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Testament of Empress Josephine

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Recommended Citation

Delehanty, Emily and Gayer, Kristen. (2011) Testament of Empress Josephine.
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Testament
of
the Empress Joséphine

found this morning

in her Palace of Malmaison



Translated by Emily Delehanty and Kristen Gayer

Translator's note: The following document is the last will and testament of the Empress Joséphine (June 23, 1763 - May 29, 1814). Born in Martinique as Marie Joséphe Rose Tascher de la Pagerie, Joséphine married Napoléon Bonaparte in 1796, after her first husband was guillotined during the French Revolution. Napoléon later divorced Joséphine because she (allegedly) could not bear him an heir, although she had two children from her first marriage. After the divorce Josephine lived in retirement at Malmaison, where this will was written and discovered.¹



In the name of the Holy Trinity, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, I, Marie-Joséphine-Rose de Tascher, Beauharnais's widow, Empress of the French, secluded to my home of Malmaison since Napoléon's repudiation of me, before the entire Universe, I declare my last wishes and sentiments in the presence of the Lord, before whom I am going to appear.

I leave my soul to God, my Creator; I beg him to receive it in his mercy, to forgive all the faults and sins that I have committed while I was on Earth; but, despite being unworthy, I dare aspire to the favor of seeing my soul elevated among the blessed. I have always believed in God, in all the mysteries of religion, despite some efforts by Bonaparte to destroy my faith. Not that I would wish to charge him in front of the supreme tribunal of God of having professed the dreadful system of atheism, because if he was atheist, the fault lies with the infamous courtesans whose base flatteries and guilty seductions, having led his imagination astray, persuaded him that there did not exist above him any supernatural power before which he must humble himself. They made him into a god- could he have the humility of a true Christian? I pray to God to forgive him for this excess of pride, as I attest that he is innocent of all the follies and extravagances that were said and done in his name. At the time that I reigned over France, I declare to having used all the influence that I had acquired over the mind of Napoléon, to stop him from committing the numerous injustices advised him by his ministers. I often had the pleasure of succeeding; but could I myself be free from their odious schemes? I was thus carried away by the torrent. My presence came to bother the emperor, my advice to displease him. I had, finally, the misfortune and the shame of seeing myself forever separated from the man whom I loved most in the world, the one who owed me both his glory and his elevation. O treacherous courtiers! It is you to whom France is indebted for all of its misfortune. Though I suffered without protest the bloody affront that my husband put me through, in thinking that as a founder of a new dynasty, he must ground it in an irrefutable manner, at least, this was the pretext of my repudiation... Experience has since proven that it had other causes.

I swear before God and the Bourbon² royal family that I am entirely innocent of the death of the Duke of Enghien³. France may already know the efforts that I made to save this

¹ Sources: "Josephine de Beauharnais." *The Columbia Encyclopedia, Sixth Edition*. 2008. *Encyclopedia.com*. 26 Oct. 2011 <<http://www.encyclopedia.com>>; "Josephine de Beauharnais." <2011<http://www.biography.com/people/joséphine-de-beauharnais>> *Biography.com*. 1 Nov. 2011

² **Bourbon**: the surname of a branch of the royal family of France. The Bourbons ruled France from 1589, when Henry IV succeeded to the throne, until the monarchy was overthrown in 1848, and reached the peak of their power under Louis XIV in the late 17th century. (Source: ELIZABETH KNOWLES. "Bourbon." *The Oxford Dictionary of Phrase and Fable*. 2006. *Encyclopedia.com*. 26 Oct. 2011 <<http://www.encyclopedia.com>>.)

³ **Louis-Antoine-Henri de Bourbon-Condé, duke d'Enghien**, (born Aug. 2, 1772, Chantilly, Fr.—died March 21, 1804, Vincennes), French prince whose execution, widely proclaimed as an atrocity, ended all hope of reconciliation between Napoleon and the royal house of Bourbon. (Source: "Louis-Antoine-Henri de Bourbon-Condé, duke d'Enghien." *Encyclopædia Britannica. Encyclopædia Britannica Online Academic Edition*.)

unfortunate prince. They have been fruitless and it is one of the most bitter regrets that I take to my grave: I hope that posterity will bring justice to the purity of my intentions.

I dare to recommend to the love of the French my son Eugène and the Queen Hortense. Since the horrifying disgrace of their protector, they had become my sole assets, the sole consolation of my old age. But God did not permit it; He is separating me from my children. May His will be fulfilled: At least I will not have any wishes to make, if I have the assurance of their well-being. Eugène- Napoléon has nothing to blame himself for in the eyes of his country and of the Bourbons. Filled with honors and kindness by Napoléon, his gratefulness made it his duty to defend Napoléon's cause. A military man, he could not abandon his flag; a viceroy, the states which had been entrusted to him. Ah! If ever valor and heroism could merit a soldier the esteem of his country, what Frenchman is more worthy than my son!

But where do my concerns get me? Has he not himself already forgotten all the great interests of his glory only to ponder the fate of his miserable mother? Have my dying eyelids not been wet twenty times by his tears? O France! France! It is on her very death bed, that Josephine beseeches you: respect and cherish her Hortense, her Eugène. Although they were strangers to the cause of your legitimate kings, they are both worthy of the Bourbons and of you.

Ah! If my sights could turn again towards the one whom I loved so much, the one that Europe has so many reasons to hate. If my fading voice could reach his ears, what cruel repentance would be kindled in his soul! How many bitter tears I would make him spill! Alas! He would listen to me! He would be touched by my just reproaches; the blindfold of error would no longer cover his eyes. I would present to him the lot of this interesting princess for whom he had sacrificed me, and whom he immolated, in her turn, by his grievous ambition, of this cherished son, of this king of Rome for whom he prepared such glorious destinies. These heart-rending depictions would have the power to weaken his courage and soften his heart... But! What am I saying? In his obscure retreat he already feels all the anguish of such a cruel separation: he feels in his turn the wrongs that I have suffered when he cast me from his court: his greatest torment would be having lost his crown? No, no, he is deprived of a son and spouse whom he must adore.

I therefore forgive him for all the pain that he caused me, intentionally or not, all the calamities of which I have personally been a victim, since they seemed to be in the interest of France. I pray to the august Marie-Louise to call on the head of her spouse the pardon of the sovereigns whom he has offended, and above all, the entirety of France, which was, until the moment of his fall, ignorant of a large part of his faults... No hatred can be eternal.

A new day comes to shine for France; Europe finally sees its wish realized, the wish that she's had for all these years, the one of lasting peace.

I ask God to protect the reign of the Bourbons, to render it as eternal as their memory. Since he permitted that the dynasty of the Napoléons be destroyed forever, he would not want France to be exposed to new dangers and new misfortunes. Blood has flowed for too long. Legitimate sovereigns, the Bourbons return in their enduring right. Nothing should oppose their generous designs any longer. I die in making sincere wishes for their happiness and the prosperity of their states.

In my lifetime I tried to do a bit of good. A good action gives such pleasure to the one who does it. For me to always ask to be repaid with gratitude would have been too much happiness. I only followed my natural instinct, the penchant of my heart, in helping the

unfortunate, and if ever I have feared death, it is because it is going to deprive me of the sweetest charm of my life, and separate me from all my adopted children.

I leave the enjoyment of all my assets to the poor families whose names my intendant will give to my dear Hortense. She is charged, along with my son Eugène-Napoléon, with the care of paying my debt. All the misfortunate that I am forced to abandon are in the sacred custody that I entrust to them. They will care for them well. They have come to swear it, in my arms... I die happy...

Empress JOSEPHINE

Written at Malmaison, the date and year below

Printing house of J. Mornoval, rue des Prêtres-Sadot-Severin, a° 4 and Quai des Augustins