



Mademoiselle: Coco Chanel and the Pulse of History

Rhonda K. Garelick

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NATIONAL BESTSELLER

Certain lives are at once so exceptional, and yet so in step with their historical moments, that they illuminate cultural forces far beyond the scope of a single person. Such is the case with Coco Chanel, whose life offers one of the most fascinating tales of the twentieth century—throwing into dramatic relief an era of war, fashion, ardent nationalism, and earth-shaking change—here brilliantly treated, for the first time, with wide-ranging and incisive historical scrutiny.

Coco Chanel transformed forever the way women dressed. Her influence remains so pervasive that to this day we can see her afterimage a dozen times while just walking down a single street: in all the little black dresses, flat shoes, costume jewelry, cardigan sweaters, and tortoiseshell eyeglasses on women of every age and background. A bottle of Chanel No. 5 perfume is sold every three seconds. Arguably, no other individual has had a deeper impact on the visual aesthetic of the world. But how did a poor orphan become a global icon of both luxury and everyday style? How did she develop such vast, undying influence? And what does our ongoing love of all things Chanel tell us about ourselves? These are the mysteries that Rhonda K. Garelick unravels in *Mademoiselle*.

Raised in rural poverty and orphaned early, the young Chanel supported herself as best she could. Then, as an uneducated nineteen-year-old café singer, she attracted the attention of a wealthy and powerful admirer and parlayed his support into her own hat design business. For the rest of Chanel's life, the professional, personal, and political were interwoven; her lovers included diplomat Boy Capel; composer Igor Stravinsky; Romanov heir Grand Duke Dmitri; Hugh Grosvenor, the Duke of Westminster; poet Pierre Reverdy; a Nazi officer; and several women as well. For all that, she was profoundly alone, her romantic life relentlessly plagued by abandonment and tragedy.

Chanel's ambitions and accomplishments were unparalleled. Her hat shop evolved into a clothing empire. She became a noted theatrical and film costume designer, collaborating with the likes of Pablo Picasso, Jean Cocteau, and Luchino Visconti. The genius of Coco Chanel, Garelick shows, lay in the way she absorbed the zeitgeist, reflecting it back to the world in her designs and in what Garelick calls "wearable personality"—the irresistible and contagious style infused with both world history and Chanel's nearly unbelievable life saga. By age forty, Chanel had become a multimillionaire and a household name, and her Chanel Corporation is still the highest-earning privately owned luxury goods manufacturer in the world.

In *Mademoiselle*, Garelick delivers the most probing, well-researched, and insightful biography to date on this seemingly familiar but endlessly surprising figure—a work that is truly both a heady intellectual study and a literary page-turner.

Praise for *Mademoiselle*

"A detailed, wry and nuanced portrait of a complicated woman that leaves the reader in a state of utterly satisfying confusion—blissfully mesmerized and confounded by the reality of the human spirit."—*The Washington Post*

“Writing an exhaustive biography of Chanel is a challenge comparable to racing a four-horse chariot. . . . This makes the assured confidence with which Garelick tells her story all the more remarkable.”—*The New York Review of Books*

“Broadly focused and beautifully written.”—*The Wall Street Journal*

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