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Lucinda Holdforth

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Meet the dazzling women of Paris: from Colette to Nancy Mitford; Marie Antoinette to Coco Chanel; Madame de Staél to Pamela Harriman; Napoleon's Josephine to Edith Wharton. Rule-breakers and style-setters, demimondes and diplomats, these women were utterly diverse, yet all shared one common passion — Paris, the world's headquarters of femininity.

At a turning point in her life, Lucinda Holdforth journeys to Paris and takes a very personal tour through the lives, loves, and losses of its celebrated women. She evokes the city's incarnations from Louis XIV through the French Revolution, two world wars and the Paris of the new millennium. As she walks in their footsteps, she draws inspiration from the fascinating women who created and nurtured the world's most civilized city. Sophisticated, witty, and intelligent, this entrancing travelogue will seduce and inspire every woman in search of her own true pleasures.

True Pleasures: A Memoir of Women in Paris Details

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From Reader Review True Pleasures: A Memoir of Women in Paris for online ebook

Carla says

The random sentence that was so true about life, about women, about Paris that were just, beautiful. That did not make up for the sentences that made me want to vomit. I found her to be borderline insufferable, her dislike of American got old, smuggled and arrogance, and her general nature and assumption made this book tough to have a desire to finish. The only reason it got two stars if the random poetic sentence that would resistant. I don't know when do with this book now, I don't want to focus it on any of my friends & don't want to donate it and have someone else to pay money for it.

Charlotte says

This book was simply lovely. It was nicely done, short, and didn't dwell on much. It has made me inspired to explore Paris (as well as teaching me some "what-to-do"s and "what-not-to-do"s). It didn't say anything brilliant or really clever, but it made me really excited about going to Paris, made me want to read the works of the writers the author talks about, and made me think about being a woman. I didn't ask for more. I loved every bit of it.

Mark Gaulding says

This is a utterly captivating and enchanting travelogue of an Australian writer who goes to Paris in search of the reason that certain expatriate literary lionesses in history blossomed and found their voice when they moved to Paris. It also features significant French women in history who contributed to a culture which allowed these author's to find an independence as a woman when only in Paris. The doyennes run a gamut: George Sand, Madame de Pompadour, Coco Chanel, Colette, Ninon de Lenclos, Germaine De Staél, Marie Antoinette, Empress Josephine, Nancy Mitford and Edith Wharton. I'm a feminist (although Male) and cannot read enough about women throughout history. I have a particular devotion to courtesans and queen regnants throughout history. This book certainly fed nourished me on many levels. Encore! Ms. Holdforth.

BookQueen says

The title and the blurb for this book are misleading and deceptive. I am listening to it in the car and so far I am skipping tracks as this seems to be a memoir about an Australian woman. Such a disappointment. I am not interested in the author at all, I want to hear more about the interesting women who have resided in Paris for whatever reason. I do not care what the author thinks of Paris or what she did in Australia.

Veldi says

Very informative on the history of 17-20th centuries French influential ladies in Salon culture and feminism movement. The author has strong points on elaborating how Paris manages to change women's views on their journeys of self-discoveries and self-identifications, thus outstanding and daring ladies like George Sand, Simone de Beauvoir and Colette would be able to shine in French societies. But then, it is very arrogant and snobbish of the author to step on those who do not aware of their own potentials and rights due to the social and religious norms forced on them and have not the opportunities and means to change the situation.

Rhonda says

Fascinating collection of stories about famous and fabulous French women, or women who have travelled to or worked in Paris. I sank into this book and emerged a few hours later still deeply immersed in rich perfumes and bright red lipsticks and a powerful and almost painful awareness of the power and freedom I could have, if I were only a litter braver. Sad about me, but a deeply satisfying reading experience. Was very sad it finished - I could live there.

Nadia Christine says

Another coming of age story in the tradition that seems to dominate travel writing. Many will enjoy this book - I however find this type of story very tired, and there are better examples such as Almost French.

Debbie Robson says

I visited Paris for the first time in November 1976. It was cold; it was the last week of a nine week trip around Europe and all of us just wanted to get back to London! I knew there was much more to see and find out about this tantalising city and now, finally, I am making my tentative way back there.

In True Pleasures Lucinda Holdforth introduces us to some fascinating women of Paris. I have heard of Colette, of course, and read one of her books. I have read a book of Nancy Mitford letters recently and want to read The Blessing but within these pages there are a troop of celebrated women and the author illuminates some of the brightest stars - how they created their own worlds and how they lived their lives in the Paris that was theirs.

Firstly though we meet the author herself. At the start of the memoir she is lost and trying to find a new way to live her life. What better way to do that in than in Paris and as Holdforth walks the streets of her favourite city we begin to find out about the brave and original women who have lived there. As the author writes: "For many of them, like me, things didn't necessarily make sense from day to day. Life was a mysterious and elusive business. But they held their nerve, and time vindicated their courage."

There is George Sand settling in the Quai Saint-Michel in one of the garrets of the big house on the corner of the block opposite the Morgue in early 1900s. We meet the women who lived in or near Place des Vosges - my favourite is Ninon de Lanclos who once famously said: "The woman who has loved but one man will never know love."

There is Hotense Mancini who left her husband and four children in 1668 to pursue her fortune. There is of course Rose de Beauharnais who became Napoleon's Josephine and Madam de Pompadour who died of tuberculosis at Versailles in 1764. And let's not forget Marie Antoinette!

Pamela Harriman, Edith Wharton and Natalie Barney are some of the women who lived there in recent times and I particularly enjoyed reading about Nancy Mitford in my favourite chapter of the book - *The Language of Love*. As Holdforth states so eloquently: "People talk a lot nowadays about having it all. Having the husband, having the career, having the children. And there's a cruel implication that missing out on any of these experiences is necessarily a permanent blight on life itself. Like most of us, however, Nancy Mitford didn't have it all. She graciously accepted that it just didn't work out like that. She merely had whatever was hers to have. And she made the most of it." As did so many of the other incredible women of Paris. Highly recommended.

TK says

Originally published in 2005, Holdforth's book escaped my attention until I came across it in a thrift shop earlier this year. It has been a most enjoyable acquaintanceship! One can never have too much Paris, but Holdforth explores the City of Lights from a refreshing perspective: she follows in the footsteps of significant women who influenced the outcome of Parisian--and, indeed, French--history, directing readers to the locations where each woman's drama played out.

After reminding her audience that the French have always valued women who are past their first "bloom", Holdforth gathers the life stories of women from Madame de Staél to Empress Josephine, to Josephine Baker, to Nancy Mitford, to Pamela Digby Churchill Hayward Harriman, touching on Gertrude Stein, Colette and Edith Wharton along the way ... and other females of note whose names currently escape me.

Reinvention becomes part of the book's arc, as the author contemplates the varying fortunes of her coterie, according to the vicissitudes of their supporters and enemies. Holdforth envisions a new way forward for herself, at a turning point in her life, that is bound to inspire readers along with the stories of the women who made Paris their stage.

Well-written, and highly recommended.

Pudds Downing says

This book was interesting for its historical content, but I'm really starting to wonder about all these people who find French women so amazing. From what I'm reading, they seem to be in complete bondage, slaves to their looks and their image. So they can have their perfect hair, perfect nails, perfect clothes, perfect bodies and the neuroses that go with them. I'll take my jeans and sneakers, my hair flying in the wind when I drive with the top down, my laugh and my music both "too" loud, and dirt under my nails from my little "secret garden" plants in the spring. Frankly, I'm delighted to say, "Je suis americaine!"

Krystal says

Perfect for anyone interested in some French history! I learnt so much, and she managed to spend just enough time on each woman, so as not too overwhelm the reader. Hortense Mancini soon became a 'hero' for me, as the way the author talks about her in such a light persuaded me to feel the same way. You can't help but pick up on the mood of the novel, as looking at French women with interest and curiosity.

Anya Nielsen says

True Pleasure a Memoir of Women in Paris

by Lucinda Holdforth

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The opening quote attributed to Germaine de Staël, True pleasure for me can be found only in love, in Paris or in power, pretty much sums up the book.

True Pleasure, is a travel memoir, an interesting historical and biographical compilation of famous women who lived in Paris. The most refined were known as les précieuses. We wonder why they came to Paris? Were they seeking esprit - wit, intellect and spirit? They became the doyens of society and derived great power and influence through their ability to gather around themselves the social crème de la crème at their little soirees.

The first Salon was established in Place de Vosges by Catherine de Vivoune, the new Marquise de Rambouillet. Only the most beautiful women and the greatest artists were invited. These were the salonnieres - women who set trends, like Mme de Pompadour, and other notable women even courtesans to whom others aspired. It was here that the code of behaviour was created for a society that valued beauty, love, sex, art and culture.

Lucinda Holdforth fleshes out even lesser known biographical details of each of these notable women. She weaves a rich tapestry for us setting the mood and revealing intimate nuances of both time and place, providing us with some small inkling of what it must have been like to move in their milieu. Many of the members were women of substance in their own right, women like Marie Antoinette, Napoleon's Josephine, Gertrude Stein, Coco Chanel, and Germaine de Staël. Why did they want to be part of these salons? Was it purely status, or was it an opportunity to eavesdrop on confidentialities, divulge secrets, influence popular thinking and impact history? I wonder about Josephine's 'pillow talk' with Napoleon... Where was the real power?

Holdforth walks around Paris tracing their last lodgings, somewhat in the manner of author Robert Dessaix's wanderings. I found myself referring to a map of Paris as I tried to join her from my armchair on her 221 page walking tour, through enchanting Marais and bohemian Montmartre districts, across the Pont des Art and into Place des Vosges and the Latin Quarter. I began recalling my own time in Paris, strolling the wide boulevards and tree lined avenues, Champs Elysee, Tour Eiffel and the various galleries and markets. It took me back into the magnificent L'Opera Garnier where I sipped champagne before the performance and gazed in awe at the architectural splendour and grand chandeliers.

You could plan your own trip to Paris following Lucinda's route or following your own famous or infamous characters and artists. If a travel memoir is meant to encourage the reader to travel then this book certainly does. Enjoy!

Frangipani says

I really wish I could've tagged along with Lucinda on this trip. I learnt so much I really want to revisit Paris with this book in my hand!

Trelawn says

This was a really enjoyable read; a literary ramble around Paris. Holdforth, during a three week holiday in Paris, goes in search of the homes and haunts of some of Paris's most famous females. Holdforth is inspired by the women who dared to be independent and relevant at a time when they were supposed to be neither. I got a brief introduction to Colette, La Pompadour and Germaine De Stael and increased my acquaintance with Nancy Mitford and Josephine. I definitely need to visit Paris one of these days.

Dvora says

I expected something light, one of those books about Paris that so many people write. But this was different and much more interesting. This is a history of some of the most important and influential women who were part of Parisian and French history. It talks about them as well as the culture that allowed them to become who they were.
