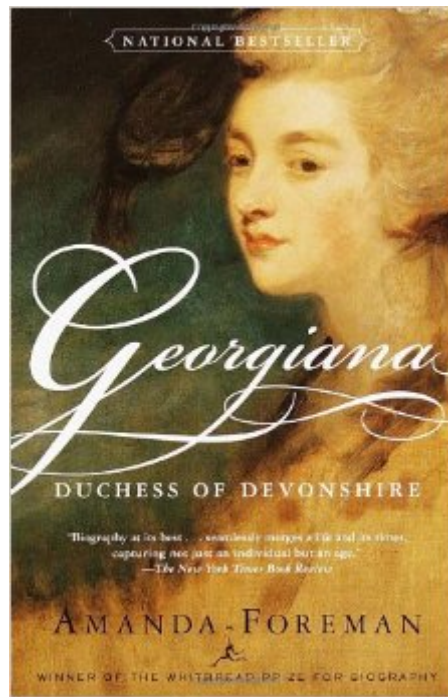


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Georgiana: Duchess Of Devonshire



Synopsis

The winner of Britain's prestigious Whitbread Prize and a bestseller there for months, this wonderfully readable biography offers a rich, rollicking picture of late-eighteenth-century British aristocracy and the intimate story of a woman who for a time was its undisputed leader. Lady Georgiana Spencer was the great-great-great-great-aunt of Diana, Princess of Wales, and was nearly as famous in her day. In 1774, at the age of seventeen, Georgiana achieved immediate celebrity by marrying one of England's richest and most influential aristocrats, the Duke of Devonshire. Launched into a world of wealth and power, she quickly became the queen of fashionable society, adored by the Prince of Wales, a dear friend of Marie-Antoinette, and leader of the most important salon of her time. Not content with the role of society hostess, she used her connections to enter politics, eventually becoming more influential than most of the men who held office. Her good works and social exploits made her loved by the multitudes, but Georgiana's public success, like Diana's, concealed a personal life that was fraught with suffering. The Duke of Devonshire was unimpressed by his wife's legendary charms, preferring instead those of her closest friend, a woman with whom Georgiana herself was rumored to be on intimate terms. For over twenty years, the three lived together in a jealous and uneasy ménage à trois, during which time both women bore the Duke's children—as well as those of other men. Foreman's descriptions of Georgiana's uncontrollable gambling, all-night drinking, drug taking, and love affairs with the leading politicians of the day give us fascinating insight into the lives of the British aristocracy in the era of the madness of King George III, the American and French revolutions, and the defeat of Napoleon. A gifted young historian whom critics are already likening to Antonia Fraser, Amanda Foreman draws on a wealth of fresh research and writes colorfully and penetratingly about the fascinating Georgiana, whose struggle against her own weaknesses, whose great beauty and flamboyance, and whose determination to play a part in the affairs of the world make her a vibrant, astonishingly contemporary figure.

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Customer Reviews

Georgianna deserves to find an American audience as proportionately big as its British audience. Georgiana was a smash over there in England, a country fond of behind-the-scenes stories of aristocratic ladies in the past. (And in the present, too: much has been made of the connections between the Duchess of Devonshire and her descendent, Diana, Princess of Wales.) Yet Amanda Foreman's Georgiana is much more than one of those ersatz popular biographies full of pillow talk and emotions that result more from the biographer's imagination than real research. The book is written in an unpretentious, straightforward style that values clarity above everything. You don't have to be a Masterpiece-Theater-watching anglophile to appreciate its glamour, wit, and intrigue, and you don't have to be a professional historian to grasp its many provocative implications about history and the birth of mass political campaigning. Amanda Foreman must thank heaven every day that such a brilliant subject came her way, and she serves it well. Still, it would be hard to write an uninteresting book about the Duchess of Devonshire. She is a wonderfully paradoxical figure whose meaning seductively eludes the reader's grasp: was she a dilettante or a genuine, energetic talent frustrated by the sexism of her time? Was she merely acting out of the privilege of her class (really, she was above class) or was she genuinely driven? The ladies of Stella Tillyard's *Aristocrats* come across as pampered pawns who infrequently lucked into a little free will. Foreman's Georgiana, in contrast, proves that at least one late-18th-century Englishwoman was capable of acting upon her will—even if she made more than one life-altering whopper of a bad decision.

That this book was The Whitbread Award Winner, and a tremendous success in The Duchess Of Devonshire's own country, is no surprise. However as an avid reader of History I was pleasantly surprised at the book's popularity here. This book was published when the Authoress Foreman was 30 years old, and was produced while she was even younger. To me this makes this Biography of Georgiana all the more impressive, as it can, and will stand with historical works by other writers twice her age and more. I also believe Ms. Foreman's youth allowed her to bring The Duchess to us as her peer in age, which allowed more objectivity, and a candid portrayal that was brutally honest

but never derogatory for its own sake. That this is the first work of Ms. Foreman's is simply amazing. History has great moments, but even the most interesting periods of time, or the life of one extraordinary life can be numbing to read. The Biographies go on forever in tedious detail that leaves the reader exhausted. Ms. Foreman writes what is necessary, she uses the space she needs, and the result is a remarkable amount of information related, in an efficient manner. Not only do we learn about The Duchess, for additionally Ms. Foreman fills her story with all manner of events surrounding the Duchess and Europe at large, to convey even more information. The life of The Duchess must be read to be appreciated. This woman filled her relatively short life with more accomplishments, and amassed more influence, that today her life is as enjoyable and impressive to experience as a reader, as it must have been exciting to witness 200 years ago. The word Renaissance is used to describe an individual of multiple talents at which they excel.

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