



Island of the Swans

Ciji Ware

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Re-issued in its original full length, this acclaimed and bestselling romantic historical novel by award-winning author Ciji Ware tells the true story of passionate and flamboyant Jane Maxwell, the 4th Duchess of Gordon (1749-1812). In love since childhood with Thomas Fraser, when she hears that he's been killed in America, she marries the Duke of Gordon with disastrous results. But Fraser, very much alive, returns to England to claim her love.

In addition to telling a heart-wrenching love story, *Island of the Swans* also paints a fascinating portrait of a powerful and controversial woman and the tumultuous era in which she lived. Patroness of poet Robert Burns, advisor to King George, painted by Sir Joshua Reynolds, Jane Maxwell was a towering figure in her own time and is an unforgettable heroine.

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Island of the Swans Details

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Author : Ciji Ware

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From Reader Review *Island of the Swans* for online ebook

BAM The Bibliomaniac says

A willful, impulsive young lass named Jane Maxwell is the spawn of a drunken baronet and his controlling wife, who is persistent in finding a rich, titled son-in-law. Jane, however, is in love with Thomas Fraser, a young man whose family lost their lands and titles by attainder because of their support of Bonny Prince Charlie. When Thomas joins the Black Watch and sails for America, Jane is despondent. While there Fraser faces mortal injury. Jane finds comfort from Alexander Gordon, a Duke of Scotland, dashing and compassionate. Bah bah bah soap opera

Years pass, but feelings don't die. Jane's marriage turns her into a breeding cow, and she grows to despise Alexander, but she has valid reasons. Eventually she learns to accept her circumstances. She does the rounds, she ingratiate herself in Pitt's election as a rival of the Duchess of Devonshire, inspiring Pitt's ardor and Alex's jealousy. But then Alex seems to always be jealous. She even becomes the patroness of one Robert Burns. Regardless of what she chooses to do on life, whether if it is to build her own home in Kinrara, marry all of her daughters to nobility, or raise sheep, Thomas never leaves her thoughts.

Having read all of this dramatic love story, I decided to do a little research. In reality the Duke of Gordon had an affair with the youthful housekeeper and had children with her. Jane lived a separate life and had her own affairs. Thomas was one of many. 'Tis true she did not wish to abandon her children or her title, but there was no love lost between the two.

A book in similar vein is *Forever Amber* by Kathleen Winsor.

2017 Reading Challenge: set during wartime

Misfit says

(3.5)

The story begins in 1870 in Edinburgh, Scotland. The Maxwells of Monreith are well-born but always in financial difficulty. Jane is ever the tomboy, much to the chagrin of her grasping mother who has plans to marry the blossoming beauty into a wealthy family. Jane's great friend and cohort in *crime* is Thomas Fraser and as the two grow older their friendship develops into something stronger. They hope to wed one day, although Jane's mother and Thomas' guardian Simon Fraser have other plans for the two and will resort to any means to separate the young lovers.

To avoid spoilers I'm not going into much more detail, but word from the colonies forever changes Jane's life and heartbroken she enters into a marriage with the handsome but ever so dark and brooding Alex Gordon, Fourth Duke of Gordon. Can Jane let go of her lost love and make a successful, happy marriage? Can Alex accept there is a part of Jane that will always love Thomas or will he allow his jealousy to run out of control? Jane Gordon led quite a life; mother to five children, she was a celebrated beauty and favorite of George III and Queen Charlotte. She meddled in politics, assisted her husband in recruiting troops for the Gordon Highlanders, and managed to obtain brilliant marriages for her daughters despite Alex's tight pocketbook - especially where Louisa was concerned.

I really enjoyed this book a lot, especially the first and last of it. Jane's antics as a young girl were priceless (loved the pig race), as well as the early days of her courtship and marriage to Alex. Things got a bit slow in the middle third as it seemed pretty much made up of strum and drang and true love denied, as well as Jane and Alex's constant arguments and reconciliations resulting in one baby after another. However, the latter part of the book definitely picked up when a very formidable Jane comes to London and makes her own mark on society and her tempestuous relationship with Alex continues.

I just have a few quibbles, first of which are the constant references to Alex as the Fourth Duke of Gordon. I got it the first time or two and I didn't need to be clubbed over the head with it ad infinitum. The constant use of "tis" in the dialog also began to grate after a while. There is quite a lot of sex in this book, and while quite tame to today's standards a lot of it wasn't all that necessary, I got a bit tired of hearing about searching between one's legs for the object of one's desire. Less is more.

Lastly, as much as I love a pair of star crossed lovers, Jane and Thomas didn't quite come to life for me as much as I'd like to see in a novel. I wanted something more like Ash and Juli in *The Far Pavilions* - oh the pain he felt when he watched Juli being married to the old goat - if Ware could have brought those emotions into the story this would have been a solid five stars. 3.5/5 rounded up to four. A very good book, just not a great one.

Farin says

I was sorely tempted to give this book two stars, but Ciji Ware's vivid descriptions of the political and social scene in 18th century Scotland, England, and America made me bump it up to three. This was one of the most frustrating books I've read in a long time, because it focused on an epic love story (much in the tradition of Anne Easter Smith and old school Rosalind Laker), and the characters spent the entire book whining and fighting and pining to the point where I just wanted to scream. It was unfortunate, because Jane Maxwell Gordon, Duchess of Gordon, was clearly a fascinating character as a rival of the Duchess of Devonshire, and I loved reading about her exploits in recruiting soldiers for the wars in America and France and in getting votes for William Pitt the Younger. However, these events didn't figure nearly as prominently as the times where she was either moaning about her lost love or worrying about seeing him when she found out he was in Scotland. It got old. Fast. And there was no pay off for all the agitation; in fact, I'm still agitated!

I don't regret reading *Island of the Swans*, but I was definitely hoping for a different book.

Gretchen says

I love reading books with strong women, and when that woman is an actual historical person, so much the better. Ciji Ware tells the story of Jane Maxwell, Duchess of Gordon, in this novel.

The history covered in this book is great. Jane lived in Scotland and England during the late 1700's. In her lifetime, she was received at George III's court, championed William Pitt to become Prime Minister, was painted by Sir Joshua Reynolds, was Robert Burns' patron, and helped raise troops to support the crown vs the Colonists, and the French. I really enjoyed the amount of research Ware brings into the novel.

Jane's emotional life is more troubling. Her mother conspires to keep her from her first love, Thomas Fraser, and this conflict provides the center of the drama in the novel. Can she build a life with the Duke of Gordon, when she's still in love with Thomas? How will Alex deal with his jealousy over this?

For me, the love triangle got tedious. The situations were too repetitive, and the drama felt forced. That aside, this book was enjoyable, and a good fit for a vacation read.

Amy Bruno says

There's nothing better than discovering a new author - one that you fancy so much you must read everything they've ever written. This just happened to me with author Ciji Ware after reading *Island of the Swans* and fortunately, I won't have to wait too long because Sourcebooks Publishing will be re-issuing her past novels – YIPPEE! They sure started off with one doozy of a historical fiction novel!

Island of the Swans tells the story of Jane Maxwell, an 18th century Scottish woman who may be an ancestor of the author herself. Raised by a firm and tenacious mother after their father separated himself from the family, Jane is the middle child and though a bit wild, she is also growing up to be quite a beauty. Her ambitious mother is determined for her to marry well to save the family from debt and to help raise their station in the all important social circles.

Jane, however, doesn't wish to marry "well", she wishes to marry for love...in particular, she wishes to marry her best friend Thomas Fraser. Jane and Thomas grew up together in the streets of Edinburgh and through the years the friendship has grown into a deep and unrelenting love. Though they have to fight to be together, as their guardians make it clear they would never consent to the marriage, they are both undeterred in their love for each other.

After Thomas reportedly dies fighting the Indians, Jane is courted by Alexander, the 4th Duke of Gordon – a son of the English aristocracy. Still grieving for the loss of Thomas and with her heart still full of love for him, Jane turns down Alex's offer of marriage, knowing she will never love anyone the way she loved Thomas. But, eventually she succumbs to the pressure and finally agrees to marry him. She knows she must move on and try to make a new life for herself and Alex.

When Thomas returns from being not dead, he finds Jane on her honeymoon, a newly made Duchess. Needless to say, this shocking event changes everything and the drama begins! I would love to go on and on – there's so much to this novel that I loved – but you need to read it for yourself!

Torn between loving two men, her children, her heart and her duty, Jane's story is completely and utterly engrossing. I truly love reading about women who defy their man-made roles and follow their hearts, have minds of their own and a backbone in which to use it.

Jane Maxwell is just that type of woman. She was rival to the hugely popular and most influential woman of the day, Georgiana, the Duchess of Devonshire and close friend to Queen Charlotte. And she was far too much into politics a woman in her time had a right to be – going so far as to disguise herself as a man and attend Parliament debates. Jane has also been dubbed the "match Making Duchess" for the excellent marriages she made for her daughters – three Duchesses and a Marquis.

Ciji Ware transports you to another time...from pig races in the streets of Edinburgh to the court of King

George III, from Gordon castle to the floor of Parliament, from the tranquil village of Kinrara to the salons of the English aristocracy, *Island of the Swans* is a sweeping novel of true love, lost love, duty and choice.

The combination of meticulous research and Ciji's seemingly effortless writing make for one unforgettable, un-pout-down-able novel!

Soundtrack: Simple Together by Alanis Morissette

Northern Lad by Tori Amos

Lucy says

The story of Jane Maxwell Duchess of Gordon, in the 18thc, as told by the excellent author, Ciji Ware is a masterpiece read; an epic on its own. I hadn't really read much about this feisty Duchess who climbed to the highest rank of nobility. Fashionable, politically savvy, doting mom, business woman...but in this magnificent novel, she mostly wears her role as a love-torn woman whose soul could never find peace.

The story begins with Jane as a mischievous young girl, who defies her mother in more ways than one. Against her mother's will, her best friend, Thomas Fraser would become her secret betrothed. Thomas' uncle, Simon Fraser, being of the same mind as Jane's mother, would come into a pact with the latter to make sure the two youngsters stayed apart forever. It was Jane's mother's wish that her most beautiful daughter marry in the highest ranks of nobility. For Simon Fraser, the family lands needed to be fought for and salvaged back to their rightful owners of the Highlands, the Fraser family...and so...

Thomas Fraser is sent off as a Scottish soldier to fight the American war. Although Jane begs him to stay, Thomas is excited about this adventure and promises to marry her when he gets back. Their last evening together at a beautiful ball filled with dancing and merriment, Jane, who is angry that Thomas is leaving, decides to make him jealous. She dances with the dashing Duke of Gordon. A brawl almost erupts between the two young men who don't like each other to begin with (a story starting way back when the three of them were all very young...and where Jane succumbs to a terrible accident..)

So, off goes Thomas and (I need to skip a spoiler here- and jump to)...Jane Maxwell marries the Duke of Gordon..huh? Yeah, you need to read the story to understand what really happens here.;

This saga is tragic to say the least. It is an emotional roller-coaster from beginning to end. First of all, the book is no menial chunkster at 565 pages- so settle in comfy cause you're in for bouts of hopes and delusions-a real tear jerker. Although this novel is mainly about a mega love story, there is a lot of interesting history involving well-known historical figures, such as: Georgiana Duchess of Devonshire (Jane's ultimate political and fashion rival), George III and his Queen (who love Jane), The Princes and many more. I loved to read about their interactions, the civil war happening in America, the Whigs and the Torys- but yes, of course, what stole the show was Jane Maxwell's constant search for happiness and quench for love.

Island of The Swans is the kind of book that I can totally see being made for the Big Screen... Gone With The Wind kind of style- Absolutely. If there is one thing though that did turn me off a little, that was the too many racy love scenes. I could have done with fewer of those (they seemed to be interjected in there constantly). And although I do understand the author's reasoning behind a few of these, some of the details, I

personally found a bit too graphic for my liking.
But other than that, this was a phenomenal read!

Lori Anderson says

This was another of my lucky Kindle finds -- I believe it was only available for a few days and then POOF, it's no longer available on Kindle. After 20 years, it was re-issued in its original length, and I'm SO VERY GLAD I bought it. Not only is it a passionate, amazing story, but it's a TRUE story.

My favorite books of all time are Diana Gabaldon's "Outlander" series, and any fans of hers will love and devour this book. First, it involves clan Fraser, and occurs right before the Revolutionary War. Thomas Fraser, godson of Simon Fraser, relation of Simon the Fox. Thomas, now titleless was close childhood friends with Jane Maxwell, who had a title but lived in poor gentility. Jane's mother was absolutely dead-set against a match between Thomas and Jane, despite the two's insistence, and looked for a higher match in order to save the penury of her family.

Thomas and Jane, secretly bethrothed, are thrown into a quandry when Thomas is called to fight in America during pre-Revolutionary skirmishes. He tries to reason with Jane that after the two year assignment, he'll have his commission and will be able to better take care of her. The two part with some harsh words (Jane wants to elope, Thomas holds fast).

Jane's mother burns all of Thomas' letters to Jane, and one day, the family is visited by a messenger who tells them that Thomas, along with two others, have been hacked to pieces by Indians. Jane falls into mourning, but her mother continues her matchmaking scheming, and after about six months, has convinced Jane to marry Duke Alexander of Gordon, an earlier rival of Thomas Fraser.

Right before Jane's wedding day, though, the tables are completely overturned when a letter arrives saying that Thomas is NOT dead, but had escaped the fray and has been convalescing in Maryland. His benefactress and nurse has fallen in love with him, though, and had hidden HIS earlier letters to Jane assuring her of his life. Jane ends up marrying Duke Alexander, Thomas arrives home, and we're set with hundreds of pages of starstruck lovers.

I won't say more, but it is SUCH a good read. Not only is the love triangle between Jane, Alexander, and Thomas a heart-rending story, but the history of the time is fascinating. Robert Burns, the poet, shows up -- William Pitt, the prime minister -- the madness of King George -- lots of court intrigues -- there's plenty to keep the pages turning. I lost a lot of much-needed sleep reading this amazing book.

This one ends up on my Favorite Books of All Time list.

Highly recommended.

Lori Anderson

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Jess says

Unreadable.

Should be a great story. Is well-researched. Jane Maxwell had a very interesting life but she single-handedly ruined it.

The book is like a romance novel, sans the sex. The sex scenes are so sterile and strange.

If you want Scottish-themed historical fiction there are ton of better places to turn. (*cough* Outlander *cough*)

Svea says

This was an excellent and moving book. There are so many emotions felt as you read Jane's story. It was told in such a captivating way that you find yourself lost in the characters struggle for happiness and love. This is definitely a book I could see as an epic movie; right up there with *Gone With the Wind*. In the authors note at the beginning of the book, we are told that a full-length biography of Jane Maxwell does not exist. Therefore, I definitely have to give a huge thank you to Ciji Ware for bringing the historical figure of Jane Maxwell to life in such a remarkable way.

Read my full synopsis & review on my blog: [Confessions and Ramblings of a Muse in the Fog](#).

Barb says

I have to admit that I was rather distracted by my real life while reading this book. It didn't grab me and pull me in at any point, though I think the last two hundred pages or so were much more compelling than the first three hundred. I generally read a book every five days or so and this one took me two weeks. I stuck with it because the back cover made it sound so interesting and I love the period. But I didn't think it lived up to the back cover's description.

I couldn't taste the Scottish flavor and the period details seemed somewhat lacking.

The writing was not bad but it wasn't very good either. There was one point that was repeated over and over and over again, I found that a bit annoying.

Relationships are what make this an interesting story and I didn't think that Ware fleshed out any of the complicated relationships very well, or as well as I would have liked. She shows us the eruptions of emotions and that she does do well but the period between those eruptions are somewhat dry and dull. The story itself seemed isolated from the history of the period until we get to the last third of the book. Jane Maxwell's rivalry with the Duchess of Devonshire is mentioned as are trips to court to see the king and queen but we don't have any vivid exchanges between the Duchesses or any details about going to court, except the one visit with Queen Charlotte at the end of the book.

There is a fair amount of sex in this book as would make sense in a story about a love triangle. I thought the

sex was tastefully done but I kept wondering 'does everyone need to talk during the act?' I would categorize this novel as a romance novel because the tension in the story moves from one romantic interlude to another without much story in between. I also wanted to better understand why Thomas and Jane weren't able to move on in their lives and get past their relationship. Or rather I wanted to see it more clearly than I did.

I also would have very much liked an historical note from the author telling us what facts she based this story on. She does say she went and visited Jane's home and Gordon Castle but what was fact and what was fiction?

This would have been much more enjoyable for me if it had been tightened up with an editor. As I said before I really enjoyed the last two hundred pages and if it had all been as interesting and compelling as the ending I would have given the book a five star review.

MAP says

WHAT a disappointment.

The first 100 or so pages of the book had me completely hooked - and completely convinced this was going to be an amazing ride. The characters were so well-defined, so rich and complex, and I was really looking forward to following a story with some subtlety...nothing is more tragic than good people who just can't make each other (or themselves) happy.

Subtle...is not what happened. First, the book just follows the same cycle over...and over...and over...and over...and over again! There's only so many ways to set up Jane and Thomas are happy, Jane and Thomas are ripped apart, Jane and Alex are miserable, Jane and Alex come to terms with things, Jane and Alex are happy, Thomas comes back, and the cycle starts all over. ENOUGH!

Plus, the characters quickly slid from complex and rich to strangle-worthy. Jane was the least of these, but I got incredibly sick of her insisting she's a special snowflake who is different from Alex because SHE'S IN WUV. Alex and Thomas both start out as interesting, complex characters, but then they both -- they BOTH - get (view spoiler). And once a character has crossed that line, I'm sorry, I'm through. No more sympathy from me, no more trying to see their side of it, I'm done. It's over. I don't know why the 80s loved using that as a plot point so much, but it gives me the heebie-jeebies and I don't appreciate being asked to somehow forgive characters for it or see their side of things about it.

sigh Sometimes I wish I could just enjoy books more. I feel like my brain picks everything apart so quickly and unconsciously that I don't have the opportunity to just lie back and let a book wash over me. I always hate it when I really look forward to a book and then it doesn't live up to what I imagined.

Jemidar says

Can't really decide between 2 or 3 stars so have plumped for 2.5!

This wasn't a bad book, but it annoyed me in several ways:-

1. It focused primarily on the (fictitious) love triangle rather than on the lives of the real people concerned.
2. It focused on general history of the period rather than on the lives of the real people concerned.
3. It was obvious that the author had done her research and she crammed in every fact she could which often made the story unwieldy and meant that the focus was taken off the real people concerned.
4. This book is really a historical romance and not historical fiction as I was led to believe.
5. I read this book to find out more about Jane Maxwell, but instead I get all the other stuff mentioned in the previous four points.
6. I actually found out more about the real Jane Maxwell by reading a short entry for her on Wikipedia, and by then reading the entries for her husband and son!
7. I didn't find the supposed love triangle (which at times felt contrived to fit the story) at all romantic or interesting...in fact I spent most the book wishing all three of them would get their act together or wanting to bang their collective heads together for their stupidity.
8. I personally just didn't like any of the main characters or find them remotely attractive, in any sense of the word. The real Jane Maxwell was larger than life and the facts we know about her didn't seem to fit comfortably with the story the author created.

So, if you like historical romance with plenty twists and turns and don't need a terribly satisfying HEA, then this could be for you. You might also like it if you are looking for broad based historical fiction (the action takes place on two continents) for this time period and don't mind a complicated romance thrown in. However, if you are looking for a historical novel focusing on Jane Maxwell and her life, take my advice and look her and her family up on Wikipedia instead as it will save you a lot of time!

Bree says

Ciji Ware is a really good writer. The story was smooth and easy to understand. This was my second historical romance novel. I would choose this book to read in a book club, because there would be a lot to talk about. I was amazed at the series of unfortunate events that took place. I was in agony! Jane and Thomas cannot catch a break, and when opportunities are given to them to be together... something happens. It was a page turner and frackin' drove me crazy at times.

Jennifer says

This is the story of a tragic love triangle (or bizarre love triangle for you New Order fans). The characters in this story are:

*Thomas Fraser, of the Fraser Highlanders who participated in the '45 with the Young Pretender, and thus

lost everything. Thomas has struggled all of his life and must join the army to make a living. He and Jane have loved each other since childhood. (And yes, these are the same Frasers as those featured in the Outlander Series)

*Alex Gordon, the Duke of Gordon. His family supported the King in the '45 and thus kept all of their land and titles. There are rumors of the Gordon Madness afflicting the bloodline. Although Alex's mother tried to spend his entire fortune, he was able to hold on to some and rebuild. Alex was acquainted with Thomas and Jane during childhood, but he was a Duke, and therefore did not hang out with them.

*Jane Maxwell, a beautiful woman from a lower ranking, somewhat poor, aristocratic family than the Gordons. She longs for family, love and independence, and freely expresses her thoughts and ideas on many subjects. Jane champions the cause of the underdog and struggles to keep Scottish traditions alive. She has been in love with Thomas since childhood, and promised to be wife someday.

Through fate and meddling family, tragedy visits this trio many times throughout their lives, bringing heartache and despair. Jane and Alex come together first as friends and then as lovers. They share the bond of having loved and lost someone close to them. But when Thomas comes back from the dead, happy times are over, and Alex and Jane's life is a constant cycle of happiness, sadness and mistrust. Every time the reader thinks everything will work out, fate brings Thomas back into their lives and reopens old wounds.

Alex is possessive and mistrustful of Jane due to his experiences growing up. Instead of just accepting that Jane will always love Thomas, Alex becomes furious and makes bad decisions, which usually hurt Jane. For her part, Jane always manages to pick herself up again and carry on. However, I do have one problem with Jane. I don't think she ever tries to see the situation from Alex's point of view. She is so consumed by her love for Thomas and how they can't be together, that she doesn't realize the pain she causes Alex. This may be my modern view of the situation, because for Alex's part, he never truly opens himself up to Jane. Men in those days didn't speak about their feelings. Alex already had trust issues, so why would he expose himself to being hurt further? And then there's Thomas, who can't be with the woman he loves, and never finds love again. Nothing compares to his Jenny.

See...very tragic situation all the way around.

The love story of these characters was deftly weaved within the life and times of Scotland in the 1760's and forward. I was completely immersed in this story and left the real world behind. I even uttered "Aye Lassie" to my co worker's questions a few times, which caused us to burst out into some much needed laughter.

There is one scene in the book, when Jane and Alex are out in the Highlands raising an army to fight off the rebellion in the colonies. Alex and Jane are performing ancient Scottish dancing; the description of the dance, and the undercurrents of the situation and their feelings are written so descriptively and accurately, it was as if I was there. I could see their faces doing that dance.

Jane was also quite a force in her day as well. She was friends with many influential people and had an ongoing rivalry with the Duchess of Devonshire. Jane was also friends with PM Pitt and the poet Robert Burns. Jane's activities throughout the story also bring a richness and realness to this tale.

If you can't tell by now, I thoroughly loved and enjoyed this book. I loved each and every character, despite their faults, and became quite fond of all of them. Although I knew a happy ending could not be had by all, I was riveted to this book and was sorry to see it end.

My Rating: 100/100 I really loved this story. I loved Ciji's writing and look forward to reading the rest of her novels. I am so happy to have discovered this author! It's a shame I never heard of her before.

Gaile says

This is the story of two men who love the same woman, Jane Maxwell. Thomas Fraser grew up her in Edinburgh and knows her through and through. Alexander Gordon first saw her riding a pig when she was ten years old.

Meeting her again as a young woman, he woos her. Jane, on her part is angry at Thomas for putting his Uncle's wishes above her own.

She marries Alexander but never ceases to love Thomas. She comes to feel Alexander will never understand her as Thomas does.

Fraught with deceit, misfortune and misunderstandings, the story is also rich with historical background, the Scottish aristocracy losing to British power, the British losing the American Revolution quickly followed by the French Revolution.

George III is King Of England but is he sane?

Jane bares seven children, becomes estranged from Alexander, involves herself in politics in London, helping to bring the vote to William Pitt, brings more profit to her husband's lands yet still has to ask him for money.

Meanwhile Thomas struggles to win his inheritance back. Failing, he tries to find love in America only to return to England. In the end, the two find they still love each other.

I missed this book when it first came out and now I can't think why I never heard of this writer. It is a well written book. The plot carries us swiftly along, never faltering. I give this five stars!
