



Alix and Nicky: The Passion of the Last Tsar and Tsarina

Virginia Rounding

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The dramatic story of Emperor Nicholas II and his wife Alexandra Fyodorovna, the last Tsar and Tsarina of Russia—A penetrating and deeply personal study that gives profound psychological insight into their marriage and how it shaped the events that engulfed them.

There are few characters in history about whom opinion has been more divided than the last Tsar of Russia, Nicholas II, and his wife the Empress Alexandra Fyodorovna. On one hand, they are venerated as saints, innocent victims of Bolshevik assassins, and on the other they are impugned as the unwitting harbingers of revolution and imperial collapse, blamed for all the ills that befell the Russian people in the 20th century. Theirs was also a tragic love story; for whatever else can be said of them, there can be no doubt that Alix and Nicky adored one another. Soon after their engagement, Alix wrote in her fiancé's diary: "Ever true and ever loving, faithful, pure and strong as death"—words which met their fulfillment twenty-four years later in a blood-spattered cellar in Ekaterinburg.

Through the letters and diaries written by the couple and by those around them, Virginia Rounding presents an intimate, penetrating, and fresh portrayal of these two complex figures and of their passion—their love and their suffering. She explores the nature and possible causes of the Empress's ill health, and examines in depth the enigmatic triangular relationship between Nicky, Alix and their 'favourite,' Ania Vyrubova, protégée of the infamous Rasputin, extracting the meaning from words left unsaid, from hints and innuendoes..

The story of Alix and Nicky, of their four daughters known collectively as 'OTMA' and of their hemophiliac little boy Alexei, is endlessly fascinating, and Rounding makes these characters come alive, presenting them in all their human dimensions and expertly leading the reader into their vanished world.

Alix and Nicky: The Passion of the Last Tsar and Tsarina Details

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From Reader Review *Alix and Nicky: The Passion of the Last Tsar and Tsarina* for online ebook

Temperance says

While I wasn't a fan of how the information was organized (the order was chaotic and extremely confusing), I did enjoy learning a few new facts.

Belle Meri says

While there is some material in this book not mentioned in other books on the Romanovs, I was thoroughly frustrated by a combination of the writing style, chapter arrangement, and the complete lack of in-line footnotes/endnotes. Though there is a list at the end of quotations noting where they came from, it's nearly useless when trying to evaluate them in the context of the book. Sadly, I can't recommend this book to anyone, even those deeply interested and/or invested in the Romanovs.

Virginia Rounding says

Well, I would give it 5 stars, wouldn't I?

Here's an extract from my Introduction to the book, which explains something about my approach to the writing of it:

"The analogy that comes most readily to mind when writing a new book about such apparently well-known yet still controversial figures is that of curating an exhibition of some already famous artist. Just as the curator endeavors to present a different view, through judicious, sometimes idiosyncratic, selection, juxtaposition, ordering, and even omission, so the biographer must select, consider, compare, and above all look with a fresh eye at what is already 'known' as well as seek out the previously 'unknown.' In so doing, curator and biographer may respectively light upon something that previous exhibitions and books have missed, some detail or a new way of seeing that may alter earlier perceptions. Through engaging closely with a number of texts, particularly diaries and letters - and sometimes looking at what is unsaid as much as what is said - I have aspired to come as close as possible to 'penetrating the souls' of these two complex characters, while presenting the story of their 'passion' (taken in both senses, of love and of suffering) in a way that I hope will pique the interest of both the Romanov expert and the general reader. At the same time - and again bearing in mind the curating analogy - mine is only one way of seeing, of arranging the material to allow the characters to appear, of 'telling the same story differently'. It may be almost as impossible to find the historical Nicholas and Alexandra as to find the historical Jesus, so much being dependent on the attitudes and beliefs of witnesses. There may be as many Nickys and Alixes as there are theories about them, their images distorted by the parts they are assigned in other people's mythologies. During their lifetime they were constantly surrounded by gossip, and sometimes it may seem that it has not yet died down. They were in addition extremely private people, only really known to one another - and maybe too shy even for such

private knowledge to be complete. Nicky's own account of himself, in his diary, is designed to give little away; he was always restrained, rarely given to obvious self-expression (though at times his silence speaks volumes). And, as if misleading gossip on the one hand and considerable reticence on the other did not present sufficient obstacles to knowledge, Nicholas and Alexandra have now vanished even further from our sight, into the reflective surface of an icon - where the image as instrument of devotion is meant always to point beyond itself, to be seen *through* rather than stared *at*, the portal to a different sort of knowledge. As saints - if that is what they are, or might be - they have moved literally beyond our understanding."

Lyd's Archive (7/'15 to 6/'18) says

I enjoyed the informative but tedious early chapters of this book which include in better detail Nicky and Alix's relationships they kept from the rest of the family, especially with Anna Vyubova. However, the chapters were too long and the book suffered from a combination of "*Anastasia's Secret* disorder" (bad earlier, chapter, good later chapter) and "*Natasha's Dance* disorder" (good, informative beginning, confusing later chapters). Most of the book could have been rated at 4 stars, despite the amount of concentration required to read it, but I found chapter eleven unimportant and tedious, discussing a large collection of ministers Nicholas and Alexandra were appointing and not appointing. I might have not finished this book, but I decided I wouldn't be too lost if I skipped a couple pages, so I technically finished it. Despite chapter eleven, chapter twelve was well-done, but not quite deserving a spot on my almost-cried shelf, so I think three stars is fitting and I still will read Catherine the Great: Love, Sex, and Power.

Ally Kumari says

Having read quite a few biographies of Nicholas and Alexandra, I was not sure if there would be anything new for me in this book. And while most of the information were indeed not "new", the way they are organized, presented and interpreted make the publication truly wonderful. Perhaps because this time the writer is a woman (most of the Romanov fiction is written by men) the politics is not the main topic. Instead we are invited to the most intimate circle of the last Imperial couple and explore their feelings and inner world. The author takes a sympathetic view of both Nicholas and Alexandra, but provides logical arguments for her conclusions and there is neither positive bias nor ironic scorn one is now used to see when reading about these people.

Some of the issues analyzed (which tend to be mentioned, but remain unexplored by other authors), include the real state of Alexandra's health and the less than ideal relationship of the couple with Anna Vyubova. I was also pleasantly surprised at how well the whole family is presented as a tightly-knit unit - as opposed to the popular narrative of Alexandra giving her all to Alexei, while the daughters are virtually non-existent.

The first half of the book does not really move chronologically, which may be taxing for readers without previous knowledge of the timeline, but to me it added to the experience - again because I have read many Romanov books and this one, thanks to the "time-travel" was different.

Marilyn says

Nicholas and Alexandria had three passions : their passion for each other, their passion to keep their rule autocratic, and their passion for suffering. They apparently felt they were fated to suffer, so they were passive about the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune that fell upon themselves. Those that fell upon their son Alexis, they were not so passive about.

I found the book both sad and interesting. Sad because those two shy people just could not be the autocrats their ancestors were. Sad because they thought they Must Be Autocrats, when, if they had more political savvy, they could have worked with their ministers to start the process of turning Russia into a constitutional monarchy. They weren't cut off from the rest of Europe. They must've seen what worked and what didn't in their relation's countries. Sad because Alix knew her son's suffering came from her genes (Her brother Frittie and her uncle Leopold had hemophilia) Sad because Alix did so want to Do Something - else she would not have got up from her chaise lounge and try to nurse and then to govern the country while Nicky was at war.

The bits about Alix's illnesses were quite interesting. Could the porphyria George III allegedly suffered been passed down to her? Was it that and not just her shyness that turned her from an active child to a reclusive bedridden empress?

Also, the Imperial Family's home life was not as idyllic as depicted in other books. The Grand Duchesses were not one personality ("OTMA") in four bodies but four different personalities who at times were catty towards each other. The Empress and Ania Verbovva were not so much bosom chums as rivals for the Tsar's affections.

Tracie says

Maybe a 2.5.

Title was misleading. I thought this was to be a love story but it was all about Alix's health problems and Nicky's indecisiveness. And it was so political. I also disliked the author's writing style. She was presumptuous and enjoyed acting as if she knew exactly what the family was thinking or meant the entire book. Her sources were shaky at best and her notes were badly done. And she bounced around too much. The last 50 pages were so boring and hard to get through.

Jenna says

I really, really wanted to love this book. Massie's 'Nicholas & Alexandra' is one of my favorite books, so I was looking forward to this update now that much new information is available from the Russian archives. Overall, though the information it contained was good, this book was a disappointment.

First of all, the organization was weird. Rounding begins with chapters organized by topic, but about halfway through switches to organizing each chapter chronologically, starting over again with the beginning of their relationship. This seems really odd to me. As a historian and Russophile, I know enough of the story to understand what was going on, but someone less familiar with the Romanov family would probably get lost at the start of the book. Weaving the themes throughout the chronology is pretty standard for biographies, and deviating from that did not work well in this book.

Secondly, the writing seemed very amateur to me. It read more like a graduate thesis than a work by a professional historian or writer. There were too many personal interjections and the editing seemed a little sloppy. There were also numerous instances where I felt like Rounding was really trying to force the story to

fit her theme, rather than allowing the story to unfold.

It was not a terrible book by any means. I enjoyed the increased emphasis on Nicky and Alix as people rather than political figures. There was some information that was new to me; the role of Anna Vyrubova was especially interesting.

Overall, though, I found myself wishing that the book featuring all this new material about Nicholas and Alexandra had been written by someone more experienced. I'd much rather read another book by Robert Massie, updated with the new archival information, but alas, that does not yet exist. This book is interesting, but simply not as good as it could have been.

Ashley says

This book was really fascinating concerning the relationship between Nicky and Alix and their children. It really went into Rasputin's huge influence over the family. The main things I has problems with was the author jumping around switching to events sometimes out of order. Nicky and Alix's anti-Semitism really turned me off and Alix's using her invalid state as a tool to control her children. My favorite parts were when the author did a personality test on Nicky with very accurate results that helped the reader understand him better because he was so reserved. I also found the ending dramatically written and eerie with Biblical texts comparing the Romanovs fate and how they courageously approached it. Over all, it was a very interesting book, sometimes tiring to read, sometimes really fascinating. The author really brings out the Romanov's complex personalities and humanity that has often been mislabeled. Having had a dream about the Romanovs, this book was very interesting to explore who they were better. Recommended for any bio buffs.

Kathleen says

This is a pretty rough read. Not because it's not a compelling story-- it is, though it can be dense at times and perhaps overly confusing in the description of the ministerial musical chairs and other things-- it's more because the story is almost too compelling.

We know, most people, that Alexandra and Nicholas, their five children, three servants, and personal doctor were shot in a cellar maybe a year after the tsar abdicated. What made this book so difficult for me was that I got to know Alexandra and Nicholas very well, almost personally, and I knew all along what was going to happen. Around the chapter where Nicholas abdicated, I nearly stopped reading.

The last chapter is very worthwhile, though. It intersperses Biblical quotations with an almost lyrical description of the family's months of confinement, and then discusses the subsequent canonization of the family with gentle speculation. This whole book is like that, actually, minus the Biblical quotations-- clear-eyed but kind, and well worth the read if you are interested in the last Russian tsar.

Susan says

This is an account of the love story, and the tragedy, of the ill-fated Nicholas and Alexandra. As one reviewer on Amazon pointed out, it's more of a psychological study of the pair than a straight biography--and

if you don't have at least a basic knowledge of this period, you may find yourself lost at times. The author relies heavily on the couple's letters, which (especially in Alix's case) are variously heartbreaking, mushy, appalling, and poignant. Rounding is sympathetic toward her subjects but takes a clear-eyed view of their faults.

I'm not knowledgeable about this period, but the book seems to have met with favor from those who are. I recommend it.

Kirsty says

Alix and Nicky remained on my TBR shelf for over two years, and after reading, I have no idea why that was. Well, perhaps the fact that my copy is rather a large hardback which was incredibly difficult to juggle whilst in bed...

I am a self-confessed Russian history nerd. I studied Russian history, from Peter the Great to the modern day, throughout my A Level History course and as part of my undergraduate degree. There's something about it which is both mysterious and compelling. It is perhaps no surprise, then, that I picked this up when I was on a trip to Oxford.

Alix and Nicky is both rich and thorough, and I thought that the non-reliance upon a rigid chronological structure worked incredibly well. The writing is strong, the vocabulary varied, and the chapters wonderfully structured. I feel as though I learnt a lot whilst reading, which is always a bonus. Virginia Rounding is an author whom I haven't read before, but based upon this, I have added the rest of her bibliography to my to-read list, and have a feeling that there will be some gems in store for me.

Jillian (PidginPea's Book Nook) says

I received this book for free as a First Reads giveaway.

I have no doubt that in the right hands, this book would get a solid 5 out of 5 star rating. It is obvious that the book was thoroughly researched, and that the author has a great interest in this topic and a passion for acting as a "curator" to gather the various accounts and opinions of Alix and Nicky. I really admire and respect all the work that very clearly went into this book on the part of the author. Unfortunately, I didn't really enjoy reading it.

The "passion" that is in the title refers to both definitions of the word: emotion as well as suffering. When I first read the book's title, I took it to be the emotional kind of passion and looked forward to a book mostly about the love between Alix and Nicky. I think the book is actually heavier on the suffering side; there is a lot of detail about their struggles, their troubles relating to the Russian people, their personality traits, Alix's illness, etc. When the emotional side came up, I really got into it and read eagerly. But there seemed to be more talk of politics and military events; there just wasn't enough of their love story for me. Don't get me wrong - I love history, and I love non-fiction history/biography books, but this book didn't bring history to life for me. It was a rather dry restating of facts and events.

The book is separated into chapters that highlight important aspects of Alix and Nicky's lives. The chapters bounce around quite a bit, not really following any chronological order. One minute we're reading about Nicky's childhood, the next Alix is a grown woman and has been married to Nicky for years, the next Alix

and Nicky are writing love letters to each other before they were engaged, and the next we're reading about Nicky's childhood again. Another issue, although this is no fault of the author's, is the Russian names of friends, family, and important figures - they are all pretty similar (to my American eyes) and it was hard to keep track of who was who. The author does provide a list of characters, essentially, at the front of the book, and also gives a little reminder each time a character is brought up of what role they play, but I still became very confused very quickly.

I have to state again just how much effort clearly went into this book, and how sure I am that someone else would give this a shining review. But to me, it was simply "ok" - it's just not my type of book. I had to force myself to sit down and read, and then I found myself flipping ahead to see how much more I had to read before I got to the end of the chapter. Because of this, I just can't give it better than 2 stars.

Rebecca Huston says

I am going to be brutally honest here and state right up front that I did not like this book very much. While I appreciated some aspects, such as the descriptions of the palaces, and various celebrations such as in 1913 and the coronation, the author's attitude was sarcastic and at times snide -- that's hard to take in a nonfiction, historical book. Most frustrating was the nonlinear format of telling the story, and the constant jumping about by the author -- it was annoying and made the story difficult to follow. Three stars overall, not recommended.

For the longer review, please go here:
<http://www.epinions.com/review/Virgin...>

Arzu says

I have always been fascinated with the Romanovs due to a childhood obsession with the film 'Anastasia.' I also did a project on them for my European history class during my freshman year in high school. However, I did not realize how ignorant I was on their history until I read this book.

I was blown away by how Virginia Rounding manage to personalize all the Romanovs, especially Alix & Nicky. It was amazing being able to read letters of theirs and to really get to know their personalities. As a history graduate, I honestly felt like I had come across a gold mine.

I also enjoyed just how human they were, because I think for a long time the Romanovs seemed to be like mythical characters to me. I found myself relating to Alix on an anxiety/depression level because from what I read it seemed as though she did suffer from both issues as well as agoraphobia.

I honestly couldn't put the book down. The names of family members did get a bit confusing after a while, with people being named after each other or having similar names, but the overall gist of the book - the humanity, the frailty, of the Romanovs - came across really well. I highly recommend this book to anyone wishing for a more personal look inside one of history's most famous families.
