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Wittily entertaining and astonishingly wise, this novel of the life of Marie Antoinette finds the characters struggling to mind their step in the great ballroom of the world.

Versailles Details

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Author : Kathryn Davis

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From Reader Review Versailles for online ebook

Brittany says

I billed this book to my mom as a historical novel about Marie Antoinette, but not a stupid one. What I mean is that it's not fluffy, and it's not a bodice-ripper thinly disguised as something with redeeming value. Instead it's a meditation upon the life of Marie Antoinette, narrated by her ghost (spirit, shade, soul, whatever you want to call it. It's her speaking from beyond the grave, knowing how her life ends, not narrating events as they happen.)

The prose is lyrical and soothing to read. It reminded me quite a bit of Karen Blixen actually. In sections, she's broken the novel out into one-act plays, which I thought worked very well in conveying subtle social and political drama. It's not a long book, and not a happy one, but a very well-written and thought-provoking book, and one I would recommended.

jenn says

1. Writing style. Prose-poetic. Not my thing. If this kind of writing annoys you, stay away.
 2. Lots of allusions to the physical world of Versailles, but few real descriptions. Basically, if you haven't been there, there's a chance you'll have NO IDEA what she's talking about. Which is too bad, because the palace is such a perfect symbol of royal excess.
 3. I probably would have given this 3 stars, because I admire things about the book that I don't necessarily like, but then I made the mistake of reading the stupid, indulgent author essay the publisher saw fit to include at the end. (I should NEVER read these, seriously.) Did you know Kathryn Davis went to Paris and just FELL IN LOVE WITH IT? I'm shocked. I'm pretty sure that never happens to anyone.
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Carolyn says

[from a 2006 blog post:] If you, like I, went to see Sofia Coppola's Marie Antoinette, and then became, shall we say, a wee bit obsessed, I can recommend both Versailles by Kathryn Davis and Abundance by Sena Jeter Naslund. Very different in construct, plot, style, yet both capture the mood just perfectly.

Versailles is short and choppy and a jumble of styles (prose, drama, dialogue), with an obsession with numbers and counting. Abundance is long and flowing and first-person narrative. Both were, simply put, page turners. Quite enchanting.

Kaleigh says

I really wish I could have enjoyed *Versailles* more, but to say I waded through it would be an understatement. I'm thankful it was a relatively short book.

The writing style was the strangest I've ever read. It went back and forth among first person, third person

limited, little script things for a play, and prose poetry. It was annoying. I feel like there was no plot. It was just... kinda pointless.

I do have a pretty good amount of knowledge on Marie Antoinette, but I still learned a few things. That's the one plus.

I'm giving this two stars because I appreciate the amount of research that must have gone into writing this book. Based solely on my enjoyment, I'd give it one though. It wasn't my cup of tea.

Nicole says

It was hard not to keep thinking to Sophia Coppola's "Marie Antoinette" as I read this book, but I think there was enough of a difference to keep me interested. There are some chapters that are filled with verse, others look like a script.

I liked meeting the character of Antonia, and I think there was a vulnerability that the author captured that made this novel even more interesting.

The end of the novel was also something that stuck with me, and I will definitely not forget it soon.

Passing onto someone via bookcrossing/bookobsessed. It's similar to something she's got on her wishlist.

Abby says

Sometimes you read books that are so rare they can't be defined. Versailles is that. A poignant meditation told (mostly) from the point of view of Marie Antoinette. A poetic meditation on a girl unprepared to be a queen and a woman jaded by the weight of her crown.

The novel is experimental from its outset -- alternating between 1st & 3rd points of view, interspersed with dramatized scenes and poetry and song. The dramatized scenes seem to add to the unreality of the situation and how Antoinette herself can hardly understand her own situation, as though it's all happening outside of her, to someone else. Overall, the novel is erratic and evocative and hauntingly lyrical. I am intrigued by the voice of this author and will probably hunt down some of her other novels.

Michele says

This stream-of-consciousness novel, a New York Times Notable Book of the Year, simply didn't work for me. I suspect the reason for this is that my knowledge of Marie Antoinette and her lineage and the French royal family she married into is quite limited, so I simply didn't understand many of the author's references.

Thanks to my numerous visits to Versailles throughout the years, however, I'm happy to report that the intricacies of the palace itself that Davis writes about made sense, although if you haven't ever been I can see how that would confuse the reader as well.

I think that if I had more of a knowledge base, the references would have made sense and the novel may have been more enlightening. As it is, I muddled through it more confused than not. I suspect, though, it might be worthwhile to hang on to this book and re-read it after I've learned more about Marie Antoinette's life and the sequences of events.

Amanda says

Really not my kind of book. Even though I love historical fiction and Marie Antoinette is one of my favourites.....this was just a bit too airy fairy for me. A short read....and this is probably the only reason I finished it.

Erendira says

I'm intrigued by the story of Marie Antoinette but I found the style of writing too distracting for the storyline. Perhaps I should just look into her biography...?

Sara Batkie says

Picked this up because I thought reading a first-person (at least in part) historical fiction would be helpful for my own work, and I think it did though it didn't dig as deeply as, say, Mantel's Cromwell novels (which are technically close third, but like, reeeally close.) That's probably because bringing Marie Antoinette to life isn't truly Davis's aim. The key to this book seems to be the epigraph at the front from Jean Le Rond d'Alembert: "Architecture is merely the embellishment with which we hide our deepest needs." There's a reason she called it "Versailles" and those hoping to be enlightened in some way on the Queen will likely come away disappointed. Those willing to go along with Davis's playful but challenging style will be rewarded with a thoughtful examination of how our physical creations often reflect back on us in ways we didn't expect, and might not like.

Katie says

Versailles is a beautiful slim novel narrated by Marie Antoinette's spirit, ghost, disembodied being. Don't be confused and think this is a book version of the movie or Vogue fluff about her that's been going around--this is a mesmerizing exploration of what it was like to be in her head. If you've never read anything by Kathryn Davis, you've missed out on one of the best contemporary writers--she uses language in a very and creative compelling way.

Reading Faerie says

Meh, I've read better books about Marie Antoinette.

Ashley Marsh says

This is one of the worst examples of historical fiction I've ever read. The entire story is disjointed and, at

times, historically inaccurate. You're given no reason to feel anything for any of the characters. I found myself looking forward to their deaths, just so the story could end. I suppose the writing style was meant to be artistic, but, even knowing the history, the entire thing made little to no sense.

Selkie says

The book was written in a lyrical style that I do not usually care for, but I can understand why the author chose to use it. It did seem to capture the personality [of Marie Antoinette], & as much as Marie Antoinette loved the theatre it is only fitting that some chapters were written as skits/plays.

The last chapter "Hall of Mirrors" could have been eliminated in my opinion. But overall it was a good book, & a quick read

Cindy says

I'm really torn between 2 and 3 stars. I went with 2 because if I hadn't already read some biographies about Marie Antoinette and the French Revolution I would have been lost with this novel. It is written in a few different styles. First person, third person and some chapters are written as a play. It jumped forward in time without much explanation and I thought didn't give you much time to dwell on what was happening. It also didn't give me a clear picture of who Marie Antoinette was and what she went through. I didn't get the feeling of how much courage she had, her love for her children didn't come through either. I did think the last chapter while she was alive was well done and captured her captivity.
