize finalist Griffin should garner respectable review coverage for this subject of timeless interest. Copyright 2001 Cahners Business Information, Inc. From Library Journal Scholars and general readers alike will welcome this fascinating and highly original book by a prolific and award-winning feminist author. Using

the insights of women's history, Griffin (*What Her Body Thought*) creatively demonstrates the interplay between sex and power as she traces the tradition of the courtesan from ancient Greece to its demise early in the 20th century. Rather than adhere to a standard chronological narrative, however, she organizes her tale around key virtues displayed by the famed courtesans of the past beauty, charm, wit, grace, and brilliance among them. She demonstrates how courtesans used their talents to gain more power and independence than women of any class until well into the 20th century. Included here are engrossing biographical details and vignettes about figures well known (Madame de Pompadour, Madame du Barry, Lola Montez) and not so well known (Celeste Venard, Harriet Wilson, Tullia D'Aragona, Ninon de Lenclos). Griffin's tone is one of admiration and respect. Highly recommended. Marie Marmo Mullaney, Caldwell Coll., NJ Copyright 2001 Reed Business Information, Inc.