

**REMARKS BY  
BARRY O'FARRELL INTRODUCING  
DR AMANDA FOREMAN  
AT THE 2013 ANNUAL DINNER OF THE SYDNEY INSTITUTE**

Dr Amanda Foreman and Jonathan Barton  
Dr Gerard Henderson and Anne Henderson  
Parliamentary colleagues  
Ladies and gentlemen

I am delighted to be at The Sydney Institute's Annual Dinner. The Institute adds significantly to the intellectual framework of this city.

By any measure Dr Amanda Foreman is an over achiever.

Historian, broadcaster and writer – there seems to be no medium safe from Dr Foreman's talent. And for the sole benefit of Joe Aston, I find no evidence of blogging—mummy or otherwise.

Dr Foreman's books – *Georgiana, Duchess of Devonshire* and *A World on Fire* – have been critically acclaimed – with *Georgiana* winning the Whitbread Prize for Biography.

She has written and presented for both television and radio.

And Dr Foreman's articles have covered topics as diverse as Queen Elizabeth II, Keira Knightly and Margaret Thatcher.

Dr Foreman is no shrinking violet when it comes to arguing a case.

In writing about Margaret Thatcher, Dr Foreman reminded readers of the silence of Britain's nascent women's movement to the chant of 'ditch the bitch' by Labor MPs every time Thatcher entered the Commons in the early 70's.

And she concludes on the great service Thatcher rendered to all women around the world by proving that a woman has the strength and capability to achieve anything if she sets her mind to it.

Dr Foreman wrote her last book, *A World on Fire*, while nursing a husband recovering from cancer. And, if all that is not achievement enough, Amanda is the mother of five children!

So Gerard and Ann deserve congratulations for securing Dr Foreman's presence for this event.

It might be also said that Amanda Foreman has an obsession with 'liberty'.

Dr Foreman's *Masters* thesis focussed on the UK Parliament's vote in 1807 to end Britain's slave trade.

Her doctorate – and basis of her first book – examined the political life of Georgiana, Duchess of Devonshire who was an active campaigner for the rights of Parliament over the Crown.

And Dr Foreman's second book, *A World on Fire*, is an epic history of the British-US relationship during the Civil War – Lincoln's war to end to slavery.

If it is indeed an obsession, it's a commendable and welcome one.

It might even be explained by the fact Dr Foreman is the daughter of a screenwriter and film producer forced to leave the US after being blacklisted in the McCarthy years.

Whatever the motivation, the result has been a body of work that is not only academically acclaimed and approachable, but which challenges readers to think deeply about the ways we interpret the events of history.

Take *A World on Fire*, a project sparked by Dr Foreman's interest in the thousands of ordinary Britons who volunteered to fight – on both sides – of a bloody Civil War that ended up costing the lives of 620,000 soldiers and 50,000 civilians.

Dr Foreman highlights choices individuals made – and the paradoxes that arose.

At one point, the future 8<sup>th</sup> Duke of Devonshire and his younger brother found themselves sympathising with different sides of the conflict—despite both regarding themselves as enlightened on the issue of slavery as Wilberforce and Gray.

One brother expressed his interpretation of liberalism with the Union North.

The other saw the threat to the South's self-determination (its 'liberty') as justification to support the Confederacy.

Dr Foreman helps remind us that, regardless of how well classical liberalism was articulated by Adam Smith, Edmund Burke or JS Mill, it doesn't deliver easy or formulaic solutions.

And of course, for those of us who believe there are lessons to be learned from history in setting a course for these times, it's also a reminder to expect conundrums, hard choices and inconsistency.

In relation to the Cavendish brothers, I should for accuracy's sake point out that the future 8<sup>th</sup> Duke – he of Confederate sympathies – was encouraged, at least in his visit to the South during the war, by a determination to escape a mistress deemed too expensive!

We are honoured to welcome Dr Foreman to Sydney, to The Sydney Institute – and delighted to have the chance to hear you speak about your work.

Dr Foreman has invited a new generation to be interested in the events of the 18<sup>th</sup> century—a period that encompasses the social and intellectual cauldron that led to our own Australian colonial beginning.

History is about people—real people—playing parts on a multidimensional stage. And those who look to history see different things from whichever seat we draw in the theatre of life.

I'm sure Amanda Foreman's own personal story of love, family, creativity and resilience is why those she writes about leap from the pages as compelling and authentic evidence of their own part in a history that shaped the liberties we enjoy—and which we are responsible for defending and evolving.

So I ask friends of The Sydney Institute to welcome Dr Amanda Foreman to the stage.

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