



England's Mistress: The Infamous Life of Emma Hamilton

Kate Williams

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She was the most famous woman in England—the beautiful model for society painters Joshua Reynolds and George Romney, an icon of fashion, the wife of an ambassador, and the mistress of naval hero Horatio Nelson. But Emma Hamilton had been born to the poverty of a coal-mining town and spent her teenage years working as a prostitute. From the brothels of London to the glittering court of Naples and the pretentious country estate of the most powerful admiral in England, British debut historian Kate Williams captures the life of Emma Hamilton with all its glamour and heartbreak.

In lucid, engaging prose, Williams brings to life a complex and intelligent woman. Emma is sensuous, generous, artistic, at once shamelessly seductive and recklessly ambitious. Willing to do anything for love and fame, she sets out to make herself a star—and she succeeds beyond even her wildest dreams. By the age of twenty-six, she leaves behind the precarious life of a courtesan to become Lady Hamilton, wife of Sir William Hamilton—the aging, besotted, and probably impotent British ambassador to the court of Naples. But everything changes when Lord Nelson steams into Naples harbor fresh from his triumph at the Battle of the Nile and literally falls into Emma’s adoring arms. Their all-consuming romance—conducted amid the bloody tumult of the Napoleonic Wars—makes Emma an international celebrity, especially when she returns to England pregnant with Nelson’s baby.

With a novelist’s flair and an historian’s eye for detail, Williams conjures up the world that Emma Hamilton conquered by the sheer force of her charisma. All but inventing the art of publicity, Emma turned herself into a kind of flesh-and-blood goddess—celebrated by wits and artists, adored by thousands, and, for a time, very rich. Yet Emma was willing to throw it all away for the man she adored.

After four years of archival research and making use of hundreds of previously undiscovered letters and documents, Kate Williams sets the record straight on one of the most fascinating and ravishing women in history. *England’s Mistress* captures the relentless drive, the innovative style, and the burning passion of a true heroine.

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