



# Josephine

*Carolly Erickson*

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**Josephine** Carolly Erickson

Alluring, wealthy, and married to the conqueror of Europe, Josephine appeared in 1804 as the most favored woman in France; but her actual life was far darker. Erickson brings the complex, charming, ever resilient Josephine to life.

## **Josephine Details**

Date : Published May 21st 2004 by Robson Books Ltd (first published March 31st 1999)

ISBN : 9781861056375

Author : Carolly Erickson

Format : Paperback 391 pages

Genre : Biography, History, Nonfiction, Cultural, France, Historical

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## From Reader Review Josephine for online ebook

### Haley Mancini says

Okay. This book is interesting, especially when discussing the early part of Josephine's life until Napoleon, but once it endeavors into her relationship with Napoleon, it goes off the rails a bit, IMO, in that it tries overly hard to negate their love story.

I'd question my own beliefs on this because I'm sure I can fall victim to romantic stories, but besides the well-documented primary and secondary sources describing their continual, albeit rocky, infatuation with each other until Josephine's death (and really, until Napoleon's death--read some of what his companion until death, Count Montholon, transcribed from Napoleon's own lips towards the end), the author also neglects a very obvious tone in her derision of Napoleon. Yeah, the guy was seriously messed up (historians now believe him to have been Bipolar I), but even after promising his first mistress he'd divorce and marry her, he didn't, and even after his family members hounded him to divorce Josephine, he didn't. He only acquiesced after several of his advisors, who, in fact, were looking to dissemble his power, told him he needed a direct heir. They knew that if he sought a wife outside of France--especially an Austrian--public opinion of him would turn. That's exactly what they wanted. And the author neatly neglects that after Josephine's passing, Napoleon locked himself in his room and would not come out for days. On his deathbed years later, he imagined her spectre beckoning him soon, and he was beside himself with joy. And, famously, she was his last word.

Anyway, I would've liked the book a lot more if the author gave the necessary merit to this side of the story; sure, Napoleon was a crazy ol' nutter, but he DID love Josephine for just who she was, not just what she could get him. She felt the same, in the end. It's just too bad their timing was a nightmare.

But 5 stars for the first half! Very interesting.

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### Nadine says

I think the author assumes too much. Her historical research here is questionable, but the book was readable nonetheless.

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### Chequers says

Molto ben scritto, non solo traccia un ottimo ritratto di Giuseppina ma e' anche attenta alla descrizione del periodo storico.

Mai noioso, veramente godibile.

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### London SE4 says

As they say, behind a great man there is a great woman. Josephine had a remarkable life, from her youth in

luscious, exotic Martinique, to a loveless arranged marriage in Paris. We see her pulling through constant worries, lack of money, the French Revolution, prison and politics, children to raise and the execution of her husband, Alexandre de Beauharnais.

A young widow, surrounded by rich friends and lovers, always elegantly dressed. She was not beautiful, but fascinating, full of grace and sweetness. She captivated Napoleon with her charm, although her frivolity and lack of deep interest for him, cooled Bonaparte's initial passion. Sensitive, prone to terrible headaches, scared to travel in a coach, and never fully accostumed to the cold and damp weather of France, Josephine was a great socialite and always a good influence on Napoleon's brusque manners and difficult character. Carolly Erickson's book is a good read for someone who is completely new to the subject. Fashion and social history between Revolution and Empire are richly detailed, and this is probably what I appreciated the most. What I didn't enjoy was her fictional writing style in portraying Josephine's private life, which made the character look like a fad and shallow woman, all jewels, tears, heavy make up, depression and headaches. All of this counterbalanced by an abusive and egotistic Napoleon, who will divorce his self indulgent creole in the end.

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### **Byron says**

One of my good friends has had a long time obsession with Napoleon Bonaparte. He knows details about Napoleon that I don't know about myself. He owns some Napoleon memorabilia. He may even be Napoleon reincarnated... there is evidence to this effect.

I went in search of a book about Napoleon and stumbled on this book. I decided it looked sufficiently interested, and since I knew absolutely nothing about either Napoleon or Josephine other than something about Waterloo, I put it on my wish list.

It took a while, but finally I purchased the book and started reading. Well, in my ignorance about Napoleon and Josephine, I just got more confused. Fully 1/3 of the way into the book, neither Napoleon or Josephine was mentioned. The book was about some licentious woman named Rose who grew up thousands of miles from France and eventually moved to France to marry some dude named Alexandre, who became of leader of the French revolution.

Finally, Napoleon entered the picture, Rose became Josephine, and my ignorance began to become awareness if not knowledge.

All this goes to say that this book was informative and interesting, and has whet my appetite to learn more about 18th and 19th century Europe, and key figures like Napoleon. This book was only peripherally about Napoleon, and I am curious to better understand the political dynamics of the various nationalities and regions of Europe. The fact that Napoleon was actually an Italian, and that attacking Russia was the beginning of his end are pieces of information that seem worthy of better understanding.

I recommend this book to those who enjoy learning about history through the biographies of those who created it.

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## **Tittirossa says**

Una vita incredibile, quella di Giuseppina Beauharnais in Bonaparte.

E' riuscita a stare a galla sia nel marasma delirante post-rivoluzione, sia pre-post durante Napoleone! Lo stress l'ha uccisa ma almeno per un po' se l'è goduta la vita.

Una biografia non del tutto acritica (certe scelte narrative implicano un giudizio non proprio favorevole a Giuseppina), ma interessante.

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## **Naomi says**

I listened to the audiobook version of this. I spent the first few chapters confused as to why I was listening the a biography of some chick named Rose Tascher from Martinique. Clearly I was not familiar at all with the subject. I had to Google Rose de Beauharnaise to find out they were the same person. Derf. This was a really revealing story and so sad for both Josephine and Napolean, but not in the tragic, romantic way I had previously heard and partially remember from the tv miniseries in the 1980s. What a sad, rough life. It's not often you hear about how grasping and desperate the French nobility of l'ancien regime were.

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## **TheSlothPrincess says**

This is an excellent biography. About as far as you can get from a dry, dusty textbook, Erickson's book is full of vivid description and interesting detail.

Before reading this, my only other knowledge of Josephine came from reading a historical novel by the same author. I very much enjoyed it, and although it gave me a basic idea of her life, I wanted to know more of her true story.

Josephine (or Rose, as she was previously known), lived a turbulent life, surviving deadly storms, prison during the French revolution, domestic abuse, and a host of other troubles. She is presented as a magnificently charismatic woman, who has remained an enduring historical figure.

Josephine was an influential figure in her own right, although most know her only for being Napoleon's wife. She was a popular, trendsetting woman for most of her life. She helped induct her awkward husband into French society and even after her divorce and his exile, was admired in the high ranking circles.

It does seem as though the author likes her subject very much, but I do not believe there is a strong bias or narrow view of the character. Besides her charm, we are also presented with her excessive spending habits, her adultery, and other less than admirable qualities.

The dramatic political and societal changes are also an important part of this work, and it is all fascinating. I loved reading about Josephine and look forward to learning more about the French revolution and Napoleon. I would highly recommend this to anyone who enjoyed Antonia Fraser's biography of Marie Antoinette. It has the same kind of personal feel to it, and, especially because Josephine ended up inheriting the very rooms she lived in, you would arguably be reading about her successor in society.

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### **Kate Lawrence says**

Erickson is a fine writer who maintains admirable focus and pace in recounting an amazing life. She combines a sympathetic, almost novelistic style with solid research, documented in endnotes.

Josephine's rise from an impoverished girl from the boondocks (the tiny island of Martinique) to the empress of France shows what can be accomplished with beauty and savvy social skills plus a fortuitous aristocratic connection. Despite her fame, glamor and wealth though, who would want to change places with her and go through the unhappy relationships, betrayal, illnesses, danger from constantly shifting politics, imprisonment, near execution and constant debt she faced? Much better to sit back and read about it in an engrossing account like this.

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### **Rob Markley says**

Interesting but not particularly engaging insight into Josephine. She does not come out of this with much credit despite this being a sympathetic biography

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### **Linda says**

Carolly Erickson has made a career of writing biographies of history's female royalty. *Josephine* tells the story of the legendary Josephine Beauharnais Bonaparte. Born of impoverished minor aristocrats who grew sugar cane on island of Martinique, Josephine, then called Rose, grew up far from the grandeur of the Paris of Louis XVI and Maria Antoinette. Her childhood was an indolent one, steeped in the magic of the Caribbean, and her formal education was mediocre at best. When it came time for marriage, the 16 year old Rose journeyed to France to marry Alexandre de Beauharnais, a wealthy cousin. Her early life in Paris, and her terrifying experiences during the bloody years of the Revolution, are vividly portrayed.

But Josephine today is best known as the wife of Napoleon, and their relationship is generally believed to have been one of history's greatest love stories. Judging by Erickson's portrayal, it was anything but. It's true that Napoleon fell deeply in love with her, but at no time did she reciprocate his feelings. Both husband and wife conducted affairs on the side, and by the time he crowned himself emperor, his ardor for Josephine had dwindled, his treatment of her becoming rather cold. Erickson does an admirable job in conveying a sense of her multifaceted personality, and is especially effective when writing about Josephine's relationship with her two children from her first marriage. Her solitary years at Malmaison are covered, as are her travels in France and in Europe.

Ms. Erickson has a pleasant expository style, skilfully breathing life into facts and events. Biography can be deadly dull, but *Josephine* is both informative and entertaining.

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### **Steena says**

I do not have a large interest in Josephine Bonaparte but found this book easily digestible and a great source of interesting information on the one-time Empress of France. It was not, as I thought, historical fiction but a true biography. Much to my enjoyment it was a very descriptive and entertaining biography. I enjoyed the audio book immensely and might not have found it so engaging as a print read.

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### **MissSusie says**

When I got this book I thought it was historical fiction, when it arrived it said it was a biography. So I thought ok but even as I was reading it I wasn't sure if it was a novel or a biography, it definitely reads like a novel.

I guess I didn't know much about Josephine when I started this book but I always thought that Napoleon & Josephine had this great love story but according to this book that's not the case.

It was ok it did read like a novel at first then got a bit boring towards the end where I just wanted it to be over.

2 ½ Stars

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### **Lorie says**

Loved this bio on Josephine. Still thinking about her remarkable life..

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### **Ally says**

#### **3.5 STARS**

I bought this book at Books A Million a few weeks ago because A) it caught my eye and B) it was only \$4.95. A used copy, of course, but let's be real here, half my books are used copies because I'm cheap. :P

In any case, before I picked it up I knew almost nothing about Empress Josephine, or Rose Tascher, except that Napoleon deeply loved her, and that she spent more money than I will probably make in my lifetime. That being said, her life was quite interesting. Erickson does a good job at portraying her sympathies to a woman who's life was constantly on edge. From her first husband's neglect and (I'm guessing) mental instability, to her imprisonment during the Reign of Terror, of which she only survived through luck, to her relationship with the Emperor Napoleon, one would think her story was a soap opera on modern television.

Alas, according to Erickson, it was all too real. From my meager research, I know Josephine was not as enamored with Napoleon as he was with her. The abuse she suffered at his hands seems plausible, given his eccentric and driven personality. I can't blame her for wanting financial security, especially during a time when nothing is definitive. The time period which she lived, however much women flaunted themselves,

ultimately left her with little choice but to stay. It is a shame that Napoleon's obvious manipulations caged her in such a way that the young, carefree, Rose Tascher of Martinique became the co-dependent Empress Josephine, a woman riddled with health problems (imagined or no), which was so different from the young girl growing up on an island.

Erickson's writing was persuasive yet I noticed several flaws and grammar mistakes. Perhaps it was due to the copy that I bought (a second edition copy, I believe) but it wasn't just that. It might be because the woman she was writing about, and the people who influenced said woman's life, were so contrary that it was somewhat confusing and a bit difficult to understand. Ergo, **3.5 Stars**.

In short, well-written, though slightly confusing. Poor Empress Josephine. She was certainly a woman of her time.

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