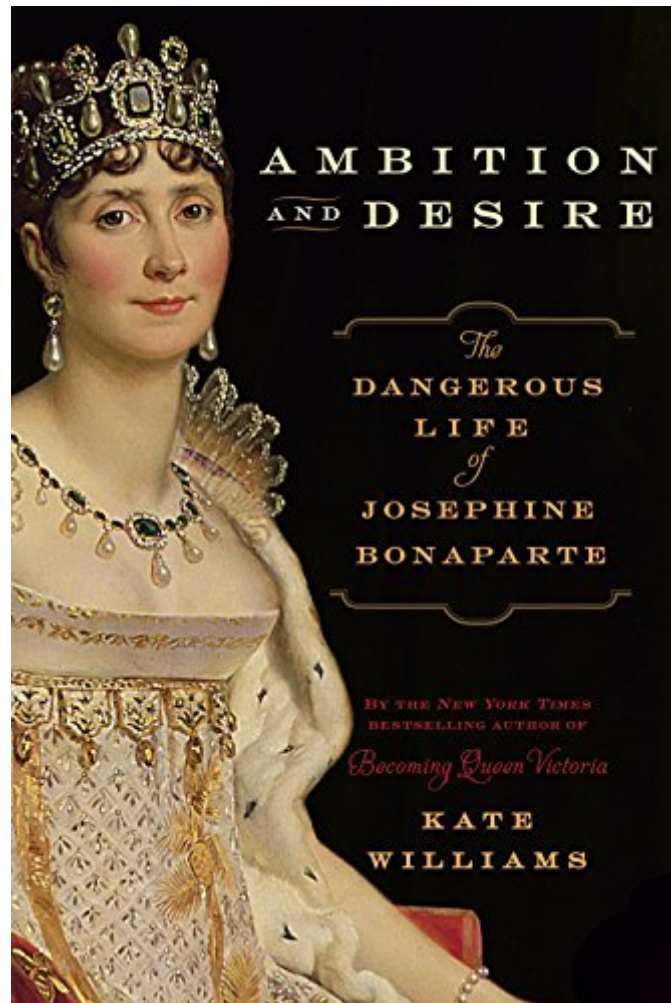


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Ambition And Desire: The Dangerous Life Of Josephine Bonaparte



Synopsis

From CNN's official royal historian, a highly praised young author with a doctorate from Oxford University, comes the extraordinary rags-to-riches story of the woman who conquered Napoleon's heart—and with it, an empire. Their love was legendary, their ambition flagrant and unashamed. Napoleon Bonaparte and his wife, Josephine, came to power during one of the most turbulent periods in the history of France. The story of the Corsican soldier's incredible rise has been well documented. Now, in this spellbinding, luminous account, Kate Williams draws back the curtain on the woman who beguiled him: her humble origins, her exorbitant appetites, and the tragic turn of events that led to her undoing. Born Marie-Joséphine-Rose de Tascher de La Pagerie on the Caribbean island of Martinique, the woman Napoleon would later call Josephine was the ultimate survivor. She endured a loveless marriage to a French aristocrat executed during the Reign of Terror—then barely escaped the guillotine blade herself. Her near-death experience only fueled Josephine's ambition and heightened her determination to find a man who could finance and sustain her. Though no classic beauty, she quickly developed a reputation as one of the most desirable women on the continent. In 1795, she met Napoleon. The attraction was mutual, immediate, and intense. Theirs was an often-tumultuous union, roiled by their pursuit of other lovers but intensely focused on power and success. Josephine was Napoleon's perfect consort and the object of national fascination. Together they conquered Europe. Their extravagance was unprecedented, even by the standards of Versailles. But she could not produce an heir. Sexual obsession brought them together, but cold biological truth tore them apart. Gripping in its immediacy, captivating in its detail, *Ambition and Desire* is a true tale of desire, heartbreak, and revolutionary turmoil, engagingly written by one of England's most praised young historians. Kate Williams's searing portrait of this alluring and complex woman will finally elevate Josephine Bonaparte to the historical prominence she deserves. Praise for *Ambition and Desire* — "Not just a scholarly work, but a page-turner . . . Williams is no stranger to creating works on strong and influential women, and, as in those works, here she does an admirable job of demystifying Josephine. . . . This engrossing and accessible account is for all readers who enjoy historical biography." —Library Journal — "[A] riveting account . . . Williams perfectly illustrates all that was bizarre and maddening about French life during the reign of Josephine and Napoleon Bonaparte." —Publishers Weekly — "Intelligent and entertaining." —Kirkus Reviews — "An in-depth portrait of the substantive woman behind the throne." —Booklist — "Reading [*Ambition and Desire*] is like watching *Silk Stockings*, the 1957 Hollywood masterpiece with Fred Astaire and Cyd Charisse. The book flows and jumps, taking the reader by the hand through tormented times in

French history without ever letting you go or losing itself in the intricacies of French politics. • "The Times" • "A sparkling account of this most fallible and endearing of women." • "Daily Mail" • "A whirlwind tour of French history." • "The Telegraph" From the Hardcover edition.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

In her brief acknowledgments, the author says that her goal -- or one of her goals -- in writing this biography of Josephine, Napoleon's first wife and the woman who helped to set his feet firmly on the path to power, was to undermine the popular conception of her as being "featherbrained". Instead, Kate Williams argues, the Josephine she wanted to explore was a woman who developed a reputation as for being "excessively 'feminine', lacking intellect and ambition" and had done so as part of "a carefully cultivated power play that worked perfectly until the end." The problem is that little of the evidence that she advances supports the theory that Josephine was any more intelligent than her reputation has suggested -- canny and charming, yes, and with an ability to size up a situation that she finds herself in (a prison during the Reign of Terror; Paris in the aftermath of Napoleon's exile to Elba) and turn it to her maximum short-term advantage. The biography is awash in the details of Josephine's lavish spending (and the debts that she racked up, from a very early age) and Williams herself makes it clear that Napoleon had little time for women who involved themselves in

matters of state. "Many days, Josephine simply had to wait, beautifully dressed and perfumed, for the moment when Napoleon might burst through the doors without warning and demand tea." When Williams does show Josephine as indulging in power plays, it tends to be to improve her personal finances or her personal position, rather than for any other advantage, nor is there anything here to support the image of Josephine as being anything more than a woman who learned to live by her charms and did so far, far more successfully than the vast majority of other women of her era.

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