

MANIPULATING MARIA: MARIE ANTOINETTE'S
IMAGE FROM BETROTHAL TO
BEHEADING AND
BEYOND

by

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ABSTRACT

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The shaping of Marie Antoinette's image began before her arrival at Versailles. Prior to her marriage, her mother, Austrian Empress Maria Theresa brought in experts to educate the Archduchess in the ways of life in the French court. Marie Antoinette was taught to walk, speak and act like a lady in the Versailles court. She was remade into the ideal image of French beauty at the time. Upon arrival at Versailles, she was quickly overwhelmed by the strict etiquette that was applied to her daily activities. There was a protocol for every aspect of her day, from her morning *toilette* to her evening *coucher*.

Marie Antoinette had very little control over her role at court or of her role in her marriage. She tried to take control of the one thing she could; her image. She crafted and manipulated it to make her presence known at the highly regimented court of Versailles. She continued to craft her image up until the time of her execution by consciously choosing her hairstyles, her dresses, shoes, and accessories. How she shaped her image, why she shaped it the way she did, and the reactions she received from it are the focus of this paper.

The many paintings, fashion plates, caricatures and cartoons of both the period and of today help to explain the myth of Marie Antoinette. The myriad of uses to which she is now put in popular culture illustrates the enduring power of her memory. By examining them I hope to find out why Marie Antoinette made the choices she made, caused the commotion and outrage she did, and why she remains a relevant figure today.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

For Marie-Antoinette, the struggle for agency and personal autonomy—the ability to be herself and act according to her own will and desires—was carried out on the public stage and within a set of dynamic forces, within what we might call history itself. She was constantly being identified, constructed, presented, and represented.
- Dena Goodman¹

Marie Antoinette has been and continues to be viewed from three different vantage points. The first views her negatively, depicting her in somber tones as a callous, spoiled spendthrift, who brought well-deserved ruination on herself and the Bourbon dynasty. The second sees her in a positive light and therefore constructs a luminous image that depicts the queen as victim, and martyr. The third point of view recognizes that we can never know the “real” woman and instead focuses on the way she has been represented, popular perceptions her, and her in/ability to control her own image.

In this work I will present Marie Antoinette through her image, both contemporary and modern. One cannot talk about the “real” Marie Antoinette without talking about her image, how it was constructed, and why it retains its potency in today’s culture. Everything about Marie Antoinette, especially in her early years as the Dauphine and young queen, was a construct. Her name was not even her given name. Marie Antoinette was the Gallicized version of her birth name, Maria Antonia Josépha Johanna von Habsburg-Lothringen. How her image was formed, why it was key to both her

¹ Dena Goodman, “Introduction”, *Marie Antoinette: Writings on the Body of a Queen*, Dena Goodman, ed., New York: Routledge, 2003, 3.

successes and her failures, the reactions to her image, and the modern uses of Marie Antoinette imagery are the focus of my research. In my examination, I hope to find out why Marie Antoinette made the choices she made, caused the commotion and outrage she did, and why she remains a relevant figure today.

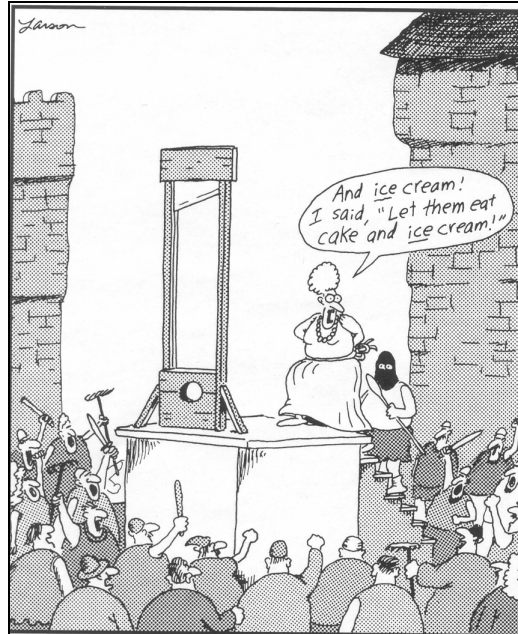


Figure 1.1 Gary Larson, Cartoon depicting “Marie Antoinette’s last-ditch effort to save her head.”
The Far Side

Marie Antoinette was a lightning rod for competing ideologies leading up to, and during, the French Revolution. The queen was seen by some as a cause of the Revolution, and by others, a victim of it. The twin forces of misogyny and xenophobia kept her at the forefront of this firestorm. Historians’ perceptions of her role in the Revolution have shifted along with the changing thoughts and theories on the causes of the Revolution itself. The debates and controversies over the cause of the French Revolution have raged since the time of the Revolution. According to Gary Kates, “much of the problem with studying the French Revolution involves sorting through what

others have said about it”. The view of the French Revolution that prevailed in post-World War One France was a Marxist interpretation. This interpretation “employed an emphasis on class struggle to explain both the causes and consequences of the Revolution”. In the Marxist view, according to Lynn Hunt, “the revolution was bourgeois in nature because its origins and outcomes were bourgeois.”²

In the interwar period recorders of French Revolution history, such as Georges Lefebvre (1874-1959) and Albert Soboul (1914-1982), were beginning to form and solidify their own, French Marxist interpretation of the Revolution. According to Kates, this interpretation saw the French Revolution:

not simply a political struggle from [evil] absolute monarchy to [good] democratic republicanism, but it represented a deeper shift from feudalism to capitalism.... [t]he French Revolution was essentially a class struggle in which one class was destroyed (the nobility), one class was awakened (the *sans-culottes*), and one class won control of the state (the bourgeoisie).³

After World War Two there occurred an enormous transformation in the historiography of the Revolution. This change:

Has been marked by the almost total collapse of the orthodox Marxist interpretation.... The broad teachings of...Lefebvre and Soboul are today, even in France, discredited. Considering how monolithic orthodox interpretations of the Revolution had become..., the attack was anticipated, [but] the complete collapse of the Marxist paradigm was a surprise.”⁴

The credit for leading the post-war attack on the Marxist paradigm and lobbing the first volley goes to Albert Cobban (1901-1968). Cobban, in his 1954 inaugural lecture at University College London, “cast doubt on the *social* and *class* interpretations” of the

² Gary Kates, “Introduction”. *The French Revolution: Recent Debates and New Controversies*, Second Edition, Gary Kates, ed., New York: Routledge, 2006, 1; Jack R. Censer, “Series Editor’s Preface,” *The French Revolution: Recent Debates and New Controversies*, Second Edition, Gary Kates, ed., New York: Routledge, 2006, xi; Lynn Hunt, *Politics, Culture, and Class in the French Revolution*, Twentieth anniversary edition, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004, 4.

³ Kates, 3.

⁴ Kates, 3-4.

French Revolution. Cobban agreed with the Marxists that the Revolution was a social one; but he argued that it was one of “*notables*” not capitalists. His parting of ways with the Marxist interpretation of the French Revolution, “earned him the title of ‘the father of revisionism’”.⁵

By the 1970s, the Revisionist school of thought on the French Revolution was finally accepted in France, the only place where writing on the French Revolution “really counts”, according to Kates. The 1978 publication of François Furet’s *Penser la Révolution Française* (translated into English as *Interpreting the French Revolution*) initiated fresh interest in the cultural history of the Revolution. Furet wanted to “break the vicious circle of...commemorative historiography.” According to Jack R. Censer, “significant ideological shifts...played a major part in the growth of revisionism”. Furet (1927-1997) ushered in a return to both political theory and intellectual history. He was less interested in the structures in place at the time of the Revolution and post-Revolution and more interested in the ideas behind it.⁶

Since 1989, the bicentennial of the French Revolution, there have been challenges to the position laid out by Furet and those in his camp. New historiographers disillusioned with structural and intellectual history opened the door to multi-cultural and feminist approaches to the Revolution, a trend mirroring the larger trend in history as a discipline. In the broader scope of history, there was a movement away from the “great man”, away from white, heterosexual males, and a turn to “others” who played roles in

⁵ Alfred Cobban, *The Social Interpretation of the French Revolution*, Second paperback edition, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999, xiii; Kates, 4; Cobban, *xiii*.

⁶ Kates, 4; François Furet, *Interpreting the French Revolution*, Elborg Forster, trans., Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 198, 10; Censer, x.

history. Women, homosexuals, non-whites, and the lower classes were then being considered as legitimate sources for historical research.

A significant trend in the scholarship on the French Revolution was the study of women and gender. In 1979, Darline Gay Levy, Harriet Branson Applewhite, and Mary Durham Johnson, three American feminist historians, published *Women in Revolutionary Paris, 1789-1795*. A collection of primary documents devoted to French Revolutionary women, this book's publication established a new research agenda for the field of French Revolutionary history. With this new research agenda firmly established, one finds more focused work on Marie Antoinette and the depiction of her during the Revolution of 1789. She is mentioned in the earlier historiographies, but not often, and when she is it is always in a negative light.⁷

Albert Soboul introduces Marie Antoinette as, “the daughter of Maria Theresa of Austria, pretty, frivolous and tactless, and by her thoughtless attitude she contributed to the discredit of the monarchy”. He concludes her life with one sentence: “When the Queen was guillotined on 16 October, her execution was hailed as ‘the greatest joy of all the Père Duchesne’”. In Soboul's work, the queen did not play a prominent role. In the same Marxist school of thought as Soboul, Georges Lefebvre, gives the queen similar treatment.⁸ She is first encountered, in a chapter titled “The Crisis of the Monarchy”, as a corruptor of the King's character:

Rumors concerning the queen had made [Louis] ridiculous. His own children were said not to be his own. Marie Antoinette passed for a Messalina, and the affair of the diamond necklace in 1785 finished her reputation in the eyes of the

⁷ Kates, 9-10; See Darline Gay Levy, Harriet Branson Applewhite, and Mary Durham Johnson, *Women in Revolutionary Paris, 1789-1795: Selected Documents Translated with Notes and Commentary*, Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1979.

⁸ Albert Soboul, *The French Revolution 1787-1799: From the Storming of the Bastille to Napoleon*, Alan Forrest and Colin Jones, trans., New York: Vintage Books, 1975, 97; 341.

whole nation. Among the immediate causes of the Revolution the character of the king and queen must be included.⁹

Marie Antoinette's subsequent appearances in Lefebvre's work are only in connection with the king, and only in minor reference to politics. Her final mention comes in the last chapter of the book where Lefebvre places her in "[a]n incident created by the imprudence of the Court [giving] the signal for insurrection" during the October Days of 1789.¹⁰ Marie Antoinette was shown in both Soboul and Lefebvre's works to be responsible for the discrediting of the monarchy and for insurrection by the people. By writing that the queen was regarded as a "Messalina" Lefebvre can be seen as simply reporting what was a fact: the queen was regarded as oversexed and power-hungry. Messalina (d. A.D. 48), who was the third wife of the Emperor Claudius of Rome, has become, according to *Brewer's Dictionary of Phrase and Fable*, "a byword for lasciviousness and incontinency."¹¹

Furet, though not in line with Soboul and Lefebvre's Marxist interpretation of the Revolution, described the queen in the same vein as his predecessors. He begins his discussion of her in relation to her future husband, Louis-Auguste, the Dauphin of France. In his descriptions of the Dauphin, he says, "the great event – and the greatest failure – of this youth was his marriage to an Austrian princess: the youngest daughter of Maria Theresa, Archduchess Marie Antoinette." Furet describes her as having, "little education, [and] as badly prepared as any could be for the role of Austrian 'antenna' at Versailles". He describes the Austrophobia of the time and the distrust the public had

⁹ Georges Lefebvre, *The Coming of the French Revolution*, R.R. Palmer, trans., Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1947, 25.

¹⁰ Lefebvre, 198. This "imprudent incident" was a dinner for officers of the Flanders Regiment in the opera house of the château at Versailles. I will discuss this incident further in Chapter 4.

¹¹ *Brewer's Dictionary of Phrase & Fable*, Centenary ed., s.v. "Messalina."

with a foreign queen, summarizing the feeling the French had towards the nuptial alliance at the time with the statement, “the virtuous sovereign had married a shameless hussy.” Much like Soboul and Lefebvre before him, Furet makes little mention of the Queen again until the incident with the Flanders Regiment involving the national cockade and the October Days. Her execution is only mentioned in passing as one of two-hundred sent to the guillotine as the Terror escalated in October of 1793.¹²

With an ideological shift away from socio-economic and intellectual history and towards more cultural history in the late twentieth century, the historiography of the Revolution as a whole begins to depict individuals and not just classes. In his landmark book *Citizens: a Chronicle of the French Revolution*, published in the year of the Revolution’s bicentennial, Simon Schama ignores “conventional barriers” to historiography and tries to “bring a world to life rather than entomb it in erudite discourse”. Schama does this, he explains, because, “the Revolution [does not] seem any longer to conform to a grand historical design, preordained by inexorable forces of social change. Instead it seems a thing of contingencies and unforeseen consequences.... [People], those of individual agency, have become correspondingly more important.” Marie Antoinette, her life, and the roles she filled leading up to, and during, the Revolution come into a more focused view.¹³

In the chapter “Body Politics” Schama devotes twenty-four pages to the queen and to the public’s thoughts on her. He begins with her unwitting involvement in the Diamond Necklace Affair. This event serves as a microcosm of Marie Antoinette’s

¹² François Furet, *The French Revolution, 1770-1814*, Antonia Nevill, trans., Cambridge: Blackwell Publishing, 1996, 28; 31-32; 138.

¹³ Simon Schama, “Preface”, in Simon Schama, *Citizens: a Chronicle of the French Revolution*, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1989, xix; xiv.

situation in France. It is an excellent example of the perceptions the public had of Marie Antoinette and how little control she had over her own image. The Diamond Necklace Affair is one of the best known stories concerning Marie Antoinette. This event, cementing her negative image in France, involved

...a diamond necklace of 647 brilliants and 2,800 carats, [which] had been made with Mme du Barry in mind by the court jewelers Böhmer and Bassenge but Louis XV had died before they could deliver it. At 1.6 million *livres* it was a ruinous piece of back inventory, and at first Marie-Antoinette seemed a likely customer. She had already bought from the same firm a pair of “chandelier” earrings, a spray and a bracelet.¹⁴



Figure 1.2 Replica of the Queen's Necklace (after Charles Auguste Böhmer and Paul Bassenge) Donated by Mrs. Paulette Laubie to the Musée National du Château de Versailles © RMN

By the 1780s, as Schama observes, Marie Antoinette had become more conscious of avoiding conspicuous luxuries. This type of oversized necklace, known as a *rivière*, was

¹⁴ Schama, 203.

a garish piece more associated with actresses in the Palais-Royal than with royal courtiers at the palace. When the jeweler Böhmer, made a scene at court and threatened to do away with himself unless the queen took the necklace, it was to no avail. The queen, although known to have a weakness for teary “*dramas bourgeois*,” thought the *rivière* was too much, a “kind of vulgarity associated with the Du Barry.” Du Barry, the last official royal mistress of Louis XV and former court rival to Marie Antoinette, was known for her garish taste in clothing, jewelry, and other ostentatious things.¹⁵

This particular *rivière* became the prize in what Schama calls, “a confidence trick of breathtaking audacity.” The cast of characters involved in this Diamond Necklace Affair seemed, in the summer of 1785, “perfect symbols of a regime worm-eaten with corruption.” The cast included a gullible aristocratic cardinal, the Cardinal de Rohan; Jeanne de la Motte, a scheming woman claiming descent from the Valois kings of France, and her husband; the magician Cagliostro; Réteaux de Villette, a amateur forger; and Nicole Le Guay, an ash-blond *grisette* picked up in the Palais-Royal to impersonate the queen.¹⁶ Unknowingly at the center of the Affair was Marie Antoinette. According to Schama, it was her “transformation in public opinion from innocent victim to vindictive harpy” that damaged the credit of the monarchy. The queen had been innocent to the intrigue, but as Schama indicates, “The phobic hysterias gathering around her, even before the plot was hatched, meant that she would be suspected of collusion, of luring others to their doom in the insatiable appetite for *luxure*: a term that usefully compressed

¹⁵ For more on the fruitless attempts to sell the jewels to Marie Antoinette and the histrionics of Böhmer see Jeanne Louise Campan, *Memoirs of the Private Life of Marie Antoinette, 2 Vol.*, Translated by F.M. Graves. New York: Brentano’s, 1917, 198-201; Schama, 203-204.

¹⁶ *Grisette*’s were Parisian shopgirls, seamstresses, linen workers, and others who made a living with their handiwork. They were often accused of loose morality and of turning to prostitution to supplement their income. For more on them and their place in eighteenth century society see Jennifer Jones, *Sexing La Mode: Gender, Fashion and Commercial Culture in Old Regime France*, New York: Berg, 2004, 145-177.

together opulence and libido.” Sara Maza notes that the incessant public interest in the Affair stemmed from the Cardinal’s arrest and the implications that the queen was involved in the intrigue. The real issue of public interest was whether the Cardinal would be tried for criminal presumption and *lèse-majesté* (treason) for thinking the queen would stoop so low as to be involved with the likes of Jeanne de la Motte, *or* would he be set free and acquitted because this type of behavior was not unusual for Marie Antoinette? Maza notes that the case generated many pamphlets arguing for and against the different sides in the Affair. Pamphlet production caused a spin-off industry of fictional biographies of the parties involved and the interest of the Parisian public seemed without limits.¹⁷

The Diamond Necklace Affair unfolded thusly: de Rohan believed the queen, with what Schama calls her “reputation for unaffected girlish sentimentality,” could restore his position at court. His well known longing to be reintroduced at Versailles caught the attention of Jeanne. She convinced de Rohan that she was an intimate of the queen and if he was to help her out from time to time financially there was a good chance that he “might indeed one day bathe in the radiance of Marie-Antoinette’s smile.”¹⁸ On the night of August 10, 1784, Nicole de la Guay was dressed up as the queen and sent into the Grove of Venus garden at Versailles. At eleven o’clock that night de Rohan waited to meet Marie Antoinette. The faux queen pressed a rose into his hand as a sign of his long awaited return to court favor. After his successful rendezvous with “the

¹⁷ Schama, 204-205; Weber, 167; Sara Maza, *Private Lives and Public Affairs: The Causes Célèbres of Prerevolutionary France*, Studies on the History of Society and Culture 18, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993, 185-196; For more on the importance of the press to Revolutionary France see Jeremy D. Popkin, *Revolutionary News: The Press in France 1789-1799*, Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1990.

¹⁸ Schama, 206.

queen,” de Rohan would do anything Jeanne requested of him. He began to give her larger and larger sums of money and once, while de Rohan was away, she had Böhmer and Bassenge bring her the *rivière*. Upon his return Jeanne told him that the queen wished to purchase the *rivière* in four payments. She produced a (forged) letter from the queen. The letter asked de Rohan to act in her behalf and purchase the necklace.

On January 29, 1785, the necklace was brought to the Palais du Cardinal and transferred to the “queen’s courier” (One of Jeanne’s cohorts playing the part). The necklace was immediately dismantled and fenced all around Paris and eventually London. Weeks, then months, passed and de Rohan awaited a sign of favor from the queen; the jewelers awaited their payments. Böhmer and Bassenge, compelled by their creditors, pressed de Rohan for the first installment. He, in turn, pressed Jeanne for the queen’s payment. She informed Böhmer and Bassenge directly that they had been cheated by a forged letter, sending them to the queen’s lady-in-waiting, Madame Campan on August 5. Once the truth emerged, the king summoned the Cardinal to Versailles on August 15. De Rohan admitted to the king that he had been taken by a woman claiming to act for the queen.¹⁹

The real casualty of the whole Diamond Necklace Affair was Marie Antoinette, who emerged from the Affair portrayed as a “spendthrift and a vindictive slut who would stop at nothing to satisfy her appetites.” There were rumors that she had orchestrated the entire affair and had even engaged in lesbian acts with Jeanne. Schama notes that none of the accusations would have been possible had there not already been a “rich and unsavory vein of court pornography to tap.” By addressing this, he delves into the reasons why Marie Antoinette was depicted in such a way, being one of the first historians to explore

¹⁹ Schama, 207- 208; For a full detailing of the queen’s reaction see Campan, 205-215.

why the queen was so reviled. Schama's focus on culture and his emphasis the important role individual actors played in the French Revolution leads him to investigate the deeper origins of the negative views of the queen.²⁰

In the twenty-first century Marie Antoinette is an oft discussed historical figure. She has, since the time of her arrival as the *Dauphine* of France, been a figure of both interest and scrutiny. The historiography of Marie Antoinette mirrors not only the historiography of the French Revolution but the changing discipline of history itself. Early historical writings focused on "great men" and wars. Subsequent histories focused on movements, be they social, political, or intellectual. More recent histories take into account individuals and their unique contributions to the larger scheme of events. It is in this latter scholarship that one finds the most in-depth and revealing work on the French queen.

The characterizations of Marie Antoinette by the early scholarship of Soboul, Lefebvre, and Furet can be seen as the foundation for the insights of Schama, Maza, and others. The fact that the Marxist orthodox view of the French Revolution was one that emphasized class struggles meant that the role of the queen was considered un-important and not heavily discussed. Because the Revisionists began to look at the ideas behind the revolution, Furet expanded on the role of the queen in the Revolution, and shed light on the Austrophobia and misogyny of eighteenth-century France. With the Revolution's bicentennial a well-rounded history of Marie Antoinette began to emerge. Now, in the twenty-first century there are histories and biographies illuminating many aspects of her life and her place in history.

²⁰ Schama, 210.

The recent studies undertaken seek to explain why Marie Antoinette was depicted as a “Messalina”; looking through the lenses of gender and feminism explanations are found. In this post-Revisionist, post-modern, look at the French Revolution the queen is seen more as a victim of the misogynistic rhetoric of the Revolutionaries and less as the cause for the Revolution itself. Marie Antoinette is seen as more of a pawn in the gendered politics of the eighteenth century. Post-Modernism makes Marie Antoinette a “legitimate” subject of historical inquiry.

In what Kates calls a “maturation of women’s and gender history”, research and writing about Marie Antoinette as a key figure in the history of the French Revolution continues. Kates contends that recent historians have “widened the scope [of historical inquiry] to include revolutionary discourse, policies, events, [and] culture – interpreted through the lens of gender.” In *Politics, Culture and Class in the French Revolution*, Lynn Hunt shows how the attitudes the French revolutionary leaders had about Marie Antoinette reveal how they intended on shaping the roles of the sexes in the new republic. In her article on the many bodies of Marie Antoinette, she argues that the queen’s body was not imbued with the mystical sacredness that the king’s was and therefore it signified threats which would undermine the Republic. Vivian R. Gruder’s work on the political pornography of prerevolutionary France provides insight into the public’s perceptions of their queen and the discrediting of her image and, by consequence, the discrediting of the monarchy. Pierre Saint-Amand looks at the political conceptions of Marie Antoinette and the fear of her power in the eighteenth century. Saint-Amand uses the interpretations of

the political conceptions of Marie Antoinette to probe the political culture of revolutionary France.²¹

Along with new looks at Marie Antoinette by historians, there has been a renewed interest in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries by the general public in the life of the last queen of France. Stefan Zweig's *Marie Antoinette: The Portrait of an Average Woman*, first published in the United States in 1933, presented "a dramatic account of the guillotine's most famous victim." Zweig, though, openly admits "paying no heed to a large number of documents, letters, and reported conversations...." in his telling of the story of her life. He does, however, make extensive use of State archives in Vienna and hoped that his depiction of Marie Antoinette would "arouse the sympathy and enjoy the understanding of the present...." He portrays the queen, though, as an "average woman", but she was not, neither by the standards of her day nor ours.²²

The latest, and most popular biography since Zweig's, is Antonia Fraser's *Marie Antoinette: The Journey* (2001). This extensive biography covers every aspect of the queen's life from birth to death and beyond. Fraser's work is well researched and uses a large variety of both primary and secondary source materials. The work portrays Marie Antoinette in a sympathetic light and reads like a good novel. Fraser's biography inspired filmmaker Sophia Coppola to pen a screenplay based on the book, which became a film in 2006. The film inspired a new generation to take interest in Marie Antoinette

²¹ Kates, 9-10; Lynn Hunt, *Politics, Culture, and Class in the French Revolution*. 20th Anniversary Edition. Berkley: University of California Press, 2004, 87-119; Lynn Hunt, "The Many Bodies of Marie-Antoinette: Political Pornography and the Problem of the Feminine in the French Revolution," in *Marie-Antoinette: Writings on the Body of a Queen*, Dana Goodman, ed., New York: Routledge, 2003, 119-122; Vivian R. Gruder, "Whither Revisionism? Political Perspectives on the Ancien Regime," *French Historical Studies* 20, No. 2, (Spring, 1997), 245-285; Pierre Saint-Amand, "Terrorizing Marie-Antoinette," Jennifer Curtiss Gage, trans., *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 20, No. 3, (Spring, 1994), 379-400.

²² Stefan Zweig, *Marie Antoinette: The Portrait of an Average Woman*, Eden and Cedar Paul, trans., Paperback ed., New York: Grove Press, 1984; back matter; 470-472.

and her life. Published the same year as Coppola's film, Caroline Weber's *Queen of Fashion: What Marie Antoinette Wore to the Revolution* is a post-Modern biography looking at Marie Antoinette's life as dictated by her fashion choices. Weber's book, touted as "A new vision of the ever-fascinating queen," promises to reveal to the reader "how Marie Antoinette's bold attempts to reshape fashion changed her fate and the future of France." Weber looks at the role of fashion in the queen's life and the influence it had. She focuses on the clothing the queen wore and the importance the people attached to it. The modern representations of Marie Antoinette in twenty-first century fashion Weber sees as confirming the former queen's "undiminished ability to conjure up both the flamboyance and the folly of a vanished aristocratic world." In this vanished world, so cherished today, and celebrated with the celebrity culture of the United States, Marie Antoinette is seen as the height of beauty, excess, and extravagance. She is idolized in a modern context for reasons unrelated to her "actual" life.²³

My interest in Marie Antoinette started when I enrolled in a seminar course on the French Revolution taught by Dr. Steven G. Reinhardt. The traditional portrayals of Marie Antoinette found in the course materials, contrasted with the very modern take on her that was assaulting me from almost every billboard and webpage I encountered. Coppola's film had just been released in the United States, and Weber's book was on the shelves of every major bookstore. My work began almost as a joke; that is poking fun at the idea that Marie Antoinette could be "real" history. Because of the surge in her popularity I told my professor that he was probably going to receive "ten papers on Marie

²³ Antonia Fraser, *Marie Antoinette: The Journey*, New York: Anchor Books, 2001; Caroline Weber, *Queen of Fashion: What Marie Antoinette Wore to the Revolution*, New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2006, front flap.

Antoinette.” He responded that he “would not mind it, if they were good.”²⁴ This challenge piqued my interest. Dr. Reinhardt had thrown down the gauntlet. I purchased Weber’s book as “bedtime reading.” I knew very little of my subject at the time and took a very tongue-in-cheek approach to her. Once I began reading I was hooked. I realized that I knew nothing about this last queen of France and wanted to know more.

Once I began my serious research, I was faced with the duality of this woman. Here was a young Austrian archduchess sent to France to be not only their queen but also to be a representative of Austria, a sort of ambassador of the Hapsburgs to the Bourbons. Her life, once in France, would require her to assume many more dual roles. She was cast in the roles of both wife and “mistress” to Louis XVI. She was seen as a whore and the cause of the downfall of the monarchy while simultaneously portrayed as a martyr and victim to the French Revolution. The fact that she was a German was used against her, despite the fact that she had been “made French” before she was acceptable marriage material for the Dauphin. I was fascinated by this multi-faceted prism used to view the life of Marie Antoinette. The idea of her image, how it was shaped, and how it continues to evolve became my main interest.

For me there are two portraits of Marie Antoinette that clearly illustrate the pressure she was under to define and assert her role in France. Both images are by the queen’s favorite painter Elisabeth Vigée-Lebrun. The first is a painting of the queen which was displayed in public at a salon in 1783. This painting, *La Reine en gaulle (The Queen in a Muslin Dress)*, 1783, shows the young queen in an informal pose and setting. Marie Antoinette wears a dress made of lightweight white summer muslin tied simply at the waist with a sheer golden sash. She has a straw hat upon her head and a rose in her

²⁴ Steven Reinhardt, Conversation, December 2006.

hand. She has no jewelry and her hair is shown unpowdered. The image is one of naturalness and relaxed serenity. In fact the fashion of the *gaulle* was so popular and oft-copied by the women of France that the style of dress was soon renamed, *chemise à la reine*.²⁵



Figure 1.3 Elisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, *La Reine en gaulle* (1783), Collection of the Hessische Hausstiftung, Germany

Despite the popularity of the dress, this image of the queen caused public outrage when it was first displayed. This reaction was elicited by the fact that there was no indication or representation of the social position of the painting's subject. Nothing in the portrait served to show the august nature of her identity. Only the rose in her hand

²⁵ Weber, 162.

alluded to her Habsburg bloodline. *La Reine en gaulle* crossed very rigid, demarcated boundaries in French society. The queen representing herself this way and letting the portrait be shown in public was seen by salon goers as an affront to the dignity of the throne. Weber notes, “She had proven definitively [in the public’s opinion] what her other fashion follies already implied: Marie Antoinette deserved neither her special standing nor her subjects’ respect.” Her image was already in jeopardy by this time, and she was the subject of political pornography. Her critics looked at the portrait *en gaulle* as an image of the queen in her undergarments. The portrait was deemed indecent and fueled the gossip of her alleged sexual escapades. The irony for Marie Antoinette is that she was literally trapped between two worlds. She was a queen and expected to fall into line with the appropriate degree of dress befitting her station while at the same time she was a daughter in the era of Rousseau. She was living at a time when one was encouraged to return to nature and live in a more natural way. According to biographer Antonia Fraser, “All over Europe costumes were being simplified (as were hairstyles) as if in response to some shared *Zeitgeist*.” But what was good for the rest of Europe was not good for the queen of France.²⁶

La Reine en gaulle was so reviled that Vigée-Lebrun had to remove it from the salon and replace it with another painting. The replacement, *La Reine à la rose* (*The Queen with a rose*) (1783), was hastily painted and put up in the salon. This portrait shows Marie Antoinette in an identical pose to the one in the previous painting. This

²⁶ For more details on the paintings of Vigée-Lebrun see, Mary D. Sheriff, *The Exceptional Woman: Elisabeth Vigée-Lebrun and the Cultural Politics of Art*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996; Weber, 161; Fraser, 176. For an interesting contrast to the life of nobility in France, see Amanda Foreman, *Georgiana: Duchess of Devonshire*. Paperback edition. New York: The Modern Library, 2001. Georgiana was an acquaintance of Marie Antoinette’s and in England had a similar reputation. Her life parallels that of the French queen’s in many regards. In an interesting twist of fashion trends, Georgiana actually popularized the wearing of the *chemise à la reine* in England after receiving one as a gift from Marie Antoinette, 171.

time, however, she is dressed in a blue-grey silk *robe à la française*, a formal gown much more befitting her station and as Weber notes, “her Frenchness.” She is bedecked with lace, ribbons, and pearl jewelry. Her hair is curled and powdered. She dons a hat of silk which is festooned with a large plume of feathers. The portrait has a very formal, stiff feel about it. The queen, though in the exact pose as before, seems distant and a little sad, very different from the ruddy-cheeked woman *en gaulle*.²⁷



Figure 1.4 Elisabeth Louise Vigée-Le Brun, *Marie-Antoinette à la rose* (1783) Musée national du Château de Versailles © RMN

The urgent need to paint a replacement indicates to me how little control Marie Antoinette had over her image. She was the queen of a nation still bound to the image

²⁷ Weber, 163.

and ideals expected of an outdated system of etiquette. The swift removal of the offending portrait and subsequent representation of her in more “appropriate” attire did little to improve her image. The aforementioned Affair of the Diamond Necklace occurred only two years after the “Affair of the Painting.” In an interesting note, Nicole Le Guay reportedly was dressed *en gaulle* for her portrayal of the queen in the garden with Cardinal de Rohan. De Rohan “knew” it was the queen because of the muslin dress, and the rose she pressed into his hand. Weber notes that it was “genius on La Motte’s part,” to dress Le Guay *en gaulle* for not only did it serve as proof to the Cardinal of the woman’s identity, but it also built upon the already prevalent idea of the queen’s “willingness to engage in nonroyal behavior.”²⁸

The publicly perceived image of Marie Antoinette as engaging in non-royal behaviors, especially behaviors perceived as non-French, ultimately led to her demise. The revolutionaries used ideas about, and images of, Marie Antoinette to help undermine the authority of Louis XVI and pave the way for the end of monarchical rule in France. Only in her imprisonment and execution was she portrayed as having the dignity and grace befitting her station. The final images of Marie Antoinette show a prematurely aged woman, one who suffered a great deal but did so with grace. Her revival in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and the reparations made to her image stand as testament to the enduring fascination of this last queen of France. Here in the twenty-first century there has been an enormous resurgence of Marie-mania. She has been reborn a pop culture icon and a symbol of female sexuality and strength. Conversely, she is also the “go-to” image for slander and blame.

²⁸ Weber, 165-169.

Finally, this vast array of the ways in which she is/has been portrayed explains the cross-disciplinary nature of my work on Marie Antoinette. It has been necessary to pull from sources not only in history, but from women's studies, human sexuality and pornography, art and art history, fashion, literature, film, and popular culture and presses of the eighteenth through the twenty-first centuries. Finding source materials in such a multitude of disciplines illustrates the wide net one must cast to capture Marie Antoinette in all of her incarnations. My approach to this subject, by its very nature, must be an interdisciplinary one, for the life of Marie Antoinette, this life of what Zweig labels an "average woman," is a lot more than the pictures portray.

CHAPTER 2

VIENNA



Figure 2.1 Engraving of Archduchess Maria Antonia. 1770. Musée Carnavalet, Paris.

Born Maria Antonia Josépha Johanna on November 2, 1755, Marie-Antoinette was the fifteenth child born to Maria Theresa, empress of Austria and Francis Stephen of Lorraine. Marie-Antoinette came at what biographer Antonia Fraser calls “the zenith of her mother’s glory.”²⁹ Austria was at peace, the memories of the War of Succession, the dynastic struggle for succession rights in Austria, were fading; the army was content and the empress’s chancellors implemented a series of domestic reforms. The empress was popular at home and well respected abroad.³⁰



Figure 2.2 Martin de Van Mytens II, *Emperor Francis I of Austria and Empress Maria-Theresa, at Schönbrunn, surrounded by their twelve children.* (1755). Musée National du Château de Versailles © RMN, Daniel Arnaudet

Marie Antoinette is the youngest child in this portrait. She is in the bassinet in the background.

Six months after the birth of Marie Antoinette, however national alliances in Europe were radically changed. The May 1, 1756, Treaty of Versailles joined Austria with her traditional enemy France in a defensive pact after Frederick II of Prussia signed

²⁹ Antonia Fraser, *Marie Antoinette: The Journey*, New York: Anchor Books, 2001, 10.

³⁰ For a more traditional view of Maria Theresa of Austria see G.P. Gooch’s *Maria Theresa and Other Studies*. London: Longmans Green & Co., 1951. A newer take on the Austrian Empress can be found in Edward Crankshaw’s *Maria Theresa*. First Paperback Edition. Fairfield: Atheneum, 1986.

a treaty with England.³¹ The Treaty of Versailles stipulated that if either France or Austria was attacked, the other would come to its aid with a specified army of 24,000 men. Fraser states that “no single event in Marie Antoinette’s childhood was to have a more profound influence on the course of her life than this alliance.”³² The alliance set into motion the future of the young Madame Antoine, as Marie-Antoinette was called by the Austrian court. As Fraser points out, “From the first, Madame Antoine had her value, not as an individual, but as a piece on her mother’s chessboard.”³³

According to John Bossy, marriage alliances were the pre-eminent method of bringing peace and reconciliations to feuds and the wars of princes. He also notes that the alliances “normally implied the subordination of the wishes of the children to the decisions of the parents and the general good.” In 1767 the Austrian empress had five daughters to marry off and expand her political alliances across Europe in the spirit of the House of Habsburg’s motto, “Bella gerant alii, tu Austria felix nube.”³⁴ That year Archduchess Elizabeth, age twenty-three, contracted smallpox. She lived but was badly scarred, ruining her beauty and eliminating her from the European royal marriage market immediately. Already betrothed to Ferdinand of Naples, Archduchess Josepha age sixteen also contracted smallpox. Josepha not only lost her looks, but her life in October 1767. Maria Theresa offered either Archduchess Amalia or Charlotte as an alternate bride for Ferdinand of Naples a mere month after their sister’s passing. The empress hoped to marry Charlotte to Louis Auguste, the Dauphin of France, but the king of

³¹ Caroline Weber, *Queen of Fashion: What Marie Antoinette Wore to the Revolution*, New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2006, 12.

³² Fraser, 10. For more information on the Treaty of Versailles (1756) see Evelyne Lever. *Madame du Pompadour: A life*. Translated by Catherine Temerson. New York: St. Martin’s Griffin, 2000 and G.P. Gooch. *Louis XV: The Monarchy in Decline*. London: Lowe and Brydone (Printers) Limited, 1962.

³³ Fraser, 13.

³⁴ Translation: “Others wage war, you Austria marry.” John Bossy, *Christianity in the West 1400-1700*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985, 20.

Naples selected Charlotte for his son, and Amalia became the bride of Don Ferdinand of Parma. Since Maria Theresa's remaining eligible daughter was Madame Antoine, the empress began the formal arrangements for her to marry the unwed heir to the Bourbon throne.

British journalist Edward Crankshaw tells us that although the Bourbon-Habsburg family alliance began when Madame Antoine was eleven years old, for two years Maria Theresa did nothing to prepare her daughter for the ordeal ahead.³⁵ Desmond Hosford however, contends that "from 1768 a concerted effort was made to provide the archduchess with a French education."³⁶ This education included instruction in French language, history, and dance. Young Madame Antoine was already an accomplished dancer; she, along with a few of her siblings, danced in a ballet for guests at the wedding of their brother, Archduke Joseph, to Josepha of Bavaria. According to Caroline Weber, "the Archduchess strikes an impressively graceful pose... despite her elaborate, hoop-skirted costume" in Martin van Myten's painting of the event.³⁷ Weber also asserts that by "[e]xcelling in dance far more than any other art form, the Empress's youngest daughter thus gravitated at an early age toward a skill that would be crucial to her assimilation in France."³⁸

Maria Theresa sent for the famous dancing master, Jean-Georges Noverre.³⁹ The legendary French dancer and ballet theoretician taught the young archduchess the

³⁵ Edward Crankshaw. *Maria Theresa*. First Paperback Edition. Fairfield: Atheneum, 1986, 324. Lever also mentions that vague nuptial negotiations began as early as 1764, long before the empress began the changes to her daughter's appearance and education. See Lever, p.12.

³⁶ Desmond Hosford. "The Queen's Hair: Marie-Antoinette, Politics, and DNA." *Eighteenth-Century Studies*. Vol. 38. 2004 p. 184.

³⁷ Weber, 13.

³⁸ Weber, 13.

³⁹ Stefan Zweig, *Marie Antoinette: The Portrait of an Average Woman*, (New York: Viking Press, 1933), 5.

“distinctive, shuffling glide of [French] court ladies.”⁴⁰ Hours of strenuous training with Noverre were required for Madame Antoine to perfect this “Versailles glide” – moving in an airy, effortless fashion.⁴¹ According to writer Stefan Zweig, Marie-Antoinette “walked as if on wings.”⁴²



Figure 2.3. George Weirket, after Martin Meytens. “The Triumph of Love”: A Ballet Performed by the Archdukes and Archduchesses of Austria on the Occasion of Joseph II’s Marriage. (1765) Réunion des Musées Nationaux/Art Resource, NY⁴³

Maria Theresa requested two actors, Aufresne and Sainville, from a French company on tour in Vienna to teach Madame Antoine French. Crankshaw notes that this was heavily frowned upon by Versailles as “the future Queen of France must not mix with strolling players.”⁴⁴ Maria Theresa then received, upon the recommendation of the

⁴⁰ Judith Thurman, “Dressed for Excess: Marie Antoinette, Out of the Closet,” *The New Yorker*, September 25, 2006., 140.

⁴¹ Weber, 48.

⁴² Zweig, 34

⁴³ Fraser, Illustration 5.

⁴⁴ Fraser, 37. Crankshaw, 324.

Bishop of Orléans, the Abbé Jacques-Mathieu de Vermond, a docteur de Sorbonne, as a tutor for the young Toinette (as Madame Antoine was called by her family).⁴⁵ According to Zweig, “it is to Vermond that we are indebted for the first authentic detailed accounts of the young Archduchess.”⁴⁶ As described by Vermond, “[the Archduchess] has a most graceful figure; holds herself well; and if (as may be hoped) she grows a little taller, she will have all the good qualities one could wish for in a great princess.”⁴⁷

Vermond had the task of repairing the “bald spots in her culture and education.”⁴⁸ He was to correct her inadequate mastery of French, her extremely bad handwriting, and her literary style, which according to Zweig was “marred by numberless inelegances and faults in spelling.”⁴⁹ Vermond notes that, “She is more intelligent than has been generally supposed. Unfortunately up to the age twelve she has not been trained to concentrate in any way. She is rather lazy and extremely frivolous; she is hard to teach...I came in the end to recognize that she would only learn so long as she was being amused.”⁵⁰ Crankshaw blames Toinette’s mother for this frivolity and laziness. He chastises the empress for her “failure to give adequate supervision and discipline in the nursery.” He further faults Maria Theresa, stating that “Her own mistake...was to assume that childish high spirits and idleness could be banished the moment duty called.” He infers that she made this assumption based on her own experiences as a young queen suddenly thrust into a position of great power with no experience.⁵¹

⁴⁵ Hosford, 183. Fraser, 37.

⁴⁶ Zweig, 5.

⁴⁷ Vermond quoted by Zweig, 5.

⁴⁸ Thurman, 140.

⁴⁹ Zweig, 37.

⁵⁰ Zweig, 7.

⁵¹ Crankshaw, 325.

The Abbé attempted to correct the future dauphine’s educational “bald spots” by imposing a curriculum on her that included the study of religion, the French language, French literature, and history.⁵² Vermond, according to historian G.P. Gooch, had “uphill work, for [the archduchess] had no desire to learn.” He was charged with educating an archduchess whom Zweig describes as “the innocent pawn with whom...important games of diplomatic chess were being played, [who] was romping with her sisters, her brothers, and her girlfriends, but...troubled little about books and education.” He describes the young Toinette as being “of a lively temperament, and clever at getting her own way, she was able to twist round her fingers the governesses and the priests who [were]...to act as her instructors, so that she managed to escape, for the most part, the tedium of lessons.”⁵³

Vermond’s writings describe Toinette as “a girl who detested reading, knew practically nothing of history and geography, and was unable to spell. Her French was a jargon full of German words.”⁵⁴ The Abbé began by devoting an hour a day to French conversation and then added lessons in history, both of France and of her own country. He found ways to educate the archduchess and amuse her at the same time. Lever explains that Vermond “shortened her hours [of study] and replaced them with long conversations. He told her anecdotes that would help her commit to memory the habits of the court and the histories of the great families she would be meeting.”⁵⁵

⁵² Evelyne Lever, *Marie Antoinette: The Last Queen of France*, trans. Catherine Temerson, (New York: St. Martin’s Griffin, 2000), 13.

⁵³ Zweig, 4.

⁵⁴ Vermond quoted by G.P. Gooch, *Maria Theresa and Other Studies*. London: Longmans Green & Co., 1951, 122.

⁵⁵ Fraser, 38. Gooch, 122. Lever, 13.

Her education and comportment, which were undergoing successful improvements, were then coupled with her physical transformation. Because it was vital to the political alliance for Madame Antoine to appear as French as possible, the Duc de Choiseul, the chief negotiator from the court of Louis XV, suggested alterations to Madame Antoine's physical appearance.⁵⁶ Hosford argues that this was a "critical symbolic matter" because France was governed by Salic Law, which prohibits inheritance by or through women. Mary D. Sheriff, calling this "Salic/Phallic Law," argues that this determination of kingship by the right of succession, and exclusion from succession of females and males descended in the female line, was considered first among the fundamental laws of France. These laws were perceived as "anterior to all other laws and hence constitutional of the nation." Hosford illustrates this point by citing Guy Coquille's *Institution au droit des François* (1588): "The King is Monarch, & has no companion in his Royal Majesty. Exterior honors may be communicated by Kings to their wives, but that which is of his Majesty, representing his power and dignity, resides in his person alone."⁵⁷

Salic Law became very important for queens of France who, because they were always foreign, could never truly be French. Nevertheless, courtiers believed queens needed to be Gallicized. Hosford argues that, "Before the queen's body assumed its performative role as the vessel through which the Bourbon dynastic power would pass during the generation of the king's sacred body, it must first be inscribed with the appropriate exterior honors." This meant that Madame Antoine needed to "look French." Therefore, a French dentist by the name Laveran came from Paris to correct the

⁵⁶ Weber, 16.

⁵⁷ Mary D. Sheriff, "The Portrait of the Queen," *Marie-Antoinette: Writings on the Body of a Queen*. Goodman, Dena, ed. New York: Routledge, 2003. Coquille quoted by Hosford, 184.

archduchess's badly aligned teeth.⁵⁸ The surgical processes took three long months to complete and were undertaken without anesthesia, but Laveran rewarded the archduchess with a beautiful smile and straight teeth.⁵⁹

Her hair became the next thing Choiseul determined should be Gallicized. Madame Antoine until this point had worn her reddish-blond hair pulled off her forehead with a woolen band. The band caused the archduchess's hair to pile into a "mountain of curls," to develop bald spots, and to accentuate her forehead. The Parisian hairdresser Sieur Larsenneur, formerly the stylist to the late Madame du Pompadour, who had been the official royal mistress of Louis XV, came to the rescue. Larsenneur was recommended from the highest level, by the sister of the Duc de Choiseul. This *coiffeur* was tasked to deal with "that forehead and that hairline."⁶⁰ He "tamed [the archduchess'] locks into a low, powdered upsweep studded with decorative gems" thus minimizing "the effect of a Habsburg forehead that was too high for French taste."⁶¹ The new *coif à la française* was a recreation of the one worn by Madame du Pompadour, bringing Madame Antoine "in line with the tonsorial conventions of Versailles."⁶² As a symbol, Hosford

⁵⁸ Hosford, 184. Lever, 14.

⁵⁹ Weber, 16. According to Fraser, wires were beginning to be used to straighten teeth in a system known as the "pelican," (Fraser, 30.). Fraser incorrectly identifies the pelican as a system of wires. I find the pelican defined as primarily a tool of extraction. James Wynbrandt, in his *The Excruciating History of Dentistry: Toothsome Tales & Oral Oddities from Babylon to Braces* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998) states, "The pelican was said to be named from its inward pointing hooks, which resembled the beak of the aqueous avian. A religious derivation of the name has also been suggested, as one of Christ's honorifics in the Middle Ages was the Pelican of Grace. Surely anyone facing its use could feel abandoned by God." Wynbrandt quoting Pierre Fauchard, who would earn acclaim as the Father of Dentistry, notes, that "the pelican, however perfect it may be, is the most dangerous of all instruments for drawing teeth." Fraser's own source, *The History of Dentistry: Technique and Demand* by Roger King (Cambridge: Cambridge Wellcome Unit Publications, 1997) agrees noting that a new kind of pelican was invented "expressly for pulling teeth into line rather than for extracting them." See King, 12.

⁶⁰ Fraser, 36.

⁶¹ Weber, 16. Hosford, 184.

⁶² Weber, 16. For more information on the official mistresses of Louis XV, see Stanley Loomis. *Du Barry: A Biography*. Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott Company, 1959 and Evelyne Lever. *Madame du Pompadour: A Life*. Translated by Catherine Temerson. New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 2000.

notes, “Marie Antoinette’s French coiffure was a crucial corporeal manifestation of her submission to France and worked in conjunction with more extroverted expressions of her new identity such as her adoption of the French language.”⁶³

This new coif adopted by the youngest Habsburg archduchess was quickly noticed and adopted by the ladies of Vienna, who normally looked to Paris for fashion direction. This new hairstyle now affiliated her with the French court and for the first time marked her as an arbiter of fashion. The archduchess, at age thirteen, had become a closely observed and copied trendsetter.⁶⁴ The Austrian Baron Nény wrote concerning Larsenneur’s work to the Comte de Mercy-Argenteau, Maria-Theresa’s ambassador to France, “His manner is simple, decent, but at the same time very advantageous to the face, and I am convinced that our young ladies, who for some time have worn mountains of curls on their heads, will give them up to be coiffed à la Dauphine.”⁶⁵

The altered constructions of Madame Antoine culminated in a commissioned portrait painted by portraitist Joseph Ducreux. Louis XV would not fully agree to this union until he saw what the young bride-to-be looked like. The Ducreux portrait was crucial to the marriage negotiations because it was intended to display the corporeal modifications that had been accomplished. As Hosford explains, “since a portrait could only present the exterior signs of [her] character, and those signs, if they were to signal that the archduchess had been thoroughly Gallicized, all needed to be French.”⁶⁶ Ducreux’s first documentation of the extensive makeover was rejected by Empress Maria Theresa.⁶⁷

The empress would not send a portrait until she deemed it perfect. After five lengthy

⁶³ Hosford, 185.

⁶⁴ Weber, 17.

⁶⁵ Hosford, 185.

⁶⁶ Hosford, 184-185.

⁶⁷ Hosford, 185.

sittings, of which each painting Maria Theresa deemed unsatisfactory, a portrait was finally approved and submitted to Louis XV in May 1769⁶⁸. The king was pleased with the appearance of the future Dauphine and found her suitable to bear heirs to the Bourbon throne. The marriage contract was signed April 4, 1770, and set the future Dauphine's allowance and assured her jewels worth 200,000 crowns. On the fifteenth the French Ambassador, the Marquise de Durfort, arrived to formally ask for Maria Antonia's hand in marriage. A wedding date of May 16, 1770, was set to take place at the Chapel of Louis XIV at Versailles.⁶⁹



Figure 2.4 Martin Myten. Archduchess Marie Antoinette Habsburg-Lotharingen (1755-93), fifteenth child of Empress Maria Theres.⁷⁰

The Archduchess sat for this at age twelve or thirteen, before her Gallic makeover.



Figure 2.5 Joseph Ducreux, Marie Antoinette, Archduchess. (1769) Musée National du Château de Versailles © RMN, Gérard Blot

This is Marie Antoinette after the Gallicization process.

⁶⁸ Fraser, 37.

⁶⁹ Gooch, 112. Zweig, 17.

⁷⁰ Fraser, Illustration.

On April 17, 1770, the archduchess officially renounced her hereditary succession rights as an archduchess of the Austrian empire. Crankshaw describes the marriage month of April as “an affair of the utmost extravaganza.... Maria Theresa was showing off to France. [There was a] full-dress military review, theatre galas, and giant receptions at the Belvedere and the Liechtenstein Palace.”

The dinner party at the Belvedere Palace was hosted by Emperor Joseph, the bride’s oldest brother, and had 1500 guests in attendance. The soiree at the Liechtenstein Palace the following night was France’s turn to shine with 800 servants provided as wait-staff for the 850 guests, fireworks, Turkish music, and decorations of golden dolphins, an emblematic reference to the bridegroom.⁷¹ On April 19, Maria Antonia Josépha Johanna von Habsburg-Lothringen was wed by proxy to Louis-Auguste, Dauphin of France, in the Church of the Augustine Friars at six o’clock in the evening. The Papal Nuncio, Monsignor Visconti, officiated. The bride wore a silver brocade dress with a long train. The groom was represented by Maria Antonia’s brother, the Archduke Ferdinand.⁷²

Shortly before her departure, scheduled for nine o’clock the morning of April 21, Vermond began addressing her by her French moniker “Marie Antoinette.”⁷³ The departure from the Hofburg was one filled with extreme sadness for the young bride. Marie Antoinette must have known, based on the marriages of her sisters, that she may never see her family or home again. The royal cavalcade taking Marie Antoinette to meet her new husband was designed to “attest to the imperial state of Austria.” Fraser lists the processional as consisting of:

⁷¹ Crankshaw, 327.

⁷² Lever, 17. Fraser, 51-53. Fraser notes that in previous eras, marriage-by-proxy was given an extra air of authenticity by having the newly “married” pair bedded together and the “proxy inserting a symbolic leg.” See p. 51

⁷³ Fraser, 53. Weber, 28.

[One hundred thirty two] dignitaries, swollen to twice that number by doctors, hairdressers and servants, including cooks, bakers, blacksmiths, and even a dressmaker for running repairs. For this there was need for 57 coaches and 376 horses [Which had to be changed at sufficient intervals to avoid delays.]; that entailed a total of 20,000 horses detailed along the route.⁷⁴



Figure 2.6 Anonymous, *Arrival of the procession driving the archduchess Marie-Antoinette to Versailles, on May 16th, 1770*. Musée National du Château de Versailles © RMN, All rights reserved.

Provisions also had to be made for the food and drink for this massive travelling court, as well as what Fraser refers to as “the more intimate moments of everyday existence.” She continues, noting that “Red velvet and gold embroidery was to be lavished everywhere, not only on furnishings..., but also in the royal commode and the royal bidet.”⁷⁵

The journey to the kingdom of France was long and tiresome. Marie Antoinette and her court took two and a half weeks to cross over several Habsburg states, as well as many German principalities and cities, before reaching Strasbourg, her place of entry into France. Each stage of her journey, approximately eight hours in duration, was met with much cheer, applause and celebration. Despite traveling many days in the pouring rain,

⁷⁴ Fraser, 41.

⁷⁵ Fraser, 41-42.

each night the archduchess attended performances and concerts given in her honor. Lever notes that "...she had to be on show, smile, and respond to compliments.... Marie Antoinette adored entertainments, but on this occasion they exceeded her capacity for endurance." On the night of May 6, in the town of Schüttern, across the Rhine River from Strasbourg, the future queen of France spent the last night in her homeland as an Austrian.⁷⁶

Prior to the royal wedding in Versailles, the official handover of Marie Antoinette, the *remise*, was to take place. This was literally a delivery, or legal transfer of Marie Antoinette from Austria to France. For many months court officials on both sides argued about where this handover would take place. Crankshaw asks, "How was a Habsburg princess to be metamorphosed into the Dauphine of France without loss of dignity to either Habsburg or Bourbon?"⁷⁷ The two sides finally agreed that a suitable location for the *remise* would be on the Île des Épis, a small island in the middle of the Rhine River, symbolically neutral territory between France and Austria.⁷⁸ Crankshaw describes the Île des Épis as "no more than a sandbank" in the Rhine River. Erected on the Île des Épis was an elaborate, specially constructed *pavillon de remise*, which resembled a small French château, with two anterooms looking at the east bank of the Rhine and two facing the west. The eastward facing rooms were Austria; the westward facing rooms were France. There was a central chamber, the *salle de remise*, between them decorated with fine tapestries, a throne, and a baldachin from the University of Strasbourg. Lever describes the pavilion as furnished "as well as possible, by calling upon the generosity of Alsatian families, who had lent the furniture, paintings and

⁷⁶ Fraser, 57. Lever, 17.

⁷⁷ Crankshaw, 328.

⁷⁸ Weber, 24.

tapestries.” Zweig notes that some tapestries were also on loan from the Archiepiscopal Palace to “conceal the wooden planking.”⁷⁹

The choice of tapestries was called into question by a young German student who happened to get inside the *pavillon de remise* prior to the arrival of the Archduchess. The student, along with his colleagues, entered the building to study the tapestries on loan which were modeled after Raphael’s cartoons.⁸⁰ Upon seeing the tapestries in the main chamber, which were taken after the works of modern French artists, the student, one Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, was taken aback by the subject of the works. He describes that the tapestries

...were the history of Jason, Medea, and Creusea – consequently, a story of the most wretched marriage. To the left of the throne was seen the bride struggling against horrible death, surrounded by persons full of sympathetic grief; to the right stood the father, horror-struck at the murdered babes at his feet; whilst the fury, in her dragon car, drove through the air.... What! Can they so thoughtlessly place before the eyes of a young queen, on her first setting foot in her dominions, the representation of the most horrible marriage perhaps that was ever consummated! Is there among the architects and decorators no one who understands that pictures represent something – that they work upon the mind and feelings – that they produce impressions and excite forebodings? It is as if they sent a ghastly spectre to meet this lovely, and as we hear most joyous, lady at the very frontiers!⁸¹

Writer George Henry Lewes remarks that “Goethe was right; and omen-lovers afterwards read in that picture a dark foreshadowing of her destiny.”⁸²

⁷⁹Crankshaw, 328. A baldachin is defined by the *Oxford English Dictionary* as “A structure in the form of a canopy, supported on columns, suspended from the roof, or projecting from the wall, placed above an altar, throne, or door-way....” Lever, 18. Zweig, 11.

⁸⁰ The type of cartoon in use here is defined by the *Oxford English Dictionary* as “A drawing on stout paper, made as a design for a painting of the same size to be executed in fresco or oil, or for a work in tapestry, mosaic, stained glass, or the like.”

⁸¹ Goethe quoted by George Henry Lewes in *The Life of Goethe. Vol. 1*. Third Edition. Leipzig: F.A. Brockhaus, 1882, 86. For a letter written by Goethe mentioning the coming of Marie Antoinette see *Selected Letters (1770-86)* by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, edited by Barker Fairley (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1949) pp. 1-2, and Notes pp. 147-148.

⁸² Lewes, 86. Weber adds that “Medea was, like Marie Antoinette, a princess brought by marriage into a foreign land – and a princess who used clothing to counter the challenges she faced there.” Weber 31.

Once inside the château Marie Antoinette was stripped in a traditional undressing ritual that marked the young archduchess's abandonment of her Austrian culture and her embracing of her new country, France. She was shedding all that was Austrian to be transformed and reborn on the other side of the central hall as a French Dauphine. Lever notes that "Before retiring to her dressing room...Marie Antoinette said goodbye to all the people who had accompanied her up to then." Her little dog Mops, who had entertained her on the long journey from Vienna, was also given over to her attendants amid many tears. The only member of her retinue allowed to remain was Prince Starhemberg, the Envoy Extraordinary from her mother's court, who would accompany the Dauphine all the way to Versailles.⁸³

The *remise* on the Île des Épis was Marie Antoinette's first indoctrination to the French court and its strict etiquette. As later explained by her lady-in-waiting at Versailles, Madam Campan, "the dauphiness had been entirely undressed, even to her body-linen and stockings; in order that she might retain nothing belonging to a foreign court (an etiquette always observed on such an occasion)."⁸⁴ The young girl was left naked in front of the entire Austrian delegation as the proceedings continued -- her first exposure, as it were, to how her new life would be lived. It was noted by a noblewoman present that Marie Antoinette had "an acute sense of modesty uncommon in individuals of her rank" and that day the Dauphine "cried a great deal."⁸⁵ Weeping, she became

⁸³ Lever, 18. Weber 25.

⁸⁴ Jeanne Louise Campan, *Memoirs of The Private Life of Marie Antoinette, Vol.1*, F.M. Graves, ed., (New York: Brentano's, 1917), 45. It should be noted that Jeanne Campan was not present at the *remise* of Marie Antoinette. For more on this see Lady Younghusband. *Marie-Antoinette: Her Early Youth (1770-1774)*. London: MacMillin and Co., 1912, 11.

⁸⁵ Weber, 27. Weber points out that no one expected the Dauphine to behave this way. She had been "Trained from childhood to present to her subjects a façade of unimpeachable royal dignity... [and] until this point acquitted herself admirably in the public eye." See Weber 26-27.

“Crown property [of France] at the moment that her new ladies redressed her.”⁸⁶ Weber says, “Cleansed of her Austrian markings, [the archduchess] was ready to be overwritten with exclusively French monarchical codes and interests.” The attendants coated Marie Antoinette’s hair with additional powder, then applied thick white makeup to her face and red rouge to her cheeks, what Weber notes as “three requisite details among the ladies of Louis XV’s court,” even for Marie Antoinette, who had naturally fair hair and rosy skin.⁸⁷

With hair and make-up finished, the attendants dressed Marie Antoinette in garments made exclusively *en France*. Zweig notes:

In the Austrian antechamber... she was re-dressed in a chemise of French silk, petticoats from Paris, stockings from Lyons, shoes made by the shoemaker to the French court, French lace. Nothing was she to keep that might be endeared to her by memory, not a ring, not a cross; for it would be a grave breach of etiquette were she to retain so much as a buckle, a clasp, or a favourite bracelet...⁸⁸

The fate of the rich Austrian bridal clothes, incidentally, was equally symbolic, representing to the Dauphine the way things worked at Versailles. The Dames du Palais seized them as perquisites of their office. The women dismantled Marie Antoinette’s elaborate travel outfit and argued among themselves about which items each would take home as souvenirs of their journey. Some of the items made their way to the French attendants, later being recognized on members of Marie Antoinette’s entourage in Versailles. Weber notes, “Etiquette prevented her from protesting, much less from

⁸⁶ Thurman, 140.

⁸⁷ Weber, 28-29. Weber also notes that the fact that all of the Archduchess’ clothing was of French manufacture to begin with did not “exempt her from the traditional undressing ritual.” See Weber 25.

⁸⁸ Zweig, 13. For more detail on the items worn by Marie Antoinette at the *remise*, see Weber 29.

demanding the return of the purloined garments.” The young Dauphine was to bear these offenses with the good graces of a future queen of France.⁸⁹

Once *bien habillée à la Française*, in a gleaming cloth-of-gold, formal grand habit, and high shoes, she moved to the central chamber for the signing of the formal *actes de remise* and was transformed “into a *Française*.”⁹⁰ She was now, in all ways, property of the French Crown, and therefore, by extension, the French people. An etiquette gaff marred the first introduction of the Dauphine to her new subjects. Overwhelmed with the dozens of French courtiers who clamored to be the first to catch a glimpse of their new Dauphine, the young girl flung herself into the arms of her *dame d’honneur* and titular guardian, the Comtesse de Noailles. This breach of etiquette between Dauphine and subject mortified the comtesse, who was the doyenne of etiquette at Versailles. Fraser states that the comtesse knew full well that “etiquette held the bodies of French sovereigns to be so sacred that casual physical contact with them bordered on the unthinkable.” The harsh recoil of the *dame d’honneur* reminded Marie Antoinette that, as Zweig states, “[T]here was no place for sentiment, which was not tabulated among the logarithms of courtly procedure.”⁹¹

After much celebration in Strasbourg, the new Dauphine journeyed seven more days by berline with her 160-person entourage to meet her new husband, her new king, and her new family in the forest of Compiègne. In all the towns Marie Antoinette passed through, residents welcomed her with “great circumstance and pomp.” Fraser notes that the young Dauphine responded to the compliments with “winning modesty and grace.” Weber remarks that “The Dauphine’s triumph reached its apogee on May 14,” when she

⁸⁹ Fraser, 61. Weber 26.

⁹⁰ Weber, 29.

⁹¹ Fraser, 33. Zweig, 14. For more information on the Comtesse de Noailles see, Fraser, and Campan.

met the king, who deemed her “French graces” as exquisite as any he had seen. Marie Antoinette had made a favorable impression on her “*Papa-Roi*” who “kissed her lustily on both cheeks.” The first encounter with her new husband, however, was not as favorable. Weber reports that Louis Auguste “seemed not so much excited as intimidated by the sight of his new bride... [and] he was visibly reluctant even to approach her.” Etiquette being what it was in the French court, the Dauphin was required to kiss his new bride on each cheek; he did so, but brusquely before shuffling off to one side of the Dauphine.⁹²

The bridegroom was, as his grandfather told the new bride “*Ce n’est pas un homme comme un autre.*”⁹³ According to most reports, Louis Auguste was the polar opposite to the king. He was fat and clumsy, tongue-tied and shy. Fraser describes the boy as being “heavy-lidded eyes [with] thick dark eyebrows, looking generally awkward.” Louis Auguste, though slovenly in dress and disagreeable in voice, was not stupid. Gooch notes that Louis “liked history and geography, and knew some Latin, Italian, German, and English.... His character was beyond reproach, but the graces were lacking. He was happiest in physical exercises [despite his portliness], hunting, swimming, the felling of trees, the sawing of wood, and in occupations of the manual kind....” He was almost terrified at the sight of a woman, and the only entry in the daily diary he kept since age thirteen for the day he met his wife: “*Entrevue avec Madame la Dauphine!*”⁹⁴ There was no elaboration on how he felt about his new wife, or whether

⁹² Weber, 37. A *berline* is “a four-wheeled closed carriage having an open, hooded seat behind.” *berline*. Dictionary.com. *The American Heritage® Dictionary of the English Language, Fourth Edition*. Houghton Mifflin Company, 2004. <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/berline> (accessed: January 21, 2008). For a modern take on the *berline* see <http://www.berlinecart.com/>. Fraser, 64.

⁹³ Quoted by Gooch, 125. Translation: “He is not a man like other men.”

⁹⁴ Fraser, 65. Gooch, 124-125. Translation: “Meeting with *Madame la Dauphine.*”

he liked or disliked her appearance. As Zweig so clinically observes, “[T]he husband who came to meet Marie Antoinette in the forest of Compiègne was neither a lover nor a man. He was only an official bridegroom.”⁹⁵



Figure 2.7 Joseph-Siffred Duplessis, *Louis XVI* (1775) Musée National du Château de Versailles © RMN, Gérard Blot

At midday on May 16, 1770, the official royal wedding took place. In preparation, the bride, once again went through a dressing ritual, though maybe not as traumatic as the one on the Île des Épis. During her wedding *toilette* she underwent a hair and make-up routine similar to that of her transformation on the island in the Rhine. After the coiffure and maquillage was complete, ladies-in-waiting laced the bride into a stiff, fitted bodice and panniers and dressed her in a grand habit. Weber notes that “only

⁹⁵ Zweig, 17.

the gown represented a notable departure from the exchange ceremony on the Rhine.” The gown provided for the Dauphine’s official wedding day was “cut from luminous, white-hued cloth-of-silver: the traditionally prescribed material for a dauphine’s wedding gown.” The silver gown was accented with many exquisite diamonds, bridal gifts from her mother, which were markers of her status as “the most important woman at court.” There was only one problem with the gown; it had been cut too small for its wearer. The helpers could not close the dress, and there was no substitute on hand, so at one o’clock the bride was sent down the Hall of Mirrors to meet the royal family in an ill-fitting gown with her lacing and shift “exposed for all to see.”⁹⁶

As for the Dauphin, he reportedly looked as glum as on previous days. He took the Dauphine’s hand, but only because it was required by protocol. The writer Hilaire Belloc describes Louis Auguste at the wedding, as the boy “to whom so much publicity was torture, [who] went awkwardly and with the nervous sadness of his eyes intensified; his gold braid and diamonds heightened his ill ease.”⁹⁷ The archbishop of Reims officiated, blessing thirteen pieces of gold and the bride’s ring. After the blessing, Louis Auguste, trembling, slipped the ring on the bride’s fourth finger of her left hand and gave her the gold pieces, thus wedding the Bourbons to the Habsburgs. At the conclusion of the religious ceremony, the 6000 guests in attendance took a rest before the evening festivities while the wedding party signed the marriage contract and Marie Antoinette received the oaths of the officers of the house, the men and women who would comprise

⁹⁶ Weber, 42.

⁹⁷ Hilaire Belloc, *Marie Antoinette*. 1909. Reprint, New York: Tess Press - Black Dog & Leventhal Publishers, 2006, 50.

her immediate entourage and those in her service. The royal wedding was an affair of the court as much as it was an affair of State.⁹⁸

The poor weather caused the outdoor festivities to be postponed for several days, sending the thousands of commoners in attendance home without a show. But, inside the palace, the courtiers were treated to another new addition to Versailles, the recently renovated Opera House, or *salle des spectacles*. The *salle* was a very expensive undertaking, two years in the making by the king's architect, Ange-Jaques Gabriel, for this occasion.⁹⁹ Lever describes the new facility as

A perfectly proportioned oval theater, gold embroidered blue silk drapes hung from the boxes and mirrors behind the colonnades reflected the gilded sculptures to infinity. The parquet floor of the stalls, raised to the level of the stage...had been made into an immense drawing room. A table had been set at the center solely for the royal family.... [T]hat evening, the courtiers remained standing, watching the spectacle of the wedding feast.¹⁰⁰

As beautiful as the new *salle* was, the guests preferred to view the spectacle of the newly married couple at supper. The courtiers could not help to notice that the new bride ate very little of the sumptuous wedding feast, while her new husband ate with a gusto for which the Bourbon men were famous. The king took notice of his grandson hunched greedily over his food and advised him to exercise some restraint and not to overindulge

⁹⁸ Zweig, 17-19. Lever, 23-26. Fraser, 67-71. Weber, 42-44. It is told in each of the works referenced here, except Lever, that the bride famously showed her own nervousness by dropping a large ink blot in her signature on the marriage contract. Fraser further notes that "her signature began to slope markedly downwards on the "ette" after the half-word "Antoine" as though the Dauphine had not quite accustomed herself to her new signature. See Fraser, 70. Bossy notes that the "idea of marriage as alliance was also embodied in the rites of the Church." The central rite being the giving of the bride to the groom in exchange for a symbolic counter-gift, here the thirteen pieces of gold, as well as the placing of the ring on the bride's finger "in token of alliance." See Bossy, p.21.

⁹⁹ Weber, 44.

¹⁰⁰ Lever, 23.

before his wedding night. To which the new groom replied, “I always sleep better after a good supper.”¹⁰¹

The wedding night of these two teenagers, strangers to one another, was, just as the wedding ceremony had been, an affair of both the court and the State. What Fraser calls the “key ceremony – on which the Franco-Austrian alliance symbolically focused,” was the ritual bedding ceremony of the newly united couple. To royal mothers, grandfathers, and political alliance makers in both courts, consummation of the marriage also meant the consummation of this long negotiated union.¹⁰² In her third, but not final, public undressing, the newlywed Dauphine was once again faced with the task of withstanding another *toilette*. Everyone with Rights of Entry into the royal bedchamber attended this *toilette*. It was important because it was the wedding night *coucher*, or the newlywed’s getting-into-bed ceremony. Attendees included not only the Dauphine’s ladies-in-waiting but also the highest-ranked princesses of the court. These strangers to Marie Antoinette were tasked with dismantling everything from her elaborate wedding coif to her intricate cloth-of-silver wedding clothes. In her first experience with the *coucher* and the extensive protocol involved in the rituals at Versailles for dressing and undressing the royal bodies, Marie Antoinette was made once again to stand semi-nude in front of persons she had either just met or had not met at all. Weber details the wedding night *coucher* of Marie Antoinette as

Crammed panier to panier into the room reserved for the *toilette*, dozens of ladies unfamiliar to the bride fell into line to ready her for her *coucher*. As the most recently married princess of the blood, the young Duchess de Chartres held the nocturnal *toilette*’s ultimate privilege, that of handing the embroidered nightdress to the Dauphine. But

¹⁰¹ Fraser, 44. Lever, 24.

¹⁰² Fraser, 70. Bossey asserts that marriage was only considered lawful and sacramental once sexual relations were completed. See Bossey, 22.

etiquette dictated that the garment pass through other privileged hands, as well, before arriving at the naked bride's body.¹⁰³

In a separate area, the groom also went through the wedding night *coucher*; on this occasion however, the bearer of his nightgown was his grandfather, the king.¹⁰⁴

Alas, the rituals did not end with the separate *coucher* for the bride and groom. After being properly dressed for bed, the bride was thrust out into the bridal suite where, according to a royal custom from the Middle Ages, the couple would go to bed “before the whole world.” Weber lists the “whole world” as, “the Archbishop of Reims, Louis XV, the prince and princesses of the blood, foreign princes and dignitaries, the dukes, duchesses, peers and peeresses of the realm, and the many other nobles whose titles afforded them Rights of Entry.” The archbishop blessed the bed and sprinkled it with holy water before the couple climbed into the golden covers. The curtains of the great four-poster bed were drawn only to be flung open again for all to see, and be reassured, that the “marriage was indeed poised for consummation.” All in attendance now bowed or curtsied and withdrew from the chamber to let the newlyweds seal the Bourbon-Habsburg alliance.¹⁰⁵

The deal was not sealed that night. The following morning the servants who changed the newlywed's bed linens were quick to notice that there was no physical sign, i.e., blood, of the virginal bride's deflowering and that royal offspring would not be expected anytime soon. Missives were sent home by foreign diplomats that the Bourbon-

¹⁰³ Weber, 45. I have not found much detailing the wedding night *coucher* for Louis Auguste. I assume that this is in part because the evening *toilette* was more “normal” for a royal resident of Versailles. The main difference for the Dauphin on this night, aside from there being foreign dignitaries present, and a wife in the bed, was the passing to him of his nightgown from the king.

¹⁰⁴ Zweig, 19.

¹⁰⁵ Weber, 45. For more on the origins of the ritual blessing of the bed, see Bossy, 22-23.

Habsburg alliance had yet to be culminated. As Zweig notes, the new union was, “*Matrimonium non consummatum est*,” which needs no translation, even if one knows nothing of Latin. The groom’s diary entry for his wedding day, and night, was simply “*Rien*,” or “nothing.” In the opinion of Gooch Louis’ behavior is that, having had no say or choice in the matter of his marriage, he “had gone through the ceremonies like an automaton,” including the expected duties of the marital bed¹⁰⁶ In fact, no “duties” at all had taken place or were even attempted. In her own accounts, Marie Antoinette notes that her new husband had not so much as touched her in the nuptial couch. Weber notes that many biographers of the queen speculate that the boy went to sleep immediately, completely ignoring his young bride. It would take the Dauphine some time to get her Dauphin to warm to her and be affectionate, but first she must learn the ways of Versailles.

¹⁰⁶ Weber, 46. Zweig, 20. Gooch, 125.

CHAPTER 3

VERSAILLES

Now married and living at Versailles, Marie Antoinette was at the very center of court ritual. In the spectacular ceremonies of Versailles, regulations governing when, how, and in whose company she dressed would serve as reminders that she was no longer in control of her own person. She had given over control when she renounced her rights of hereditary succession to the Austrian Empire. Marie Antoinette was now subject to the court life, rituals, and protocols initiated by Louis XIV. He had established these highly elaborate court routines as a way of controlling the nobility. According to Fraser, these routines were all constructed so the system centered on “the Sun King about whom the galaxies of the nobility were obliged to revolve by their constant attendance at his court.”¹⁰⁷

Louis XIV used the rituals of Versailles to bolster his absolutist rule.¹⁰⁸ Donna Bohanan notes that Louis’s successes were based on his “skillful uses of the traditional means at hand.” The relationship the king had with his nobility formed the backbone of his absolutist rule. The order and control effected by his reign were the result of vastly improved relations between the king and nobility. With this type of order and control, Louis XIV made sure that the “ties of dependency were reinforced.” Louis constructed at Versailles a more elaborate and loyal version of the Renaissance court. The most obvious feature of the court was its size. The court society was comprised of the royal

¹⁰⁷ Fraser, 73.

¹⁰⁸ For more on Louis XIV and his courts see John C. Rule, “Court, Capital, and Councils in the Reign of Louis XIV,” in *The Sun King: Louis XIV and the New World*, Steven G. Reinhardt, ed. and trans., New Orleans: The Louisiana Museum Foundation, 1984, 38-49.

family, princes and princesses of the blood, political officials, and others who were in the king's favor. These nobles and officials came to the court for "access to power and prestige." Louis XIV's court at Versailles was the center of French society. Norbert Elias reports that in 1744 Versailles had about 10,000 persons in residence, including the servants.¹⁰⁹

The idea of being at court and in the king's favor drew the nobility to Versailles. The political implications of being in residence there were important as clients benefitted from their patrons' close proximity to the king. Court society was highly competitive and organized into cliques and factions, each promoting its own interests at court. These factions were formed in a variety of ways, but most commonly through marriages, patron – client relationships, political alliances, and of course familial associations. The high level of competition and loyalty in Versailles society caused relationships to change rapidly. Relationships here depended on one person's usefulness to another and the political power one held or could attain. One's ability to be both cunning and deceitful was pivotal to maintaining one's position at Versailles. Louis's efforts in balancing factions only encouraged the competition among them. By keeping courtiers constantly competing with each other, the king maintained this balance, and therefore control, over the court. The rituals, courtesies, and etiquette that constituted daily life at Versailles were vital to his control. What Louis did was not new; ceremonial submissive behavior had been previously enforced by Louis XIII and Cardinal Richelieu. What Louis XIV

¹⁰⁹ Donna Bohanan, *Crown and Nobility in Early Modern France*. New York: Palgrave, 2001, 61. Norbert Elias, *The Civilizing Process: The History of Manners*, Edmund Jephcott trans., New York: Urizen Books, 1978, 78-80.

did was emphasize etiquette and ceremony, creating a structure that gave him an incredible amount of control.¹¹⁰

In his account of contemporary representations of Louis XIV, Peter Burke notes that today the name ‘Versailles’ “evokes not only a building, but a social world...and in particular the ritualisation of the king’s everyday life.” The mundane events of getting up in the morning, going to bed at night, and eating were all performances done before an audience. The highly ritualized events were planned down to the slightest detail. Courtiers at Versailles could set their watches by the king’s activities, which took place at the same time every day. Because Louis performed all of his daily actions in public, and because his personage was sacred, the recurrence of his daily activities took on symbolic meanings.¹¹¹

A much sought after mark of status at Versailles for courtiers was to be in attendance at the king’s most banal activities.¹¹² Louis XIV used his intimate activities as a way to display favors and differentiate the social rank of courtiers. He also used the same activities to show his displeasure with those out of favor, indicating that etiquette held an important symbolic function in the societal structure of Versailles. Burke notes that “the material objects most closely associated with the king became sacred in their turn because they represented him.” The king necessarily had to remove his nightshirt in order to get dressed in the morning. By putting the exchange of one type of clothing for another into a social context, it was, immediately invested with a different meaning. The king turned the handing of a shirt into a moment of privilege distinguishing the hander of

¹¹⁰ Bohanan, 62- 63.

¹¹¹ Peter Burke, *The Fabrication of Louis XIV*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992, 87-90. For a look at the daily routine of Louis XIV see Jeroen Duindam, *Vienna and Versailles: The Courts of Europe’s Dynastic Rivals, 1550-1780*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996, 153-155.

¹¹² Bohanan, 63. For details on who gained Rights of Entry to the king’s bedchamber, see Elias, 83-84.

the shirt from others present in the bedchamber. Persons placed into these distinguishing posts saw the demarcation increasingly as what Elias calls “a prestige-fetish” which “served as an indicator of the position of an individual within the balance of power between courtiers.”¹¹³ Louis XIV was able to keep the strict order of etiquette in perpetual motion during his long reign. By the time Louis XV came into power, obeisance was firmly engrained into the social workings of the French nobility.



Figure 3.1 Hyacinthe Rigaud, *Louis XIV (1638–1715)*, 1701, Louis XIV Collection, Louvre, Paris.

¹¹³ Burke, 90; Elias, 84-85.

In great contrast to the French court's rigid social structure was the imperial court structure of the Habsburgs. John P. Spielman shows that the Viennese court "defined itself not as a place but as a family extended to include all persons who were called to serve it."¹¹⁴ He notes that the court of Maria Theresa, in particular, had an "informal, easygoing, highly personal style."¹¹⁵ The sources for Habsburg court life in Vienna are much less abundant than the ones for Versailles. Jeroen Duindam notes that instructions for senior court officers included many hints on daily life but rarely became specific. The Habsburg court did not see any reason to describe their daily routines. As a result, it is easy to find information on royal audiences, festive occasions, and foreign sovereign visits, but intimate details of life at the Hofburg, the Habsburg's imperial palace, remain shrouded.¹¹⁶

Everyday actions that today we view as private were court events both in Versailles, and to a lesser extent, at Vienna. These particular actions were performed publicly to demonstrate not only the power of the monarch, but to demarcate status of those in service to the king. Both courts may be seen as "as series of concentric circles around the ruler, reaching from intimacy and seclusion to distance and display." French kings, however, remained loyal to the tradition of openness whereas the Austrians preferred a little more privacy. Duindam asks, "Was a French king ever truly 'en son

¹¹⁴ John P. Spielman, *The City & the Crown: Vienna and the Imperial Court 1600 -1740*, West Lafayette, Indiana: Purdue University Press, 1993, 57-58.

¹¹⁵ Spielman, 211.

¹¹⁶ Duindam, 133-134. For more information on courts under the influence of Vienna and the Habsburgs see Helen Watanabe-O'Kelly, *Court Culture in Dresden: From Renaissance to Baroque*, London: Palgrave, 2002, and Samuel John Klingensmith, *The Utility of Splendor: Ceremony, Social Life, and Architecture at the Court of Bavaria, 1600-1800*. Christian F. Otto and Mark Ashton, eds. for publication, 1994.

particulier' ...when his sleeping, eating, and excreting habits were habitually witnessed by others?"¹¹⁷

In the court of Vienna, the royal bedchamber was not accessible to the courtiers, only those explicitly invited could enter. In Vienna, there were more opportunities for the regents to find refuge from their public duties than at Versailles. The Habsburgs were able to secure a comfortable level of privacy in their quarters.¹¹⁸ No such level of comfort or privacy existed for Marie Antoinette at her new court. For what was a quest for order under the Sun King had fallen into what Fraser describes as a "power struggle among the nobility, played out on the field of etiquette" under Louis XV.¹¹⁹ The convoluted rules had ossified into strict adherence by this time. As a newcomer to the Versailles court, Marie Antoinette had to learn the appropriate degree of acknowledgement for each person who had Rights of Entry into her chambers, and each degree of royal lineage had its own special form of honor.¹²⁰

The Dauphine's *coucher*, or ritual evening undressing, is illustrative of the elaborateness of the court rituals. In her *Memoirs*, Madam Campan documents the "*etiquette of the toilet*":

[Marie Antoinette's] toilet was a masterpiece of etiquette: everything done on the occasion was in a prescribed form. Both the *dame d'honneur* and the tirewoman usually attended and officiated, assisted by the principal lady-in-waiting, and two inferior attendants. The tirewoman put on the petticoat, and handed the gown to the [Dauphine]. The *dame d'honneur* poured out the water for her hands, and put on her body linen. When a princess of the royal family happened to be present while the [Dauphine] was dressing, the *dame d'honneur* yielded to her the latter act of office, but still did not yield it directly to the princesses of the blood; in

¹¹⁷ Duindam, 161.

¹¹⁸ Duindam, 164-165.

¹¹⁹ Fraser, 74.

¹²⁰ Zweig, 35.

such a case the *dame d'honneur* was accustomed to present the linen to the chief lady-in-waiting, who, in turn, handed it to the princess of the blood.¹²¹

Campan details one occasion, a specific winter day, which underscores Fraser's characterization of rituals as power struggles "played out on the field of etiquette." It also serves to illustrate the elaborate etiquette that Campan calls "inconvenient, [but] suitable to the royal dignity."¹²²

[I]t happened that the [Dauphine], who was entirely undressed, was just going to put on her body linen; I held it ready unfolded for her; the *dame d'honneur* came in, slipped off her gloves, and took it. A scratching was heard at the door [the Versailles equivalent of a knock]; it was opened: and in came the Duchesse d'Orléans; she took her gloves off, and came forward to take the garment; but as it would have been wrong in the *dame d'honneur* to hand it to her, she gave it to me, and I handed it to the princess: a further noise – it was the Comtesse de Provence; the Duchesse d'Orléans handed her the linen. All the while the [Dauphine] kept her arms crossed upon her bosom, and appeared to feel cold. Madame observed her in her uncomfortable situation, and merely laying down her handkerchief, without taking off her gloves, she put on the linen, and in doing so knocked the [Dauphine's] cap off. The [Dauphine] laughed to conceal her impatience, but not until she had muttered several times, "How disagreeable! How tiresome!"¹²³

The ladies with Rights of Entry to the morning and evening dressing/undressing rituals viewed their duties as "sacred rites." Per Weber, the Dauphine's *toilette* ceremony was "supposed to overlay on her person all the established, outward signs of monarchical grandeur." Unfortunately, this left the Dauphine at the mercy of her subjects, particularly when the attire was especially formal, as with the *robe à la française*. The customs held that the Dauphine could reach for nothing on her own, which, as Weber explains, "meant

¹²¹ Campan, 89.

¹²² Campan, 90; the scenes described by Campan were portrayed in the film *Marie Antoinette*, directed by Sophia Coppola, Sony Pictures, 2006.

¹²³ Campan, 90.

that unless Madame de Noailles, who as *dame d'honneur* held the privilege of handing her a glass of water, was nearby, the princess had to go thirsty.”¹²⁴

Not one aspect of Marie Antoinette’s life was under her control, including her body and most intimate of functions, especially once her husband became King Louis XVI and she became queen upon the death of Louis XV in May 1774.¹²⁵ By then her marriage had already become suspect. Because she had not produced an heir in her first several years as Dauphine, she held a very tenuous position in the highly cut-throat and competitive court of Versailles. Marie Antoinette’s prestige and the assurance of her place in court all came down to one thing – her fertility. Yet, the cause of the couple’s lack of progeny was hardly her fault. Louis XVI was thought to have had phimosis, a penile deformity in which the foreskin of the penis is so tight that it cannot be pulled back to reveal the head of the penis. Narrowing of the foreskin on an uncircumcised penis restricts its movement. Both moderate and severe phimosis may cause the foreskin to remain partially, or even completely, over the glans when the penis is erect. This can cause pain when there is sexual stimulation and can interfere with sexual intercourse.¹²⁶ Due to this physical ailment, Louis could not (or would not) consummate the marriage right away.

This lack of intimacy between the monarch and his consort, and the lack of the subsequent heirs the marital relations *should* produce, left the young queen open to

¹²⁴ Weber, 63-64.

¹²⁵ Lever, 55.

¹²⁶ Tracy C. Shuman, MD, ed., “What Is Phimosis?”, Sexual Health: Male Reproductive Problems: Penis Disorders, accessed 28 April 2007, ©2005-2007 WebMD, Inc., available <<http://www.webmd.com/sexual-conditions/guide/sexual-health-male-reproductive-problems-penis-disorders?page=2>>. Glen S. Rothfield, M.D., M.A.C. and Deborah S. Romaine, *The Encyclopedia of Men’s Health*, An Amaranth Book, Facts on File Library of Health and Living, New York: Facts on File, 2005, 260.

further scrutiny. French historian François Furet adds that due to Louis' sexual inadequacies, Marie Antoinette:

had to live through those long early years [of marriage] with the court speculating every morning on what had happened – or rather, what had *not* happened – in her bed; gossip traveled swiftly from Versailles to Paris and she was soon credited with lovers (of both sexes)... When children did finally appear...the damage was already done: the image of an Austrian Messalina had been fixed by Parisian lampoons.¹²⁷

Vivian R. Gruder, in her essay on political perspectives in the *ancien regime*, notes that as early as the first year of their reign, the infertility of the young royals “set tongues to wagging. Ridicule of the king’s virility and probable impotence yielded the counter-image of a queen whose voracious sexual appetite drove her to both men and women. The absence of a royal mistress also left the queen the major target for royal scandal-mongering.”¹²⁸ Thurman notes that this intrusion of Marie Antoinette’s most personal domain was coupled with the “humiliation of having her bedsheets checked for blood or emissions, and her periods reported on by ambassadors to every court in Europe.”¹²⁹ Due to public anxiety over succession to the throne of France, the sex life of Louis and Marie Antoinette was understandably believed to be everyone’s business.

The expectation of the European courts and of the general populace was that the young couple would consummate their marriage in a timely manner. The fact that they were not conforming to societal norms and were, in effect, violating the social standards of the time left the newlyweds open to public shaming rituals, gossip, and other forms of ridicule. The point of this activity was to shame them into conformity, to ridicule them

¹²⁷ François Furet, *The French Revolution, 1770-1814*, Antonia Nevill, trans., Cambridge: Blackwell Publishing, 1996, 31.

¹²⁸ Vivian R. Gruder, “Whither Revisionism? Political Perspectives on the Ancien Regime,” *French Historical Studies* 20, no. 2, (Spring, 1997): 257.

¹²⁹ Thurman, 137-138.

until they resolved the problem.¹³⁰ The couple had, in fact, engaged in sexual intercourse, but not to completion, as early as 1773. Lever remarks “Finally, in Compiègne, on July 22, Louis Auguste could proclaim victory. Before going off to hunt, he went to see the King in order to introduce ‘his wife,’ and he assured his grandfather that the Princess had truly become his during the night.”¹³¹ It was not until 1777 that Louis was finally able to accomplish wholly the consummation of his marriage, and this only after Marie Antoinette’s brother, Emperor Joseph II co-regent of Austria, arrived and had a frank talk with his seemingly impotent brother-in-law. Joseph was not happy to find out what had occurred (or not occurred) in the royal bedchamber. He wrote to Archduke Leopold in Vienna, “[The King] has strong, perfectly satisfactory erections; he introduces his member, stays there without moving for about two minutes, withdraws without ejaculating but still erect, and bids [the queen] goodnight.” Joseph continued writing that if he had been there he would have Louis whipped “so that he would have come out of sheer rage like a donkey.”¹³²

Her prolonged “virginity” kept Marie Antoinette in a kind of limbo. As long as no heirs were produced, her position at court was not secure. Therefore, she felt she had to cultivate an “appearance of credit” and so began to model her style and behavior on those of a royal paramour.¹³³ Royal mistresses had traditionally held the role of being the outward sign of the king’s sexual prowess, of his virility. They wore lavish clothing

¹³⁰ For an interesting look at shaming rituals used to ridicule a non-consummating peasant couple in the sixteenth century see Natalie Zemon Davis, *The Return of Martin Guerre*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983, 20-22. For a more in-depth look at sexuality and married life in Early Modern Europe see Jean-Louis Flandrin, *Families in former times: Kinship, household and sexuality*, Richard Southern, trans., Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979; and Katherine Crawford, *European Sexualities, 1400-1800*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007.

¹³¹ Lever, 41.

¹³² Thurman, 137.

¹³³ Thurman, 137.

in sumptuous colors and expensive cuts of cloth. Jennifer Jones states that the royal mistresses played a prominent role in the “iconic world of the court.” She also notes that “...as sartorial, sexual, and state power conjoined, the official mistress of the king became the official mistress of *la mode* as well.”¹³⁴ Official mistresses were provided with jewels, a royal purse and apartments at Versailles. This *maîtresse-en-titre* was the highest ranking female in social settings, the organizer of all the Versailles entertainment and the one whose power no one dared to ignore.¹³⁵ In contrast, the royal consorts were supposed to be pious, obscure, discreet, i.e., defined by their function as bearers and rearers of royal broods. Queens were the polar opposites of mistresses.

To become the Dauphine, Marie Antoinette had adopted the appropriate “external honors” to mark her as property of the Crown. But she would not remain an innocent bystander once she became queen. Marie Antoinette’s mother, Empress Maria Theresa, told her, “It is for you to set the tone at Versailles,” and set it she did, though not in the way her mother intended. Beginning with the coronation of Louis Auguste on June 11, 1775, the young queen’s fashion became the subject of much discussion and emulation.¹³⁶ The gown Marie Antoinette chose for the ceremony was not of the traditional coronation style, but rather, as the Duc du Croÿ noted, “In the contemporary,

¹³⁴ Jennifer M. Jones, *Sexing la Mode: Gender, Fashion and Commercial Culture in Old Regime France*, New York: Berg, 2004, 11.

¹³⁵ Lever, 34. For more on the lives of the *maîtresse-en-titres* see Julia Kavanagh, *Woman in France During the Eighteenth Century*, 2 Vols. New York: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1893. Also see, G. P. Gooch, *Louis XV: The Monarchy in Decline*, London: Lowe and Brydone (Printers) Limited, 1962; Evelyn Lever, *Madame du Pompadour: A Life*. Catherine Temerson, trans., New York: St. Martin’s Griffin, 2000; and Stanley Loomis, *Du Barry: A Biography*. Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott Company, 1959.

¹³⁶ Hosford, 187; Simon Schama, *Citizens: a Chronicle of the French Revolution*, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1989, 51. For more thoughts on women and eighteenth-century clothing see Jennie Batchelor, *Dress, Distress and Desire: Clothing and the Female Body in Eighteenth-Century Literature*, New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2005; for a look at the fashion of the Eighteenth Century see Stella, Blum, ed., *Eighteenth-Century French Fashion Plates in Full Color: 64 Engravings from the “Galerie des Modes,” 1778-1787*, New York: Dover Publications, 1982.

gallant style.” The regent’s dress was covered in sapphires, other gemstones, and ornate, fanciful embroidery. It was the work of Rose Bertin, a young, rising star in the Parisian fashion industry. Bertin, whose shop was on the *rue Saint Honoré*, became the “bastion of French fashion” and was one of the great influences on the queen’s evolving taste in fashion.¹³⁷ She would help to usher in another image shift for Marie Antoinette.

As Desmond Hosford notes, the queen’s hair, “became a corporeal site for the enactment of personal agency.”¹³⁸ Among all the opulence of the coronation in gothic Reims cathedral, the biggest surprise was the new queen’s hairstyle. Weber notes that it was, “...teased high above her forehead, heavily powdered, and topped with a cluster of nodding white feathers... So towering was the overall effect of this coiffure that the face appeared to be the midpoint between the top of her hair and the hem of her gown.”¹³⁹

The Dagoty portrait, *Marie Antoinette Wearing Court Dress (1775)* shows the “*coiffure pyramidale*” a complex powdered creation with an *aigrette* (a spray of gems, or similar ornament, worn on the head) and a strand of diamonds, a blue silk ribbon, and feathers.

¹⁴⁰ The *pouf*, as it was known, began with a wire form that Léonard, the queen’s hairstylist, padded with wool, cloth, horsehair, and gauze, interweaving her own hair with fake tresses. Once it was made stiff with both pomade and powder, it was trimmed with

its defining scene.¹⁴¹ *Poufs* quickly became political billboards of a sort, their

¹³⁷ Weber, 95; Michael and Arianne Baterberry, *Mirror Mirror: A Social History of Fashion*. New York: Holt, Reinhart & Winston, 1977, 187; For more on Rose Bertin, see Aileen Ribeiro and Elizabeth Wilson. *The Art of Dress: Fashion in England and France 1750-1820*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995, 73-73, see also, Jones, 168-169.

¹³⁸ Hosford, 186. For more on hair as “sites for the cultural production and staging of the self,” see Angela Rosenthal, “Raising Hair,” *Eigtheenth-Century Studies*, Vol. 38, No. 1, (2004), 1-16.

¹³⁹ Weber, 95.

¹⁴⁰ Hosford, 187.

¹⁴¹ Thurman, 142. For more on the queen’s stylist see Léonard Autié, *Journal de Léonard coiffeur de Marie-Antoinette*, Paris: Les Editeurs Libres, 2007.

ornamentation frequently containing figures referring to current events.¹⁴² Hosford states that, “Such politicization of hair was a sign of the extravagance of the 1770s, much of which was inspired by Marie-Antoinette.”¹⁴³



Figure 3.2 Jean-Baptiste Gautier-Dagoty, *Marie Antoinette Wearing Court Dress* (1775) (Réunion des Musées Nationaux/Art Resource, NY)¹⁴⁴

¹⁴² Hosford, 187. For more on *poufs* see Batterberry, 188-189.

¹⁴³ Hosford, 188.

¹⁴⁴ Weber, Plate 11.

Soon all of French society clamored to imitate their new queen's coif. Madam Campan notes, "[S]he was of course imitated by other women. All wished to have the same dress as the Queen, and to wear the feathers and flowers to which her beauty...lent an indescribable charm."¹⁴⁵ The coiffure became the rage of Europe. Ironically, even her



Figure 3.3 French Fashion Caricature: *Coiffure à l'Independence ou the Triumph of Liberty*. c. 1778. Réunion des Musées Nationaux/Art Resource, NY.¹⁴⁶

reputation as an arbiter of fashion eventually contributed to the downfall of Marie Antoinette's good image as ladies sacrificed what they could to be *à la mode de la reine*. Madam Campan observed that

The expenditure of the younger ladies was necessarily much increased; mothers and husbands murmured at it; some few giddy women contracted debts; unpleasant domestic scenes occurred; several families either quarreled, or grew cool among themselves; and the general report was – that the Queen would be the ruin of all the

¹⁴⁵ Campan, 87-88.

¹⁴⁶ Weber, Plate 9.

French ladies.¹⁴⁷ The cost of the upkeep of her hair, the extravagant sums of money she spent on dresses from Bertin, and her growing passion for gambling at various card games fed into the image of Marie Antoinette as an ostentatious royal mistress.

Pierre Saint-Amand notes that the queen assumed this role to “compensate for a long Bourbon line of mistresses who had usurped the Queen of France’s position.” “If there is a style we could call *style Marie Antoinette*,” Saint-Amand says, “it is to be seen in this excess of ornament and decoration.”¹⁴⁸ Discussing sexual politics and public order in eighteenth-century France, Jeffrey Merrick remarks that, “Louis XVI chided Marie-Antoinette for gambling, taking part in plays at court, wearing too much makeup and jewelry, popularizing extravagant coiffures, and spending too much money.”¹⁴⁹ But she paid him no heed.

This course of asserting her position at court, flaunting her sexuality, and making herself the queen-mistress was rash. Styling herself in this manner was a risky move. Humanities professor and author, Camille Paglia, sums up the dangerous game the queen was playing:

Forced to jockey for position, French courtiers were slaves of fashion, while queens tended to be more modest and reserved. Fashion flash was practiced instead by the kings’ semiofficial mistresses – a role...borrowed by Marie Antoinette (whose husband had no mistress). [This] eventually compromised her reputation and made it easier for scurrilous pamphleteers to caricature her as a whore.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁷ Campan, 88.

¹⁴⁸ Pierre Saint-Amand, “Terrorizing Marie-Antoinette.” Jennifer Curtiss Gage, trans., *Critical Inquiry* 20. No. 3, Spring, 1994, 389. For more on Marie Antoinette’s expenditure on personal pleasures see Elizabeth de Feydeau, *A Scented Palace: The Secret History of Marie Antoinette’s Perfumer*, Jane Lizop, trans., New York: I. B. Tauris & Co., Ltd., 2006.

¹⁴⁹ Jeffrey Merrick, “Sexual Politics and Public Order in Late Eighteenth-Century France: The Mémoires Secrets and the Correspondance Secrète,” *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 1, No. 1, July, 1990, p. 81.

¹⁵⁰ Camille Paglia, “A Queen for the Modern Age? The Fascinating Marie Antoinette,” Available at <<http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?file>>, posted Sunday, October 8, 2006.

Consciously or unconsciously, Marie Antoinette's actions blurred the traditional roles (and status) of queen and mistress. This blunder precipitated her fall from grace with the French people. Paglia continues: "Under Louis XVI, the artificial superstructure of the French elite has reached its decadent limit.... Marie Antoinette's fashion display was no longer about the nation but about unfettered self-indulgence."¹⁵¹

Saint-Amand further argues that the queen was contaminated by her own extravagant tastes:

She offered herself up for frequent rituals (such as balls, games, and parties) that exposed her as an object to be looked at, an object of desire. Marie Antoinette was progressively perceived as usurping the spectacular role of the king. What Marie Antoinette did was to efface the king, to render him invisible, by orienting all circuits of desire toward her body.¹⁵²

This "rendering of the king invisible" made the queen more visible for all the wrong reasons. She was soon represented as a whore (among other things), a representation she never intended while unwittingly trying to cultivate an "appearance of credit" for herself at Versailles.

According to Furet, "public opinion deeply resented such derelictions of the duties and trappings of the reign: Marie-Antoinette represented a trebly vulnerable target – queen, foreigner, and woman." Emphasizing the Austrophobia of the time and conveying the deep distrust the public had for its foreign queen, he portrays Marie Antoinette as, Louis' "rash Austrian queen" who "elbowed aside" the Bourbon court tradition and "revealed the rack and ruin behind the walls." He therefore attributes the discrediting of the monarchy, or at least the discrediting of the image of the monarchy, to the actions of Marie Antoinette. By obtaining her own private apartments and creating a

¹⁵¹ Paglia, www.sfgate.com .

¹⁵² Saint-Amand, 390.

court within the court, where she amused herself and her friends, the queen effectively destroyed “the nature of the monarchy’s public image offered at Versailles, and exposing only the aristocratic coteries,” Furet concludes. However, the actions of Marie Antoinette did not initiate the discrediting and desacralization of the monarchy. This process had its roots in the reign of Louis XV. In *From Tribes to Nation: The Making of France 500-1799*, James B. Collins notes that the reputation of Louis XV as a roué “tarnished the entire Court.” The king’s personal conduct, excessive drinking, hunting, and his array of mistresses -- coupled with political, social, and cultural developments, -- “delegitimized the government and desacralized the monarchy.” All of the contempt that had been directed towards Louis XV and Madame du Barry was redirected towards Marie Antoinette.¹⁵³

Imagery of the late *ancien regime* portrays the queen as a nymphomaniac, lesbian, and adulteress, who was guilty of corruption and uttering the infamous, “Let them eat cake!”¹⁵⁴ Recent work on the scandalous and pornographic writings of the

¹⁵³ Furet, *The French Revolution, 1770-1814*, 32; James B. Collins, *From Tribes to Nation: The Making of France 500-1799*, Toronto: Wadsworth Thompson Learning, 2002, 482. For more on the conduct of Louis XV and the opinion of him see Thomas E. Kaiser, “Louis le Bien-Aimé and the Rhetoric of the Royal Body,” in *From the Royal to the Republican Body: Incorporating the Political in the Seventeenth- and Eighteenth-Century France*, Sara E. Melzer and Kathryn Norberg, eds., Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1998, 131-161.

¹⁵⁴ That utterance has been attributed to Marie Antoinette, but according to Susan S. Lanser the phrase was “cross-cultural folklore attached to French royalty well before the time of Marie Antoinette.” In a classification of folktales, Antti Aarne and Stith Thompson list examples of “Let them eat cake!”-type lore from countries such as Estonia, Germany, Russia, and India. The attachment of the apocryphal phrase to French queens is attributed to Jean Jacques Rousseau. In Book VI, Vol. II of his *Confessions* Rousseau recounts a tale of “a great princess, who, on being informed that the countrypeople had no bread, replied, ‘Then let them eat pastry.’” The ‘great princess’ in his tale is assumed to be the Spanish wife of Louis XIV, Queen Marie-Thérèse. *Confessions* was completed in 1765, when Marie Antoinette was only ten years old, so the princess in Rousseau’s tale could not have been the ill-fated last queen of France. See Susan S. Lanser, “Eating Cake: The (Ab)uses of Marie-Antoinette,” Afterward, *Marie Antoinette: Writings on the Body of a Queen*, 274. Antti Aarne and Stith Thompson, *The Types of the Folktale: A Classification and Bibliography*. Helsinki: Folklore Fellows Communication No. 184, 1973, 424. Jean Jacques Rousseau, *The Confessions of Jean Jacques Rousseau*, 2 Vols., London : Gibbings & Company Ltd., 1901, Book VI, 148. For a look at numerous French princesses to whom “Let them eat cake!” has been attributed see Fraser, 135.

1770s and 1780s give insight into the public's opinion of Marie Antoinette and the discrediting of her image, and by consequence the discrediting of the monarchy. Vivian R. Gruder, in her essay on political perspectives in the *ancien regime*, notes that during the revolutionary period, there was "political pornography exuding vitriol against the preferred target, Marie-Antoinette." In vulgar images of this period Marie Antoinette is represented as both nymphomaniac and lesbian. These images had the effect of fatally eroding the French public's allegiance to the sanctity of the royal body of the king and to the monarchy as an institution.¹⁵⁵

Lynn Hunt argues that because queens could never rule in France they were not imagined as having the two bodies associated with kings.¹⁵⁶ Marie Antoinette, however, had many bodies. Later, during the Revolution, each was attacked and destroyed in turn because they represented the threats, conscious and unconscious, that could be posed to the Republic. The queen represented not only the ultimate in counterrevolutionary conspiracy, but also the menace of the feminine and the "effeminizing to republican

¹⁵⁵ Gruder, 255. For a look at some of the pornographic images of Marie Antoinette see Gilles Néret, *Erotica Universalis*. Köln: Benedikt Taschen, 1994, 338-365.

¹⁵⁶ For more on the bodies of queens see *The Body of the Queen: Gender and Rule in the Courtly World 1500-2000*, Regina Schulte, ed., New York: Berghahn Books, 2006. For an interesting contrast to the visual representations of Marie Antoinette as queen, see Louis Montrose, *The Subject of Elizabeth: Authority, Gender, and Representation*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006. In his work on the portraiture of England's Queen Elizabeth I Montrose demonstrates how this queen regnant was able to use her image, and control her image, to maintain her sovereignty as legitimate. The images he presents and analyzes in this work show Elizabeth's mastery at imbuing images of herself with important symbols of virginity, maternity, power, wisdom, and strength. This work provides an excellent contrast to the imagery of Marie Antoinette. Elizabeth I did not have the problem of being a foreign queen that Marie Antoinette had, but did have to contend with the issue of her legitimacy, of her gender, and that of her succession. Montrose illustrates how she was able to contend with the speculation of her heritage by often representing herself in portraiture alongside her father Henry VIII. The constant visual reminder that she was Henry's daughter and a true Englishwoman (her mother Anne Boleyn was English) was used to strengthen her reign and emphasize her Tudor bloodline. She was adept at positioning herself in portraits in similar ways to her father. Elizabeth emphasized the sacralization of her person and role as queen, as well as positively representing herself during times of religious and geopolitical conflicts. Montrose's portrayal of Elizabeth Tudor is the antithesis of Marie Antoinette, especially where image, and control of image, is concerned.

notions of manhood and virility.” The queen was “the antonym of the nation.”¹⁵⁷ Chantal Thomas notes that the first pamphlets denounced the queen’s acts of imprudence, her taste for gambling, her lack of respect for etiquette, and above all “her coquetry.” Around 1775, when the rage for high hairstyles overtook the court, the queen set the example. She turned her back on the services of the royal hairdresser and used a more fashionable one, Léonard. This desacralization, through fashion, of the royal head was a perceived as a first step towards the fall of the monarchy.¹⁵⁸

Work on the political pornography of the late-eighteenth century reveals varied attacks against Marie Antoinette indicating that the criticism in pamphlets, caricatures, and gossip, began around 1774 and continued, though varying intensity, through 1789.¹⁵⁹ Early in their reign the young ruler’s infertility initiated gossip. Ridicule of Louis’s impotence and questions about his manhood brought forth the image of a weak, ineffectual king and the antipodal image of a queen whose rapacious sexual desires drove her to find pleasure in men and women alike. The fact that Louis did not take a mistress, paired with Marie Antoinette’s assuming of that important court role, left her *the* major target for calumny at Versailles. Thomas adds that the libels against Marie Antoinette did not become serious until 1778, with the birth of the Madame Royale, and then intensified further in 1781 with the arrival of the Dauphin. The earlier theme of the king’s impotence was revived by claims that the Dauphin was a bastard. This was also the period France was at war with Great Britain over the new United States’ independence.

¹⁵⁷ Lynn Hunt, “The Many Bodies of Marie-Antoinette: Political Pornography and the Problem of the Feminine in the French Revolution,” in *Marie-Antoinette: Writings on the Body of a Queen*, Dana Goodman, ed., New York: Routledge, 2003, 119-122; for more on the rise of pamphlets see Chantal Thomas, “The Heroine of the Crime: Marie-Antoinette in the Pamphlets,” in *Marie-Antoinette: Writings on the Body of a Queen*, 100-104.

¹⁵⁸ Thomas, 104-105.

¹⁵⁹ For more information on pornography in Early Modern Europe see *The Invention of Pornography: Obscenity and the Origins of Modernity, 1500-1800*, Lynn Hunt, ed., New York: Zone Books, 1993.

Gruder states, “Scandal could be a propaganda tool against the Bourbons to weaken the French resolve in war.”¹⁶⁰

In her writings on the political pornography directed at Marie Antoinette, Gruder asks the question, “Reality fed fantasy and fantasy sometimes shaped reality, but was fantasy read as reality?” Tales of the queen’s sexual exploits, “made use of real experiences superimposed on classic pornographic scenarios: garden walks, dances, the privacy of Trianon [the Queen’s private residence on the grounds of Versailles] became settings of trysts, liaisons, intrigues, and orgies....” Rumors about Marie Antoinette and her companions originated in the court circles of Versailles; courtiers knew of the queen’s nighttime walks, who she danced with at parties and masked balls, the friendships she made (or rejected), and it was the courtiers who speculated on the conjugal relationship of the royal couple. It was these defamatory stories about Marie Antoinette which harmed her reputation and assisted in the loss of respect from her subjects. Jacques Revel notes that the fictional accounts of Marie Antoinette created a “paper queen that, early on...replaced the ‘real’ queen until the latter was completely eclipsed.”¹⁶¹

Pornography was more commonplace and less shocking in the eighteenth than in later centuries. As a tradition, Gruder notes, pornography was:

the repository of a substratum of human consciousness, ranging from an easier acceptance of bodily functions to male (and sometimes female) lust and the fear of the female. Such archetypes may explain in part why, in the form of political pornography, these emotions were impressed at particular times upon particular individuals.¹⁶²

¹⁶⁰ Thomas, 105; Gruder, 258.

¹⁶¹ Gruder, 262-4. Jacques Revel, “Marie-Antoinette in Her Fictions: The Staging of Hatred,” *Fictions of the French Revolution*, Bernadette Fort, ed., Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1991, 114.

¹⁶² Gruder, 268.

In early modern Europe, pornography was the vehicle most often used to criticize religious and political authority. It emerged as a distinct category of written and visual representation in large part due to the spread of print culture. Hunt notes that pornography was linked to, “free-thinking and heresy, to science and natural philosophy, and to attacks on absolutist political authority.” As a result, she argues, analysis of pornography reveals much about gender differences developing within “the culture of modernity.” Gender alone was not the reason Marie Antoinette was a prominent figure in the political pornography. As a whole, pornography has always been and remains a genre of political criticism. This type of pornography defames character; it lowers the reputation of the person(s) lampooned and reverberates “on everything and everyone associated with that person.” In addition to the images and individuals portrayed, the underlying political arguments caught the interests of the public. In pornographic imagery, the queen appears guilty of “political and moral misdeeds.”¹⁶³

The queen’s three major transgressions were secretly promoting the interests of Austria over those of France, wasting public money by extravagant spending, and seeking office for her favorites. Recalling the Austrophobia mentioned by Soboul, Lefebvre, and Furet, one realizes that the queen’s “Austrian connection” touched a collective French historical memory, the old fear of the Habsburg enemy now ally, whose friendship the French public did not trust and whose relationship to France was suspect. Negative depictions of the queen sprang from the belief that she exerted too much influence in government by her support of Austrian interests and those of her friends. These charges against Marie Antoinette originated in the final years of the *ancien régime*; but the effect the writings had in instigating the French Revolution is questionable. Gruder argues that,

¹⁶³ Hunt, *The Invention of pornography*, 10-11. Gruder, 268-269.

“the presence of political criticism in the libels and pornography may suggest that fears of financial waste, high taxes, and foreign powers aroused the French more than did the purported sexual antics of Marie Antoinette and her putative many lovers.”¹⁶⁴ In other words, the scurrilous attacks on the queen may have been symptoms more than causes. The lampooning of Marie Antoinette and others in the court, including the king, were the expression of other, more deep-seated anxieties and tensions concerning the supposed sacred status of the monarchy. Sexual attacks on the queen (and king) can be seen as largely a continuation of the decades-long desacralization of the monarchy, which had been accelerated by Louis XV.¹⁶⁵ The accusations of sexual degeneration went hand in hand with political corruption. The constant manipulation of her image by others took on a newer dimension during the French Revolution, when the queen was conceived “as pure disorder, as misfit, as a sexual monster, a divided individual, a figure of impropriety.”¹⁶⁶



Figure 3.4 Cartoon depicting Marie Antoinette as Harpy (Musée de la Révolution Française, Vizille/Bridgeman Art Library).

¹⁶⁴ Gruder, 269-271.

¹⁶⁵ For a different take on the desacralization of the monarchy under Louis XV see Jeffrey Merrick, *The Desacralization of the French Monarchy in the Eighteenth Century*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1990.

¹⁶⁶ Saint-Amand, 393.

The body of the queen was a source of unlimited fantasies because traditionally her body belonged to the public. Her body was an affair of the State. This was most evident on two occasions in Marie Antoinette's life. The first was the ritual undressing and redressing during the *remise*. The other had to do with her lying-ins, the traditional ceremony of the queen giving birth in public. This was done to assure that there was "no trafficking in babies." The pamphlets against the queen took up this public display of her body. The pornographic descriptions of the queen's body stripped Marie Antoinette bare in a way that would arouse voyeuristic interest in the reader. The spectacle of the queen's nakedness had to be appalling and give rise to indignation, not titillation. To present the queen as a libertine was to denounce her royal function. In the pornography, according to Thomas, which was "undergirded by misogyny, the licentiousness of the queen is presented as a defect, a pathology of the nymphomaniac." It stripped her of her clothes and revealed a sexuality that dishonored both Marie Antoinette the queen and Marie Antoinette the woman.¹⁶⁷

Thomas attributes the wide success of the pamphlets to their being a commercial enterprise.

Contrary to high literature, [pamphleteering] above all obeyed mercantile objectives. Like [a] tabloid press, its register was hyperbole, excess its motto. The diabolical vocation of Marie-Antoinette was to overstep all the limits, to always outdo herself in frivolousness, indecency, denaturation, scorn for her husband and squandering of the realm, sexual audacity, and murderous lunacy. As pamphlet heroine, Marie-Antoinette was a woman whose capacity for evil exceeded, by a long shot, all bounds of plausibility.¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁷ Thomas, 107-108.

¹⁶⁸ Chantal Thomas, "Introduction," *The Wicked Queen*, Julie Rose, trans. New York: Zone Books, 1999, 10.

Much like the tabloid presses today, the “Marie Antoinette industry” of the 1780s served to keep the queen in the forefront of people’s minds. Love her or hate her she could be counted on to sell pamphlets. Like Lindsey Lohan, Britney Spears, Paris Hilton, and other tabloid celebrities today, the general public just could not look away from the press coverage, no matter how outlandish or mundane it was.

In the course of the 1789 Revolution, detractors continued to manipulate the queen’s name. Through countless abridgements and adaptations ran the common thread of degradation; the moniker of choice and insult was “*L’Autrichienne*”. It is a play on words of her Austrian, foreign, non-French, “*autre*” or “other” heritage, and the word for bitch, *chienne*. As Saint-Amand notes, “The queen’s final appellation – *Veuve Capet* – represents the ultimate endpoint of these processes of identification and substitution. The queen ceases to be the *queen of France*; her name will no longer summon forbidding images of the sacred.” No longer exceptional, the *ci-devant reine de France* succumbs to “the banality of equality”. Her condemnation as an Austrian and a foreigner was a way for the French to take back the hospitality that had been given to her upon her arrival at Strasbourg.¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁹ Saint-Amand, 394-396.

CHAPTER 4

LA VEUVE CAPET

Despite the fall of the Bastille, July 14, 1789, and the social and political unrest that followed in Paris, the royal family spent the summer in Versailles as if nothing had occurred, even redecorating both the apartments of Marie Antoinette and those of the royal children.¹⁷⁰ The market women of Paris, fed up with their living conditions and the ever deepening food crisis, decided to take matters into their own hands. An incident at Versailles involving the king and queen propelled them into action. In this “imprudent incident,” the royal family appeared at a dinner for officers of the Flanders Regiment in the opera house of the château at Versailles on October the first. The eleven hundred soldiers of the regiment had been sent to Versailles as added protection of the royal family and of the château itself. The national cockade, the tri-color, was insulted when someone cried, “Everyman take the black cockade, that is the best one!” black being the color of Austria and by extension the color of Marie Antoinette. News of this insult spread to Paris by October 3, 1789. By the fifth the group of women from the markets of Paris had marched to Versailles to protest against unemployment and the high cost of bread. On October sixth, the crowds began aggressive demonstrations, killed a bodyguard, and stormed Versailles. The king and queen, along with other members of the royal family and their staff, were forced to return to Paris by the mob.¹⁷¹ This insult

¹⁷⁰ Philippe Huisman and Marguerite Jallut, *Marie Antoinette*, Edita Lausanne ed. and trans., New York: Viking Press, 1971, 196.

¹⁷¹ Huisman and Jallut, 196-201; Lefebvre, 198; Lever, 223-229; for more on the French Revolution and what led up to the actions of the Paris market women, see Peter McPhee, *The French Revolution 1789-1799*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002, 60-62.

against the national cockade, and therefore Paris, launched an initiative ordering the prosecution of persons wearing anything other than the tricolor cockade. This crime was called *lèse-nation*, a new term invented by the revolutionaries for political crimes against the nation. It was simply an adaptation of the *ancien regime's lèse-majesté*, or treason.¹⁷²

Once brought back to Paris to reside in the Tuileries Palace, the tide gradually turned against the royal family until eventually the more radical elements of the Paris citizenry and the Legislative Assembly rejected them. Fueled by the negative images of the queen, the weakened position of the king, and especially the royal family's flight to Varennes, the monarchy would be abolished just over a year when the revolutionaries declared France a Republic on September 20, 1792. The decisive event was the king's attempt to flee the nation with his family on June 21, 1791, and the incriminating documents he left behind containing evidence of his plans to use assistance from countries sympathetic to the Bourbon family to maintain the monarchy in France. Louis XVI was tried as *citizen* Louis Capet for high treason by the National Convention January 14-17, 1793. Convicted by a slim margin of votes on the seventeenth, Louis Capet, the *ci-devant* king of France, went to the scaffold and was executed by guillotine four days later. Marie Antoinette, now the Widow Capet, would follow her husband to the scaffold nine months later.¹⁷³

Dorinda Outram states the monarchy, in the rhetoric of the French Revolution, was “*par excellence* a régime characterized by the corruption of power through the agency of women.” Bedroom politicking, which she describes as “the exchange of

¹⁷² Lefebvre, 198; Leigh Whaley, review of, *The Hébertistes to the Guillotine*, by Morris Slavin, *Canadian Journal of History* 30, (April 1995): 126; *Brewer's Dictionary of Phrase & Fable*, Centenary ed., s.v. “*lèse-majesté*.”

¹⁷³ McPhee, 104-105; Schama, 655-675.

political gifts for sexual favors,” was seen both as a cause of the weaknesses of the old regime and as justification for the Revolution itself.¹⁷⁴ The most visible example of this attitude, according to Outram, is the trial of Marie Antoinette. She argues that the “political counts against her were inseparable from, and bolstered by, the accusations of sexual perversions and incest which accompanied them.” She also claims that the extent to which the power of the monarchy was accredited to women was matched by the degree to which the Revolution was “committed to anti-feminine rhetoric.” The politicians found in this particular rhetoric

an escape from the guilt arising from the destruction of the French monarchy and its complex religious sanctions; what looked like a sacrilegious act had *in fact* been a crusade for virtue; what looked like an attack on the supreme political symbol, the king’s body, had *in fact* been a purging of the female from the body politic.

Outram argues that the trial of Marie Antoinette was “staged virtually as a morality play on the evil impact of women on the body politic, as well as an epitome of monarchical corruption.”¹⁷⁵ Susan S. Lanser agrees, noting that

The sapphic taint around Marie-Antoinette had something to do with the displacement of Louis from the decision-making bed, just as the placement of women in the heteroscopic sapphic pornography of 1790s France had something to do with the re-placement of women from revolutionary organizations into a private sphere.

Lanser argues that the collusion of public power and female intimacies was suggested by the “widespread sapphophobia that bursts forth” in the late eighteenth century.¹⁷⁶

¹⁷⁴ For more on boudoir politics, see Julia Kavanagh, *Woman in France During the Eighteenth Century*, 2 Vols. New York: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1893; also Gooch, *Louis XV: The Monarchy in Decline*, and his *Maria Theresa and Other Studies*; Evelyn Lever, *Madame du Pompadour: A Life*; Stanley Loomis, *Du Barry: A Biography*; and Edward Crankshaw, *Maria Theresa*.

¹⁷⁵ Dorinda Outram, *The Body and the French Revolution: Sex, Class and Political Culture*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1989, 125-127.

¹⁷⁶ Susan S. Lanser, “Befriending the Body: Female Intimacies as Class Acts,” *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, Vol. 32, No. 2, (1998-99), 193-194.

Saint-Amand states that the king's death was "foundational, that it was the generator of a new nation." This nation in the making had to divorce itself from its progenitor. Hunt argues that the king and queen were the failed father and mother of the old nation. Their execution was as much parricide as regicide because the revolutionary citizen-sons killed their father-king and replaced him with a group of equal brothers. Madelyn Gutwirth states that the killing of Louis "smacks of revenge" for he was "no totem..., but a failed symbol of a patriarchal state... [a] ritual sacrifice to restore order to the community." Susan Dunn agrees, concluding that Louis XVI possessed "the supernatural ability to purify and regenerate the nation through his own death."¹⁷⁷

Saint-Amand asks, in light of the reasons stated for the killing of Louis Capet, "How are we then to read what happened to the queen? Was her death insignificant and inconsequential?" He argues that "the execution of Marie Antoinette was by no means an affair of state." *La Veuve Capet's* trial was held before a revolutionary court, not the Convention, as her husband's had been. During the trial of Citizen Capet, the queen's name had been brought up only to show that she would have no special status once Louis was gone. She was to be tried before the judicial courts like any other person in the country charged with the crime of treason. She was to be tried before judges, not representatives of the nation.¹⁷⁸ The revolutionary court would go after her private life, condemning "the woman in her as much as the queen." Saint-Amand argues that Marie Antoinette was a victim of,

¹⁷⁷ Saint-Amand, 384; See Hunt, *The Family Romance of the French Revolution* for a more in-depth look at the familial images associated with French Revolution politics; Madelyn Gutwirth, "Sacred Father; Profane Sons: Lynn Hunt's French Revolution," *French Historical Studies*, Vol. 19, No. 2, (Autumn 1995), 268; Susan Dunn, *The Deaths of Louis XVI: Regicide and the French Political Imagination*, Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1994, 4; For more on the trial of Louis XVI see Dunn, see also Michael Walzer, ed., *Regicide and Revolution: Speeches at the Trial of Louis XVI*, Marian Rothstein, trans., Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974.

¹⁷⁸ Fraser, 407.

backlash against the advancement of women in the public sphere, against their increased visibility and competition with men for participation in social institutions. When people denounced Marie Antoinette they also denounced the excessive publicity of aristocratic women.... [She] was perceived as the most unbridled symbol of this new representation of women.¹⁷⁹

Hunt concurs, noting that the charges brought up against Marie Antoinette as the queen were all “reflecting a fundamental anxiety about queenship as the most extreme form of the invasion of the public sphere by women.” Hunt sees Marie Antoinette as the “emblem for the feared disintegration of gender boundaries that accompanied the French Revolution.” The queen, who never could control the uses to which she was put, was cast in the final role she would play in the drama of her very public life.¹⁸⁰

Time in the Temple prison gave the Capet family something they had never had at Versailles, a typical bourgeois family life. Here they had the simplified routine that Marie Antoinette tried to instill at the Petit Trianon. Gone were the elaborate court ceremonies of Louis XIV. Gone were the elaborate public *toilettes* and *couchers*. The only ones to dress the queen now were her sister-in-law, Madame Elizabeth, and the young Madame Royale, Marie-Therese. Marie Antoinette’s hair, once dressed by the great and fashion-forward Léonard, was simply brushed and lightly powdered by Cléry, a former valet to her son the Dauphin, Louis Charles. Away from the rigid structures of court life, the family was able to spend more time with one another and Marie Antoinette and Louis were finally able to grow close to each other and jointly participate in the raising of their two remaining children. The queen and the Madame Royal spent their days sewing and reading while the king tutored and played with the Dauphin. They took

¹⁷⁹ Saint-Amand, 386-387; for more on women and how they were portrayed in the French Revolution see Gutwirth’s *The Twilight of the Goddesses: Women and Representation in the French Revolutionary Era*. New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1992

¹⁸⁰ Hunt, *The Family Romance of the French Revolution*, 113-114.

their meals *en famille* with Madame Elizabeth joining them. Marie Antoinette finally had a family life that approximated the one she had left in Vienna twenty-three years earlier.¹⁸¹

This family life was short lived as Louis was separated from his family in October of 1792 and moved to the Great Tower of the Temple. Though he had been moved to separate rooms, remaining in isolation for his trial, even over Christmas and New Year's Day, Louis was allowed a two hour meeting with his family the evening of January 20, 1793, which, unbeknownst to his wife, sister, and children, would be their last.¹⁸² Weber notes that the afternoon of her husband's death, Marie Antoinette handled the news as only she knew how, "by choosing costumes." Goret, a municipal officer in Paris, noted in his memoirs that when he visited the queen after Louis' execution, she "interrupt[ed] her sobbing to pronounce these words: 'We are aware of the tragedy that has befallen us; ...our own tragedy is certain, and we wish to go into mourning.'" The new widow requested that the clothing be "as simple as possible."¹⁸³

Mourning clothes were provided for the family. The gown for the new Widow Capet was of plain black taffeta. Weber notes that this choice "constituted a grave tactical error, insofar as [Marie Antoinette's] clothes preserved through their symbolism a monarchy that the Revolution had already gone to great lengths to suppress...."According to Weber, some saw the widow's weeds as an expression of her Austrian heritage, because black was not only Austria's national color but it was the late

¹⁸¹ Weber, 256-257.

¹⁸² When Louis sent his family away at ten o'clock in the evening before his execution, he assured them that he would see them at seven o'clock the following morning. He did not as he thought it would be too much on his family to have a second goodbye. See Zweig, 379 and Fraser, 398-399.

¹⁸³ Weber, 266-268; Goret quoted in Weber, 268.

Maria Theresa's signature style after the passing of her husband, Stephen Francis of Lorraine, in Marie Antoinette's youth.¹⁸⁴

Six months after Louis' death, Marie Antoinette was separated from her children and sister-in-law and moved from the Temple to the Conciergerie to await her trial. The former queen was badly in need of clothing as she only had the black mourning dress she had worn from the Temple. Ladies employed in the prison occasionally made repairs to the only dress she had worn since becoming a widow. The mother of the Conciergerie's turnkey, Mme. Larivière, had to patch the queen's dress with pieces of muslin under the arms and at the hem where it was worn thin. The former queen of France had very little access to everyday items, such as paper, ink, or even a candle. Her jewelry had been removed, including her wedding ring and the one Austrian item she managed to preserve during the *remise*, the gold watch from her mother, which was finally relinquished to France. Her sewing scissors had been taken from her in case she wished to harm herself, rendering her unable to repair her own clothing or pass her time with needlework. The black satin slippers and heavy, winter-weight dress had become ragged from overuse. The former queen reportedly even slept in her mourning gown for fear that she would be taken away and executed without notice. She remained dressed, wanting to go to the scaffold in her widow's rags.¹⁸⁵

¹⁸⁴ Weber, 269.

¹⁸⁵ Fraser, 421-422; Weber, 279.



Figure 4.1 The Marquise de Brehan, *Marie Antoinette Imprisoned in the Conciergerie* (c. 1793-1795)(Erich Lessing/Art Resource, NY)¹⁸⁶

The Temple jailer Simon caught the young former Dauphin Louis Charles, now Charles Capet (or Louis XVII depending on which side one fell on during the Revolution), masturbating in his cell one day. Charles, about age ten, was then prodded to make a series of accusations against his mother, sister, and aunt; the most heinous of which was the charge of incest. Louis Charles affirmed that his mother and aunt had shown him how to masturbate and that he had often been made to lie between Marie Antoinette and Madame Elizabeth in the bed at the Temple. The court's proof of this incest was the boy's injured testicle, which Fraser reports had in fact been injured when Louis Charles was playing with a stick. The queen was secretly interrogated in the middle

¹⁸⁶ Weber, Plate 24.

of the night, October 12, 1793, in front of the president of the Revolutionary Tribunal. Afterwards she was asked if she would like any counsel. She answered yes and was provided with two lawyers for her defense. The lawyers, who did not meet with the former queen until the next day, had no time to prepare their case. The trial began at eight o'clock in the following morning, Monday, October 14.¹⁸⁷

In her final days, her trial, and subsequent execution, Marie Antoinette seemingly had, at long last, control over her own body. She was, maybe for the first time, actually fully in control of her own corporeal manifestation. Stefan Zweig captures her preparation for her trial with the following:

She was determined to face the Revolutionary Tribunal and those members of the public that were admitted as with the dignity becoming to her station. The people must be made to realize that the woman who appeared in the dock was a scion of the House of Habsburg and, notwithstanding the decree of deposition, a queen. More carefully than of late in the Conciergerie she arranged her white locks. Then she donned a freshly starched cap of white linen, from either side of which her mourning veil fell. It was as the widow of Louis XVI, the last King of France that she was to present herself before the republican judges.¹⁸⁸

According to Fraser, the appearance of the Widow Capet in the courtroom “caused an immediate sensation.” The crowded courtroom was packed with all of the court officials, prosecutors, and jurors, as well as market-women and other spectators who had come to look upon the event. Marie Antoinette, age thirty-seven, was white-haired and pale. Her fine features were now sunken and the circumstance of her confinement in the Conciergerie did nothing to alleviate her ailments or provide her with fresh air and sunlight.¹⁸⁹

¹⁸⁷ Fraser, 426 -27.

¹⁸⁸ Zweig, 434.

¹⁸⁹ Fraser notes that Marie Antoinette was in very poor health at the time of her trial. She cites the history of tuberculosis in the Habsburg line and the possibility that Marie Antoinette was afflicted by it. Fraser also makes note of the former queen’s ongoing gynecological problems, vaginal blood loss, and the

The appearance of the *ci-devant reine* must have been a shock to the Parisians who had only seen her portraiture or had seen her in her court robes at a royal function. To see Marie Antoinette in this light must have been a sharp contrast to the images of her as the spendthrift queen dressed fashionably in the latest Rose Bertin confection topped off with a Léonard *pouf* and glittering diamonds and jewels. The image of her in her worn-out and dirty widow's dress coupled with her ill appearance showed those in attendance a woman deeply bereaved and one who had long suffered since her imprisonment.¹⁹⁰ This pale, haggard looking former queen drew unsuspected sympathy in the courtroom, especially with her reaction to the charges of incest with the former Dauphin. With what Weber calls “undisguised heartbreak and shock” Marie Antoinette famously answered the allegations by stating, “I call upon all mothers present to say whether such a thing is possible!” The feeling of the court witnesses would have no bearing, though, as her fate had been determined before she entered the court. Marie Antoinette was found guilty of high treason. The reaction of the court audience, however, “finally...alerted [Marie Antoinette's] enemies to the tactical dangers of allowing her to dress like a tragic royalist martyr.” At four o'clock in the morning October 16, after her conviction and sentencing to death by guillotine, the Widow Capet was informed that she would not be allowed to go to the scaffold in mourning dress.¹⁹¹

possibility of uterine fibroids, early-onset menopause, or even uterine cancer as an explanation for Marie Antoinette's physical condition and appearance. See Fraser 408-409.

¹⁹⁰ Fraser, 427-429; although reviled by many, there were those who still harbored secret longings for the regime of old and were saddened by Marie Antoinette's imprisonment. There were times when using the queen's name garnered special favors. Fraser cites workers in the Conciergerie as receiving special treatment and discounts on goods during their daily errands for food and items to be used for the former queen. See Fraser, 422-23.

¹⁹¹ Weber, 284-5.



Figure 4.2 Alexandre Kucharski, *Marie Antoinette in Widow's Dress in Prison* (1793) (Reunion des Musees Nationaux/Art Resource, New York)¹⁹²

La Veuve Capet was sentenced to be guillotined on October 16, 1793, at twelve o'clock noon. Marie Antoinette tried to manipulate her own image for the final time. She chose how she would be seen on her last day. Her final public undressing and *toilette* was done in a setting far removed from the first on the Île des Épis and the subsequent ones in the royal bedchambers of Versailles. When the condemned Marie Antoinette got up to get dressed for the last time, she had to do it under the gaze of the gendarme stationed in her cell. It had previously been ordered that the former queen was to be watched at *all* times. She positioned herself between the lumpy bed of straw and the wall with peeling paper and tried to exchange her bloodied undergarments for clean ones with as much decency and dignity as she could muster, shoving her soiled linens

¹⁹² Weber, image 16, 274. According to Weber, the Polish painter Kucharski was Marie Antoinette's favorite at the time of her imprisonment. It is unclear how he managed to gain access to the former queen's cell, but he painted this portrait from memory after his visit with her; Weber, 273.

into a crevice in the stones. Marie Antoinette had managed to keep one white chemise and one white *déshabillé* (morning dress) pristine, seemingly for this very occasion. Her hand-maiden at the Conciergerie, Rosalie Lamorlière, noted that “it was [Marie Antoinette’s] intention to appear in public as decently dressed as her impoverished circumstances allowed....” As she faced her execution, Marie Antoinette’s desire to control her public image through clothing had not wavered.¹⁹³ Zweig notes:

Marie Antoinette had been forbidden to go to the scaffold in the mourning [dress] she had worn when on trial before the Revolutionary Tribunal, since the authorities were afraid this widow’s dress might be regarded by the people as provocative. Well, what did a dress matter now? She made no objection, and decided to don a simple white gown. Then she dressed herself with peculiar care. It was more than a year since she has set foot in the streets... The last progress should find her respectable and cleanly dressed. The desire that animated her was no longer feminine vanity, but a sense of dignity for a historical hour. She carefully smoothed her white gown, wrapped her neck in a muslin cloth, and put on her best shoes. Her white hair she covered with a two-winged cap.¹⁹⁴

Henry Sanson, grandson of Charles Henri Sanson, Marie Antoinette’s executioner writes, “No one could forgive [Marie Antoinette] her independent mind, her elegant tastes, her liking for amusements forbidden by etiquette. By traducing her sentiments, by incriminating her acts, her enemies had rendered her odious to all other women.”¹⁹⁵

Sanson notes that his grandfather asked for an order to “procure a closed carriage similar to that in which the King had been taken to the guillotine.” When Louis was executed, he had been granted the favor of riding to the Place de la Revolution in the closed carriage of the Mayor of Paris, not in the wooden tumbril of a common criminal. Two policemen and a priest rode with Louis to the scaffold. One hundred mounted

¹⁹³ Lamorlière quoted in Weber, 286-287.

¹⁹⁴ Zweig, 448-449.

¹⁹⁵ Henry Sanson, Late Executioner of the Court of Justice of Paris, ed., *Memoirs of the Sansons from Private Notes and Documents [1688-1847]*, 2 Vols., London: Chatto and Windus, Picadilly, 1876, Vol. 2, 49-55; For more on the lives of Royal Executioners see Wendell Allen Hunnicutt, “Executioners: The Cutting Edge of Royal Power,” (master’s thesis, University of Texas at Arlington, 2003).

policemen led the carriage and one hundred more National Guardsmen followed it through the streets of Paris. The route was lined with crowds who were restrained by the guards.¹⁹⁶ The request for the former queen to be transported in the same way as her husband was rejected.



Figure 4.3 Marie Antoinette's Linen Chemise from the Conciergerie. Musée Carnavalet, © Carnavalet / Roger Viollet

On the morning of October 16, Marie Antoinette was led through the streets of Paris on the back of a wooden cart, like a common criminal. Sanson notes that “On reaching the court [of the Conciergerie], Marie Antoinette saw the cart; she came to a sudden halt, and a strong feeling of horror appeared on her features.” A crowd so thick that the horses had a hard time pulling the cart to the Place de la Revolution lined the way to the scaffold. He tells us that the crowds let out “an immense clamour of maledictions,

¹⁹⁶ Sanson, 49-55; Antoine de Baecque, *Glory and Terror: Seven Deaths Under the French Revolution*, Charlotte Mandell trans., New York: Routledge, 2003, 95.

a torrent of curses, and cries of ‘Death!’” There were even heard a few cries of “Death to the Austrian!” rising from the crowd.¹⁹⁷ Thomas E. Kaiser concludes that “there can be little doubt of Marie-Antoinette’s demonization as an agent of feminine corruption; nor can there be much doubt that this vilification fed noisy, visceral hatreds among the sansculottes....”¹⁹⁸



Figure 4.4 Jacques-Louis David, *Marie-Antoinette conduite au supplice* (1793). Musée du Louvre © RMN, Thierry Le Mage

Upon arriving at the Place de la Concorde, she stepped down from the tumbril. Sanson notes that the former queen, “advanced slowly, but with a firm step, and mounted the scaffold as majestically as if the steps of the guillotine had been those of a grand staircase at Versailles.” The executioner tied her body to the weigh-plank and put it into

¹⁹⁷ Sanson, 49-55.

¹⁹⁸ Thomas E. Kaiser, “From the Austrian Committee to the Foreign Plot: Marie-Antoinette, Austrophobia, and the Terror,” *French Historical Studies*, Vol. 26, No. 4, (Fall 2003), 604.

position. Her oft copied hair having been freshly cropped by Sanson the executioner, the queen's head was cut off cleanly at twelve-fifteen in the afternoon. Sanson picked up her bleeding head and held it high for everyone to see. He wheeled away her body in a little hand-cart, the head between its legs.¹⁹⁹



Figure 4.5 Sketch of the decapitated head of Marie Antoinette, attributed to Jacques Louis David.²⁰⁰

Saint-Amand theorizes that Marie Antoinette's execution was not political, as Louis' had been, but moral. The king's execution had "rallied the new nation and helped to define it." The queen's execution, as Saint-Amand interprets it, was

the Revolution's attempt to rectify the errant sexuality of the nation. The orgy was over, and the queen's lustfulness had been the symbol of this debauchery. Louis XVI's despotism, or tyranny, found its equal in the queen's lasciviousness, her wicked profligacy. The sexual promiscuity that had ravished the nation was gone with the queens' head.

¹⁹⁹Fraser, 440; Zweig, 454; Sanson, 56; for more information and commentary on the guillotine from its early usage through 1794, see Daniel Arasse. *The Guillotine and the Terror*, Christopher Millertrans., London: Allen Lane The Penguin Press, 1989.

²⁰⁰ Sketch of the decapitated head of Marie Antoinette, attributed to Jacques Louis David. Available at <http://www.senat.fr/evenement/archives/D22/mantoinette.html>. Posted March 17, 2005.

After their execution, the monarchs were mourned as martyrs by other European courts. But their reputations in France were not restored until Bourbons were returned to the throne (1814-1815) after the defeat of Napoleon Bonaparte.²⁰¹

During the Bourbon Restoration, cults of martyrdom developed and spread among royalists. Members of the Cult of the Sacred Heart of Jesus (*Sacré-Coeur*) kept Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette as symbols of a return of France to both the Roman Catholic faith and monarchical rule. Members of this devotion, promoted by the Jesuits, used the symbol of Jesus' bleeding heart to emphasize both his love for mankind and the damage done to the heart of Jesus by human indifference. They believed that if the king consecrated France to the *Sacré-Coeur* the nation would become elect among nations and its people chosen among all others.²⁰² Louis XVI reportedly had vowed to consecrate France to the *Sacré-Coeur*, build a chapel in its honor, and put the image of the Sacred Heart of Jesus on the royal flag if he was given his freedom. Louis' freedom, of course, was not granted.²⁰³ Devotees hoped that King Louis XVIII, Louis XVI's younger brother, the former Comte de Provence, would consecrate France to the *Sacré-Coeur* and honor his martyred brother's wishes.

Prior to Louis XVI's execution, members of the Convention had decided that the former king would be buried in an "ordinary place of burial for citizens," not with his royal ancestors. After the execution Louis' body was transferred to the former Church of the Madeleine where it was covered in quicklime and hastily buried in a ditch. After her

²⁰¹ For more on the Bourbon Restoration see Guillaume de Bertier de Sauvigny, *The Bourbon Restoration*, Lynn M. Case, trans., Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1967 and Paul A. Gagnan, *France Since 1789*, Revised Ed., New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1972, 89-141.

²⁰² Raymond Jonas, *France and the Cult of the Sacred Heart: An Epic Tale for Modern Times*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000, 2.

²⁰³ Jonas, 119-121; 133.

execution, Marie Antoinette's body was also taken to the cemetery of the Church of the Madeline to be buried. Her gravediggers billed the municipal authorities "6 livres for the coffin, 15 livres, 35 sols for the grave and gravediggers," this being the last expense of the spendthrift queen.²⁰⁴

During the Bourbon Restoration the royal remains were located at the Madeleine cemetery and exhumed from their "ordinary citizen" graves – the remains of Marie Antoinette on January 18, 1815, and those of Louis the next day. After three days of prayers, at a house on the rue d'Anjou, the remains were placed in new coffins, ones that signified the royal status of the deceased. On January 21, 1815, a royal funeral procession carried Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette to their final resting place in the *caveau* (vault) of the Bourbon dynasty at the Cathedral of St. Denis, Paris, twenty-two years after their deaths. Commemorative and idealized statues of both Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette were erected and remain there today. Louis XVIII had an expiatory chapel erected on the Madeleine cemetery site where his brother and sister-in-law had been buried after their executions. The future Charles X, another of Louis XVI's brothers, the former Comte d'Artois, placed the chapel's first stone on the martyrs' former gravesite. Louis XVIII also declared the anniversaries of their executions as national days of mourning and atonement.²⁰⁵

In the mid-nineteenth century the wife of Napoleon III, Empress Eugénie, was obsessed with Marie Antoinette. She had portraits painted of herself in eighteenth-century costume and she collected furniture pieces, and other items, thought to be Marie Antoinette's. In 1867 Empress Eugénie held an exhibition about Marie Antoinette at the

²⁰⁴ de Baecque, 97; Fraser ; 447.

²⁰⁵ de Baecque, 97; Fraser ; 447 Lever 305; de Baecque, 118; Jonas 119.

Petit Trianon, “bringing the château back to life as a testament to both the queen and the exquisitely made objects of the years preceding the revolution.” She was not the only royal consort with an attachment to the life of Marie Antoinette. Alexandra, the last Tsarina of Russia, decorated her desk with a picture of the late queen. She also displayed a Gobelin tapestry of Marie Antoinette and her children in the drawing room at the Alexander Palace at Tsarskoe Seloe, keeping a close connection to her fourth cousin, four generations removed.²⁰⁶



Figure 4.6 Statues of Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette at the Cathedral of St. Denis, Paris

Not only royalty cultivated an obsession for Marie Antoinette. In the nineteenth century there was a rash of literature from women claiming to either be an incarnation of the former queen or to have been visited by her in visions, dreams, or as a spectre from the grave. Terry Castle’s article on the subject discusses that Marie Antoinette and her image were used to justify, or even provide outlets, for women’s homosexual feelings.

²⁰⁶ *Marie Antoinette and the Petit Trianon at Versailles*, San Francisco: Fine Arts Museum of San Francisco, 2007, 77-81; Fraser, final image, facing 455; Fraser, 450.

He notes that in the desire to defend the queen against the accusations of tribadism, and “exorcize the specter of her putative lesbianism once and for all,” the authors often made her the symbol of Sapphic romance. This function of Marie Antoinette as lesbian icon made its way into the twentieth century with several literary works aimed at a lesbian readership invoking the memory of either the queen, or some of her female companions, to represent female homosexuality. It is in this manner, Castle notes, Marie Antoinette’s image as an idealized martyr has her functioning as “a kind of lesbian Oscar Wilde: a rallying point for sentiment and collective intransigence.” Marie Antoinette in this context and usage gives those who obsess about her a new way of thinking about themselves and makes their homoerotic fantasies/feelings acceptable.²⁰⁷

The long-dead queen’s image is still in constant use. In postmodernist popular culture Marie Antoinette is viewed in a favorable light because she is thought to have defied female stereotypes. Today she tends to be seen as a thoroughly (post)modern woman who was punished on all sides because of it. The collective image of Marie Antoinette today epitomizes strength, sexuality, and the allure of the female. Evoking Marie Antoinette as a symbol of empowerment is to move her from one category to another, portraying positively those traits for which others condemned her. Women use her and her imagery today to convey their power and strength. The images of pop-icon Madonna are not ones of opulence for its own sake, but ones of female sexuality, control and power. Fashioning oneself as Marie Antoinette, or in the perceived image of Marie

²⁰⁷ Terry Castle, “Marie Antoinette Obsession,” *Representations*, No. 38, (Spring, 1992), 1-38.

Antoinette, the wearer of this persona is both sexy and powerful at the same time. The title of Madonna's tour, *Reinvention*, is a nod not only to Marie Antoinette's constant reinvention of her image, but also to Madonna's as well.

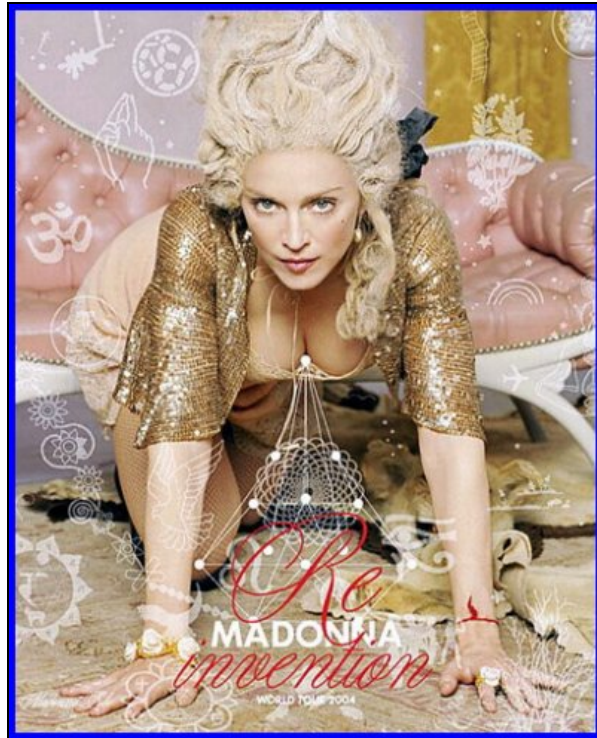


Figure 4.7 Promotional poster for Madonna's *Reinvention* World Tour 2004

Misrepresentations of Marie Antoinette's sexuality are powerful, evocative images. Director Sophia Coppola, I think, knew this and used it to her advantage when promoting her 2006 feature film *Marie Antoinette*. The promotional materials for the movie project the title character's oft-discussed sexuality. To create pre-release buzz for the film, mirror clings were created to be placed in public restrooms in both Los Angeles and New York City.²⁰⁸ The blatant construction of the ads to resemble bathroom graffiti is an insight into the ideas the ad company had about Marie Antoinette and perceived

²⁰⁸ Paula Zargaj-Reynolds, "Advertising for Marie Antoinette: Flirty and Fun," Advertising is Good For You Blog, entry posted on October 5, 2006, http://pzrservices.typepad.com/advertisingisgoodforyou/2006/10/advertising_for.html, (accessed March 22, 2008).

public perception of her today. The film stresses the sexual frustrations of the young queen and her desire to produce an heir. It also stresses the young queen's supposed love affair with Count Axel von Fersen of Sweden. The film, based on Antonia Frasier's biography of the queen, portrays Marie Antoinette as a young, frivolous, Valley Girl-type, who plays, attends parties and loves to shop, gamble and eat cakes. The film was seen by some, including Caroline Weber, as "reflecting [Marie Antoinette's] self-absorbed, "let them eat cake" frivolity" as opposed to showing the queen's choices, fashion and otherwise, as "daring bids for political power."²⁰⁹



Figure 4.8 Cornerstone Promotions' mirror clings for restrooms promoting the Sony Pictures release *Marie Antoinette* (2006).

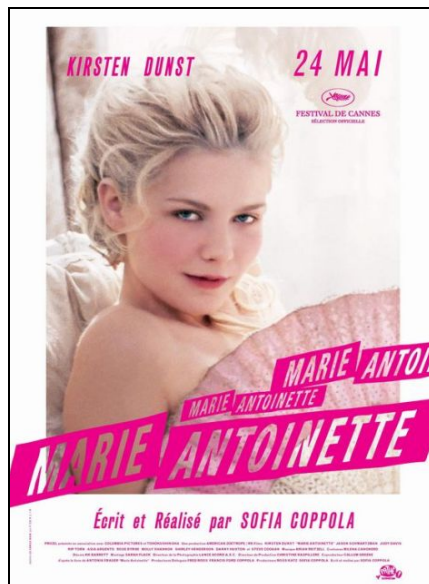


Figure 4.9 Promotional poster for *Marie Antoinette* (2006).

²⁰⁹ Caroline Weber, "Let Them Eat Lace: Marie Antoinette's Fierce and Fearless Fashion," The Huffington Post Blog, entry posted on September 5, 2006, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/caroline-weber/let-them-eat-lace-marie-_b_28701.html (accessed January 9, 2008).

Nonetheless, Marie Antoinette's image is still used and misused alternately to garner sympathy or to tarnish anyone seen as excessive or lacking empathy for the poor. When, after the devastation of Hurricane Katrina in 2004 rendered New Orleans, Louisiana, a disaster site and many of the poor and minority residents were forced to relocate to a Houston, Texas, sporting arena, former First Lady Barbara Bush was deemed to have had a "Marie-Antoinette" moment when she uttered the infamous, "So many of the people in the arena here, you know were underprivileged anyway, so this is working well for them." Her son, President George W. Bush, as well as former House Majority Leader, Tom Delay, have both been lampooned in the media as "Marie-Antoinettes" for their various perceived mistreatments of the poor or lower-class Americans.²¹⁰



Figure 4.10 Shelley Matheis, *Barbara Bush Has a "Marie Antoinette" Moment* (2004) (www.CartoonStock.com)

²¹⁰ "Olbermann Delivers Anti-Bush Diatribe Pegged to Chertoff Slip." Mediaresearch.org. 7 Sept. 2005. <http://www.mediaresearch.org/cyberalerts/2005/cyb20050907.asp#1> (accessed January 2007).

The political pundit Bernard Goldberg uses Marie Antoinette to describe the “wretched excess and shameless greed” of Dennis Kozlowski, former CEO of Tyco. Goldberg lists Kozlowski as number 44 on his list of the *110 People Who Are Screwing Up America (And Al Franken is #37)* because he threw a fortieth-birthday party for his wife, spending \$2.1 million and charging half of the week-long bash on the Italian island of Sardinia to the company as a business function. This party, coupled with other allegations of Kozlowski’s excessive spending, or as Goldberg says, “looting Tyco of about \$600 million” for unauthorized personal expenses, earned him the description of “a man who thought he was Marie Antoinette, living like there was no tomorrow while his company was gobbling up lots of smaller companies, then streamlining...and firing thousands of employees.”²¹¹



Figure 4.11 Juicy Couture advertisement (2006)

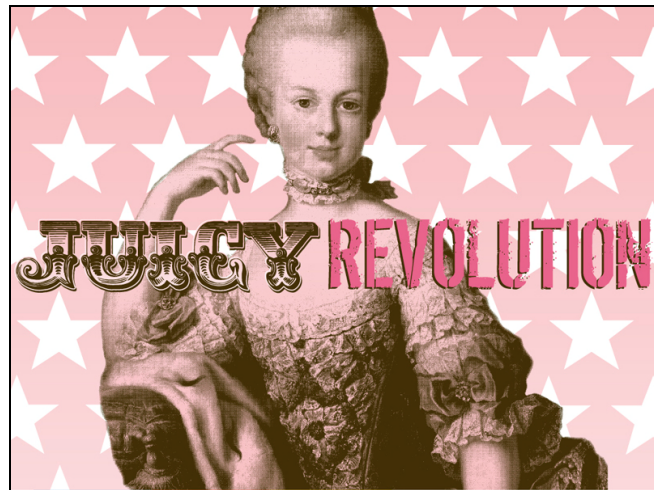


Figure 4.12 Juicy Couture advertisement (2008)

²¹¹ Bernard Goldberg, *110 People Who Are Screwing Up America (And Al Franken is #37)*, New York: Harper, 2006, 172-174.

The reported extravagances of Marie-Antoinette are so “well known” that her image is recognized as symbol of excess and often used in advertising campaigns for companies such as Juicy Couture, and as extravagant displays in a New York City shop windows. Linda Fargo, Vice President of Visual Merchandising at Bergdorf Goodman noted that “Enough is never enough for Marie Antoinette, it has to be more, it has to be more!” Following the theme of excess and popular culture manifestations of the *ci-devant reine*, Hugh Hefner, founder of *Playboy: Entertainment for Men* magazine, hosted a lavish Marie Antoinette-themed birthday party for Holly Madison, one of his three girlfriends. When asked why she chose the long-dead queen as a theme to celebrate her special day, Holly replied, “Because we are both blond and like little dogs.”²¹²



Figure 4.13 Bridget Marquardt, Hugh Hefner, Holly Madison, and Kendra Wilkinson

Our contemporary image of Marie Antoinette, the collective memory we have of her, in no way represents the woman that was. The costume worn by Holly at the party,

²¹² Fargo, Linda. Interview. *Totally Cool News*. Time Warner Cable. 1997; “Let Them Eat Birthday Cake,” *The Girls Next Door*, Season 3, Episode 8, E! 18 Mar. 2007.

and on the television show it was filmed for, is now available as part of a collection, along with six other Marie Antoinette inspired outfits, on-line at a costume and lingerie “boutique,” Trashy.com. The costumes are beautiful and very expensive, yet represent very little of their namesake. The Marie Antoinette lingerie collection, also beautiful and also expensive, takes history just far enough, as a colleague says, “To be dangerous.”²¹³ Descriptions of the various undergarments have a hint of the historical with just a soupçon of fact intermingled with the persuasive push to purchase. Who would not want to “be ready for a tryst in the gardens of Versailles,” by purchasing a lace-up back corset? The ad copy suggests that there was some historical research done prior to launching the lingerie line, but the products demand that the perceived sexuality of Marie Antoinette be enhanced. To entice one to purchase the Marie Antoinette Underbust Ruffle Cupless Chemigarter, one is told that:

Marie Antoinette was scandalous for her lavish parties and indulgent excesses, but you will be the subject of scandal wearing this underbust ruffle cupless chemi-garter. It hugs your body showing off your curves and the underbust ruffle underwire halter is cupless to display your crown jewels. Lace and satin bows adorn this feminine favorite that has a hook and eye closure in the back and at the neck.²¹⁴

Popular perceptions of Marie Antoinette are perpetuated through the selling of thong underwear touting, “Regardless of the rumors, Louis was the only man who had the privilege of perusing Marie's panties. This thong would have sent the court reeling with gossip.” The site goes even so far as to hint that the queen’s life may have not been cut short had she worn their Lace-Up Front Underwire Chemi-Garter with Thong, noting, “Maybe if Marie wore this chemi-garter to the guillotine she would have been spared. It

²¹³ Todd Owen, conversation December 2007.

²¹⁴ “The Marie Antoinette Collection,” Trashy.com, <http://www.trashy.com/Marie-Antoinette431-bycollection.htm> (accessed January 2008).

flatters every curve from top to bottom and front to back.” The idea Trashy.com is selling is that image is everything and the image of Marie Antoinette is the zenith of excess, beauty, and sexuality.²¹⁵

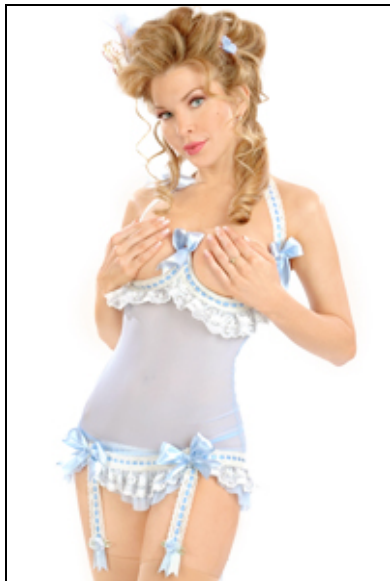


Figure 4.14 Marie Antoinette Underbust Ruffle Cupless Chemigarter (www.Trashy.com)



Figure 4.15 Marie Antoinette Lace-Up Front Chemi-Garter with Thong (www.Trashy.com)

Little Toinette from Austria underwent so many changes throughout her short thirty-seven years. She was never allowed to be herself. From her very birth, she had been cultivated, shaped, and molded to be a certain way. As an Archduchess in Austria, she was manipulated to serve the needs of diplomacy. As Dauphine she was forced into the strict rigors of court life at Versailles. Once queen, she felt she finally was able to “spread her wings” and become an individual. In the end, however, it cost her her reputation. When she tried to take charge of her own image, to put herself into a place that was not usually held by queens of France, but by royal mistresses, she brought upon herself all of the ill will that was directed at the failing *ancien régime*. Her image was

²¹⁵ “The Marie Antoinette Collection,” www.Trashy.com.

never completely her own. As a widow she was stripped of the “external honors” conferred upon her by the king and then further stripped of her right to die in mourning. She was no longer the regent of France, and she had long ago relinquished her claim to the Austrian royal house. Although of noble birth, she was in the end a common woman.

Marie Antoinette, the *Veuve* Capet, *née* Maria Antonia Josépha Johanna von Habsburg-Lothringen, ended her life much as she had begun her initial transformation into a *Dauphine*, with a haircut. Her “external honors” were sheared away, literally, by Sanson, her final hairdresser and her executioner. Marie Antoinette, archduchess, *dauphine*, queen, mother, *veuve*, and finally commoner never fully had control over her corporeal manifestations even when she thought she did. Her attempts to cultivate an “appearance of credit,” to state her individuality, and be free of external manipulations backfired into the worst kind of bodily manipulation: political pornography and caricatures. This scandalous and scurrilous pamphleteering aided in the discrediting of the monarchy and bolstered the cause of the revolutionaries of 1789. Marie Antoinette, neither in life nor in death, ever had full control over her body and the uses to which it was put. The myriad uses to which Marie-Antoinette is now put in popular culture illustrate the enduring power of her memory. From the strong to the sexual, the excessive to the uncaring, Marie Antoinette remains a powerful icon in our collective memory and she remains a relevant figure today.

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BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

Mylynka Kilgore-Mueller is a military brat (U.S. Air Force) with twenty years service as a dependent, a U.S. Army veteran, and a life-long world traveler. She has lived in several European countries and developed a love of history from her parents. They instilled in her a curiosity of cultures and histories other than her own. Living in and fully experiencing foreign lands planted a seed that has taken firm root and will never grow old.

After a rather non-illustrious fifteen-plus years stint in the “real” world Kilgore-Mueller decided to finish her long abandoned academic career. After earning her Bachelors of Arts in History, *magna cum laude*, in 2006 from the University of Texas at Arlington, she decided to continue her pursuit of history at the graduate level. She will enter into a doctoral program in Transatlantic History in fall 2008. Her current interests lie in the history of France, Early Modern Europe, court culture, colonialism, and gender studies. She currently resides in the Dallas/Fort Worth Metro area with her unbelievably supportive partner, Guadalupe P. Cardona, and their two feline children, Frito and Lola.