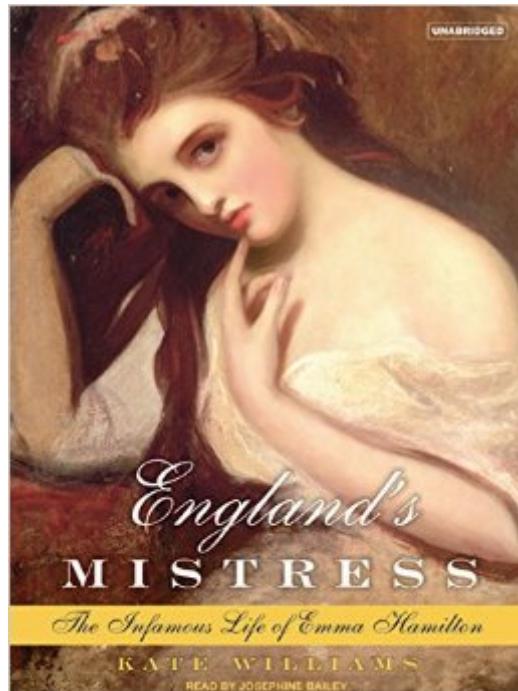


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England's Mistress: The Infamous Life Of Emma Hamilton



Synopsis

Emma Hamilton was England's first superstar. She fought her way out of dire poverty to become a fashion icon, an Ambassador's wife, a confidante of both Queen Marie Antoinette and the Queen of Naples, and the mistress of Lord Nelson, England's greatest military hero. Drawing on hundreds of previously undiscovered letters, *England's Mistress* follows Emma's dramatic journey from the slums of Northern England to the Royal Court of Naples, and from the brothels of St. James's to the tragedy and glory of the Napoleonic wars. Muse and mother, wife and mistress, celebrity and villain, victim and survivor: Emma Hamilton was one of the most remarkable women in British history. Emma set out to make herself a star - and she succeeded beyond even her wildest dreams. By her early twenties, she was the most painted woman of her day. Her 'Attitudes', classical postures in diaphanous outfits, thrilled aristocrats and intellectuals while her innovations in fashion and dress changed the way women looked for ever. Shrewdly manipulating the media's fascination with her, Emma made herself into the most famous woman in England, desired by every man she met, adored by thousands, and, for a time, very rich. Yet, she was willing to throw it all away for the man she loved. Extensively researched but told with a novelist's flair, this is the story of one woman's fight to live on her own terms. *England's Mistress* captures the relentless drive, innovative style and burning passion of a true heroine.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Not every historical biography is as compulsively readable as this. If they were a lot of school children would be much more happy. Many biographies claim to be as compelling and fascinating to

read as novels, but I can't recall a single other biography I've read that's lived up to that very big claim. Kate Williams manages to strike the perfect tone between the feel of fiction prose and an informative and engaging history lesson. She grabs the reader immediately, partly due to the fact her subject is, to put it mildly, an interesting figure. But it's more than that. Williams writes in such an approachable style, and it's probably what I'd consider the absolute perfect style for writing a historical biography. There are no places interest flags in this book, so perfectly has Williams paced the material. From start to finish it's as gripping to read as the best literary novels, and it's made all the more fascinating knowing every word of it is true. As for Lady Emma Hamilton herself, what a woman! Whether you think her bold and courageous or a gold-digging tramp, you have to give the lady credit for having her wits about her. She reminds me of Daniel Defoe's Moll Flanders, though Moll never hit the big time the way Emma did. Moll was crafty, it's true, but lacking the stunning beauty and obvious and unflagging street smarts of Emma. As far as fictional characters go, though, I think Moll would be as near the mark as they come. What an amazing cast of real-life historical characters pepper this book. Not really knowing much of the hard history behind Lady Emma's life, I didn't realize her relationship with Admiral Nelson beforehand.

I love him, I adore him, my mind and soul is now transported with the thought of that blessed ecstatic moment when I shall see him, embrace him.....I must sin on and love him more than ever. It is a crime worth going to Hell for. Emma Hamilton on Nelson, 1804

Amy Lyon was born April 26th 1765 in Cheshire England; her name changed soon after birth to Emma Lyon. Emma's parents were poverty stricken and life was constantly tested with endurance. Emma aged twelve; travelled to London to take on a job as a maid which was extremely demanding and tough; her employment did not last for she was far to full spirited. London was hard but it had opportunity she would start from the bottom and work her way up. Emma turned to the theatre again as a maid hoping to become an actress; but jobs were hard to keep again she lost her job. Someone with poor back ground of such humble beginnings had not many choices so for Emma to make money she was forced to sell herself, this was a set back she soon became employed again at a London health spa (with a seedy side to it) she wished to better herself and live in higher circles of society. Emma had an innocent beauty men loved and before long she had been noticed by the most notorious Madam Kelly (real name Charlotte Hayes) who reinvented her girls to please her exclusive clientele of men. Emma was transformed into a high class Courtesan but this was not fraught without danger of becoming pregnant or riddled with disease.

I found Ms. Williams a very readable author, with a style that's accessible and entertaining, but I'm afraid I'm in complete agreement with James MacLean: there are far too many pronouncements here with inadequate support. There's the material about Emma/Amy's father, the insistent attribution of scandal to Henry's death, the assertion that her mother "fled in shame" rather than merely returning to her own mother after the possibly quite unremarkable death of her husband. In an apparent effort to provide atmosphere in the absence of any confirmable factual information, Williams goes on at length about Emma's time at the Drury Lane Theatre (which totalled less than a year and a half), on one page describing a "frantic round of dressing in the airless heat," on the next explaining that "there was no heating" in the seating area, so patrons kept their coats on. She describes hundreds of candles "stuffed into the cellar"--where they would almost certainly have been lost to rats. She ascribes to Richard Brinsley Sheridan motives of nepotism in appointing his father-in-law, Thomas Linley, musical director, when Linley was a well-known and well regarded musician and composer who had managed the successful career of his daughter Elizabeth for several years. Most tortuous, perhaps, is her description of the clothing Emma "would have" worn as a prostitute employed at Madam Kelly's: hair worn in a "tower of three feet or higher", gowns featuring embroidery AND brocade, and fake breasts that might be made of porcelain. A cursory view of fashionable portraits from 1779 shows high hairstyles, to be sure, but nothing that approaches that ridiculous dimension.

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