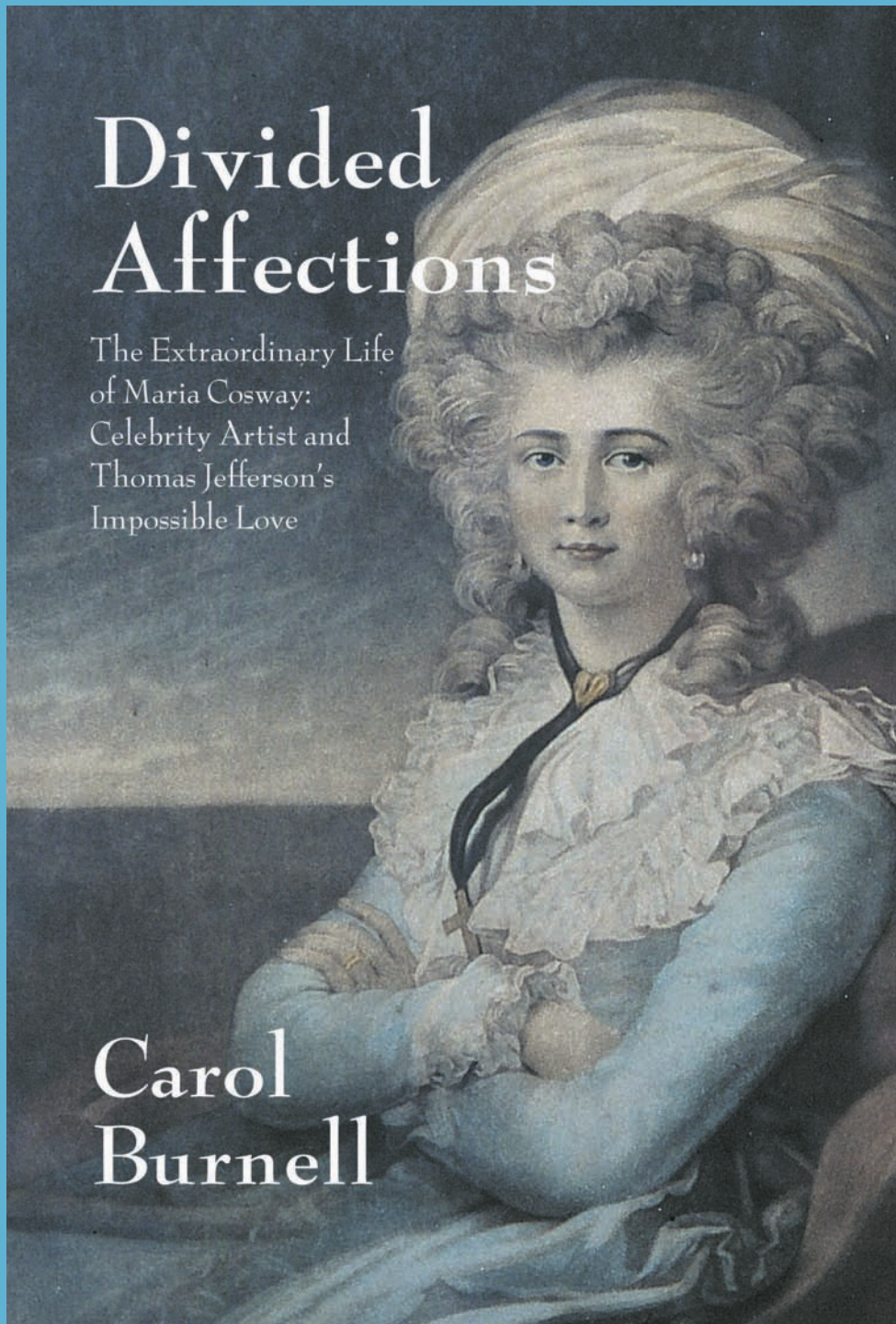


Divided Affections

The Extraordinary Life
of Maria Cosway:
Celebrity Artist and
Thomas Jefferson's
Impossible Love

Carol
Burnell



DIVIDED AFFECTIONS

The Extraordinary Life of

Maria Cosway

Celebrity Artist and Thomas Jefferson's Impossible Love

Maria Hadfield Cosway was a beautiful and talented English artist, who accompanied her husband, the miniature portrait painter, Richard Cosway, to Paris, in 1786, where she was introduced to Thomas Jefferson, then American Envoy to the Court of Versailles. The future President of the United States fell in love with the young Mrs. Cosway the day they met.

Their impossible love was immortalised in Jefferson's 4000-word letter, a Dialogue between the Head and the Heart, which marked the beginning of a life-long correspondence, the record of a touching and unrequited affection.

But Maria Cosway's life is not only extraordinary because of her relationship with the American ambassador. She was a celebrity artist, an exceptional musician, a Regency hostess who entertained the Prince of Wales, later an intimate of the Bonapartes, and finally a successful founder of schools. For her pioneering work in women's education, this daughter of an innkeeper was given the title of Baroness by the Austrian Emperor Franz I.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Carol Burnell read English literature at Columbia University as a Woodrow Wilson Fellow. After several years spent teaching, she entered government service, notably in the White House as an aide to the First Lady and later writing speeches for the American ambassador to France, while serving in the US Embassy. In reading the papers of a former resident of the White House, Thomas Jefferson, and following the Paris footsteps of the second American envoy to France, the same Mr Jefferson, she discovered and became fascinated by the charming Mrs Cosway.

Living in France for over twenty years, where she worked as a speechwriter for a large international company, the author pursued her interest in Maria Cosway's life, carrying out research in Italy, France, Britain, and the United States.

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1786

On a rainy October evening in Paris Thomas Jefferson sat near the fire to write a letter.

With his left hand he scratched quill on paper awkwardly. The right wrist, broken in a fall two weeks earlier, was painfully stiff. Emotion propelled the pen, enabling him to surmount the effort. Over the course of a week he continued writing until he had filled twelve pages. The result was a 4,000-word declaration of love. The normally reserved Mr. Jefferson, slightly embarrassed by the unveiling of his feelings, enclosed a brief note to his correspondent, advising her lightheartedly how to read the letter: ‘Divide it into six doses of half a sheet each, and every day, when the toilette begins, take a dose... . By this means its length and dullness can aspire to that of assisting your coiffeuse to procure you six good naps of sleep.’

The lady in London who received the letter – conceived by its author as a Dialogue of the Head and the Heart – could hardly have been put to sleep. She was supremely flattered, but was she pleased? What sort of woman had penetrated the carefully preserved public façade protecting the wounded feelings of a private man? What sort of woman could inspire the affection of a man whose discriminating tastes were a barrier in themselves? Certainly a woman as extraordinary as the letter writer. Who was she? Which of her many gifts impressed the talented American? Her name was Maria Cosway, and her story will make clear how she came to fascinate the American Envoy to France.

