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Thomas Jefferson and Maria
Cosway: A Gordian Love Affair



Complete Correspondence with Critical Commentary

M. Andrew Holowchak

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About the author

M. Andrew Holowchak, Ph.D. is a professor of philosophy and history, and editor of 'The Journal of Thomas Jefferson's Life and Times.' He is author/editor of over 65 books and over 270 published essays on topics such as ethics, ancient philosophy, science, psychoanalysis, and critical thinking. His current research is on Thomas Jefferson—he is acknowledged by many scholars to be the world's foremost authority on the thinking of Jefferson—and has published 27 books and over 200 essays on Jefferson. Like Jefferson, he has a passion for "putting up and pulling down," but his putting up and pulling down is not architectural, but done on a landscape or in a garden. He also enjoys lifting weights, bike riding, conferencing, and talking about Thomas Jefferson.

Summary

This is the only book to offer the complete correspondence between Thomas Jefferson and Maria Cosway, a talented artist for whom Jefferson fell while in France. There is agreement in the secondary literature that Jefferson's affection for Hemings was reciprocated. This book shows that that cannot be believed. Holowchak also shows that Hemings, through letters late in life, much longs for Jefferson's company, suggestive of regret for not having earlier in life reciprocated Jefferson's feelings—hence, the importance of a book with the complete correspondence.

Holowchak also offers in the introduction a short psychobiography of Cosway that shows the significance of key early-life events—e.g., her childhood in a tavern, her removal to a convent, her introduction to art, and two singular dreams. Cosway would ever be tugged antipodally by the lure of earthy living as well as the asceticism of Catholic piety.

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