The Many Faces of Marie Antoinette: Rewriting the Portrait of a Queen through the Enlightenment, Political Pornography and the French Revolution

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On October 16, 1793, Marie Antoinette climbed the steps of the scaffold in the Place de la Révolution. “Pardon me, sir, I did not mean to do it,” she said to the executioner, having accidentally stepped on his foot. She was then placed in the guillotine and the blade was dropped. Only two and a half weeks before her thirty-eighth birthday, Marie Antoinette fell victim to the French Revolution of 1789 and was executed. Early modern representations of Marie Antoinette, the infamous Queen of France, show a very confused picture. Many depict her as an extravagant spendthrift who showed little concern for the care of her subjects. They focus on her frivolous pursuits including fashion and gambling, and her alleged sexual exploits. A few describe her as a victim of a bloody revolution that tore
France apart at the seams for decades. Marie Antoinette, therefore, emerges as both the cause of the French Revolution and as its martyr. Why such discrepancies?

In this thesis, I will analyze three major sources that offer contrasting images of Marie Antoinette: the pornographic literature of the Queen and the royal court, the trial proceedings of the queen at the end of her life, and the post-revolutionary memoirs of Madame Campan. The pornographic plays and poems, written in the Enlightenment literary underground, depict the queen in the worst of possible ways. The literature around her trial proceedings offer a very interesting picture of a queen who was eventually put to death for sexual crimes, political treason only appearing as an afterthought. Finally, a lady-in-waiting to Marie Antoinette, Campan provides one of the only surviving positive renderings of the queen.

This thesis will analyze these sources to make several arguments. First, I will argue that none of these representations singularly represent Marie Antoinette as a whole. Given the subjective character of all of these sources, none gives a portrait that represents Marie Antoinette as she “truly” was. Second, I will argue that while Marie Antoinette may have contributed to her negative reputation through the choices that she made
as Queen, other political and cultural factors played a major role in her eventual decline. These include the rise of an Enlightened public sphere, the existence of an “un-enlightened” Grub Street, and the political realities of Austro-French xenophobia. Finally, the changing ideas about sexuality, gender, and women in eighteenth-century France played a major role in the stigmatization of the Queen. The eighteenth-century was a confused period for gender where on one hand, publically accepted extra-marital affairs among the aristocracy went unpunished, and powerful women became leaders of the philosophical Republic of Letters, but on the other hand, despite great participation in intellectual and public affairs, women like Marie Antoinette were slandered for allegedly untraditional sexual practices, and criticized for being overly active in public politics. It was, after all the century that promoted the Cult of Domesticity in modern form.

Primary and Secondary Sources

In researching Marie Antoinette, I reference a number of primary and secondary sources. Images and narratives of political pornography are my first main primary source. Marie Antoinette was a popular subject of such literature during the decline of the monarchy, and they serve to
explain how the general French public, that is the French outside of court, viewed their Queen. I will analyze several pornographic images created during the Old Regime, and will also analyze several plays including *The Royal Dildo*, *The Austrian Woman on the Rampage* and *The Royal Bordello*. This chapter will also analyze the historical context in which public opinion in pre-Revolutionary France became a political weapon. Two historians, Jürgen Habermas and James van Horn Melton, provide important historical background and theories regarding “the public”, more specifically the rise of what Habermas calls the “bourgeois public sphere”. This chapter will therefore analyze the historical context in which public opinion in pre-Revolutionary France became a political weapon. Two historians, Jürgen Habermas and James van Horn Melton, provide important historical background and theories regarding “the public”, more specifically the rise of what Habermas calls the “bourgeois public sphere”. *The Forbidden Bestsellers of Pre-Revolutionary France* by Robert Darnton provides the historical context of political pornography and clandestine literature in France before the reign of Marie Antoinette and the Revolution, and contextualizing how these crude forms of literature became a political weapon against the Old Regime.
My second main primary source is the trial of Marie Antoinette. Although she, like her husband, was tried for political crimes and accused of treason, Marie Antoinette’s trial differed as the majority of the case against her focused on discussions of her sexuality. In her trial, Marie Antoinette was accused of committing incest with her children as well as having extramarital relations with men and women, among other equally scandalous allegations. In a discussion of Marie Antoinette’s trial I also utilize a number of documents from the Revolution including speeches by Maximilian Robespierre, the Marquis de Condorcet and Saint-Just, all of whom offered noteworthy commentaries during the trial of King Louis XVI. In discussing the trial of Marie Antoinette, the transcript of which has not been translated into English, I relied mainly on *The Family Romance of the French Revolution* by Lynn Hunt as well as a partial translation of the trial; both of these sources describe the charges levied against Marie Antoinette by the court.

While political pornography and the Queen’s trial show Marie Antoinette as a scandalous, immoral woman, Madame Campan, provides an unusually positive view of the fallen Queen. Jean Louis Henriette Campan was a lady-in-waiting and confidante of Marie Antoinette both before and during the French Revolution, serving as first lady of the
bedchamber from 1786 to 1789. Following the Bourbon Restoration, well after the Revolution of 1789, Campan penned her memoirs, titled *The Memoirs of Marie Antoinette*. Being one of the only surviving firsthand accounts of the court at Versailles under Louis XVI, this document provides one of the only positives portrayals of Marie Antoinette during a time where she was so widely criticized both at court and amongst the public. In a discussion of the memoirs, I also look to the writings of Abbé Sieyès’ *What is the Third Estate?* Having survived several regime changes in France, Sieyès, like Campan, was attempting to reinstate himself among France’s elites through writing, and thus, the two share many of the same ideas.

I also use several secondary sources throughout my thesis, which provide historical context of eighteenth century France and the life of Marie Antoinette. My main source of background information is Antonia Fraser’s *Marie Antoinette: The Journey*; this book provided me not only with a detailed biography of Marie Antoinette, but also explained the historical context in which Marie Antoinette entered France. Another major secondary source I used is *Marie Antoinette: Writings on the Body of a Queen*, edited by Dena Goodman. This book consists of a collection of essays, which analyze scandals Marie Antoinette was involved in such as political
pornography and the Diamond Necklace Affair, discussing how each damaged her reputation in France. *The French Revolution 1787-1804* edited by P.M. Jones provided me with background information of the French Revolution as a whole, helping me to contextualize the events of Marie Antoinette’s life with regard to the events of the Revolution.

Through an analysis of these three very different sources and supporting documents, each of which provides a different view of Marie Antoinette, I will seek to piece together a more accurate picture of this ill-fated queen of France. Each having been written by a different author or group, each source is biased either against or in favor of Marie Antoinette. But what do these biases tell us of the Queen? How can we look past the opinions of these authors to find out who Marie Antoinette truly was?
CHAPTER 1

L’Autriche in France

Before discussing the representations of Marie Antoinette in political pornography, her trial and the memoirs of Madame Campan, it is necessary to examine the historical context surrounding her transition from Austrian Archduchess to la Dauphine of France. This chapter will, therefore, discuss Marie Antoinette’s upbringing at the Viennese court and her entry into the court of Versailles. Not only was she ill suited to the French court, having been raised in a drastically different court culture, but once in France, Marie Antoinette faced the realities of French
xenophobia. With strong anti-Austrian sentiments throughout the court, she became a target for courtiers who were firmly against the Franco-Austrian alliance. This controversial political context, however, set the stage for the later representations of Marie Antoinette, all of which brought into question her Austrian heritage.

The aim of this chapter is to demonstrate that from the start, Marie Antoinette was not well suited to the French court as a result of her Austrian upbringing. So much scholarship on Marie Antoinette focuses on her body and sexuality, but they fall short of explaining the political pre-history of the animosity against her. Marie Antoinette was a product of the court culture of Vienna, which was not compatible with the court culture of the French Bourbons; what was right for an Austrian empress, was wrong for a French queen. Because of this, Marie Antoinette’s poor reputation developed among certain French courtiers before she had even set foot on French soil. While it is important to evaluate the scandals of her later reign as

Figure 1. The Imperial Family on St. Nicholas Day, painted by the Archduchess Marie Christine, 1762.
Queen, it is equally important to discuss court politics, which were at play before Marie Antoinette even set foot in France. This provides a fuller picture of Marie Antoinette as a person and how she came to be seen as “the Austrian whore”.

The Court of Vienna versus Versailles

Though, Marie Antoinette would become a fixture at Versailles, she truly was a product of the Viennese court. Under the reign of Emperor Francis Stephen and Empress Maria Theresa, the more informal court of Vienna provided a striking contrast to the highly ceremonial court of Versailles under Louis XV. Whereas France observed strict conventions for each and every daily activity from dawn until dusk, Francis Stephen encouraged his family to observe a more informal private life.

What was important was the distinction encouraged by Francis Stephen and supported by Maria Theresa, between state ceremonial and private life. The one was to be carried out as a matter of duty, and as magnificently as possible. The other was to be enjoyed.¹

The French monarchy, however, operated under the idea of transparency, which dictated a need for monarchs to essentially be “on show” for the

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courtiers to observe and, at times, interact with. In other words, French royal life was predicated on the notion of royal publicity. Thus, every moment in a French monarchs life was ceremonial and lacked the option of privacy. This point would prove particularly difficult for Marie Antoinette once she became la Dauphine.

One example of the informality of the Viennese court is that many people were admitted to court based on merit and not necessarily by accidents of birth or hereditary titles. In fact, Marie Antoinette remained very close to the son of her wet nurse, Joseph Weber, throughout her childhood. Though, much below her in rank, Joseph would become a playmate not only of Marie Antoinette, but of her siblings as well.² In addition, paintings by Marie Christine, Antoine’s elder sister, show the family in these informal settings. One such painting, depicting the family on St. Nicholas Day in 1762, shows the Emperor in his slippers and robe reading at the table, while his wife stands behind him clothe d in a simple blue frock. A young Marie Antoinette also appears, along with her siblings Marie Christine, Ferdinand and Max, who are seated on the floor playing with their toys. This painting, among others, shows that the Emperor and Empress took active roles in raising their children, which

² Antonia Fraser, Marie Antoinette: The Journey, 15.
was rarely the case in royal family settings. It certainly was not the case at Versailles, and this too would be a point of contention for Marie Antoinette when she began having children of her own.

**Becoming la Dauphine**

Physically speaking, Marie Antoinette did not fit French ideals of beauty. Her hairline was uneven, her forehead too high, her nose aquiline and she had a protruding lower lip characteristic of the Hapsburgs.\(^3\) She was not, however, a lost cause. She was generally described as a pretty girl, though small, but it was hoped that in time she would develop into a handsome young woman.\(^4\) With the help of a French hairdresser, a new wardrobe of the latest French fashions and an opulent collection of jewels, Marie Antoinette came closer to become a young girl fit to become queen of France.

But it was Marie Antoinette’s education, or rather lack thereof, that was a true cause for concern. Though she was an archduchess, Marie Antoinette’s level of education at age twelve did not reflect such elevation.

Due to a string of lax tutors who did not uphold the young archduchess to the high standards set by the Empress, Marie Antoinette was able to get

\(^3\) Ibid., 30.
\(^4\) Ibid, 37.
by without putting a great deal of effort into her studies.\(^5\) Though she excelled in areas such as dancing and music, she was essentially illiterate, and struggled with reading and writing. In addition, Marie Antoinette lacked the ability to concentrate, a problem she would be criticized for in her adult life as well. “Her enemies ascribed her lack of concentration to capriciousness, which, by the time they encountered her, it had probably become.”\(^6\)

Despite her flaws Marie Antoinette made a concerted effort to adapt to life at Versailles. She quickly discarded her native German, claiming, “…From now on I want to hear no other language but French,”\(^7\) She also adopted a more French courtly appearance, rouging her cheeks with distinct circles of color, a custom found abhorrent by the Germans, and powdering her hair. In addition, she was quick to learn the “Versailles glide”, a trademark skill of Versailles female courtiers, by which they appeared to skim over the floor, maintaining their grace and poise despite their cumbersome hoop skirts, never dirtying their dainty satin slippers or skirt hems. Though such things would seem trivial, dress and appearance mattered a great deal at Versailles. By adopting a more French courtly

\(^5\) Ibid, 31.
\(^6\) Ibid, 33.
\(^7\) Ibid., 63.
appearance and emulating the behavior of Versailles’ women, Marie Antoinette outwardly expressed her desire to please the French court and be accepted by it. The extra attention focused on Marie Antoinette was the result of an absence of a leading female figure at court. With Louis Auguste’s mother, Dauphine Maria Josepha, and the Queen Marie Leszczynski, wife of Louis XV, both dead, Marie Antoinette was the highest-ranking woman at Versailles. This also meant that the Dauphine had no royal female mentor to guide her through her transition into the French court, and teach her the duties as Dauphine and future Queen. Being such a focus of attention, Marie Antoinette was heavily criticized when she broke any rule of etiquette, her few mistakes overshadowing her many successes. However, it was the political relationship between France and Austria that truly damaged Marie Antoinette’s reputation at court.

*Traitorous Ties to the House of Lorraine*

Maria Antonia Josepha Joanna, later known as Marie Antoinette, was born on November 2, 1755 to Francis Stephen and Maria Theresa, Emperor and Empress of the Holy Roman Empire; she was the family’s
fifteenth child, the eleventh daughter. Together the imperial couple reined over Upper and Lower Austria, Moravia (present day Czech Republic), Bohemia, Hungary, present-day Rumania, the Austrian Netherlands (present day Belgium), and some of the former Yugoslavia as well as the Italian Duchies of Milan and Tuscany. All of these territories were passed onto Maria Theresa upon becoming Empress, and ties to such a large empire made any of the archdukes and archduchess attractive candidates for marriage. However, it was the territories of Emperor Francis Stephen that would prove troublesome to young Marie Antoinette in her future marriage.

In 1729, prior to his marriage to Maria Theresa, Francis Stephen inherited the title Duc de Lorraine. Though Francis’ father was a Hapsburg, his mother Charlotte d’Orléans was a French royal princess, and Charlotte’s brother, the Duc d’Orléans, had been Regent for Louis XV. Thus, Francis had a very strong French heritage, identifying himself as a Lorrainer by birth. Though originally a French province, Lorraine spent several periods under German rule, leading the house of Lorraine to intermarry with members of both the French and German aristocracies. However, this also caused both nations to be suspect of Lorraine; Germans

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8 Ibid., 3.
9 Antonia Fraser, Marie Antoinette: The Journey, 7.
believed Lorrainers were Francophiles, while France believed Lorraine to be strongly pro-German. In addition, one family of the Lorraine branch, the Guises had played a crucial part in the Austrian Hapsburgs plan to gain control of France in the 1630s. Most famously, the Guises participated in the massacre of the Huguenots, which began the French Wars of Religion in 1562. Taking advantage of the Valois dynasty’s fragility following the death of King Henry (when Catherine de Medici came to rule as Regent), the Guises hoped to show their military and political might to strengthen their power against a weak throne. As the Duc de Saint-Simon stated, the house of Lorraine, was guilty of seeking to “…devour this kingdom and to assassinate its royal race, in order to usurp its provinces ad more often its crown.”

Though this was well before the time of Marie Antoinette, the house of Lorraine and all associated with it, remained traitors of the patrie in the eyes of other French aristocrats.

These sentiments only worsened when Marie Antoinette’s father inherited Lorraine in 1729, and subsequently entered into negotiations to marry Maria Theresa, the future Hapsburg Empress. In order to marry Maria Theresa, Francis Stephen was forced to renounce his claims to Lorraine, ensuring that France would never find its security compromised.

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by another Hapsburg threat. However, Francis Stephen was also a known Francophile, a “born enemy of France” and despite relinquishing the territory of Lorraine, it was believed that he would reassert his claim to the province following his accession to emperor. When Marie Antoinette’s eldest brother, Joseph II, became Emperor in 1756, Austrophobia in France again worsened, as he too, was staunchly anti-French. The anti-French sentiments of Marie Antoinette’s family members caused many in France to suspect her of the same opinions. Thus, before she had even arrived in France, Marie Antoinette’s loyalty to her new nation was already in question.

The Affair of the Minuet is one incident that proved incredibly damaging to the reputation of Marie Antoinette during her early years at Versailles. According to historian Thomas Kaiser, this incident emphasized Marie Antoinette’s ties to Lorraine, leading many courtiers to question her loyalty to France. The affair occurred when Madame de Brionne, a distant relative of la Dauphine, requested special recognition for the House of Lorraine following the wedding of Marie Antoinette to

Louis Auguste. Louis XV approved the plan, at the behest of Marie Antoinette’s ally, Ambassador Mercy-Argenteau. Thus, Madame de Brionne’s daughter, Anne-Charlotte was allowed to take part in a dance immediately following the Princes of the Blood, that is, the King’s immediate family. Ordinarily, courtiers were allowed to dance based on a descending order of rank. By allowing Mademoiselle de Brionne to dance second, Louis placed her ahead of courtiers of higher rank. This shocking disregard for tradition led many of the court to boycott the event, while others intentionally arrived late to the ball, and still more threatened to leave court altogether.

Though she played no role in the event, Marie Antoinette was blamed for it, and it became a permanent stain on her reputation. Emphasizing her relationship to the alienated province of Lorraine, the Affair of the Minuet led many to believe that Marie Antoinette had intentionally disregarded court customs in order to advance her relatives in France. However, it was Maria Theresa who was responsible for this severe breach of etiquette, as she sought to gain favor for her distant relatives. The event also emphasized suspicion of Count Mercy’s loyalty. Though a Frenchman by birth with his own familial connections to Lorraine, Mercy worked as a diplomat for Austria, becoming the Austrian
ambassador to France in 1766, and later, the personal confidante of Marie Antoinette. Thus, Mercy was not a popular figure at court; many questioned his loyalty, and he was often accused of working in favor of Austria against France. Though his loyalty to France was dubious, Mercy made no secret of his fierce loyalty to Maria Theresa, and this only furthered the court’s worries of him. Despite her best efforts to become French, Marie Antoinette’s connections to Mercy only made the courtiers believe that she, too, was loyal to Austria over France, and as such, could not be trusted.

A Questionable Alliance

Despite France and Austria’s fear of one another, they did come to an unlikely alliance under the Treaty of Versailles on May 1, 1756. During her early years as empress, Maria Theresa suffered a devastating blow during the War of Austrian Succession, when Prussia captured the province of Silesia. Though she lost no other provinces, Maria Theresa remained embittered over this loss, as Silesia had been the empire’s most prosperous region. At the same time, France abandoned its alliance with Prussia, who had signed an alliance with England, France’s enemy. Similarly, Austria abandoned its alliance with England for allying with
Prussia, who she still had not forgiven for the Rape of Silesia.\textsuperscript{13} Finding a common ground over their discarded alliances, France and Austria signed the Treaty of Versailles. Though there were clear benefits to the alliance for both parties, prejudices and suspicions between the two held strong. In fact, Louis Ferdinand, father of Louis Auguste, was vehemently opposed to the alliance, as were his wife and sisters.\textsuperscript{14} However, Louis XV, then-king of France, did not find this reason enough to forgo the alliance. “As Voltaire wittily expressed it: some people found that the union of France and Austria was an unnatural monstrosity, but since it was necessary, it turned out to be quite natural.”\textsuperscript{15}

With these shifting alliances, European states began dividing themselves into two major groups. One side, which included France and Austria, also included the Bourbon monarchy of Spain, in addition to Sweden, Saxony and Russia. To solidify their alliance, these nations subsequently entered into the Family Pact of 1761, which led the princes and princesses of these monarchies to intermarry. Accordingly, Maria Theresa treated her own children as political pawns, marrying off her daughters to various European royalties, such as the Duke of Parma and

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{13} Antonia Fraser, \textit{Marie Antoinette: The Journey}, 10.
  \item \textsuperscript{14} Ibid., 10.
  \item \textsuperscript{15} Ibid., 11.
\end{itemize}
the King of Naples. It was as a result of this pact that Marie Antoinette became a candidate for marriage to Louis Auguste, future king of France.

During Marie Antoinette’s years as Dauphine, her position in France was unstable. Though married in April of 1770, Marie Antoinette and Louis Auguste did not consummate their marriage until June of 1773, over three years later. This was highly unusual for a royal couple, traditionally expected to consummate the marriage on the night of their wedding. Marie Antoinette’s first and foremost concern was to produce an heir to the throne; a male heir was imperative to the continuation of the Bourbon line. Without a male heir, the Guise family, who was next in line to the throne, would have succeeded Louis XVI. Furthermore, if Marie Antoinette did not soon conceive a child, her marriage could have been annulled, and she, stripped of the title of Queen of France, would have been sent back to Austria in disgrace. Thus, this was not just a personal threat to Marie Antoinette’s and her position in France; it was also a threat to the Franco-Austrian alliance. Without the marriage of an Austrian archduchess to Louis Auguste, the alliance would certainly have crumbled, a fact, Maria Theresa reminded Maria Antoinette of constantly.

Ultimately, Marie Antoinette entered the French court under inauspicious political circumstances. As a result of French xenophobia, the
Franco-Austrian alliance was not well looked upon by many in the French court. Despite her best efforts to become French and leave her Austrian heritage behind, Marie Antoinette would always be *l’Autrichë*, the Austrian, in the eyes of the French people. Furthermore, her association with the house of Lorraine and the Guise family led many to question where her loyalties truly lied. Was Marie Antoinette to be trusted as Queen of France, or was she working to promote Austrian interests at the expense of the French people? Such questions would resurface in later representations of the Queen. Political pornography for example often made references to the Queen’s Austrian heritage, as did her trial, during which she was accused of using French funds to provide her brother, Emperor of Austria, with financial aid. Thus, the combination of these political and social factors created a dangerous mix for the young queen and would plague the rest of her reign.
CHAPTER 2

Political Pornography and Marie Antoinette

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In the later years of her reign, Marie Antoinette became the subject of numerous pamphlets, which depicted her as a harlot who had affairs with men and women alike. These pamphlets were also a prime focus in the Queen’s 1793 trial, which included accusations of several extramarital affairs, including incestuous relationships with her own children. Discussions of the Queen’s sexuality and alleged affairs became a popular topic among the courtiers of Versailles, who gossiped of the King and Queen’s sexual relationship, as well as among the educated public sphere, where Enlightenment rhetoric redefined traditional gender roles. However, as discontent with the monarchy increased, these pamphlets trickled down from the court to the streets of Paris and beyond, reaching the commoners and lowbrow culture. It was here that they became progressively more vulgar and damaging to the Queen’s reputation.

This chapter will examine the role of political pornography in the destruction of Marie Antoinette’s reputation. To begin, I will discuss the rise of what Jürgen Habermas calls “the enlightened public sphere”, that is, the rise of the educated bourgeois, paying particular attention to how
the development of a reading public in France became a challenge to the monarchy. While licentious literature was especially damaging to the monarchy under Marie Antoinette and Louis XVI, it was by no means a new development; Louis XV, Louis XVI’s grandfather, and his mistress, Madame du Barry, were also frequent subjects of public pamphlets. Therefore, it is important to understand the history of political pornography and clandestine literature and how it developed into a public tool against Marie Antoinette. To provide this historical context I will examine Robert Danton’s *The Forbidden Bestsellers of Pre-Revolutionary France*, in which he argues that political pornography was responsible for the French Revolution. This chapter will also examine gender roles in pre-revolutionary France, examining what was expected of women and whether or not Marie Antoinette fit those expectations. Finally, I will examine several pornographic plays and images, in which Marie Antoinette was the main character. Ultimately, this chapter will decide if political pornography led to the revolution, and, more importantly, were political pornography and lowbrow culture the only factors responsible for destroying Marie Antoinette’s reputation and the monarchy?

*The Rise of the Public Sphere*
Beginning in the thirteenth century, the European economy experienced a significant structural change, expanding due to developments in long distance trade and early forms of capitalism. Where trade had previously been based on local markets and heavily regulated by guilds, capitalism began to develop threatening the estate system, particularly the three estates of France’s Ancien Regime. According to Habermas, the “traffic of commodities and news” would lead to the undoing of traditional power structures. 16 As trade expanded internationally, it developed a “network of horizontal economic dependencies”, which no longer relied on the vertical interdependencies characterized by the estate system. 17 With the growth in trade and international markets also made the need for regular communication more urgent, leading to the systematization of an early postal service; mail regarding mercantile ventures would be collected and delivered on a regular basis, as opposed to on demand, facilitating communication and the spreading of news.

From the 1500’s onward, bureaucracy expanded to support the burgeoning trade network, developing new systems of taxation and more

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17 Habermas, 15.
commercial economies. With public administrations, both local and national, increasingly working to create opportunities for employment, the state became depersonalized, creating a distinct separation between the individual family economy and the public. The economy no longer revolved solely around the running of individual households and town-based markets, but instead focused on profit oriented businesses, the former considered part of the private sphere and the latter being associated with the public.\(^{18}\) With this also came the development of the press. By the mid-1600’s many weekly political journals called \textit{custodes novellarum}, became daily publications, spreading news of events abroad, commercial developments, and, of course, the royal court.\(^ {19}\) However, the amount of news made public was fairly superficial, focusing on more trivial events. Regardless, the development of news was important not only because it made information more accessible to the public, but also because it became a commodity within itself. The selling of published journals was now utilized as a means of profit. The state also made use of public journals, printing ordinances and announcements, as well as details of political appointments and the comings and goings of the monarchy.

\(^{18}\) Ibid., 20.
\(^{19}\) Ibid., 21.
While the state bureaucracy used the news as a way of addressing the public, it was only the educated classes, not the commoners, who had access to it, a fact that can be partially attributed to low literacy rates among the French poor. This created a distinct separation within the Third Estate, dividing the educated wealthier, albeit non-aristocratic members of society, from the uneducated poor, creating a new bourgeois. This group would, thus, serve as a middle class between the French nobility and the poor. By the 1780’s France’s literacy rate had increased from 29% among male subjects and 14% among female subjects in the 1690’s, to 48% and 27%, respectively.\(^2^0\) However, with the rise of this new reading public came tension between the bourgeois and the nobility, changing traditional social hierarchies. Though the two groups were distinctly separate due to privileges of birth, some of the new bourgeois were just as wealthy, if not wealthier, than some of the nobility.

The bourgeois public sphere, according to Habermas, was,

\[\ldots\text{the sphere of private people come together as a public...to engage them [state authorities] in a debate over the general rules governing relations in the basically privatized but publicly relevant sphere of commodity exchange and social labor...}\]  

\(^2^0\) Ibid, 21.  
\(^2^1\) Ibid., 27.
Habermas furthers this idea, suggesting that it was through the “public use of their reason” that the public engaged in such debates.\textsuperscript{22} With the developments of the Scientific Revolution of the 18\textsuperscript{th} century, in addition to the Enlightenment, the public began to learn of concepts such as inductive reasoning and utility, which brought them to think critically about the state and their place within it. Thus, France began to see the emergence not just of a bourgeois sphere, but also of a critical public, which demanded active participation in civil society. However, before the public sphere became a politically charged arena of debate, there came the Republic of Letters, an arena in which men could discuss and debate contemporary Enlightenment literature. It was here that, “the bourgeois avant-garde of the educated middle class learned the art of critical-rational public debate through its contact with the ‘elegant world’.\textsuperscript{23} The Republic of Letters, or salons, included members of the nobility as well as members of the educated bourgeois, and it was from this circle that Enlightenment philosophers such as Voltaire and Rousseau first emerged. Gradually, the Republic of Letters became independent of the monarch’s personal sphere, finding audiences not only in the salons, but also in the café houses, taverns and theaters of Paris. Because this space allowed aristocrats and

\hspace{1cm} \textsuperscript{22} Ibid., 27.

\hspace{1cm} \textsuperscript{23} Ibid., 29.
the bourgeois to participate as intellectual equals, the Republic of Letters, “...built a bridge between the remains of a collapsing form of publicity (the courtly one) and the precursor of a new one: the bourgeois public sphere.”24 Ultimately, this developed into a political debate, which would, “...put the state in touch with the needs of society.”25

A Challenge to the French Monarchy

With The Rise of the Public in Enlightenment Europe, James van Horn Melton shows how the rise of what Habermas’ “bourgeois public sphere” affected the French monarchy and challenged concepts of absolutism in the Old Regime. Royalist theory in 18th century France and well before dictated that the French monarchy was based on divine right theory, by which sovereignty was wholly vested in the body of the king, both metaphorically and physically. The king was said to derive his power from God, acting as His earthly representative and, therefore, ruling within the lines of justice and religion.

In 1768 King Louis XV declared that the subsequent monarchs, Louis Auguste and Marie Antoinette, would inherit with the throne the same constitution he had inherited upon his own accession. This, as van

24 Ibid., 30-31.
25 Ibid., 31.
Horn Melton notes, shows that within France, “the sovereign’s rule was defined in terms of conservation, not transformation.”

Conservation, in this context, meant not only maintaining traditional government functions, but also the system of Estates, by which each estate was granted specific privileges depending on their rank. This became problematic with the emergence of the bourgeois, who resembled the nobility in terms of wealth and education but, as part of the Third Estate, was not granted the same privileges. However, under Louis XVI the lines between the bourgeois and aristocracy were blurred, as educated members of the Third Estate were able to secure bureaucratic appointments and titles through merit, the position of intendant being one such example.

Public opinion also became a political weapon in the form of remonstrance, through which the parliament and public could reprimand the monarch for his political actions. By allowing remonstrance, Louis XVI implied that public opinion had the authority to pass judgment on the monarchy, granting them an active role in the French civil society. Thus, “a political culture had emerged in which public opinion was conceived as a sovereign tribunal whose judgments were binding to everyone,

including the king.”

This also promoted ideas of transparency, which suggested that the public had a right to know how the monarchy wielded its power and to what purpose. It also challenged theories of absolutism, as the king of France had always been considered responsible to no one but God; where the king was previously impervious to public opinion, the reign of Louis XVI began to suggest that, like any other subject of the Crown, the king was equally bound by law.

In addition, France saw the rise of printed literature, an expansion upon the earlier developments of the news, as discussed by Habermas. Between 1751 and 1800, 2,663 new titles were published in France, more than twice as many as the 939 titles published from 1701-1750. While the rise of literature also included formats such as news, religious texts and almanacs, the publication of epistolary novels and pornography proved especially detrimental to the French monarchy. The epistolary novel was fictional literature written in the form of letters between characters, which, “...functioned, in part, to create an illusion of authenticity...” Because the epistolary novel was written in the form of letters, albeit fictional, it created a sense of transparency. The reader was immersed in the

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28 Ibid., 57.
29 Ibid., 94.
30 Ibid., 100.
characters’ private communications, through which all their flaws were revealed. In other words, the epistolary novel made the private public, exposing the hidden motives of each character and providing a striking contrast to the secrecy of the French court. *The Persian Letters* by Montesquieu and Laclos’ *Les Liaisons dangereuses* are two examples of epistolary novels, which served as critiques of the Old Regime, exposing the monarchy’s “…motives and secrets otherwise hidden from view.”

Pornographic literature likewise served as critique of the monarchy and the court at Versailles. While such literature originated much earlier than the 18th century, it was distinct because it revolved around an element of voyeurism. “Ostensibly private trysts were often described through the eyes of a narrator hidden behind a door or drape.” Such works then exposed otherwise intimate scenes to the public, again relating to the ideas of transparency. Pornographic literature contributed to the destruction of the monarchy under Louis XIV and Louis XVI more so than previous kings because it depicted the two kings as sexually, and therefore politically, weak men, who were controlled by corrupt women, the Comtesse du Barry and Marie Antoinette, respectively. Unlike earlier

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31 Ibid., 101.
32 Ibid., 102.
33 Ibid., 103.
pornographic pamphlets, which exposed the already well-known liaisons at court, the narratives, “portrayed political corruption and despotism as systemic, the product not of a single individual but of the entire structure of the royal government. These works were a key factor in the destruction of Marie Antoinette’s reputation, for they depicted her as a licentious women, who had sexual affairs with men as well as women such as the Duchess de Polignac, one of her closest friends at court. Other representations bestialized the King and Queen, depicting Marie Antoinette as a harpy for example, further damaging their credibility and reputation among the French public.

*The History of Clandestine Literature*

Robert Darnton’s *The Forbidden Bestsellers of Pre-Revolutionary France* provides a general history of how the clandestine literature and political pornography that became immensely popular under the reign of Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette developed. Clandestine literature generally refers to literature that was forbidden by the government or a religious institution from being published, distributed or read. It took various forms such as pamphlets, novels and poetry, but also came as images,

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34 Ibid., 103.
songs and plays, all focusing on a wide variety of philosophical subjects such as religion, gender and politics. The most important form of clandestine literature in a study of Marie Antoinette, however, is political libels, which was wielded as a weapon against the Old Regime in pre-Revolutionary France, destroying the monarch’s reputation, and that of the regime as a whole.

*Libelles*, from the Latin *liber* or book, was a term used in the late medieval period to describe any type of small book. However, by 1762 the Académie française officially defined the word as *écrit injurieux*, an offensive work; Darnton expands on this definition, calling *libelles*, “…slanderous attacks on public figures known collectively as ‘les grandes’.” 35 *Libelles* were, thus, used as a tool against the French government from the 16th to 18th centuries, such publications beginning well before Marie Antoinette became queen. In addition, Darnton notes that earlier *libelles* from the 16th and 17th century differed greatly from those of the later 18th century. First, the popularity and volume of *libelles* in the pre-revolutionary period far surpassed those of earlier centuries. In addition, the rise of an enlightened public resulted in wider circulation of literature as a whole, clandestine literature included, and, subsequently,

gave *libelles* more influence over public opinion. Third, while early *libelles* focused on scandalizing individual people, those of the 1700’s sought to destroy the reputation of the Old Regime as a whole. These *libelles* became so destructive, in part, because their target audience was so wide, being accessible to the lowbrow commoners and the educated elites alike. “The most vulgar pamphlets sometimes lapsed into Latin...intended to amuse the sophisticates,” whereas others, “captured the tone of seditious street talk,” and were clearly meant for a plebian audience.

In discussing the rise of clandestine literature, specifically political *libelles*, Darnton notes four key time periods: 1588-94, 1614-17, 1648-52, and 1688-97, each period corresponding to a time when *libelles* were especially popular in France. The first period, 1588-94, coincides with the French Wars of Religion (1562-98), as well as the reigns of Henry III (r. 1574-89) and Henry IV (Henry of Navarre, r. 1589-1610). The intense religious conflicts between the Catholics and Protestants of France during this time resulted in numerous printed pamphlets, which were employed by both sides to inform the public of the events of the wars, such as assassinations and attacks. In 1589, one pamphlet was printed per day, a significant increase from the dozen pamphlets printed per year in 1585.

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37 Ibid., 202-03.
Henri III and Henri IV, both of who were viewed as crypto-Huguenots by the French Catholics, became main targets of pamphlets. According to Darnton, Parisian authorities, the majority of whom were Catholic, lifted all censorship of the press during this period, so long as publications remained anti-Protestant. Unlike pamphlets of the 1700’s, which focused on Marie Antoinette’s sexuality, these late 16th century publications largely ignored Henri III’s alleged homosexuality, instead focusing on topics of religion.³⁸

The second period, 1614-17, took place during the early rule of Louis XIII, when the King was but twelve years old. This period was characterized by a power struggle between Marie de’ Medici, Louis’ mother and regent, and the prince de Condé, who sought to usurp the throne. Through various intrigues, both sides attempted to grab power from the other, using printed pamphlets as a way of garnering public support and insulting their enemies. In 1617, 450 new pamphlets were published, well over the 365 printed in 1589.³⁹ Unlike pamphlets of the earlier period, these were specifically aimed at the “politically important public,” such as noblemen, religious authorities, and government officials. They were more secular and political in subject, focusing less on religious

³⁸ Ibid., 204.
³⁹ Ibid., 205.
topics. Most importantly, the pamphlets of this period respected the sovereignty of the king, and did not attack him or his office, realizing that he had little to do with the conflict.\footnote{Ibid., 205.}

During the years of 1648-52, a period known as the Fronde, 5,000 new pamphlets were published. This period again saw a struggle for the throne, with Anne of Austria, mother and regent of King Louis XIII, and her advisor, Cardinal Mazarin, fighting Louis II, another prince of Condé. When Condé successfully drove Louis, Anne and Mazarin from Paris, anti-Mazarin pamphlets were flying off the presses, with 10 new pamphlets printed each day from January to March of 1649. However, the tone of these pamphlets changed upon the return of Louis to power in August of the same year. While some pamphlets became less crude and more philosophical, a new genre emerged, the mazarinade, a “subgenre of burlesque verse”, which, “...drew on the tradition of ritual insult...and it certainly hit below the belt.”\footnote{Ibid., 207.} Mazarinades show a certain similarity to later libelles against Marie Antoinette as they chided Mazarin for his luxurious lifestyle and focused heavily on his sex life, accusing him of a sexual affair with Anne of Austria.\footnote{Ibid., 207.} One such pamphlet La custode du lit de
la reine stated, “Townsmen, don’t doubt it anymore; it’s true that he f*** her.” This is a significant quote as it shows that public preoccupation with the royal sex life was not a new development during the pre-revolutionary period, and was not exclusive to Marie Antoinette.

The final period in the early development of *libelles* was from 1688-97, during the reign of Louis XIV. During his reign, Louis put into place strict laws of press censorship in order to prevent the publication of *libelles* that would slander his regime. Though 1,500 pamphlets were still published during Louis’ reign, the majority was created in the Netherlands and Switzerland, where many French Huguenots had fled following the revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1685. However, a new type of pamphlet also emerged from within Versailles. Roger de Rabutin, the comte de Bussy, published works of nonfiction, in which he wrote of court gossip and sexual affairs. All his pamphlets were written in formal French, thus, he avoided the crudeness and vulgarity of more lowbrow pamphlets. However, as others began to imitate Rabutin’s work, creating

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43 Ibid., 200.

44 The Edict of Nantes was established in 1598 under King Henry of Navarre (Henry IV) following the conclusion of the French Wars of Religion, and granted religious freedom to all French subjects. Thus, French Protestants could practice freely without fear of persecution by the historically Catholic government. However, the edict was revoked in 1685 by King Louis XIV, renewing religious conflict in France and leading many French Protestants, or Huguenots, to flee the country.
fictional variations, they took on a more unrefined tone, focusing less on court politics, and more on sex. Though fictional, the voyeuristic quality of these works made them appear to the public as though they were true nonfiction, much like the images focused on the sexuality of Marie Antoinette, thereby, laying the foundation for the political pornography of pre-revolutionary France.

While the political libel was present throughout the 16th to 17th centuries, it began as a propagandistic tool in the French Wars of Religion, but later evolved in a tool for slandering the reputations of specific individuals. But how did these early publications become the libelles of the 18th century? How were later libelles under Louis XV and Louis XVI more damaging to the Old Regime than their predecessors? One reason Darnton gives for this is that 18th libelles were written in longer narratives, sometimes volumes, making them more of a literary form than earlier pamphlets. A second reasons is that book distribution networks had greatly expanded by the 1700’s, making literature readily available to a wider population than in earlier centuries.45 One of the most important reasons, however, is that stories focused on Louis XV, “…went far beyond those of Lois XIV by setting the royal sex life within the general narrative

of contemporary history.” This is significant as it shows that *libelles* placed discussions of Louis XV sexuality alongside political and social discourses, making the royal sex life of public concern.

Furthermore, the *libelles* of the 1700’s show a loss of respect for the monarch, focusing not on his strength but on his sexual shortcomings, which became symbolic of his political ineptitudes. Louis XV, for example, was accused of impotence, a result of his being dominated by his mistress Madame du Barry, a woman of vile origins. In dominating Louis, du Barry, “…drains the monarchy of its symbolic power.” Impotence would also be a theme in criticisms of Marie Antoinette and Louis, as would Marie Antoinette’s dominance over her husband. Finally, political libels of the 18th century differed from those of the 16th and 17th centuries as they accused the Old Regime of despotism not tyranny. Though both terms suggest an abuse of power:

...Tyranny connected it [the abuse of power] with the arbitrary rule of an individual...whereas despotism indicated that it had pervaded the entire system of government.48

Whereas removing a single person from a position of power could end tyranny, accusations of despotism suggest that the entire government

\[46\] Ibid., 212.
\[47\] Ibid., 213.
\[48\] Ibid., 213.
must be abolished. Thus, *libelles* of the 18th century began attacking entire political systems, not simply individuals within the system.

But were political libels responsible for causing the French Revolution? According to Darnton, *libelles* and clandestine literature alone were not destructive enough to incite the revolution. However, they were responsible for destroying reputation of the Old Regime and its monarchs. Darnton argues that one’s reputation could make or break one’s power in Renaissance politics; a good reputation meant more power. Richelieu states, “Reputation is so necessary that a prince who benefits from a good opinion can do more with his name alone than those who have armies but no esteem.” Thus, the influence of a good reputation on public opinion far outweighed the influence of physical force. However, Darnton also emphasizes that a single misstep could forever tarnish a monarch’s reputation, putting him out of favor with the public. Despite the fact that politics were reserved for the nobility and royalty, it was necessary for the monarch to maintain public support as it would allow him to more easily recuperate from political stumbles than if he were unpopular amongst his subjects. “A well-aimed affront,” such as scandalous political libel, “could puncture a reputation and destroy an

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49 Ibid., 201.
entire performance,” but the support of the people could save it.\textsuperscript{50} As evident in an analysis of clandestine literature focused on Marie Antoinette, the Queen was unable to maintain a good reputation, causing her to fall out of favor with the public, never to recuperate.

\textit{Gender Roles of Pre-Revolutionary France}

To better understand the themes of political libel aimed at Marie Antoinette, it is essential to understand what was considered acceptable behavior for women in pre-revolutionary France; such a discussion clarifies why Marie Antoinette became a target of public slander. While Enlightenment philosophy in 18\textsuperscript{th} century France encouraged active political and social participation, it did so only insofar as men were concerned. Much Enlightenment rhetoric, while progressive for men, encouraged a return to more conservative roles for women. Many discussions of gender during this period spoke of gender complementarity, that is, the idea that men and women are compliments of one another. For example, if men are rational beings, then women are irrational or emotional. This concept culminated in the idea that men were figures of the public sphere, while women were meant to stay in the

\textsuperscript{50} Ibid.,202.
home, or the private sphere. Such ideas are reflected in several well-known philosophes, with Jean Jacques Rousseau’s *Émile* providing a particularly strong example.

*Émile, ou De l’éducation* [*Émile, or On Education*], is a treatise by Rousseau written in May of 1762. The work as a whole focuses on the education of Émile, from infancy to adulthood, with each chapter focusing on a specific stage of his tutelage. However, while the first four chapters focus solely on Émile, Rousseau dedicates an entire fifth chapter to Sophie, Émile’s fiancé, and a discussion on the education of women. Sophie is presented as the ideal woman; she is passive, gentle and obliging, having been taught subjects such as drawing, social graces and reading, as per Rousseau’s prescription. However, the most important element of this chapter is Rousseau’s idea of gender complementarity. Through an analysis of this work, it is possible to deduce what was considered proper behavior for women during the time of the Enlightenment, and applying these ideas to Marie Antoinette, determine whether or not she fit these accepted social norms.\(^{51}\)

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Rousseau begins Book Five stating that men and women are physically the same, noting that both are created in the same manner, with the same general anatomy and physical features, but they differ in their morals and behavior. He states that he does not find the two sexes to be unequal, but rather says, “…differences between the two [genders] are part of the natural order of things, and for one to try and be like the other would make them imperfect.”

Therefore, Rousseau suggests that by behaving in a manner befitting his or her gender, both men and women can each become perfect in their own right. He furthers this idea by stating that men and women are to be complements of one another, each possessing the qualities, which the other lacks.

According to Rousseau there are three general female qualities that all women should aspire to posses. With regards to their character, women should be soft-spoken and docile, subservient to the demands of men.

The one [men] should be active and strong, the other [women] passive and weak; it is necessary that the one have the power and will; it is enough that the other offer little resistance.

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52 Rousseau, Émile, or On Education.
53 Ibid.
In addition, Rousseau discusses the importance of women as mothers. The role of women, above all else, is to be a good wife and bear children, and her behavior should reflect this goal. She must be of the private sphere, as pregnancy will require a “quiet sedentary lifestyle” to ensure the health of both the mother and baby. And once blessed with a child, she should raise that child with tenderness and affection.54

Secondly, Rousseau believes that “woman is specially made to please man.”55 Therefore, she should aim to serve her husband, motivating him to be an ideal man and allowing him to hold the dominant role in their relationship. Because women must allow men to be the dominant figures in society, women must control their sexual desires, which Rousseau claims are “limitless”. Since women can use their charms to attract and dominate men, and so, they must show restraint and modesty, lest men fall prey to them and, “…find themselves dragged to their death without ever being able to defend themselves.”56 Should this happen, it would upset the balance of the natural social order.

Furthermore, it is crucial that women restrain their sexual desires so that they do not stray from their husbands. They are to act as the liaison

54 Ibid.
55 Ibid.
56 Ibid.
between husband and children, making them responsible for maintaining the bonds of the family unit. While Rousseau agrees that an unfaithful husband is cruel, an unfaithful wife “...dissolves the family and breaks the bonds of nature.”\textsuperscript{57} Since women can become pregnant, an unfaithful woman risks bringing another man’s child into her family, thereby robbing her legitimate children of their rightful inheritance and betraying her entire family.

Most importantly, a woman must be responsible for the education of their children, a job that calls for “patience and gentleness”. It is the responsibility of mothers, never fathers, to educate daughters; because men do not have time to worry with the education of girl, women can educate them as they please. However, Rousseau notes, “…the more women resemble men, the less influence they will have over them, and the more men will truly be masters.”\textsuperscript{58} Therefore, a woman’s education should be directly opposite to that of men. Women should learn to,

...please them [men], be useful to them, to make oneself loved and honored by them, to raise them when they are young, to care for them when they are grown, to advise them, console them, make their life sweet and pleasant.\textsuperscript{59}

\textsuperscript{57} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{58} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{59} Ibid.
Thus, while he claims women can learn whatever they chose, Rousseau strongly advises women to simply learn to serve men.

He is, however, significantly more critical in his criteria for the education of boys, for which mothers, or by Rousseau’s guidelines, all women, are also responsible. He appoints women with the task of shaping men’s tastes, morals, pleasures, passions and happiness. “Women are more responsible for men’s follies than men are for theirs,” states Rousseau. That is, if a man should not meet Rousseau’s standards, it is the fault of his mother as she was responsible for his education. Just as he argues women should not imitate men, Rousseau is strongly against effeminate men, claiming, “…these little dandies are a disgrace to their own sex and the sex which they imitate.”

Thus, Rousseau’s guidelines of male and female behavior are clearly divided, not overlapping in any way. Women should act as is acceptable for their sex, just as men should demonstrate accepted masculine behaviors; to blur the lines between the two would only cause each gender to become imperfect. Based on Rousseau’s concepts of femininity, Marie Antoinette did not fit the ideal; she was too public, too sexual, too immodest and therefore, too masculine overall, whereas Louis

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60 Ibid.
61 Ibid.
XVI was too effeminate. Their inability to fill the appropriate gender roles of 18th century France are clearly represented in numerous political *libelles* against them.

*Marie Antoinette and Libelles: Plays and Images*

The *libelles* of pre-revolutionary France and of the early revolutionary period took many forms, however, plays and images became two of the most popular. Both served as a way for the public to critique and ridicule Versailles; featuring Marie Antoinette as a popular protagonist, these *libelles* only fueled rumors against the Queen, severely damaging her reputation among the people. Both the images and plays depict Marie Antoinette as a woman who was not considered the ideal, but rather show her to be an immoral woman. Such depictions ranged from allegories, visual and written, to the downright pornographic, written not only for lowbrow culture but also for a more educated audience. They accused the Queen of having extramarital affairs with men and women alike, and bestialized Marie Antoinette by depicting her in forms such as a harpy. Such political pornography, thus, damaged the reputation of the King and Queen by desacralizing their physical bodies,
and consequently, their metaphorical bodies as described by the Leviathan image of Thomas Hobbes.

One common depiction of Marie Antoinette in political libels is as a harpy. The harpy, a creature of Greek mythology, is generally depicted as the body of a bird with the head of a woman. Originally the character of the harpy came from a story of Phineas, a prophet, who when punished by Zeus for abusing his gift, was forced to sit before a feast of food, but could never eat because harpies would steal the food from his hands.  

Thus, harpies came to represent viciousness and greed, and were continually associated with women. Figure 1 shows a political cartoon of Marie Antoinette as a harpy, *The Declaration of the Rights of Man* trampled beneath her claws.  

![Figure 1](image1.png)

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bird-woman harpy, transforming the Queen into a beastly creature, showing the Queen as a dragon-like creature. Such a portrayal associates the Queen with the mythology of the harpy, rendering her an insatiable and cruel woman. The inclusion of *The Declaration of the Rights of Man* is especially important in this image. First and foremost, it clearly demonstrates that Marie Antoinette was against the French Revolution of 1789. The harpy, shown to be ripping up the document with its massive clawed feet, suggests that the victims of her cruelty were the people of France. It represents the Queen trampling on the newfound rights of citizenship accorded to the French people by the revolutionary National Assembly. Thus, the author creates the allegory that the harpy, that is, Marie Antoinette, has victimized the people of France, assaulting their rights to satisfy her own greed and taste for luxury. Overall, this cartoon depicts the Queen as neglectful of her people and generally heartless, a sentiment also reflected in the statement, “Let them eat cake,” which was falsely attributed to Marie Antoinette.

A second image of Marie Antoinette as a harpy shows a similar metaphor to the first; however, it goes even further to truly depict the Queen as a monster. This image shows Marie Antoinette, again as a harpy, however, while shown with the same wings and double tail as in Figure 1,
she appears in Figure 2 also with some siren-like qualities. Sirens, also creatures of Greek mythology, are defined as, partly human, female creatures, “that lured mariners to their destruction by their singing.”

Here, Marie Antoinette is shown on the shores of a lake, discernable by the quotation accompanying the image, one of her claws clamped over what appears to be a small lamb. She appears significantly more monstrous than the previous figure; her tail is distinctly reptile-like, her is hair long and

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wild, topped with large pointed ears and a set of horns. Her facial expression is equally atrocious, as she appears to have fangs and her mouth in contorted in a grimacing smile.

Aside from the obvious connotation of Marie Antoinette as a monster of a human being, the inclusion of the lamb suggests she has manipulated her husband, usurping his power. Based on the images inscription, the lamb, often used to signify innocence, appears as a symbol of the King, who has fallen victim to his overpowering wife.  

Furthermore, this harpy appears overtly sexualized, her chest bare and exposed. This image recalls Rousseau’s *Émile*, in which he discusses men being “dragged to their deaths” by the charms of women, another allusion to women as sirens. Thus, these images of Marie Antoinette as harpies are directly opposite to what Rousseau would call the ideal women. Whereas women should learn to control their desires and charms, particularly those of a sexual nature, through modesty, these harpies are voracious, victimizing the innocent and dragging them to their deaths. Figure One 

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66 The accompanying inscription reads: “Harpie femelle, monstre amphibie. Cette Harpie a été apperçue vers le même Lac de Fagua, elle a les mêmes proportions que son mâle tant pour les Aites, Queües, Pates, Cornes, Oreillea, Chevelure, que pour la grosseur et longueur qui est de 12 pieds. Le Vice-Roy apporte tout ses soins pour que cette femelle soit prise.” [Female harpy, amphibious monster. This harpy has been sighted on the shores of Lake Fagua, it has the same proportions as the male in air, tail…horns, ears, hair, who in size and length is twelve feet. The King brings himself to care for that which this monster will do.]
shows Marie Antoinette as trampling the rights of her people and the second shows her as emasculating her husband, taking on his role as the male, while Louis is reduced to that of the female.
Other images, however, are much less metaphorical, depicting the Queen in blatantly pornographic scenarios. These images were decidedly more vulgar than others, though not unique to the reign of Marie Antoinette, as discussions of the royal sex life were published as early as the previous century. However, these images show Marie Antoinette engaged in sexual acts with men, women and, in some cases, both; in them Marie Antoinette is shown with other recognizable members of the court, for example the princesse de Guémenée, one of her ladies in waiting, and her close friend, Governess of the Children of France, the duchesse de Polignac.

Such images indicate that Marie Antoinette is unfaithful to her husband, further humiliating Louis along with rumors rumors of his
sexual impotence. Thus, she is presented as the villain of the royal couple. Louis is emasculated and feminized because he is unable to fulfill his duties as a husband, whereas Marie Antoinette is shown as limitless in her desires and makes no attempt to control them, precisely what Rousseau would call the evil woman. Thus, there is a gender role reversal in the royal marriage. In addition, rumors of infidelity recall Rousseau’s idea that an unfaithful wife is worse than an unfaithful husband. These pornographic images and rumors of Marie Antoinette’s infidelity, in addition to tarnishing the King and Queen’s reputations, also bring into question the legitimacy of their children. With increasing public discontent with the monarchy and the Old Regime questions of legitimacy were extremely detrimental to the royal family. Also based on Rousseau’s ideas, political pornography suggests that Marie Antoinette was also a bad mother, who through her numerous infidelities, broke the bonds of her family and betrayed both her husband and children.

Another consequence of political pornography is that it made the men of Versailles appear effeminate. Images of Marie Antoinette engaged in sexual acts with other women suggested that the men of Versailles were unable to fulfill the women’s desires. This acts as a critique of noblemen, who were equally obsessed with fineries such as clothing and beauty, and
would have been considered by Rousseau to be “dandies”. To be an effeminate man was, by Rousseau’s standards, even more unacceptable than a masculine woman. Therefore, as the genders traded their prescribed roles, each became less perfect and went against the natural order. However, these images are especially important for their voyeuristic element; that is, they appear to come from the perspective of someone viewing the act as it is takes place. The drawings are placed in intimate settings, often the boudoir or bedroom of the Queen, suggesting that she entertained her many lovers in her private apartments. Though these drawings were entirely fictional, the fact that they created a sense of transparency and made Marie Antoinette’s sex life appear accessible to the public, made them appear as works of nonfiction. Thus, people took drawings and rumors about the Queen’s sexuality as truth. Plays, which were equally pornographic in nature, only furthered these rumors and the public’s acceptance of them.

Marie Antoinette, Louis XVI and the court of Versailles were the subjects of numerous plays, which not only critiqued the Old Regime, but also openly mocked it. One popular play, The Royal Dildo (1789), is the conversation between Hebe and her mistress, Juno in which they discuss Juno’s sexual frustration. These characters, both titled after Greek
mythology, are, in fact, representations of Marie Antoinette and one her of ladies-in-waiting, either Madame de Polignac or the Princesse de Lamballe. The play begins with accusations that Jupiter, Juno’s husband and a foil for Louis XVI, will not sleep with her, but rather prefers the company of men, thus, she too seeks her pleasures with other men of the court.

This play is significant in several ways. First, there are blatant accusations that Marie Antoinette is a whore, sleeping with every man but her own husband. She is overtly sexual, valuing her own physical pleasure of her duties as queen. Hebe states: “I spurn the throne and all it’s empty honors; A single c*** is worth a scepter...A pair of b**** are worth more than the most illustrious crown.” A sentiment with which Juno, that is, Marie Antoinette, whole-heartedly agrees, suggesting that she neglects her duties as a monarch, satisfying her own carnal desires over serving her people. In addition, it suggests that Marie Antoinette has turned Versailles into a brothel, where she is the prostitute and her ladies in waiting act as her Madame. Juno says to Hebe: “Go, fly, dear Hebe, round up your pals, Encircle my c*** with a battalion of c***.” This

68 “Le Godmiché (The Royal Dildo).” 197.
suggests that Marie Antoinette’s ladies organized her affairs and intrigues with other men, particularly Madame de Lamballe, but more likely, Madame de Polignac. This would not only further public distaste for the Queen, but also a dislike of her ladies and most intimate circle, who apparently supported and encouraged these trysts.

Furthermore, this play is significant for it’s portrayal of Louis XVI. Not only does it jest at his lack of a sexual relationship with his wife, but it also accuses him of homosexuality. At the very beginning of the play, Juno exclaims, “His c*** is limp for me and stiffens for some arse****.” Thus, Louis’ inability to fulfill his sexual duties as a husband has left his wife “…dissatisfied and free with my favors!” Ultimately, this play mocks Louis in such a manner makes him appear emasculated and powerless. In addition, this play makes some suggestion that Marie Antoinette was involved in an incestuous relationship with her children, an accusation that would resurface during her trial in 1793. “A really amorous c*** can f*** it’s own father: Delectable children, bring Juno off.” This statement, though fictional, was enough to fuel rumors that Marie Antoinette did, indeed, have an inappropriate sexual relationship with her own children.

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32 Ibid., 193.
70 Ibid., 200.
71 Ibid., 201.
A second play, *The Austrian Woman on the Rampage, or The Royal Orgy* (1789) describes a scene in which Marie Antoinette engages in a ménage à trois with the Comte d’Artois, Louis XVI’s brother, and Madame de Polignac, in front of a sleeping Louis. The scene, witnessed by a royal bodyguard, is described as he witnesses it. It is a play meant as an “operatic proverb” set to the music of the Queen, who, “is of the firm persuasion that she is a fine musician because she can murder a few sonatas on her harpsichord.” 72 This play, like the previous, blatantly accuses Marie Antoinette and her intimate circle of scandalous behavior; however, it makes an even stronger commentary of Louis XVI. Louis, having arrived late to meet with his wife, Artois and Polignac, was detained as he was working on a lock, a well known hobby of his, for which his wife sarcastically makes fun of him. “He’ll be along to bore us soon enough,” his wife says to Artois and Polignac, a statement which hints at the many stereotypes of Louis as a fool. 73

In addition, this play, like *The Royal Dildo*, presents Louis as a cuckold, entirely unaware of his wife’s infidelities. Once Louis falls asleep from drunkenness, Marie Antoinette giddily exclaims, “He must assist our

lovemaking. The way he’s sitting fits in with my scheme. I can’t help
laughing already.” The Queen, Artois and Polignac then begin their
lovemaking, a sleeping Louis seated amongst them, entirely unaware. The
King is depicted as such a fool that he does not wake to see his own
brother sexually engaged with the Queen two times. This ultimately,
shows that he does not hold the upper hand in his marriage, but rather he
is a fool easily manipulated by his villainous wife. Louis furthers
stereotypes of himself, his character saying, “It’s true there’s no point in
wanting to do the right thing; those gentlemen [his council] always
manage to get me to do something stupid.” Thus, not only does this play
suggest that Louis does not have control of his wife, but he also lacks any
control over his government, as according to Marie Antoinette, “Your
council will do what it always does: whatever it likes.” He is portrayed
as an ignorant man unaware that he is the joke not only of his court, but
also of his government and kingdom.

This play also encourages stereotypes that Marie Antoinette is not
only behaves at the expense of her husband, but also at the expense of her
subjects. Calling the people of Paris “the frogs of the Seine”, Marie

74 Ibid., 214.
75 Ibid., 208.
76 Ibid., 208.
Antoinette states, “Let’s laugh, let’s revel, make use of our power; squander all the money of our good Parisians.” This statement hints at the Queen’s supposed love of gambling and opulent parties, but also depicts the Queen as a despot, who abused her power, spending the money of the poor people of France to support her overtly luxurious lifestyle. She appears to have cared nothing for the well being of her subjects, but rather appears to only seek the fulfillment of her own immoral desires.

A third play *The Royal Bordello*, again depicts Marie Antoinette as an immoral woman, in this case having affairs with men of court and the clergy, namely an abbot and a bishop. However, this play is most significant in its mention of the Cardinal de Rohan, the same cardinal involved in the Affair of the Necklace. The play suggests that Marie Antoinette had a sexual affair with Rohan, which we can infer by the statement, “Immediately undertaking the task, he [Rohan] puts her petticoat on and slips his hand underneath it. Not in her pocket but...” During the trial following the Affair of the Necklace, Marie Antoinette maintained that she and the Cardinal were the firmest of enemies, however, the play suggests otherwise. Instead, it states, “Although her

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77 Ibid., 209.
[Marie Antoinette’s] feelings about him [Rohan] hadn’t changed, she pretends to be nice to him. The judicious reader can easily guess the reason.” The reason for the Queen’s false niceness to Rohan can quickly be interpreted as her desire to acquire the necklace. Thus, the play, though entirely fictional, suggested to the public that Marie Antoinette was, in fact, involved in the Diamond Necklace Affair and sought to purchase the jewels. The play also accuses her of friendship with Jean de LaMotte, the woman who was the true mastermind behind the plot, further suggesting her involvement in the scheme.

However, the play is especially disturbing as it suggests that Rohan, not the King, is the father of the Queen’s children. “Shouldn’t you have shown more consideration for the father of the Dauphin and perhaps the Dauphine?” states Rohan to Marie Antoinette, asking why she did not come to meet him one evening, having instead gone to spend the evening with LaMotte. Again, the idea that the Children of France were not the biological children of the King is an entirely fictional accusation. However, with rumors abounding about Marie Antoinette’s involvement in the necklace scandal, as well as rumors of her numerous extramarital affairs,

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in retrospect, an affair with Rohan would not have seemed all that improbable in the eyes of the French people. Thus, though the Queen actually had no involvement in the Affair of the Necklace, plays such as *The Royal Bordello,* supported claims that she did, permanently tarnishing her reputation in the eyes of the French public.

**Conclusion**

Thus, *libelles* and political pornography played a crucial role in destroying the reputation of the French Queen. Though such literature and political pornography was not a new development under the reign of Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette, it became an especially powerful tool against them. With the rise of an enlightened reading public such literature circulated amongst the upper classes, but was not restricted to them. Rather, political pornography was accessible to lowest classes of commoners as well as the highest ranks of court. As these plays could be performed on the street, they spread their message to both the literate and illiterate public, making them an especially harmful tool in the destruction of the Old Regime.

Though all forms of *libelles* damaged the reputations of the King and Queen, images and plays were two of the most important. Not only
did they bring into question the Queen’s virtue, but they also emasculate Louis, rendering him a physically and politically impotent ruler. In addition, these *libelles* caused questions of the legitimacy of the royal children, suggesting that they were not Louis’ true heirs. Furthermore, they were tools used to implicate Marie Antoinette in public scandals such as the Affair of the Necklace, in which she had no true involvement. Ultimately, because the voyeuristic element of the *libelles* made them appear as fact, they were taken as such by the public.
On October 16, 1789 Marie Antoinette was executed by guillotine, only two days after her trial had begun. Her husband, Louis XVI had been executed nine months earlier, in January 1793, his trial beginning in December of 1792. Not only did the two trials differ radically in length, but they also differed significantly in their treatment of the accused. Whereas Louis XVI was tried as Citizen Louis Capet, condemned for political treason, the trial of Marie Antoinette focused significantly more on accusations of money squandering and sexual crimes, treason being only an afterthought. Thus, this chapter will examine and compare the trials of the last monarchs of France to determine not only how the treatment of Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette differed, but also to determine why they differed.
This chapter will begin by discussing the historical context in which the trials materialized. Louis XVI’s trial took place soon after the abolition of the monarchy in September of 1772. Marie Antoinette, however, was tried under the Reign of Terror led by Robespierre. Ultimately, the change in political situation caused the Convention, the legislative body, to approach the two trials with very different attitudes. In addition, this chapter will examine the trial of Louis XVI, Citizen Louis Capet, discussing what crimes were leveled against him and how he was portrayed throughout his trial. Finally, I will examine the trial of Marie Antoinette, comparing it to that of her husband, and discussing how Robespierre’s Cult of Domesticity biased the Queen’s trial against her. Ultimately, the question that will be answered is: how is Marie Antoinette portrayed through her trial, and how did this portrayal contribute to her lasting legacy following her execution?

From Monarchy to Republic

Though the French Revolution officially began in 1789 with the storming of the Bastille, the start of the revolution alone was not responsible for destroying the monarchy. Rather, it was the Flight to Varennes in 1791 that led revolutionaries to call for the end of monarchical
rule in France. Following the October Days (October 5 – 6, 1789), when a mob forcibly brought the royal family from Versailles to Paris, essentially imprisoning them at the Palace of the Tuileries. With the revolution gaining steam and intensifying mob violence, Louis and Marie Antoinette feared for their lives, and began planning their escape. With the help of Count Axel von Fersen, a Swedish nobleman and Marie Antoinette’s supposed lover, and the Baron de Breteuil, the monarchs and their immediate family fled Paris on the night of June 20 – 21, 1791. Disguised in commoners clothing, they successfully left the city but were recognized at the town of Varennes by revolutionaries. Though Louis insisted their intended destination had been Montmédy, a fortified royalist city in north eastern France, it is also possible that the royals had intended to cross the nearby border into Austria, thereby fleeing the country altogether. Upon discovery, the family was promptly escorted back to Paris.79

The Flight to Varennes had significant consequences for the monarchy following 1791. Until this time the legislative body, the National Assembly, had intended to create reform within the context of the existing monarchy, hoping to transition France from an absolute to a constitutional monarchy. Though the proposed constitution would

significantly limit Louis’ powers (in comparison to the relative legislative freedom he enjoyed as an absolute monarch) he would remain at the head of the government. However, the monarchs’ botched escape encouraged the demise of the monarchy, having demonstrated that the King and Queen were enemies of the revolution. Furthermore, Louis made a grave mistake of writing the *Déclaration*, which he left at at the Tuileries for his captors. In this letter, he criticized the revolution as, “total anarchy taking place of the law,” outlining his complaints with the Assembly and the revolution as a whole.\(^80\) Thus, he very clearly indicted himself as a counter-revolutionary. However, an account of the trial of Marie Antoinette also shows that many blamed her for the family’s escape. They claimed she encouraged her husband to escape, and, therefore, needed to be gotten rid of as it was, “…she who hampered everything and who prevented her easy going husband from putting himself behind the new regime.”\(^81\)

Following the acceptance of the new constitution, the National Assembly disbanded, and the Legislative Assembly, the new governing body, took its place. However, the new government was far from stable.


\(^{81}\) “Le procès de Marie Antoinette,” in Actes du tribunal révolutionnaire, (Paris: Mercure de France), 84-103.
With violence escalating amongst the general population, including an armed demonstration of sans culottes at the Tuileries, and discord between the governing factions, the Legislative Assembly declared the “fatherland in danger” on July 11. The violence continued to escalate throughout the summer of 1792, and on the night of August 9 – 10, mobs of sans culottes stormed the Tuileries, while the monarchs who sought refuge in the chamber of the Legislative Assembly. Some 900 were killed in the course of the night, and the following day came to mark the end of the monarchy; the anger amongst the people towards the government was too great and the constitutional monarchy too unstable. On August 10, 1792, Louis XVI was deposed.\(^82\)

With this, the constitutional monarchy crumbled. The Legislative Assembly was left powerless, fleeing following the journée of August 10, and the sans culottes, arming themselves and taking to the streets. One especially violent event known as the September Massacres, took place from 2 – 6 September 1792. In these few days, the sans culottes invaded the prisons of Paris, namely the Abbey of Saint-Germain-des-Prés, the prison of the revolutionary government, murdering and mutilating over 1,400 non-juring priests, counter-revolutionaries, aristocrats and Swiss Guards.

The Princess de Lambelle, sister-in-law of the Duc d’Orléans and close confidant of Marie Antoinette, was one such victim, her body mutilated and her head placed on a spike and paraded in front of the captive Queen’s window. Though by this point the Constitution of 1791 was essentially void, National Convention, the new legislative body, met on September 21, desperate to restore order to Paris. In an attempt to take the revolution back from the people, the National Convention abolished the monarchy and declared France a republic.

The Trial of Citizen Louis Capet

With France officially a republic, the National Convention faced a new challenge. What, if anything, was to be done with the King? By the Constitution of 1791, should the King abdicate the throne, he could be tried and punished as a citizen. However, Louis XVI had not abdicated, he had been forcibly removed from his position of power. This presented the Convention with a further question: should the King be treated as a citizen? It was unanimous that he had committed some crime, but what was Louis guilty of and how was that guilt to be determined? On this question, the Convention found itself divided in three opposing positions. Louis’ few remaining supporters, the royalists, argued that, legally, Louis
could not be tried or punished as a citizen for any previous actions as king. Thus, they suggested he go untried and, ultimately, unpunished. The second position stated that it was legal to treat Louis as a citizen, wanting to place him on trial and punish him accordingly; the Girondin, the Convention’s politically moderate party, largely supported this position.83 A French philosopher and a representative in the National Convention, the Marquis de Condorcet spoke towards the Girondist position, advocating that the King be put to trial for his crimes. The Convention, he argued, should try Louis not only so that he may be appropriately punished for the ills he committed as king, but also to prove the legitimacy of the revolution to France and the rest of Europe. He reasoned that in conducting a trial:

The rights of the nation, doubtless, would not be changed. Abolition of the monarchy, equally, would be legitimate; but it is important for the cause of liberty that its defenders cannot be accused of having misled the people in order to incite them to reassert their legitimate rights. It is important that the nation know if it was led to the moment when the convocation of a Convention became necessary by those who sought to enlighten or by those whose end was to deceive.84

Thus, a trial would not change the goals of the revolution; it would not change the inalienable rights of the people and it would not restore the monarchy. But a trial was crucial, as it would justify the National Convention’s overthrow of the King; this, they argued, was a necessary step towards restoring liberty to the French people. Most importantly, a trial was necessary because it would legitimize the creation of the Convention and also clarify the Convention’s motives, which, unlike the king were not to manipulate the people, but rather to support them. Thus, it was imperative for the Convention to prove it’s legitimacy and clarify it’s motives before the sans culottes hijacked the revolution and the nation devolved into anarchy.

The Jacobins, also know as the Montagnards, held a significantly more radical position, arguing that Louis could not legally be tried as a citizen because he was not a citizen; to hold the office of king was in itself a crime, and so, Louis must be immediately executed. Louis Antoine Léon de Saint-Just, more simply known as Saint-Just, was one supporter of this position, arguing that Louis should be judged not as one of the people, but as an enemy of the people. He believed that it was an inherent contradiction that, “...today, respectfully, we conduct a trial for a man...”

85 "The Convention Divided: The King’s Trial." 303.
who was the assassin of a people, taken *in flagrante*, his hand soaked with blood, his hand plunged in crime...” Furthermore, Saint-Just argued that Louis could not be tried as a citizen because as king he remained outside the bonds of the constitution.

The social contract is between citizen and citizen, not between citizen and government. A contract affects on those whom it binds. As a consequence, Louis who was not bound, cannot be judged in civil law.

Maximilien de Robespierre, also a Jacobin and an ally of Saint-Just, similarly argued for the swift punishment of Louis. Robespierre agreed that Louis could not be tried as a citizen for was outside the social contract, adding that to try Louis would undermine the revolution, allowing Louis supporters to flock to his defense.

The trial of Louis XVI! But what is this trial if not an appeal from the insurrection the some tribunal or some assembly?...By opening an arena to the champions of Louis XVI, you renew the dispute between despotism and liberty; you consecrate the right to blaspheme against the Republic and the people.

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87 “Saint-Just, 13 November 1792.” 305.

Thus, Robespierre argued that a trial would offer an opportunity for Louis to be proven innocent, and therefore, would cause people to question the authority of the newly established republic. In addition, he believed that Louis and the republic could never coexist; the republic, regardless of name, was still tyranny so long as the king still lived, for it could not undo the evils of the monarchy. “…Let us beware that in showing too much indulgence for the guilty man we join him in his guilt.” Ultimately, the Girondin position took the majority vote, and the citizen Louis Capet went to trial on December 11, 1792.

The Indictment of Louis XVI, which includes thirty-three clauses, was issued at the start of Louis’ trial and clearly shows that the King was tried specifically for political crimes. It begins with the statement: “Louis, the French people accuses you of having committed a multitude of crimes in order to establish your tyranny by destroying its liberty.” Ultimately, Louis was accused of being an enemy to the revolution, and thus, to the state. It continues: “On 14 September you [Louis] apparently accepted the Constitution; your speeches announced a desire to maintain it, and you

89 “Robespierre, 3 December 1792.” Readings in Western Civilization: The Old Regime and the French Revolution. 311.

worked to overthrow it before it even was achieved.” Overall, Louis is accused of being a counter-revolutionary, attempting to flee on multiple occasions from Paris and creating alliances with other counter-revolutionaries with the goal of regaining the throne. Louis is also accused of undermining the rule of the Convention by vetoing its decrees. And finally, the indictment names several instances during which Louis, “caused the blood of Frenchmen to flow”, including the storming of the Bastille and the journée of August 10.91

The National Convention, which served as jury during the trial, ultimately found Louis XVI guilty of treason by an astounding majority. However, there was no such majority on deciding what was to be Louis’ punishment. Execution was one option; the guillotine, invented just two years earlier in 1791, was already in use by this time. It is unclear what other options of punishment would have been, though exile may have been one such option. When put to a vote in the Convention 361 representatives voted for the execution of Louis; 360 voted against. On January 20, the request for a reprieve was rejected and Louis XVI, the last king of France, was put to death by guillotine with the parting words “I am satisfied to have given my life for my country. I hope that it will serve

91 “The Indictment of Louis XVI.”
to consolidate liberty and equality, and to cause their enemies to be discovered.”

The Trial of Marie Antoinette

By the time of Marie Antoinette’s trial in October of 1793, the political condition of France had changed significantly. With the *sans culottes* running rampant through the streets of Paris and a growing fear of counter-revolutionaries, the Convention established the Committee of Public Safety on April 6, 1793. This program was sanctioned with several tasks, namely seeking out and bringing to trial any and all counter-revolutionaries and enemies of the state. By June 2, 1793, rebellion in Paris amongst the *sans culottes* was at a high, and the Jacobins, still a government minority, enlisted the help of the people to attack the Girondin, placing many party members under house arrest, and purging the Convention of the Girondin majority. Thus, Robespierre seized power and the Committee of Public Safety became the *de facto* government of France. 

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94 *The French Revolution 1787 - 1804*. 68.
With pressure from the *sans culottes* to take more radical measures, the Committee of Public Safety declared terror “the order of the day”, issuing the Law of Suspects on September 17, 1793. This decree stated that, “...all suspected persons within the territory of the Republic and still at liberty shall be placed in custody.”\(^\text{95}\) By this law most anyone in France was subject to be a suspect as it defined “suspected persons” as:

...those who, by their conduct, associations, talk or writings have shown themselves partisans of tyranny or federalism and enemies of liberty; 2\(^{nd}\), those who are unable to justify...their means means of existence and performance of civic duties; 3\(^{rd}\), those to whom certificates of patriotism have been refused...\(^\text{96}\)

The order further noted that former nobles and their families were also suspect, as were *émigrés* and anyone who did not properly declare their alliance to the revolution. Célestin Guittard de Floriban, an observer of the many Terror’s many executions, witnessed an execution almost everyday in Paris; during the week of July 29, 1794 alone, 270 people were killed by guillotine.\(^\text{97}\) However, despite using the *sans culottes* to bring the Jacobins into power, Robespierre began pushing the people out of power to concentrate it for himself, calling for a combination of representative

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\(^{96}\) “The Law of Suspects (17 September 1793).” 353.

\(^{97}\) *The French Revolution 1787 - 1804*. 75.
democracy and emergency martial law (under his command) as opposed to the direct democracy desired by the people.

Under the Reign of Terror, Robespierre also utilized ideological bombardment, indoctrinating the *sans culottes* into his ideas of a new France. Through public ceremonies and numerous decrees, Robespierre sought to regenerate the nation:

> The Revolution has renewed the souls of Frenchmen; it educates them each day in republican virtues. Time opens a new book in history; and in its new march, as majestic and simple as equality, it must engrave with a new and vigorous instrument the annals of regenerated France.  

Working under this concept, Robespierre and the Committee attempted to do away with religion, arguing that it was a “superstitious routine” that has “delivered centuries of ignorance to us,” and instituting a new calendar by which France began again at year one, the first day of the calendar corresponding to September 22, 1792, the first day of the Republic.

Most important to the reign of Robespierre in regards to Marie Antoinette, however, is his restructuring of gender roles. During the reign of Terror Robespierre instituted the Cult of Domesticity, through which he

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advocated a return to traditional gender roles, similar to those earlier discussed in Jean Jacques Rousseau’s *Émile*. Though it took place a few months following Marie Antoinette’s execution, the Festival of the Supreme Being was one of Robespierre’s public celebrations, which demonstrated the ideas of the Cult of Domesticity. This festival, intended to celebrate the republic, took place on June 8, 1794. Robespierre’s account of the event specifically describes the roles of all participants, that is, men, women and children, but it is his description of the women that is most important to a discussion of Marie Antoinette.

According to Robespierre, women were to be private figures, mothers and educators to the children of France. He describes the women as all dressed “in the colors of liberty” carrying bouquets and flowers woven through their hair, a select few women dressed entirely in white.

Figure 5 Jacques-Louis David, *The Oath of the Horatii* (1785).
with a tricolor sash, invoking images of purity, both of the women and of the nation. Furthermore, he states:

The mothers and girls positioned on the mountain will sing a second verse. The girls will promise only to marry citizens who have served the country; and the mothers will thank the Supreme Being for their fertility…

while the men, “swear together to lay down their arms only after having annihilated the enemies of the Republic.” Thus, he describes men as strong, classically masculine types, while women are to be pure and virtuous mothers, raising their children in the ideals of republicanism. These ideas had already been brought to life by the painting *The Oath of the Horatii* (1785) by French painter Jacques-Louis David. The work shows Horatius and his three sons, swearing on their swords to defend Rome. While the men appear strong, in classical Roman garb and preparing for battle, their wives appear subdued in the background. Dressed in simply draped Roman gowns, they appear unassuming and modest; their eyes cast downward; they appear inactive in comparison to the strong stances of their husbands. One woman cradles a child, again emphasizing the role of women as mothers. Thus, the gender roles as represented in this


painting, along with the ideas of Robespierre, truly came to restrict women to a position in the household as wife and mother.

In this context, Marie Antoinette became a target and victim of these arguments against “public women” and “corrupt” women. Marie Antoinette’s trial began on October 14, 1793 and ended only two days later with her execution on October 16. Like her husband, Marie Antoinette was tried as a citizen as the Widow Capet. However, under the context of Robespierre’s Terror and the Cult of Domesticity, Marie Antoinette was not tried for political crimes like her husband, but rather for personal crimes. Furthermore, Marie Antoinette was not tried by the Convention, but rather by the Revolutionary Criminal Tribunal. According to Lynn Hunt, “With her strategic position on the cusp between the public and private, Marie Antoinette was emblematic of a much larger problem of the relation between women and the public sphere in the eighteenth century,” the problem being women crossing into male-assigned gender roles.\(^\text{102}\)

The indictment of Marie Antoinette listed many crimes: squandering the money of France on “disorderly pleasures”, secretly giving money to her brother the Emperor of Austria and supporting

counter-revolutionaries were three of the accusations levied against her. In addition, she was accused of teaching her husband how to “dissimulate, that is, how to promise one thing in public and plan another in the shadows of the court.” But most important in her trial were the accusations of a more sexual nature; in addition to being accused of numerous extramarital affairs with members of the court, she was also accused of committing incest with her son.

The widow Capet, immoral in every way, the new Agrippina, is so perverse and so familiar with all crimes that, forgetting her quality of mother and the demarcation prescribed by the laws of nature, she has not stopped short of indulging herself with Louis-Charles Capet, her son – and and on the confession of the latter – in indecencies whose idea and name would make us shudder with horror.104

This brief passage from the indictment of Marie Antoinette is so important as it shows that where her husband was tried for being a bad king, Marie Antoinette was tried for being a bad woman. Here, the court focused on her as a mother speaking little to her political crimes against the people of France. She was similarly accused of conducting orgies at Versailles and of intimate liaisons with infamous ministers, perfidious generals, disloyal representatives of the people.”105

103 Hunt, Lynn. The Family Romance of the French Revolution. 93.
104 Ibid., 93.
105 Ibid., 94.
A translation of Marie Antoinette’s trial shows similar sentiments. In discussing the Flight to Varennes, the trial transcription accuses Marie Antoinette of seducing Barnave, a leading revolutionary, despite a long-term affair with Count Fersen. Though she did so to hasten her escape, Marie Antoinette is accused of being an opportunist, and that she would carry on with Barnave while Fersen sought to help her is touted as “something repulsive.” The trial argues that, having found herself in so dire a situation, Marie Antoinette would use any means necessary to regain her power. “If made to lie, she lies; if made to swear, she swears; if made to betray, she betrays.” Thus, the fallen Queen is depicted as a woman who cannot be trusted. Furthermore, she is shown as an enemy of the revolutionaries, but also of the counter-revolutionaries. “Oh! Damn the nation! It is unfortunate to have to live with them! The French are atrocious on all sides.” Thus, Marie Antoinette, unlike Louis, is not simply a counter-revolutionary, but an enemy of the state, and, even worse, a foreigner.

Conclusion

106 “Le procès de Marie Antoinette,” 84-103.
107 “Le procès de Marie Antoinette,” 84-103.
108 “Le procès de Marie Antoinette,” 84-103.
Despite accusations of royal orgies and incest being utterly false, the damage to Marie Antoinette’s reputation had already been done. Marie Antoinette was condemned to be executed only two days after her trial had begun. However, what is most important about her trial is to understand how it was a result of Robespierre’s Reign of Terror and the Cult of Domesticity. In trying Marie Antoinette as a bad woman, Robespierre and the Jacobins were able to make an example to the women of France, showing them precisely what a woman was not to be and condemning such a woman to death. Furthermore, she was also a tool used to vilify the Old Regime, which through this trial, is shown as wicked, corrupt and sexualized; by showing the Old Regime as corrupt, Robespierre, depicted his regime, characterized, in theory, by good republican citizens, as virtuous and pure.
CHAPTER 4

Marie Antoinette in the Memoirs of Madame Campan

The Memoirs of Marie Antoinette written by Madame Campan, one of the Queen’s ladies-in-waiting, are one of the only favorable portrayals of Marie Antoinette which remain today. Though the memoirs focus primarily on the life of Marie Antoinette in France, they also provide information on the life of Campan and on historical events leading up to the Revolution of 1789. While the account is clearly biased in favor of Marie Antoinette, it is an important primary source because provides a counter-argument to the many negative portrayals of the Queen, such as political pornography. This chapter will focus on Madame Campan’s depictions of Marie Antoinette in comparison to other more negative accounts, paying particular attention to Marie Antoinette’s relationship with the public and the nobility, and her role in the Diamond Necklace
Affair. In addition, this chapter will provide a brief biography of Madame Campan, and, most importantly, will contextualize her memoirs as a post-revolutionary document.

Madame Campan and Post-Revolutionary France

Madame Campan, née Jeanne Louis Henriette Genet, was born on December 6, 1752 in Paris. Her father, M. Genet, first clerk in the Foreign Office, had elevated his status through merit despite being a member of the Third Estate. Campan’s father saw that his daughter was well educated, and she had become such an accomplished young lady that at age fifteen she was appointed Reader to the Madames, the daughters of Louis XV. In 1770, following Marie Antoinette’s marriage Louis Auguste, Campan was married to the son of a Monsieur Campan, secretary of the royal cabinet, and also of the Third Estate. That same year, Campan was appointed Reader to Marie Antoinette, and in 1768 was promoted to the position of First Lady of the
Bedchamber. According to her memoirs, Campan remained in the Queen’s service until they were separated on August 10, 1792 by the storming of the Tuileries. Madame Campan was able to survive the revolution, despite being targeted during the Terror by Robespierre, and went on to establish a boarding school for girls at St. Germain, which Napoleon Bonaparte’s stepdaughter later attended. Napoleon was so impressed by Campan’s teaching abilities that in 1807 he named her superintendent of the Legion of Honor school at Écouen. She lost this position, however, in 1814 following the Bourbon restoration, which ended Napoleon’s empire and named Louis XVIII as King of France. She then retired to Mantes, but her connection to the Napoleonic government raised suspicions of Campan’s political loyalties. Campan died in 1822 and her memoirs were published posthumous in 1823.109

Understanding Madame Campan’s life is essential to understanding the underlying purpose of her memoirs, as Campan’s experiences strongly influenced her writing. First, Campan was a member of the Third Estate; though she was extremely well educated and held a place at court, Campan was extremely anti-aristocracy. In her memoirs, she blames various members of the court and nobility for tarnishing Marie

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Antoinette’s reputation, and condemns them for their abuse of privilege. Though she was able to elevate her status through merit, Campan recognized that as a Third Estate member there were limitations on how high she could rise in society.

With such anti-aristocratic sentiments, Campan can be considered, to some extent, a product of the Enlightenment, and as such, can be associated with other Enlightenment thinkers. Abbé Sieyès (1748 – 1836), another member of the Third Estate, was like Campan as he also witnessed multiple regimes in French history: the Old Regime, the Revolution, the Terror, the Directory, the Consulate, the Napoleonic Empire and the Bourbon Restoration, as well as the July Monarchy (1830 – 1848). His pamphlet *What is the Third Estate?* (1789) made him one of the most influential leaders of the early Revolution, and it echoes many of Campan’s anti-aristocracy sentiments. Sieyès and Campan’s shared sentiments, lend credit to the latter’s memoirs, showing that her distaste for the nobility was a common sentiment among Third Estate members.

Though Campan was in some respects a student of the Enlightenment, she was also a woman and maintained traditional Old Regime gender roles. This tension is important as it not only affected Campan individually, but was also a point of contradiction throughout the Enlightenment and
Revolution. While Enlightenment philosophy encouraged increased public participation in government and society, female participation was only encouraged to a certain extent, and women generally remained beings of the private sphere. This tension would remain prevalent in French politics and society long after Campan’s death.

The Preface of *The Memoirs of Marie Antoinette* clearly illustrates Madame Campan’s purpose in writing and publishing her memoirs. The main purpose of the memoirs, according to Campan, is to clear the reputation of Marie Antoinette “from the attacks of calumny”.¹¹⁰ She argued that not only did Marie Antoinette deserve to have lived a better, longer life, but that she also deserved, “a different place in the opinion of mankind after her fall”; that is, a reputation free of the many scandals unjustly attributed to her. Campan seeks to do so by chronicling the events of Marie Antoinette’s reign, describing numerous events, paying particular attention to the roles of nobles and government ministers in them. Though she recognizes flaws in Marie Antoinette’s behavior which would have further deteriorated the Queen’s reputation, Campan ultimately blames Marie Antoinette’s manipulative enemies at court, her poor advisors and Louis XVI for acting in ways which turned public

¹¹¹ Ibid., 5.
opinion against the Queen. This again emphasizes her anti-nobility attitude.

Campan also notes that with much of the nobility and members of the household at Versailles having been executed during the Revolution, few remained to pen authentic memoirs of Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette’s reign. In addition, those who did publish memoirs did so for the “vindication of their own characters”. 112 However, in reading Campan’s memoirs, it is clear that she, too, is seeking vindication for herself and her position in society. Following the end of Napoleon’s empire and the restoration of the Bourbon monarchy, many in the new government were suspicious of Campan’s political affiliations, as she had shared a close relationship with Bonaparte. Thus, by publishing her memoirs in favor of Marie Antoinette, the last Queen of France, Campan shows her support not only for the monarchy of the Old Regime, but also for the new Bourbon monarch, Louis XVIII. Her work shows, not only a sense of personal loss at the death of Marie Antoinette, but also a general sense of nostalgia for elements of the Old Regime. These emotions are emblematic of romanticism, a 19th century literary movement led by authors such as François-René de Chateaubriand, which emphasized

112 Ibid., 3.
themes such as nationalism and sentimentalism. More specifically, the French Romantic Movement was characterized by reminiscence for prerevolutionary society, which helps to further contextualize why Campan wrote in the way she did.

*Marie Antoinette, the Nobility and the Public*

Madame Campan’s memoirs demonstrate the deterioration of Marie Antoinette’s reputation with the people of France, arguing that the Queen, through her own actions, did little to merit the hatred of the public. Campan adamantly counters public assumptions of Marie Antoinette as a frivolous spendthrift that cared nothing for her people. Rather, she suggests that poor public opinion of Marie Antoinette started amongst the nobility and then trickled down to the general public. While much of the court plotted against her, Marie Antoinette, showed a great deal of care and generosity toward the rest of her subjects. It was not until much later that public opinion, attacking the Queen and depicting her as the “Queen of deficit”, a reputation that is still attributed to her in contemporary representations.

Madame Campan notes several instances in which Marie Antoinette displayed a great deal of care for her subjects, and they for her.
Aside from showing the utmost generosity to favored members of her household, Marie Antoinette, especially in her younger years, went out of her way to care for members of the Third Estate, who she found in need; such actions on her part, often defied conventions of etiquette and charity, and considered inappropriate for a woman in her position. On one occasion, Marie Antoinette witnessing an elderly peasant being injured by a stag, took up the family in her carriage, returned them to their home and sat by the man’s bedside caring for him herself. “Her heart was always open to the feelings of compassion and the recollection of her rank never restrained her sensibility,” 113 notes Campan, suggesting that Marie Antoinette was a kind soul, who would do anything within her power to care for her people, even when that meant defying strictly imposed rules of etiquette.

According to Campan, the Queen made significant efforts to ensure that her subjects were provided for. On learning that animals had destroyed the crop of a Parisian neighborhood, the Queen stated, “I will undertake to have these good people relieved from so great an annoyance...I desire that immediate justice be done to this petition,” because Campan claimed, “She [Marie Antoinette] was always so happy

113 Madame Campan, The Memoirs of Marie Antoinette, 56.
when it was in her power to do good.”\textsuperscript{114} This event shows a stark contrast to the events of the October Days of 1789 where a mob of women marched on Versailles demanding bread from their sovereigns following a devastating crop failure.

The memoirs show that up until 1788, despite her decreasing popularity, Marie Antoinette remained a thoughtful monarch. The winter of 1788 marks the last instance of public support for the Queen, when France suffered an incredibly severe winter. The people were so grateful for the aid of the monarchs, during this period, that statues of ice and snow were erected in their honor; on one was the following inscription:

\begin{quote}
To Marie Antoinette,  
Lovely and good, to tender pity true,  
Queen of virtuous King, the trophy view;  
Cold Ice and snow sustain it’s fragile form,  
But ev’ry grateful heart to thee is warm.  
Oh, may this tribute in your hearts excite,  
Illustrious pair, more pure and real delight,  
Whilst thus your virtues are sincerely prais’d,  
Than pompous domes by servile flatt’ry rais’d.\textsuperscript{115}
\end{quote}

However, this praise was short lived when public opinion turned on the Queen following the convocation of the Estates General in 1789.

Campan’s accounts of the Queen and her people are important as they depict Marie Antoinette in a light very different from contemporary

\textsuperscript{114} Ibid., 114.  
\textsuperscript{115} Madame Campan, \textit{The Memoirs of Marie Antoinette}, 185.
stereotypes. While Campan paints a flattering picture of the Queen, public pamphlets show that criticism of the monarchy began as early as 1775. As my discussion of political pornography and clandestine literature already demonstrates, criticism of the monarchy began at court, not in the streets of Paris. The memoirs of Madame Campan also highlight this fact, as she blames the courtiers for opening the monarchy to the vulgar criticisms of the people.

While the people initially loved her, many courtiers hated Marie Antoinette for her heritage and for her misunderstanding of French etiquette. Throughout, Campan is resolute in her argument that the court hated Marie Antoinette not by fault of the Queen but because, “The anti-Austrian party, discontented and vindictive, became spies upon her conduct, exaggerated her slightest errors, and calumniated her most innocent proceedings,” to turn public opinion against the Queen.\footnote{Ibid., 22.} She was especially criticized for abolishing certain practices of etiquette and privilege. Campan claims this was done at the behest of Abbé de Vermond, one of the Queen’s advisors, who constantly mocked Versailles etiquette for its lack of “political aim”, and, “guided her [Marie...
Antoinette] with so little prudence.”117 In addition to blaming the Queen’s poor advisors, Campan also blames scheming courtiers who she claims were responsible for plotting against the Queen, going so far as to encourage divorce between Marie Antoinette and Louis Auguste. Campan even blames Louis for his wife’s failures at court stating that, “The King, too indifferent to serve as her guide, as yet had conceived no love for her.”118

However, Campan also shows how Marie Antoinette was criticized not just for ignoring etiquette at court, but also for being too close to the public, overstepping the bounds of acceptable behavior to help the people. She depicts the Queen as a mother figure to the people, in one instance very literally so, as she brought a young orphaned boy in the care of his poor grandmother back to court, caring for him and providing his education, while also financially providing for his grandmother and his other siblings.119 The same motherly affection transpired at court where she, “…instead of discussing the important rights to chairs and stools, good-naturedly invited everybody to be seated.”120 While we might now see such behavior as kindness on the part of the Queen was at Versailles

117 Ibid., 51.
118 Ibid., 88.
119 Ibid., 88.
120 Madame Campan, The Memoirs of Marie Antoinette, 22.
considered a reprehensible breach of conduct that was unbecoming for a monarch. Thus, in a court that prided itself on exclusivity and the privileges associated with that, Marie Antoinette was too inclusive, sharing to close a relationship to the people and treating all nobility as equals regardless of minute differences in rank.

In constantly blaming court politics for ruining her Queen’s reputation, Campan emphasizes her own anti-aristocratic sentiments, which were echoed by many other members of the high Third Estate, for example Abbé Sieyès. Not only does Sieyès discredit the utility of the nobility saying, “...the so-called usefulness of a privileged order to the public service is a fallacy,” but he also praises the merit of the Third Estate without which, “…Nothing will go well.”

Sieyès argues that the nobility stands separate from the Third Estate and the body of the nation because it is idle, serving no legitimate public function, yet possessing various privileges which it in no way earned, all the while manipulating the monarchs for personal gain.

It is not the King who reigns; it is the Court. The Court has made and the Court has unmade; the Court has appointed minister and the Court has dismissed them; the Court has created posts and the Court has filled them...And what is

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the Court but the head of this vast aristocracy which overruns every part of France, which seizes on everything through its members, which exercise everywhere every essential function in the whole administration?¹²²

Both Sieyès and Campan argue that it was the courtiers who brought down the monarchy by constantly seeking more privileges inciting an uprising of the Third Estate. While both note that the monarchs, Marie Antoinette and Louis XVI did in several ways contribute to disapproval of the government, the courtiers were most at fault for manipulating the government to their own advantage, filling positions which they did not merit.

Through all these examples, Campan demonstrates that Marie Antoinette was constantly caught in the struggle between the nobility and the people, where the nobility criticized her for being a good queen to the people, and the people criticized her for following courtly standards the etiquette demanded by the nobility. Ultimately, Marie Antoinette was in a “lose – lose” situation where she could not please one Estate without upsetting the other. Such tension left Marie Antoinette as an outsider in the French social hierarchy. In addition, the inability of Marie Antoinette, and the monarchy in general, to reconcile the demands of the Second and Third Estates ultimately allowed for the revolution of the nobles, which

¹²² Emmanuel-Joseph Sieyès, "What is the Third Estate?,” 159.
demanded a return to stricter Old Regime social policies, to transform into a revolution of the people and mob politics that demanded the abolition of the Old Regime altogether.

This tension, this lose-lose situation, is equally representative of events in Madame Campan’s own life, showing that she used her “version” of Marie Antoinette as a foil for herself. Following the Restoration Campan found herself in a struggle between political factions; while she had previously being a part of Napoleon’s regime, she was struggling to prove to the newly empowered monarchists that she was one of them. By exaggerating her position in Marie Antoinette’s circle, showing herself to be a close confidante of the Queen, and defending the previous monarch, Campan tried to show that she could be trusted by the new monarchy. However, there remains a tension in Campan’s life due to her position as a member of the Third Estate.

Though she did work at court, Campan benefited from the Revolution and Napoleon’s Empire because they gave her an opportunity at social mobility, which had been previously closed to her under the Old Regime. However, with the Bourbon Restoration, Campan was brought back down in society, having lost her high position as an educator when Napoleon fell from power. This left Campan as a social outsider, much
like Marie Antoinette’s struggle between the people and the nobility made her a social outsider. Despite having been persecuted as a friend of the monarchy (she narrowly escaping the guillotine) under Robespierre’s Reign of Terror, the Restoration still mistrusted her simply because she had worked under Napoleon. The message she is sending through her memoirs is that she, like Marie Antoinette was simply doing what was necessary for her to survive.

In addition, Campan emphasizes Marie Antoinette’s motherly characteristics, stating that because Marie Antoinette was raised to “fear and respect rather than love” her mother, “…she therefore never desired to place between her own children and herself that distance which had existed in the imperial family.”\(^{123}\) This closeness to her own children, also accounts for her closeness to the people of France, who were, in a sense, her children as well. These attributes are reflective of Campan’s experiences as an educator, where she constantly acted as a mother figure to her students. By emphasizing the fact that she was an educator, Campan evokes a certain motherly sympathy or camaraderie from her readers, especially female readers, in an effort to gain their support. Ultimately, she appears to be emphasizing the fact that while she did

\(^{123}\) Madame Campan, The Memoirs of Marie Antoinette, 46.
work for Napoleon, it was in no way a political position but rather she filled a necessary position in society for which she should be valued.

The Affair of The Necklace

The Affair of the Necklace began with Jeanne de Saint-Rémi. Her family was of provincial nobility and destitute, however, she claimed that she was distantly related to the royal Valois family. Thus calling herself Jeanne de Valois, she was taken in by the marquise de Boulainvilliers who gave her an education and married her to Nicolas de La Motte, a low ranking count in 1780. Through her connection with the Boulainvilliers family, Jeanne de La Motte became acquainted with the Louis de Rohan, a cardinal of a wealthy French family of the old nobility. Marie Antoinette, however, strongly disliked the Cardinal based on their earlier encounters in Vienna, where Rohan had served as the French ambassador. Desperate for the Queen’s approval in order to elevate his status, Rohan became the perfect pawn for de La Motte’s conspiracy by which she sought to replenish her own lost fortune.\textsuperscript{124}

La Motte thus engineered a plot by which she convinced the Cardinal that Marie Antoinette was desperate to acquire a diamond necklace, valued at 1600,000 Francs, which was created by Boehmer and Bassange, the court jewelers. Purchasing the necklace for the Queen would put Rohan back in the Queen’s favor, giving him an opportunity to elevate his position politically. Through a series of carefully forged letters created by La Motte and her secretary, the Cardinal was convinced that Marie Antoinette did, indeed, want the necklace. La Motte further convinced him through a meeting she arranged between Rohan and “the Queen”, a young prostitute named Nicole Le Guay who had a striking resemblance to the Queen. Le Guay was coached by La Motte to impersonate the Queen, and met with Rohan in the gardens of Versailles one night during the summer of 1784.  

Figure 7 The Diamond Necklace

125 Sarah Maza, "The Diamond Necklace Affair Revisited (1785-1786): The Case of the Missing Queen” 80-81.
Thus, Rohan bought the necklace from Boehmer and on February 1, 1785 it was delivered to La Motte and the Cardinal, who then handed it off to a man claiming to be the Queen’s valet (but who was really another in La Motte’s service). La Motte and her accomplices then took the necklace for themselves, selling the diamonds individually in the streets of Paris and London. The plot was ultimately discovered through a conversation between Madame Campan and Boehmer, as she discusses in her memoirs, on August 3.\footnote{Sarah Maza, "The Diamond Necklace Affair Revisited (1785-1786): The Case of the Missing Queen" 80-81.}

In her memoirs, Campan dedicates an entire chapter to the crisis of the Diamond Necklace affair. The Diamond Necklace Affair of 1785 was the single event that utterly destroyed the reputation of Marie Antoinette on the eve of the Revolution. While Campan named the Cardinal de Rohan and Jeanne de La Motte as the masterminds behind the plot, the people blamed Marie Antoinette and turned against her. At the beginning of her memoirs Campan acknowledges that Marie Antoinette and Rohan had been acquainted at the court of Vienna but that he was found to be “so frivolous and so immoral” by both the Archduchesses and her mother the Empress, that neither would associate with him.\footnote{Madame Campan, The Memoirs of Marie Antoinette, 51.} Once Rohan
became Cardinal and Marie Antoinette became Queen of France, their relationship only continued to sour. She would show him no favor, which seriously hindered his ability to advance his ecclesiastical position in the ranks of French society.

Thus, he allowed himself to be drawn into a plot created by de LaMotte. This was the very same necklace that Boehmer, the court jeweler, had offered the queen several times prior, and each time the Queen refused. Yet Boehmer was persistent, having already made the necklace at great personal expense, and desperate for a buyer. Marie Antoinette, however, according to Campan, was well aware of the financial difficulties her subjects were facing and, “...for her part, she would never wear it [the necklace], being unwilling that the world should have to reproach her with having coveted so expensive an article.” This shows that Marie Antoinette adamantly refused the acquisition of this necklace, not only on the grounds that she did not want in it part because it had originally been created for Madame du Barry, Louis XV’s mistress, but also because she could not justify so extravagant a purchase when her people were burdened by heavy taxes and food shortages, again emphasizing her care, as monarch, for the well being of her people. But

129 Ibid., 167.
the plot was discovered when Boehmer sought an audience with the Queen in the hopes that he would be paid for the necklace. By this time, however, La Motte and her other accomplices had separated the jewels, selling them individually. De La Motte was condemned to be whipped, branded and jailed while Rohan was fully acquitted of all charges.  

Marie Antoinette was in no way involved in the plot to actually obtain the necklace from Boehmer, however, Cardinal Rohan claimed that de LaMotte had shown him letters from the Queen with instructions on the purchase of the necklace. The key factor in determining that these letters were, in fact, false was the signature; these letters forged by de LaMotte had been signed “Marie Antoinette de France”, a grave mistake on her part, as according to Louis XVI, “queens sign only by their baptismal names.” The issue, however, was not so much whether or not the Queen was actually involved (regardless of the fact that she was not, most of the public accused her for the entire affair), but rather that King Louis XVI made a fatal choice, that would destroy his wife’s reputation and the monarchy’s credibility, by allowing the case to be tried publically in court.

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130 Ibid., 180.
131 Ibid., 173.
Fatal moment! In which the Queen found herself, in consequence of the highly impolitic step, on trial with a subject, who ought to have been dealt with by the power of the King alone.132

The King’s choice was so contested because the nobility, instead of rallying behind their sovereign, took opposing sides in the trial because they were horrified by the idea that the monarchy’s secrets would be put on display for the public. The Cardinal de Bernis, ambassador to France from the Pope, and Louis XVI aunt’s, “wished this scandalous affair should be hushed up,” while, “the majority of the nobility saw in this affair only an attack on the Prince’s [Rohan’s] rank, the clergy only a blow at the privileges of a Cardinal.”133 The King’s sister-in-law even went so far as to support de LaMotte, offering her a pension of at least twelve hundred francs.134 Again, this shows the discord between the nobility and Marie Antoinette over her attempts to curtail the excessive rules of etiquette at Versailles. The people, on the other hand, were fully convinced of the Queen’s guilt when de LaMotte, after being whipped and branded in public, escaped from the prison l’Hopital within days of her imprisonment.

132 Ibid., 176.
134 Ibid., 178.
This new error confirmed the Parisians in the idea that the wretch De LaMotte, who had never been able to make her way so far as to the room appropriated the Queen’s women, had really interested the Queen herself.\textsuperscript{135}

The Diamond Necklace Affair serves as an important parallel for the life of Campan. Unlike much of the public who blamed Marie Antoinette for the affair, Campan argues that the Queen was totally innocent and in no way participated or caused the affair. This serves as a foil for Campan’s involvement in the Napoleonic Empire, for which she was harshly judged. While Campan did work under Napoleon, she was in no way involved in the political aspects of his regime; that is, she only worked with him on educational matters. Ultimately, she is seeking vindication for her connection to the Napoleonic regime, which she became involved in through no fault of her own, but, rather, treated it as a necessary means for survival. By criticizing Campan for her connection to Napoleon and questioning her loyalty, the Bourbon Restoration suggested that she was politically suspect, when in fact, her position made no contribution to politics. However, like Marie Antoinette, who was not actually part of the Diamond Necklace Affair, the inclusion of her name alone was to raise suspicions.

\textsuperscript{135} Ibid., 180.
Conclusion

Despite the obvious pro-Marie Antoinette bias, this document offers a unique and valuable perspective of the monarch, court and people of France. While Campan certainly exaggerates the extent of her personal relationship with the Queen, her account of court politics, through which she illustrates tensions between the Queen, the nobility and the people, are surprisingly correct. Campan is able to show, albeit with her exaggerations, how the various players at court tied into the life of Marie Antoinette, and how they each contributed to the deterioration of her public reputation.

In addition by paralleling her own life to that of Marie Antoinette, Campan seeks to clear her own reputation as well as that of the Queen. Ultimately, these parallels show that the tensions and contradictions of the revolutionary period continued to haunt the people of France well after the fall of the Old Regime. Even during the Bourbon Restoration, France found itself still in a limbo of sorts. Who was faithful to the Restoration and the monarchy, and who were not? Who, if anyone, would be privileged under this new regime? Would a restoration of the monarchs mean a return to Old Regime politics, or would Enlightenment and
revolutionary ideals of liberty and equality be united with the monarchy? These questions and others left many, like Madame Campan, who had survived multiple political regimes, wondering where exactly they belonged in society. Ultimately, Marie Antoinette became a tool whereby Madame Campan could express her loyalty to the monarchy, disassociate herself from the Napoleonic regime, and at the same time, issue her criticisms against the nobility, whom, for Campan and many others, were the real cause of political and social disorder in the Old Regime and in the new.
CONCLUSION

The Afterlife of Marie Antoinette

Since her execution Marie Antoinette has remained an important historical figure, her name well known in popular culture even today. But how has her legacy lived on in the modern day period? This chapter will, therefore, discuss contemporary representations of Marie Antoinette, particularly in popular culture media such as films and magazines. Two films have been created about the Queen, both titled Marie Antoinette, the first created released in 1938 and the other in 2006. Though they share the same name, the two films show very different images of the ill-fated
queen. Furthermore, I will discuss literary representations, namely the *Vogue* September 2006 issue, of which Marie Antoinette was the primary focus of several fashion-focused and intellectual articles. This chapter will also discuss how 18th century discussions of gender roles which were particularly relevant to Marie Antoinette, have remained important in dialogues regarding contemporary women in twentieth and twenty-first century politics. Hillary Clinton, Michelle Obama, Sarah Palin and Kate Middleton, all offer various contrasts to gender roles in politics today versus those of pre-revolutionary France. Contemporary representations of Marie Antoinette, much like those of 18th and 19th century France, show very biased pictures of the Queen. Since her downfall, Marie Antoinette has become an infamous figure, her name having become synonymous with the French Revolution. However, it appears that over the course of
the 20th and 21st centuries, Marie Antoinette is less remembered for her role in the French Revolution, and more so for her incredible fashion. She has become a symbol for excess and extravagance. She has been the subject of several films, most notably *Marie Antoinette* (1938), which stars Norma Shearer as the superficial and senseless Queen of France, and *Marie Antoinette* (2006), a Sofia Coppola adaption of Antonia Fraser’s *The Journey*. Accompanying the release of this latter film was the September 2006 issue of *Vogue* magazine dedicated to articles not only of the Queen’s fashion, as appropriate for this high fashion publication, but also discussions of the Queen herself.

*Marie Antoinette* (1938) is a film ripe with historical inaccuracies; in fact, little about this film actually represents Versailles as it was in the Old Regime. Filmed on Hollywood sets with costumes more fitting for the Southern plantations of *Gone With the Wind*, this adaptation shows Marie
Antoinette, not as a young girl, but as a grown woman, who sought to make herself the star of Paris at the expense of Madame du Barry and King Louis XV. It clearly supports rumors that she was a harlot, as she freely kisses any and all men who will have her, kissing and falling in love with Count Axel von Fersen upon their very first meeting. Her husband, played by Robert Morley, is depicted as a King who totally lacks the respect of the royal family, the court and the people of France. He appears as unintelligent and childlike, but also as an outright fool, if not mentally unstable. He has several outbursts of violent rage and is totally unable to hold a coherent conversation with anyone but his wife. Overall, the film suggests that Marie Antoinette was wholly responsible for causing the Revolution, sending the country into heavy debts and not caring at all for the well being of her subjects.

The whole film is highly exaggerated; the French people are shown toiling away in the fields, their clothes ragged and their bodies thin, a dramatic soundtrack only worsening their condition. In addition, the film appears to show that the Revolution began amongst the people, with the commoners taking up arms against the tyrants, Marie Antoinette and Louis. Though it does suggest that Marie Antoinette was an innocent party in the Diamond Necklace Affair, it was not enough to save the
horrible reputation she gained through the rest of the movie. She appears manipulative and overly involved in politics, her husband King Louis XVI wrapped around her finger. According to historian Laura Mason,

In *Marie Antoinette* the heroine’s search for an ideal masculine authority serves the narrative by giving cause for the French Revolution at the same time that it reflects prevailing concerns in Depression-era America about the status of contemporary masculinity.136

Thus, she attributes the films historical flaws to Hollywood film-typology, and the heavy weight given to the Queen’s sexuality, a result of the crisis of masculinity caused by the 1930’s Depression. Nonetheless, the film still encouraged negative stereotypes of the Queen, despite being a foil of contemporary American issues.

The later *Marie Antoinette*, written and directed by Sofia Coppola, stars Kirsten Dunst and Jason Schwartzman as the royal couple. Set to a pulsating soundtrack of pop-rock music from popular bands such as The Strokes, this film focuses significantly more on the fashions and general opulence of Versailles, only giving a cursory glance at the politics surrounding the monarchy. Simply put, this film depicts Marie Antoinette as a teen Queen reminiscent of contemporary twenty-something socialites and heiresses. Though, like the earlier film, this adaptation shows Marie

Antoinette as somewhat shallow, it also appears to suggest that her actions as Queen were a result of her age and unpreparedness for the role, not because she was intentionally malicious. She also appears to lack an interest in politics, a strong contrast to ideas that was too present in the political sphere. Overall, this depiction, though decried by many film critics including several articles from the prominent *New Yorker* magazine, humanizes the young Queen.

*Vogue’s* September 2006 issue picks up right where Sofia Coppola left off, focusing several articles on both Kirsten Dunst and Marie Antoinette. “Teen Queen”, an article by Kennedy Fraser, discusses both the true Queen and the Coppola version. “I feel that Marie Antoinette is a very creative person,” says Coppola in the article.137 Thus, her film focuses

mainly on Marie Antoinette the fashion icon, viewing 18th century France and the court of Versailles “from a very feminine young woman’s point of view.”138 Beginning with these statements from Coppola, the article then launches into a brief history of Marie Antoinette, focusing on all the things she is best known for today: her unconsummated marriage, her socially inept husband, her rumored affairs and, most importantly, her fashions. However, though depicting Marie Antoinette in all her stereotypical glory, the article, like the 2006 film, attempts to humanize the Queen, suggesting that in the monarchs last years she became an adept diplomat and was a

![Figure 10 Kirsten Dunst poses on the cover of Vogue as Marie Antoinette.](image)

“tenderhearted mother”.

A second article in the same issue, however, shows Marie Antoinette in a very different light, focusing entirely on the fashion craze she began with her elaborate hairdos, the pouf. The pouf was a hairstyle developed by Rose Bertin, the Queen’s dressmaker, and Monsieur Léonard, the Queen’s personal coiffeur, and became the height, quite literally, of style in 1774.\textsuperscript{139}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.8\textwidth]{pouf.png}
\caption{Marie Antoinette’s Coiffure of Independence c. 1778}
\end{figure}

..The pouf was built on scaffolding made from wire, cloth, guaze, horsehair, fake hair, and the wearer’s own tresses, teased into a near vertical position. After coating the whole edifice with powder, its architect installed amid the twists and curls an elaborate still life, intended either to express a feeling (\textit{pouf au sentiment}) or to commemorate a special event (\textit{pouf à la circonstance}).\textsuperscript{140}

Thus, the Queen’s poufs included the \textit{pouf à l’Iphigiénie}, which she wore for to Gluck’s opera \textit{Iphigiénie en Aulide}, and was topped with a large crescent moon, ribbons and a veil.

\textsuperscript{139} Fraser, Kennedy. “Teen Queen.” 648.

Other poufs included one commemorating Louis XVI’s inoculation against smallpox, another meant to represent a comet and still another was topped with garden vegetables.\textsuperscript{141}

However, while she portrays Marie Antoinette as a “Queen of fashion” to the French people, she also discusses the Queen from the perspective of her more popular nickname “Madame Deficit”. Not only does she discuss how ridiculous these hairstyles were, requiring women to sit on the floor of carriages to accommodate the height of their hair and hairdresser to work from the height of a ladder, but she also notes how expensive they were to maintain. According to Weber, “…1,500,000 unmarried demoiselles were squandering their dowries in order to imitate the Queen’s style, declaring the were ‘just as happy buying poufs as [getting] a husband.’”\textsuperscript{142} Poor women also sought to imitate the Queen’s style, and did so at the cost of accepting “the strings-attached ‘offers of generous lovers’ – and to lose their virtue in the process.”\textsuperscript{143} Consequently, women not only squandered their fortunes, but also sacrificed their virtues all for the sake of emulating their queen. Thus, both Vogue articles, though placed one after the other in the same magazine, show two very

\textsuperscript{142} Weber, Caroline. “The Height of Fashion.” 748.
\textsuperscript{143} Ibid., 748.
different sides of Marie Antoinette. While “Teen Queen” attempts to humanize Marie Antoinette, attributing her stumbles to her naivety and innocence, “The Height of Fashion” leans more towards depicting Marie Antoinette as the woman who emptied the coffers of France on her ridiculous fashions. We, therefore, see continuations of more negative 18th century stereotypes of the Queen, but also new, more sympathetic views of the young woman who was thrown into the position of monarch well before she was ready.

While cultural products such as films and magazines have deployed stereotypes of Marie Antoinette for modern-day audiences, another aspect of discussions about the queen remains relevant to this day: the issue of women in politics. The Revolution and Robespierre’s indictment of Marie Antoinette as a bad, public woman, while outdated are still applied to contemporary women in politics. Discussions of proper gender roles, particularly for “political” or “public women” remain central to our own discussions. Women such as Hilary Clinton, Michelle Obama and Sarah Palin have all become prominent female figures in the American government, and, as such, have also been highly criticized for their behavior, especially in terms of their appearance. Kate Middleton, fiancée of Prince William and future queen of England, has also become a
popular public figure, presenting the closest comparison to Marie Antoinette.

Hillary Clinton, the current Secretary of State, came under severe criticism in 1992 during her husband’s presidential campaign and his subsequent term in office. Mrs. Clinton was especially criticized for her involvement in politics, often accused of holding too much sway over her husband and usurping the role of the vice-president. In fact, historian Pierre Saint Amand writes “the hatred trained upon Hillary Clinton during the 1992 presidential election was reproduced in the very same language as the discourse of infamy that sent Queen Marie Antoinette to the guillotine on 16 October 1793.” He writes that the fear of “women in power, of women’s empowerment might be designated the Marie Antoinette syndrome.” He continues:

In the case of Hillary Clinton, the threat stems from the degree to which she has appeared as a model of women’s political power, of their success in social and professional spheres traditionally reserved for men, of women’s dramatic exit from domestic confinement.144

Thus, Hillary, like Marie Antoinette, shows a woman criticized for being too present in the public sphere. Unlike the proper domestic woman, Hillary openly participated in politics and advised her husband in his duties as President. This recalls discussions of Marie Antoinette, who, as seen through various *libelles*, was accused of manipulating her husband and usurping his political power. She, in other words, was the “man” in the family; similarly, Hillary Clinton was depicted, quite literally, as a woman with a penis. The two women are even more similar as Hillary was also a subject of a modern day *libelles*, depicted on the cover of *Spy* magazine as a dominatrix, suggesting her dominance over her husband. The *libelles* of Marie Antoinette and Hillary, therefore, show them to be “not female,” or not “feminine.”

Figure 12 Hillary Clinton on the cover of *Spy* magazine, February 1993.
Michelle Obama has likewise, come under the public spotlight; however, discussions involving these women have generally been focused on their clothing and appearance. Where Hillary Clinton always appeared in public in a “masculine” styled pantsuit, Obama and Palin have taken a much more feminine approach to their political wardrobes. However, while Palin has been criticized for spending too much on her wardrobe and beauty regimen, Obama has been praised for her refined, yet fashion forward approach, combining high-end luxury pieces with more accessible labels such as J. Crew. Gracing the March 2009 cover of Vogue, Obama is touted as “the first lady the world’s been waiting for.” Criticized for topping her red Narcisco Rodriguez sheath with a black cardigan on Election Night, Obama responded, “Some will think that a sweater was horrible, [but] I...
was cold; I needed that sweater!”

Thus, her approach to First Lady fashion, while on the expensive side, is also practical, much unlike Marie Antoinette’s fashions, which were often over-the-top, incredibly expensive and unfeasible for the everyday woman. Unlike her contemporary, Clinton, Obama has appeared in public as a more traditionally feminine woman, choosing simple sheaths as opposed to the masculine pantsuits of Clinton. Her appearance, therefore, seems to suggest that she adopts a more traditional role as “submissive wife” rather than dominating, “non-woman.”

Unlike these American politicians, Kate Middleton, a future monarch shows a much closer parallel Marie Antoinette. Throughout her relationship with the heir to the English’s throne, Middleton has been praised for her gracious demeanor and impeccable fashion sense, and having come from a non-noble family, has become a favorite within the royal family nonetheless. Unlike Marie Antoinette, this future monarch has maintained a scandal free reputation while remaining a fashion icon, so much so, that the blue wrap dress she wore for the official

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announcement of her engagement sold out from British retailer Harvey Nichols within hours. Thus, Middleton provides an interesting contrast to Marie Antoinette. Though both are considered major fashion icons of their times, Marie Antoinette’s fashion choices damaged her reputation whereas Middleton’s wardrobe has garnered her the support of the monarchy as well as the public, as she has taken a much more subtle approach to glamor than Marie Antoinette. What is common about all of these women, however, is the important role that gender plays in the public’s perception of them. Fashion becomes symbolic of their roles, either positive or negative, as women, as wives, and as public figures.

To return to Marie Antoinette, what can be learned through these many

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representations, both past and present? It is impossible to say which representation shows her in the most accurate light. Clearly no single representation is entirely correct as they each offer such contrasting views. Was she a kind and thoughtful mother and wife, as depicted by Madame Campan? Or was she truly the immoral harlot as her trial and clandestine literature would suggest? The answer to these questions will never be certain. However, what can be concluded from an analysis of all these sources is that Marie Antoinette, regardless of who she truly was as a person, was used by each of these authors as a political and cultural tool to further their own agendas. Pornographic literature depicted Marie Antoinette as a whore, to depict the Old Regime as sexually corrupt and ultimately, politically corrupt. Thus, Marie Antoinette became symbolic of the Old Regime as a whole. Similarly, the trial of Marie Antoinette which took place under the direction of Robespierre, was used as a tool to help consolidate his own power and to further implement The Terror’s Cult of Domesticity, Marie Antoinette being depicted as the ultimate bad woman and punished accordingly. Finally, Campan depicted Marie Antoinette in the best of lights, hoping to regain favor under the Bourbon Restoration. Her gendered body—as too feminine, not feminine enough, masculine, over-sexed, not sexed enough, maternal or not—have formed the center of
discussions in the past and in the present. Thus, I conclude my thesis with the idea that the true identity of Marie Antoinette can never be known based on sources at our disposal today; each is simply too biased depending on the opinion and position of its author. However, it is this bias that makes these sources important as each shows how Marie Antoinette became a device or symbol for others to use in championing their own causes. And they shed light on the various historical contexts in which they were written.

Works Cited


