



Marie-Therese, Child of Terror: The Fate of Marie Antoinette's Daughter

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The first major biography of one of France's most mysterious women—Marie Antoinette's only child to survive the revolution.

Susan Nagel, author of the critically acclaimed biography *Mistress of the Elgin Marbles*, turns her attention to the life of a remarkable woman who both defined and shaped an era, the tumultuous last days of the crumbling *ancien régime*. Nagel brings the formidable Marie-Thérèse to life, along with the age of revolution and the waning days of the aristocracy, in a page-turning biography that will appeal to fans of Antonia Fraser's *Marie Antoinette* and Amanda Foreman's *Georgiana: Duchess of Devonshire*.

In December 1795, at midnight on her seventeenth birthday, Marie-Thérèse, the only surviving child of Marie Antoinette and Louis XVI, escaped from Paris's notorious Temple Prison. To this day many believe that the real Marie-Thérèse, traumatized following her family's brutal execution during the Reign of Terror, switched identities with an illegitimate half sister who was often mistaken for her twin. Was the real Marie-Thérèse spirited away to a remote castle to live her life as the woman called "the Dark Countess," while an imposter played her role on the political stage of Europe? Now, two hundred years later, using handwriting samples, DNA testing, and an undiscovered cache of Bourbon family letters, Nagel finally solves this mystery. She tells the remarkable story in full and draws a vivid portrait of an astonishing woman who both defined and shaped an era. Marie-Thérèse's deliberate choice of husbands determined the map of nineteenth-century Europe. Even Napoleon was in awe and called her "the only man in the family." Nagel's gripping narrative captures the events of her fascinating life from her very public birth in front of the rowdy crowds and her precocious childhood to her hideous time in prison and her later reincarnation in the public eye as a saint, and, above all, her fierce loyalty to France throughout.

Marie-Therese, Child of Terror: The Fate of Marie Antoinette's Daughter Details

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Anna says

After reading many biographies on Marie Antoinette, I knew she had four children - two died as children, one - Louis XVII - at the Temple Prison in Paris, and the eldest, Marie-Thérèse, survived. But Madame Royale, as Marie-Thérèse was known as eldest daughter of the King, not only survived but went on to live a long and eventful life.

Born after years of a childless marriage between Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette, Marie-Thérèse (named after her grandmother, Austrian Empress Maria Theresa) had a lavish childhood at Versailles. She had loving parents and siblings she adored. But her world came tumbling down with the French Revolution. I very much enjoyed Nagel's portrait of the Revolution - never forgetting Marie-Thérèse's point of view while in their house arrest in the Tuileries or during their ill-fated escape to Varennes. The chapters describing their life at the Temple Prison are heartbreaking, descriptions of the lonely teenager, locked into a disgusting cell, having already lost her father, not knowing her mother and beloved aunt Madame Elisabeth had been guillotined and often hearing her little brother being tortured. And yet is hard to pity Marie-Thérèse: she comes accross as an incredibly strong and confident young woman, and it's easy to see how she would always survive.

Once the Directory comes into power Marie-Thérèse's life changes, she manages to escape to her mother's birthplace of Austria and her new life finally begins. As a pawn in the European marriage market she stays in Vienna until her marriage to her first cousin, the Duc D'Angoulême, son of the future Charles X. Alongside her uncle Louis XVIII, Marie-Thérèse would become a powerful woman, going through her many grievances in life with extreme dignity and her head always held high. Marie-Thérèse believed in her duty to the King and France over anything, and her piety and capacity for forgiveness were remarkable. She does truly come to life through Nagel's words, and I really could not stop reading about her story.

My only problems with the book were - the lack of notes, but the research is so incredible I can overlook it; and how little the relationship between Duc and Duchesse D'Angoulême was analyzed. But overall, the book was fantastic, and I'm glad to know more about Marie-Thérèse's life. Napoleon called her "the only man" in her family - and he was not mistaken.

Barbara says

Fascinating account of the life of Marie-Therese. Before reading this, I knew of her existence but nothing more. What a sad life she led. After her gilded start in life, she was imprisoned (which I knew), had to deal with the deaths of her parents and siblings, married out of duty not love, had no children, and spent her life moving around, seeking (and twice seeing) the restoration of Bourbon rule in France. A particularly interesting part of her story was speculation that she wasn't who she said she was (switched places with her supposed illegitimate half-sister?) and the possibility that her brother hadn't really died in the Temple prison.

Victoria says

I have been familiar with the history of the French Revolution and familiar with her parents but I didn't know much about Marie-Térèse with the exception of the fact that she died childless. This was a fascinating account of her life, with exceptional detail and sympathetic eye on the Royal family. I found that the details were sometimes a bit too much (and heavy), but it was a compliment to the story.

Natalie Wright says

2.5

Let me preface this super mini review by saying that I think that part of my problem with this book was that I listened to it on audiobook. Keeping track of all of the people in the latter half of the book got to be a bit of a problem, especially because by the time I got about 3/4 of the way through the book I was, admittedly, a little bit bored.

My largest problem, however, was that I had a hard time believing some (I repeat: some, not all) of the things that the author said. While I knew next to nothing about Marie Antoinette's sole surviving daughter, I have read and researched extensively on Marie Antoinette herself. There were many instances during Marie Therese that I felt the information contradicted a lot of what I had previously read. I have a long list of things that I plan on researching after this book, so I'm not going to say that the information is entirely inaccurate, I just have my doubts. I will also be locating my physical copy of the book so that I can look at the sources she used and what not. I'll update my review with more thoughts after I compile my findings!

Also, all of that being said, I didn't necessarily dislike the book! I did find much of the information about Marie Therese to be very interesting, and I'm excited to research further!

Louise says

Most important to me in a biography is that the writer lay out the story of the person and the times in an interesting and readable way. For the writer this means finding the right balance between documenting, which can get very dry, and telling, which calls for judgment of what to leave in and out. Susan Nagel has hit a perfect balance. She has sorted through a tremendous number of sources and created what may be the first biography of the only surviving child of Marie Antoinette.

Next in importance to me when I read a biography is feeling, at the end, that I know and understand the person who is chronicled. For a subject such as Marie-Therese, the author must bridge the centuries so that the modern reader can actually understand a believer in the divine right of kings. Here, Nagel shows that she has come to know her subject and this period in France and she communicates it very well.

History certainly has some interesting twists and turns. The most interesting to me, in this book, is the support of the British monarchy for the Bourbon exiles not long after concluding a war against them. Another smaller curiosity is how in exile, in the rudest of circumstances, the royals maintain protocol. They bow before each other and then leave rooms in a prescribed order.

Susan Nagel does a wonderful job. For anyone interested in European history, she has created an excellent read.

Colleen McCarthy says

A lot of interesting detail about the French Revolution and the aftermath that I had never heard before - so that kept me reading, but I had 2 big issues with this book:

1. It's written as though the French royalty were saints as if everything everyone besides Marie Antoinette, Louis the 16th, and Marie Therese did was right and the rest were wrong...Even the adjectives she uses for everyone else are negative - even though I'm not sure she really has enough historical info to describe some of these people. Yes, what happened to them was gruesome and cruel and the French Revolution was extremely bloody and violent. But the royalty weren't blameless in everything that happened. For instance, one of the reasons the family did not escape before they were guillotined was that Marie Antoinette went on a shopping spree - buying a whole new set of clothes and all sorts of perfumes,etc - that tipped off the revolutionaries that they were trying to flee. She keeps trying to endear us to the royal family by saying things like "the revolutionaries didn't even let them change their clothes for a whole day." Not sure that makes me feel so bad for them compared to the common French citizen who didn't have enough to eat.
2. The description of the book talks about the theory of the Dark Countess and a potential switch after Marie Therese escaped the prison with her half sister. However, that's barely touched on in the book and most of the discussion of this is left to an "Afterword" almost like the author forgot to address it until then. So if you are really interested in that story, this isn't the book for you.

It's still worth a read if you are interested in the history post-revolution of the French royalty and Europe in general in the 1800s. Would have never learned that there are a bunch of people who are direct descendants of the King who still claim the French throne today in Europe!

Juliet-Camille says

This was absolutely excellent! One of the strongest, and well researched biographies **of any person** I've read in a long time.

I've read a lot of books, and biographies, about Marie-Antoinette and the French Revolution, and looking back I shutter to realize how seldomly noted her eldest child (her only child to make it to adulthood) is in the historical context of all those collected works.

This is a new all time favorite of mine.

Lauren Albert says

This is practically a hagiography of the royal family. It is a shame because her obvious tendency to adoration makes her portrayal--sometimes, I'm sure, unfairly--seem less believable. It is an interesting story about someone I knew nothing about. I realize that Nagel might simply be attempting to counter narratives biased in the other way of the "let them eat cake" sort. But the constant references, for instance, to members of the royal family "charming" people made this reader think that perhaps it was a case of "the lady doth protest too much." Perhaps they really were all charming people. But we'd know that only through accounts from people

of the time and it would have been better and more believable to let their words portray the royals without the intercession of the author's interpretations.

Carol says

This excellent biography of the only surviving child of Marie Antoinette and Louis XVI gives an outstanding, scholarly but easily-read depiction of the events and atmosphere leading up to her birth and throughout her more than seven decades of life. I was especiallh impressed by the ease with which rumors could be spread in the mostly-illiterate population, by the role of Louis XVI's cousin Louis-Philippe in propagating rumors in the hope of his own succession and Louis-Philippe's disingenousness. He could be a modern sleazy politician. Courts tended to have lots of attendants, they were, in essence, jobs programs. In exile, royals were surrounded by emigres who wanted jobs. The lot of royal females was miserable under Salic law (which demanded male succession, thus making females only useful for marriage bartering, in the usually-vain hope of gaining the friendship of another country.)

Kiesha ~ 1Cheekylass says

Such a sad, sad, story.

Holly says

An interesting subject, but the book suffers mightily from the author's inability to express anything but the highest praise for Marie-Therese. She is always intelligent, kind, thoughtful, generous, charitable, etc., never sets a foot wrong, never makes a bad choice -- which makes her, in the end, rather impossible to like. At the same time, the massive events through which Marie-Therese lived are treated so superficially, and so much through a lens of what would or would not benefit or please Marie-Therese, that it is impossible to take any of it seriously. Nagel makes 90% the political crises of the Revolution and Restoration the fault of the greedy, grabbing Orleans family -- Marie-Therese blamed them, so why should we have a wider perspective? She mentions in passing that Count Fersen was in love with Marie Antoinette, but doesn't let the reader know that Fersen was at least plausibly her lover, and certainly a favorite of long standing. An omission like that, along with a strong implication that there would have been plenty to eat in Paris in 1789 if only the revolutionaries hadn't hoarded grain to goad the populace into fury just makes me think Nagel is hopelessly blinkered by her sympathies.

SlushTurtle says

I got this because it promised to reveal the true story of the "Dark Countess". I had no idea who she was, but she sounded like someone I wanted to get to know. She actually doesn't figure much into this book after all, but the story of Marie Antoinette's only surviving child was thrilling enough to hold my interest. And for the record- I think poor Marie got the shaft from history. I'm going to have to get a book on her next.

Lynne-marie says

Given her birth to Marie Antoinette, and the loss of the mother, father and younger brother in the French Revolution, you would expect Marie-Therese's life to be full of interest. Instead it's full of horror in it's French half and of dull priggishness once she is returned to the Germans, who allow her to marry back into the French royal family, a course that even the author seems to see as self-destructive. This is living proof that being born a "royal" does not make one a singular person. The book was no doubt historically correct, but was also without a doubt a crashing bore. I hate to have to say this but I cannot in all conscience recommend it, except to someone with a minutely particular interest in the French Royal family after the revolution.

The Wee Hen says

I don't think I've ever given a thought to whatever happened to Marie-Antoinette's daughter but am I glad I got my hands on this book and read it because Marie-Therese, Madame Royale Of France, was a fascinating woman. Versailles was her childhood home; opulence, deference, divine right and Privilege with a P were hers from birth. But Marie-Antoinette and her husband also instilled a deep and abiding religious faith as well as a serious case of Noblesse Oblige in the little girl that served her well in enduring the terrors committed against her family. Imprisoned for three years during her adolescence she didn't learn that her mother had been guillotined or her little brother slowly starved, beaten and neglected to death until some time after the fact. She remained silent for over a year rather than communicate with her very cruel captors. The young girl had a grave dignity that could not be broken. She finally emerged from prison to deal with the difficult and dangerous politics of her extended family where her cool head and firmly entrenched sense of duty to France afforded her a life of intrigue, power and tremendous respect amongst the royalty of late 18th century & early 19th century Europe. She was as much of a mover and shaker as a woman could be during these complicated and quickly evolving times. She denied herself a great deal of happiness by devoting her every move towards what she truly believed was in the best interests of the Bourbon family and the kingdom she knew was theirs by divine right, her beloved home, France, which she always left only under duress. Her greatest pain was being exiled from the country of her birth, away from the French people whom she always forgave and dearly loved.

Nagel writes a lovely biography, bringing Marie-Therese very much to life. Well researched, beautifully paced, I sped through this book with joy. Really good stuff here.

Emily Ross says

I really enjoyed this book. Having read a lot of Marie Antoinette biographies, it became quite difficult finding Marie-Thérèse biographies.

The only survivor of the royal family sent to the Temple, Marie-Thérèse comes across as a strong, independent, confident and regal woman. It was incredibly interesting to read about her life after the deaths of Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette.

The book itself felt quite easy to read. It was well researched and well written and I really enjoyed reading it.

My major complaint about this book was that it was supposed to tell the story of the Dark Countess, and small paragraphs were dedicated to her and the Dark Count occasionally, but I didn't really learn much about either of them. I didn't come out of the book knowing much more about them than I did going in. It also disrupted the flow of the book.
