

THE SUNDAY TIMES *Magazine*

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DIVIDED SHE STANDS

Blood. Guts. Glamour.
The private battles behind
Amanda Foreman's chronicle
of the American civil war

Adulterous liaison
Unseen prison
s of Christine Keeler

Route of success
Oliver's recipe for
ng disaffected youths



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Tom Pilston
photographed Amanda Foreman in Liverpool. "There were no Beatles or Liver Birds, but watching Amanda Foreman bring history to life was incredible. I haven't enjoyed the city so much in years." (p50)



Katie Glass
talked to the victims of romance fraud. "I owe Sonia Richards for making this piece happen, for her bravery in speaking to me at such a hard time. I'm delighted her story has a happy ending: an 8lb grandson born last week." (p58)

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Watch: David Bailey and other 1960s icons talking about Christine Keeler; Jamie Oliver's trainees in action; a walking tour of Britain's involvement in the US civil war. Download your entry form for our £30,000 Short Story prize at thesundaytimes.co.uk/shortstoryaward. Follow us at twitter.com/TheSTMagazine. thesundaytimes.co.uk/magazine





THE LADY IS FOR PAGE-TURNING

She's glamorous and geeky, serious and sexy. As Amanda Foreman has learnt through her new epic on the Britons in the American civil war, there are two sides to every story. She talks to Amy Turner about her private battles and the personal price of victory. Portrait: Chris Floyd

Look, it's my book-buying public!" squeaks the historian Amanda Foreman, hopping from foot to foot and clapping her hands. She points to a group of tourists who have joined us in a mossy courtyard at 10 Rumford Place, Liverpool. "Look how many there are, on a Friday, in the middle of the day!" she coos. That's the recession for you, I think. But here they are, taking the Liverpool World

Heritage walking tour. This courtyard was once surrounded by the offices of Fraser and Trenholm, a shipping company that operated during the American civil war of 1861-1865, running contraband goods from the Mersey dockyards to the American South — anything from Bibles to munitions. Foreman's new book, *A World on Fire*, is about the close and often troublesome ties that ➤





Above: the Alabama, famous for burning 65 Union vessels; and the place in Liverpool (right) where it was built. Centre: in Liverpool at the grave of James Bulloch, envoy to England, who commissioned the ship. Far right: a monument in Edinburgh to the Scots who died in the civil war, the only American civil-war memorial outside the US



bound Britain and America during the civil war, when Britain was still learning how to be friends with its former colony, the beginnings of the special relationship. Foreman and I are taking a tour of sorts, too: of the countless small, but significant, remnants of Britain's little-remembered involvement in the civil war.

Foreman, 42, has been working on her book for 10 years, partly because of the scale of the project, and partly because of dramas in her personal life. During this time she had five children and her husband was diagnosed with cancer. He was only recently given the all-clear.

The book speaks to Foreman's own heritage; she was born in England, raised in LA, schooled here and in New York, and now lives between New York and London with her family. She is often billed as "the glamorous historian", which she says she loves. "But it's all nonsense really." Today she is expensively, but not especially glamorously, dressed for walking: green cords, wax jacket, flat leather loafers, paisley blouse, her hair held in a ponytail with a lilac flower clip.

Later, we visit Liverpool's dockyard, where the Alabama — the Confederate warship famous for burning 65 Union vessels on various raids — was built in secret. This is the first time she has seen

many of the British places she has written about.

We think of America's civil war as solely theirs — "the war between the states" — the struggle of the agricultural, slave-owning Southern states (the Confederacy) to win independence from the North (the Union). It's easy to forget how deeply Britain was connected to the Southern cotton trade, and therefore slavery, though the institution had been abolished in Britain in 1833, almost 30 years before the civil war began. By 1862, almost one in five Britons was in some way supported by the cotton trade.

President Abraham Lincoln never actually mentioned abolishing slavery in his war policy until 1863, fearing he would lose the vital support of the slave-owning border states. "The war was often seen in Britain as the fight of the plucky underdog, the agricultural South, which Britain identified with, against the bossy, bureaucratic North," Foreman explains. British support constantly fluctuated between Union and Confederacy, and thousands of British men volunteered to fight for both sides. *A World on Fire* is an amazing feat of research, bringing together the lives of almost 200 characters from the civil war — soldiers,

politicians, spies, doctors, mercenaries and diplomats, and some bigger players, too: Abraham Lincoln, Ulysses S Grant, the victorious Union general, and William Henry Seward, a plotter, Lincoln's cabinet rival and the secretary of state. There is Lord Lyons, the painfully shy British ambassador to Washington, William Gladstone, then chancellor of the exchequer, who was sympathetic to the South, and Charles Francis Adams, the dry but fiercely patriotic US ambassador to London.

Foreman admits that the project's sheer scale nearly overwhelmed her several times.

"I realised the material had hold of me, not the other way around. I spent a year breaking it all down, then literally plotting it on a map, with lines going from country to country, linking it back together."

She hopes the result is something she calls "history in the round". She wanted to create the sense of a camera panning 360 degrees, from place to place, character to character: "Just like modern television, the sense the viewer is always in the room, there's no interruption."

You can't help thinking the book is well suited to TV; it has blood and guts, political intrigues and love interests. The television rights have



mind, or how frequently it would be resurrected (she jokes that publishers now write a no-nudity clause into her contract), though she went along with it at the time as a bit of fun. "If only I'd known, I'd have washed my hair!" she wails.

Almost a decade later, the historian Kathryn Hughes wrote a long article in *The Guardian* blaming Foreman for single-handedly destroying the biography genre: "The fact is that much of the devaluing of the biographer's skill can be dated to 10 years ago when Foreman's first book, a biography of the Duchess of Devonshire, became a publishing phenomenon. By choosing to be photographed nude behind a pile of books, and by allowing her own life story (starry father, tricky adolescence) to become as important as the person she was writing about, Foreman did an accidental disservice to biography in general, and to young women biographers in particular," she spat. It must have stung. Foreman was quick to respond with an article in the *Evening Standard*, pointing out that the *Tatler* photo was taken a year after the book was published and had already won the Whitbread.

Now, she won't be drawn on Hughes or any other critics (David Starkey had a pop at the glamorous historian, too), saying carefully: "There are two kinds of criticism. The real stuff — so-and-so failed to prove their argument since there are strong counter-arguments to their theory. And the fake stuff: so-and-so isn't a real historian or is only popular because of X and Y."

Does she ever feel looked down upon as a more commercial, and therefore somehow less worthy, historian? She says: "There's a wonderful quote in the Bible, 'in my father's house are' ➤

already been bought by BBC Worldwide, with plans for a miniseries in the style of Steven Spielberg's second-world-war drama *Band of Brothers*. But at over 800 pages — almost as epic as *Gone with the Wind* — *A World on Fire* is asking a lot of its readers.

It may be difficult for Foreman to repeat the success of her first book, the biography *Georgiana, Duchess of Devonshire*. Published in 1998, when Foreman was 29, it came at a time when the world and the media were obsessed with Princess Diana, another Spencer.

13 languages, and became the 2008 film *The Duchess*, starring Keira Knightley as Georgiana and Ralph Fiennes as her repressed husband. The film made Foreman even more marketable, sprinkling her with Hollywood glitter dust.

The "glamorous historian" label came partly because she's pretty and blonde, and has had her picture taken on various red carpets with Keira Knightley, but also because her father was the Oscar-winning screenwriter and producer Carl Foreman, whose films included *High Noon* and *The Bridge on the River Kwai*. Foreman says

she's flattered by the glamour-puss tag: "It's a label that helps, because what I do is particularly spoddy — basically I'm a geek." But it has brought her criticism from her peers. After *Georgiana* was published, Foreman posed naked for *Tatler*, standing behind a stack of her books, for a feature on influential Brits under 40. She says she hadn't realised that's what *Tatler* had in

HER FATHER DIED OF BRAIN CANCER WHEN SHE WAS 16. 'IT GAVE ME A LIFELONG SENSE OF FEAR THAT ANYTHING BAD COULD HAPPEN AT ANY MOMENT'

Foreman stumbled across *Georgiana* while researching her doctoral thesis on race and colour in pre-Victorian England — a definite precursor to *A World on Fire*. *Georgiana* also took a decade to write, and went on to win a Whitbread Book Award for best biography. It made Foreman's name as a popular historian, sold around a million copies worldwide in

many rooms'. There's space for us all."

Foreman's famous father and stylish mother caused a stir whenever they visited her English boarding school, Sherborne School for Girls, but Amanda's American accent drew ridicule from the other girls and she was bullied and didn't fit in or do well academically. She says she was "a very unhappy child. I didn't have the language of childhood. Basically, the person you see today is how I was then". She read the newspapers avidly and loved popular culture — still does — was left-handed and had unintelligible writing, wasn't good at sports, "or anything you're supposed to be good at at school. I felt terribly isolated and lonely, I spent years literally crying behind the woodpile."

Carl Foreman died of brain cancer when Amanda was just 16, before she really knew him. "How can you be close to someone at that age? I think what it did was give me a lifelong sense of fear, that anything bad could happen at any moment." After Amanda had failed her A-levels and been refused by 12 English universities, her mother took her to New York and enrolled her in the progressive Sarah Lawrence college, where she flourished: "Finally, no exams! It was all about self-fulfilment." She became a talented student of philosophy, psychology and history, then studied at Columbia for a year to test herself in a "normal university". She got straight As, then went to Oxford in 1991 as a post-graduate, aged 23. Her thesis, *The Politics Behind the Abolition of the Slave Trade in 1806-07*, won the Henrietta Jex-Blake Graduate Scholarship.

So, really, she's been researching *A World on Fire* since then, and the book probably would have come sooner had it not been for Georgiana. Foreman devoted her entire twenties to writing Georgiana, spending "days, weeks" holed up in the Bodleian Library or sifting through archives at Chatsworth, the Devonshire family estate. "Georgiana was completely, utterly consuming, and yes, I was obsessed with her," she says. "She was the love of my life." The odd boyfriend came and went — she dated the education secretary Michael Gove for a while — but everything came second to the Duchess. "Michael was phenomenally clever and very well-read and has interesting views on everything. Great fun to go out with and probably very fun to be married to." She says she "genuinely can't remember" why

they split, but it's clear her obsession with Georgiana played into it: "She was so much part of things, it must have been infuriating."

Foreman was grief-stricken when she finished the book. "I know it sounds completely mad, but when you've researched someone for five years, they live inside your head and you have this peculiar connection. Pain inside your head — like having a tooth drilled — is different from any other kind of pain."

When she finished *A World on Fire*, she felt "an extraordinary freedom. Relief. Like the end of school". It must have been a very different book to write, too. "It had a lot less of me in it, although I've brought women's voices into it, and I've tried to bring in the effect of the war on civilians as much as possible, which I think is typically missing in male historical perspectives."

A World on Fire was a deliberate departure from biography. "I don't think I could write a book like Georgiana again, or have a consuming, monogamous relationship with one subject at the expense of the real people in my life."

Continuing our tour, we travel to Edinburgh to find more traces of the civil war. We visit the Old Calton Cemetery, home of the only civil-war monument outside America — an understated bronze statue that depicts President Lincoln and an emancipated African slave, dedicated to the unnumbered fallen Scottish soldiers. It's

impossible to know exactly how many English, Irish, Scottish and Welsh soldiers enlisted and died in the war, she explains, because conscription was so badly recorded, and hundreds of guerrilla bands fought unattached to any regiment. Connected places are forgotten, too. William Oliphant & Sons, the printworks on Edinburgh's South Bridge Street that published and distributed abolitionist literature, is now a Marie Curie shop, without so much as a commemorative plaque.

But we can't escape Georgiana. Later, we wander round the National Gallery of Scotland. A famous Gainsborough portrait of Mary Graham — a friend of Georgiana's and possibly her lover for a time — catches Foreman's eye. "Ah, the beautiful Mrs Graham, they called her. I'm so glad to see this again. I'd love to own it." She likes portraits of ladies in their finery reclining in drawing rooms, I note. Does she ever wish she'd been born in



Georgiana's time? "No. I just like pretty things. I'm probably the girliest war historian you'll ever meet." Next to Mrs Graham is a portrait of the Waldegrave sisters: "Also Georgiana's friends. They were very naughty girls... Promiscuous."

The "real people" in Foreman's life are her husband, Jonathan Barton, a hedge-fund partner she calls Reg — "because he went to Marlborough [the public school in Wiltshire], and there was a tradition that anyone with the surname Barton was known as Reg" — and their five children, Helena, aged eight, Theodore, seven, Halcyon, five, and Xanthe and Hero, three-year-old twins. Foreman is fascinated by Greek mythology and each name has a special meaning: "Halcyon means the best memory of the best day in your life. How wonderful is that?" Amanda herself is known as Bill, because her brother gave her the nickname as a little girl. "He was a wordsmith and he loved the sound of it — Manda, Mandible, Bill."

Amanda and Reg met when they were 30. Thrown together at a dinner party in New York "full of terrible 1990s Brits, the worst kind, what I call worthless people. You know the sort — long, unbrushed hair and a tremendous amount of coke". There she spoon-fed him a mouthful of cheesecake. "The moment the fork touched his lips, I fell in love with him, like an electric shock down my arm," she says. They married in 2000. She'd never thought of herself as the marrying kind: "I felt for a long time that I'd never find love, that because my parents had been so in love,



Centre: with her husband and children, as extras on *The Duchess* set. Left: the future Duke of Devonshire, a rebel sympathiser and a great-nephew of Georgiana (below). Middle: Abraham Lincoln abolishes slavery. Far left: the controversial picture of a naked Foreman



During her last pregnancy, while carrying the twins, her pelvis cracked in half and she was bed-bound for six months, unable to walk. "The doctor told me, no one has a baby a year and gets away with it." At times she feared she'd never walk again. Then HarperCollins grew tired of waiting for *A World on Fire* and, alarmed by the perpetual pregnancies, cancelled her contract and asked for the advance back. "I was devastated," she says. "I really felt a sense of loyalty to the company, pride at being there and growing with them. Ha! And obviously I'd sold a gazillion copies and the film had been a success. It was terrible to discover it didn't mean anything to them at all. People's books are always delayed. I was having twins, I hadn't lost my mind."

All this was put into perspective by her husband's cancer diagnosis in 2008. Three weeks after *The Duchess* came out, he was diagnosed with non-Hodgkin's lymphoma. He had five months of chemo and radiotherapy.

"We're optimistic. But one never knows," she says. The thought of being left alone with five

and drive my family crazy: 'Oh, Bill's off again.'"

Having children has centred her, she thinks, because "no matter what kind of day you've had, they need you to be happy, loving, interested and present, with dinner on the table". Foreman was pregnant every year from 2001 to 2007.

Somehow this echoes her dogged churning out of *Georgiana* the decade before. It's as if she has created her own little gang, somewhere to belong. "Yes exactly," she laughs. She concedes

DOES SHE WISH SHE'D BEEN BORN IN GEORGIANA'S TIME? 'I JUST LIKE PRETTY THINGS. I'M THE GIRLIEST WAR HISTORIAN YOU'LL EVER MEET'

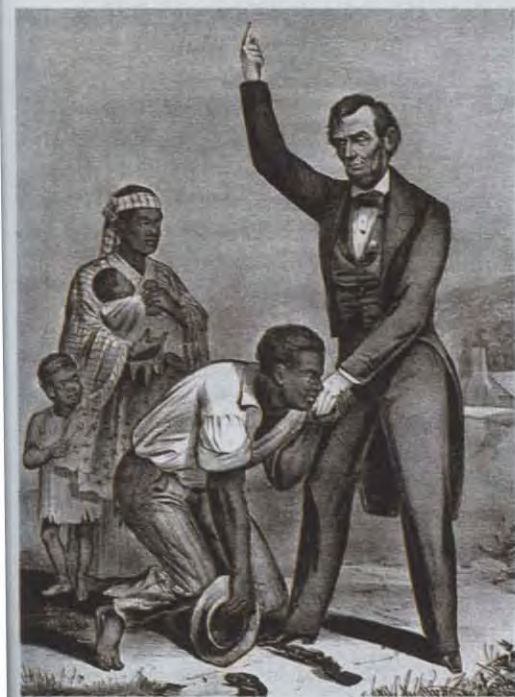
that family life affected her productivity: "They say each child is worth a book, so that means five books I'll never write. But I think one just has to work harder, be more disciplined." She plays the piano and the children are all learning music. "I'm going to make us into a little band. We joke we're like the Von Trapps. The greatest happiness of my life is in being a wife and mother, to love and be loved in return. It is completely and utterly humbling."

There is always guilt, though. "I feel like a bad mummy this week. It was my son's seventh birthday and I'm here, so I had to wish him happy birthday on Skype. Then one of the twins popped up and said, 'Mummy, you are coming home, aren't you?'"

children, "and without the person you love most in the world, was terrifying".

It was reminiscent of her father's cancer. Reg, a vicar's son, found comfort in his Christianity, "which I admire but don't feel myself at all. He just feels God's love. He doesn't have that mortal fear, whereas every time he steps out the door I'm frightened he's not going to come back".

Foreman's parents were non-practising Jews, and she herself is not religious. Reg takes the children to church sometimes and she feels she ought to teach them about their Jewish heritage, "just so they feel included by it so it doesn't feel alien." Foreman and her family (apart from the twins) were extras in *The Duchess*. She shows me a photo on her iPhone of them in period



lightning wouldn't strike twice in our family. And writing is a very selfish profession, I didn't think a man could love me enough to accept that. Also I'm a very emotional person, and I presumed men would always find that tiresome. Nobody had stuck around long enough to put up with it." Her emotional side is now under control, she says. "I've learnt to feel things and function. I couldn't before. I would emote all over the place

TWO NATIONS DIVIDED

Amanda Foreman writes about pioneering British volunteers whose loyalties were shaken by shocking scenes they witnessed in the American civil war

Some years ago, while researching the life of Georgiana, Duchess of Devonshire, I learnt that her great-nephew, the Marquis of Hartington, later the 8th Duke of Devonshire (pictured, previous page), had spent Christmas Day 1862 making eggnog for the Confederate cavalry officers of General Robert E Lee's army. 'I hope Freddy [his younger brother], won't groan much over my rebel sympathies, but I can't help them,' he wrote to his father three days later. 'The people here are so much more earnest about the thing than the North seems to be.'

The Southerners certainly put on a good show for him. Hartington was introduced to the Confederate president, Jefferson Davis, and his cabinet, and taken to a couple of carefully selected plantations. 'The Negroes hardly look as well off as I expected to see them,' he admitted, 'but they are not dirtier or more uncomfortable-looking than Irish labourers.'

I was aware that the American civil war had sharply polarised public opinion in Britain but it was still a shock to discover that the heir to the greatest liberal peerage in England thought the slave-holding South had the moral advantage over the anti-slavery North. Understanding how the Confederacy had managed to achieve this ascendancy with people who might generally be considered as belonging to the 'progressive' classes in Britain — journalists, writers, university students, actors, social reformers, even the clergy — became one of the driving obsessions behind my book.

A poem in *Punch*, on March 30, 1861, neatly expressed Britain's dilemma: 'Though with the North we sympathise/ It must not be forgotten/ That with the South, we've stronger ties, Which are composed of cotton.' The

livelihoods of 440,000 millworkers depended on the cotton trade.

The issue of slavery was an embarrassment to both sides. Northern supporters were not allowed to claim that the war was to end slavery, and Southern supporters naturally could not say, as John Stuart Mill had so trenchantly put it, that the South was fighting for the right 'of burning human creatures alive'.

Every Confederate sympathiser in Britain assumed that the South would abolish the 'peculiar institution' as soon as its economy could sustain free labour.

William Gladstone was among the deluded. 'There was no doubt,' he declared to an audience of Confederate sympathisers in Manchester, 'if we could say that this was a contest of slavery and freedom... there is, perhaps, hardly a man in

AS THE TROOPS GATHERED, A BOY STOOPED DOWN TO PICK A POSY OF VIOLETS. 'THEY ARE A SYMBOL OF PEACE,' HE TOLD STANLEY. 'PERHAPS THEY WON'T SHOOT ME IF THEY SEE ME WEARING SUCH FLOWERS'

all England, who would for a moment hesitate upon the side he should take.' But Gladstone fell in love with the humanitarian argument that this 'bloody and purposeless conflict should cease' and argued that Britain should formally recognise the South.

On May 13, 1861, Queen Victoria issued a Proclamation of Neutrality and forbade British subjects from taking part in the war, but Britons ignored the injunction to volunteer in their thousands in the Union and Confederate armies.

Among the participants was Henry Morton Stanley, who went on to find the missionary

Dr David Livingstone, in Africa. Stanley had left Wales at 18 in 1859 to seek his fortune in New Orleans. When war broke out, he joined the Confederate 'Dixie Grays', and was one of 100,000 soldiers who took part in the Battle of Shiloh in 1862. It was the first time Americans witnessed the mass slaughter that comes with large-scale combat, and the 'first time', Stanley recalled, 'Glory sickened me with its repulsive aspect, and made me suspect it was a glittering lie.'

As the troops gathered in formation, a boy stooped down to pick a small posy of violets. 'They are a symbol of peace,' he told Stanley. 'Perhaps they won't shoot me if they see me wearing such flowers.' Impulsively, Stanley also stuck a sprig in his cap. Once they charged, 'We had no individuality at this moment... My nerves tingled, my pulses beat double quick, my heart throbbed loudly, and almost painfully... Waves of human voices, louder than all other battle sounds together, penetrated to every sense... I rejoiced in

the shouting like all the rest.'

Shortly afterwards, Stanley heard a piteous cry behind him. 'Oh, stop, please stop a bit.' He glanced back. It was the boy with the violets. He was standing awkwardly on one leg, staring at the remains of his foot. Stanley continued to run until something hit his belt-buckle with such force that he flipped over and landed on the ground headfirst. When he came to, his regiment had disappeared. As he stumbled through the forest, he almost fell again on to a body lying face up. The eyes of the dead soldier seemed to stare back at him. With a shock, Stanley



Top right: a depiction of the Battle of Pittsburgh, better known as Shiloh, in which 100,000 soldiers fought, including Henry Morton Stanley (far left). Centre left: the casualties of war. Left: William Gladstone, then chancellor of the exchequer, had sympathy with the South, despite Britain's neutrality



THE BATTLE OF PITTSBURGH, TENN. APRIL 7TH 1862.

This plate represents the moment when the heroic Genl Grant rode to the left of the field, and placing himself at the head of a column, ordered a charge on the enemy, himself leading, while cannon balls were falling like hail around him. — His men followed with a shout, and in the tremendous shock of arms that ensued, completely routed the Rebels, although they were commanded by their best and bravest Generals Johnston and Beauregard.

recognised him as the 'stout English Sargeant of a neighbouring company'. The more he ran, the more bodies he encountered. The dead, he recalled, 'lay as thick as the sleepers in a London park on a bank holiday'. By the time he found his company again, only 50 remained.

Stanley began to wonder if he had joined the right side after he was captured by Union forces and taken to Camp Douglas, outside of Chicago. About 26,000 men were sent there during the war; at least 6,000 never came out. The inmates called it '80 acres of hell'.

'The appearance of the prisoners startled me,' he recalled. Every man was filthy, emaciated and crawling with vermin.

To reach the latrines, Stanley was forced to step over half-naked men who lay in great puddles of faeces, either too weak or delirious to move themselves. 'Exhumed corpses could not have presented anything more hideous than dozens of these dead-and-alive men,' he wrote. 'Every morning the wagons came to the hospital and dead-house, to take away the bodies; and I saw the corpses rolled in their blankets, taken to the vehicles and piled one upon another.'

Stanley solved his predicament by switching sides and enlisting for three years in the 1st Illinois Light Artillery. The 'increase in sickness, the horrors of the prison, the oily atmosphere, the ignominious cartage of the dead, the useless flight of time, the fear of

being incarcerated for years... so affected my spirits that I felt a few more days of these scenes would drive me mad'. He had never cared about politics anyway, he concluded: 'There were no blackies in Wales.'

Stanley went on to serve in the Navy, but in 1865, he jumped ship from the USS Minnesota — becoming a serial deserter — and embarked on his expedition to Africa six years later. Coincidentally, Dr Livingstone's son Robert had died in a Confederate prison camp during a mass prison break-out attempt shortly before the war's end.

The last year that the US Consulate in London collected information on British civil-war pensioners was in 1925. By then, the largest survivors' organisation in the country, the American Civil War Veterans (London Branch), had dwindled from 140 members to a mere 24 ex-soldiers and 21 widows.

But already in the histories of the war, it was as though the British volunteers in the Union and Confederate armies had never existed ■

costume on the set. "It was an amazing day," she says. "I loved every minute. There must have been 500 people dressing the set, doing the props. To think all those years ago at Oxford I was slaving away, never dreaming that people would one day take their salaries from making my book come to life was so moving."

Less moving were the book's screen adaptations, which Foreman didn't write. "Rage-inducing" liberties were taken, apparently, which made the duchess sound like "Britney Spears in a petticoat". Eventually she realised: "That was the whole point of selling the rights. If you take the money, you lose the right to control." When eventually the final script came along, she was pleased with it, and acted as a consultant to the film. She particularly connected with Ralph Fiennes, who asked her lots of questions: "I explained that the duke wasn't a bad man, just trapped by his upbringing. You could see him working it into his performance — he's a very clever actor."

But she felt that Knightley was too young to play Georgiana. "The camera loved her. But if she'd been older and had children — the film really centres on her being forced to choose between her husband's children and the unborn child of her lover — it would've made a difference."

She wishes she'd written *Georgiana* after she'd had children herself: "What I didn't understand in my twenties is when you're young, life is all about possibility. Everything is fixable. When you're older, life is about consequences."

Her experiences may enrich her writing but they trouble her mind, she still "feels things very strongly". In a scene in *A World on Fire*, a girl is raped by soldiers: "I was very depressed that week." It comes back to Foreman's belief in "authenticity", a concept she says she learnt from her father. "If you want to make something come alive, you have to feel it, live it. Authenticity is emotionally wearing. It's painful to come up against. But if you can do it, there's no subject too difficult for an audience to understand and get something out of. If they don't, it's a failure of writing." ■

A World on Fire: An Epic History of Two Nations Divided, is published by Allen Lane on November 4 at £30. It is available from The Sunday Times Bookshop at £22.50 (including p&p). Tel: 0845 271 2135

