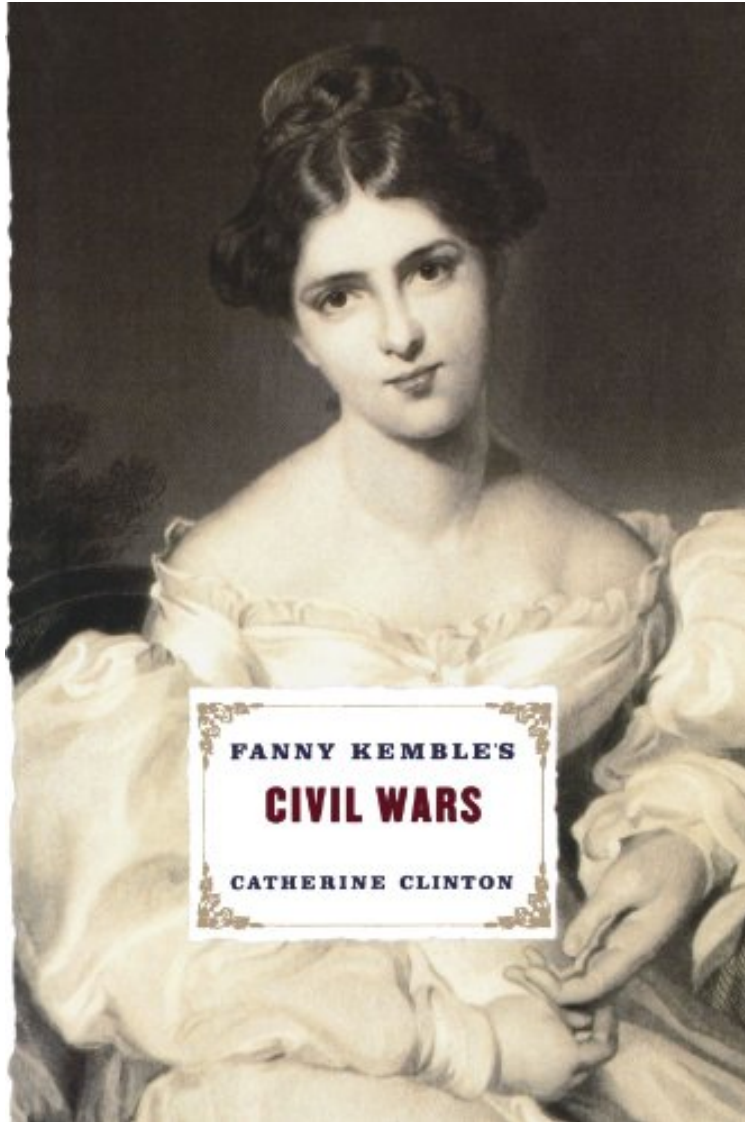


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## Fanny Kemble's Civil Wars

*Catherine Clinton*

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**Catherine Clinton : Fanny Kemble's Civil Wars** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Fanny Kemble's Civil Wars:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Not as interesting as material could have beenBy ReaderI did not get a very clear picture of Fanny, the woman, or her role as an abolitionist. I think I would have preferred to read her diaries.0 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Shows a bit of both sides of this woman.By WayneThe biography covers her life and includes journal entries. My take is she was from a privileged family, looked down on

others, and with the exception of her offbeat personality for the era and her being against the evil of slavery it was marginally worth the time to finish the book. 1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. The life of an impressive nineteenth century woman By Michael Oppenheim British stage idol Fanny Kemble (1809-93) married a wealthy American slave-owner in 1834. Although the marriage turned out disastrously, it provided a bonanza for historians. No shrinking violet and a prolific writer, Fanny wrote profusely on slavery, America, and women's issues till her death. The Kembles were England's leading theatrical family. Sarah Siddons was her aunt, but Fanny became equally celebrated. Despite this, her family were chronically in debt, and the American tour was one of innumerable unsuccessful efforts to make money. Soon after arriving she fell in love with Pierce Butler, a Georgia plantation owner, who made her stop working after they married. She quickly regretted her decision, but there was little a woman could do in that era. When Butler moved to his plantation, Fanny encountered slavery first hand and did not like what she saw. She complained bitterly and protested the slaves' treatment. Worse, she outraged her husband and the neighbors by expressing her opinions in print and in the north. Perhaps her most impressive accomplishment was getting a divorce, a nearly impossible feat in the nineteenth century. It took fifteen years. Except for public readings she never acted again, but her personality and writing sustained her celebrity until the end of the century. Like many nineteenth century figures, Kemble seemed to spend half her day writing. She kept a journal, sent and received a torrent of letters, published a dozen books and scores of articles and essays. Catherine Clinton, Professor of History at Baruch College (*The Plantation Mistress*, 1982) has obviously read it all and transformed it into an entertaining account of one of the most colorful women of her time.

A British stage star turned Georgia plantation mistress, Fanny Kemble is perhaps best remembered as a critic of slavery--and an influential opponent of this institution during the years leading up to the Civil War. By the mid-1830s, American society was firmly in the grip of Kemble's celebrity as an actress--young ladies adopted "Fanny Kemble curls," a tulip was named in her honor, and lecture attendance at Harvard fell so sharply on afternoons of Kemble's matinees that professors threatened to cancel classes. Catherine Clinton's insightful biography chronicles these early portraits of Fanny's life and shows how her role in society changed drastically after her bitter and short-lived marriage to the heir of a Georgia plantation owner, whom she derisively called her "lord and master." We witness the publication of *Journal of a Residence on a Georgia Plantation*, in which Kemble hauntingly records the "simple horror" and misery she saw among the slaves. The raw power of her words made for an influential anti-slavery tract, which swayed European sentiment toward the Union cause. The book was embraced by Northern critics as "a permanent and most valuable chapter in our history" (*Atlantic Monthly*). In *Fanny Kemble's Civil Wars*, Catherine Clinton reveals how one woman's life reflected in microcosm the public battles--over slavery, the role of women, and sectionalism--that fueled our nation's greatest conflict and have permanently marked our history.

From Publishers Weekly This smashing new biography by historian Clinton (author of the controversial study *The Plantation Mistress: Woman's World in the Old South*) should be as popular today as Fanny Kemble herself was in the 19th century. Scion of a famed theatrical family, Kemble was born in England in 1809 and debuted as an actress in 1829, playing Juliet in Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*. She earned not only the esteem of her family and the cash they so badly needed but also, when she came to these shores, the vibrant Kemble earned a cadre of American admirers who styled their hair in "Fanny Kemble curls," spent their savings on "Fanny Kemble caps" and planted "Miss Fanny Kemble" tulips in their gardens. Kemble also won the heart of Pierce Butler, the second largest landholder in Georgia. At 24, she married him, giving up the stage and settling into the role of plantation mistress. The Butlers' marriage was filled with tension from the beginning: Pierce's eye wandered, and Fanny, horrified by the realities of slavery, spoke privately against that practice and was friendly with the abolitionist Sedgwick family. In 1845, after several attempted reconciliations with her husband, a "morose and restless" Kemble sailed for England, where she became an abolitionist crusader (her *Journal of a Residence of a Georgian Plantation* was published in 1863, and many credited the book with England's refusal to recognize the Confederacy). Kemble's own writing is distinguished by a feisty verve, and she has long awaited a biographer who can match her. Clinton is Kemble's equal--this biography is every bit as sharp, evocative and eloquent as Kemble's *Journal*. 64 bw illus. (Sept.) FYI: Also in September, Harvard University Press will publish a volume of Kemble's journals, edited by Catherine Clinton. Copyright 2000 Reed Business Information, Inc. From Library Journal Fanny Kemble--English-born actress, author, and abolitionist--commanded center stage in the American drama over slavery and in her much-publicized personal civil wars of marriage to one of America's wealthiest slaveholders, bitter divorce, and publication of her private letters and her antislavery journal describing life on a Georgia plantation. Clinton (history, Baruch Coll.), the author of numerous books on Southern women, casts Kemble in a sympathetic light as a woman trapped by family and fame, even as she cultivated both, and as a metaphor for the battle over reform, marital relations, and slavery argued on both sides of the Atlantic. Clinton's great contribution to the thick literature on slavery, Kemble, and gender is to give Kemble her own voice and to offer original readings of Kemble's many writings. That the proslavery secessionist Butler comes off as a cad is no surprise, but that Clinton discovers Kemble's own flaws of ego and emotion gives her

work a unique credibility. So, too, does Clinton's deft handling of the tangled Butler family history. Clinton's eloquent history is not quite Tara recast, but it is better than any fiction on the subject and should give Kemble a new audience in a new century. Highly recommended. Randall M. Miller, Saint Joseph's Univ., Philadelphia Copyright 2000 Reed Business Information, Inc. From Booklist Born to an English theatrical family, Frances Anne Kemble was a Shakespearean sensation in London in her early twenties, circa 1830. She also was a tireless diarist, letter-writer, and author whose life intersected with slavery, the Civil War, and Reconstruction. Profiting from this source material, Clinton describes a woman barely contained by the social straitjackets of her times: a determined, highly intelligent woman, she questioned slavery and the legal dominion of husbands over wives. Because of her family's financial straits, she and her actor-father toured America in the early 1830s to great success; success (and acidulous reviews) also met the journal she published of those rough American democrats. Yet this budding literary career halted when she married a slaveowner named Pierce Butler, who demanded that she retire from the stage and publishing and attend to motherhood. The balance of Clinton's story traces the inevitable collapse of the Butler-Kemble mismatch, Fanny's relations with her daughters, and post-war literary life. A rounded portrait of a tempestuous life. Gilbert Taylor Copyright © American Library Association. All rights reserved