

19. LUISA SANFELICE

Luisa Sanfelice is a character who is shrouded in mystery, and references to her in literature have only served to fire people's imagination even more. We should remember, of course, that there is very little real information about her because of the so-called "**ripungo**", the systematic destruction on the part of the Bourbons of any documents relating to the victims of the 1799 Parthenopean Revolution.

Luisa Fortunata de Molino was born in Naples on 28 February 1764, daughter of Don Pedro de Molino, a Spanish Officer who came to Naples along with Charles III, and Camilla Salinero from Genova. At the age of seventeen, Luisa married the Neapolitan nobleman, Andrea Sanfelice, the son of one of her mother's cousins.

Luisa Sanfelice and her husband had **serious financial problems** as a result of their extravagant lifestyle and reckless behaviour. Things got worse when Luisa had to support her **three children**. Their massive overspending, and huge debt, led Luisa's mother to request that the King have the couple **exiled** to Cilento and their children sent to a convent.

Luisa was later separated from her husband and locked away in the Conservatorio di Santa Sofia in Montecorvino Rovella near Salerno. The enforced separation rekindled the couple's love and Luisa and Andrea managed to run away back to Naples and their house in Palazzo Mastelloni in Largo Carità.

In 1797, Andrea Sanfelice received a warrant for his arrest for debt.

Luisa had no particular political beliefs and she hung around with Monarchists and Republicans alike, probably more attracted by the salon atmosphere, upper-class company, parties and opportunities for encounters with the opposite sex. Her large circle of acquaintance found her caught up in the **Baccher anti-French campaign**, which she inadvertently revealed to the Authorities. When the Neapolitan Republic was founded, it led to intense counter-revolutionary activity in the city, often in the guise of conspiracies. Gerardo Baccher, along with his brothers and closest friends, firmly believed that Ferdinando and Carolina would return triumphant. Gerardo fell in love with Luisa, and spent time with the Sanfelice family in order to court Luisa. This was when Luisa found out from her suitor that the Bacchers had arranged with the Bourbons and the English to bomb the city during one of the festivals. Their intention was to create such chaos and confusion that they would be able to capture and kill the Republicans without problems. Gerardo Baccher gave Luisa a **salvacondotto**, or safety warrant, so that her life would be saved once the plan went into action. During that period, however, Luisa Sanfelice was extremely fond of **Ferdinando Ferri**, a Republican, and, fearing for his life, she preferred to pass her safety warrant onto him. Ferri told the Neapolitan government about the attack that was being planned and the Republicans reacted violently against its perpetrators who paid with their lives. Gerardo Baccher and his brother were gunned to death in the Castel Nuovo courtyard.

Eleonora Pimentel Fonseca in her "Monitore napoletano" described Sanfelice as the "**saviour of the Republic and mother of the homeland**".

The Republic was defeated with the return of the Bourbons. Sanfelice was recognised as a patriot, and the King and Baccher's family took out their anger and desire for revenge on her. She was tried by the State Court and was condemned to death and imprisoned. When she announced that she was **pregnant** her sentence was repealed. King Ferdinando had her transferred to Palermo where she could be examined by a doctor he trusted. The doctors in Sicily declared that she was not pregnant so the King ordered her to be brought back to Naples and judgement to be carried out immediately. Although the Princess Maria Clementina, wife of the heir to the throne, Francesco, intervened to ask for clemency, Luisa Sanfelice was **beheaded** in Piazza Mercato on 11 September 1800.

She is buried along with the other martyrs of the '99 revolution in the crypt of the Chiesa del Carmine.