To my parents: Ronald and Cecilia Strasik
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This thesis seeks to explore notions of queenly agency through the examination of the visual self-fashioning of Marie-Antoinette (1755-1793) as a private, Rousseauian woman. Portraits of Marie-Antoinette from the 1780s demonstrate a shift toward the queen’s conception of herself as a private individual that departed from conventional ideologies of queenship and representations of the “public” queen as defined by Salic Law. When portraits of the queen with her children were presented at Salon exhibitions, Marie-Antoinette’s public persona as Queen of France and her identity as nurturing, domesticated mother appeared scandalously at odds with one another because they suggested a queen acting independently from the traditional constraints of her rank.

The social realities of prerevolutionary France increasingly complicated the identity of the queen. Enlightenment critics attacked women’s prominent participation in court culture and politics; Jean-Jacques Rousseau advocated for bourgeois and aristocratic women alike to embrace nature and confine themselves to the private sphere of the home in order to contribute to political reform. Versailles, a traditionally masculine realm of absolute power, became increasingly privatized and associated with “effeminacy” in the eyes of Enlightenment critics.
The emergence of an active public sphere distinct from the court, the rise of public opinion, and the redefinition of selfhood and exploration of individuality challenged the divine authority of the king. With the gendered separation of proper spheres of influence for men and women, what did this new ideology mean for representations of the queen—an inherently public figure, who unlike other women, was paradoxically not permitted to keep to the private sphere?

Private representations of Marie-Antoinette with (and without) her children at the secluded Petit Trianon arguably indicate the queen’s awareness of, even an enthusiasm for, Rousseauian ideology that advocated attentive relationships with one’s children, informal dress, and an interest in a personal experience of the unaltered simplicity of nature. Critical reception of the “private” representations of Marie-Antoinette shown at the Salon suggest the irreconcilable tensions between the traditional model of queenship and contemporary discourse that advocated private motherhood and domesticity. Moreover, rumors of the queen’s alleged disloyalty to France and her secret schemes to usurp power point to the larger problem of how to understand the role of the queen once she departed from convention and embraced an identity that did not directly reference the king. As her private portraits tended to favor Rousseauian notions of femininity and selfhood, Marie-Antoinette scandalously deviated from the public’s expectations of queenly behavior and appearance, thus suggesting that absolutist notions of queenship and a privately constructed sense of self could not co-exist in the figure of the queen of France.
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

“All eyes will be fixed upon you; you must therefore not cause a scandal.”

-Maria Theresa to Marie-Antoinette, 21 April 1770

On the day of Marie-Antoinette’s permanent departure from Vienna to Versailles as the future queen of France, her mother, Empress Maria Theresa, provided her adolescent daughter with a private letter of instructions on how to “successfully” execute her role at the glamorous French court. Packed with themes of religious piety and unwavering compliancy to the customs of her new home, Maria Theresa advised her daughter, as the foreign (future) queen, to avoid court intrigue, dissipation, and familiarities that distracted her from the duties of her august rank. As wife of the future king of France, Marie-Antoinette was told to always act submissively to her husband since “[the wife] must have no other business than to please [her husband] and obey him . . . all depends on the wife, on her being willing, sweet, and amusing.”

Throughout her letters of correspondence to her daughter, Maria Theresa makes clear that as first subject of the (future) king, Marie-Antoinette must unquestioningly conform to the deeply rooted traditions of French queenship, which, by nature, transformed the fourteen-year-old dauphine’s life at Versailles into a public spectacle with no space for, or even conception of, a private sense of self. French absolutism and Salic Law firmly established the queen of France as a figure whose presence at court honored la gloire of the monarch. Her body was adorned to celebrate and honor the king’s majesty, and her primary obligation to La France and the Bourbon dynasty included the birth of a male heir.


During Marie-Antoinette’s initial years at Versailles and especially after she became queen in 1774, Maria Theresa’s early requests for portraits of her daughter without pendants of the king paradoxically suggest that the Empress conceived of her daughter as a private individual. Marie-Antoinette would cultivate an increasingly private identity in her portraits until her execution in 1793. The portraits that Marie-Antoinette commissioned from the late 1770s and early 1780s without state intervention point to the queen’s unprecedented involvement with the construction of her own image. In so doing, her self-images clashed with conventional notions of queenship that almost always represented the queen as a direct object of the king’s authority. Marie-Antoinette’s portraits with and without her children indicate the queen’s awareness of, and possibly enthusiasm for, the contemporary ideals of bourgeois femininity that privileged affective bonds of motherhood and familial intimacy in order to provide middle-class women with a more dignified and empowered social role, albeit from the home. And yet, the queen of France was an inherently public figure not permitted to keep to the private sphere, and her familial bonds were traditionally dynastic and quite emotionally disengaged, not affectionate. It is my argument that portraits of Marie-Antoinette from the 1780s demonstrate a shift toward the queen’s greater recognition of a private identity more in accordance with Rousseauian notions of bourgeois maternal domesticity. By subscribing to Rousseauian thought, the queen was able to claim a degree of selfhood while in an otherwise ambiguous position in terms of her individual relation to the state as well as within her own family at Versailles. The representation of Marie-Antoinette’s own subjecthood in portraiture departed from Old Régime models of queenship and consequently erupted in public scandal. Negative commentary from the period has shown that the public’s expectations of queenship and Marie-Antoinette’s own fashioning of herself as a private woman-mother were fundamentally at odds when portraits of the queen were shown at
the Salon exhibitions of 1783, 1785, and possibly 1787. The unprecedented critical reception of
the queen’s portraits attests to the emergence of an opinionated public that objected to the newly
ambiguous identity of Marie-Antoinette and questioned whether or not queenship and a growing
sense of private womanhood could harmoniously co-exist in the figure of the queen.

My argument largely builds upon notions of queenly agency and the fashioning of a
private queen as first established by art historian Mary D. Sheriff in her compelling discussion of
Elisabeth Vigée Lebrun’s *Portrait of Marie-Antoinette en chemise* from the Salon of 1783.\(^3\)
Sheriff has demonstrated the profound tensions between conventional representations of
queenship produced for public consumption and the private portrayal that figured Marie-
Antoinette that departed from traditional queenly iconography of official state portraiture.
According to Sheriff, Marie-Antoinette’s 1783 portrait caused a sensation because it depicted the
queen as a fashionable lady that did not suit the proper image of a king’s wife. Commissioned
by Marie-Antoinette herself for a friend, the private portrait was made public at the Salon and
represented the queen as a woman with the power to reconfigure associations at Versailles, to
ignore the rules of court life and etiquette, and to reconsecrate part of the king’s domain as her
own through the occupation of her own realm at the Petit Trianon.\(^4\) To a public accustomed to
viewing state-commissioned, almost mechanical representations of a passive queen that included
a set iconography of royalty, the portrayal of a fashionable queen that distinguished herself from
the demands of her rank was unsettling.

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\(^3\) Mary D. Sheriff, *The Exceptional Woman: Elisabeth Vigée-Lebrun and the Cultural Politics of Art* (Chicago:
University of Chicago Press, 1996), chapter 5; reprinted as Sheriff, “The Portrait of the Queen,” in Dena Goodman,
ed., *Marie-Antoinette: Writings on the Body of a Queen* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 45-72. For another
perspective on this portrait in terms of Marie-Antoinette’s self-fashioning as a patroness to assert an authoritative
image of power, see Todd Lawrence Larkin, “‘Je ne suis plus la Reine, je suis moi:’ Marie-Antoinette at the Salon

\(^4\) Sheriff, *The Exceptional Woman*, 143-147.
Also, the queen’s relationship to the state effectively heightened her foreignness since she acquired her title through marriage, not birth. While the queen ostensibly adopted French customs and formal royal costumes to appear integrated into the official public sphere of the French court, she always remained separate from the kingdom. Ironically, the queen’s marriage did not allow her to fully retreat to the private sphere. Her body was integral to the dynastic continuity that enabled the transmission of power from king to heir in the birth of a son. After the queen provided her husband and France with a dauphin, her presence at court became superfluous. In other words, the Marie-Antoinette’s role at court was paradoxically visible and invisible at once; she had no right to rule nor did she, as a royal figure, have any right to embrace a private life.

While Sheriff’s chapter focused upon the challenges the 1783 Portrait en chemise posed to conventional representations of queenship, her aims did include an account of the evolving ideals of feminine identity and notions of selfhood in terms of contemporary Enlightenment discourse. The social realities of prerevolutionary France, as articulated by Carol Duncan in her article “Happy Mothers and Other New Ideas in Eighteenth-Century French Art,” increasingly complicated the identity of women actively involved in the public sphere. In her analysis of family genre scenes and portraits of mothers depicted with their children, Duncan demonstrated the reconception of marriage and the changing attitudes towards child-rearing over the course of the eighteenth century. The writings of Enlightenment philosophers, particularly Jean-Jacques Rousseau in the 1760s, privileged emotional relationships between family members as a means to personal happiness rather than to merely perpetuate of the life and identity of the family group.

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and its financial holdings.\textsuperscript{6} To promote their ideas, Rousseau and his peers argued for the
gendered redistribution of social and political space in which women were “naturally” better
suited for the private domain of the home as a supportive wives and attentively engaged mothers.

Moreover, the ascendency of women at Versailles and the consequent feminization of
court life were thought to have infectiously corrupted and weakened society at large as women
had undue influence over men and, in the immoral pursuit of their own personal pleasures,
violated the laws of nature through the abandonment of their families.\textsuperscript{7} To restore the once-virile
French state, Rousseau encouraged women to dutifully remain in their homes to raise children
according to Enlightenment ideals that privileged individual merit instead of rights according to
birth. Duncan makes clear that Rousseau’s social prescriptions applied to bourgeois, but then
were also embraced by, aristocratic women.\textsuperscript{8} But because Versailles served as a public
monument to visualize the power of the king, no concept of the private, domestic sphere existed,
even though the queen was also a wife and mother. The arranged marriage between Louis XVI
and Marie-Antoinette suggested orderly succession, dynastic prosperity, and above all, the
physical manifestation of the Franco-Austrian alliance. The queen’s children were not even hers
to raise—they belonged to France.

Sheriff revisited representations of queenship and royal identity in her article, “The Cradle
is Empty: Elisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, Marie-Antoinette, and the Problem of Intention ” and
considered the portrayal of the queen as mother in the 1787 state-commissioned Salon portrait of

\textsuperscript{6} Duncan, 204.

\textsuperscript{7} For a discussion of women’s activity in the public sphere during the Old Régime and their detractors, see Dena
Goodman, “Women and the Enlightenment,” in Renate Bridenthal, Susan Mosher Stuard, and Merry E. Wiesner,

\textsuperscript{8} Margaret H. Darrow, “ French Noblewomen and the New Domesticity, 1750-1850,” \textit{Feminist Studies} 5, no. 1
(Spring 1979): 41-65.
Marie-Antoinette and her three children.\textsuperscript{9} Escalating rumors of the queen’s alleged sexual promiscuity and her secret schemes to usurp power point to the larger problem of how to understand the role of the queen once she departed from convention and embraced an identity that did not directly reference the king. Here, Sheriff challenged scholars’ earlier conclusions that the state issued the portrait as a “deliberate” attempt to launder the queen’s sullied reputation through a disconnected combination of the bourgeois ideal of maternal bliss and the image of absolutist monarchy.\textsuperscript{10} Instead, as Sheriff has argued, in spite of the intentions of the artist and state, the painting was unavoidably equivocal because of inherent uncertainties, both visual and political, in the contemporary discourse about motherhood and queenship and their relationship. Because the portrait’s imagery points to the intrinsic contradictions found in the queen’s maternity, the painting was interpreted as a success or a failure, depending upon who was looking and when. Moreover, no queens’ portraits had ever needed to function as a “corrective” to revive an unfavorable reputation. Portraits of Marie-Antoinette’s predecessors, whose behaviors at court did not transgress the traditional ideals of queenship, consistently functioned as uniform, explicit representations of royalty without cause for scandal.

Sheriff has raised important questions in terms of the inherent ambiguity in defining Marie-Antoinette’s sense of self as a mother and queen in portraits for public consumption. By the beginning of the French Revolution in 1789, the proliferation of pamphlet literature and imagery represented Marie-Antoinette as a “bad mother.” In this turbulent political context, Marie-Antoinette’s private commission of a miniature portrait of herself with her children from 1789-90 by François Dumont allowed for the queen to freely assert her own identity as the


\textsuperscript{10} Sheriff, “The Cradle is Empty,” 166.
affectionate, natural, and rightfully “good” queen-mother of her own children in addition to the French people. Ironically, unlike her earlier portraits that were private commissions made public, Marie-Antoinette’s final image with her children possessed a profoundly public message that was kept private. As her private portraits tended to favor Rousseauian notions of femininity and selfhood, Marie-Antoinette scandalously deviated from the public’s expectations of royal behavior and appearance, thus suggesting that notions of queenship and a privately constructed sense of self cannot co-exist in the figure of the queen of France.

This thesis seeks to establish that while portraits of Marie-Antoinette scandalously deviated from the public’s expectations of royal behavior and appearance to suggest that notions of queenship and a privately constructed identity are implicitly at odds within the figure of the queen, portraits of Marie-Antoinette commissioned by the queen herself tended to favor Rousseauian notions of femininity in order to claim her own sense of self. Beginning with an analysis of the aesthetics of queenship in Chapter 2, I will first describe the visual conventions of portraits of French queens that denied the queen any agency in the formulation of her image or any acknowledgement of her as an individual. I will also discuss the typical functions of these types of formal representations as compared to state portraits of the king, and how and for whom portraits of the queen were produced. Considering the politics of queenship in absolutist France, the Château de Versailles enforced strict codes of etiquette to enhance the public spectacle of the monarchy. Yet, starting with Louis XV, a growing sense of ambiguity in the distinction between public and private moments for the royal family became increasingly problematic and soon manifested itself in portraiture. For instance, the 1747 Jean-Marc Nattier portrait of Marie Leszczinska, wife of Louis XV, hints at the queen’s determination to represent more private aspects of her public identity after she satisfied her duties to her husband and his kingdom with
the birth of a dauphin. A privately commissioned portrait of Marie-Joséphe and the Dauphin from 1761 by Maurice-Quentin de La Tour hints at the possibility of a more intimately depicted representation of the royal family, but the portrait strictly adheres to precedents of regality and hierarchical arrangement in publicly representing the (future) queen with heir. Chapter 2 ends with a discussion of early portrayals of Marie-Antoinette that had begun to shift away from the usual representations of queenship because of the queen’s involvement in the construction of her image. In her 1778 formal portrait by Vigée Lebrun, Marie-Antoinette incorporated typical royal accoutrements to appropriately visualize her rank, but the unaccompanied, pendant-less portrait already suggests the queen’s desire to construct a queenship distinct from that which she inherited from her predecessors; to transform her identity as an objectified queen-vessel defined according to the authority of her husband, the king, into something more independent and personal.

Chapter 3 expands upon the problem of publically presenting a more private queen that defied tradition. Enlightenment critics attacked women’s prominent participation in court culture and politics; Jean-Jacques Rousseau advocated for bourgeois and aristocratic women alike to embrace nature and return to the private sphere of the home in order to contribute to political reform. Versailles, a traditionally masculine realm of absolute power, became increasingly privatized and associated with “effeminacy.” The emergence of an active public sphere distinct from the court, the rise of public opinion, and the Enlightenment’s redefinition of selfhood and exploration of individuality challenged the divine authority of the king. With the gendered separation of proper spheres of influence for men and women, what did this new ideology mean for representations of the queen—a public figure with no access to a private sphere of her own? Portraits of Marie-Antoinette from the 1780s indicate the queen’s insistence on her own identity.
separate from the typical constraints of queenship. What is more, critics viewed her private
domain of the Petit Trianon as a marginalized space associated with unrestrained feminine power
and indulgence enabled by the king. When the Bâtiments du Roi looked to reverse the degraded
image of the monarchy through reforms of art and the replantation of the gardens of Versailles
after 1774, the Petit Trianon complicated this undertaking because it fell under the direct
supervision of the queen. Portraits of Marie-Antoinette from this era represent the queen at the
Petit Trianon in clothing not associated with formal court costume, but rather more fashionable
gowns that served as the queen’s country “uniform” at Trianon. When depicted with her
children at the Petit Trianon in the 1785 portrait by Adolf Ulrik Wertmüller, Marie-Antoinette is
represented more as an affective, Rousseauian-type mother rather than the embodiment of
dynastic continuity. She appears that way because of her informal clothing and more intimate
interactions between the figures.

In Chapter 4, I analyze the critical reception of portraits of Marie-Antoinette from the 1783
and 1785 Salon exhibitions. Emerging Enlightenment discourse on social role of women
inevitably affected how people saw the queen as well as how Marie-Antoinette saw herself as
queen, wife, and mother. Critics attacked the 1783 and 1785 portraits because of the inherently
contradictory aspects of idealized expectations of submissive but majestic queenship and the
identity of Marie-Antoinette constructed by exaggerated public rumor that emphasized her
foreignness, allegedly unnatural sexuality, and her desire to express her own sense of self.
Because the French court already possessed reputation for ambitious women and weak kings
manipulated by personal favor, the public perceived Marie-Antoinette as wielding power over
her husband when she spent time apart from Louis XVI at her Petit Trianon.
In the context of prerevolutionary France and the rumored depravity of “masculine” women engaged in the public sphere, this unprecedented reversal of power subjected the queen to much criticism and contributed to the ruin of her public reputation. Chapter 5 again takes up the question of queenly agency and the implications of Marie-Antoinette’s self-fashioning as queen and private mother both in the public and private spheres. A formal analysis of the queen’s 1787 Salon portrait and Dumont’s miniature from 1789-1790 each depict Marie-Antoinette with her children, and when juxtaposed, the public and private identities of the queen appear to be emphatically at odds and largely incompatible. As a self-representation of a figure that showed to exist somewhere between the public and private spheres of influence, the self-commissioned Dumont miniature of the queen and her children allows for greater flexibility of self-representation once the queen removed her image from the public gaze. The miniature plays with the multiple dimensions inevitably tied to Marie-Antoinette’s inseparable identities as mother, woman, and queen to assert her own perception of selfhood.
CHAPTER 2
AESTHETICS AND POLITICS OF QUEENSHIP

Public Functions of Royal Portraiture

Traditionally in France, portraits of the king, his queen, and other members of the royal household were produced and copied in great quantities and in various forms to satisfy the constant demand for images of the royal family. State-commissioned, monumental paintings were based on life studies of the face that served as the prototype for subsequent reproductions of the royal sitter. The state portrait combined a likeness of the sitter with “an assertion of authority and an indication of dynastic continuity” clearly expressed in a visual language accessible to all levels of viewership. The state portrait was meant for public display, and portraits were frequently copied and exhibited throughout France and other realms to remind the French and her allies of the omnipotent authority of the absolute monarch. French absolutism was articulated through the belief in the duality of the king’s person: the king’s corporeal body, subject to the ravages of time, was fused to an imaginary “juridico-political” body that possessed the immortal spirit of the French nation. While the king’s material body eventually succumbed to death, the divine body of the monarchy lived forever through the transmission of royal blood from father to first-born son. The formal state portrait of the king played a significant role in its promotion of the absolute authority of the king’s “two bodies.”

“L’état, c’est moi:” Representing the King’s Majesty

To visualize this sacred body of divine power, the function of a state portrait of the king of France served as a physical manifestation of the material and mystical bodies of the Crown.

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12 On the theory of the king’s two bodies, see Louis Marin, Portrait of the King (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988); and Peter Burke, The Fabrication of Louis XIV (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992).
David Beaurain has described the king’s portrait as a propagandistic image that portrayed the political ideologies of absolutism; each element of the composition commented upon the power and virtue of the monarch himself.\textsuperscript{13} The King’s Household commissioned the artist to create an image that recalled the physicality of the historical man-king through the features of his face but also defined the absolute monarch through the evocation of his majestic qualities and his duties to the nation. Expanding upon the depiction of the king’s two bodies in a single painted figure, Beaurain writes “the beauty of [the king’s] body was evident through the goodness of his soul and designated through the sacredness of his character.”\textsuperscript{14} In his discussion of classical absolutism and the unification of the king’s two bodies, Louis Marin suggests that the king’s portrait became a sacramental site that “married” the physical body of the man-king with the theoretical body of the king-nation. The painted body of the king exemplified Louis XIV’s famous motto “L’état, c’est moi,” and his representation was both human and \textsc{La France} at once.\textsuperscript{15} Viewers reflected upon and paid homage to the portrait as if it were the king himself; the official portrait of the king legitimized his absolute power through his symbolic presence on the canvas.

Hyacinthe Rigaud’s famous state portrait of Louis XIV subjects the viewer to the public spectacle of absolutism and \textit{la gloire} of France (1701 Figure 1). Commissioned by an elderly Louis XIV as a gift for his grandson, the newly crowned Philip V of Spain, the portrait symbolically displays the physically imposing grandeur of the king’s presence as well as the


\textsuperscript{14} Beaurain, 242.

timelessness of the mystical body of the French king-nation. At age sixty-three, Louis XIV theatrically strikes a commanding pose in the center of the composition that belies his age or waning authority at court. The body of the king is situated on a raised platform that acts like a stage to elevate the monarch above his audience. The room is opulently decorated to express Louis XIV’s rank, and the background swag of red fabric is arranged to further the notion of theatrical presentation. Because the material body of the king appears highly idealized, Rigaud’s representation of the king reveals the powerful immortal body of the king’s majesty. Louis XIV is richly dressed in a costume d’apparat: a ceremonial or parade costume worn on occasions of court ritual. His ermine-lined, fleur-de-lis mantle, symbolic of the monarchy, is gathered at his hip to expose a pair of athletically toned legs that are more typical of an youthful ballet dancer than an aged king. Louis XIV’s sword, the Joyeuse of Charlemagne and used during the coronation ceremonies of French kings, dangles at his side while the weight of his right arm rests upon a firmly planted golden scepter. The diagonal of the scepter leads the viewer to another cluster of essential royal accoutrements: a cushion upon which rests the Bourbon Crown and the “Hand of Justice,” an instrument made for the coronation of Henri IV and uniquely associated with the Bourbon dynasty. Located in between the Bourbon Crown and the body of Louis XIV, a gilded relief of the figure of Justice accentuates the authority and righteousness personified in the royal body of the king.

Originally intended to hang in proximity to a state portrait of Philip V in his palace in Spain, the Portrait of Louis XIV never left Versailles. Ultimately, the portrait was displayed in

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17 Posner, 84-85. Posner suggests that by the time the portrait of Louis XIV was ready for shipment in 1704, Philip V had already obtained an unpopular reputation, not to mention he was residing in Italy. The celebratory mood of the French king’s majesty may have not been appropriate for the political climate of the Spanish state at the time.
Louis XIV’s public Throne Room and incorporated into a pictorial program that featured the king as the “figurative center of the natural and historical world.”

Displayed on a dais to make clear his rightful place above the spectator, the painted figure of Louis XIV “stood” beneath a canopied throne to gaze down upon his subjects and provided a constant presence of royal authority. Given the supremacy of the king as the embodiment of the nation, Donald Posner has mentioned that the figure of the king depicted in portraiture served as a surrogate for the king himself. In fact, during a two-month long celebratory exhibition in 1707 the members of the Académie Royale de Peinture et de Sculpture held at the Grand Galerie of the Louvre in honor of the birth of the duc de Bretagne, Louis XIV’s great-grandson and third in line to the throne, the king failed to personally attend the show. Instead, Louis XIV sent Rigaud’s portrait to the Louvre to officiate in his absence. Installed in an “on-site” Throne Room, the grand portrait of the monarch was placed upon a dais beneath a decorated canopy. The king welcomed each visitor before he (she) entered the exhibition gallery.

The representation of the king through portraiture possessed a significant degree of power, and it was venerated as if it was the king’s own flesh and blood. The interchangeability of the king’s painted and mortal bodies tells us that each figure was a vehicle to convey the authority of the absolute monarchy found in the king’s person alone.

Most eighteenth-century state portraits of the monarch continued Rigaud’s approach to the grand representation of royalty. Royal portraiture became an unchanging type that continuously visualized the timelessness of the king’s Majesty through a legible iconographic program of Bourbon symbols, regal poses, and opulent settings and costumes. Carle Vanloo’s *Louis XV*

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18 Posner, 82.

19 Posner, 87.
(1710-1774), *King of France and Navarre* (circa 1747, Figure 2) exemplifies the continuity of conventions in state portraits of the monarch. Commissioned by the state, this portrait was not posed from life; Vanloo modeled the head of Louis XV from Maurice-Quentin de La Tour’s half-length pastel portrait (circa 1747, Figure 3) and inserted attributes of royalty. The large-scale painting then became the official state portrait of the monarch from which later copies originated.²⁰ Vanloo’s portrait originally hung in the throne room at the Château de Versailles, opposite of Rigaud’s 1701 state portrait of Louis XIV. The portraits’ similar compositional arrangements noticeably engage with one another to convey the spirit of monarchical power that (in theory) seamlessly transitioned from king to heir upon the death of the king’s physical body.²¹

The king’s role as absolute ruler of France and fearless military leader are visually conflated in Vanloo’s iconographic program, particularly through Louis XV’s suit of armor and layers of rich, swirling fabrics typically associated with the monarchy. Louis XV also authoritatively stands before the viewer with one foot planted before the other; one hand is commandingly placed upon the hip while the other firmly grasps the helmet-crown of the king’s battle armor to suggest his competency as a warrior-king. Vanloo drapes Louis XV in all of the trappings of royal regalia as the king heroically confronts the viewer with a confident gaze. Fastened around his neck like a cape, the king’s blue, ermine-edged velvet coronation mantle cascades from his shoulders; the golden Bourbon fleur-de-lis communicates his place in the dynastic order. Here the ambiguous baroque setting of the portrait again alludes to the timelessness and theatricality


of the immortal body of the king. Like the surrogate function of his great-grandfather’s portrait, the portrait of Louis XV stood in for the king. One example of this is to be found in the requests from officials of the town of Nantes for full-length portraits of Louis XV. Speaking about the portrait of Louis XV as if it was the man himself, in 1757, the mayor of Nantes eagerly requested a copy of Vanloo’s Portrait of Louis XV from the Bâtiments du roi to display in the audience rooms in the town’s courthouse. The request required the portrait to possess emblems of the monarchy along with the image of the sovereign dressed in his fleur-de-lis mantle. Immediately recognizable as the supreme source of power in France through such a conventional representation of the monarch, the portrait would “preside” over trials to ensure justice.

The “Nature” of Salic Law and the Objectified Body of the Queen

Portraits of the queen of France were also formulaic representations of royalty, but the portrayal of the queen’s body to the public signified a different set of aims. French Salic Law, a fundamental statute derived from the supposedly natural separation of roles for men and women, subjected the body of the queen to the authority of her husband, the king. While the king embodied the sacred and immortal realm of the monarchy in addition to his own material form, the queen was strictly bound to the limitations of her corporeal body. The queen participated in court ritual as the honored first subject of the king, but her body never shared in the royal majesty and state power that resided in the king alone. Unlike the king who was born royal and French, the queen of France—most often a foreign princess—acquired her title and domicile in France through marriage; her rank was never inherited through birth. The kingdom

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22 Beaurain, 244-246.
23 Beaurain, 244-246.
24 For a further discussion of the terms of Salic Law, see the “Salic/Phallic Law” section of Chapter 5 of Sheriff, *The Exceptional Woman*, 149-158.
25 Sheriff, *The Exceptional Woman*, 150.
itself was an attribute of the king’s sovereignty and excluded the queen from the right to fully “belong” to the kingdom; she was an outsider in her own marriage. Because of this exclusive relationship between king and kingdom, *La France* was the king’s “privileged spouse” while the ostracized queen became the “alien spouse.”

Despite the adoption of French customs and outward assimilation into court culture, the queen of France would always retain a suspicious degree of foreign status.

Although Salic Law dictated that the queen and her female descendants were ineligible to inherit the throne or any monarchical properties, the queen possessed a form of power that remained crucial to the continuation of the royal dynasty. Her foreign body served as the vessel through which power was transferred from king to heir; the reproductive function of her body and her identity as mother ensured political security and familial continuity. Given her inherently public function to serve the state through a conjugal relationship with her husband, a “good” queen of France had no identity independent from that of submissive wife and consequently reinforced the traditional hierarchies associated between husband/wife and sovereign/subject that framed the basis of eighteenth-century understandings of the monarchy.

Because of the queen’s differentiated status, the functions of her state portraits never equaled those of the monarch. Her rank and place at court was meaningless when separated from the king. Given the “naturally” subordinate relationship of the queen to her husband, large-scale, publicly displayed, state portraits of queenship most often corresponded to a pendant portrait of the king and conspicuously used the passive image of the queen as a prop to bolster her husband’s authority. Commissioned by the Bâtiments du roi on behalf of Louis XV as a

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pendant to Vanloo’s Portrait of Louis XV, Vanloo’s Portrait of Marie Leszczinska (1703-1768), reine de France, en grande Robe de Cour (1747 Figure 4) is typical of the established conventions of public representations of queenship. In addition to the usual trappings of Bourbon royalty, the queen’s body became a living emblem that eulogized the authority of the king to the public.

Assuming an erect, full-length, and yet immobile pose, Marie Leszczinska is regally presented to the public in formal court dress heavily embroidered with golden thread and embellished with jewels and lace. Vanloo includes the traditional attributes of Bourbon royalty; the queen wears the ermine-lined cloak with golden fleur-de-lis, and the Crown rests atop a plush fleur-de-lis-covered cushion. The artist visually rhymes the serpentine curvature of the overtly decorative rococo table with the queen’s sumptuous gown, perhaps inadvertently implying the superfluous nature of the queen after she provided the kingdom with an heir.

A strong sense of verticality via the towering background column and linearity of the queen’s posture evokes an overall aura of stability. Marie Leszczinska occupies an opulently furnished indoor setting; a sweeping swag of fabric is pulled back to allow the viewer to glimpse the outdoor setting to which the queen turns her back; the kingdom is not her concern. Most significantly, Vanloo included a profile bust of Louis XV that possessively stares down upon his queen. As Marie Leszczinska gazes toward the viewer, her body is inwardly angled toward the

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28 Sheriff claims that the gendered nature of the queen’s “immobile” pose (when compared to the active pose of the pendant portrait of the king) is the result of the inherent passivity of her role as wife of the French king. See her own discussion of the Portrait of Marie Leszczinska, reine de France, en grande robe de cour in The Exceptional Woman, 151-154.

29 During the mid-eighteenth-century, critics attacked the alleged ornamental frivolity of the curvilinear and asymmetrical forms of the rococo in art, attacking the rococo for its “degenerating into meaningless superfluity of form.” Also, the rococo was thought to demonstrate the extravagant taste the Old Régime, a line of argument that perhaps justifies the application of rococo decoration in a royal portrait functioning to exhibit the wealth and power of the king. See Aileen Ribeiro’s discussion of eighteenth-century rococo ornamentation and women’s costume in Dress in Eighteenth-Century Europe, 1715-1789 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 136-165.
bust to show her subservience to the king’s gaze. Yet, Vanloo opened up the space in between
the bust and queen’s body to reveal the luxurious trappings of royalty, made visible through the
queen’s costume, to the viewer. The symbolic presence of Louis XV and his controlling stare
upon her figure implies the objectification of Marie Leszczinska as wife of the king. The
primary subject of the state portrait of the queen is the authority of the king, despite the portrait’s
ostensible outward representation of the queen.

**Visualizing the vessel.** In addition to the queen’s portraits that formed pendants to the
representations of the king, there are numerous examples of formal state portraits of the queen
with her oldest son—the heir to the French throne. A traditional state portrait of the queen with
the dauphin exhibited the stability and continuity of the monarchy and the queen’s fulfillment of
her marital obligations to the kingdom. Most eighteenth-century portraits of Marie-Antoinette’s
predecessors as “queen (or future queen)/mother” take on distinctly formulaic dimensions of
figuring the continuation of the monarchy through the body of the queen shown with the object
of her labor: the dauphin of France. With an emphasis upon the next body to inhabit the majesty
of the throne, queen-dauphin portraits had little, if anything, to do with figuring the sentimental
bonds between mother and son. Alexis Simon Belle’s *Marie Leszczinska and her Son* (1730
Figure 5) depicts the wife of Louis XV with their son, Louis the Dauphin of France. While
young Louis died in 1765 before he ascended to the throne, the portrait of Louis as a young child
incorporates all of the traditional accoutrements of Bourbon majesty that one would expect.
Queen Marie Leszczinska is ornately costumed, and a rich royal ermine-lined, blue and gold
fleur-de-lis mantle surrounds her body—a powerful symbol since her identity and purpose at
Versailles was contingent upon the identity and status of her husband. A golden, sculpted image
of the Bourbon crown that tops the canapé on which the figures sit evokes the omnipotent
presence of the monarch, in spite of the absence of Louis XV’s mortal body. Louis the Dauphin occupies a prominent space on the lap of his mother; her body transforms into his throne with no traces of emotional intimacy between mother and child. His regal costume, blue sash that identifies his allegiance to the Order of Saint Esprit, and his outwardly assertive gaze indicates an awareness and confident acceptance of his future responsibilities as he is presented to La France. Recalling the kingdom’s privileged role as Louis XV’s figurative spouse, heirs were traditionally known as the “children of France.” This title highlighted the special “marriage” between the king and state, and France became the dauphin’s “mother” (and future wife). Superfluous after the birth of the dauphin, the actual queen was simply the body that bore the historical body of the future king. Not expected to raise the dauphin or prepare him for his future position, the queen’s displacement after completing her role in the guarantee of dynastic continuity, reinforced her foreignness at court with no right in matters of the kingdom.

   Even though the Dauphin’s pose mimics that of his mother and the two figures clasp hands to visualize familial unity, Marie Leszczinska subtly points to redirect the viewer’s gaze to her son as not only the source of future royal authority, but as the product of her conjugal duty as wife of the king. Because of Louis the Dauphin’s birth, Marie Leszczinska finally secured her role as queen, even though she had already borne three older children—all daughters of France. The indoor setting of Belle’s portrait is vague in its actual location, but the opulence of the room is typical as it reveals the performative public spectacle of the king’s court. By placing the queen inside of the king’s palace, the portrait expresses the queen’s adherence to her role as subject to the body of the king.  

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30 Germann, 32. Sheriff also has a brief discussion of the iconographic aspects of this work as it aligns itself with earlier seventeenth- and eighteenth-century royal portrait conventions of queens with their first-born sons in “The Cradle is Empty,” 164-187.
exercise the agency of the king through the objectified image of his wife with no direct
relationship between the physical body of the queen and the juridico-political body of the state.
The queen’s body was powerful because it bore the next king, but it was also powerless because
she did not possess any legitimate agency of her own to rule or to shape an identity distinct from
her husband.

The long-established, passive conditions of queenship were soon resisted and challenged
by Marie-Antoinette, both through her conduct at court and her pictorial self-fashioning.
Another significant dimension of the queen’s existence had to do with her status as ambiguously
positioned between the public and private worlds at court. The tension between these two highly
elusive realms soon manifested itself in portraits of the queen.

**The Ambiguity of Public-Private Court Life at Versailles**

Begun in the late 1660s, Louis XIV initiated the transformation of the once-modest
hunting château at Versailles into a massively symbolic complex of absolute political power to
further manifest the king’s right to rule and to control his courtiers. Because the spirit of France
resided within the king’s person alone, he was, by definition not a private citizen as his physical
body was a living monument to the majesty of the state and demanded adoration and respect.
The absolutist court claimed its majestic status through ancient iconographic references of
power, public ceremonies, and rituals of submission and display. Strict etiquette protocols,
behaviors, mannerisms, and even dress rigidly structured the lives of the monarch, his family,
and the court. The space also functioned as the official residence of the royal family; even the
most intimate moments of daily life were ceremoniously performed to publically exhibit the
king’s majesty. Private affairs became public: occasions that ranged from the couples’ wedding
night to the birth of their children, to quotidian moments like bathing, dressing and dining
expelled any notion of private life at Versailles. A 1778 drawing by Gabriel de Saint-Aubin
depicts a version of the public birth of Madame Royale from within the queen’s bedroom (circa 1778 Figure 6). A decorative balustrade surrounds the queen’s bed and becomes a barrier to denote the “private” space reserved for the royal parents in this public spectacle. A mass of courtiers hovers before the balustrade to verify the child’s parentage. Louis XVI, gesturing enthusiastically, joins his wife in this celebratory family moment, even though the birth of a daughter was regarded as a disappointment in terms of the state’s (and Marie-Antoinette’s) future. Because the infant belongs to France, she has already been removed from Marie-Antoinette’s care and placed with a wet nurse who waits in the doorway of the chamber.  

The elaborate performance of the formal toilette at court was a kind of quasi-public display as the king and queen dressed and undressed in front of all members of the court. In his description of the formalities of court life under Louis XIV, Christopher Hibbert describes the Grand Lever dressing ceremony, a ritual symbolic not only of the participants’ noble births, but also indicative of the possibility of personal favor from the monarch. During the king’s Grand Lever, the Grand Master of the Wardrobe put on the king’s breeches, waistcoat, and his cordon bleu sash of the Order of the Saint Esprit while in the presence of “lesser courtiers” such as royal tutors, chaplains, and other distinguished and privileged equerries. During the royal undressing (Grand Coucher), an act as mundane as the holding of the sleeves of the king’s coat was a particularly coveted gesture, along with the honorable presentation of the royal nightshirt to His Majesty. The gathering of courtiers at the toilette ceremonies served as an opportune occasion to conduct business affairs. The king would converse with those present before

32 Christopher Hibbert, Versailles (New York: Newsweek, 1972), 52-57.
33 Ribeiro, 180-183.
completing the final stages of his toilette in greater privacy. The “public” toilette ritual possessed a significant degree of privacy despite its public façade: the king only granted permission to distinguished courtiers to watch and/or participate in the ceremony and subsequent, more private, conversation. In other words, private moments with the monarch formed the basis for competing courtiers to secure favor with the king and his circles to advance their own (or their family’s) social status.

An excerpt from U.S. statesman John Adams’s autobiography elaborates upon the formal etiquette of the Royal Family at supper in his autobiography. Adams describes “the magnificent spectacle of a great Queen [Marie-Antoinette] swallowing her royal supper in a single spoonful . . . performed like clockwork, not a feature of her face, nor a motion of any part of her person . . . could be criticized as out of order.”34 Adams continues to write about the large audience of courtiers, dressed in golden and bejeweled costumes to showcase their status, who maneuvered about in “seats arranged like those in a theater” to catch a glimpse of the Royal Family engaged in something as ordinary as eating soup. Although a foreign observer at court, Adams’ reaction to the “magnificent” and orderly performance of what one might expect to be a private family moment reveals the nature of public spectacle at Versailles. During this moment, the queen’s own identity is irrelevant because her mechanical movements are a reflection of royal tradition and synchronized to the match the king.

The queen also performed the strictly regimented toilette ceremony to transform her person into a site of monarchical grandeur. Caroline Weber has extensively explained the intricacies of the queen’s highly public toilette ceremony.35 Dictated by the codes of court etiquette, the queen

34 Excerpt quoted in Hibbert, 146-147.

was obliged to extend the appropriate greeting or gesture to each courtier who entered her chambers to participate in the ritual. If she did not follow protocol, the queen risked seriously offending a member of the court and thereby humiliated herself and the monarch. As courtiers of various ranks entered the chamber to join at different moments, the dressing ceremony restarted to uphold the proper hierarchical order of participation. Marie-Antoinette, in particular, was not fond of the etiquette that defined her life at court. Weber recounts that one morning in the early 1770s, latecomers to the Marie-Antoinette’s toilette caused even more disruptions to the process than usual. Exasperated by the tedium and the cold morning air, Marie-Antoinette allegedly remarked “oh this is odious, what an inconvenience” as she stood naked and impatient before her attendants.36 While the toilette ceremony signified the profound political importance that was made visible in the ceremonial dressing of the queen’s body, Marie-Antoinette, by all accounts, found the public spectacle of her private moments absurdly excessive and tiresome.

One image that demonstrates the ambiguity of public and private at court is Maurice-Quentin De La Tour’s portrait of Marie-Joséphe de Saxe, the Dauphine of France (and the mother of future Louis XVI), and the Duke of Burgundy (1761 Figure 7). Commissioned by the Dauphine rather than the state, the portrait falls in between what was typical for official and private portraits of royalty. It adheres to the tradition of formally representing dynastic continuity through the body of the (future) queen with her first-born son. Yet, La Tour’s application of a less-formal pastel medium to a large-scale canvas goes against the more “finished” surface qualities typically associated with a traditional state portrait. Mostly identified with small-scale, informal portraits and life studies, La Tour’s use of pastels suggests a greater sense of intimacy through the soft tactility of the surface and is reiterated by the small

scale of the work itself. Rena Hoisington has pointed out that because of the pigments’ velvety textures, pastels enhanced the feeling of naturalism through illusionistically rendered flesh and sumptuous fabrics. However, this portrait does not engage with notions of familial intimacy or affective bonds. The royal figures retain their public identities through recognizable poses, a dignified setting, and lavish dress with iconic Bourbon attributes. I want to suggest that the implication of a private, more intimate, royal identity here is at odds with the inherently public existence of the dauphine (future queen) at Versailles; the “private” formal elements of the portrait merge with official subject matter to create a hybrid-type portrait that hints at future ambiguities of the boundaries of public-private representations of queenship that will become more pronounced in portraits of Marie-Antoinette.

La Tour presents the viewer with strategically placed portraits and sculpted busts of male progenitors from the Bourbon line within the image of Marie-Joséphe with the young duke and heir to reinforce the succession of the monarchy. Following earlier conventions of the queen and her oldest son, the Dauphine wears a deadpan expression while she formally sits in an opulent interior space within the Château, presumably her own apartments. Marie-Joséphe’s red velvet dress is sumptuously trimmed in fur to highlight the regality of her rank, and her hair is simply decorated and demurely pinned to the top of her head to show off the delicate pearl choker around her neck. The Dauphine’s clothing, hairstyle, and jewelry are not entirely suggestive of her personal style. Rather, Marie-Joséphe self-consciously fashioned her appearance to draw attention to the timeless character of the queenship, just as her mother-in-law, Marie Leszczinska, had done twenty years earlier. Painted as a full-length standing figure in a ceremonial court costume at his mother’s side, the gently smiling heir firmly plants one foot

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forward like a miniature Louis XIV and confidently claims his place among his ancestors as the successor to the throne. Recalling the formal gesture of Marie Leszczinska and her son from Belle’s 1730 portrait, the gazes of both mother and son solicit respectful attention from the viewer, and they simply touch hands to show ancestral lineage, not affection.

Following the customs associated with Salic Law and the ideology of the queen’s function as mother-vessel, the portrait places an emphasis on the first-born son and heir because the duke is the only identifiable child in the portrait. While the younger children of Marie-Joséphe and her husband, the Dauphin Louis Ferdinand, are present, they are barely visible. Because marriage was considered legal contract that produced children to perpetuate the family line and secure economic and social status, royal and bourgeois parents alike tended to center their interests on the sole heir.  

Although the arrival of the heir bestowed honor and security upon the queen, the task of caring for and raising a child was considered “debilitating, obnoxious, and coarsening.” Infants were immediately handed over to a court servant, and they could grow up barely knowing their royal parents. La Tour reduced the young Louis Auguste (future Louis XVI) and the infant Marie-Clothilde to miniature representations in the background, and they are situated in the arms of a wet nurse on the terrace of the palace. The chamber of Bourbon succession is distanced from their rank, and the younger children are literally removed from the space. To protect the virtue of the group of women and children wandering outside of the patriarchal realm of the palace, as well as the sanctity of the interior space, a Swiss Guard stands discreetly in the shadowy doorway to supervise.

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38 Duncan, 201-220; see also 204.

39 Duncan, 207. Also, since breast milk was thought to prevent pregnancy, queens did not breastfeed their children in order to maintain a healthy conjugal relationship with the king to produce more children.
The figures’ organization within the composition corresponds to the social hierarchy at court. What is more, the representations of figures within the portrait itself correspond to the gendered hierarchy of artistic media that privileged painting and sculpture as “masculine” materials. On the wall behind the Dauphine, placed at the apex of the geometrically arranged grouping of figures, is a half-length painted portrait bust of Dauphin Louis-Ferdinand wearing the cordon bleu sash of the Order of the Holy Spirit assertively looks toward the viewer. To articulate his supremacy as heir to the throne, the Dauphin is literally elevated above the passively represented body of his wife. To the left of the composition, the robustly sculpted portrait bust of Louis XV, similar to that from Vanloo’s 1747 portrait of Marie Leszczinska, actively engages with the central grouping of figures even though it is an inanimate object. The king’s gaze is cast over the image of Marie-Joséphe to reiterate the body of the Dauphine, like her mother-in-law Marie Leszczinska, is subject to the control of the (future) king. The clasped hands of the Dauphine and her eldest son partially obstruct an open book near the center of the composition that displays a private image of Marie Leszczinska. The queen is represented modestly and without obvious royal insignia. Instead, she wears a laced kerchief that had become a legible symbol of her chastity through its repetition in numerous private portraits from the 1740s. Here the queen’s depiction is relegated to a book engraving that is discreet, small-scale, and noticeably passive, especially when compared to the skillfully rendered grandiose representations of Bourbon kings in oil and marble. Considering the hierarchy of artistic media as a metaphor for the hierarchy of importance as enforced at court, the subordinate rank of a book engraving compared to the high art of painting and sculpture explains Marie Leszczinska’s place beneath that of her husband and eldest son. While reduced in size and literally beneath the images of Louis XV and the Dauphin, the queen’s image is located near the privileged center of
the canvas to show that while subordinated to the gaze of her husband and rendered superfluous
after the birth of her son, Marie Leszczinska’s presence still mattered at court. It was through
her body that power transitioned from king to heir and guaranteed the depicted Bourbon
succession.

Although the Dauphine commissioned the portrait, her intervention in the construction of
her own sense of self was largely absent. While La Tour’s pastels superficially hint at the
possibility of a more intimately depicted representation of the royal family, the portrait strictly
adheres to precedents of regality and hierarchical arrangement in publicly representing the
(future) queen with heir. Objectified by the sculpted and painted Bourbon male progenitors,
Marie-Josèphe’s presence functioned as an emblem of dynastic continuity with no indication of
queenly agency.

“Private” Royal Portraiture

More private portrayals of the queen existed, but the imagery remained highly standardized
and retained the necessary formalities that expressed the queen’s titled identity in terms of the
king. For example, La Tour’s half-length pastel portrait of Marie-Josèphe de Saxe (1761 Figure
8) from the Salon of 1761 addresses the identity of (future) queen somewhat less formally than
the full-length group portrait just discussed. The Dauphine’s lips gently curve upward and her
expressive eyes hint at a personality that is not evident in La Tour’s 1761 group portrait. Here
again, the medium is significant; La Tour’s pastels suggest a private study of the face, often
painted from life, and then used as a model for more formalized state portraiture. The pastel
softens the features of the figure and causes the Dauphine to appear more docile and
approachable, especially compared to the representations of the queen that brimmed with
references to the monarch’s authority. Because La Tour placed the figure of Marie-Josèphe at
the front of the picture plane, the viewer can imagine himself (herself) within the same privileged
space as the dauphine. The ambiguous setting of the portrait contributes to this feeling of private accessibility; Marie-Josèphe is likely at Versailles, but her location is not made explicitly clear because of the vague background.

Despite these informalities that drifted away from the usual state portraits, La Tour’s pastel remains safely within the limits of traditional representations of queenship. This image was displayed as a pendant to a pastel portrait of Louis the Dauphin (1761 Figure 9) and consequently identified Marie-Josèphe as royalty. Not only is the Dauphine dressed in a luxurious costume with a fan and her pearl choker to amplify her virtuous femininity, but her pose and overall august poise is nearly identical to a pastel portrait of her mother-in-law, Marie Leszczinska (1747 Figure 10), also by La Tour and exhibited as a pendant to the pastel portrait of Louis XV at the Salon of 1747.40 Represented with a modest smile and tender eyes, the queen’s character is apparent. Pushed to the front of the canvas to engage with the viewer, Marie Leszczinska wears a regal gown embellished with lace and ribbon while delicately holding a fan in her right hand, just like her daughter-in-law. Instead of pearls to signify her chaste femininity, La Tour demurely covers the queen’s head with her signature black butterfly-style kerchief that appropriately accentuates the queen’s modesty. The portraits’ emphases on customary symbols of femininity through the women’s costumes, accessories, and refined bearings merely identify Marie-Josèphe and Marie Leszczinska as properly mannered courtiers. Because the portraits of the queen and the dauphine are paired with images of their royal husbands, their private identities are subordinated to their public status in relation to the king/dauphin. Their representations are elevated from images of anonymous, yet virtuously feminine, nobles into (future) queens of France. The continuity of these more “private” representations of Marie-Josèphe and Marie

40 La Tour’s pastel half-length portrait of Marie Leszczinska served as the prototype for Vanloo’s grand-scale portrait of the queen from 1747, see Besnard and Wildenstein, cat. 154-155.
Leszczinska become public expressions of the tradition of ideal femininity inextricably linked to queenship.

Jean-Marc Nattier’s *Portrait of Marie Leszczinska* (1748 Figure 11) further complicates the formulaic approach to the timeless representation of passive queenship. The queen commissioned this portrait herself and personally sat for Nattier instead of having the artist copy her likeness from existing sources, which was the more common practice at the time. Publicly displayed at the Salon of 1748, the representation of Marie Leszczinska as a devout, matronly woman without the blatant inclusion of the king suggests that what is figured here is an image of her own self-fashioning that exemplified her own perception of self. However, the idea of a private, personal character of the queen, whose identity is only recognized through her contractual and public relationship to the king of France, is theoretically paradoxical. According to Salic Law and the politics of queenship, the identity of a French queen is non-existent without the king. As we saw, a state-commissioned portrait of the queen defines her being as the object of the king’s gaze, and through her body, the viewer is presented with the authority of the king. As Nattier’s direct patron, however, Marie Leszczinska is able to assert an unexpected degree of agency to claim herself as the definitive subject of her portrait.

Jennifer Germann has convincingly argued that in commissioning this portrait, Marie Leszczinska constructed an alternative version of herself as a private queen and offered it to the Salon public. The queen appears to the viewer as a religious and sensitive woman without the explicit visualization of her marriage to the king that enabled her role at court. When

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41 John Rogister writes that the royal family had been patrons of Nattier since 1742; the king commissioned the artist to paint portraits of his daughters for the queen’s private cabinet at Versailles. The success of the portraits led the queen to commission Nattier for her own portrait. See John Rogister, “Marie Leszczinska, Consort to Louis XV” in Clarissa Campbell Orr, ed., *Queenship in Europe, 1660-1815; The Role of the Consort* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 186-218, 209.

42 Germann, 59.
compared to Vanloo’s state portrait that distanced Marie Leszczinska from the viewer as she angled her body toward the representation of the king, Nattier allows the queen to more intimately engage with the viewer. The queen sits at the front of the picture plane, and she appears to inhabit the viewer’s space and gazes off into a distance, as if she is contemplating the Bible on which she rests her left arm. The rich baroque setting conveys the queen’s elevated social rank, but the cropped canvas fills the portrait with a sense of privacy that did not necessarily correspond to the reality of Marie Leszczinska’s life at Versailles. Marie Leszczinska’s modest black lace bonnet reappears to cover her unpowdered hair, and her unstructured, red velvet, and fur-trimmed costume recalls her Polish origins. In Vanloo’s state portrait of Marie Leszczinska, the state chose the grand habit du cour to adorn the queen, and her figure is invisible. In her ceremonial costume, the tightly-fitted bodice, the voluminous hoopskirt fitted over the wide paniers at the waist, and the layers of jeweled fabric in addition to a heavy fleur-de-lis train literally immobilize the queen. In her court costume to express the majesty of the court, she is motionless and harnessed to the active gaze of the king. When Marie Leszczinska assumes control of her own representation, her dress, while still fanciful, allows her to reclaim her own body. The folds of the gown tastefully conform to the contours of the queen’s body and reveal the modeling of the queen’s legs. As she sits upon her canapé, Marie Leszczinska fashions herself as an actual woman, not a mannequin in a court dress topped with a likeness of the queen’s head.

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43 Ribeiro and Germann suggest that the fashion for fur-trimmed clothing originated with Marie Leszczinska and Polish styles in the 1720s, but its popularity more likely emerged from the occupation of Central European troops and their preference for fur-lined uniforms from the Orient during the War of the Austrian Succession in 1740. Ribeiro, 151. Germann, 59.

However, Marie Leszczinska’s tactical approach to establish a sense of individuality, an endeavor that quite possibly teetered on the edge of scandal, remains within the bounds of appropriate representations of gender identity and queenship according to the expectations of this century’s Salon audiences. While her gown alludes to the fashions of Poland, its embellishments, with its ladder of bows on the bodice and tiered lace appliqués at the sleeves, are styled according to contemporaneous French fashions; Marie Leszczinska appears to have successfully completed the conversion from a foreigner to a French queen. The modesty of the gown, with lace piled to the top of the neck to conceal the queen’s décolletage, enhances the modest reputation of the queen.

Although the Nattier portrait does not directly proclaim the power of the king, unlike the declarative imagery of the state-commissioned portrait by Vanloo, for example, Marie Leszczinska’s quiet femininity and modesty reiterates the gendered, hierarchical arrangement that structured her life at Versailles. Because she is ultimately the wife and first subject of the king, it is true that Marie Leszczinska could not entirely separate herself from her duty: an inconspicuous golden fleur-de-lis—the symbol that binds her to Louis XV—is revealed on the back of the queen’s canapé. Partially shrouded in a wall of sumptuous fabrics, this subtle inclusion of Bourbon imagery is unlike the extravagant fleur-de-lis mantles and other royal attributes that are inserted into state-commissioned royal portraits of the queen. Despite the fashioning of a “private” image of queenship through an assertion of individuality, Nattier’s portrait of Marie Leszczinska does not reconstruct or radically challenge the passive role of the queen at court. By the 1740s when Louis XV named Madame de Pompadour as his official mistress, the conjugal relationship between Marie Leszczinska and Louis XV had long ended. When Nattier completed the portrait in 1748, Marie Leszczinska had fulfilled her obligations to
her husband and the kingdom with the birth of Louis, the Dauphin of France, in 1729 and the short-lived duc d’Anjou in 1733 in addition to the births of eight daughters between 1727-1737. For the remainder of her life at court, the queen was expected to passively exist and devote herself to religion. Embracing a quiet theme of devotional practice and modesty appropriate for a queen who met all official duties, Nattier’s portrait of Marie Leszczinska conveys the queen’s personal piety while suggesting her unwavering subservience to her husband and king.

Because the queen commissioned the portrait and not the state officials under the King’s Household, the queen’s own intervention in the representation of her identity for public display suggests greater queenly artistic agency, especially when Nattier’s portrait portrays the queen as more than a vessel for the transfer of kingly power from father to son. Even though Marie Leszczinska conflated her sense of individuality with her rank, the quiet, self-reflexive piety that emanates from the Nattier portrait represents to the public how a queen was required to behave after she satisfied her marital obligations. Although the queen continued to participate in court rituals and ceremoniously lived under gaze of the scrutinizing public eye, the court and French populace expected a “good queen” to quietly recede into the interior of the palace and to continue to obey her husband’s authority after the birth of the male heir.

**Early Representations of Marie-Antoinette**

Early portraits of Marie-Antoinette also suggest the self-fashioning of a more private queen, especially since her portraits did not correspond to a pendant of the king and were not issued by the state. After Marie-Antoinette’s marriage to Louis XVI via proxy in 1770, she permanently left Vienna for the court at Versailles to assume her new life as the new dauphine and future queen of France. In the years that followed, her mother, Empress Maria-Theresa of Austria, frequently expressed her eagerness to receive a portrait that not only represented the new queen in all of her royal accoutrements, but one that reminded the Empress of the child she
sent away to France. As Sheriff has pointed out, the Empress clearly distinguished between officially public and more intimately private functioning representations of her daughter. In private correspondence between the Empress and Marie-Antoinette from Marie-Antoinette’s arrival in France in 1770 until the Empress’s death in 1780, Maria-Theresa lamented that most official portraits of the Dauphine did not represent a convincing “likeness” of Marie-Antoinette-as-future-queen. To the Empress, portrait of Marie-Antoinette in the trappings of Bourbon royalty was a political emblem of the Franco-Austrian alliance for public display.

Over the course of their correspondence, Maria-Theresa oscillates between her roles as Empress and mother, periodically merging the two identities in order to strategically compel her daughter to take initiative at court. The tone of a private letter from 1770, for instance, establishes Maria-Theresa more fully “as Empress:” Maria-Theresa wrote to Marie-Antoinette hoping to receive a painting of the dauphine in “her finery, not in casual dress nor in a man’s outfit.”  

Although a 1771 portrait by Joseph Krantzinger of Marie-Antoinette en amazone (Figure 12) pleased the Empress because it portrayed a youthful Marie-Antoinette dressed for riding, an activity the dauphine personally enjoyed, Maria-Theresa chastised her daughter for her frequent high-speed equestrian outings. Not only did riding astride dressed in a man’s costume allegedly jeopardize the young woman’s fertility, but it also challenged norms of appropriate feminine behavior and proper attire that corresponded to her rank. To fully assimilate into court life at Versailles, the dauphine of France was obligated to observe and obey all codes of etiquette. Nevertheless, Krantzinger’s portrait was for the Empress’s private viewership; therefore, imagery such as this would have challenged public expectations of the representation

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of the dauphine if it had been shown in public. Its placement in the Empress’s most intimate spaces within her bedroom and office suggest that the imagery would only become problematic if displayed publicly.

In 1778, Elisabeth Vigée Lebrun was the first artist to successfully produce an official full-length portrait of Marie-Antoinette for Maria-Theresa. Commissioned by the dauphine and intended for Vienna, the portrait was one that seemingly aligned with traditional portrayals of queenship (Figure 13). In this portrait, Marie-Antoinette occupies the center of the composition in the French grand habit du cour with extra-wide paniers, and she stands near a table that displays the Bourbon crown that rests upon a pillow embellished with fleur-de-lis. A sculpted portrait bust of Louis XVI is raised on a pedestal and emerges from the shadows in the corner of the composition. The image of the king gazes at a scene beyond the picture plane, and his line of vision does not fall upon the body of his wife, unlike earlier painted busts of the monarch. Instead of passively gazing at the audience as her husband’s stare takes possession of her body, Marie-Antoinette adopts the same serious expression as her husband, even though her body is angled toward her husband’s representation. The crucial point here is that while she retains the superficial formalities associated with public representations of the queen of France, Marie-Antoinette is not as conspicuously objectified as her predecessors.

Moreover, unlike Vanloo’s state portrait of Marie Leszczinska that was displayed as a pendant to a portrait of Louis XV, Vigée Lebrun’s state portrait stood alone as an independent image of the queen of France and daughter of the Empress. Maria-Theresa wrote that the formal portrait of Marie-Antoinette would accompany other large-scale state portraits of her Austrian family that hung in a public room at Schönbrunn Palace in Austria.⁴⁶ To reiterate her identity as

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⁴⁶ Sheriff, The Exceptional Woman, 162-165.
an Austrian, Vigée Lebrun does not efface the dauphine’s elongated forehead or pouting lips, two distinguishing facial characteristics that specifically pointed to her Hapsburgian lineage and forever branded her a “foreigner” at the French court. Similarly to Nattier’s stylistic transformation of Marie Leszczinska’s Polish gown, Marie-Antoinette’s “foreign” appearance was reworked according to the French style. Despite her Hapsburgian features, the silhouette of the grand habit du cour unequivocally signified French majesty and the royal tradition at Versailles. Without a corresponding pendant portrait of the king to legitimize Marie-Antoinette’s presence as (future) queen, the dauphine’s portrait stood alone as a solitary representation of queenship. As the commissioner of the pendant-less painting deemed a “success” in Vienna, Marie-Antoinette continued with Marie Leszczinska’s exploration of queenly agency in the formation of an image that distinguished itself from, but not necessarily usurped or escaped, the king and state. The 1778 official portrait alludes to the mounting tensions between capturing the public queenship while asserting the private individuality of the woman and daughter of a powerful Empress. Even though the portrait incorporates Marie-Antoinette into the theatricality of the French monarchy with the sweeping swag of background drapery and allusions to Louis XVI’s authority, the unaccompanied portrait suggests Marie-Antoinette’s early desire to construct a queenship distinct from that which she inherited that would allow the queen to claim her own sense of identity. Building upon the aims of Nattier’s portrait of Marie Leszczinska that did not necessarily hide the queen’s identity as consort but also did not feature it as the only dimension of her character, Marie-Antoinette’s early portrait also suggests her early desire to transform her identity as an objectified queen-vessel defined according to the authority of her husband into something more personal, but still within the realm of royalty. In the context of prerevolutionary France and the rumored depravity of “masculine”
women ambitiously engaged in the public sphere, this unprecedented reversal of “power” would subject the queen to much public suspicion and criticism.
CHAPTER 3
MARIE-ANTOINETTE AND THE INFLUENCES OF ROUSSEAU

During the 1780s, the queen’s reputation was increasingly under attack. With the public’s perception of an immodest queen with monarchical ambitions, publically displayed portraits of Marie-Antoinette that deviated from earlier images of queenship became rather controversial. It has been argued that Salon portraits from the 1780s incorporated contemporary ideologies of femininity and motherhood as correctives to rumors about the queen’s imprudent behavior and activities in other areas of life that were deemed outside the boundaries of nature, or at least beyond public expectations of queenship. Marie-Antoinette’s portraits from the 1780s that portrayed her as fashionable woman and mother contrasted with the older iconographic models of depicting the queen with her eldest son. It is my argument that these portraits engage with new notions of Rousseauian womanhood that point to Marie-Antoinette’s gradual advancement toward a more private sense of self-representation during a politically turbulent period in prerevolutionary France. This, despite the fact that French Salic Law explicitly declared that the queen had no right to exist apart from the king who was a fundamentally public figure, Marie-Antoinette, nonetheless, sought to carve out her own space and identity.


A year after Louis XVI ascended to the throne and Marie-Antoinette became Queen of France in 1774, Marie-Antoinette was still childless and frivolously preoccupied with personal amusements. The queen surrounded herself with personal friends, regardless of rank, often without the presence of the king. She also accrued substantial debts despite her increased allowance from the state. Appearing to have abandoned serious attempts at sexual intimacy with the king in favor of a dissipative lifestyle, Marie-Antoinette spent more than twice her yearly clothing allotment on jewels and the latest Parisian fashion trends with the assistance of her “Minister of Fashion,” Rose Bertin—a woman of lower birth privileged to enjoy private audiences with the queen that scandalized higher ranking courtiers who were accustomed to the practices of strict court etiquette. Having fashioned a somewhat independent, private life through which Marie-Antoinette made herself unavailable for consistent nighttime visits to the king’s bed became problematic for her public identity. Maria-Theresa warned her daughter: “if the King no longer comes to sleep with you, you will have to give up having heirs; your friendship, your habit of always being together will also end, and I foresee only misfortunes and sorrow for you in this most brilliant position.”

Olivier Bernier writes that the French would have expected for the king to restrain his wife’s “almost hysterical need for entertainment,” but the court soon came to regard Louis XVI as too weak and dependent on his wife to curb her indulgent behavior. On 17 September 1776, for instance, the Comte de Mercy-Argenteau, the Austrian ambassador to France and the Empress’s clandestine “informant,” described the queen’s excessive gambling habits in addition to her fondness for lavish parties, theatrical performances, unescorted promenades, and redecoration. With much dismay, Mercy informed the Empress in

49 Bernier, 163. Marie-Therese prompted Marie-Antoinette to “be [Louis XVI’s] best friend in whom he can confide . . . he should find pleasures and security nowhere but in your company.” See Bernier, 163.

50 Bernier, 129-130. Bernier also suggests that Louis XVI’s leniency was the result of his guilt and embarrassment over his own sexual shortcomings; the couple did not officially consummate their marriage until 1777.
his routine report to Vienna that “it is also true that these high stakes displease the King and are concealed from him as much as possible.”

Marie-Antoinette was seemingly aware of, yet impervious to, the rumors that circulated to expose her extravagant personal conduct and its affects on her public, yet intimately private, duties as wife of the king. Six years after their unproductive wedding night and subsequent failed attempts, the royal couple had not yet consummated the marriage. Without an active, visibly fruitful, conjugal relationship with her husband, Marie-Antoinette was seen to have failed not only in her private duties as a desirably feminine wife, but also in her public responsibilities as (future) mother of France in the birth of a dauphin. As Marie-Antoinette’s public reputation began to gradually deteriorate as early as 1775, she lamented to her mother:

We are in the midst of an epidemic of satirical songs. They are being written about everyone at Court, men and women alike, and the frivolity of the French did not spare the King. The need for the operation has been the main theme against the king. As for me, I haven’t been spared; I have very liberally been gratified with both tastes, those for male and female lovers.

Because of the publicity of her rank, the French viewed the queen’s seemingly unlimited indulgences as a signal of her “power” over the king whose weak character enabled her extravagant lifestyle. The public came to perceive Marie-Antoinette’s control over the reclusive Louis XVI as dangerously transgressive; her actions were beyond the bounds of the traditions of French queenship and, more generally, nature of her gender. In the absence of an official court mistress to assume a portion of the “power” (and therefore responsibility and public blame) of feminine influence over the king, her critics and later, revolutionaries, equated Marie-Antoinette

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51 Bernier, 201-205. See letter from Mercy to Marie-Therese from 15 November 1776 in which Louis XVI merely dismissed Marie-Antoinette’s scandalized all-night gambling session during All Hallows Eve, one of the most revered religious feast days in eighteenth-century Catholic France.

52 Bernier, 180-182. Marie-Antoinette references Louis XVI’s “operation:” a corrective procedure physicians recommended for Louis XVI to consider that would cure him of his phimosis. The king suffered from a tightened foreskin that typically caused discomfort or pain during sexual intercourse.
with a conniving court favorite who brazenly used her sexuality to maintain a hold on the weak body of the king in order to accumulate power for herself, her close circle of favorites, and her Austrian family from which she, unlike her Polish predecessor Marie Leszczinska, never fully severed ties.

**The Critique of Court Culture**

Because court culture at Versailles was a mechanism to publically communicate the grandeur and legitimacy of absolutist ideologies, critics of the court feared the infectious spread of debauched femininity that seeped from Versailles into the rest of the country. The apparent inversion of gender roles as well as the jumbled social and political hierarchies of the court threatened to degrade the sacred order of the French state. 53 As early as the 1740s, Louis XV had already begun to resist the inherently public identity of the absolutist court through his development of a network of small-scale, private rooms called the Petits Cabinets at Versailles. The atmosphere of these private interior spaces was highly informal, and rules of etiquette were suspended. In the Salon de Jeu, for instance, there were no servants as the king himself made coffee for his friends while they played games. 54 Courtiers eagerly sought after special invitations to join the king in the Salle à Manger, a small chamber that Louis XV had constructed to casually entertain a few chosen guests instead of the designated staterooms reserved for public ceremonies. 55 Some favorites were admitted to these exclusive spaces according to the king’s personal choice instead of through one’s rank according to birth, and therefore instigated much court scandal, competition, malicious gossip, and jealousy. In fact, under Louis XV and his


54 Hibbert, 83-85.

55 Hibbert, 83-85.
successive associations with powerful, yet scandalously non-aristocratic, titled mistresses who entertained with the king and soon appeared to control “the reins of the kingdom” from behind the closed doors of the bedroom, pamphlets described the growing feminization, eroticization, and overall privatization of the official public sphere of the absolutist court that Louis XIV had envisioned at Versailles.

Uncontrolled femininity in the public sphere (both at court and spilling over into society at large) and women’s ability to seduce impaired the virility of men, especially the image of Louis XV as the most public (and therefore the most masculine) figure at Versailles and, perhaps even more significantly, the personification of France. Instead of exerting his power as sovereign, Louis XV “put down his armor and withdrew from his designated sphere into the private, slothful, and voluptuous life for which he had been yearning.”56 The masculinized, public space of Versailles as a representation of the absolute power of the monarchy was polluted with women masquerading as men who transformed the palace into a weakened site of unchecked femininity.

In his critique of the condition of French society, Enlightenment philosophe Jean-Jacques Rousseau attacked the notion of the apparent feminization and privatization of the monarchy and its contaminative effect on the security and morality of the state. He feared the overt privatization of the public realm that caused men to lose their physical vigor as they grew more unsuited to fulfill their political responsibilities because of their dependence on intellectually unsuitable women.57 Because of their natural aims to please women, Rousseau found that men


intellectually debased themselves to impress women and became too privatized to fulfill their duties as patriotic citizens who pursued serious thought without fear of ridicule. In his *Politics and the Arts: Letter to M. d’Alembert on the Theatre* from 1758, Rousseau warned of overly ambitious feminine rule and their ascendancy over men. He wrote:

> This weaker [female] sex, not in the position to take on our [men’s] way of life, which is too hard for it, forces us to take on its way, too soft for us; and no longer wishing to tolerate separation, unable to make themselves into men, the women make [men] into women.  

As a result, Rousseau viewed the progression of modern civilization as dangerous since effeminate men could not serve the state. Moreover, modern aristocratic women had become too public to devote adequate attention to their deserted families. The overall social order was at risk because of the rise of society women as the covert arbiters of taste.

Rousseau supported the notion, as Joel Schwartz has emphasized, that a “good society” was based on clear sexual differentiation in which the two sexes mutually depended upon one another while each performed their natural duties in their assigned sphere of influence; men and women obeyed and ruled one another at once. In *Émile* from 1762, Rousseau justified the separation, yet interdependence, of the sexes according to the laws of nature: bourgeois men were naturally “free and equal, just as it [was] the nature of middle class women to be dependent, passive, and subordinate to men.” Rousseau’s idea of female power was fundamentally passive and relegated to the domestic realm. Women discreetly presided over men to appeal to the emotional authority of personal rule. To make up for their physical weaknesses, feminine

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58 Schwartz, 61-62.

59 Schwartz, 47.

wiles or coquetry became women’s indirect talent. Rousseau advised his readers that “[women] must have the art to make [men] want to do everything which her sex cannot do by itself and which is necessary or agreeable to it.”61 Men’s natural physical strength, inclinations to protect, and the mental ability to methodically reason would improve the prosperity of nature while women’s social and economic contributions came from their procreative functions and the cultivation of a happy domestic environment.

Rousseau called for middle class women to return to their “natural,” private realm of the home to dutifully obey their husbands and raise strong sons according to Enlightenment ideals. Middle class women’s education developed talents that would allow for her to become a loving mother and chaste housewife in addition to pleasing her husband to entice him into meeting her own needs and desires. If women surrendered to Rousseau’s social prescriptions, they would have little time, energy, or desire to participate or meddle in activities outside of the home that were naturally reserved for men. Women active in the public sphere who strove to usurp the roles of men while they neglected their children futilely worked against nature and ultimately deprived themselves of natural happiness. The ideal Rousseauian woman strived to attain domestic values that included simplicity, utility, thrift, and virtue.

Before the eighteenth century’s refashioned conceptions of bourgeois feminine virtue based upon one’s identity as an affectionate mother, motherhood simply indicated a woman’s fulfillment of her marital and familial obligations to produce an heir. Prior to the Enlightenment, the groom and bride’s father negotiated the details of the bride’s marriage as if she was property traded among families for financial purposes. Arranged, loveless marriages often resulted in sexual promiscuity and depravity; Rousseau explained that “victims of their parents’ avarice or

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61 Schwartz, 87.
vanity, young women are forced into ill-matched marriages that leave them vulnerable to seduction.\textsuperscript{62} According to Rousseau’s vision of reformed bourgeois marriage, mutual selection and romantic interest promoted sufficient affection between partners. The urge to become involved in an illicit, extra-marital relationship was no longer necessary to obtain personal satisfaction.\textsuperscript{63} For a bourgeois woman, a commitment to her husband’s gaze preserved her virtue and perpetuated the wife’s devotion to the private sphere in order to please her partner.

Middle class women identified with Rousseau’s suggested moral order because it offered them a more dignified and empowered social role, albeit from the space of the domestic, private sphere as mothers and wives. Mary Seidman Trouille has explained that because of a mother’s willing participation in the rearing of her children by breastfeeding without a wet nurse and a personal commitment to her children’s education in the formative years, women played a non-threatening, yet arguably active, role in the regeneration of society envisioned by Rousseau.\textsuperscript{64} Ultimately, the decentralization of the state through “domestic reform” that increased the autonomy of the patriarch of the nuclear family and diluted the power of the king as the ultimate paterfamilias would become the antidote to morally regenerate the state.\textsuperscript{65}

\textbf{Separate Spheres at Versailles}

As Lynn Hunt has explained, the king, under absolutist ideology, was the supreme body of patriarchal authority in France. Because the king embodied France, his person alone was the body politic. All of his subjects, whether males or females, were subordinated to the position of

\textsuperscript{62} Other times, the bride and groom were omitted from the marriage negotiations altogether as the couple’s parents arranged the terms of the nuptials, as was the case for the marriage of Louis XVI and Marie-Antoinette. Seidman Trouille, 48.

\textsuperscript{63} Seidman Trouille, 21-22; Duncan, 201-220.

\textsuperscript{64} Seidman Trouille, 4. In \textit{Emile}, Rousseau wrote: “If only mothers would breastfeed their children, then public morals would reform themselves.”

\textsuperscript{65} Landes, 20-21.
his obedient children.66 The emergence of an oppositional bourgeois public sphere from the organization of private citizens equipped the population with a voice to criticize the monarchy.67 According to the perspective of the reformers, the monarchy was a problematic private sphere since its relationships and policies were “governed not by publically accessible reason but by privately contracted obedience and fidelity” to the king.68 Because of the new public sphere’s rejection of blind obedience and perceived monarchical despotism in search of reason, knowledge, and truth, those subjects involved with, or supportive of, Enlightenment ideals could arguably claim to represent the nation and therefore challenge the king’s divine claim to personify the interests of France. The public mission of the project of Enlightenment promoted an open forum from which all who possessed reason could theoretically learn and participate. French absolutism, with its one divinely appointed man as the decision-maker, lacked this sense of inclusiveness and any space for constructive political contestation and change.

If the emergence of the bourgeois public sphere revealed the possibility of political activism beyond the monarch, such changes inevitably undermined the identity of the king as the most authoritative father and deflated the majestically constructed image of absolute control. The rise of the modern state through the reorganization of the bourgeois middle class according to the gendered separation of proper spheres of influence for men and women would reduce the


king to a more modest position among equals.⁶⁹ Considering these shifting ideologies of the family, the redefinition of feminine virtue based on private Rousseauian thought, and the confinement of bourgeois and aristocratic women to the domestic realm, the position of Marie-Antoinette as a royal figure who straddled the public and private worlds became complex—especially when those two worlds overlapped at Versailles: a “home” for the royal family that was not private.

Hubert Robert’s View of the Gardens at Versailles, at the Time of the Clearing of the Trees, Winter 1774-1775, Entrance to the Tapis-Vert (1775 Figure 14) depicts a representation of the queen within the king’s absolutist public domain at Versailles. The formal gardens of Versailles, originally planted by Louis XIV, emphasized structure, the subjugation of nature to the commands of the omnipotent monarchy, and the significance of Versailles as a spectacle of the king: a place to see and be seen. Commissioned by the King’s Household as a propagandistic gesture to restore public opinion, Robert’s monumental painting represented the stripped garden awaiting replantation as a symbol of the revival of the glory of the state’s patriarchal authority as Louis XVI ascended to the throne in 1774.⁷⁰ Displayed at the Salon of 1777, Robert’s small representation of Marie-Antoinette in the foreground of the painting was the queen’s first public representation. Because this work was a state commission with a specific political agenda, the queen had no role in the fashioning of her image. The queen’s presence at the replantation site establishes her identity as a “good queen” in terms of her figure’s adherence to the conventions of submissive queenship. Marie-Antoinette’s figure is emblematic of her support to the restoration of the absolutist state under her husband’s reign. Separated from the (peasant)

⁶⁹ Landes, 21.

⁷⁰ For a discussion of this painting in terms of its representation of political reform under Louis XVI, see Paula Radisich, “The King Prunes his Garden: Hubert Robert’s Pictures of the King’s Garden in 1775,” Eighteenth-Century Studies 21 (Summer 1988): 454-471.
laborers gathered in the shadows to offset her own royal status, Marie-Antoinette appropriately demonstrates her feminine virtue as she does not stray from the watchful gaze of her husband. While Louis XVI is engaged in conversation with an aristocratically dressed male, Marie-Antoinette tends to a pair of fancifully dressed young girls who reach to embrace their queen; modestly dressed ladies-in-waiting are also present to chaperone the queen on this outing.

Despite her absence from any involvement in the commission, Robert’s representation of Marie-Antoinette indicates the queen’s evocation of her own tastes through the realm of fashion. The youthful figure of Marie-Antoinette is represented in traditional court costume to signify the queen’s presence to the viewer, but she is the only figure who wears her fashionably iconic pouf hairstyle, a trend popularized by the queen in the mid-1770s. During his visit to Versailles in 1777, the queen’s brother Joseph II criticized his sister for sporting a heavily decorated coiffure that was “too light to support a crown”71 and thus implied that frivolous contemporary trends were beneath the dignified nature of queenship. Paradoxically, Marie-Antoinette’s promotion of contemporary fashion trends was one of the early ways that the queen campaigned for increased public support, especially since she had still not fulfilled her duty through the birth of an heir at the time of the painting’s conception. Caroline Weber writes that the notion of the revival of the monarchy’s gloire manifested itself, at least in many female subjects, in the outbreak of copycat poufs throughout Paris as women looked to emulate their new trendsetting queen.72 Here the representation of the queen with her stylish wig hints at a degree of personal definition that was distinct from what was formally expected of the queen’s representation that favored timeless

71 Weber, 117-118.
72 Weber, 104-106 and 124-130. Weber writes that the queen’s engagement with fashion trends soon came under attack as gossip sheets accused the queen’s trends of havingproblematically blurred the boundaries of class. One underground pamphleteer noted that “the most elegant whore in Paris could not be more tarted up than the Queen,” Weber, 128.
luxury as a privilege only available to royalty. Instead of her costume speaking only to the traditions of the queen in relation to a display of the monarchy’s public grandeur, the contemporary modishness of the pouf is indicative of Marie-Antoinette’s own sense of style and may suggest an interest in the development of a private identity.  

While the left half of Robert’s canvas is dark with dead plants to show the decay of the kingdom before Louis XVI’s accession, the right side is bright and lively to accentuate the substantial public support and affection the royal couple enjoyed in the early part of their rulership; the only living tree in the composition flourishes with leaves and towers over the couple. Dense with foliage, the lush tree alludes to the hope of future abundance during the new couple’s reign, in terms of economic growth for the French in addition to the growth of the Bourbon family through the birth of an heir. Because of the queen’s attentiveness toward the young girls, who were typically rendered insignificant or financially burdensome at court because of Salic Law, this interaction anticipates Marie-Antoinette’s own indiscriminate engagement with all of her children, not just the dauphin. Furthermore, the representation of the queen preoccupied with a cluster of women within a space devoted to the authority of the king foreshadows the queen’s occupation of a feminized, private space at her Petit Trianon that distinguished itself from the masculine public sphere of Versailles.

Publically Presenting the Private Queen

Subsequent images of Marie-Antoinette build upon the queen’s exploration of self and her insistence upon maintaining a maternal presence in the lives of all of her children, thus reinventing the notion of the detached queen as a passive vessel to make her a more privatized, individual woman who was distinct from her predecessors. But, to what extent could Marie-

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73 Weber, 114.
Antoinette as the king’s consort, a profoundly and perpetually public figure be expected to perform a domestic role as submissive wife and bearer of children, create an image that satisfied the inherently opposed ideologies of Rousseauian womanhood and traditional representations of queenship? Portraits that portray Marie-Antoinette in the early 1780s build upon the notion of a private, more independent queen that was hinted at in Nattier’s portrait of Marie Leszczinska, but they diverge from established conventions because the queen is never, according to the customary definition, a private citizen.

In a portrait attributed to Jean-Baptiste André Gautier-Dagoty (1783? Figure 15), Marie-Antoinette is not immediately recognizable as queen of France or represented as the spendthrift fashionista her mother had once sharply criticized. Abandoning the heavy rouge, powdered hair, and jeweled gowns that made up the queen at her daily toilette ceremony, a fresh-faced Marie-Antoinette wears a fashionable redingote, a popular ensemble of the 1780s and indicative of the queen’s penchant for the equestrian activities her mother had once deemed inappropriate for her rank and gender. Adapted from masculine-tailored English frock coats and riding vests, her costume is unmistakably feminized. The soft-laced collar of the unstructured, white lévite undergown daintily frames and compliments the queen’s famed luminescent complexion. The glow of the queen’s pale complexion, once described by Vigée Lebrun as “so transparent that it bore no umber in painting,” is enhanced by her naturally flushed pink cheeks as well as Marie-Antoinette’s characteristically thick Hapsburgian lips. Her simple, fitted riding jacket, offset with stylized buttons, emphasizes the queen’s narrow waist and womanly curves.

As Weber has proposed, the loosened, oversized neckline of the lévite that peeks from the redingote replaced the physically restrictive décolletage of the court robe à la françasie and

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possibly facilitated the queen’s efforts to breast-feed her children on her own. 75 The queen is also surrounded by equestrian accoutrements that speak of her own personal preference for horseback riding “like a man,” which, as I’ve already noted, was deemed an unsuitable endeavor for queens. The wide-brimmed feathered hat, riding gloves, and catogan riding whip were indicative of the fashionable French craze that infiltrated court circles to the extent that palace conservatives, including Louis XVI, found the informal equestrian fashions “indecent to the point of naughtiness.” 76

With the Temple of Love looming in the hazy shadows to define Marie-Antoinette’s location, the queen is portrayed in her exclusive domain of the gardens of the Petit Trianon. 77 Prior to Louis XVI’s presentation of the Petit Trianon to Marie-Antoinette in 1774, Louis XV had commissioned it for his long-term mistress, Madame de Pompadour, in 1761. Because of its association with the king’s private pleasures, the space had gained an unfavorable reputation of secrecy and personal vice. Pompadour eventually died before the building was finished; Louis XV entertained his last mistress, Madame Du Barry, at the Petit Trianon in 1770, and the space eventually fell into ruin. Upon her renovation of the site, Marie-Antoinette transformed the neglected Petit Trianon into a stylish English garden with simple aesthetics that mirrored “the look of natural growth through planned disorder.” 78 In his discussion of the English picturesque garden style, Roy Strong has argued that picturesque garden landscape became a stimulant to

75 Weber, 148. By 1783, Marie-Antoinette had already borne two children: Marie-Thérèse (Madame Royale) in 1778 and Louis Joseph (Monseigneur le Dauphin) in 1781.

76 Weber, 148.

77 Hibbert explains that the Temple of Love was small temple that housed Bouchardon’s statue of Venus, goddess of love, beauty, and fertility. The Temple was built on an artificially constructed island that was overgrown with flowers, and it located in a man-made river on the grounds of the Petit Trianon. Hibbert, 110-113.

78 Sheriff, The Exceptional Woman, 172-175.
delight the imagination or to indulge the senses.⁷⁹ Winding pathways led the viewer to inspiring views that placed an emphasis upon an individual, emotional response that contributed to a more personal viewing experience. A casual promenade through the English-style, picturesque garden became a largely private experience between the individual and Nature. Even though the basis for Strong’s argument is England and not France, the gardens of the Petit Trianon were fashioned after the trendy English picturesque style with the experience of the individual, and not the state, in mind. The designs of the gardens of the Petit Trianon enabled the queen to express her individuality without the forceful restrictions of French etiquette that put the queen on display to exclusively communicate monarchical ideologies.

Whereas the grounds of Versailles was open to the public at large, Marie-Antoinette’s Petit Trianon was an exclusive space open only to guests of the queen’s own choosing. Even Louis XVI went to the Petit Trianon by invitation only, and he returned to the main Château at night. Although landscaping projects and design commissions were funded by the king, official orders at the Petit Trianon were granted “by order of the queen,” an unprecedented feminization of the standard monarchical decree.⁸⁰ Compared to the ceremonial spectacle of Versailles, the Petit Trianon and its gardens became an unaffected space that was vital to the experience of a natural self. Marie-Antoinette did not uphold court etiquette, and she told her guests to continue with conversation and to remain seated when she entered a room. Upon receiving the Princess Louise von Hesse-Darmstadt at Trianon, the queen requested for her friend to not wear formal court attire, but rather “country wear.” Encoded with a specific vision of Rousseauian nature instead of the theatrical artifice of the court, and accessible to only an exclusive group of favored friends


⁸⁰ Meredith Sunshine Martin, Dairy queens: Sexuality, space, and subjectivity in pleasure dairies from Catherine de' Medici to Marie-Antoinette (Ph.D. dissertation, Harvard University, 2006), 436.
and relatives, the Petit Trianon and its gardens inverted not only the hierarchical order of the court with the queen as the supreme decision-maker, but the space defied the traditionally submissive identity and role of the queen in relation to the king. Without attributes of queenship, Marie-Antoinette appears as a fashionable, aristocratic *citoyenne*.

In Gautier-Dagoty’s portrait, instead of planting the queen within Louis XVI’s meticulously manicured formal gardens of Versailles, the queen commands her own presence as she sits in the center of the composition; she is alone within her beloved, lushly blooming landscape. Because her gardens were landscaped to appear untouched, the queen’s preferred aesthetic hints at her awareness of Rousseau’s aesthetic ideology. For example, in Book IV of *Émile*, Rousseau endorsed a simplified, unaltered vision of Nature in order for society to develop true models of good taste. The further humans deviated from Nature in their cultivation of the land (or in works of art, personal adornment, and interior decoration), the more their relationship with Nature would degenerate. In other words, the Rousseauian conception of the garden favored the new, untamed style of landscape as the most virtuous reflection of the purity of beauty found in Nature. When humans attempted to overly manipulate or exceed the untouched beauty of Nature with lavish embellishment, such “beauty” contradicted Nature. Rousseau asserted that “luxury and bad taste are inseparable; whenever taste is expensive, it is false.”

Meredith Martin has questioned the contradictory aspects of Rousseau’s discourse on the picturesque landscape and the “naturalism” that Marie-Antoinette embraced at the Petit Trianon. While the queen and her ladies spent time with their children in the queen’s private setting, they displayed the latest fashions and surrounded themselves with expensive domestic

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81 Rousseau and Archer, 212.

82 Rousseau and Archer, 212.
accoutrements.83 This gave rise to an anxiety that the world of the Petit Trianon was not completely naturalistic, but another stylish fad in which the queen appeared contemporary and constructed without regard for either French etiquette or pure domestic femininity that entirely renounced luxury. While Marie-Antoinette did not necessarily want to abandon the luxury of her rank that was made unlimitedly available to her by her husband, the queen’s engagement with popular Rousseauian aesthetics suggests that the idea of an uncorrupted, sentimental, and individualistic enjoyment of nature, however artificially constructed, appealed to her as a legitimate means to fashion a quiet, private identity that distanced Marie-Antoinette from the relentless public display that she vocally despised at court. At the Petit Trianon, as the Marie-Antoinette reportedly told her friend, the Comtesse Jules de Polignac, she was free to be herself.84

Marie-Antoinette’s awareness of, and perhaps enthusiasm for, the Rousseauian vision of nature is also evident in Vigée Lebrun’s three-quarter-length Portrait of Marie-Antoinette en chemise, publically exhibited in 1783 (Figure 16). Although the English-style gardens were very much in fashion during this period because of their associations with new ideologies that included rusticity and the purity of the unspoiled landscape, Sheriff has also argued that the queen used the untamed character of the English garden to reflect the freedom and liberty she hoped to gain from the occupation of this space.85 The portrait references some formal elements from La Tour’s informal pastel portraits of Marie-Antoinette’s predecessors. Like Marie Leszczinska and Marie-Joséphe de Saxe, Marie-Antoinette is positioned against a blank

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83 Martin, 436-438; Weber, 133-135. Weber wrote that in one year, the queen spent over 350,000 livres on landscaping improvements in order to achieve an understated version of the picturesque.
84 Weber, 136.
85 Sheriff, The Exceptional Woman, 172.
background, and her figure is pushed to the front of the picture plane and cropped to suggest approachability. However, it is crucial to note that Vigée Lebrun’s portrait of the queen is pendant-less, and Marie-Antoinette appears less majestic and more invitingly fashionable than her predecessors had been represented. In place of the timeless silk court gown, accessories of chaste femininity, and any conventional accoutrements that signified Bourbon royal identity, the queen is shown in her informal, yet stylish and expensive, muslin chemise. Not only was the chemise the official “uniform” of Marie-Antoinette’s Petit Trianon, but its concept as a simple, Rousseauian dress was easy to replicate and virtually accessible to all women, unlike the jeweled gowns of the court exclusively available to the queen. Marie-Antoinette’s blatant informality problematically obscured her rank and sinned against the king’s majesty.

One noteworthy aspect of Gautier-Dagoty’s portrait of Marie-Antoinette and several other portraits of Marie-Antoinette from the 1780s is that the queen is shown outdoors. Even though an earlier tradition of depicting the queen outdoors exists, in those paintings the queen maintained her formal public identity through visual references to the king’s authority. Typically, the interior baroque setting of a portrait of a queen conveyed her royal status to the public in addition to the relegation of the wife to the proper interior space reserved for the female sex. For example, in Vanloo’s Marie Leszczińska, Queen of France, (1740s Figure 17), two chaperones escort Marie Leszczińska around the terrace at Versailles to protect her virtue, as a decent woman would never promenade unaccompanied. Although much less rigid and didactic than Vanloo’s 1747 state portrait, the setting of this small sketch maintains a sense of formality and French orderliness because of the classical grandeur of the outdoor architecture and overall linearity of the composition.
Through this carefully constructed setting at Versailles that exemplified the king’s authority and power, Marie Leszczinska remains within the bounds of queenly propriety despite venturing from her interior realm. What is more, the queen’s rank was made immediately recognizable through the luxury of the brocaded fabrics and expensive ornamentations that decorated her costume. Because a variation of Marie Leszczinska’s golden brocade dress repeats itself so frequently across the gamut of her portraits, it serves as an arguably discernible sartorial identification tag for royalty. The gown visualizes the royal status of the woman’s body, and Marie Leszczinska consistently appears “queenly” even if the viewer did not immediately recognize her face. Although it remains unclear as to whether or not this depiction of Marie Leszczinska was for public consumption, it is arguable that the queen still puts forth an image within the traditional boundaries of queenship to satisfy public expectations.

By contrast, the foregrounding of Rousseauian-endorsed simplicity at Marie-Antoinette’s Petit Trianon created a relaxed environment to which the queen retreated with her children, nursemaids, and selected female friends. Fashioned to communicate the queen’s own tastes that reflected her sense of self as woman and mother, it was King Gustave III of Sweden who commissioned Adolf Ulrik Wertmüller, a fellow Swede acting as First Painter en survivance, to paint a portrait of Marie-Antoinette after the king’s visit to France in 1784 (Figure 18). The queen agreed to personally sit for the portrait, and she promised to do “everything to make the painting a success.” 86 This suggests a significant degree of agency on part of the queen in the construction of her own image for display, unlike most formal portraits made for dignitaries abroad that were copied from other painted portraits. Recalling the circulation of Rousseauian

86 Melissa Lee Hyde, “Notes on a Scandal: The Critical Fortunes and Misfortunes of Adolf Ulrik Wertmüller,” Unpublished manuscript, 1 and 7-8. Impressed by the Petit Trianon, the portrait of the queen in her private garden setting may have been used to please Gustave III.
ideologies that promoted the natural virtues of motherhood, it has also been suggested that the idea to publically display the portrait of Marie-Antoinette with her two oldest children at the Salon may have been politically motivated. In his campaign for the revival of the glory of the monarchy made visible through the fine arts, the comte d’Angiviller, director of the Bâtiments du roi, may have desired to launder the queen’s immoral reputation through a more nurturing representation of queenship.\(^87\) In any event, Marie-Antoinette was likely to have been generally aware of the plan for the presentation of herself as a mother set amidst the gardens that had so impressed Gustave III, even if she did not personally view the finished portrait before its display at the Salon.

Wertmüller’s placement of Marie-Antoinette with her son and daughter within the queen’s realm of the Petit Trianon, signified by the Temple of Love in the background, points to the queen’s deviation from conventional portraits to an unprecedentedly private, or at least non-royal, assertion of queenship. As previously demonstrated, traditional portraits of the queen as mother were hardly private expressions of maternal involvement and contentment. Most portraits of mother and child were strictly public and specifically represented the dauphin as the privileged emblem of the kingdom and the visualization of his mother’s fulfillment of duty to her husband. Additional children, especially daughters, were almost never displayed with the queen because they were ineligible to inherit the throne.

Wertmüller hierarchically arranged the three figures into a pyramidal shape, and a full-length representation of Marie-Antoinette occupies the center of the composition to evoke her elevated rank. In the portrait, Marie-Antoinette exchanges the heavily embroidered and corseted \textit{grand habit du cour} for a less physically confining, though still fancifully embellished, \textit{robe à la}

turque, a lacy gown more in line with the queen’s preference for a casual and natural atmosphere at the Petit Trianon. As Rousseau advocated for mothers to personally tend to their children to experience the natural gratifications of motherhood that women alone could enjoy, the queen looks toward the viewer while she gestures toward her daughter and rests her bejeweled hand on Monseigneur le Dauphin’s arm; he boyishly reaches up to grasp a handful of his mother’s skirt. When compared to the severely formal dress and gesture between queen and dauphin in Charles Beaubrun and Henri Beaubrun the Younger’s Portrait of Maria-Theresa of Spain, Queen of France, and the Dauphin (1663 Figure 19), the gesture between Marie-Antoinette and her son is far less courtly and more gentle. In the Beaubruns’ portrait, mother and son are ceremoniously dressed in matching masquerade ball costumes sprinkled with jewels to signify of their rank. Even though the queen appears to lead the pair along a terrace as she points with her mask, the three-year-old dauphin is imbued with an unusual degree of control for such a young child. He stiffly holds his mother’s limp hand and commandingly looks out to the viewer to proclaim his right to the throne.

Although tradition posits “the children of France” as living symbols of their mother’s duty in addition to the affirmation of the political alliance between France and queen’s home country, the interactions between the Marie-Antoinette and her children betray a definition of motherhood in political terms and suggest a more emotional connection. Unlike the stoicism of Maria-Theresa of Spain and her son, Marie-Antoinette and her oldest son share a moment of tenderness. While Louis-Joseph retains the paraphernalia of his rank to communicate his official identity as future king, he appears as a small boy in need of his mother’s guidance as Marie-Antoinette leads the group on a quiet promenade through the gardens of the Petit Trianon. Nearly three years old at the time Wertmüller painted the portrait, the Dauphin’s representation reflects his
youthful vulnerability quite truthfully. Rousseau argued against restrictive clothing for children; he claimed that tight clothing could impede a child’s health and development. The dauphin is informally dressed in a contemporary suit that reveals his small frame, unlike his seventeenth-century counterpart who is cloaked in heavy fabrics. The dauphin’s trappings of rank are greatly subdued, and he appears in motion as he throws his weight forward to clutch onto his mother’s dress. In turn, Marie-Antoinette rests her hand on top of his small arm to reassure him of her presence. The gesture tellingly conveys a more Rousseauian conception of the queen’s role as conscientious mother, especially when compared to the representation of Maria Theresa, passively frozen in the presence of the future king.

While Marie-Antoinette’s gesture with her son can be interpreted as affectionate, her gesture toward her daughter is instructive. The queen’s palm faces outward, and she slightly reaches to her daughter to encourage the viewer to behold Madame Royale instead of the Dauphin, and therefore removes the family from the realm of royalty that only privileged the heir’s presence. After the queen’s first pregnancy produced a daughter and left the future of the Bourbon line in question, Marie-Antoinette was reported to have announced that “a son would have belonged to the nation, whereas a daughter could be hers alone.” Weber writes that Marie-Antoinette doted upon her daughter as if she was a doll; the queen nicknamed her daughter “Muslin” (Mousseline), the dress associated with her private identity, and she dressed Madame Royale in chemises to coordinate with her own country wear. This matching mother-daughter act also speaks to Marie-Antoinette’s desire to facilitate a deeper bond with her daughter, well beyond that required of a queen. Depicted more realistically as a little girl instead

88 Weber, 173.
89 Weber, 141.
90 Weber, 141.
of a refined miniature adult of the court, Madame Royale clutches the fabrics of her lévite to contain an unruly bouquet of roses that spill out of her make-shift basket. Symbolically associated with Marie-Antoinette and the House of Hapsburg, the blooming roses suggest the queen’s fertility and marital responsibility to bear children for France. Yet, Madame Royale lovingly handles a single rose to identify the doting relationship between mother and daughter. Through touch, gesture, and exchanged glances, the figures enjoy a private moment of familial intimacy.

Because Wertmüller represented Marie-Antoinette with her two children with no allusion to the king, the portrait shifts from the traditional iconography of queenship and aligns itself with the established seventeenth-century precedent of official court mistresses represented with all of the king’s natural children.91 Pierre Mignard’s Portrait of Madame de Montespan, one of Louis XIV’s mistresses, (Figure 21) shows the king’s favorite casually reclining in an ambiguous outdoor space while surrounded by her four legitimated children whose figures each occupy their own quadrant of the canvas. During this period, Montespan followed convention by way of entrusting her children with a suitable governess while she busied herself with court gossip and entertained the king.92 In the foreground, the Mademoiselle de Tours, the couple’s second-youngest daughter, innocently gathers flowers in a pose that foreshadows Wertmüller’s depiction of Madame Royale. Madame de Montespan subtly gestures toward her daughter, but her distant gaze veers outside of the picture plane and reduces her body to a passive object for the king’s gaze. Her supine figure is provocatively on display, and she exposes her decorated leg from underneath the fabrics of her dress to draw attention to her beauty and sexuality. The painting

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91 Sheriff, “The Cradle is Empty,” 173. Sheriff also points out Pierre Mignard’s Portrait of the Grand Dauphin and his Family from 1678 (Figure 20) that displays the dauphine with all of her children. However, this portrait follows protocol because of the presence of the dauphin as father and husband.

92 Hibbert, 43-44.
literally shows the children’s physical separation from their mother after their births; their inclusion functions as emblems of Montespan’s sexual relationship with the king.

Given the earlier traditions of representing the queen that publically reiterated the queen’s subservience to the king with little room for the establishment of self, portraits such as Wertmüller’s “Rousseauian” Marie-Antoinette in her gardens with no indication of the king or attributes of queenship threatened viewers. As we will see in Chapter 4, critics’ commentaries from the Salons of 1783, 1785, and 1787 are complicated by the problematic ambiguity of the public-private identity and subsequent role of the queen at Versailles. When the queen, instead of the state, played a significant role in the fashioning of her own image in public, critics feared an active feminine space that reconfigured the queen’s identity as both consort and courtesan that plotted to usurp the king’s power.
CHAPTER 4
CRITICAL RECEPTION OF PORTRAITS OF MARIE-ANTOINETTE

Rousseau’s promotion of blissful marriage, engaged motherhood, and the ordering of society based upon the strict occupation of separate public and private spheres for men and women, respectively, inevitably contrasted with the equivocation of public-private identities at Versailles. The deeply ingrained traditions of absolutism faced off against redefined notions of French selfhood for bourgeois and aristocratic women and inevitably affected how people saw (or wanted to see) the queen as well as how Marie-Antoinette saw herself as queen in addition to wife and mother. When one considers Marie-Antoinette’s self-fashioning in light of Rousseauian discourse that condemned women’s “unnatural” activities in public life, one begins to doubt whether Marie-Antoinette could ever have stepped outside of her contractual and gendered role as wife of the king of France and still maintain a respectable, virtuous image in the eyes of a (masculinized) public.

Critics both admired and attacked the Salon portraits from 1783 and 1785 because of the inherently contradictory aspects of idealized expectations of submissive queenship and the perception of Marie-Antoinette constructed by exaggerated public rumor that emphasized her foreignness, insisted on the queen’s unnatural sexuality, and her desire to assert her own status. Critical reception of the queen’s portraits often depended upon who was looking and where. During the Salon of 1783, for instance, Vigée Lebrun recorded an anecdote that revealed audiences’ praises for Portrait of Marie-Antoinette en chemise, and she also recalled that malicious people did not refrain from saying the queen was painted in her underwear.93 A portrait that represented the queen of France as a largely private citizen with no affiliation to the monarch appeared scandalous and un-French when made public. Domestic ideals that preached

93 Vigée Lebrun, 26. Also see Sheriff, The Exceptional Woman, 46.
affectionate motherhood and loving marriages were private bourgeois virtues that did not apply to Marie-Antoinette’s traditional role as an inherently public emblem of her husband’s authority and the vessel through which power was transferred. According to the absolutist public realm, even though the queen gave birth to her children, they were not hers to raise or nurture; the children of France they belonged to the state, her husband’s privileged spouse. After the birth of her children, especially the heir, Marie-Antoinette was not to maintain an active presence in her children’s lives. When portraits of Marie-Antoinette fashioned the queen to appear as a largely private, Rousseauian woman-mother, the queen’s apparent individualization and separation from the king conveyed a new level of power that was seen to defy traditional conceptions of the queen as mother and posed a danger to the state.

**Queen of “Little Vienna”**

Because the French court had gained a threatening reputation for being controlled by ambitious women and weak kings manipulated by personal favor, the public perceived Marie-Antoinette as wielding power over her reclusive husband when she spent time apart from Louis XVI at her Petit Trianon. This observation was largely based upon precedents established by the official mistresses under Louis XV, a formal position at court that was considered the antithesis of queenly identity. Considering the construction of Marie-Antoinette’s Petit Trianon as a private residence that abandoned the formal etiquette that expressed the queen’s royalty, the public associated Marie-Antoinette with the privileges reserved for the king’s favorite. Due to the nature of their unofficial relationship with the king, court mistresses like Pompadour and Du Barry from the reign of Louis XV remained private figures despite their close proximity to the body politic. While they enjoyed lavish gifts and favors from the king, they were not expected to produce heirs or to partake in the rituals of etiquette at Versailles that publicized the glory of the state. While in favor, the king’s mistresses maintained intimate residences to entertain the king.
and to host parties for their own circles of friends. Similarly to the private nature of Marie-Antoinette’s Petit Trianon that I have already outlined, the titled court mistresses richly decorated these chateaus according to their own personal tastes and not as monuments that were embellished with traditional icons to visualize the glory of the state. Because the queen implemented her own designs and rules of decorum that created a private space distinct from Versailles and its formalities, the Petit Trianon facilitated a privatized image of the queen that appeared more akin with traditions of court mistresses rather than the customary practices and public images of her queenly predecessors.

While Marie-Antoinette tellingly remarked that Vigée Lebrun’s *Portrait en chemise* was “the most resembling of all her portraits,” critics denounced the impropriety of the queen for showing herself off so informally to a public that expected certain standards of queenly representation. The French chemise, while a modest rustic gown that tended toward Rousseauian simplicity instead of the artifice of luxury, also served as an casual lounging gown that was worn while dressing at the boudoir or during informal promenades in the garden. Not only was the gown unqueenly in its lack of luxury, but, according to formal French court customs, the fashionable chemise was unacceptable for the public portrayals of the queen as the timeless consort and the object of display for the glory of the monarchy. Another spectator even remarked that the queen violated: “the fundamental law of [France], which is that the public cannot suffer to see its princes lower themselves to the level of mere mortals.”

More specifically, the chemise, having become a fashionable emblem of the Petit Trianon, alluded to Marie-Antoinette’s engagement in the construction of her own image based on her preference for her private realm. One pamphleteer even argued against Vigée Lebrun’s

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94 Quoted in Weber, 161.
accountability since such “liberties” (meaning the informality of the chemise, for one) would not have been taken without the consent of the sitter. 95 Marie-Antoinette commissioned the painting without a pendant of the king as a private gift for a friend, and, once again, the absence of the monarch or royal attributes rendered the portrait an image of “unqueenly” representation. Moreover, because the portrait suggested the queen’s penchant for the Petit Trianon through her dress, the audience could not even imagine a corresponding image of the king, if such a pendant portrait was to ever exist. At the Petit Trianon, the king became the foreigner within the space the was specifically separated from the official public sphere of Versailles. Exclusively fashioned to reflect Marie-Antoinette’s own sense of self, the portrait was a complete departure from royal convention since it was the portrayal of a private woman whose assertion of her own identity negated the fundamentally public ideologies of passive queenship. The representation of an entirely private Marie-Antoinette as the subject of her own portrait granted the queen an unprecedented amount of agency, even beyond that of Nattier’s 1747 portrait of Marie Leszczinska that maintained proper allegiance to the Crown. In addition to her break from the conventional representations of queenship, without a nod to the august nature of her rank, audiences viewed the queen’s self-fashioning as a private woman as a slanderous affront to the majesty of the king, to whom she was inextricably connected and obligated to respect.

Because of the public outcry, Vigée Lebrun hastily replaced the scandalous Portrait en chemise with Marie-Antoinette à la rose (1784 Figure 22). 96 This portrait represents the queen in a similar pose, but with significant revisions to re-present Marie-Antoinette conforming to the conventions of queenship. By replacing the straw hat and chemise with a powdered wig, a frilly,

95 From the Mémoires secrets, quoted in Sheriff, The Exceptional Woman, 145.
96 Sheriff, The Exceptional Woman, 146.
blue silk dress, and pearl jewelry more akin to the luxuries of the monarchy, Vigée Lebrun effaced the queen’s persona of a private self and the aura of Rousseauian naturalness associated with Marie-Antoinette’s private Petit Trianon. The figure of the queen reappears with greater modesty; she is set back from the front of the picture plane and is no longer easily accessible. Interestingly, Vigée Lebrun transformed the ambiguous blank background of the 1783 portrait into a largely informal garden setting. Because the garden does not directly allude to Trianon, unlike other portraits from the period, the reworked painting becomes a “safe,” even generic, image for public consumption. This suggests that representations of Marie-Antoinette at Trianon not only symbolized unprecedented queenly agency to the extent that the queen established her own rules and naturalistic aesthetics within her private domain, but this separate sphere was indicative of the queen’s sense of identity as a private citizen and sinned against the traditional ideals of queenship.

“Royalty Should Always be Royal”

At the Salon of 1785, Salon critics, along with Marie-Antoinette herself, attacked Wertmüller for his unconvincing attempt to capture an accurate likeness of the queen; the portrait, it was said, neither portrayed the majesty of the queenship nor the grace for which Marie-Antoinette was renowned. Regarding the unqueenly aspects of the work, one critic, echoing Salon commentary from the Portrait en chemise, wrote that “royalty should always be royal, even in a painting.” 97 Once again, critics deemed Marie-Antoinette’s fashionably desirable appearance to be beneath the dignified nature of her rank. Perhaps even more damaging to the reputation of the queen, one pamphlet noted that it was “necessary here to represent the queen as mother of the children who surround her, as presenting these august

children to the nation, and as a sovereign." Instead, the Wertmüller portrait represented the children of France promenading with their unchaperoned mother in a profanely “feminized” space that opposed the absolute authority of the kingship and defied the “appropriate” identity of a virtuous queen.

To make matters worse, the public debut of Wertmüller’s portrait coincided with the queen’s unfortunate “role” in what came to be known as the Diamond Necklace Affair: just ten days prior to the opening of the Salon, Marie-Antoinette was falsely implicated as a major player in the Affair. Although con artists dressed a young prostitute in a chemise à la reine to impersonate the queen for their own malicious purposes, rumors spread that the queen herself engaged in an illicit nighttime meeting with Cardinal Louis de Rohan in the grottos at the Trianon. Even when evidence surfaced to exonerate Marie-Antoinette from participation in the scandal, the queen was deemed not entirely innocent; her dubious virtue and pattern of unqueenly behavior provided sufficient evidence to make the Cardinal’s mistaking her identity understandable. Because Wertmüller’s painting alluded to the provocative atmosphere of the Trianon, critics, already troubled by the fusion of public and private representations of queenship, were appalled to see Marie Antoinette leading her children, particularly the heir, through the gardens that exposed the future king to the environment that facilitated his mother’s deviation from French tradition.

Also, the recognition of an informal, private sphere at Versailles associated with the queen’s exploration of self symbolically negated the original intention for the state’s 1774 propagandistic replantation project to reclaim Versailles as the official (masculine) site of the

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98 Sheriff, “The Cradle is Empty,” 182. This pamphleteer eventually admitted that it was difficult “combine the necessary qualities of ‘majesty, benevolence, and charm’ into a single image.”

absolutist public sphere as originally envisioned by Louis XIV. Considering the picturesque layout of the gardens at the Petit Trianon, the aesthetics of the grounds were constructed to appear “naturally overgrown” to follow the modish styles of the English, unlike the orderly and precisely symmetrical gardens of d’Angiviller’s plan to reassert the grandeur of the overall French tradition. For some, Marie-Antoinette’s private behavior and personal aesthetics appeared to abandon sacred French tradition and Bourbon rule to (re)align herself with foreign trends, especially since the Petit Trianon gained a reputation as the queen’s “Little Vienna.” In fact, rumors of Marie-Antoinette’s reputed private rebellion against France became so widespread and convincing that Madame Campan, one of the queen’s attendants, recalled in her memoirs that when a gullible man of court requested permission to enter into the queen’s society at Petit Trianon, he allegedly referred to the space as Marie-Antoinette’s “Little Vienna.”¹⁰⁰ To the contemporary viewers, a foreign space on the grounds of the complex erected to symbolize the state threatened the security and pride of the kingdom—especially when deeply-rooted Austrophobic prejudices surfaced to cause some to suspect the Petit Trianon as a space for Austria to conspire against and make a mockery of France.

The second unqueenly appearance of Marie-Antoinette caused such a scandal that after the 1785 Salon, arts officials asked Wertmüller to adjust the image of the queen before sending the finished portrait to Sweden. X-radiograph technology has revealed that originally, the queen’s head was slanted to the left, a pose often associated with flirtatiousness or intrigue.¹⁰¹ Melissa Hyde writes of the correspondence between Jean-Baptiste Pierre, the Director of the Académie, and the comte d’Angiviller, explaining that Pierre reassured d’Angiviller that the painting

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¹⁰⁰ Quoted from the Mémoires of Mme. Campan in Sheriff, The Exceptional Woman, 173.

appeared “infinitely better” after its corrections; the memoirs of Madame Campan mention that the queen was satisfied with the changes as well.\textsuperscript{102} Certainly, a coquettish demeanor was inappropriate for the regal comportment for which Marie-Antoinette was said to bear. The edited version of the portrait shows a more upright depiction of the figure of Marie-Antoinette; her upright stance evokes the formality of the queenship while the setting and her costume unintentionally call into question the queen’s allegiance to France and whether or not the queen, as a woman and mother, had a right to assume a private, Rousseauian identity in public.

Despite the negative reviews, some Salon critics were more sympathetic to the informality of Wertmüller’s representation of Marie-Antoinette. One commentator observed that the queen appeared to have:

Extinguished the majesterial fire of her regard and descended from her throne, in offer to procure from the bourgeois of the capital, the satisfaction of seeing her and offering to her the homage of their hearts and their subservience.\textsuperscript{103}

Instead of regarding the queen’s appearance as “frivolous and uncourtly” due to the absence of the golden fleur-de-lis or ermine-lined mantle, this critic viewed Wertmüller’s portrayal of Marie-Antoinette as a positive representation of a more approachable and affable image of “bourgeois” queenship to the public. However, the queen of France was not her own citizen with the liberty to keep to the private sphere. Since her body belonged to France, she was not free to descend from the throne to assume the identity of a private 	extit{citoynenne}. To reduce the queen to a fashionable aristocrat attuned to contemporary fashion trends and philosophical discourse implied that aristocratic women could be elevated to a more royal social status; strict segregation

\textsuperscript{102} Hyde, “Notes on a Scandal,” 9.

\textsuperscript{103} Bernadette de Boysson and Xavier Salmon, Marie-Antoinette à Versailles: le goût d’une reine (Bordeaux: Musée des arts décoratifs de Bordeaux, 2005), cat. 15; quoted in Hyde, “Notes on a Scandal,” 9.
of social hierarchies became more disfigured, and the possibility to debase the queenship with notions of accessibility offended the implicit superiority and dignity of the crown.

Not only did the public perceive their queen as exceeding the natural limits of her sex and status as queen by deserting the domestic space to seek her own pleasures, but she had done so at the nation’s financial expense. Furthermore, an active queen defined separately from the reigning king invalidated her marriage contract that granted her identity and overall purpose as queen of France. The absence of a visible reference to the king in these portraits presented another body of the king to the public: the threat of an emasculated Louis XVI that reaffirmed the feminization of the once virile Versailles that served as the masculine public space of the monarchy.
CHAPTER 5
BE THE MOTHER OF US ALL

The “Bourgeois” Queen of France

Both the 1783 Vigée Lebrun portrait and the Wertmüller piece from the next Salon exhibition in 1785 attest that the combination of a Rousseauian, “natural” woman and the queen of France were fundamentally incompatible representations of Marie-Antoinette because of conflicting ideologies related to domestic, bourgeois femininity and the august public identity of the queen. Widely considered as the state’s “corrective” response to the alleged shortcomings of the scandalized 1785 portrait of the queen with her children, some of which I emphasized in Chapter 4, the Bâtiments du roi commissioned Vigée Lebrun, on behalf of Marie-Antoinette, to paint another portrait of the queen with her children for exhibition at the Salon of 1787 (Figure 23). 104 Considering the two previous Salon portraits of Marie-Antoinette were images for a private audience made public, the 1787 portrait of Marie-Antoinette and her children was the first formal portrait of the queen conceived by the state with the opinion of the Salon public opinion in mind. However, an image of Marie-Antoinette had already been briefly introduced by the state to the public ten years earlier, but in a different artistic genre. As I have argued, one interpretation of the cameo appearance of Marie-Antoinette in Robert’s 1777 Salon painting was for the representation of Marie-Antoinette to appear as a “good queen” in the showing of her support to the state’s symbolic restoration of the glory of the tarnished Bourbon monarchy through the replantation project at Versailles. The 1787 Vigée Lebrun portrait was said to be deliberately designed to construct a state-approved public image of the queen herself, but now to

104 Baillio, 8. Baillio also writes that “only a French artist could invest the subject with the dignity required by the propagandistic message the painting had to convey.” Baillio assumes that the source of the problem with the Wertmüller portrait stemmed from the foreign identity of the artist: Wertmüller was too Swedish to understand French tradition. Also see Hyde, “Notes on a Scandal,” 11-13.
repair the queen’s own unfavorable reputation, an unprecedented function of state portraits of the queen.\textsuperscript{105}

Vigée Lebrun’s \textit{Portrait of Marie-Antoinette with her Children} borrowed some familiar characteristics from traditional public representations of queen-mothers, but it also incorporated moralistic elements of private motherhood to call attention to the virtues of the queen. Marie-Antoinette appears authoritative; she is dressed majestically—not frivolously—in a red velvet gown trimmed with fur that recalls the private-public images of her predecessors. The “Frenchified” red gown appeared in Nattier’s \textit{Poritrat of Marie Leszczinska} (Figure 11) and augments the queen’s modest, but luxuriously adorned, image. The previous dauphine, Marie-Joséphe, wears a version of this less formal court attire, but the gown remains within the limits of appropriate public dress for the queen in La Tour’s 1761 pastel portrait that displays the Bourbon succession; the small engraving in the painting of Marie Leszczinska shows her in the same costume (Figure 7). The striking sartorial continuity among the three succeeding royal women is telling when one considers the construction of their public and private identities through publicly exhibited portraiture. A publicly recognizable and symbolic tool to convey the regality of the Bourbon Crown as well as the queens’ fulfillment of her duties as consort, the reproduction of the velvet gown trimmed with fur over the three generations of queens of France (and Dauphine, in the case of Marie-Joséphe) signified their benign version of a more private queenship that did not challenge convention or the king. The gown itself became iconic; it visually linked the women together based on their role as “good” queens.

\textsuperscript{105} Baillio, 80; Schama, 155-183. For a somewhat different viewpoint of the equivocal political and gender discourse of the period that contributed to an overall equivocal representation of Marie-Antoinette and her children, see Sheriff, “The Cradle is Empty,” 164-187.
In Vigée Lebrun’s grand-scale portrait, the children of Louis XVI and Marie-Antoinette surround their mother to draw attention to her duties as a queen, but Madame Royale and baby Louis-Charles interact with their mother through largely affectionate gestures to suggest the queen’s maternal identity in terms of Rousseauian womanhood. Marie-Antoinette adopts a full-length seated pose, like her predecessors, but she does not interact with or even acknowledge her children. Instead, she sits quietly and looks toward the viewer without much expression. Partly conceived to resemble the grandeur of a history painting, Vigée Lebrun’s compact pyramidal organization of the figures in the portrait alludes to the triangular arrangement of the Holy Family on Renaissance altarpieces, thereby imposing a sense of monumentality and divinity suitable for depictions of the French monarchy.

While the upper portion of the portrait is cast in shadow, the figures are dramatically illuminated as light streams in from the Galerie des Glaces. With Versailles traditionally thought of as a metaphorical stage on which the royal family performs, the queen and her children are theatrically presented for the public to behold. Madame Royale is at her mother’s side, and she embraces Marie-Antoinette’s arm while gazing admiringly up at the queen. Marie-Antoinette neither returns her daughter’s gaze nor evokes emotion; her own regal pose and assertive stare accentuates the conventions of royal portraiture that treats the queen’s body as a throne. Recalling Belle’s Portrait of Marie Leszcynska and the Dauphin (1730 Figure 5) where the motionless queen is the “throne” for the regally posed Dauphin, whose commanding gaze and upright posture is highly idealized for a child born around the time the painting was produced. While Belle’s dauphin was born a miniature monarch, Marie-Antoinette’s youngest son is shown more realistically as a baby. Louis Charles squirms on his mother’s lap, and his gaze is focused upon a distraction outside of the picture plane instead of on the viewer. His representation as a
fussy baby evokes Rousseauian thought that called for the differentiation between childhood and adulthood; raising children as miniature adults ultimately harmed their development of reason.\textsuperscript{106} As the baby reaches toward Marie-Antoinette, she loosely rests her arms around him and does not disrupt her stately posture. Marie-Antoinette’s evocation of her royal demeanor distances the queen from the reality of her children; Louis Charles appears as though he may tumble from her lap at any moment, and Marie-Antoinette hardly notices.

The Dauphin completes the pyramidal formation of the figures in the right-hand corner of the portrait. He looks at the viewer while pointing to Marie-Antoinette and his siblings, as if he is redirecting attention back to the queen and her role as mother. The Dauphin also uncovers an empty cradle, which possibly commemorated the recent death of Marie-Antoinette’s youngest daughter Madame Sophie. Placed next to Marie-Antoinette, the curved shape of the cradle visually rhymes with the rounded shoulders and bosom of the queen. Just like a cradle holds children, so does the body of the queen in her primary duty to the kingdom.\textsuperscript{107} While a throne is ostentatiously decorated and depersonalized, with the exception of identifying one’s social rank, a cradle evokes a greater sense of maternity, warmth, and comfort. Marie-Antoinette’s figure is both throne and cradle at once, an impossible combination that complicates the public’s conception of their queen’s identity.\textsuperscript{108}

The figures are depicted in an undecorated version of the Salon de la Paix, a relatively public space in the Grand Apartments at Versailles, to amplify the portrait’s sense of

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\textsuperscript{106} Rousseau and Archer, 207.

\textsuperscript{107} Sheriff, “The Cradle is Empty,” 171.

\textsuperscript{108} Sheriff, “The Cradle is Empty,” 171.
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formality. Unlike the private spaces of the Marie-Antoinette’s apartments reserved for exclusive guests of the queen’s own choosing, the Salon de la Paix was reserved for state parties and entertainment, but it was also where the queen received foreign guests. Because Marie-Antoinette usually met with her children in her private apartments, the actual presence of the children with their mother in the Salon de la Paix would have been unlikely. Sheriff writes that because the children, the cradle, and even the queen’s personal jewelry box are depicted in a room where they would not actually be found suggests a deeper visual metaphor. Instead of signaling the real or the domestic, the out of place furniture and the displaced children become theatrical props to communicate to the viewer a representation of the queen on a more official level.

Additionally, scholars point to the placement of the queen’s jewelry box in the background of the portrait as a possible allegorical allusion to Cornelia, the mother of the leaders of the democratic party in ancient Rome and a symbol of virtuous maternity to the eighteenth-century French. On the heels of the Diamond Necklace Affair which magnified, among other malevolent implications, Marie-Antoinette’s extravagant spending in a time of national scarcity, this allegorical reference indicates virtue and pride in one’s children. Instead of flaunting her jewels, Marie-Antoinette becomes Cornelia and presents her children as her gems. The Cornelia anecdote satisfies Rousseau’s recommendations for women to find satisfaction in their children and not material possessions or carnal pursuits. However, Marie-Antoinette does not motion

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109 Sheriff, “The Cradle is Empty,” 180-181. Sheriff suggests that Vigée Lebrun may have not reproduced the elaborate decoration of the Salon de la Paix because the ornamentation and mirrored walls would have distracted attention away from the main figures.


toward or draw attention to her children. The Dauphin is the figure that gestures toward his mother as he draws back the curtain of the cradle. In this recasting of the roles in the Cornelia narrative, Marie-Antoinette becomes the jewel of France, or at least the site from which the children of France as gems were produced. The Bourbon Crown, placed upon a fleur-de-lis cushion, rests on top of the jewelry box given from the people of France to Marie-Antoinette upon her marriage to Louis XVI. Calling to mind traditional state portraits of queenship, the crown evoked the presence of the king. Literally placed under the symbolic representation of Louis XVI, Marie-Antoinette is shown in her natural sphere of influence as submissive wife and first subject of the king.

Sheriff has argued that critics of the Salon of 1787 found the Portrait of Marie-Antoinette with her Children to lack clear intention due to the queen’s vague, emotionless appearance and rigid pose in which her youngest child is about to fall from her lap. Some observers deemed the queen’s stoic expression as the root of the portrait’s equivocation while others blamed Vigée Lebrun’s artistic execution. Critics viewed the portrait as an awkward attempt to unite the bourgeois ideal of maternal bliss with the elevated image of the absolute monarchy; Marie-Antoinette cannot be throne and cradle at the same time. Enriched by Madame Royale’s loving embrace, the portrait alludes to the bonds of affectionate motherhood as determined by Rousseau that Marie-Antoinette privately practiced. However, this was a public state portrait of queenship; since the queen’s children belonged to the state and not to her own person, Marie-Antoinette’s portrayal with them publically showcased Bourbon succession without private

112 Sheriff, “The Cradle is Empty,” 166-167.

113 Sheriff, “The Cradle is Empty,” 166.
bonds. Any implications of Marie-Antoinette’s more private identity with the children of France would defy conventional notions of queenship.

Paradoxically, even though the queen is surrounded by all of the children of France, her disinterested posture contradicts Rousseau’s message and further armed her critics with evidence of her alleged immorality and desire to distance herself from the state, beginning with the children of France. For instance, one critic wrote that the rank of the nobility and brilliance of the queen and her children is apparent, but Marie-Antoinette’s expression does not put forth any feeling. If one of the purposes of Vigée Lebrun’s image was to restore Marie-Antoinette’s reputation according to current cultural discourse that defined feminine virtue in terms of a woman’s occupation of the private sphere and a feeling of personal pleasure through one’s children, why did the queen not evoke a palpable sense of maternal bliss? To make matters worse, the Salon of 1787 exhibited Vigée Lebrun’s Portrait of the Artist With Her Daughter (Figure 24) beneath the Portrait of Marie-Antoinette with her Children, so viewers had visual evidence of Vigée Lebrun’s ability to express maternal tenderness because of her own self-portrait imbued with emotion and Rousseauian femininity. In this self-portrait, the artist lovingly embraces her daughter Julie, and her smiling expression alludes to the joyous satisfactions of motherhood. Upon seeing the portrait at the Salon of 1787, a critic remarked that because Vigée Lebrun showed herself with her daughter in her arms, she enhanced her beauty and talent though alignment with the tenderest and most delightful of affections.114 Although Vigée Lebrun successfully employed Rousseauian thought to reconcile her “scandalous” public identity as a professional artist with her femininity as a mother, Marie-Antoinette, as queen, did not have the same rights to private virtues of domesticity due to the nature of her public rank.

114 Quoted in Baillio, 70. For a fuller discussion of Vigée Lebrun’s fashioning of her own identity through portraiture, see Radisich, “Qui peut définir les femmes,” 449.
The Mémoires secrets, a publication known for its contempt for both the queen and Vigée Lebrun, was also particularly unsettled by the portrait’s uncertain intentions. The critic, obviously interpreting the portrait according to Rousseauian themes of the time, stated that the queen appears troubled and distracted, and she seems to “experience affliction rather than the expansive joy of a mother who is pleased to find herself in the midst of her children.”\(^\text{115}\) Despite the notion that Marie-Antoinette embraced some aspects of Rousseauian thought in her effort to carve out a more private identity at Trianon and in her relationships with her children, in Vigée Lebrun’s 1787 portrait, critics found Marie-Antoinette as either too private for a public queen or not Rousseauian enough to reconcile her unfeminine behavior. As I have demonstrated, the conventions of portraits of queen-mothers were standardized representations of the public spectacle of royalty and had never been precisely commissioned to launder the queen’s unfavorable reputation. The portraits were mechanical depictions of the monarchy that conveyed a tradition of dynastic continuity that was issued to the dauphin, who was born ready to inherit the majestic role of the king. Emotional attachments between mother and children were irrelevant and thus non-existent in royal portraiture. But, in order to portray Marie-Antoinette as both a queen and mother that complied with redefined notions of virtuous femininity and the public representations and expectations of queenship, a sense of ambiguity was inevitable.\(^\text{116}\)

While it is plausible that the state, through Vigée Lebrun, merged notions of Rousseauian motherhood with traditions of queenly portraiture to correct unacceptable self-representations of the queen as an independent, private woman, the public’s conditioning to images of queenship clashed with Rousseauian ideology that called for women to yield to the laws of nature and

\(^{115}\) Sheriff, “The Cradle is Empty,” 169.

\(^{116}\) Sheriff, “The Cradle is Empty,” 184-185.
engage in society from the private sphere. In a social category specifically elevated above the bourgeoisie and nobility, Marie-Antoinette was, according to tradition, only supposed to occupy the public realm since ideals of private, affective motherhood did not pertain to her rank. However, earlier portraits of Marie-Antoinette suggest that that the queen had fashioned her image to occupy the public as well as the private realms. The queen consciously chose what customs of queenly behavior she wanted to adhere to while she also subscribed to Rousseauian ideals like domestic motherhood in order to cultivate a private identity that went beyond any of her predecessors.

**Fashioning the “Good (Queen) Mother”**

As her private portraits tended to favor Rousseauian notions of femininity and selfhood, I have demonstrated that Marie-Antoinette scandalously deviated from the public’s expectations of queenly behavior and appearance, and thus suggest that notions of queenship and a privately constructed sense of self cannot peacefully co-exist in the figure of the queen of France. Hunt has pointed out that on the eve of the Revolution, republican ideals of virtue focused upon the fraternity of men as patriarchs in their own right; women were confined to the domestic realm while men engaged in society from the public sphere. As the authority of the king as the sole patriarch of the state was increasingly destabilized, the question of motherhood and Marie-Antoinette, the most public woman-mother in France who was ironically not permitted to inhabit the private sphere, was also subject to criticism. Thus, in the public realm, slanderous pamphlets that speculated upon the immorality of the queen’s private life. Libels denounced the queen as a “bad mother” as revolutionary tensions escalated in the late 1780s, despite Vigée Lebrun’s grand, but futile, effort to rectify the queen’s public image in 1787.

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During this period of political upheaval and a general distrust of the monarchy, a 1790 entry from miniaturist François Dumont’s ledger references a commission for Marie-Antoinette (Figure 25). The queen paid 200 louis for a miniature portrait on ivory of herself with her children depicted outdoors, arguably begun around 1789, and it was the final representation of Marie-Antoinette with her children.118 Miniature portraits are small-scale works that could be carried or worn, often given to close friends or set into jewel boxes. Reserved for a private audience, miniatures typically conveyed a more intimately rendered portrait of the subject, especially when compared to the formalized, large-scale state portraits displayed in public. The application of pastel colors on ivory, an expensive material in itself with no need for additional embellishment, imbues the image with a sense of delicacy and accentuates the overall feeling of intimacy. As a representation of a figure that existed somewhere between the public and private spheres of influence, this self-commissioned private portrait allows for greater flexibility of self-representation once the queen removed her image from the troubling public gaze. The miniature plays with the multiple dimensions inevitably tied to Marie-Antoinette’s inseparable identities as mother, woman, and queen to reflect her own sense of selfhood at the beginning of the French Revolution.

Due to Marie-Antoinette’s position at an allegedly morally corrupt court that also functioned as her home and therefore, according to Rousseau, her rightful domain as wife and mother, revolutionaries would redefine the queen as an ungratefully bad mother. Because republican virtue required masculine virility and rejected the intrusion of the feminine into the public sphere, Marie-Antoinette was the “bad mother” that contaminated the body of the king and corrupted the foundation of the new republic that was “supposed to be shaped by the lessons

118 Dumont’s entry states: “Rendu le 29 jeanjver en tableau composé pour la Reine où est son Portrait celui de Madame fille du roi et Monseigneur le dauphin. Payé 200 louis.” Arizzoli-Clémentel and Salmon, cat. 234.
of good republican mothers” from their rightful domains.\footnote{Hunt, \textit{The Family Romance}, 122.} Prior to the Revolution, Marie-Antoinette was not the favored or “good” mother in the lives of her own children at court. Under French Salic Law, theoretically, \textit{La France} was the figurative and privileged wife of the majestic body of Louis XVI as king; the body of Marie-Antoinette was supplanted after the birth of her son as the Dauphin was raised to affectionately associate with his metaphorical mother, the state. Later, revolutionaries challenged the king’s absolute patriarchal authority and realized that “in a civil society all men . . . can generate political life and political right . . . political creativity belongs to masculinity.”\footnote{Carole Pateman, \textit{The Sexual Contract} (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1988, 36; quoted in Hunt, \textit{The Family Romance}, 99.} \textit{La Nation}, therefore, became a “masculine” mother without threatening feminine qualities to corrupt the public sphere, unlike Marie-Antoinette whose body alone had given birth to the next sovereign.\footnote{Hunt, \textit{The Family Romance}, 99.} Paris, the nation, and the Revolution were all figuratively “good mothers” that nurtured her French children without threat. On the other hand, Marie-Antoinette was framed as “the bad mother” and ultimately incompatible with republican feminine ideology that valued good, private mothers to facilitate political reform.\footnote{Hunt, \textit{The Family Romance}, chapter 4; Hunt, “The Many Bodies of Marie-Antoinette,” 121-123; Sheriff, \textit{The Exceptional Woman}, 149-156; Revel, 111-129.\footnote{Revel, 114. Revel uses this phrase to describe the character of Marie-Antoinette represented in contemporary libelous literature.}}

The escalation of slanderous, even pornographic, pamphlets that featured Marie-Antoinette spread throughout France and created a kind of fictional, yet powerful, “paper queen” with her own identity and evil agenda.\footnote{Revel, 114.} The themes of these book-length texts, short stories, satires and songs cast Marie-Antoinette as a perverse villain with masculine ambitions, despite the queen’s visible commitment to simple adornment, nature, her children, and her husband—
typical components of private feminine virtue. In her own writings on the libelous literature that defamed Marie-Antoinette, Hunt has demonstrated that the queen’s detractors had existed since 1774, but pamphlet production heightened with the coming of the Revolution in 1789 as Marie-Antoinette’s function as public queen proved itself dangerously incompatible with revolutionary ideals of the private roles of women. ¹²⁴ For instance, in the 1789 edition of the *Essai historique sur la vie de Marie-Antoinette*, libelists fashioned the queen as an “a woman without morals, polluted with crimes and debaucheries.”¹²⁵ Compared to pamphlets’ descriptions of the father-king and his “pure, sincere love which [Marie-Antoinette] so often and cruelly abused,”¹²⁶ the queen, as an inherently public wife and mother, was “proof” of the degeneracy that resulted when allegedly immoral femininity polluted the public sphere. To reinforce this image of the queen as a “bad mother,” *Essai historique* accused Marie-Antoinette of poisoning her son, the future sovereign and embodiment of the public sphere (in terms of Old Regime absolutism, which was not officially abolished until 1792) to cause his death in early 1789.

Despite mounting images of the queen as an immoral mother, Marie-Antoinette primarily fashioned her final image with her children as a private woman concerned with affective bonds of motherhood. Dumont’s miniature features an informally costumed Marie-Antoinette resting at the foot of a large tree in an idealized outdoor setting. All of the figures were placed directly into the landscape, on the ground, with little hierarchical arrangement according to court rank. With an unpowdered hairstyle and no jewelry or rouge, Marie-Antoinette abandons the artifice associated with her former public self at Versailles. The queen is flanked by her surviving children who also wear the simple costumes reminiscent of the Petit Trianon with no reference to

¹²⁵ Quoted in Hunt, *The Family Romance*, 104.
their noble ancestry. Madame Royale is to her mother’s right, and Marie-Antoinette’s youngest son Louis Charles, the duke of Normandy, who assumed the title of the Dauphin of France after the death of his older brother Louis Joseph in 1789, playfully wraps his arms around his mother’s (in) famous pearly-white neck. To further express the feeling of intimacy in the group portrait, the figures are isolated and casually grouped together on the ground instead of enthroned inside of the palace under the watchful eye of the king. While the Dauphin sweetly embraces his mother from behind, Marie-Antoinette clasps Madame Royale’s left hand. The queen’s left hand gently supports her daughter’s other hand as she gracefully carves into the trunk of the tree: “be the mother of us all (soyez à tous la mere).” The gaze of each figure solicits the viewer’s attention, as if to present Marie-Antoinette’s maternal virtues to her audience.

Because this image was small-scale and intended only for a private audience, Marie Antoinette does not have to appear for the satisfaction of the French public as she had done in the 1787 state portrait by Vigée Lebrun. What is more, by 1789, mobs had forced the royal family from Versailles, and they were essentially incarcerated in the Tuileries Palace in Paris. Once “dethroned” from the public spectacle of Versailles, the queen appears to have fully embraced the characteristics of the private woman that she had been (officially) denied at the absolutist public sphere of the palace. No longer harnessed to icons of royalty which viewers were once desperate to see incorporated into the composition, the miniature conveys a freer expression of the queen’s private sense of self in terms of Rousseauian ideals. Additionally, Madame Royale’s inscription intervenes to recast Marie-Antoinette as the deservedly “good mother” instead of the imaginary figures of the _La Nation_, the masculinized mother of the burgeoning Republic, or _La France_, the metaphorical “mother” of the children of France that displaced Marie-Antoinette at court. Through the miniature’s portrayal of private feminine virtue that
demonstrated Marie-Antoinette’s capacity to effectively nurture all of her “children” (both blood related and in terms of the French people) as an affectionate queen-mother without harm, the queen herself reclaims her right to be the exclusive mother of France.

To fashion Marie-Antoinette as the “good mother,” Dumont’s miniature incorporates traditional and “Rousseauian” poses for the children in the presence of the queen, who appears more at ease than her disengaged, imposing 1787 state representation. While the genders of the children do not correspond to the conventions their poses, the inversion is positive. Both children are granted an amount of prestige and attention that was typically only reserved for the dauphin. For instance, Madame Royale and Marie-Antoinette lightly touch hands, a pose reminiscent of the formal gestures between queen and male heir from Marie Leszczinska’s and Marie-Joséph’s state portraits. While this pose may indicate Marie-Antoinette’s preference and future hopes for her daughter, the Dauphin assumes his sister’s former 1787 pose and lovingly wraps his arms around his mother. Marie-Antoinette, once depicted as emotionally unresponsive to this gesture, inclines her head toward her son to acknowledge his affection. Although the queen was expected to have no relationship with the children of France beyond their birth, through gentle, reciprocal interactions between the figures, Marie-Antoinette reclaims her children as her own.

Unlike a number of her Salon portraits from the 1780s that were private images made public and which resulted in scandal, Dumont’s miniature paradoxically establishes a public message for a private painting about Marie-Antoinette’s desire to be a private mother and a queen, but, as always, according to her vision. While it has been demonstrated that the dauphin conventionally symbolized the fulfillment of the queen’s duty to the kingdom and directed attention to Marie-Antoinette’s role as first subject of the king through gesture, Dumont bestows
this honor to Madame Royale. Marie-Thérèse makes an explicit reference to the queen as mother through an inscription. Instead of the displaced vessel the queen once embodied that denied her full access to her children and the kingdom, Madame Royale imperatively demands for her mother to become the benevolent mother of all of her children. Because the queen firmly upheld the notion of her husband as the benevolent father to all of the French, Marie-Antoinette actively constructed her identity as the affectionate and accessible woman and mother she had always wanted to become. As the “good mother” that supplanted La France and La Nation in this imaginary world, Marie-Antoinette posits herself as the affable, nurturing mother of the monarchical “family” of the kingdom in addition to her own private family. To further this idea of restoring her sense of agency and identity within her public and private families through acting on this redefined notion of motherhood, Marie-Antoinette physically upholds her daughter’s writing hand, which implies her enthusiasm for this empowering declaration.

The revolutionary intervention granted Marie-Antoinette the aspects of privacy that she had craved since her arrival in France in 1770, and the Dumont miniature demonstrates her own vision of the queenship with motherhood that she could not have pursued publically. Sheriff writes that Marie Antoinette never wanted to abdicate her position as the queen of France, rather, she wanted to define her identity according to her own willful personality, which was against the established norms of modest and queenly behavior while “on duty” at Versailles.127 Because her audience could not reconcile new ideologies of femininity with outdated notions of who/where the queen should be in relation to the public and private spheres, viewers reverted to Old Régime aesthetics of queenship to interpret the figured (or non-figured) imagery. Liberated from the scrutiny of an increasingly critical public, the Dumont commission allowed Marie-Antoinette the

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127 Sheriff, The Exceptional Woman, 176-179.
freedom to define herself as she saw fit. Her last assertion as the rightful, virtuous mother of all of her “children” imbued her with a sense of self-worth: a woman with an identity as something more than a passive vessel for public spectacle.
LIST OF REFERENCES


BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Amanda Strasik received her BA in international affairs with a concentration in European studies and art history from the George Washington University in Washington, DC in 2007. During her time as a master’s student at the University of Florida, her research has primarily focused upon art from eighteenth-century France and issues of gender representation in the public and private spheres.