



Mistress of the Court

Laura Purcell

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Orphaned and trapped in an abusive marriage, Henrietta Howard has little left to lose. She stakes everything on a new life in Hanover with its royal family, the heirs to the British throne. Henrietta's beauty and intelligence soon win her the friendship of clever Princess Caroline and her mercurial husband, Prince George. But, as time passes, it becomes clear that friendship is the last thing on the hot-blooded young prince's mind. Dare Henrietta give into his advances and anger her violent husband? Dare she refuse?

Whatever George's shortcomings, Princess Caroline is determined to make the family a success. Yet the feud between her husband and his obstinate father threatens all she has worked for. As England erupts in Jacobite riots, her family falls apart. She vows to save the country for her children to inherit – even if it costs her pride and her marriage. Set in the turbulent years of the Hanoverian accession, *Mistress of the Court* tells the story of two remarkable women at the center of George II's reign.

Mistress of the Court Details

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From Reader Review Mistress of the Court for online ebook

Sharon Bruce says

This was the true story of Henrietta Howard who was an abused wife who made her way up in court to become King George's mistress. Very good book!

Meg - A Bookish Affair says

"Mistress of the Court" is the second book in Laura Purcell's Georgian Queens series. This book is a standalone but I do suggest that you go back and read the first books in the series "Queen of Bedlam," because it is good historical fiction. This second book in the series takes on Henrietta Howard, a woman who becomes the unwilling (at least at first!) mistress to King George II. She and King George's wife, Caroline, are at the center of this story. This story brought to life two women at the center of a very volatile time in British history.

I have not read a lot about the Georgian period of British royalty, particularly not in fiction. After enjoying "Queen of Bedlam," I was anxious to read this book. What I found was some interesting characters and a great story line. Princess Caroline understands that there are many things that she can control secondarily if she cannot control them primarily. Henrietta becoming her husband's mistress is one of those things. The way that the author writes about the dynamic between these two women is so interesting and makes for a really interesting power play that kept me entertained.

I really enjoyed visiting a new setting in this book. I love reading about British royalty and I liked the way that the author added detail to make the story really pop. I will be interested to see what the author comes out with next!

Lady Wesley says

This absorbing novel revolves around the lives of two early 18th-century women – Princess of Wales, later Queen, Caroline and her devoted servant Henrietta Howard.

At age 16, Henrietta, orphaned and responsible for her young siblings, sought the help of distant relatives the Earl and Countess of Suffolk. Ultimately she married their younger son, who turned out to be "wrong-headed, ill-tempered, obstinate, drunken, extravagant and brutal." Henrietta's small fortune was tied up in trust for her children, and Charles's drinking and gambling forced them to move into increasingly squalid accommodations. Henrietta came up with a clever plan: they would travel to the German state of Hanover and ingratiate themselves with the Elector, George Ludwig, heir apparent to Great Britain's Queen Anne. To do so, however, they had to leave their six-year-old son Henry Howard behind with Henrietta's brother. Charles agreed to go, primarily as a way of escaping his creditors.

Henrietta's gambit worked, and soon she was one of the Women of the Bedchamber to Caroline of Ansbach, wife of the future George II, while Charles joined George's staff. Henrietta was pretty, but not beautiful, witty, charming and intelligent, and she and Caroline formed a friendship of sorts.

Although he loved his wife, George believed that a mistress was a necessary accessory for a prince, so eventually, Henrietta became his mistress, with the full approval of Caroline, who wanted a lady of sense and discretion in that role. It might also be said that the prince wanted to demonstrate that he was not fully under his wife's control, even though everyone at court knew that she was the power behind the throne.

George was not any woman's idea of an appealing lover. He was short and stocky, with the bulging Hanover eyes, and moreover, he was moody, bombastic, controlling, and prone to sputtering fits of rage. He considered himself something of an accomplished lover, however, and liked to regale his wife with minute descriptions of his conquests. There is nothing in this book to suggest that Henrietta was especially fond of him, but she knew that he offered her some protection from her brutal husband.

After the death of Queen Anne in 1714, the entire court packed up and moved to London, where they lived under the tyranny of King George I, who began the Hanoverian tradition of treating one's children abominably. Those abominations are far too many to discuss here, but Henrietta stayed loyal to George and Caroline throughout. Unlike other royal mistresses in history, Henrietta did not exert political influence or get rich from her position. She did receive a stipend from George, but she had to give most of that to her blackmailing husband to keep him quiet. George did give her some gifts, making sure that Charles couldn't touch them.

It is a sobering reminder of the status of women in the 18th century that when Henrietta left Charles for good, she had to persuade him to sign a "deed of separation," relinquishing dominion over his wife as though she were a piece of property. In retaliation for her revolt, Charles turned their son Henry against her, with the result that Henrietta and her beloved son never were reconciled. Charles was so awful that even his own brother couldn't stand him, and he left his unentailed estate to his sister-in-law, with Charles getting only the title and not much more.

After more than 15 years as mistress to the man who was now King George II, Henrietta was tired and ailing. She suffered from hearing loss and severe headaches, possibly the result of Charles's beatings. Her relationship with the Queen was strained as political factions tried to bring Henrietta into their camps. Her status as countess after Charles became Earl of Suffolk entitled her to a promotion to the position of Mistress of the Wardrobe, which actually meant that Henrietta had fewer duties and could spend more time away from court. Finally, she was able to negotiate her departure from court duties, including the role of mistress, although despite her decades of loyal service the King and Queen were not gracious about it.

With the inheritance from her brother-in-law and a generous gift from the King, Henrietta bought land on the Thames near Twickenham and commissioned the construction of Marble Hill House, a little gem of a Palladian villa. Henrietta lived there for several years before falling in love with and marrying the Hon. George Berkeley, son of the 2nd Earl Berkeley in 1735. By all accounts he was kind, loving, and honest, and they had 11 happy, but too short, years together. After his death Henrietta retired to Marble Hill House, where she died at the age of 78.

Henrietta's remarkable life is vividly portrayed in Laura Purcell's historical novel, and she takes no great liberties with the historical facts. Had I not previously read Lucy Worsley's *The Courtiers: Splendor and Intrigue in the Georgian Court at Kensington Palace*, however, I would have had a difficult time believing how wretched court life could be. Henrietta and other high-born ladies were nothing more than personal servants, performing the hard and sometimes demeaning work of taking the Queen through her daily dressing routine. Court life was stultifyingly formal and largely boring and miserable for everyone involved. Kensington Palace was cramped and drafty and far from splendid, although the periods spent at Hampton Court sound lovely. Granted the ladies and gentlemen of the court were better fed and clothed than the

masses, but their lives at court do not sound the least bit glamorous or romantic.

Henrietta Howard, however, was able ultimately to emerge from this life in triumph and distinction. She counted among her friends Alexander Pope (she is generally supposed to be the model for Chloe in Pope's *The Rape of the Lock*), Jonathan Swift, and playwright John Gay (best remembered for *The Beggar's Opera*). Her Marble Hill House was widely acclaimed and became the model for English Georgian villas and even American plantation houses. It still stands today under the ownership of English Heritage, where visitors can experience some of the finer aspects of Georgian life.

Laura Purcell is a superb storyteller, and this book is an excellent way to learn more about this period in history. I plan to go back and read her well-received first book Queen of Bedlam, the story of George III's Queen Charlotte, and I look forward to more volumes in her Georgian Queens series.

Marble Hill House (photo courtesy of English Heritage)

Raven Haired Girl says

Laura Purcell has joined the ranks of my favorite authors. She provided two memorable women whose lives collide in a rocky quasi partnership.

Purcell illustrates how challenging the era was towards women especially when trapped within the bonds of a horrid marriage. The disparity between Caroline and Henrietta is obvious however, their similarities are evident through love, power, and their unfaltering love of their children.

Quite a page turner and you will find yourself at odds with each woman, each tugging at pulling at you. You feel tremendous empathy for these two women as they are pawns of the court, mere instruments of power. You vacillate from the Queen's pains to the uncomfortable predicament of mistress, a true emotional rollercoaster ride. George possesses zero backbone, simply a weakling, he disguises his weakness by his temper tantrums and intimidating demeanor. Caroline sacrifices and the reader understands her reason for agreeing to the arrangement as opposing along with her choice in involving Henrietta. Henrietta really grabs your heart, you enter the story rooting for her, you feel for the choices she makes but her hand forced she has no other options in order to survive, to gain her independence, she's a casualty of the times and sadly by her overall predicament.

A wonderful story, well written. A story of what lengths women will do for the love of their children when dealt a challenging and unfair hand. I look forward to more from Laura Purcell, one talented authoress.

Visit [Raven Haired Girl](#) for more reviews & giveaways

Grace Troxel says

This review originally appeared on my blog, Books Without Any Pictures:
<http://bookswithoutanypictures.com/20...>

Mistress of the Court by Laura Purcell is a historical fiction novel about the Hanoverian monarchy. The protagonist, Henrietta Howard, is trapped in an abusive marriage, and sees entering court as a way to escape her tyrannical husband. She sells her few possessions for a ticket to Hanover, where she is accepted into princess Caroline's household. She and Caroline become confidantes, and as Caroline and her husband George aspire to the English throne, Henrietta begins to help George with his English. But George wants more than that, and Henrietta becomes his reluctant mistress.

In many cases, royal mistresses in fiction are treated as gold-diggers. Henrietta is a much more sympathetic character who is portrayed as making the decisions she does because they're her best options in light of terrible circumstances. Her husband is clearly dangerous, and as a woman in the 18th century, Henrietta has zero legal recourse and must seek whatever protection she can. The theme of Henrietta's desperate struggle to escape domestic violence permeates the entire novel, and makes me realize how very glad I am to be alive in the 21st century. Her husband Charles was a terrible person, and I kept wishing that Henrietta and Caroline would go all Goodbye Earl on him. But alas, we can't change history.

On a similar note, the oppression of women throughout Mistress of the Court extended to the fact that they had no legal right to their own children. When Henrietta first escapes Charles' grasp, she is forced to leave her son behind, never to truly return to her. When they are finally reunited, Charles has already influenced him to the point that they no longer have a relationship. Meanwhile, when Caroline and George go to England, the king forces them to leave their son Fred at Hanover. The royal family isn't reunited for many years, at which point Fred is not the sweet young son that Caroline had left behind, and instead has political aspirations of his own. The women in the story were robbed of being able to see their children's childhood and to be able to build relationships with them.

Caroline, Henrietta, and George formed a rather awkward love triangle. Caroline initially wanted Henrietta to sleep with George as a distraction as part of her own political machinations. But she quickly becomes jealous of their relationship, and starts going all Mean Girls on Henrietta. Henrietta gets to experience somewhat of a normal relationship for the first time in her life, but at the expense of one of her closest friendships. Meanwhile, it never really was her choice, as Caroline used protection against Charles in order to leverage her into the position. Once Henrietta was there, she realized just how unstable her own position was, and how little actual power a royal mistress had.

While I enjoyed being able to learn more about history through Mistress of the Court, I found the story itself to be extremely depressing. And although the novel ended on a positive note and with Henrietta's eventual empowerment, I couldn't help but feel sad for all of the opportunities that had been lost.

Amanda says

Laura Purcell's two books about the Georgian Queens are true masterpieces. Simple as that. Thank you from the bottom of my heart, Mrs. Purcell, for giving these amazing women their voices. I truly believe that you have done their stories justice and I cannot wait for the next book in the series to blow me away :)

Carol says

I'm not up-to-speed on the lives of royalty so I have no idea how true this book is. That being said, I really enjoyed learning about the woman who would be queen and her loyal servant.

Tasneem Jamal says

3.25 stars

The start starting very well and ended very poorly. The promise of this novel sounds interesting but the monotony of the characters killed the excitement, especially when we talk about Mrs Howard how she changed very little during the years and how she was stupid in her chooses but fortune was on her side. The writing style was smooth and engaging, I mean I felt that I was there in the 18 century.

Lucinda Brant says

Not since Jean Plaidy's Georgian series has historical fiction about the Hanoverian monarchy been so captivating in all its glorious and gritty intrigue. Henrietta Howard, wife of a brutish husband and mistress of a king, is portrayed with sympathetic realism, a woman of her time and place, who through circumstance and determination makes the best of a bad lot. Queen Caroline, intelligent and manipulative; George the Second, moody and managed; the Georgian setting in all its filth and splendor, are brought vividly to life. Laura Purcell is a wonderful storyteller, and Mistress of the Court a fabulous Georgian read! Highly Recommended.

Andrea Guy says

Mistress Of The Court is a wonderfully written novel about the first Hanover King and his family. The focus is on Prince George and Princess Caroline and Henrietta Howard.

Henrietta is a woman that you can totally sympathize with. Her husband is very abusive. There's absolutely no way that you can feel anything but hatred for Charles Howard. And when he pits her son against her, you will hate him even more, especially as she did everything to keep her child safe when he was a little boy.

On the more royal side you have Caroline and George. They have their own family problems, when George I ascends the throne their family is torn apart in much the same way as Henrietta's life was when she came to court.

Through Caroline, Henrietta became mistress, but Henrietta isn't the typical royal mistress. Her relationship with George isn't one based on power or even greed. Their relationship seems to be more a matter of need.

All throughout the book I found myself feeling sympathetic more towards Hetty than Caroline, though both women inspire a certain amount of pity from their readers.

When George and Hetty's relationship starts to crumble you'd expect to feel elated for Caroline, who would

then have her husband back, but really you feel elated for Hetty because she is finally free to live her life.

This book was a wonderful read for anyone that loves stories involving the the British monarchy. Its always nice to get away from the Tudors and Stuarts, who seem to dominate most of the books in this genre.

I look forward to reading the other books in the Hanover series.

Audra (Unabridged Chick) says

Purcell's previous novel, *Queen of Bedlam* , made my top ten of 2014; it was a compelling, sympathetic look at a royal family not often featured in fiction, and it kindled in me a renewed interest (and sympathy) for royal women.

In this book, Purcell tells the story of Henrietta Howard, courtier in the Hanover court of George II and Caroline. Trapped in a violent marriage, Henrietta moves her abusive, gambling husband to Germany in hopes of bettering their lives. Her obvious plight touches Caroline, and the two develop an intimate friendship of sorts.

So loyal is Henrietta that when asked by Caroline, she becomes the King's mistress. And from there, Henrietta is plunged into even more emotional tumult. What privilege and comfort she got from that romance was countered by the loss of her friendship with Caroline as well as access to her only child.

I was gripped by this novel from the first page. Despite the scandalous plot, it's a deeply melancholy novel -- so much loss, so much sacrifice -- and I loved that Purcell focused on the darkly pragmatic nature of royal mistresses. The point of view switches between Henrietta and Caroline (occasionally in the same paragraph, which was confusing!), allowing the rich, complicated relationship between these two women to come into full view. I liked and felt for both of them, two women battling the unfair power wielded by the men in their lives.

The characters are all vibrant and unforgettable. In some ways, Henrietta could be seen as a passive puppet ("...she had given and given of herself until she was nothing but a limp rag rung through a mangle." p 290) and yet, Purcell articulates such tender affection for her, I felt the same way. George I, Caroline's father-in-law, is a manipulative, villainous man I loathed -- fun, since in her Author's Note, Purcell comments that she wrote him from the view of George II and Caroline and plans to feature him in a future novel -- one I will undoubtedly get because I cannot wait to see how she makes me care for him!

The world of the Hanover court is also portrayed with evocative detail, small dashes of description that linger in my mind -- the mushrooms growing from the walls in the dank rooms of one palace, the glittering splendor of another -- as well as other tidbits about life in this time. (For a behind-the-curtain look at writing historical fiction, I recommend Purcell's blog post about wrestling with the historical stuff that readers think aren't historical!)

Moms will appreciate this endorsement for what it means, but this book was so good, I read it in bed (under my pillow, to keep from waking the baby!).

With this read, Purcell can count me a devoted fangirl. She does historical fiction beautifully, taking people and places foreign and unfamiliar, and rendering them warm, real, and approachable.

Caz says

I've given this an A- at AAR, so I'm calling it 4.5 stars.

With **Mistress of the Court**, Laura Purcell continues her fictional exploration of the lives of some of the less frequently written about historical figures of the Georgian era – namely, its women. In Queen of Bedlam, she tells the by now familiar story of the madness of King George III from the point of view of his wife and daughters, and now, she has turned her attention to an earlier era, to the first days of the Hanoverian monarchy and the court of King George I.

Focusing on the lives of two very different women, Ms Purcell brilliantly exposes the hypocrisy, the intrigue and power-struggles of the early Georgian era and describes, in vivid detail, the opulence and the squalor, from the gorgeous silk coats and ridiculously wide pannier hoops worn by the courtiers to the lack of cleanliness or medical understanding and the rat-infested, dank corners of the outwardly magnificent residences occupied by the royal family, their retinue and multitude of servants.

Well-born and married into an influential family, Henrietta Howard is living in poverty, subject to the whims of the drunken husband who regularly beats and abuses her. She has just one hope of improving her lot, which is to somehow make her way to Hanover, where the name of Howard is sure to open doors at court. Queen Anne's health is failing and the Hanoverian succession has been assured; if she can find a place at the Elector's court at Herrenhausen, then she believes her troubles will be over.

Little does she realise that she will be exchanging one set of troubles for another.

When her husband Charles discovers her plan to travel overseas, he is furious. But his own circumstances are such that he needs to get out of England, so he agrees to the scheme. Leaving their young son behind with her brother, the couple arrives in Hanover where Charles insists that it's up to Henrietta to carry out her plan to secure their futures.

Henrietta is fortunate to attract the attention of Caroline of Ansbach, wife of the Elector's son (who will eventually become King George II). Caroline is a lovely, intelligent and politically astute woman, already adept at managing her mercurial, ineffectual husband; and Henrietta's demure manner and generosity of spirit very quickly see her rise to a position of favour in the Princess' retinue. When Queen Anne dies and George I ascends the throne, the court moves back to England, enabling Henrietta to return to her homeland in relative comfort. But even then, she is not to be allowed to live her life in contentment or security; Charles continually threatens to force her to return to him and cruelly prevents her from seeing their son Henry, something which causes her constant pain.

This is a fascinating period of history and one about which I didn't know a great deal before. One thing I did know was the fact that George I and his son never saw eye-to-eye (a situation which repeated itself with each successive George!) and that the younger man felt as though he was being continually snubbed and overlooked by his father. This was mostly because of his resentment of his son's popularity; the king's British subjects did not take kindly to their new, German monarch and the clever Caroline had quickly realised that his peoples' disapproval provided the perfect opportunity for her husband to ingratiate himself with them. The king went to extraordinary lengths to humiliate his son, and Ms Purcell weaves such instances into her story with skill and relish, painting a superb picture of the rivalry between the men and

shining a clear light upon the political machinations and manouevrings of the two opposing camps.

But the real meat of the story lies in the relationship between Henrietta and Caroline, and in the way the author highlights the differences and similarities between them. On the outside, they would seem to have little in common; Caroline lives in luxury, surrounded by servants, married to a man who dotes on her (even though, as was common at the time, he kept a mistress), whereas Henrietta is a brutalised young woman, struggling to feed her child while wondering all the time if her husband's next blow would kill her. Yet as the story progresses, it becomes clear that in spite of their differing circumstances, both are nonetheless bound by the restrictions imposed upon them simply because they are women, and both have been cruelly deprived of the company of their children by men who wish to control them. When, to serve her own purposes, Caroline forces Henrietta to make an impossible choice, their relationship is irrevocably changed – but even then, Henrietta continues to serve her mistress faithfully, maintaining her dignity and serene demeanour in the face of insult and derision. Yet the reasons behind Caroline's actions are completely understandable and easy to sympathise with, making it impossible to see her in a bad light. In the end, these are women living in difficult and sometimes dangerous circumstances doing what they have to do to survive, and it makes for a thoroughly gripping story.

Ms Purcell's writing style is straightforward and easy to read, and the amount of research that has gone into the creation of this story is impressive. **Mistress of the Court** is one of those books that combines the best of both worlds, being both entertaining and informative as it tells a sometimes difficult story in an unsentimental and engaging manner. I was hooked from the very first page and, even as I recognised the difficulties of Caroline's situation and felt for her, I was rooting for Henrietta to get what she wanted; namely to be able to live an independent life on her own terms with, hopefully, a man she could love. This is a terrific piece of historical fiction and I'm looking forward to reading more from this talented author.

Margaret says

I have a giveaway on my blog for this book

<http://www.justonemorechapter.com/2015/10/reviewgiveaway-mistress-of-court-by.html>

It's rare when I venture past the reign of Queen Elizabeth I in my reading. I know the names of the various kings and queens but that's about it. I started Mistress of the Court with both excitement and a little trepidation (would I be lost in an unfamiliar time?).

I am happy to report that I thoroughly enjoyed this book. The author created characters that I really got to know, not just on the surface but she got inside of them which had me feeling much empathy for their plight.

The story weaves the POV which I liked, it gives the reader both sides of certain plot lines. Again not being familiar with issues of the day, I learned much as I was also entertained. The outline of this book above does a great job with what this book is about, no need for me to add to it. The authors writing was smooth and her knowledge of this time period is evident. Reading it wasn't hard to feel the life style of that era. Upon closing the book I googled what I could about both Henrietta and Caroline, even King George (was he really that nasty?). I think I have myself a new time period to study and read about. The conflicts, family drama seem as typical as any other British royalty and the author has done a great job with Mistress of the Court.

There is a nice couple pages with Author's notes which just completed this book perfectly. I eagerly away the sequel and reading more of her books.

Martine Bailey says

In her latest novel, young British novelist Laura Purcell has turned her talents to the tale of two remarkable women of the Georgian era, forced together in a relationship that swings from liking to dependence to loathing. Princess Caroline of Ansbach is intelligent, powerful and married to George, the future King, when the novel opens. In contrast, Henrietta Howard is a poverty-stricken young mother and victim of an abusive husband, the ghastly sponger Charles Howard. Casting all her resources on one throw in the game, Henrietta travels out to the Hanoverian court in Germany and in spite of being partially deaf from a blow from her husband, psychologically alone and inappropriately dressed, she succeeds in ingratiating herself to the royal pair.

Henrietta's star rises because of the convention that George needs a mistress and it seems that Caroline prefers that her submissive servant takes the dubious honour. As in the excellent *Queen of Bedlam*, it is surprising to learn what dreadful conditions the royal family endured at that time and how circumscribed their lives were. If asked whether anyone in the royal family is made happy by their rank and wealth, one would have to say, no. Particularly unfortunate is what we would now call the dysfunctional curse of Hanoverian fathers and sons, seemingly trapped in mutual aversion.

Purcell cleverly contrasts Caroline and Henrietta's lives, as we follow their attempts to gain love, power, and the regard of children. Being a great aficionado of the eighteenth century, it is salutary to be reminded just how difficult life could be for women in the past, and just how imprisoning a bad marriage could be. The other theme that stays with me is the lack of reliable medical care, as both women suffer terribly from conditions untreatable at the time that modern medicine might at least relieve.

As the pages rapidly turned, my sympathies swung between Queen and mistress; both women essentially trapped in the court's uneasy power games. As for George himself, he is well rendered as fundamentally weak, bad tempered and difficult. Some of the best moments in the novel are those when we understand Caroline's complicity with the arrangement, as a means to fob her irritating husband off on a weaker woman. I also found myself cheering Henrietta on in her journey from utter desperation to a more independent life. After the book had ended, I had to eagerly search out images of the main characters and also a certain building that becomes a positive symbol more valuable than any royal palace.

Heaven Claussen says

Such a wonderful series!