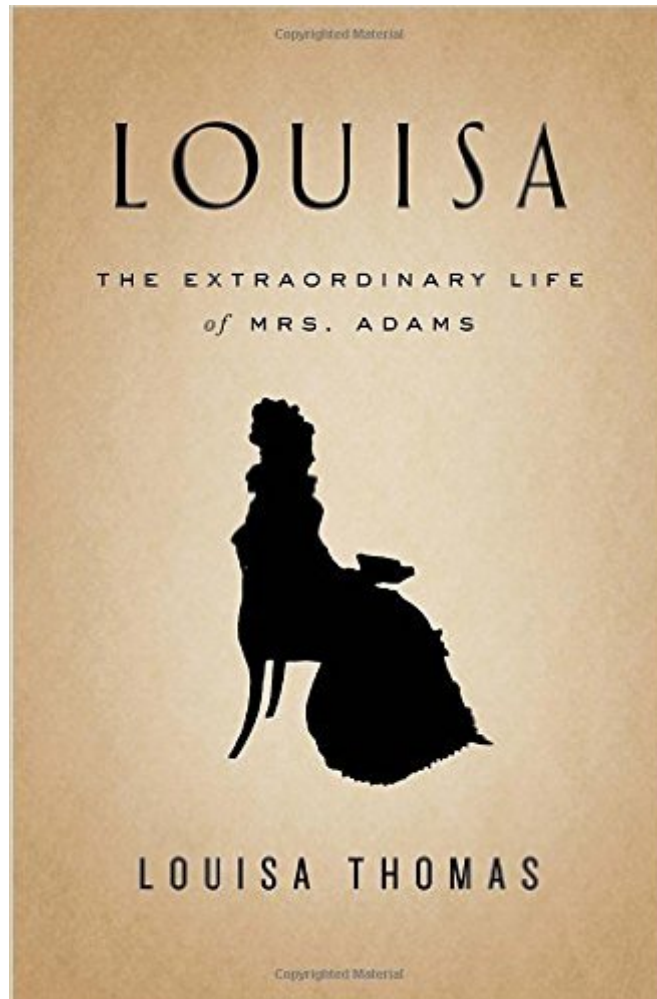


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Louisa: The Extraordinary Life Of Mrs. Adams



Synopsis

An intimate portrait of Louisa Catherine Adams, the wife of John Quincy Adams, who witnessed firsthand the greatest transformations of her time. Born in London to an American father and a British mother on the eve of the Revolutionary War, Louisa Catherine Johnson was raised in circumstances very different from the New England upbringing of the future president John Quincy Adams, whose life had been dedicated to public service from the earliest age. And yet John Quincy fell in love with her, almost despite himself. Their often tempestuous but deeply close marriage lasted half a century. They lived in Prussia, Massachusetts, Washington, Russia, and England, at royal courts, on farms, in cities, and in the White House. Louisa saw more of Europe and America than nearly any other woman of her time. But wherever she lived, she was always pressing her nose against the glass, not quite sure whether she was looking in or out. The other members of the Adams family could take their identity for granted—they were Adamses; they were Americans—but she had to invent her own. The story of Louisa Catherine Adams is one of a woman who forged a sense of self. As the country her husband led found its place in the world, she found a voice. That voice resonates still. In this deeply felt biography, the talented journalist and historian Louisa Thomas finally gives Louisa Catherine Adams's full extraordinary life its due. An intimate portrait of a remarkable woman, a complicated marriage, and a pivotal historical moment, Louisa Thomas's biography is a masterful work from an elegant storyteller.

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Customer Reviews

This is such an engaging and revealing biography about a woman who was clearly influential, but

about whom I'd never known a thing. Louisa Thomas is a captivating writer who has done exceptional research into Louisa Catherine Johnson Adams's life and marriage to President John Quincy Adams, the scion of a powerful New England family whose reticence required her to extend herself beyond her natural shyness to charm their way into the good graces of royal courts and the houses of Congress. She succeeded, becoming a savvy and successful hostess who won over supporters to her husband's side even when he refused to openly seek the political posts he desperately wanted. Louisa's success was achieved despite the many strikes against her: Though her father was American, she was raised in London, and, as were so many women of the time, she was under-educated. John Quincy Adams fell in love with her good looks and charm, and married her despite the objections of his powerful father and mother, President John Adams and Abigail Adams. And, Louisa was frail and often quite ill, in large part due to the numerous pregnancies and resultant miscarriages she suffered -- there were times that she was forced to spend months in bed recuperating. Despite those multiple pregnancies, Louisa only carried four children to term, and only one son, Charles Francis Adams, lived beyond early adulthood. Nonetheless, seeing the need for her to be an educated helpmate to John Quincy, Louisa became an avid reader and writer, and her voluminous journals, letters, and two books provided Thomas with excellent resources.

This is a highly readable, entertaining, well-researched biography of Louisa Adams, the wife of a brilliant, exasperating, difficult man. Born in England to an American businessman and his British companion -- her parents did not marry until they'd had several children together -- Louisa had led a privileged life before marrying John Quincy Adams, a self-denying, self-centered puritan, prone to depression who, although drawn to the lovely, vivacious Louisa disapproved of what he saw as her girlish frivolity. His mother, the redoubtable Abigail, wasn't keen on Louisa, either. She'd hoped for a more sober spouse for her son. Worse still, Louisa's father went bankrupt shortly after she married John Quincy, an event that caused her shame and distress for the rest of her days. They were wrong. Although their marriage was difficult, Louisa and John Quincy stayed together until his death over 50 years later. Tried by Louisa's many miscarriages, and other family tragedies, they grew stronger as both individuals and a couple. Louisa matured from a girl who could barely write a letter, into a woman whose letters and diaries were eagerly anticipated and read by both her mother-in-law and, after Abigail Adams's death, her father-in-law, John Adams. Bred for the drawing room, she became an astute politician who often stepped in when her rigid, uncompromising, socially inept spouse stumbled. Insecure and lacking a sense of herself, she grew into a woman who navigated the hazardous political and social waters of Tsarist Russia, Europe and the U.S., and made an

amazing journey from Moscow to Paris, in the midst of the Napoleonic wars, accompanied only by her young son and a few servants -- the latter of whom ran away when the armies of Napoleon drew near.

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