



The Girl Who Loved Camellias: The Life and Legend of Marie Duplessis

Julie Kavanagh

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From the author of *Nureyev*, the definitive biography of the celebrated Russian dancer, now comes the astonishing and unknown story of Marie Duplessis, the courtesan who inspired Alexandre Dumas fils's novel and play *La dame aux camélias*, Giuseppe Verdi's opera *La Traviata*, George Cukor's film *Camille*, and Frederick Ashton's ballet *Marguerite and Armand*. Sarah Bernhardt, Eleonora Duse, Greta Garbo, Isabelle Huppert, Maria Callas, Anna Netrebko, and Margot Fonteyn are just a few of the celebrated actors, singers, and dancers who have portrayed her.

Drawing on new research, Julie Kavanagh brilliantly re-creates the short, intense, and passionate life of the tall, pale, slender girl who at thirteen fled her brute of a father and Normandy to go to Paris, where she would become one of the grand courtesans of the 1840s. France's national treasure, Alexandre Dumas père, was intrigued by her, his son became her lover, and Franz Liszt, too, fell under her spell. Quick to adapt an aristocratic mien, with elegant clothes, a coach, and a grand apartment, she entertained a salon of dandies, writers, and artists. Fascinating to both men and women, Marie, with her stylish outfits and signature camellias, was always a subject of great interest at the opera or at the Café de Paris, where she sat at the table of the director of the Paris Opéra, along with the director of the Théâtre Variétés, the infamous dancer Lola Montez, and others. Her early death at age twenty-three from tuberculosis created an outpouring of sympathy, noted by Charles Dickens, who wrote in February 1847: "For several days all questions political, artistic, commercial have been abandoned by the papers. Everything is erased in the face of an incident which is far more important, the romantic death of one of the glories of the demi-monde, the beautiful, the famous Marie Duplessis."

With *The Girl Who Loved Camellias*, Kavanagh has written a compelling and poignant life of a nineteenth-century muse whose independent and modern spirit has timeless appeal.

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