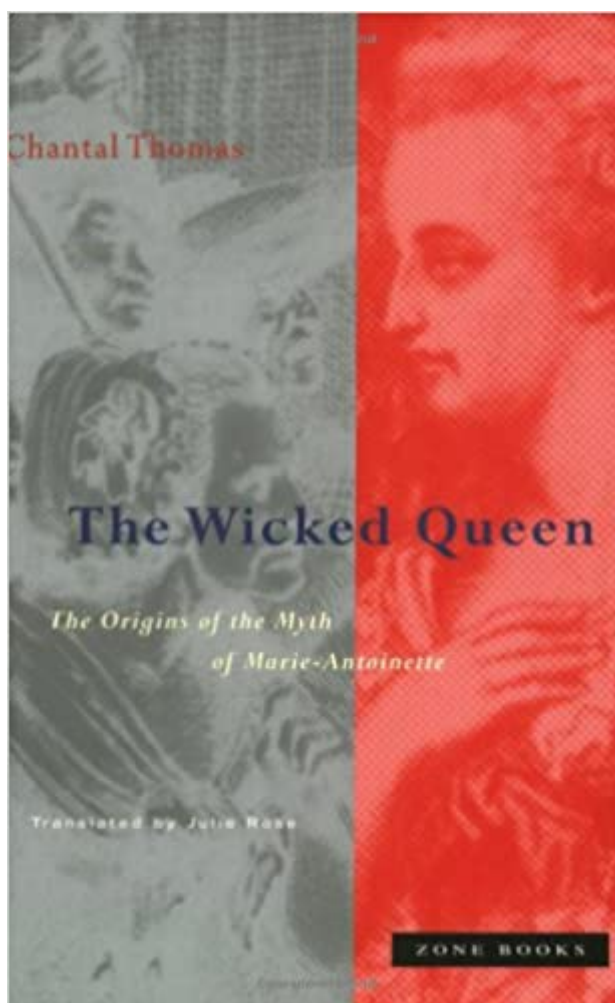


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# The Wicked Queen: The Origins Of The Myth Of Marie-Antoinette



## Synopsis

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.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Ignore the subtitle at your peril! This is strictly a study of the portrayal of Marie-Antoinette in contemporary propaganda pamphlets, particularly those emphasizing her supposed sexual proclivities. This unique approach produces some thought-provoking points. Whether the subject warrants a book-length study is, however, questionable. Thomas, the author of two studies of

libertinage published in France, argues that these pamphlets do not reflect the reality of the queen's conduct. This is self-evident in our sophisticated age and was probably fairly apparent even in the 18th century. The book is filled out with digressions, a useful chronology of Marie-Antoinette's life, an annotated cast of characters, and reprints of seven of the pamphlets. The tone is uneven, mixing obscure sociological jargon with the crudest street language. Recommended only for the largest academic or research libraries collecting in French history or propaganda. A Jean E.S. Storrs, Enoch Pratt Free Lib., Baltimore Copyright 1999 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Revolutionary agitation is always most effective when outrage can be concentrated on an individual or one class of people. Our Declaration of Independence demonized George III, though the colonists' real dispute was with a faction of Parliament. As a foreigner with a knack for putting her foot in her mouth, French queen Marie-Antoinette was an inviting target for agitators. Thomas, who has specialized in examining the mass culture of eighteenth-century France, does not attempt to find the "real" Marie-Antoinette. Rather, her target is the queen's detractors, who carried on a campaign of vilification and distortion, primarily via pamphlets, which contributed substantially to the undermining of the monarchy. The campaign began soon after Marie-Antoinette's arrival in France and continued with increasing intensity until her execution. She was variously accused of nymphomania, lesbianism, incest, and insensitive frivolity. This is an unusual and interesting examination of a primitive but quite effective effort at mass political indoctrination. Jay Freeman --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

I have long been obsessed with Marie Antoinette. I am, in fact, writing a book set in the court of Louis XVI. You can imagine my delight when I was informed about the pending release of Ms. Thomas's book. I had hoped her book would provide many examples of libel against the queen. I was hoping this book would detail who wrote what and when. I found this book to be an excuse to print a lot of nasty words. Ms. Thomas's views, while educated, were tired and repeated over and over again. Nothing in this book was thought-provoking or fresh. It did not illuminate or entertain. Very little was devoted to the effects of the words against the queen. How did this effect MA emotionally, physically? What did it do to the marriage of the King and Queen? What were the long-term impacts of these libelous ditty's? How did they effect journalism as we know it today? How did they contribute to the Revolution? All in all, a disappointment.

I regret I did not read these reviews before I bought this book. The digressions were very distracting. I was greatly offended by the vulgar language of the pamphlets. I had to throw the book out to prevent any one else being offended. At the time I bought this book I bought another that was more informative.

I am a college student majoring in History and I thank Chantal Thomas for writing this excellent work. I first ran across her name when researching the propaganda against Marie Antoinette (I wrote my thesis on this during the semester). I have found her to be the authority, at the present time, on the pamphlets, propaganda, etc. written against MA. If you are interested in reading about this, I strongly recommend this book. She includes copies of the actual pamphlets written and they are truly fascinating. One can see the fervor of the Paris mob on the pages of these vile, xrated pieces. If you love French history or women's history, buy this book today!

"The Wicked Queen" by Chantal Thomas is a thoughtful, well-researched book that explores the role of the queen in France, as well as how -- through the power of the propaganda hate machine -- the public image of Marie Antoinette was morphed from the sweet, fresh-faced Dauphine that the people adored upon her arrival in France; to the sexually deviant, murderous queen they accused her of being as the revolution took hold. As a bonus, in the back of the book are a handful of the original pamphlets of the day, fully translated into English. These are quite interesting, as I've always wanted to read some of the unedited, infamous pieces of propaganda (some of which are often referenced in various biographies of Marie Antoinette). One can almost feel the sadistic glee infused into the writing, which was specifically crafted to tap into the public's rage and despair over the prevailing social order, using one woman as a scape-goat for all evils. As such, the pamphlets' content is quite crude and blunt . . . so if you're not keen on reading the disgusting specifics of the accusations hurled at the queen, you may easily skip that section of the book. (It's pretty much a separate entity, buried behind Author's Notes, etc.) All in all, if you're interested in the origins of the generally accepted -- and mostly false -- pop-culture image of Marie Antoinette (as the unsympathetic tart who flippantly proclaims "Let them eat cake!") . . . I definitely recommend this book for an informative read.

Unfortunately publishers feel that a book on Marie Antoinette will sell every couple years, so like clockwork we see an avalanche of pro royalist, sympathetic, out of context garbage. Most of them repeat the same legends... They base their accounts of the flight to Varennes on Carlyle and talk

about her martyrdom...With the exception of Le Notre not one of her biographers has also done a biography of one of the leaders of the Revolution. Most demonstrate an alarming lack of understanding of basic events such as the the Bread March on Versailles, September Massacres, the Necklace Affair or even how official Court appointments were made. This is the first book in some time that has put Marie Antoinette back into the context of her time...unfortunately for Royalist Mythology she was commonly referred to as the Austrian .... By her actions she precipitated the Revolution...she was provocative and weak...a flammable combination. As for the reader whose sensibilities are offended by the "riding the penis" cartoon...you obviously haven't seen the several thousand cartoons of the time that are available...the one you refer to is tame...you should see the ones where she is dressed like a nun.... You should also read the pamphlets sold at the Palais Royale...While Hebert did indeed make things up in her indictment, it is hard to get around the fact that she has to shoulder a lot of responsibility for the revolution...I recommend this book as one of the best books on Marie Antoinette in last 20 years...it has also prompted me to seek out the author. I think the book is well researched, devoid of sentimentality and attempts to place Marie Antoinette back into the context of the tapestry of her times. Michael La Vean Fellow, International Napoleonic Society

I thought this book was thought provoking and sensible. It is about the painful struggle of Marie Antoinette, queen of France and what her people thought of her. I strongly suggest that who ever is interested in her life and the people around her read this book for research or just for fun. I had to submit a report on Marie and her life and influential expansion. I am a third year college student at UMass and I received a B+ on my paper in French History seminar/class. I got the most of my research in this book and found it a little shocking, to say the least. Most of the book talks about her life and the leading up time to her reign as queen. It speaks specifically of how she was misrepresented and blamed for incidents beyond her control. My personal favorite chapter is that of chapter six when the reader learns of her blame in her husband being unable to father her children. If you have an important report to write, I strongly recommend this book.

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