



Georgiana: Duchess of Devonshire

Amanda Foreman

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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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