



## The Courtesan's Revenge

*Frances Wilson*

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## **The Courtesan's Revenge** Frances Wilson

In a biography of style and energy, Frances Wilson makes use of previously unseen letters, law reports and confidential Government correspondence to reveal the true story of the sexual celebrity who blackmailed the British aristocracy and held even the king to ransom.

## **The Courtesan's Revenge Details**

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Author : Frances Wilson

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## From Reader Review The Courtesan's Revenge for online ebook

### BeeQuiet says

I had relatively high hopes for this book, in part because it came recommended by a friend but also in part because I was genuinely interested to learn about this fascinating subject. I have read various tomes centred on sexuality, yet had no knowledge of courtesans.

The book got off to a relatively good start, painting a picture of regency period England which I had been sadly lacking till then. Unfortunately as the narrative progressed I found myself infuriated and confused by a mish-mash of names and family lines which no doubt made perfect sense to the author, but left me feeling dazed and lost. I understand the need to show the way in which the aristocracy were all linked through family or courtesans but I can't help but think there could have been a slightly more elegant and understandable way of doing this. At first the confusion added to the early chapters, illustrating the tangled nature of relations, yet by the end I was dreading the next list of important peoples whose relations with each other I was by now supposed to have remembered.

Nonetheless The Courtesan's Revenge certainly had its good points when it wasn't listing out information. I have a rich knowledge now of the interactions of some of Britain's past élite, which were often pieced together adeptly from letters still archived today. Wilson's use of historical evidence shines in many places, bringing the period to life. All the same, I do not think I will be recommending this book in a hurry.

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### Naomi Clifford says

This is an excellent and thorough biography of an interesting and important figure. It is well written and the research is exemplary. Harriette Wilson was one of those "one-offs" that we have all met at some point in our lives - egotistical, manipulative, confident, generous, mean-spirited, bitchy. She went into the only profession suitable for her talents and preferences: high-class prostitution. Then she blackmailed all her former clients, threatening to publish details of their relationship. Some, not all, paid up. Wellington famously said: "Write and be damned" which went down in history as "Publish and be damned." Frances Wilson handles her material well, giving it depth and scope. Please ignore reviews that complain of lists of lineage - this is important to show how people were related. Harriette was operating in a very small gene pool. The men, although perhaps they did not say so publicly, must have been delighted to have connection with someone who did not look like their cousin!

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### Meredith says

Best paragraph in the book:

"Writing, Harriette found, was regarded as more transgressive than the sale of her body had been. It was unusual for a woman's name to be attached to a book; novels by lady novelists tended to be anonymous and named attached to a scandal tended to asterixed out after the initial letter. . . But it was not so much what she wrote or the manner in which she wrote it that made Harriette outrageous; it was the mere fact of writing at all. Women who write have long been distrusted, and it is the combination of writing and female sexuality that has baffled readers and critics."

I couldn't help but think that she should have invested when the money was rolling in at 50 pounds for an introduction...I'm so 18th Century. Harriette's story is timeless, which makes the way people use each other during the whole tale even sadder. It's, at its foundation, nothing but a series of broken promises on both ends.

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### **Liza says**

The main character's life its a bit repetitive and boring but the author didn't help to present it in a rather interesting and adventurous mode.

I have read other books about courtesans in the 17th, 18th, 19th century and they are quite entertaining but I am sure Miss Harriette Wilson's life was thrilling too (i think?). Too bad the author didn't do any justice to her biography.

I also found the main character a bit egotistical. I am sure a lot of these women who led this type of "demimonde" life thought only about themselves and their achievements.

One example is the relationship she had in her head with Byron regarding how he was infatuated with her. No matter how many times Byron refused her, she was still clinging to him, thinking and writing in her own memoirs that he was fascinated by her beauty and intellect. Its sad to think that this woman used to think of herself as a femme fatale. I think she was just a big mouth but I am sure, if the book had been written in a more exciting and adventurous way, I would probably think of her as a fighter (just like the other courtesans).

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### **Stacy says**

3.5 stars; incredibly well-researched but it felt somewhat unfocused, oddly enough. Really enjoyed the first half about her early life and family background; less so the later section.

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### **Fence says**

It has taken me quite a while to finish this book. Usually that isn't a very good sign, it means I've not really being all that interested in it, but usually I don't read non-fiction. Whenever I do it always takes me longer to get through.

This is the story of Harriette Wilson who grew up to become a courtesan in Regency London. The woman whose Memoirs caused a scandal, and raised her quite a bit of cash, as those named began to buy her silence. But as well as that it is a story of how few options there were available to women at that time. It was a case of be married or be damned. Harriette seems to have chosen the damned option. It was her book that led to the, now famous, if incorrect line by Wellington, "publish and be damned".

Full review: <http://www.susanhatedliterature.net/2...>

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## Kaylee says

1.5 I don't quite know how the author managed to make the life of a notorious courtesan dull as dish water but she did. The 1.5 is because while I can't say I would ever read it again it wasn't the worst thing I've ever read. Though I have to say I can't recall learning a single thing from this book which is slightly worrisome.

This is just my opinion and I am entitled to it just as you are to yours.

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## Janet Rainey says

Strangely, I had to put this book down even though I was enjoying it. It was just taking me a long time to read and it felt more like a text, almost. Very interesting and full of info but I needed a break from it.

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## Jo says

I registered a book at BookCrossing.com!  
<http://www.BookCrossing.com/journal/13865264>

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## Yooperprof says

Interesting and fast-paced romp through the festive streets and well-appointed boudoirs of Regency (early 19th century) England. Harriette Wilson was the most-sought after courtesan of her age, notorious later for her sensationalist "kiss and tell" memoirs which scandalized her era by revealing detailed intricacies of sexual intrigue and the peccadillos of aristocratic lust. Among those who had affairs with Harriette were three Prime Ministers, the brother of another Prime Minister, the brother-in-law of yet another P.M., a Lord Chancellor and a Foreign Secretary - to name only the most prominent. Yet - and perhaps not surprisingly - Harriette died in poverty, unable to pay for her own burial. It's a fascinating life.

Unfortunately, there are some rough passages in author Frances Wilson's biography. Awkward sentences and paragraphs appear with some frequency; some of the chapters should have been edited more thoroughly. But the research is very impressive, and this book provides an insight into its time which is valuable and unique. In her "Memoirs", Harriette made no apologies for her life; she showed no shame at being a courtesan, only regret at being an impoverished one. And Harriette completely omitted the standard trope of the innocent girl being corrupted by a single "evil" man who introduced her to the "underworld" of vice. Her biography is much more complex than that.

"Writing, Harriette found, was regarded as more transgressive than the sale of her body had been. It was unusual for a woman's name to be attached to a book; novels by lady novelists tended to be anonymous and named attached to a scandal tended to asterixed out after the initial letter. . . But it was not so much what she wrote or the manner in which she wrote it that made Harriette outrageous; it was the mere fact of writing at all. Women who write have long been distrusted, and it is the combination of writing and female sexuality that has baffled readers and critics." (Note the use of the present tense!)

### **Sarahscarlet says**

started well . but i got bored .

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### **Lauren Albert says**

The subtitle of this book is misleading--the King plays a very small role in the book and many, many more people are blackmailed. Overall, I found the book growing tedious. I didn't find most of her life that interesting. I think it would have been more interesting, perhaps, to focus on her family in which so many of the women became courtesans.

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### **LOL\_BOOKS says**

SHE HAS A LOT OF SEX WHEN SHE'S YOUNG. WHEN SHE'S OLDER THE MEN STOP COMING AROUND AND SHE CAN'T PAY HER BILLS, SO SHE THREATENS TO WRITE A MEMOIR. "PUBLISH AND BE DAMNED!" SO SHE DOES.

NN A NONFICTION BOOK YOU THINK MEMERS SHOULD READ OR WOULD ENJOY READING.

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### **Mills College Library says**

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### **Vivienne says**

Although an academic biography bursting with names and dates I did quite enjoy this even though I was in the minority at my library reading group.

Aside from the scholarship Francis Wilson brought to the task, I felt it wasn't overly dry and gave a fascinating portrait of early 19th century England with special emphasis upon the changing values as the century progressed.

I rather adored the Regency romances of Georgette Heyer - my how innocent she made it all seem, while the reality was far more racy.

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