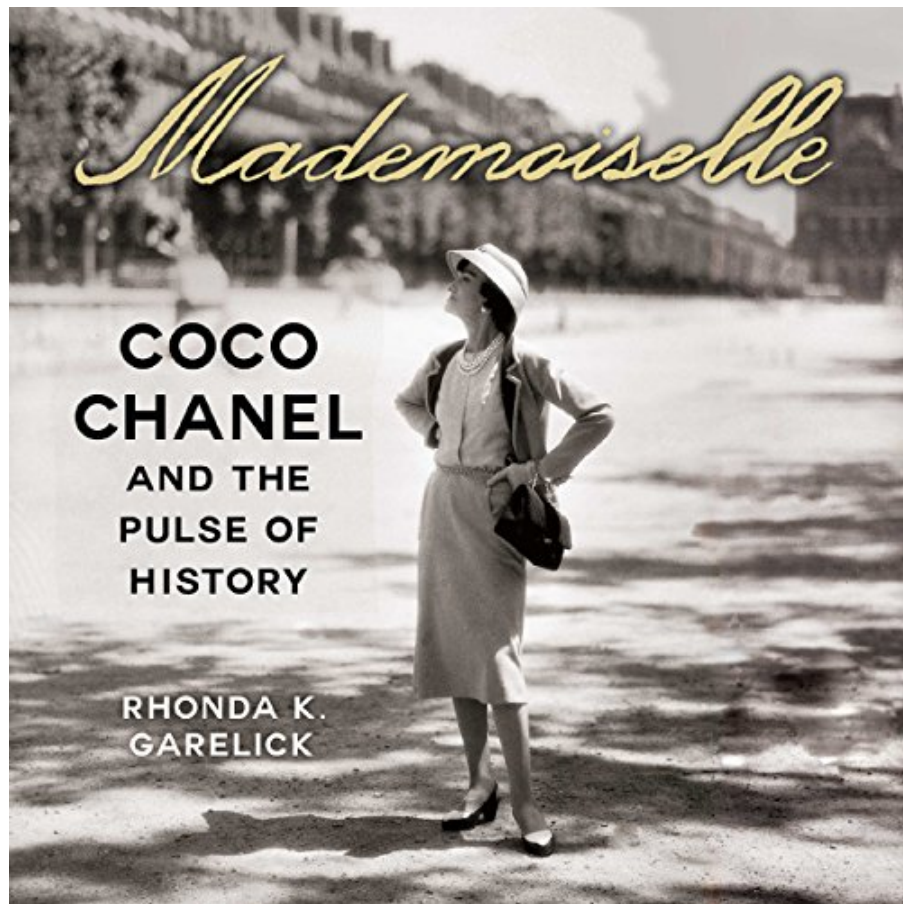


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Little black dresses. Fake pearls. Jersey knit. Blazers. Ballet flats. Today - and for nearly the last hundred years - we all see some version of Gabrielle "Coco" Chanel every time we pass a woman on the street. But few among us realize that Chanel's role in the events of the 20th century was as pervasive as her influence on fashion, or how deeply she absorbed and then brilliantly reimagined the historical currents around her. Here, with unprecedented detail and ambition - and through fascinating, thoroughly researched portraits of Chanel's lovers and friends - Rhonda Garelick shows us the Chanel who conquered the world: a woman who thirsted to create others in her image, who ruthlessly and innovatively borrowed from her famous (and infamous) intimates, who understood the idea of branding and image well ahead of her time, who created "wearable personality". This is Chanel at the nexus of history: a woman of daring, passion, and legendary vision, in a wonderful biography that gives her long-awaited due.

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- Original language: English
- Running time: 1002 minutes

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Biased Biography with Ulterior Motives

By Domo

Though extensive and seemingly exhaustive in its details and depth of research, almost half of the 600 pages is devoted to hammering it into our heads the fact that Coco Chanel was a fascist Nazi sympathizer. Garelick attempts to subtly separate Coco Chanel the fascist woman from Chanel the powerhouse fashion brand of today, so as not to offend the current owners nor damage their profits in any way.

The author easily glosses over the fact that Coco had to gain the favor of the Nazis in order to rescue her nephew (or most likely son), who was dying in Nazi captivity and whom she loved dearly. The author quickly glosses over the fact that the Wertheimers royally screwed Coco by setting up their own, separate Chanel corporation in America during the war, and profited enormously from perfume sales, all the while sharing none of it with the woman herself.

The first thing Garelick does is insinuate that the interlocking C logo is a fascist symbol much like the swastika, and how Coco's own fascist tendencies enabled her fashion brand to dominate. There are a good twenty pages or so where the author lectures the reader on fascism and the evils of the German Nazis. It is repetitive, completely unnecessary, and only serves Garelick's purpose in imprinting a very negative image of Coco in the readers' minds. Many of those who were wealthy or had much to lose during the war were Nazi sympathizers, including the British royal family and almost everyone in the upper echelons of European society, but the particularly harsh focus of the author on Coco, as well as Garelick's own personal

insinuations (which she weaves in many paragraphs stealthily) on Coco's thoughts or motives, are just plain annoying.

The real motive of this biography is to shame, denigrate, and disparage Coco Chanel the woman, while simultaneously praising and building respect for the house of Chanel under the Wertheimer ownership. I do not recommend this book, and feel that it portrays a very strong woman who overcame incredible tragedies and obstacles in a purposefully negative light. It is not an unbiased, objective biography.

55 of 56 people found the following review helpful.

Unexpectedly, a page-turner!

By JB Nolet

I thought I knew this story; as they say, 'I saw the movie...' But I didn't know the half of it. Reading on, I found myself staying up later and later, dying to know what Coco would do next. I was particularly struck by Garelick's meticulous research -- her apt contextualizing of historical events and convincing use of new information about Gabrielle Chanel's friends, to show how they affected the haute-couture designer's constantly-evolving, increasingly mercurial persona. The last third of the book makes for disturbing reading. We watch Chanel as her dynamic charisma becomes manic grandiosity and she slips into sadistic madness without, apparently, losing her innate creative genius. She may not have been lovable (though many loved her) but Coco Chanel is an utterly unforgettable character -- the perfect heroine for a vampire movie. Without revealing any of the book's dramatic surprises, let me particularly recommend the passage where she spends several hours alone with the corpse of her ambivalently-loved friend Misia Natanson-Edwards-Sert. One thought -- I read the book on my paper-white Kindle, which cannot do justice to its many illustrations. The images are important to understanding the character, who in her own way was a visual artist. If you can, buy the physical book.

11 of 11 people found the following review helpful.

Tediously Thorough

By Sharon

Extremely well researched and minutely detailed in seemingly every aspect of Chanel's life. I began to find it tedious by only one-third finished, even though I have read many lengthier biographies. My loss of interest is not as much the fault of the author's as my previous ignorance of Chanel's extreme Nazi leanings that completely disenchanted me from learning more about her and will forever keep me from purchasing or using her empire's products.

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