



Rasputin: A Short Life

Frances Welch

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Told with humor, intrigue, and a shrewd eye for detail, this riveting short biography sheds much-needed light on the life of nineteenth-century Russian icon Grigory Rasputin.

Grigory Rasputin, a Siberian peasant turned mystic and court sage, was as fascinating as he was unfathomable. He played the role of the simple man, eating with his fingers and boasting, "I don't even know the ABC." But, as the only person able to relieve the symptoms of hemophilia in the Tsar's heir Alexei, he gained almost hallowed status within the Imperial court.

During the last decade of his life, Rasputin and his band of "little ladies" came to symbolize all that was decadent, corrupt, and remote about the Imperial Family, especially when it was rumored that he was not only shaping Russian policy during the First World War, but also enjoying an intimate relationship with the Empress...

Rasputin's role in the downfall of the tsarist regime is beyond dispute. But who was he really? Prophet or rascal? A "breath of rank air...who blew away the cobwebs of the Imperial Palace," as Beryl Bainbridge put it, or a dangerous deviant?

Writing for historical aficionados and curious readers alike, Frances Welch turns her inimitable wry gaze on one of the great mysteries of Russian history.

Rasputin: A Short Life Details

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Author : Frances Welch

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From Reader Review *Rasputin: A Short Life* for online ebook

F.R. says

My wife is a great fan of the Boney-M song (in fact it was played at our wedding) and having read this entertaining, short biography I think it's safe to say that he was "*a cat that really was gone*". However we can't give him the title "*Russia's greatest love machine*" as that would mean over-looking an alarming number of alleged sexual assaults; and we can categorically dismiss the claim that he was "*lover of the Russian queen*". Truly though "*it was a shame how he carried on*"

We're at the sharp end of history here, in the whirl of events leading up to the downfall of the Romanovs in the Russian revolution (one commentator makes the point that without Rasputin, there wouldn't have been a Lenin.) It is frankly astounding just how much influence this bearded, unkempt mystic actually had. Letter after letter from the Tsarina is referenced where she quotes Rasputin's advice (some of it contradictory) and bullies her husband to act on it. All the time, outside the immediate royal circle, the nest of his opponents grows every day, while he's such a public figure that salacious gossip about his relations with the Tsarina spreads right throughout the populous.

It's hard here to get a grasp of Rasputin's character, it seems likely that a team of psychiatrists sitting down with the man for a month would struggle, let alone a biographer one hundred years later. He is like a dervish at the centre of the madness, clearly in some ways charismatic but also distinctly off-putting. This was a time of mystics, healers and charlatans at the Russian court (a contemporary and implacable foe of Rasputin was a monk named Iliodor. Even though he had thousands of followers he never attained the fame or prestige of Rasputin and – bizarrely – ended his days as the janitor of the Municipal Life Building in New York). Hindsight is a wonderful thing so we know we're looking at the end of days for old and decrepit aristocracy here, but it's still incredible to see the level of trust they placed in this amoral, promiscuous, licentious self-proclaimed holy man.

It's an eyebrow raising and occasionally salacious read, albeit one that can get confusing as titled personage after titled personage shows up to first passionately support and then violently denounce Rasputin. You will though shake your head in wonder at how he could climb so high and then drag everybody – both supporters and opponents – so low.

Louise says

In this short biography the politics of pre-revolutionary Russia are a necessary part but take a back seat to the personal life of Grigori Rasputin. There is a lot that is unsavory about this "Man of God's" life so this volume, by his very nature, would have a parental advisory in the movie world.

It is a quick read. Even for those who know the story there is new (or at least new to me) material. The book is not footnoted so it is unclear how much some assertions are interpretative. Some are significant, for instance, did Yussoufov (one of the assassins) discuss a cure for his homosexuality with Rasputin on an earlier occasion? Some are interesting but not so significant, for instance, did the Romanov daughters keep lockets with Rasputin's picture throughout their incarceration?

The last pages were of the most interest. They capsize what became of the main people in Rasputin's life.

While most of the nobility perished in the Revolution, Rasputin's assassins were (safely) exiled before the empire's ultimate fall. Rasputin's family, considered wealthy peasants, did not fare better than the nobles although his daughter survived until 1977 in the US in ways that are as amazing as (but very different from) those of her father.

This is a light and spicy overview for those with general interest in the topic. For those who want more depth I recommend Rasputin: The Untold Story.

Bridie says

What a horrible example of a human being. To state that his own actions and sins would cleanse others of their own, and then actively seek out those sins in order to engage. I mean, extra-marital affairs, alcoholism and whispers of rape --- to be frowned upon unless you are Rasputin, then you are assisting others who have engaged to cleanse their own.

I feel what I was most interested in was how Rasputin managed to manipulate the Tsar and Tsarina into granting him such power, wealth and control with little to no consequences.

Absolutely fascinating read.

Susan says

If you ever wondered how much of the Russian Revolution was Rasputin and how much was the ineptitude of the Tsar, Ms Welch did a good job showing how Rasputin was a pawn, and a corrupt one at that, of the Tsarina. History blames Rasputin wholly, but I think that is rather sexist -- no one wants to say that it was a woman, and a German princess at that, who really botched up everything. Welch does a good job of laying the blame where it should be -- on Her head. It would have been nice had it been better edited, or at points fuller like the Dr Baemaev piece, but it was good that the black and white pictures were throughout the book and not like just in the middle. It was enjoyable as well enlightening reading. I would recommend it.

Fiona MacDonald says

Knowing very little about Rasputin I was fascinated to read Frances Welch's account of this dangerous yet strangely charismatic man. I was absolutely blown away by this book. It was insightful, easy to read, wonderfully researched and at times frankly hilarious. Welch goes into amazingly intricate detail about Rasputin, from his birth right up until his assassination and finishing the book has simply made me more interested in his story. The impact he had over the Romanov family, in particular the Tsarina was rather frightening in my opinion, and in my head I was likening him to Charles Manson, who appeared to 'bewitch' his followers by spouting rubbish about his own sort of 'religion'.

Frances Welch should be highly congratulated, she has encouraged me to read more about Rasputin, feeding my curiosity in ways that would not have happened if I had not read her book.

Keiran Thegreat says

Clear, concise and well phrased. A fascinating and even-handed look at one of Russian history's most polarising and mysterious figures.

Jeanette says

Terribly choppy read. Mostly hearsay from dubious witnesses, like Rasputin's daughter, Maria. Definitely perverse and frenetic mentally ill individual, IMHO, who was almost constantly drunk. So many cult related sadistic or perverted to controlling behaviors throughout the cultural mores and belief system of the larger society (especially within the ruling nobles), existed that an individual with characteristics of a Rasputin was thought to have mystic powers and several kinds of paranormal abilities by his presence or touch.

The photographs were far more interesting than the print, to me. You need a strong stomach to visualize some of these eating, hygiene, physiology condition descriptions and explanations mentioned randomly and often within the print. Not just in Rasputin's case, either.

Rasputin was murdered, and the entire Tsar's family murdered, as well, about 19 months after Rasputin's death.

It's probably a 3 star in the context of the total Rasputin life's facts being accurate. The photographs and pictures are 4 star. Coming near the end of WWI, Rasputin's assassination was effected by some members of the noble class close to the Tsar and Tsarina coupled with aid from King George (England's king, a cousin). It was believed a separate peace was going to be reached by Germany with Russia because of the influences of Rasputin. All of it seems historic guesswork, far more than any surety. And most survivors who are visual witnesses in close association wanted to continue connection with the cult following for monetary reasons as they lived in exile during the years after the Revolution. Continually changing their stories for better pay offs or living conditions. Regardless, it seems the Tsarina had more politico direction to the situation than the Tsar. And had great reliance upon the "safety" she felt under a Rasputin voicing of control and prophecy. Overall, nasty, mean and crude over rode any kind of holy when it comes down to the man himself.

Viv JM says

I blame Boney M for my choosing this book for Task 6 of the Book Riot Read Harder Challenge (to read a biography)! Unfortunately, the whole time of reading it I have had a "Ra-Ra-Rasputin" earworm to contend with!

As to the book - it's a short but entertaining look at the life and death of the controversial figure of Rasputin, with reference made to a variety of sources.

Jo says

A brief biography of Rasputin, the Mad Monk of Russia. I remember learning about him briefly at school

when we were studying Russia but this is the first biography I've read. Whether you believe he was a mystic or a charlatan, he certainly led an interesting life. He also had bloody big cojones to get away with the things he did. This is a great introduction to Rasputin if you've never heard of him or know little although you might end up like me with the Boney M song stuck in your head for days.

Alvin says

Entertainingly salacious and macabre, but poorly edited and sorely lacking in historical context and analysis.

Dalton Valette says

Better suited for children than adults. Welch's writing and structure borders on that of crassness while providing skimpy details on the vastly interesting Rasputin. I try and find redeeming qualities, be it from something even as minuscule as good pictures or credits, but fail to find any at all. A horribly disappointing read for a subject that requires far better.

Cat (cat-thecatladylady) says

quite interesting and fun to read, short and entertaining. it had a bit of a campy style but it made all the craziness of this whole tale more outrageous. I have a deep fascination with this Rasputin character and the more I know about it, the more I love it

Rai says

It's hard to find anything good to say about 'Rasputin', except for it was short. I'm very thankful it was short, because otherwise, I wouldn't have got through it. Frances Welch really gives it her all when it comes to sensationalizing history. I'm going to keep this review short because for me 2018 is the year of not spending too much time on things I'm not / didn't enjoy.

I hate when history books / biographies don't give notes - I might not read those notes but at least I can go back and see where the writer has got their information from; even a bibliography would do. Welch gives us neither, and I do genuinely think it's because a lot of what she writes is pure and total hearsay. She writes so many sensational things, gives wide sweeping statements and attributes quotes to Rasputin, and then doesn't back her information up with anything at all.

In fact 'Rasputin' is more an account of Rasputin's sex life than his actual journey through religion, mysticism and politics. Welch is more concerned with the contents of Rasputin's trousers and where he puts them than how he influenced the Royal family – sure, she mentions that but it's obvious it's completely secondary to her.

I went into this hoping for a better look at one of the most conflicting figures of Russian history. I knew I wasn't going to get anything amazingly detailed due to how short the book is, but I thought it'd be a nice

taste that'd lead to me wanting to go deeper into Rasputin's life and biographies. Now it turns out that being short is this book's only saving grace.

2 / 5

Jose says

É uma leitura rápida e interessante mas não acrescenta muito ao que já sabia...

Zachary Owen says

I picked up *Rasputin: A Short Life* because Frances Welch, I'd heard, wasn't afraid to spend some time on the rumors and more sensational aspects of Rasputin's life. After reading two very factual books on the notorious Mad Monk I wanted something that would dive into the more bizarre elements of his life (the amount of crazy stories about Rasputin and his cronies seems practically endless) and I was not disappointed. To those painting the book as **purely** a sensational account: I think that's a bit unfair. Welch does do a good job separating pure fact from speculation, rumor, hear-say, and complete fabrication. It may not be the definitive account of Rasputin, but it was certainly one of the most entertaining. A good companion book to more historically minded studies of Rasputin.
