



Madame Du Deffand and World

Benedetta Craveri

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This biography of Madame du Deffand describes the life of this highly intelligent libertine and the role she played in the social and cultural life of 18th-century France. Quoting extensively from her subject's correspondence, Craveri attempts to relive the world of the "philosophes" of the Enlightenment, centred around Voltaire and d'Alembert, and unravels a complex world of extreme intelligence, taste and sensibility, revealing a new view of reality, full of foreboding for the future. Gifted with destructive insight, and dominated by obsessive boredom, Madame du Deffand tended towards cynicism and wariness in her opinion of men, ever-fearful of being disappointed by others. When she became old and blind, she developed a passion for the young English writer Horace Walpole, son of the Prime Minister. The author has been awarded the Viareggio and Comisso prizes in Italy and the Prix de Meilleur Livre Etranger in France for this biography.

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