

## Chapter 24 : Queen and Widow (III) (1844-1876).

As Queen, Josephine read supplications, held audiences for individual supplicants and made house visits. She also spent time on meetings, hospital visits (where she was informed of such issues that "had difficulties reaching the throne") & inspections. The children were often involved. In 1862, she supported the establishment of the French School and in 1865 the "Association for Voluntary Healthcare in the Field", a precursor of the Swedish Red Cross. The association received a lot of publicity through her. It also attracted a lot of attention when during the Franco-German War she had the (by all means rather worn) tablecloths of the castle cut into dressing material.<sup>1</sup> The time allocated for all this is unclear, a couple of days each week has been suggested. She developed an effective, rather unpopular style. Her detractors thought her bourgeois, cold & too ambitious for comfort. Even Fredrika Bremer wanted someone softer & more devout on the throne:

The new Queen is thought increasingly proud and uncaring of others. She usually says "No" to demands and prefers acting on her own. I have not heard this from courtiers but from others, but I think it is true. Of the royal couple, she is without question the more powerful character.<sup>2</sup>

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Oscar & Josephine's Swedish coronation took place at Storkyrkan on September 28, 1844. Several authors have claimed that the Swedish archbishop of Wingård had his doubts about Josephine's right to be crowned but gave in. There are no sources however.<sup>3</sup> The King and Queen were also to be crowned in Norway, but the cathedral in Trondheim needed to be repaired, why it could not take place until the summer of 1847. In the meantime, a discussion started in Norway about Josephine's right to be crowned. The politician and bishop Hans Riddervold in Trondheim 1847 protested it in two letters to the Ministry of Church affairs, under the heading "Should the Queen be anointed and crowned in Norway? - two letters to the Royal Ministry from the Bishop of Trondhjem":

On March 6, 1846, Riddervold sent a letter to the Norwegian Ministry of the Church, stating that only the regent, Oscar, had the right to be crowned. To crown the queen would give her a political role that she did not have under the Norwegian constitution. Oscar responded with a letter in which he wondered if the bishop had any religious concerns, separate from his political concerns, since he in that case did not have to officiate at the ceremony. The ministry also instructed historian Professor Rudolf Keyser to investigate the matter. Keyser's prompt answer was that the coronation symbolically expressed that the Sovereign had his position by the grace of God, not by the Constitution. If the Queen was crowned, she would symbolically become complicit in the divinely sanctioned power of the Sovereign. On May 4, 1846, Riddervold replied that he agreed with Keyser's interpretation. The coronation was a medieval rite reserved for the Catholic Church, which was also a worldly power. Sacralization by anointing with sacred oil contradicted the Protestant principle, as formulated in § 28 of the Augsburg Creed, that worldly and spiritual things should not be confused. On these his misgivings, he was extremely verbose. I interpret his objections as him

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<sup>1</sup> Zalewski, 1999: ss. 263-265.

<sup>2</sup> Bremer 1915: del 2, ss. 411-412; Braun 1950: s. 135; Nohrenius & Wiklund 2012: s. 94. [Brev till Per Böklin, 1844-04-02.]

<sup>3</sup> Sehlstedt 1981: s. 19; Ulvros 2007: s. 177,

despite the theology willing to participate or at least attend Oscar's coronation, but not Josephine's.<sup>4</sup>

It is unclear whether the matter was ever put to the vote in the Parliament. Those in favour of Josephine's coronation argued that, since it had only symbolic significance, its real significance was in the eye of the beholder. The negotiations continued without success until 1853. Neither Oscar nor Josephine was crowned in Norway. Josephine does not seem to have felt any particular rancour. Perhaps she accepted Riddervold's theological arguments. Since Norway later allowed the coronation of both Charles XV's and Oscar II's (protestant) consort, it has been assumed that Desirée & Josephine were denied the coronation because of their Catholic religion, but that it was redacted for diplomatic reasons.<sup>5</sup>

Josephine had a somewhat easier time than Desirée handling the court life but thought the "game" was both exhausting and meaningless. There was less of this in Norway, which was a relief. Her chief maid (1844-1859) was Countess Charlotta Skjöldebrand (1791-1866; lady-in-waiting 1836-1866). Charlotta was a wholesaler's daughter and not so familiar with court rituals, but was considered easy to deal with, and a better fit for Oscar & Josephine's bourgeois life and simple habits. Josephine's noble surroundings thought her amiable and intelligent but had difficulty mustering any enthusiasm for her bourgeois asceticism. It was also the case that after all the attacks on her religion she kept her guard up and it showed. She & Oscar travelled a lot, both in Sweden & in Norway, and she spent a lot of time attending various events, often accompanied by Desirée, who thought being dowager queen was extremely boring. Josephine soldiered on though. For example, in 1854 she and her ladies-in-waiting spent a lot of time embroidering a carpet for the Eugénia chapel, and later also Christmas gifts for acquaintances.

As Crown Princess, Josephine presented a medal for outstanding silkworm cultivation. As queen, she presented the more prestigious "Ingenio et arti" for scientific and artistic merit, "Virtus ipsa sibi pretium" for civic merit & a couple of others.<sup>6</sup> Unclear who received them, but it has been possible to identify one recipient, Sofia Lundegren in Malmö, who Josephine in 1845 awarded for her donations to schools and other charitable purposes.

With Josephine's poor knowledge of modern European history - there is no information that she even read newspapers - the 1848 unrest was incomprehensible and the work of a few fanatics: "Alas this France [which has become a republic], this France or, more accurately, those few fanatics lacking faith and morality, who have brought chaos to their beautiful fatherland. ... A judgment goes out on the princes, this is for sure, and even the best must bear their share of suffering. God alone knows why."<sup>7</sup> Even more troubling was the 1870 overthrow of her cousin Napoleon III by malevolent Republican powers & that Bavaria upon the unification of Germany was forced to submit to Prussia. The world of the Vienna Congress, her world, a compromise between old and new, was in total dissolution.

Josephine is alleged to have exercised an undue influence on Swedish politics towards the end of Oscar's life by acting as "doorman", sounding board & only confidant, but it has not been verifiable. She cared for him during the illness and dismissed the visitors when he was too tired to continue. There was a "press campaign", orchestrated by Crusenstolpe &

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<sup>4</sup> Aftonbladet, 1846-09-10, s. 2; Riddervold 1847.

<sup>5</sup> Braun 1950: ss. 140-151.

<sup>6</sup> Lagerqvist 1991: ss. 191-192.

<sup>7</sup> Braun 1950: s. 163. [Brev från Josephine till hennes moster drottningen av Preussen, 1848-03-28.,

Fäderneslandet, but it seems as much targeted at Oscars replacement, the future Charles XV, as at her.<sup>8</sup> The most concrete political rumour about Josephine's influence is that Oscar is supposed to have used her as an envoy in the 1848 war between Prussia and Denmark. She communicated a peace offer to Prussia through her aunt.<sup>9</sup>

As Queen & Dowager Queen Josephine was mainly known for her suffering: Her mother died in 1851, her son Gustav in 1852, her brother Max in 1852, her sister Théoline in 1857, Oscar in 1859, her mother-in-law Desirée in 1860, her daughter-in-law Lovisa in 1871, her son Charles in 1872, her son August in 1873, her sister Amélie in 1873. Her daughter, Eugénie, also came close to death several times. She was praised for her stoical endurance both as a mother and as a deceived woman. Here is an excerpt of a letter from fellow catholic Mathilda Orozco to some friend who c. 1858 ventured to distrust Josephine's noble and exalted character:

What approaches perfection is hard to grasp. You said yesterday that our Queen is proud and ambitious. Proud, She who with such submissive dignity and religion suffered the greatest humiliation - namely - of her husband's adultery. She who, within her family circle, lived a bourgeois life, so bourgeois, that she was blamed for it. If posture and pride are the same, then she is proud, but with her good head, she realized that in this new court and united with a new dynasty *she* needed dignity, because *no one* else possessed it.

Charles John as Regent had ravishing qualities, King Oscar had truth and wisdom, Queen Desirée had goodness, but none of them had the type royal dignity, that could silence opposition against the family, none but Queen Josephine.

Has she ever tried to intervene in state affairs? Has she even intervened in the many changes in uniform? Would it even have hurt if she did? She has admonished her son when committing follies, making him appear a fool, as every mother should, whatever estate she belongs to, and still more important when the opinion of an entire nation is in the balance.

She has asked for mercy or redress for some (an accusation that I have heard often and always with the same names and circumstances). [Probably the six expelled catholic converts.] But then she has only used a Queen's most beautiful prerogative - *to ask for mercy*. Is that supposed to be the fate of a deceived wife, a humble mother, the nurse of both her Husband, Daughter and Son? And now, when she is again visited by grief, when she watches and cries over her mentally debilitated husband who has so cruelly deceived her, and who she tries to protect from ridicule. Does she in addition have to be denigrated, treated as her husbands jailer - "she pushes the King", they say, "the poor thing, to make him greet people when he goes out. She watches him not as an angel of mercy, nor as a servant, nor as a suffering wife - but as a Virago, exercising her power." This is so harsh, so ungrateful that it must revolt every right-thinking person.

As for her proselytizing - I wonder, why she has not influenced her daughter, this would have been very easy - and instead Princess Eugénie has become "a [protestant] reader", and that under her mother's eyes, without family quarrels or opposition on the mother's side. If the Princes childishly complain of the Queen, then it is *They*, who are in the wrong. Certainly neither Prince Gustaf nor Oscar have done so.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Bengtsson 1991a; Bengtsson 1993.

<sup>9</sup> Braun 1950: ss. 167-172; Holm 1973.

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The last years Josephine was very much on the road: 1861, -74 & -75 Norway, 1869 family visit to Tegernsee, 1872 family visit & sightseeing in Berlin-Paris-Madrid-Lisbon-Pau-Lindau-Tegernsee-Munich-Vienna-Dresden, 1873 rest in Bavaria, 1875 family visit in Berlin-Munich-Innsbruck-Verona-Florence-Rome-Naples-Sorrento-Milan-Bologna-Berchtesgaden-Tegernsee-Salzburg. At times she was depressed, but had good basic health: Ate moderately, neither tobacco nor spirits and took daily walks. In 1876, however, she suffered several infections, became weaker and on June 7 died of pneumonia.<sup>11</sup> The last to see her alive commented on her complete lack of fear of death. Perhaps not quite in accordance with the truth. In her chignon, there was a letter that, before the funeral, everything necessary would be done to make sure that she was not merely unconscious with a weak pulse. Her religion caused her trouble until the end. The Swedish church refused her a Catholic burial, so it was held in the Hall of Knights. Fellow catholic Robert Braun & atheist Adam Lewenhaupt got the last word:

Braun: "When I first began to occupy myself with Josephine of Leuchtenberg, daughter of Eugene Beauharnais, wife of Oskar I, Queen of Sweden-Norway, it was her religious personality that captivated me - the fact that a Catholic queen in the Nordic countries could uphold her ideals with a fidelity, which forced admiration in people even of a completely different orientation. There were times in her life when her own beloved family abandoned her; Her consort turned to other women, her eldest son sought to hurt her at her most vulnerable points and the spirit of her time was against her. Despite this, she remained true to her faith – walking on embers."<sup>12</sup>

Lewenhaupt: "[She] was regal on the outside, on the inside and from head to foot with a deep sense of duty both to herself and to others. She lived a rich life."<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Montgomery-Cederhielm 1919: ss. 53-54; Horn 1946: ss. 24-25. [Brev från Mathilda Orozco (g. Montgomery-Cederhielm) till okänd. Omkring 1858.]

<sup>11</sup> Malmsten & Westfelt 1876.

<sup>12</sup> Braun 1950: s. 9.

<sup>13</sup> Lewenhaupt 1942: s. 18.