



Mistresses: a History of the Other Woman

By Elizabeth Abbott

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Mistresses: a History of the Other Woman By Elizabeth Abbott

She has been called the "kept woman," the "fancy woman," and the "other woman."

She exists as both a fictional character and as a flesh-and-blood human being. But who is she, really? Why do women become mistresses, and what is it like to have a private life that is usually also a secret life? Is a mistress merely a wife-in-waiting, or is she the very definition of the emancipated, independent female? Elizabeth Abbott intelligently examines the motives and morals of some of history's most infamous and fascinating women, from antiquity to today. Drawing intimate portraits of those who have--by chance, coercion, or choice--assumed this complex role, *Mistresses* offers a rich blend of personal biography and cultural insight.

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Editorial Review

Review

"Abbott's tour of sensational love affairs provides juicy details and intelligent commentary on some of history's most marginalized women." — *Ms. Magazine*

"A fascinating account of the other woman through history." — *The Sunday Times (London)*

"Ms. Abbott is delightfully indiscreet, with an eye for a good story and a colloquial style. . . She has done the ladies a service by bringing them out of the shadows." — *The Economist*

"One of the surprises of this engrossing book is how mired in myth and fantasy it reveals our attitude to mistresses as being." — *The Sunday Telegraph*

"A lively and nuanced look at gender roles as they have been revealed by the lives of concubines and mistresses over the centuries...The book has the irresistible fascination of celebrity gossip...but it reveals far more than the foibles of the rich and famous. Full of fascinating details and illuminating insights." — *Kirkus*

"*Mistresses*, [Abbott's] prosopography of other women from Biblical times to the present, is refreshingly liberated from moral probity or censoriousness. Abbott's perspective, that of a seasoned, unbiased cultural historian, shines through this informed genealogy . . . Abbott is at her liveliest when covering history's endearing mistresses . . . Abbott offers a poignant, humanizing corrective to the mistress's marginalization . . . Abbott does justice to the many lexicographical variants of the term "mistress," which according to the Oxford American Dictionary, connotes domination, learnedness, authority, and, of course, being beloved. She probes the antic recklessness and wanton secrecy endemic to love affairs, breathing life into mistresses who evince the agency, autonomy, self-direction, and order of this definition." — **Bookslut**

"*Mistresses: A History of the Other Woman* blends a social and political study under one cover and provides a probe into the love lives of famous and infamous mistresses, from royal mistresses in 16th century France to Chinese concubines, mobster molls, and those associated with today's big names. It provides portraits of some 80 women over time who assumed the role of a mistress and pairs history with social analysis in a lively survey recommended for any women's issues or history holding." — *Midwest Book Review*

About the Author

Elizabeth Abbott is Research Associate at Trinity College, University of Toronto, and, from 1991 to 2004, was Dean of Women. She is the author of several books, including *Sugar and Haiti*, also published by Overlook. She lives in Toronto.

Users Review

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Dick McAlister:

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