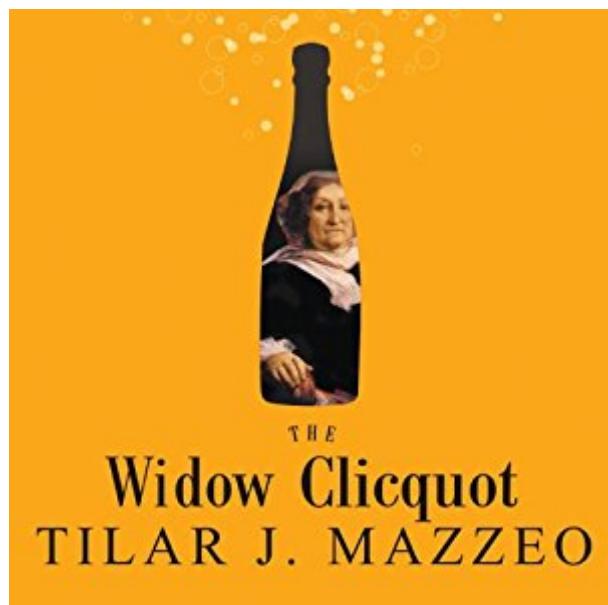


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The Widow Clicquot: The Story Of A Champagne Empire And The Woman Who Ruled It



Synopsis

The Widow Clicquot is the New York Times bestselling business biography of the visionary young widow who built a champagne empire, became a legend in her tumultuous times, and showed the world how to live with style. Tilar J. Mazzeo brings to life the woman behind the label, Barbe-Nicole Clicquot Ponsardin, in this utterly intoxicating book that is as much a fascinating journey through the process of making this temperamental wine as a biography of a uniquely tempered and fascinating woman. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Tilar Mazzeo's The Widow Clicquot tells the story of one of the most interesting of the early champagne tycoons: a woman who, in the turmoil of the Napoleonic Wars, founded a dynasty. Barbe-Nicole Ponsardin, the daughter of a prosperous Reims merchant, married into the Clicquot family, who sold both cloth and wine. After her husband's death, she chose to continue running the family's wine business, concentrating on the fizzy wine we now call champagne. The Widow Clicquot faced long odds-indeed, she was a true gambler-because travel was hazardous and much of the export market was closed. Still, she clung to her vision with a remarkable tenacity and was ultimately successful-Veuve Clicquot Ponsardin is still one of the best known champagne houses in the world. The book has a great deal of interesting information on the history and production of champagne-this gives the Widow's life some context. Mazzeo's finest moment is her taut telling of the delivery of the 1811 vintage under the specter of war in 1813. Mazzeo clearly sets the scene

and lets the reader know just how high the stakes are. We really get a sense of the menace-and triumph-of the Widow's life. Much of what happens after that drama, which falls about in the middle of the book, is unfortunately anti-climax. Mazzeo's problem is that there simply aren't any sources to guide her: since the Widow left scanty records of her personal life, we just don't know what was going on there. It's no coincidence that a well-documented episode from the Widow's business career is the best part of the book: clearly, there were solid sources to ground the story here. There also seems to be a great deal of telling, rather than showing in the narrative. Time and again, the reader is told that Barbe-Nicole was an exceptional woman, and that she couldn't have been successful had she started her career a few years earlier or a few years later. We are also reminded frequently that Barbe-Nicole was middle class-but she came from one of the wealthiest families in Reims and ultimately ran a multi-billion dollar (in today's terms) business empire. True, she was not a titled noble, but today's audiences might not consider a woman born to her privilege and riches "middle class." Much of the problem is apparent in the title-it's just too wordy for its own good. Why not "The Widow Clicquot: The Woman Who Ruled a Champagne Empire?" The book suffers similarly-though it's less than 200 pages, it still feels repetitious and over-long at points. It's too bad, because Mazzeo has a great story to tell, and where she's got the benefit of solid sources, she's does a fine job. Perhaps this story would have worked better as one chapter in a book devoted to similar pioneers? It's certainly a good read, and a story that more people should know about.

As a lover of history, a career woman who takes pride in other women's achievements in the business world, and an oenophile (whose favorite champagne is Clicquot), I could hardly wait to read this book. In fact, the summary of the book seemed to be written just for me! What I found when I read this book, however, was very different from what I expected. I feel as if I read a "docudrama" or some similar fictional account based loosely upon a few historical facts. The Widow Clicquot should have been a 50 page thesis for a history grad student (assuming the author was first able to unearth sufficient historical facts). Instead, the author stretched this book to 194 pages in the advance review copy - at least 100 pages past the book's historical-accuracy-breaking-point. The author did her readers a great disservice by attempting to write a biography about Madame Clicquot when the author herself repeatedly admits in the book that she could find almost no recorded history about the lady. Was this book pursued purely for commercial reasons, without regard to the lack of substantive content? Was the author too wrapped up in her intellectual love affair with the concept of Madame Clicquot to recognize that "The Story of a Champagne Empire and the Woman Who Ruled It" fails to tell us much of anything about how Madame created her

Champagne Empire, or how she ruled it? My greatest complaint is that Ms. Mazzeo tries to create historical fact out of thin air throughout *The Widow Clicquot*. I could provide innumerable examples of the author leaping to conclusions about what Clicquot felt or saw, what Clicquot did and why she did it - all without any sort of reference material to back up her conclusions. For example, the way Ms. Mazzeo writes should provide you with an idea of my problems with this book: "Barbe-Nicole probably also learned..." "Barbe-Nicole certainly learned..." "Barbe-Nicole surely did not miss..." (pages 42-43 of the ARC). Time and again throughout the book, Ms. Mazzeo makes leaps of logic regarding what Madame Clicquot knew, did, loved, liked, disliked and how she felt. I understand that some assumptions must be made about a historical figure about whom so little appears to be known, but the casual way the author has managed to spin a tale that is nearly empty of hard fact while being full of gossip, innuendo and guess - well, it didn't sit well with me, and if you are a student of history, I doubt it will sit well with you, either.

I read this book two months ago, and it's still frustrating to think that something so poorly crafted and built on a flimsy foundation could have made it to the best seller list. Seriously? There are so many awesome books which will never get popular, and THIS one snags a ride on the hype machine. "Non-fiction" means a book is factual, unless the definitions have changed along the line and I didn't get the email update. This book, in its hundreds of pages, has about the same amount of facts as your average Huffington Post article. It could actually have been an entertaining read if it was re-engineered to be a dramatic fictional retelling based on fact, like a Tracy Chevalier or a Susan Vreeland book--oh hey, that's totally a real painting, but here's a fun new story I made up for it. Instead, this book is asking you to bore through page after page of "she possibly did this" or "this might've been the circumstance" and take that as legit non-fiction.

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