

ANTONIA  
FRASER  
Marie  
Antoinette  
THE JOURNEY

Drama, betrayal, religion and sex: it's all here, adorned by often fascinating, at times esoteric detail.

Hazel Miller, *Guardian*

# MARIE ANTOINETTE

*The Journey*

Antonia Fraser



Doubleday

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MARIE  
ANTOINETTE



*The Journey*

ANTONIA FRASER

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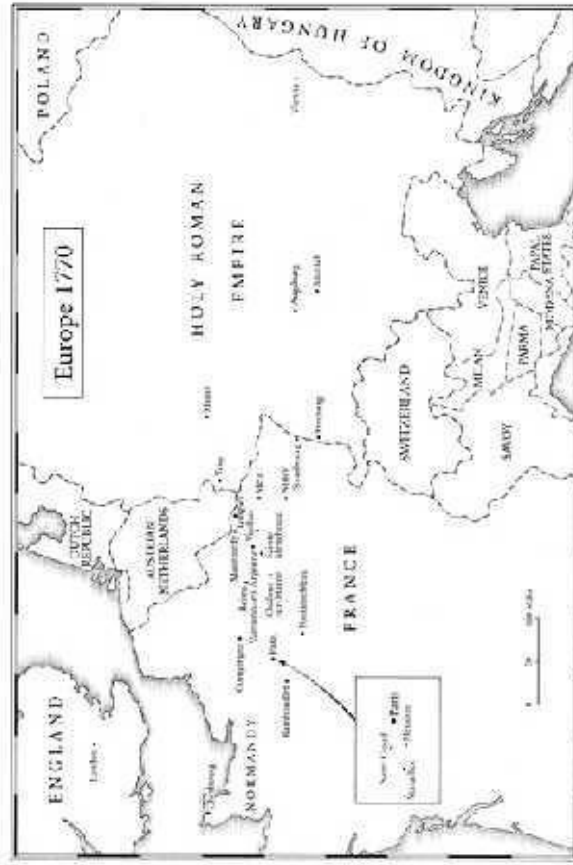
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**FOR HAROLD  
THE FIRST READER**









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## AUTHOR'S NOTE



*Et in Arcadia Ego*: even in Arcadia death is lurking. Madame de Staël, thinking of the “brilliance and gaiety” of Marie Antoinette’s early life in contrast to her later sufferings, was reminded of Poussin’s great picture on the theme of the omnipresence of death: the revelling shepherds in the forest glade brought up short by the sight of a tomb with this menacing inscription. Yet hindsight can make bad history. In writing this biography, I have tried not to allow the somber tomb to make its presence felt too early. The elegiac should have its place as well as the tragic. Flowers and music as well as revolution and counter-revolution. Above all, I have attempted, at least so far as is humanly possible, to tell Marie Antoinette’s dramatic story without anticipating its terrible ending.


My concern, as the subtitle of the book indicates, has been to trace the twofold journey of the Austrian-born French Queen. On the one hand, this was an important political journey from her homeland to act as an ambassadress—or agent—in a predominantly hostile country where she was nicknamed in advance *L’Autrichienne*. On the other hand, there was her journey of personal development from the inadequate fourteen-year-old bride to a very different mature woman, twenty odd years later.

In the course of tracing this journey, I have hoped to unravel the cruel myths and salacious distortions surrounding her name. Principal among them must be the notorious incident which has Marie Antoinette urging the poor, being without bread, to eat cake. This story was first told about the Spanish Princess who married Louis XIV a hundred years before the arrival of Marie Antoinette in France; it continued to be repeated about a series of other Princesses throughout the eighteenth century. As a handy journalistic cliché, it may never die. Yet, not only was the story wrongly ascribed to Marie Antoinette in the first place, but such ignorant behaviour would have been quite out of character. The unfashionably philanthropic Marie Antoinette would have been far more likely to bestow her own cake (or *brioche*) impulsively upon the starving people before her. On the subject of the Queen’s sex life—insatiable lover? voracious lesbian? heroine of a single romantic passion?—I have similarly tried to exert common sense in an area which must remain forever speculative (and indeed it was in her own day).

Biographers have their small private moments of perception, the importance of which was recognized by the Goncourt brothers, admiring biographers of the Queen in 1858: “a time of which one does not have a dress sample and a dinner menu, is a time dead to us, an irrecoverable time

Lafont d'Aussone, author of an early post-Restoration study (1824), found an ear of wheat made out of silver thread on the floor of the Queen's former bedroom at Saint Cloud during a sale and pocketed it. Two hundred years after the death of Marie Antoinette, I found the experience of being asked to do so in white gloves to inspect the tiny swatches in her Wardrobe Book at the Archives Nationales both appropriate and affecting, the pinpricks made by the Queen to indicate her choice of the day's costume being still visible. I had, however, no desire to emulate Lafont d'Aussone's act of pious theft—if only because two gendarmes stood close behind my chair.

The Baronne d'Oberkirch, writing her memoirs just before the deluge, gave an unforgettable vignette of the aristocrats returning from an all-night ball at Versailles in their carriages, with the peasants already doing their rounds in the bright morning sunshine: "What a contrast between the calm and satisfied visages and our exhausted appearance! The rouge had fallen from our cheeks, the powder from our hair . . . not a pretty sight." Such a vision seems to sum up the contrasts of the *ancien régime* in France—including the Baronne's innocent assumption that the peasants were calm and satisfied. Certainly the wealth of female testimonies to the period and to the life of Marie Antoinette gave special immediacy to my researches. The women who survived felt an urgent need to relive the trauma and record the truth, a compulsion often modestly disguised as a little gift to their descendants: "c'est pour vous, mes enfants . . ." wrote Pauline de Tourzel, an eye-witness to some of the horrific incidents of the early Revolution, at the start of her reminiscences. Probably no queen's history has been so well served by her female chroniclers.

 In a book written in English about a French (and Austrian) subject, there is an obvious problem to do with translation. Nor does it have an easy solution. What is tiresomely obscure for one reader may be gratefully obvious to another. On the whole I have preferred to translate rather than not in the interests of clarity. With names and titles I have also placed the need for clarity above consistency, even if some decisions may seem arbitrary in consequence, intelligibility has been the aim. Where eighteenth-century money is concerned, it is notoriously difficult to provide any idea of the modern equivalent so on the whole I have avoided doing so. However, one recent estimate equated a pound sterling in 1790 to £45 in 1996; there were roughly 24 livres to the pound in the reign of Louis XV. As ever, it has been my pleasure and privilege to do my own research, except where individuals are specifically and most gratefully acknowledged. The references are, with equal gratitude, listed in the Notes and Sources.

I wish to thank H.M. the Queen for permission to use and quote from the Royal Archives, and also Lady de Bellaigue, Keeper of the Royal Archives, Windsor. I thank the Duke of Devonshire for permission to quote from the Devonshire Collections and Mr. Peter Day, Keeper of the Collections at Chatsworth; also Dr. Amanda Foreman and Ms. Caroline Chapman who supplied me with references to the 5th Duke's Collection. Ms. Jane Dormer gave permission for me to quote from Lady Elizabeth Foster's (unpublished) Journal; Dr. Robin Eagles let me read his D.Phil. thesis "Francophilia and Francophobia in English Society 1748–1783," Oxford, 1996 (since published). Jessica Beer was invaluable in helping me to set up research in the Hofburg, Vienna, and accompanied me on expeditions into the scenes of Marie Antoinette's childhood; Christina Burton did useful Fersé research in Sweden; Fr. Francis Edwards S.J. directed me towards canonical references; Professor David Jacobson supplied material about the early Judaic history of the Scapegoat; Cynthia Liebow was at times a highly able enabler in Paris; Katie Mitchell pointed me towards Genet's feelings for Marie Antoinette; Mrs. Bernadette Peters, former Archivist, Coutts Bank, researched their archives there for me; Mlle. Cécile Coutin, Vice Présidente de l'Association Marie-Antoinette, supplied information

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The Vicomte de Rohan, Président, Société des Amis de Versailles, was a distinguished guide to the secrets of Versailles. I wish to thank Doktor Lauger, Press Attaché to the President of the Austrian Republic, for access to the room in which Marie Antoinette was born, and Mag. Christina Schüttner, IIASA, Laxenburg, for my visit there. The Austrian Tourist Board was helpful with current information about Mariazell; as were Gendarme Klein of the Varennes-en-Argonne Gendarmerie, Madame Vagnère of the Sainte Ménehould Tourist Office and the Gendarmerie at Sainte Ménehould with information relevant to the flight to Varennes.

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ANTONIA FRASER

*Feast of All Saints 2000*

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*Part One*



MADAME  
ANTOINE

## A SMALL ARCHDUCHESS

*“Her Majesty has been very happily delivered of a small, but completely healthy Archduchess.”*  
cOUNT KHEVENHÜLLER, cOURT cHAMBERLAIN, 1755



On 2 November 1755 the Queen-Empress was in labour all day with her fifteenth child. Since the experience of childbirth was no novelty, and since Maria Teresa, Queen of Hungary by inheritance and Empress of the Holy Roman Empire by marriage, hated to waste time, she also laboured in another way at her papers. For the responsibilities of government were not to be lightly cast aside; in her own words: “My subjects are my first children.” Finally, at about half past eight in the evening in her apartments at the Hofburg Palace in Vienna, Maria Teresa gave birth. It was a girl. Or, as the Court Chamberlain, Count Khevenhüller, described the event in his diary: “Her Majesty has been happily delivered of a small, but completely healthy Archduchess.” As soon as was practical, Maria Teresa returned to work, signing papers from her bed.

The announcement was made by the Emperor Francis Stephen. He left his wife’s bedroom, after the usual Te Deum and Benediction had been said. In the Mirror Room next door the ladies and gentlemen of the court who had the Rights of Entry were waiting. Maria Teresa had firmly ended the practice, so distasteful to the mother in labour (but still in place at the court of Versailles), by which the courtiers were actually present in the delivery room. As it was they had to content themselves with congratulating the happy father. It was not until four days later that those ladies of the court who by etiquette would formerly have been in the bedchamber were allowed to kiss the Empress. Other courtiers, including Khevenhüller, were permitted the privilege on 8 November, and a further set the next day. Perhaps it was the small size of the baby, perhaps it was the therapeutic effect of working on her papers throughout the day, but Maria Teresa had never looked so well after a delivery.

The Empress’s suite of apartments was on the first floor of the so-called Leopoldine wing of the extensive and rambling Hofburg complex.<sup>[\\*01](#)</sup> The Habsburgs had lived in the Hofburg since the late thirteenth century, but this wing had originally been constructed by the Emperor Leopold I in 1660. It was rebuilt following a fire, then greatly renovated by Maria Teresa herself. It lay south-west of the internal courtyard known as In Der Burg. The Swiss Guards, that doughty international force that protected the royalty, gave their name to the adjacent courtyard and gate, the Schweizerhof and the Schweizerteror.

The next stage in the new baby’s life was routine. She was handed over to an official wet-nurse. Great ladies did not nurse their own children. For one thing, breastfeeding was considered to ruin the shape of the bosom, made so visible by eighteenth-century fashions. The philandering Louis XV openly disliked the practice for this reason. The traditional prohibition against husbands sleeping with their wives during this period probably counted for more with Maria Teresa, an enthusiast for the marital double-bed and the conception—if not the nursing—of ever increasing numbers of babies. *A*

the Empress said of herself, she was insatiable on the subject of children.

Marie Antoinette was put into the care of Constance Weber, wife of a magistrate. Constance, according to her son Joseph Weber, who later wrote his memoirs, was famed for her beautiful figure and an even greater beauty of soul. She had been nursing little Joseph for three months when she took over the baby Archduchess, and it was understood in the family that Constance's appointment would improve all their fortunes. As the foster-brother of an archduchess, Joseph Weber benefited all his life; there were pensions for Constance as well as his other brothers and sisters. During Marie Antoinette's childhood, Maria Teresa took her to visit the Weber household; there she showered gifts upon the children and, according to Joseph, admonished Constance: "Good Weber, have a care for your son."

Maria Teresa was thirty-eight years old and since her marriage nearly twenty years earlier, she had produced four Archdukes as well as ten Archduchesses (of whom seven were living in 1755). The extraordinarily high survival rate of the imperial family—by the standards of infant mortality of the time—meant that there was no urgent pressure upon the Queen-Empress to produce a fifth son. In any case it seems that Maria Teresa had expected a daughter. One of her courtiers, Count Dietrichstein, wagered against her that the new baby would be a boy. When the appearance of a girl, said to be as like her mother as two drops of water, meant that he lost the bet, the Count had a small porcelain figure made of himself, on his knees, proffering verses by Metastasio to Maria Teresa. He may have lost his wager but if the new-born *augusta figlia* resembled her mother, then all the world would have gained.

If the birth of an eighth surviving daughter was not in itself a disappointment, was there not perhaps something inauspicious about the date itself, 2 November? This, the Feast of All Souls, was the great Catholic Day of the Dead, when the departed were solemnly commemorated in a series of requiem Masses, in churches and chapels heavily draped in black. What this actually meant during the childhood of Marie Antoinette was that her birthday was generally celebrated on its eve, the Feast of All Saints, a day of white and gold. Besides which, 13 June, the feast of her patron saint St. Antonine, tended to be regarded as Marie Antoinette's personal day of celebration, just as the feast of St. Teresa of Avila on 15 October was the name-day of her mother.

If one looks to influences, the baby born on the sombre Day of the Dead must have been conceived on or around a far more cheerful feast of the church: 2 February, the traditionally candle-lit celebration of the Purification of the Virgin Mary. An episode during the Empress's pregnancy could also be seen as significant. In April, Christoph Willibald Gluck was engaged by Maria Teresa to compose "theatrical and chamber music" in exchange for an official salary; this followed his successes in Italy and England as well as in Vienna. A court ball at the palace of Laxenburg, fifteen miles from Vienna, on 5 May 1755, marked his inauguration in this role. Two tastes that would impress themselves upon Marie Antoinette—a love of the "holiday" palace of Laxenburg and a love of the music of Gluck—could literally be said to have been inculcated in her mother's womb.


In contrast, the fact that a colossal earthquake took place in Lisbon on 2 November, with 30,000 killed, was not at the time seen as relevant. This was an age of poor European communications and news of the disaster did not reach Vienna until some time afterwards. It was true that the King of Portugal and his wife had been engaged to stand as the coming baby's godparents; the unfortunate royal couple had to flee from their capital at about the time Marie Antoinette was born. But, once again, this was not known at the time. In any case, royalties were not expected to be present at the event; according to custom, proxies were appointed in their absence: the baby's eldest brother, Joseph, and her eldest sister, Marianne, aged fourteen and seventeen respectively.

The baptism took place at noon on 3 November (baptisms were always held speedily and in the absence of the mother, who was allowed to recover from her ordeal). The Emperor went with a cortège



to the Church of the Augustine Friars, the traditional church used by the court, and heard Mass including the sermon. After that, at twelve o'clock, as Count Khevenhüller noted in his meticulous diary, which is an important source for our knowledge of events in Maria Teresa's family, the baptism was held in "the new and beautiful Anticamera" and performed by "our Archbishop," since the new Papal Nuncio had not yet made a formal appearance at court. The imperial family sat in a row on a long bench. Two galas were ordered: a great gala for the day of the baptism, and a lesser gala for the day after. On 5 and 6 November there were two more spectacles that were shown to the public for free and on those days there was no charge to the public for entry at the city gates. It was all a very well established ritual.

The baby in whose honour these celebrations were held was given the names Maria Antonia Josepha Joanna. The prefix of Maria had been established for all Habsburg princesses in the days of the baby's great-grandfather, the Emperor Leopold I and his third wife Eleanora of Neuburg; it was intended to signify the special veneration of the Habsburg family for the Virgin Mary. Obviously in a bevy of eight sisters (and a mother) all enjoying the same hallowed prefix, it was not going to be used for everyone all the time. In fact the new baby would be called Antoine in the family.

 The French diminutive of the baptismal name, Antoine, was significant. Viennese society was multilingual, people being able to make themselves easily understood in Italian and Spanish as well as in German and French. But it was French, acknowledged as the language of civilization, that was the universal language of courts throughout Europe; Frederick II of Prussia, Maria Teresa's great rival for example, preferred his beloved French to German. It was French that was used in diplomatic despatches to the Habsburgs. Maria Teresa spoke French, although with a strong German accent (she also spoke the Viennese dialect), but the Emperor Francis Stephen spoke French all his life, not caring to learn German. In this way, both in the family circle and outside it, Maria Antonia was quickly transmogrified into Antoine, the name she also used to sign her letters. To courtiers, the late archduchess was to be known as Madame Antoine.

Charming, sophisticated, lazy and pleasure-loving, an inveterate womanizer who adored his wife and family, Francis Stephen of Lorraine handed on to Marie Antoinette a strong dose of French blood. His mother Elisabeth Charlotte d'Orléans had been a French royal princess and a granddaughter of Louis XIII. Her brother, the Duc d'Orléans, had acted as Regent during the childhood of Louis XV. As for Francis Stephen himself, although he had Habsburg blood on his father's side and was adopted into the Viennese court in 1723 at the age of fourteen, it was important to him that he was by birth a Lorrainer. From 1729, when his father died, he was hereditary Duke of Lorraine, a title that stretched back to the time of Charlemagne. This notional Lorrainer inheritance would also feature in the consciousness of Marie Antoinette, even though Francis Stephen was obliged to surrender the actual duchy in 1735. It was part of a complicated European deal whereby Louis XV's father-in-law, who had been dispossessed as King of Poland, received the Duchy of Lorraine for the duration of his lifetime; it then became part of the kingdom of France. In return Francis Stephen was awarded the Duchy of Tuscany.

The renunciation of his family heritage in order to soothe France was presented to Francis Stephen as part of a package that would enable him to marry Maria Teresa. On her side, it was a passionate love match. The British ambassador to Vienna reported that the young Archduchess "sighs and pines all night for her Duke of Lorraine. If she sleeps, it is only to dream of him. If she wakes, it is but talk of him to the lady-in-waiting." Wilfully, in a way that would be in striking contradiction to the precepts she preached as a mother, Maria Teresa set her heart against a far grander suitor, the heir to

the Spanish throne. The medal struck for the wedding bore the inscription (in Latin): “Having length the fruit of our desires.”

The desires in question, however, did not include the bridegroom’s continued enjoyment of his hereditary possessions. As his future father-in-law Charles VI crudely put it: “No renunciation, no Archduchess.” Maria Teresa of course believed in total wifely submission, at least in theory, another doctrine that she would expound assiduously to her daughters. Her solution was to tolerate and even encourage her husband’s Lorrainer relations at court, as well as a multitude of Lorrainer hangers-on.

The marriage of Maria Teresa’s sister Marianna to Francis Stephen’s younger brother Charles of Lorraine strengthened these ties; Marianna’s early death left Maria Teresa with a sentimental devotion to her widower. Then there was Francis Stephen’s attachment to his unmarried sister Princess Charlotte, Abbess of Remiremont, who was a frequent visitor. She shared her brother’s taste for shooting parties, in which she personally participated. In the year of Marie Antoinette’s birth, a party of twenty-three, three of them ladies, killed nearly 50,000 head of game and wild deer. Princess Charlotte fired over 9000 shots, nearly as many as the Emperor. This strong-minded woman was so devoted to her native Lorraine that she once said she was prepared to travel there barefoot.

Thus Marie Antoinette was brought up to think of herself as “de Lorraine” as well as “d’Autriche de Hongrie.” In the meantime Lorraine had become a foreign principality attached to France, so that the princes of Lorraine who made their lives in France had the status of “foreign princes” only and were not accorded the respect due to foreign royalties nor that due to French dukes. This ambiguous status was one from which the foreign princes ever sought to escape, while those of superior birth in French courtly terms sought to hold them down. A seemingly small point of French etiquette—small at least to outsiders—was to be of considerable significance in the future of Francis Stephen’s daughter.

This was an age of multiple intermarriage where royal houses were concerned. Insofar as one can simplify it purely in terms of her four grandparents, Marie Antoinette had the blood of the Bourbons—the Orléans branch—and of Lorraine on her father’s side. More remotely, her Orléans great-grandmother, a Palatine princess known as Liselotte, brought her the blood of Mary Queen of Scots via Elizabeth of Bohemia—but this was to go back 200 years. On the maternal side, Marie Antoinette inherited German blood from her grandmother Elizabeth Christina of Brunswick-Wolfbüttel, once described as “the most beautiful queen on earth.” Her appearance at the age of fourteen enchanted her husband Charles VI: “Now that I have seen her, everything that has been said about her is but a shadow devoured by the light of the sun.” However, if exceptional beauty was to be found in the pool of genes that Marie Antoinette might inherit, it was also true that the lovely Empress became immensely large and dropsical in later years.


Lastly, Marie Antoinette inherited the Habsburg blood, both Austrian and Spanish, of her grandfather the Emperor Charles VI. These two branches of the Habsburg family, which had in theory divided in the sixteenth century, were in fact the result of constant intermarriage, like great rivers whose tributaries flowed into each other so frequently that their waters were inextricably mingled. The failure of the direct Spanish Habsburg line in 1700 led to the accession of a French Bourbon prince, the grandson of Louis XIV, to the Spanish throne (via his Spanish Habsburg grandmother) despite the efforts of the then Archduke Charles who was the rival pretender.

In 1711, however, the death of the Emperor Joseph I, leaving only two daughters, meant that Charles as his younger brother inherited the Austrian dominions. He was elected as Holy Roman Emperor shortly afterwards. Although unable to claim the imperial throne, Joseph’s daughters married respectively the Electors of Bavaria and Saxony to provide a plethora of descendants, who would spin webs of alliance and intrigue throughout Europe in the eighteenth century. In the meantime, by one of those historical ironies, Charles VI himself was unable to produce a male heir. He too was left with two daughters, of whom the elder, Maria Teresa, was now to be transformed into his heiress.

Charles VI's attempts to secure the inheritance of Maria Teresa by, in effect, bribing other European powers to respect the arrangement was known as the Pragmatic Sanction. For all the efforts, his death in 1740 merely unleashed a new dynastic struggle, the eight-year War of the Austrian Succession. Silesia was immediately conquered by the Prussian King: this was the most prosperous region under the Habsburg dominion and the twenty-three-year-old Maria Teresa felt the loss keenly. It seemed that she was doomed to preside over the dismemberment of the once great Habsburg Empire. In her own words: "It would not be easy to find in history an example of a crowned head acceding to government in more unfavourable circumstances than I did myself."

It was a measure of the greatness of Maria Teresa that fifteen years later, at the time of Marie Antoinette's birth, she was in fact wreathed in triumph, admired throughout Europe as "the glory of her sex and the model of kings." For all her losses in the war—at the Peace of Aix-la-Chapelle in 1748 Maria Teresa still could not recover Silesia—she was nevertheless confirmed in her hereditary possessions. Apart from Upper and Lower Austria, these included Bohemia and Moravia (now the Czech Republic), Hungary, much of what is now Rumania, a portion of former Yugoslavia, as well as the Austrian Netherlands (approximately Belgium\*02) and the Duchies of Milan and Tuscany in Italy. Meanwhile Francis Stephen had been elected Emperor.

In 1755 the country was at peace, with memories of the War of Succession receding; the army was contented and a series of domestic reforms had taken place, thanks to Maria Teresa's chancellor Haugwitz. As a result the Empress was not only admired abroad but enjoyed popularity at home. For the twentieth anniversary of her wedding to Francis Stephen in February 1756, Maria Teresa gave a surprise children's party in which all her children, even "the little Madame Antoine," appeared in masks and costumes. That summed up the Empress's domestic bliss. Of all the children of Maria Teresa, Marie Antoinette was the one who was born at the zenith of her mother's glory.

 Six months after the birth of Marie Antoinette, a radical change in the national alliances of Europe put an end to this surface tranquillity. By the Treaty of Versailles, signed on 1 May 1756, Austria joined with her traditional enemy France in a defensive pact against Prussia. If either country was attacked, the other would come to its aid with an army specified to be 24,000 strong. No single event in Marie Antoinette's childhood was to have a more profound influence on the course of her life than this alliance, forged while she was still in her cradle.

It is not difficult to explain Austria's hostility to Prussia: Maria Teresa had neither forgotten nor forgiven the Rape of Silesia which occurred at her accession, and she regularly referred to Frederick as "the evil animal" and "the monster." (He responded in kind by having a sermon preached pointed out on the text of St. Paul: "Let the woman learn in silence.") France's friendship with Prussia, on the other hand, had long been seen as the cornerstone of the latter's foreign policy; but it had been eroded in a complex series of manoeuvres in which Prussia turned towards England. Not only had hostility between France and England—rival colonial powers—already broken out in the Americas in 1754, but France also viewed England as an enemy in Europe. Since Austria, once England's friend, felt similarly betrayed by the latter's involvement with Prussia, the way was open for a diplomatic *volt face*.

Once the will, or rather the need, was there, personalities played their part. The French King Louis XV favoured the alliance, although his only son and heir, the Dauphin Louis Ferdinand, his daughter-in-law Maria Josepha (a Saxon princess), and his formidable array of grown-up daughters still in court, were all resolutely anti-Austrian. But the appointment of a pro-Austrian Foreign Minister, the

Duc de Choiseul, meant that, for the time being at least, these family prejudices were unimportant. Meanwhile Maria Teresa's own trusted servant Prince Kaunitz, convincing her that French support would enable her to reconquer Silesia, was sent as ambassador to Versailles in 1750. Maria Teresa, that pillar of conjugal virtue, was even accused (falsely) of despatching messages to the Marquise de Pompadour, Louis XV's all-powerful mistress; there was an ugly rumour that the Empress had actually addressed the mistress as "cousin." Afterwards Maria Teresa would indignantly deny this to the Electress Maria Antonia of Bavaria, one of Joseph I's dispossessed daughters: "That channel would not have suited me." Nevertheless the fact was that there was opportunism on both sides, and Maria Teresa was certainly not without her share of it.

The imperial Austrian will was firm, as was the royal French will. <sup>\*03</sup> As Voltaire wittily expressed it: some people said that the union of France and Austria was an unnatural monstrosity, but since it was necessary, it turned out to be quite natural. Nevertheless the heart and mind of neither country were won over. As we shall see, Austria and Maria Teresa continued to admire France as the fountain of style, just as they continued to employ the French language. At the same time the French were regularly dismissed as frivolous, lightweight, incapable of constancy and so forth, compared with the "solidity and frankness" of the Germans (the word the Empress and her relations always used to describe themselves). It was an unfavourable stereotype, which could not fail to impress itself upon any child—say, a small archduchess—brought up at the Austrian court.

The French for their part, conscious of their civilizing role, were not backward in their derision of customs other than their own. An alliance could not so easily sweep away the prejudices against Austria that had so long held sway, especially the suspicion that Austria might intend to manipulate and control France in its own best interests. This was a point of view that would impress itself upon another young person, for example, a young French prince, Louis Auguste, son of the Dauphin, brought up at the French court.

The question of an alliance between an archduchess and a prince was not an academic one. Europe was now dividing into two powerful groups, whose rivalries in both the Old World and the New World would shortly lead to a seven-year-long war. Prussia, England and Portugal faced an alliance of Austria, France, Sweden and Saxony, to which Russia would soon be added; Spain, France's fellow Bourbon monarchy, would also become involved on the French side. These various allies would shortly seek to express their future cooperation in the customary manner of the time: royal intermarriage.

As it happened, the 1740s and 1750s had witnessed the birth of a multitude of young royals, both male and female, within the reigning families of these countries. Austria no longer lacked male heirs as it had under two successive emperors, Joseph I and Charles VI. The days when the direct line of the French monarchy was represented by the frail person of a single child, the great-grandson of Louis XIV (the future Louis XV), were over. Europe was positively crowded with small royal pawns, ready as it seemed, to be employed in the great game of diplomatic alliance.

In the separate but related Spanish branch of the Bourbon family, there was a number of princes and princesses available; for example Isabella, Maria Louisa and Don Ferdinand of Parma, the grandchildren of Louis XV by his favourite daughter known as "Madame Infante." There were the children of the King of Spain: his heir the Prince of Asturias, another Maria Louisa and his young son, Ferdinand, who assumed the throne of Naples. Then there were the princes and princesses of Savoy. This was a royal house with many historic links to France—Louis XV's mother had been a Savoyard princess—more especially because Savoy's geographical position in what is now northern Italy made it an excellent buffer against Austria. Lastly, of the major players, there were the princes and princesses at Versailles—the Children of France as they were proud to be termed. These were the

French grandchildren of Louis XV, the family of his only son.

All in all, fate or nature had provided abundant material for the older generation to weave the dynastic plots, be they Louis XV, Maria Teresa, Charles III of Spain or the reigning King of Sardinia, Charles Emmanuel III, grandfather of the Savoyard family. The so-called Family Pact of 1761, by which Maria Teresa's heir, the Archduke Joseph, married Isabella of Parma, and Isabella's youngest sister married her first cousin, heir to the throne of Spain, was an outward manifestation of this. French Bourbons, Spanish Bourbons and Habsburgs were all joining together in opposition to Prussia and England.

What then of the many Habsburg archduchesses who had been born in the space of roughly twenty years and who were now joined by another sister? What of Marie Christine? Elizabeth? Amalia? Josepha? Joanna? Charlotte? (The eldest, Marianne, being disabled, was not considered a candidate for marriage.) Without any specific names being mentioned—one princess being much like another when it came to dynastic alliances—it was understood that three of the archduchesses might be destined for, in no particular order, Don Ferdinand of Parma, the young King Ferdinand of Naples—and maybe a French prince.

The new baby, contentedly nursed by Constance Weber, was a sweet little thing. But that was hardly the point when it came to the matter of forging an alliance. From the first Madame Antoine had had value, not as an individual, but as a piece on her mother's chessboard.

## BORN TO OBEY

*“They are born to obey and must learn to do so in good time.”*

EMPERESS MARIA TERESA ON HER DAUGHTERS, 1756



Like many people exiled from the scenes of their childhood, Marie Antoinette would look back on her early years as idyllic. It is easy to see how this might be so. The family portraits of which Maria Teresa was so fond do indeed portray a domestic paradise for which anyone might yearn in later life.

Here was the Empress, supremely confident in herself and her position, still handsome in her forties. <sup>\*04</sup> It is true that, like her husband, she had begun to put on weight and no longer reminded older courtiers of the quicksilver young woman of the 1740s who danced and played cards all night yet could ride and go sledging with equal energy in the day. In her case, given that her mother the Empress Elizabeth Christina suffered from dropsy, her weight gain may have been partly due to an unavoidable heredity, partly due to multiple child-bearing. However, the celebrated physician and educationalist Gerhard Van Swieten, Maria Teresa's guru, regularly lectured the imperial couple on the need to take care and eat less, so there may have been an element of personal responsibility. Yet the Empress's ample appearance only served to emphasize the awesome dignity combined with maternal tenderness that was the image she radiated. Who would not be proud to be the child of such a mother?

As for Francis Stephen, in portraits he cut an equally imposing figure. In private life, however—which he infinitely preferred—he was cheerful, teasing, indulgent. In short, he was an ideal father from the point of view of a small child who would not pick up the strains imposed by his frequent infidelities. To these, Maria Teresa, with a characteristic mixture of fieriness and puritanism, was never reconciled. Wifely tolerance of husbandly frailty was yet another eighteenth-century female virtue, like submissiveness and accepting a worldly marriage, which Maria Teresa preached to others but did not apply to herself.

A preference for informality was Francis Stephen's legacy to the Austrian Habsburgs; it was undoubtedly one that he handed on to his youngest daughter along with the Lorrainer blood to which she was generally ascribed. Louis Dutens, a traveller who knew most of the European courts, praised the “good-natured” Emperor for his innovations. “The family of Lorraine,” he wrote, “has contributed not a little to banish from the Court of Vienna the severe etiquette which prevailed there.”

The message was not, however, of the need to abolish all formality. Although the strict customs, including the old-fashioned black court dress inherited from Spain, were gradually dropped, the Austrian court remained a place of much stately splendour when the occasion demanded it. There were still, for example, 1500 Court Chamberlains in the time of Maria Teresa whose existence was justified

by various ritual duties whose origins lay far in the past. What was important was the distinction encouraged by Francis Stephen and supported by Maria Teresa, between state ceremonial and private life. The one was to be carried out as a matter of duty, and as magnificently as possible. The other was to be enjoyed.

Joseph Weber, Madame Antoine's foster-brother, revealed that the Archdukes and Archduchesses were encouraged to make friends with "ordinary" children in their everyday lives. In the same way, people of merit were admitted freely to the court, without necessity of birth or title. Except, that is, on the great days of formal celebration; then, as in the old days, ceremonial pomp continued to be observed, including the restrictions of the Rights of Entry. The young Madame Antoine, born when this relaxation had already taken place, grew up taking this distinction at court or in Vienna for granted.

A family group on St. Nicholas' Day 1762, painted by the Archduchess Marie Christine, perfectly depicts the bourgeois cosiness of the imperial couple's home life, something that was unthinkable at the parallel court of Versailles. This was the feast at which young children traditionally receive presents. The Emperor, at his breakfast, wears a robe and slippers, with a turban-style cap on his head instead of a wig. The Empress's dress is extremely plain and Marie Christine, who put herself in the picture, looks more like a maid than an archduchess. The Archduke Ferdinand is apparently upset with his gift, while little Max, on the floor with his toys, is delighted. A smiling Madame Antoine holds a doll aloft to indicate that she has just been given it; at the age of seven she looks much like a doll herself.

This seemingly perfect childhood had for its background three principal castles, as well as numerous other lesser ones, and the superb houses of the Austrian grandees. The stately and sprawling Hofburg, where Antoine was born, was used in the winter months; it was central to the capital where these same grandees also had their splendid town houses. In spite of its size, the opportunities for freedom for the children could hardly be extensive there. Nevertheless, Marie Antoinette would later remember it with pleasure. She became sentimental at the thought of proposed changes, although she was happy to think of Maria Teresa moving into her old rooms. Only about five miles away, however, lay the magical palace of Schönbrunn.

This enormous imperial abode could compete in size and splendour with most of the palaces of Europe. At the same time it enjoyed a pastoral setting. Its short distance from central Vienna—and a well-maintained road—meant it could be used for state occasions in the spring and summer; the family generally took up residence there from Easter onwards. In contrast, the French court at Versailles had no real base in Paris itself by the middle of the eighteenth century. The Austrian court was thus more like that of England as it developed under George III, able to oscillate between its London residence (now Buckingham Palace), Windsor Castle, and Hampton Court.

Everyone loved Schönbrunn with its beautiful gardens, leading to parkland and woods beyond as far as the eye could see. By the time of Madame Antoine's birth Maria Teresa had made substantial improvements to the residence of her forefathers, not only necessary repairs—it had been destroyed by the Turks in 1683—but various enhancements. She was seized by the contemporary passion for chinoiserie and Eastern decor, including lacquer, mirrors, vellum miniatures and tapestries, declaring "all the diamonds in the world" were as nothing compared to "what comes from the Indies."

Significant from the point of view of Habsburg family life was the Empress's decision to construct two new wings to meet the demands of her growing family. The Archdukes inhabited the right wing and the Archduchesses the left. Although each child or young person had his or her own suite of five rooms—including an audience room as well as a salon and a bedroom, sisters close in age and in the same wing were in fact thrown further together by this arrangement, which separated them from boys.



their brothers and their parents. [\\*05](#)

Francis Stephen loved plants and gardens; the Dutch Botanical Garden at Schönbrunn was created in 1753 and an orangery was built two years later, housing a rich collection of tropical plants. The gardens themselves were planned and replanned with zest, an enthusiasm that Madame Antoinette herself would take for granted as one of the natural interests of a civilized royal person. A menagerie situated so that Francis Stephen could enjoy contemplating it over his breakfast, had been established in 1751; it included a camel sent by a sultan, a rhinoceros that had arrived by boat down the Danube, a puma, the red squirrels favoured by Marie Christine and the parrots that were the favourites of Elizabeth. There was a theatre for those constant musical and dramatic celebrations.

Another theatre was built at Laxenburg in 1753. Like everything to do with Laxenburg, it was on a much smaller scale. That was in fact the point of the Empress's predilection for this charming rococo

palace. [\\*06](#) It lay about ten miles south of Vienna in the direction of Hungary, at the edge of a small pretty town, and was bordered by thick woods good for hunting. Here there was simply no room for the vast crowds of courtiers thought essential to the imperial dignity at Schönbrunn and the Hofburg; even great officials had to make do with houses in the town. Understandably, the imperial family greatly preferred performances in the Laxenburg theatre, because the scale made it much easier for them to hear.

This was a period when many royalties were embellishing their country retreats by requiring specific uniforms (the modern equivalent of this dress code would be that oxymoron casual chic). For example, the colours demanded by the Pompadour at Bellevue were purple, gold and white. Laxenburg's dress code was a red cloth frockcoat (*le frac*), which was considered informal at the time, with a green waistcoat, and red dresses for the ladies. Both had to be ornamented with gold, which made their casual chic expensive for the courtiers to produce. Nevertheless the message was clear: Laxenburg is different; even the clothes are different.

The Empress herself, with all her cares of state, was known to be generally cheerful while at Laxenburg; her father Charles VI had also loved it for the beauty of its surroundings. These were effect family holidays. It was no wonder that of all the scenes of Antoine's childhood, Laxenburg was the one that exercised the greatest nostalgic pull. Not only was there that cheerful mother but the Archdukes and Archduchesses could also enjoy a measure of personal freedom.

Early in the next century, the Empress Marie Louise, Marie Antoinette's great-niece, would be struck by the similarity between Laxenburg and the Petit Trianon at Versailles; no doubt the resemblance was one effect of Marie Antoinette's affection for this first exquisite palace of retreat. In fact Laxenburg was an adapted hunting lodge, rebuilt by Leopold I, like so much else, after the end of the Turkish depredations. It was during Antoine's own childhood that the court architect Nikolaus Pacassi designed the so-called Blue Court (a corruption of the original owner's name) as a further enlargement; the need, as at Schönbrunn, was to accommodate the royal family.

A belvedere now crowned the roof of the north wing and there was a sequence of playrooms, like elevated garden rooms, with wide views across the park. [\\*07](#) They were painted with a series of *trompe l'oeils*, birds on the ceiling, and romantic pastoral scenes on the walls, glimpsed through painted green latticework up which climbed painted sweet peas. The feeling of freshness, of greenery and light, was intended to be vivid for the children, even when the weather was bad. In eighteenth-century royal terms—the only ones Marie Antoinette was in a position to understand—Laxenburg presented an image of rustic bliss, a paradise that could perhaps one day be recreated.



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