



The Wicked Queen: The Origins of the Myth of Marie-Antoinette

Chantal Thomas

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In *The Wicked Queen*, Chantal Thomas presents the history of the mythification of one of the most infamous queens in all history, whose execution still fascinates us today. Almost as soon as Marie-Antoinette, archduchess of Austria, was brought to France as the bride of Louis XVI in 1771, she was smothered in images. In a monarchy increasingly under assault, the charm and horror of her feminine body and her political power as a foreign intruder turned Marie-Antoinette into an alien other. Marie-Antoinette's mythification, argues Thomas, must be interpreted as the misogynist demonization of women's power and authority in revolutionary France. In a series of pamphlets written from the 1770s until her death in 1793, Marie-Antoinette is portrayed as a spendthrift, a libertine, an orgiastic lesbian, and a poisoner and infant murderess. In her analyses of these pamphlets, seven of which appear here in translation for the first time, Thomas reconstructs how the mounting hallucinatory and libelous discourse culminated in the inevitable destruction of what had become the counterrevolutionary symbol par excellence. *The Wicked Queen* exposes the elaborate process by which the myth of Marie-Antoinette emerged as a crucial element in the successful staging of the French Revolution.

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