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Hélène Becquet, *Marie-Thérèse de France, l'Orpheline du Temple*. Paris: Perrin, 2012. 414 pp. €24 (cl). ISBN: 978-2-262-03244-9.

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The expectations of others and the endeavor to satisfy them tend to present insurmountable difficulties for any individual. There is a desperate desire to please which is almost always inevitably counter-balanced by an incapacity to do so. Unfortunately for Marie Thérèse of France, the daughter of that motley regal couple, Louis XVI and Marie-Antoinette, this was her destiny. Her birth, the last to be witnessed publically by the entire court of Versailles on 19 December 1778, was a decided anti-climax. The event had been eagerly anticipated after her parents' failure to consummate their marriage for over seven years.[1] To the disappointment of all involved, the child was not the long hoped for male *dauphin*, but a female princess, whose ultimate destination would be the Catholic dynastic marriage market.

These prospects too were to be thwarted, or delayed rather, by the revolutionary upheavals of the 1790s. After her parents' execution in 1793, Marie Thérèse became the living symbol and hope for French royalism. The orphan of the temple prison, as she was known, became a unifying figure around which a deeply divided émigré community could rally, and a victim whose injuries needed to be avenged.[2] Her rescue was never a real possibility, and she was released in 1795 in a far from triumphant prisoner of war exchange. Embarrassingly, the value of a daughter of Saint Louis was deemed to be equivalent to four captured deputies of the National Convention and two French diplomats/spies. In Vienna, her Austrian relations flirted briefly with the idea of marrying her to her Habsburg cousin Archduke Charles (Napoleon's only successful Austrian nemesis). Yet, as legend has it, she was determined to remain a French princess and, in the end, married her rather dowdy Bourbon cousin, the duc d'Angoulême. She became again the incarnation of a royalist future. Perplexingly for her contemporaries, she failed to produce an heir for the French crown while in exile. This led Chateaubriand to speculate in his 1814 pamphlet *De Buonaparte et des Bourbons* that: "Yes, Mme la duchesse d'Angoulême will only become fecund on the fecund soil of her homeland." [3] Alas, this was yet another prognostication that remained unrealised. This supremely royal duty was left to her sister-in-law Marie Caroline, duchesse de Berry, who performed it in the less than felicitous aftermath of her husband's assassination in 1820.

On first sight, this haughty, humorless, etiquette-obsessed and far from endearing Bourbon princess, who according to apocrypha Napoleon once described "as the only man in her family" [4] makes for a somewhat uninspiring subject for a biography. It is much to Hélène Becquet's credit to have produced an engaging and ambitious work, which strives to understand and dissect such stereotypes. Her book has two ambitions. First, it seeks to retell chronologically, through a rigorous sifting of much primary material located in no fewer than seven European archives, the life of the last Dauphine of France. Indeed, the story is told with unprecedented detail in a moving and thoughtful style, although, at times, a little too lachrymose for my taste, but let us put that down to *de gustibus*.

The other function of this biography is to understand Louis XVI's daughter as a living symbol, whose significance evolved constantly in an age of Revolution, Empire and eventually Restoration. For nascent French romanticism Marie Therese, as a semiotic device, was simply and literally a godsend. Indeed, she was cast in innumerable roles: orphaned victim of providence, redemptive

harbinger of a royal restoration, avenging fury, saintly intermediary for the expiation of the Revolution's innumerable sins, and, finally, the Miss Havisham of the Bourbon family. She was the perfect heroine and repository for official royalist memory of the post-Napoleonic world. To put it more simply, she was the chief mourner of the *ancien régime*. Indeed, her many portraits and other forms of memorabilia constantly sought to present and reimagine her as the redeemer and embodiment of a recharged and resacralised French monarchy.

The structure to Becquet's work is broadly chronological, which is eminently defensible when dabbling with biography. Having said this, her book is clearly (and thankfully) much, much more than a royalist hagiography. Her chapters are well organized, and each is roughly divided into two sections. The first half recounts in a gripping and fluent narrative the key events of Marie Thérèse's life from her cradle in Versailles to the crypt of the Castagnavizza convent in Gorizia.[5] The second part discusses how she was portrayed in newspapers, literature and material culture. This multifaceted approach seeks to juxtapose the real and imagined Madame Royale side by side. This choice bears some fruitful results in understanding how far Marie-Thérèse herself played a role as an agent in the creation, dissemination and control of her public image. This is a difficult task, as it should be borne in mind that this *dauphine* did not leave behind many introspective letters. Like others from the courtly world of Versailles, she sought to hide, throughout her life, her true feelings and genuine reflections. Therefore, her attempts to stop the diary of her imprisonment at the temple from being published and her determination to leave her Austrian relations to rejoin the Bourbon court exiled in Mittau in Latvia in 1799, highlight a personality genuinely committed to an unadulterated vision of monarchical legitimacy.

As might be expected, her abilities to fashion her own "media persona" increased significantly with the onset of maturity. Her role in the various anti-Bonapartist uprisings in Aquitaine made her a political actor in her own right, rather than just a passive victim of history. Becquet speculates, in a fascinating manner, about whether or not Marie Thérèse, despite the restrictions of Salic law, considered herself the true queen of France. Like her mother she pattered about in court politics, and seems to have supported Monsieur's (her father-in-law) ultra-royalist faction and opposed Louis XVIII's (her elder uncle) attempts at conciliation with moderates and liberals. This, perhaps, explains her obsession with court ceremony and precedent. Attachment to the forms of Versailles tended to increase her importance and status at the Tuileries. Apparently, she even insisted, as Louis XVI's daughter, that she should have precedence over her husband on ceremonial occasions. Only at the death of Louis XVIII did she magnanimously say to her spouse "passez devant, M. le Dauphin" (p. 230). Most importantly, she became the guardian of the memory of the Temple prison. Here her importance was paramount in deciding which building projects, images and ceremonies were appropriate for the commemoration of the "martyrdom" of her parents. She also became an avid collector of prints and images of her family's imprisonment.

On the whole, I think this is a successful biography which seeks to understand in a novel manner how a life and its public image fuse together at certain moments and diverge at others. The only reservations with this book lie in its omissions. Foremost is an absence of an explicitly stated purpose for this project. We are never told clearly why Becquet feels this new biography was deemed necessary.[6] Indeed, while stimulating and admirable, her attempt to connect the duchesse d'Angoulême's lived experience with contemporary representations of her person tries to do more than a single volume can realistically hope to accomplish. More serious is the absence of any methodological discussion about how Becquet approached, selected and interpreted her sources. This may be due to editorial constraints, but it is a puzzling oversight. Unreliable memoirs, apocrypha, anecdotes and other texts are quoted reverentially in the book's voluminous endnotes and bibliography, and it is unclear how the author has selected her authorities, or the extent to which she is aware that the "politics of memory" can make memoirs tricky documents to interpret.

Another less pressing issue relates to the reception of the duchesse's image. Again, a large number of prints, newspaper reports and visual representations are invoked, but little effort is made to gauge how far a mass audience (composed either of royalists or their antagonists) engaged readily with this symbolic barrage.[7] The author argues convincingly that legitimacy, dignity, martyrdom and victimhood were essential components in the public fashioning of Marie-Thérèse. I am left to

wonder whether the other members of the Bourbon clan were as bereft of these attributes as Becquet's work seems to imply. They may not have suffered imprisonment, but they did have the experience of a long and disheartening exile. Equally, more could have been made of the duchesse's travels around France during the Restoration. This seems to place her in a league of her own among a notoriously sedentary family. Only Napoleon III and the Empress Eugenie could hope to parallel the energy with which Marie-Thérèse traveled the realm.

Such quibbles are, however, the sign of a successful book in which the author has left at least one reader asking for more rather than less. The only section I would excise is the conclusion dealing with Saxe-Altenburg's claim that the Madame Royale who entered the Temple prison was not the same as the one who came out. Such conspiracy theories are best left to minds hungry for sensationalism. Thanks to this work, the last Dauphine of France will remain a fascinating and romantic figure, symbolizing a life lived through suffering, which this study does much to resurrect. While external circumstances did make Marie Thérèse the sombre and morose character she became, it seems she rather relished and cultivated enthusiastically this aspect of her image. Indeed, throughout the entire Restoration, she never hosted a single ball or theatrical *divertissement*. One suspects that she was not the suffering romantic heroine à la Walter Scott (as Becquet implies in her final chapter) but rather was trapped in Sade's sublimity of pain.

#### NOTES

[1] Munro Price, *The Fall of the French Monarchy: Louis XVI, Marie Antoinette and the baron de Breteuil* (London: Macmillan, 2002), pp. 12-13.

[2] Philip Masel, "From Coblenz to Hartwell: the Émigré Government and the European Powers 1791-1814," in Kirsty Carpenter and Philip Mansel, eds., *The French Emigres in Europe and the Struggle against Revolution, 1789-1814* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1999), pp.1-27; and Kirsty Carpenter, *Refugees of the French Revolution: Émigrés in London, 1789-1802: French Emigres in London, 1789-1802* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999), pp.116-132.

[3] François René de Chateaubriand, *De Buonaparte, des Bourbons et de la nécessité de se rallier à nos princes légitimes, pour le bonheur de la France et de l'Europe* (Paris: Mame Frères, 1814), p.61.

[4] Apparently, *Le Nain jaune*, 15 avril 1815, well known and cited in Becquet *Marie-Thérèse de France*, p. 204.

[5] For an interesting after life see, William D. Godsey Jr., "'La société était au fond légitimiste': Émigrés, Aristocracy, and the Court at Vienna, 1789-1848," *European History Quarterly*, vol. 35, no. 1 (2005), pp.63-95.

[6] Among recent biographies, see Susan Nagel, *Marie-Thérèse, the fate of Marie Antoinette's daughter* (London: Bloomsbury, 2009); Michel Bernard Cartron, *Marie-Thérèse, duchesse d'Angoulême, la vertu et le malheur* (Paris: Communication et tradition, 1999); and the somewhat overstated work by the same author, *Louis XIX, roi sans couronne* (Paris: Communication et tradition, 1996); as well as Noëlle Destremau, *Madame Royale et son mystère* (Paris: Nouvelles éditions latines, 1991); and the fun though execrable Frédéric de Saxe-Altenbourg, *L'énigme de Madame Royale* (Paris: Flammarion, 1954).

[7] On a completely different biographical subject, Lucy Riall very successfully analyzes the fashioning and reception of Garibaldi in her *Garibaldi, Invention of a Hero* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2008).

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