



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

By Susan Nagel

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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.

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**Bibliography**

- Sales Rank: #876513 in Books
- Brand: Brand: Bloomsbury USA
- Published on: 2008-03-18
- Released on: 2008-03-18
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 231.90" h x 40.64" w x 6.73" l, 1.72 pounds
- Binding: Hardcover
- 418 pages

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### Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

What was the fate of Marie-Thérèse (1778–1851) after the beheadings of her parents, King Louis XVI and Queen Marie Antoinette of France? Nagel, professor of humanities at Marymount Manhattan College (*Mistress of the Elgin Marbles*), relates the dramatic highs and lows experienced by the woman known as Madame Royale. Her uncle, the Austrian emperor, wanted her to marry his brother, when she escaped from the Temple Prison at age 17 after three hellish years. Instead, she endured a loveless and childless marriage to her Bourbon cousin the Duc d'Angoulême, but became the close political ally of their uncle, Louis XVIII, whom she joined in his peripatetic exile and saw in his triumphant return to France in 1814 as king. Marie Thérèse survived the 1830 abdication of her father-in-law, Charles X, and died in exile. Known for her kindness and wit, she also endured persistent rumors that she was not the real Marie-Thérèse and the constant threat of abduction and assassination. Nagel's highly detailed and sympathetic account competently fills in historical gaps, but, unfortunately, is hampered by plodding prose. 16 pages of color illus; map. (*Apr.*) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

From [Booklist](#)

\*Starred Review\* Most people who know about the sad end of Queen Marie Antoinette of France also know that she left behind a daughter and a son. The boy died as a result of appalling abuse at the hands of prison guards, but what became of the girl? Born in 1778, Marie-Thérèse was just 17 when her release from three harrowing years of imprisonment was finally negotiated. Almost immediately, she became a powerful symbol and a political pawn. But Nagel shows her as having a mind of her own as she found refuge at the Austrian court; then she married her cousin and became part of the peripatetic French monarchy-in-exile. Finally, she helped to preside over the Restoration. Through it all she was an object of fascination, admired for her dignity and her steadfast devotion to the ideals of the ancien régime. The fascination persists even today in the legend of the Dark Countess, according to which the princess switched identities, and the woman the world knew as Marie-Thérèse was an imposter. This highly detailed, exhaustively researched, often-riveting account will appeal especially to all those readers who've immersed themselves in the many recent books about Marie Antoinette. --Mary Ellen Quinn

Review

"The woman in these pages emerges...as a veritable prototype of saintly Catholic forgiveness." ?*The Atlantic Monthly*

"In *Marie-Thérèse, Child of Terror*, Susan Nagel...faces the challenge of turning this largely unknown and fairly unsympathetic historical figure into a lively biographical subject....[Nagel] does capture the peculiar humanity of her subject as she evolved from princess to prisoner to decorous matron." ?*Valerie Styker, New York Times Book Review*

"Gripping....providing new insights into a misunderstood and tragic figure and showing us the real human buffeted by all those historical crosscurrents." ?*Martin Rubin, Washington Times*

"A fascinating, readable, and engrossing book that should interest general readers and scholars alike." ?*Library Journal, starred review*

"This highly detailed, exhaustively researched, often riveting account will appeal especially to all those

readers who've immersed themselves in the many recent books about Marie Antoinette" ?*Booklist*, starred review

"Relates the dramatic highs and lows experienced by the woman known as "Madame Royale"...highly detailed and sympathetic." ?*Publishers Weekly*

"Enlivened by intriguing asides about the young Marie-Thérèse, such as the special sign language she developed to communicate with her parents in prison and the impact on her own development of her mother's bravery in the face of the French Revolution." ?*Kirkus Reviews*

"Masterly and compelling...a triumph." ?*Tina Brown, author of the Diana Chronicles*

"Few historical tales can match the family drama of Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette. Beheaded in 1793 during the French Revolution, they left behind a daughter, Marie-Therese, who did everything she could to help restore the Bourbons to the throne. Author Susan Nagel puts to rest most of the doubts about the Bourbons (Was Therese the legitimate daughter? Did her brother the dauphin really die in Temple Prison?) via a thorough analysis of DNA samples and handwriting in family letters. But the best part of the tale isn't the clarification of the historical record--it's the engaging portrait Nagel paints of a young woman who gave up everything for the love of France and her family." ?*Virtuoso Life*

"Taking one of those fascinating lives that have remained too long untold, Susan Nagel's *Marie-Therese* is a well-researched, entertaining and often poignant biography that recreates royalty, terror, tragedy, revolution, and restoration with verve and vividness." ?*Simon Sebag Montefiore, author of Young Stalin and Stalin: The Court of the Red Star*

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