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Napoleon And Josephine: An Improbable Marriage



Synopsis

Provides a colorful richly textured dual portrait of the flamboyant French emperor, his sensual Creole wife, and the turbulent social, political, and cultural world in which Napoleon and Josephine lived. Reprint. NYT. PW.

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Customer Reviews

Mention the word 'Napoleon,' and what may come to mind is a short fellow with his hand stuck in his vest, a breed of cat that has abnormally short legs, or a rich pastry with thin layers and lots of sweet cream in a high stack. The origin of this term actually comes from a historical figure, who was the subject of fear, loathing and satire, who managed to conquer most of Europe in the early nineteenth century, and who fell in love with a woman. Author Evangline Bruce -- this was the only work that she published -- takes a long look at the self-proclaimed Emperor of the French, Napoleon, and his wife, the American born Josephine. Both of them came from unlikely backgrounds, both survived the Terror that came after the Revolution, and both were to play vital roles in history. It's an amazing look at one of history's more famous 'power couples.' The courtship of the pair was intense, with Napoleon firing off passionate letters, and Josephine maintaining a cool, rather remote presence. The more she refused to give in, the more he pressed her to accept his offer of marriage. His family were all firmly against his choice of a wife, and would gleefully repeat damaging gossip and would openly refer to her as la putana or that woman. Finally, he wore Josephine down -- or was it the fact that he was on the fast track to fame, and especially fortune? -- and she wed him in a quick, civil ceremony. Many of the witnesses noted that she looked rather unhappy and fatigued, and after a

honeymoon of only two days, Napoleon was marching with his armies to Italy. By 1804, he had conquered Italy, conducted his Egyptian campaign, and had consolidated enough power to crown himself Emperor of the French, and Josephine was his Empress.

Anybody with a slight interest in Napoleon I or his age, the period of French history known as First Empire, is aware that after his fall power in France was regained by the Bourbon dynasty that had been replaced first by the Revolution, then by Napoleon's Consulate and Empire. Even during his life, after his abdication, he was violently vilified by Royalist propaganda, as never a dethroned sovereign was in all History. Besides the obvious political reasons for that hatred, there was the xenophobic one: not only Bonaparte, the former Emperor of the French, was not of French noble birth, but also he wasn't French at all. Josephine, on the other hand, who was always a representative of the Ancien R gime, regardless of her being Napoleon's wife for 13 years, was beloved by the Royalists, she, who was of French, though doubtful, noble birth. Evangeline Bruce's book could have been written during the Bourbon Restoration, between 1815 and 1830, being, as it is, a compendium of all kinds of Royalist gossip and slander ever written against Napoleon and his Italian family, whereas Josephine and her French family are always treated fairly and sympathetically. Bruce sees Napoleon as a natural born monster: cynical, unscrupulous, ambitious, calculating, tyrannical and a bloodthirsty warmonger, in a word, the Corsican Ogre, that famous boogeyman invented by French and English Royalists to extinguish all trace of the Revolution which, according to them, was embodied by that single man. She denies him any patriotism or idealism. She denies him any merit, attributing his military successes to his marshals and his political ones to his "incredible luck.

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