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Carol Berkin, *Wondrous Beauty: The Life and Adventures of Elizabeth Patterson Bonaparte*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2014. US \$ 27.95. xiii +237 pp. Bibliography, index. \$27.95 U.S. (cl). ISBN 978-0-307-59278-1.

Review by Denise Z. Davidson, Georgia State University.

Elizabeth Patterson Bonaparte (1785-1879) led an unusual and interesting life that straddled American and European society and linked her personal choices and romantic ties to larger matters of politics and diplomacy. Carol Berkin, author of several important studies focusing on US women's history, tells her story well. Geared toward the general public, the book prioritizes narrative over analysis, recounting the life of this fascinating woman in an engaging manner, while drawing attention to the ways that her life choices reflected (or more accurately rejected) broader trends.

Elizabeth (Betsy) Spear Patterson was the daughter of a Scottish Immigrant, William Patterson, a wealthy, self-made man who dominated his submissive wife, Dorcas Spear Patterson, but who never managed to control his more willful and beautiful daughter. In 1803, "the belle of Baltimore" met the handsome and irresponsible younger brother of Napoleon Bonaparte, Jérôme. A rabid womanizer, Jérôme had traveled to the city specifically to meet the girl he had heard described as the most beautiful woman in America. The two quickly fell in love and married, despite William's strong opposition. The well-connected couple then circulated in the highest realms of Washington society, quickly gaining notoriety in part because Betsy chose to wear the transparent fabrics then in fashion in Europe, but rarely donned in the US. Their marriage carried political implications, too, as it seemed to emphasize U.S. ties to France over Britain during this period of war, when the young nation was working to remain neutral.

The marriage did not last long, however, as Jérôme was a minor, and had not received permission from his widowed mother to marry. In addition, Napoleon was staunchly opposed to it because he had higher aspirations for his brother. In March 1805, after several unsuccessful attempts to board French ships, the couple managed to cross the Atlantic in a private vessel chartered by Betsy's wealthy father. They hoped to convince Napoleon to recognize their marriage, but Napoleon successfully blocked their attempt to disembark at Lisbon. Instead, Jérôme traveled alone to Paris, while his pregnant wife and her father remained on their ship, eventually arriving in London. There, Betsy gave birth to a son, Jerome, known to the family as "Bo." Meanwhile, Jérôme the father did not manage to win over his powerful brother, who had the marriage annulled and then arranged for Jerome to marry Princess Catherine Fredericka Sophia Dorothea of Württemberg. The new couple then took the title of King and Queen of Westphalia.

From that point forward, Elizabeth and her son remained estranged from Jérôme. They returned to the US, where Bo resided with his mother's family for much of his childhood. Finding life in Baltimore stifling, Betsy preferred the aristocratic social gatherings she had encountered in Europe, and spent much of her life there. She traveled by herself to England in 1815, leaving behind "a furious father, a saddened son, and a collection of disappointed suitors" (p. 81). She quickly rose in English society, even receiving an invitation from the Duke of Wales. After London came Paris, where Betsy found it was "the

only habitable place on earth" (p. 99). While in Paris, she developed a life-long friendship with the Irish novelist Lady Sydney Morgan. As a witty and bright woman who enjoyed sophisticated conversations, Betsy felt at home in Paris, and later Geneva and Florence, where "she could act, in short, upon a public stage rather than be confined to the private world of parlor and nursery" (p. 105). Eventually, though, her money ran out, and she had to return to Baltimore. She did not stay long. In 1819, she managed to escape again, this time with her son, whom she enrolled in a boarding school in Geneva while she rented a modest flat in the same city.

By this point, the Bonaparte family was living in exile in Italy, and some of Bo's relatives contacted Betsy, suggesting that she and her son come to visit them. After hesitating for several months, they finally traveled to Rome in late 1821 where they met Napoleon's mother and sister, Letizia and Pauline, both of whom showered the Americans with money and gifts, and invited them to participate in their luxurious socializing. Together, they began engineering a marriage between Bo and his cousin Charlotte, the daughter of Napoleon's older brother, Joseph, who by this point had settled in an estate in Bordentown, New Jersey. Bo traveled back to America to discuss the possible match with his uncle, but soon afterward Betsy's relationship with the Bonapartes began to sour. She returned to Switzerland only to learn that the proposed marriage had fallen through. Bo then enrolled at Harvard College while Betsy remained in Europe. Unlike his mother, Bo preferred life in America. To his mother's great chagrin and his grandfather's pleasure, he chose to marry an American heiress rather than one of the many European women his mother had hoped he might wed.

High politics entered the story again during the Second Empire, when Bo's heritage suddenly made him seem like a possible heir to Napoleon III. He and his mother traveled to France, where they launched a lawsuit seeking his recognition as Jérôme's legitimate son and thus a potential heir to the throne. After losing both their first trial in 1856 and an appeal in 1861, they gave up. The connection to France did not end, however, as Bo's son, Jerome Napoleon Bonaparte (whom the family called "Junior") began a career as an officer in the French army after graduating from West Point. His career brought him closest to the kinds of aspirations that his grandmother had long held for her offspring, but even this Jerome chose an American wife (the granddaughter of Daniel Webster) and settled back in the United States in the 1870s. His younger brother Charles also chose to remain in the United States, becoming a lawyer and eventually serving as attorney general under Theodore Roosevelt.

This "great American story" with an important French and European dimension tells us quite a bit about gender and sociability in Europe and the United States during the nineteenth century. In exploring the limits of acceptable behavior in these two worlds, Berkin demonstrates that the overlapping nature of the private and the political could make women influential, even in the young United States, where they led much more confined lives. Occasionally, Berkin's expertise as a historian of the United States and not Europe becomes evident in small inaccuracies regarding French political history. One blatant error is the date of Napoleon's abdication, which took place in April 1814, not 1813 (p. 77). Overall, though, the effort to use Betsy's transatlantic story to draw comparisons between the US and Europe is highly successful.

Wondrous Beauty is an interesting and engaging biography that is a pleasure to read. It should thus succeed in its goal of attracting a broader audience. To the extent that the book engages more scholarly matters, it builds a convincing case for recognizing the interwoven nature of private life and political matters, particularly during the very early nineteenth century when Betsy's decision to marry Napoleon's brother nearly caused a diplomatic rupture with England. Later, in her efforts to force the Bonapartes to recognize her son as legitimate, Betsy threatened to disrupt the family's plans for succession. Berkin encapsulates this point nicely in a sentence that appears near the end of the book. "Betsy's story thus reminds us that policies are often formed at the nexus of the private and public spheres" (185). The book also sheds light on topics of interest to historians of women in drawing attention to contrasting attitudes toward women's behavior in the US and Europe. Female domesticity

came early to the young republic, and Betsy's ability to ignore such norms demonstrates that strong-willed women could choose to live their lives differently. In some ways, Betsy was ahead of her time. By the middle of the nineteenth century, when her shrewd business sense had made her a wealthy woman, she could observe the emerging feminist movement arguing for women's rights and their capacity to influence public life. Her story illustrates nicely the limited power of social norms in this period as in most others. There was space for men and women to flout them, and in the process offer an alternative path that could provide inspiration to others. Disobeying norms did not come without risk, however, as suggested by the strained relationship that existed between Betsy and her father throughout their lives, and by the bitterness she felt in the last decades of her life as she led a lonely existence in Baltimore.

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