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**PRINCESS ON THE MARIGNS: TOWARD A NEW PORTRAIT OF
MADAME ÉLISABETH DE FRANCE**

by

MARIA SPENCER WENDELN

DISSERTATION

Submitted to the Graduate School

of Wayne State University,

Detroit, Michigan,

in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

2015

MAJOR: HISTORY

Approved by:

Advisor

Date

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DEDICATION

For my sisters in French heritage and history: Alice du Puy Spencer, my grandmother; Josephine du Puy, her sister and my godmother; Mary Paulette Van Vactor Heil, my beloved friend; and Mary Joan Gills Spencer, my mother and fellow researcher.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My acknowledgements begin with a special note of gratitude to Dr. Christopher Johnson. I could have not had a better adviser for my master's thesis and this work in part derives from his guidance on my analysis of Madame Élisabeth's 1787 portrait by Labille-Guiard. Still, the thing that he did which I am most thankful for is bringing Janine Lanza into my life. On numerous occasions I've pondered if Chris thought to himself as Janine went through the interview process, "She's *the* advisor for Maria."

I have been truly blessed to have Dr. Janine Lanza as my dissertation adviser. The value of her guidance is immeasurable, but I can tell you the extent of her supportiveness. Seldom does a graduate student have an adviser who picks you up from the airport, shows you the ropes at both the *Archives Nationales* and the *Bibliothèque Nationale*, and even picks you up at the curb of the Newberry Library just so you'll have more time to do research. There is no way this work could have been achieved without her and I am eternally grateful for all her help.

I would also like to thank the members of my committee: Anne Duggan; Karen Marrero; and Aaron Retish. I have learned so much from our numerous conversations and their feedback has so helped to reassure me over the years. I would also like to extend my thanks to both Dr. Jose Cuello and Dr. Joseph Turrini, my intrepid explorers in Latin American History and Archival & Public History. Also, I would be remiss if I did not take a moment to thank both Dr. Marc Kruman and Ms. Gayle McCreedy. When I was considering going to graduate school twenty-years ago, I met with Dr. Kruman and came away with the realization that pursuing an advanced degree was possible. Meanwhile, it has been Ms. McCreedy's knowledge and patience which always helped calm my fears and showed me the path forward. The laughs we've shared have brightened many an academic day. Moreover, this project could not have been

accomplished without generous grants from the WSU History department for travel to the archives in France and the 2013 exhibition at Montreuil, Madame Élisabeth's estate.

Over the years I have made so many friends in graduate school and while I cannot mention them all, I want to thank the following for their constant encouragement and support: Dr. Amy French; Dr. Barry Johnson; Dr. Louis Jones; Elizabeth Chamberlain; Tim Moran; Elizabeth Ryan; and Errin Stegich. Many are the laughs, glasses of wine, and even trips to the beach we've shared; and I want Dr. French to know she always puts a huge smile on my face when I hear her say on the other end of the line, "Hey, Girlie Girl!" Also, no project is achievable without the foundational support of one's friends outside academia. It is in that sentiment I also want to thank Kelly Bixby, Diane Tsaprazis, and Thomas C. Coons, the former two being there for me from the beginning of my academic journey; and the latter for being my oldest friend and for always understanding my warped sense of historical humor.

Lastly, I am especially appreciative to the members of my family for all their love and support, from Dr. Hugh Spencer's eternal love; to Dr. Tara Singer's sisterly academic guidance; to Britt Singer's listening to me explain Marie-Antoinette's *Hameau* as we wandered through it; and especially to my mother, Jo Spencer, for willingly to trekking with me out to Versailles on multiple occasions. Moreover, none of this could have been achieved without the unceasing love and support of my husband, Tom, and our beautiful daughters, Natalie and Carolyn. "Muchas, muchas gracias" and "Je t'aime."

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PROLOGUE

“It is unjust but all-powerful gods who demand the slaughter of a young innocent princess.”

-- from “Tragedy,” The Encyclopedia of Diderot & d’Alembert¹

The scene before Marie-Thérèse was an unexpected but familiar one. She and her only companion, her aunt Élisabeth, had just prepared for bed when they heard the bolts of the outer door being moved, followed by a harsh pounding on the inner door. Quickly dressing themselves, Élisabeth opened it to find a small contingent of armed men. “*Citoyenne,*” they brusquely said to her, “you will please come down” [Fig. P.1]. When Élisabeth asked about her niece, the men replied that Marie-Thérèse would be attended to later. Élisabeth moved to kiss her brother’s beloved first-born and reassured the frightened child that she would return soon. “No, *citoyenne,* you will not return,” the men stated. They proceeded to hurl insults and coarse words at the noble woman. Marie-Thérèse wrote of the scene, “She bore it all with patience, took her cap; kissed me again, and told me to have courage and firmness, to hope always in God, to practise (sic) the good principles of religion given me by my parents, and not to fail in the last instructions given to me by my father and by my mother.”²

¹ Jaucourt, Louis, chevalier de. “Tragedy.” *The Encyclopedia of Diderot & d’Alembert Collaborative Translation Project*. Translated by Desmond Hosford. Ann Arbor: MPublishing, University of Michigan Library, 2002. Web. Sept. 21, 2012. <<http://hdl.handle.net/2027/spo.did2222.0000.013>>. Trans. of “Tragédie,” *Encyclopédie ou Dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers*, vol. 16. Paris, 1765.

² From “Narrative of Madame Royale” by the Duchesse d’Angoulême, in Élisabeth de France, *The Life and Letters of Madame Élisabeth de France, Sister of Louis XVI*, trans. and ed. by Katharine Prescott Wormeley (Boston: Hardy, Pratt & co.; 1899; 1902), 281-282.



Fig. P.1. Carlo Lasinio, engraver; Domenico Pellegrini, designer. *Madame Anne Élisabeth soeur du Roy Louis XVI condamnée au supplice le 10 mai 1794 : Les Commissaires en exercice viennent le notifier et la somment de sortir sur le champ du Temple.* 1795. Engraving; London.³

Citoyenne Élisabeth Capet went to the scaffold the following morning. The day was May 10, 1794, just days after the young woman's thirtieth birthday. One account of her execution claimed that the twenty-four other persons sent to guillotine that fateful day individually paid her all honors due to a woman of her station. She stoically repeated the *de profundis* prayer as they went to their deaths. Another account claimed that the scent of roses wafted across the *Place de Grève* just as her head fell.

³ *Madame Anne Élisabeth soeur du Roy Louis XVI condamnée au supplice le 10 mai 1794 : Les Commissaires en exercice viennent le notifier et la somment de sortir sur le champ du Temple*, Gallica, accessed April 28, 2015. <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b53009848k/f1.highres>.

Later that day Committee of Public Safety member Bertrand Barère wandered with Robespierre through the bookseller Maret's shop near the *Palais Royale*. A small crowd gathered outside and began to cry out against Robespierre. They demanded, "What were Madame Élisabeth's crimes? Why did you send to the scaffold that innocent and virtuous person?" Turning to Barère and Maret, Robespierre lamented: "You see, it's always me. ... I am far from being the author of Madame Élisabeth's death. I wanted to save her. It was the rascal Collot d'Herbois who grappled with me for over it."⁴

⁴ C. F. Beaulieu, *Essais historiques sur les causes et les effets de la Révolution de France, avec des notes sur quelques évènements et quelques institutions* (Paris: Maradun, 1803), Vol. 6: 10-11. See also R. Scurr, *Fatal Purity: Robespierre and the French Revolution* (New York: Metropolitan Books; 2006), 323; and J.M. Thompson, *Robespierre* (New York: Appleton-Century; 1936), Vol. 2: 218.

CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

Tried by the National Convention and found guilty of treason, Louis XVI went to the scaffold on January 21, 1793 [Fig. 1.1]. Amongst the former King of France and Navarre's last requests was that he receive religious counsel on the way to his death; the revolutionaries permitted his sister's former confessor, the Abbé Edgeworth de Firmont, to attend to him.¹ Nine months later Louis's widow, Marie-Antoinette, appeared before the Revolutionary Tribunal and



Fig. 1.1. Anon. *Éxecution de Louis Capet XVI.me du nom, le 21 janvier 1793.* 1793. Engraving.²

¹ John Hardman, *Louis XVI* (London: Arnold; 2000): 177. It should be noted that the Abbé Edgeworth de Firmont was from Ireland and as such he was not required to swear the oath of loyalty to the nation of France over loyalty to the Roman Catholic Church as set forth in the Civil Constitution of the Clergy.

² *Éxecution de Louis Capet XVI.me du nom, le 21 janvier 1793*, Gallica, accessed December 10, 2012. <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b6949650q/f1.highres>.



Fig. 1.2. Jacques-Louis David. *Portrait de Marie Antoinette reine de France conduit au supplice*. 1793. Drawing.³

was also found guilty of conspiring against the French people, the *Moniteur Universel* reproducing the trial's transcript in its October 14 and 16, 1793 editions.⁴ Renowned artist Jacques-Louis David immortalized the queen's Habsburg chin and haughty profile in a quickly drawn thumbnail sketch as she was transported alone from the Conciergerie to the Place de Grève in a hackney cart, not given the dignity of a coach like her husband [Fig. 1.2]. The following May, as the Revolution's political and physical purging of its enemies intensified, Louis XVI's sister found herself unexpectedly removed from the Temple in the middle of the night and interrogated by the Tribunal's notorious prosecutor, Antoine-Quentin Fouquier-Tinville. In the following hours Madame Élisabeth appeared before the Revolutionary Tribunal

³ *Portrait de Marie Antoinette reine de France conduit au supplice*, Gallica, accessed Dec. 10, 2012. <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b84119831/f1.highres>.

⁴ *Gazette nationale*, 14 October 1793; no. 25, 16 October 1793.

alongside twenty-four other defendants, the court ultimately finding them all guilty. It issued the following decree:

Plots and conspiracies have existed, formed by Capet,⁵ his wife, his family, his agents and his accomplices, in consequence of which external war on the part of a coalition of tyrants has been provoked, also civil war in the interior has been raised, succour (sp) in men and money have been furnished to the enemy, troops have been assembled, plans of campaign have been made, and leaders appointed to murder the people, annihilate liberty, and restore despotism.⁶

Moreover, the announcement of the former princess's death in the *Moniteur Universel* amounted to the simple line:

Anne-Élisabeth Capet, âgé de 30 ans, née à Versailles, soeur de dernier tyran; ...⁷

The very public executions of Louis XVI, Marie-Antoinette, and Madame Élisabeth were political acts, as were all the executions which took place during the tumult of the French Revolution. The lives and unfortunate ends of the last king and queen of the Old Regime have spawned numerous volumes, the fascination with Marie-Antoinette generating copious textual and visual material from her arrival at Versailles in the spring of 1770 up to the present day.. Meanwhile, the life and death of Madame Élisabeth has garnered some attention, but it is essentially biographical in nature. Furthermore, much of it tends toward the melodramatic and

⁵ After the fall of the monarchy on August 10, 1792, the National Convention gave this surname to the then defunct monarch, deriving the name from the Capetian rulers of France (when to when). It was thereby extended to Louis XVI's wife, children, and sister.

⁶ Reproduced and trans. in *The Life and Letters of Madame Élisabeth de France, Sister of Louis XVI* (1899), 102. The decree also appears in the *Gazette Nationale, ou Le Moniteur Universel*, No. 233, 12 mai 1794. It reads: "Convaincus d'être complices de complots et conspirations formés par Capet, sa femme, sa famille, ses agens et complices, par suite desquels des provocations à la guerre extérieure de la part des tyrans coalisés, à la guerre civile dans l'intérieur, ont été formés; des secours en hommes et en argent fournis aux ennemis, des intelligences criminelles entretenues avec eux, des troupes rassemblées, des chefs nommés, des dispositions préparées pour affaiblir le Peuple, auéantir la liberté, et rétablir le despotisme, ont été condamnés à la peine de mort."

⁷ *Gazette Nationale, ou Le Moniteur Universel*, No. 233, 12 mai 1794.

the overtly sympathetic. The origins of such treatment are found in the era of the Revolution itself; several engravings, the 1795 biography dedicated to her, and at least one theatrical treatment transformed the princess into a virgin martyr. With the Restoration of the Bourbon monarchy in 1815, Louis's and Marie-Antoinette's only surviving, Marie-Thérèse, promulgated this image further in her personal narrative of life in the Temple after her mother's removal, recalling the manner in which the prison's municipal guards harassed Madame Élisabeth for her continued and visible adherence to the Catholic faith.⁸

Known in her lifetime for her religious piety, it is no wonder that Madame Élisabeth's life and death were open to commemoration, dramatization, and mythologization. Within months of her execution there appeared the *Éloge funèbre d'Élisabeth-Phillippine-Marie-Hélène, soeur de Louis XVI, ci-devant roi des Français* (Lyon: 1795) by the Comte Antoine-François-Claude Ferrand. Numerous nineteenth-century volumes carried forward its depiction of her as a martyr, the motif working its way eventually into twentieth-century biographies of the ill-fated princess. A more recent evocation of it appears in the title of the biography produced by Martial Debriffée, *Madame Élisabeth, La Princesse Martyre* (Paris: 1997); and historian Jean de Viguerie alludes to it in the title of his 2010 work, *Le Sacrifice du Soir, Vie et Mort de Madame Élisabeth, soeur de Louis XVI* (Paris).

Biographies of Madame Élisabeth offer little to nothing of significance to the historiographical discourse on the French Revolution. Moreover, they overlook her political agency. Essentially, they retell the story of her life from her birth at the palace of Versailles on May 3, 1764, to her death on May 10, 1794, with several volumes seeking to define why the revolutionaries killed her. As this volume demonstrates, the answer to that question is in the

⁸ *Life and Letters of Madame Élisabeth de France, Sister of Louis XVI*, 279.

decree issued by the Revolutionary Tribunal: like her brother, her sister-in-law, and thousands of others, Madame Élisabeth was guilty of treason.

While what follows certainly has the air of a biography, it is instead is an analysis of Madame Élisabeth's political agency and her place within the political culture of the era. There is a wealth of archival material, from the princess' personal letters, to her many portraits, and even the multiple artifacts associated with her private estate, including the chateaux given to her by Louis XVI in 1783. There are as well the numerous revolutionary era prints, engravings, and textual materials which incorporated Madame Élisabeth into the ongoing political discourse, including those items which deliberately defamed her. This work chooses not to ignore this evidence as some of her biographers have done in their perpetuation of the royal virgin martyr image. It instead regards her as a "site," a historical location within a political and cultural crisis. To do so is, as gender historian Joan W. Scott notes, is to figure Madame Élisabeth's place within the historical discourse without losing sight of her humanity. Scott writes, "To figure a person—in this case, a woman—as a place or location is not to deny her humanity; it is rather to recognize the many factors that constitute her agency, the complex and multiple ways to which she is constructed as a historical actor."⁹ Madame Élisabeth, like Marie-Antoinette, was not a feminist campaigner, like the women at the core of Scott's interests; rather taking a page from Dena Goodman's analysis of the hapless French queen, we can see that this princess is woven into the fabric of the revolutionary era. Her body was one among the many female bodies which

⁹ Joan W. Scott, *Only Paradoxes to Offer: French Feminists and the Rights of Man* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press; 1996), 16.

represented the numerous contradictions pertaining to French politics, society, culture, and gender in both the Old Regime and the Revolutionary Republic which replaced it.¹⁰

Madame Élisabeth's body has always been studied in a biographic manner and as part of the French Revolution, a statistic of the persons executed during the Reign of Terror. Denied political authority by her sex, royal descent nevertheless invested Madame Élisabeth's body with political importance. Hence, the body of any French royal woman was a political body; and in spite of the Salic Law's denial of women's political authority, royal women were not without political influence upon the monarch, his counselors, and the public realm of the court. Hence, the bodies of all royal women were public bodies, ones that regularly moved and acted in the presence of the definitive political body—the king; and his court simultaneously encapsulated the two opposing spheres of royal spectacle and public surveillance. The daughter of Louis XV's eldest son, from birth Madame Élisabeth's body was continuously located in the political field of the Bourbon monarchy, a political field which invested it with significance, placed expectations on it, and forced it to perform.

From the seventeenth century the royal court of Versailles into which Madame Élisabeth was born functioned as a visual, theatrical, and political spectacle. The ideology of absolutism itself rested on the model of patriarchal authority.¹¹ It also mapped all political authority onto the body of the king and instilled it with a mythical sacrality. The Bourbon monarchy maintained its absolute authority through the repeated and spectacular public display of the king's body before the privileged royal audience of his family and the court nobility. While they were

¹⁰ Dena Goodman, "Introduction: Not Another Biography of Marie-Antoinette!" in Goodman, ed., *Marie-Antoinette, Writings on the Body of a Queen* (New York; London: Routledge; 2003), 2.

¹¹ Lynn Hunt, *Family Romance of the French Revolution* (Berkeley: University of California Press; 1992), 4-5.

beholders of the king's power, all members of the royal family also played a role in the elaborate spectacle, their individual royal bodies representing the king's authority to wider audience of his subjects across the land.¹² As with all other royal women, Madame Élisabeth was directly involved the public political sphere of her brother's power; and while political authority was denied to her, she was still essential to representation of that power.¹³

By analyzing the life, death, and martyrdom of Madame Élisabeth, we garner a better understanding of the French Revolution's eventual exclusion of women from liberal politics. The Salic Law excluded royal women from political authority except in periods of regency. The regencies of Catherine de' Medici (1560-1589) and Anne of Austria (1643-51) lingered perpetually in the French historical memory.¹⁴ Within the royal family itself, the family model of politics furthered the exclusion of women; as consorts, princesses, and even courtesans they were expected to defer to the reigning monarch. Even more than upon the death of their father in 1765, Louis XVI's ascension to the throne in 1774 solidified Madame Élisabeth's subjugation to him. He was both king and patriarch of the royal family. Moreover, any and all deference Madame Élisabeth showed to Louis and his decisions demonstrate that the gendered separation of the spheres bequeathed by the Revolution to the Nineteenth Century originated in part within royal family politics, especially since it was women's presence within that realm which so concerned Jean-Jacques Rousseau and many of his contemporaries.

¹² Joan Landes, *Women and the Public Sphere in the Age of the French Revolution* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press; 1988), 18-21.

¹³ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: the Birth of the Prison*, trans. by Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage Books), 25.

¹⁴ Considering that France did not have a complete standardized law code until 1804, the Salic Law was in fact a fictive decree which was utilized by late medieval French writers to justify the exclusion of royal women from succession to the French throne. See Sarah Hanley, "The Family, the State, and the Law in Seventeenth- and Eighteenth-Century France: The Political Ideology of Male Right versus an Early Theory of Natural Rights," *The Journal of Modern History* 78.2 (June 2006): 289-332; and, Taylor Craig, "The Salic Law, French Queenship, and the Defense of Women in the Late Middle Ages," *French Historical Studies* 29.4 (Fall 2006): 543-564.

Madame Élisabeth, to borrow a phrase from Natalie Zemon Davis, was the quintessential royal woman “on the margins.”¹⁵ While her sister-in-law has received extensive analytical attention, Élisabeth has not.¹⁶ In order to properly analyze this princess, I draw upon a combination of methodologies from political, cultural, micro-history and the “new” biography. Also, in order to thoroughly examine the numerous visual representations of Madame Élisabeth left to us, including officially sanctioned portraits, I will use art historical analysis. Additionally, and central to the process of locating a given individual within the historical discourse of the era in which he or she lived, I take the social construction of gender into account. Madame Élisabeth’s status as a woman was always paradoxical, first within the dynamics of the royal family and the court; and second, within the new civil order of the Revolution. She was incorporated into both, princess in one and *citoyenne* in the other; her exclusion from political authority in the former carried over into the latter as political rights continued to be denied to all French women.¹⁷

The Princess Paradox

Modern liberal politics and feminism are both products of the Enlightenment’s application of rational thought to human relationships. Furthermore, feminism is an outgrowth of the French Revolution itself, the movement’s seminal documents being Mary Wollstonecraft’s *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1790) and Olympe de Gouge’s *Declaration of the Rights*

¹⁵ Natalie Zemon Davis, *Women on the Margins, Three Seventeenth-Century Lives* (Cambridge; London: Harvard University Press; 1995, 1997).

¹⁶ Clarissa Orr, “Introduction,” chap. in *Queenship In Europe, 1660-1815; the Role of the Consort*, ed. by Clarissa C. Orr (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press; 2004), 2.

¹⁷ Hunt, *The Family Romance of the French Revolution*, 202. In the epilogue of her work, Hunt examines the explanations set forth by Carole Pateman and Joan W. Scott as to why women were excluded from the public sphere of liberal politics as feminism.

of *Women* (1791). Writing in response to Edmund Burke's condemnation of women's political action in his *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790), his fury especially focused on the crowd of women who forcibly moved the royal family from Versailles to Paris during the October Days (October 5-6, 1789), Wollstonecraft argued for women's education, demonstrating that their ability for rational thought was hampered by the patriarchal subjugation of women in European society. Counterpoising Jean-Jacques Rousseau's argument that providing women with an education comparable to that of men would only result in the lesser sex having authority over them, Wollstonecraft wrote: "I do not wish them to have power over men; but over themselves."¹⁸

Noting the freedoms French men granted to themselves in the *Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen* (August 26, 1789), playwright and political activist de Gouges exposed the exclusion of "woman" in the document which the revolutionaries held most dear. Line for line, her *Declaration* corresponded with that of the revolutionaries as it argued for the equality of both sexes under the law. She observed:

No one should be disturbed for his fundamental opinions; woman has the right to mount the scaffold, so she should have the right equally to mount the rostrum, provided that these manifestations do not trouble public order as established by the law.¹⁹

¹⁸ Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1790) (New York; London: W. W. Norton & Company; 1988), 62.

¹⁹ Olympe de Gouges, *Declaration of the Rights of Woman* (Sept. 1791). Trans., edited, and with an introduction by Lynn Hunt in *The French Revolution and Human Rights: A Brief Documentary History* (Boston/New York: Bedford / St. Martin's; 1996), 124–29. See also "Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity: Exploring the French Revolution," accessed Dec. 14, 2013. <http://chnm.gmu.edu/revolution/d/477/>.

²⁰ *Le Moniteur Universel*, 19 November 1793. Quoted and trans. in Mary Trouille, "The Circe of the Republic: Mme. Roland, Rousseau, and Revolutionary Politics," chapter in *Literate Women and the French Revolution of 1789*, ed. by Catherine K. Montfort (Birmingham: Summa Publications; 1994), 102.

In the weeks following her own trial and execution for treasonously disturbing the public order in early November 1793, an anonymous article appeared in the *Moniteur Universel* holding up the fates of de Gouges, Mme. Jeanne Manon Roland, and Marie-Antoinette as a warning to politically active women. All three women were seen as violating the boundaries of their sex by actively participating in the public realm of politics. For women to be “true republicans,” the article advised them to “love, follow, and teach the laws that guide your husbands and sons in the exercise of their rights. ... Be diligent in your housework; never attend political meetings with the intention of speaking there.”²⁰ As Louis XVI’s sister and aunt to his heir, Madame Élisabeth spent her entire life in the public sphere of politics. Although denied political authority, Madame Élisabeth was not without political voice and it was to her understanding that the guidance she was to give to either her brother or his son was one which promoted the exercise of their monarchical authority. It was in part this guidance for which the princess was found guilty of treason.

Madame Élisabeth was a royal woman in the public sphere of politics. The study of eighteenth-century French women’s presence in the public sphere has been greatly enlightened in recent decades through the application of Jürgen Habermas’s theories on the development and structural transformation of the modern public sphere. In his analysis of *the* absolute French monarch, Louis XIV (r. 1643-1715), Habermas observed that the “*The state, it is I*” ruler reified his authority through the constant public representation of himself, be it in person, in textual form, or through visual imagery:

²⁰ *Le Moniteur Universel*, 19 November 1793. Quoted and trans. in Mary Trouille, “The Circe of the Republic: Mme. Roland, Rousseau, and Revolutionary Politics,” chapter in *Literate Women and the French Revolution of 1789*, ed. by Catherine K. Montfort (Birmingham: Summa Publications; 1994), 102.

[R]epresentation pretended to make something invisible visible through the public presence of the person of the lord; . . . [T]his publicity of representation [was] inseparable from the lord's concrete existence, that, as an 'aura,' surrounded and endowed his authority.²¹

Louis XIV's "representative publicness" depended on an audience, an audience composed of every subject within his domain, from the highest ecclesiastics, through his courtiers and the nobility, and down to the lowliest of the peasantry. Away from the public realm of the king and his court, there eventually emerged a public sphere of critical inquiry, discussion, and opinion, one which expanded over the course of the Eighteenth Century as information—the news—came to be exchanged as a commodity.²² Over the eighteenth century the public representation of the king's power via the spectacular display of his body, in person or through portraiture, was transposed by the representation of his absolute authority in the newer public space, termed the "bourgeois public sphere" by Habermas, through the press, in newspapers and magazines, including in the *Gazette de France* and the *Mercure de France*. Ultimately, by addressing itself to this sphere of public opinion, the monarchy supplanted its own authority.²³ In time, and before the outbreak of the French Revolution's in 1789, the sphere of public opinion replaced the royal public sphere as *the* voice of authority. Moreover, the Bourbon monarchy's absolutist authority was further undone as Louis XIV's heirs, Louis XV and Louis XVI increasingly retreated into their private lives, in the palace of Versailles' clandestine and enclosed spaces. The "great ceremonial" of Louis XIV's representative publicness "gave way to an almost bourgeois intimacy" as Louis XV spent time in the company of his many favorites, most notably

²¹ Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, trans. by Thomas Burger with Frederick Lawrence (Cambridge, MA: the MIT Press; 1991; 1996), 7.

²² Habermas, 14.

²³ Keith M. Baker, *Inventing the French Revolution, Essays on French Political Culture in the Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press; 1990), 198-99.

the Marquise de Pompadour and the Comtesse du Barry; and as his grandson retreated to the small forge he installed above his Versailles apartment.²⁴

Where Madame Élisabeth is concerned, and particularly since the French Revolution's bicentennial, a number of historians of gender and social contract theory have searched for an explanation as to why women were denied political rights at a time when it seemed so promising. Of particular note is the work done by political theorist and historian Joan Landes in *Women and the Public Sphere in the Age of the French Revolution* (1988). Landes argues that the "incarceration" of women into the private, domestic sphere of home and family during the eighteenth century, particularly during and after the Revolution, was central to the embodiment of the masculinist bourgeois public sphere bequeathed to the nineteenth century.²⁵ Landes regards the essential motivating force behind this confinement as coming from masculine fears pertaining to the presence and influence of women in the domains of public society and politics, particularly the royal and aristocratic women in close proximity to the king and his representatives. In the realm of the French monarch and his court, consorts, princesses, marquises, comtesses, and the occasional lady-in-waiting actively operated as "conduits or mediators for aspiring courtiers and socially ambitious gentlemen."²⁶ Rousseau, the Swiss-born *philosophe* who found himself cast out of the female centered realms of influence at both court and the intimate Parisian social gatherings known as the *salons*, feared that the monarchy and all of France were being feminized by such women. In his most outspoken statement against "public" women, the *Letter to M. D'Alembert on Theatre* (1758), Rousseau charged:

²⁴ Habermas, 31.

²⁵ Landes, 7; 31-35.

²⁶ Landes, 20.

They are affected as much as, and more than, women by a commerce that is too intimate; they lose not only their morals [manners], but we lose our morals [manners] and our constitution; for this weaker sex, not in the position to take on our 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 us into women.²⁷

Rousseau was certainly not the only *philosophe* in that era who held such misogynistic ideas, but his is of the most importance in this analysis because of his eighteenth-century popularity with members of both sexes. His *La Nouvelle Héloïse* (1761), a novel in epistolary form, was one of the century's best-sellers, readers becoming so absorbed in the passionate exchange of sentiment and love in Julie d'Étange's and Saint-Preux's letters that they were moved to tears.²⁸ *Émile: Or, On Education*, published the following year, is credited with giving rise to the cult of maternity in the eighteenth century, Rousseau affirming women's natural roles as wives and mothers. Depicting his ideal woman in the character of Sophie, Émile's fiancée, Rousseau incorporated women into the regeneration of contemporary society, a society which he regarded as both effeminated and debauched, by instructing them to raise their children to be good citizens of the state while remaining in the private sphere of the home. Motherhood, as historian Madelyn Gutwirth observes in *Twilight of the Goddesses*, became the location of eighteenth-century women's displaced ambition;²⁹ and in regards to the French Revolution, "[r]epublican motherhood," as Landes terms it, "proved to be insufficiently supple to allow women to join on equal terms the armed and virtuous citizenry of the militant republic." Instead, and attested to by the *Moniteur Universel's* aforementioned anonymous author, claims to

²⁷Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Politics and the Arts: Letter to M. D'Alembert on the Theatre* (1758), trans. by Allan Bloom (Glenco: The Free Press, Corp.; 1960), 100.

²⁸ Robert Darnton, "Readers Respond to Rousseau: The Fabrication of Romantic Sensitivity," in *The Great Cat Massacre and Other Episodes in French Cultural History* (New York: Vintage Books; 1984; 1985), 242-249.

²⁹ Madelyn Gutwirth, *Twilight of the Goddesses: Women and Representation in the Revolutionary Era* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press; 1992) , 60; 122.

republican motherhood by the revolutionaries were directed at combating women's unruly presence in the public sphere.³⁰

Despite the fact that she was neither a mother, or a wife, Madame Élisabeth did not fit in the new social order of the French Republic, a republic predicated on over a century of social contract theorization, including John Locke's *The Two Treatises of Government* (1689), the Baron de Montesquieu's *The Spirit of the Laws* (1748), and Rousseau's *The Social Contract* (1762). "Man was born free," he wrote, "and he is everywhere in chains," chains imposed in eighteenth-century France by the Bourbon monarchy, the descendant of an "irrational" and "feudal" system established by Louis IX (r. 1226-1270). "All legitimate authority among *men*," Rousseau wrote, "must be based on covenants. ... [but] any covenant which stipulated absolute dominion for one party and absolute obedience for the other would be illogical and nugatory."³¹ Yet, in Rousseau's mind women were naturally not part of covenant making:

In everything connected with sex, woman and man are in every respect related and in every respect different. The difficulty of comparing them comes from the difficulty of determining what in their constitutions is due to sex and what is not. ... [H]ow vain are the disputes as to whether one of the two sexes is superior or whether they are equal—as though each, in fulfilling nature's ends according to its own particular purpose, were thereby less perfect than if it resembled the other more! ...

In the union of the sexes each contributes equally to the common aim, but not in the same way. From this diversity arises the first assignable difference in the moral relations of the two sexes. One ought to be active and strong, the other passive and weak. One must necessarily will and be able; it suffices that the other put up little resistance.³²

³⁰ Landes, 147-48. Landes's analysis is not without its critics. Notable among them Olwen Hufton regards it as being a rather generic assessment of eighteenth-century French women. Hufton also finds it as containing a feminist agenda. See Olwen Hufton, *Women and the Limits of Citizenship in the French Revolution* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press; 1992), xviii.

³¹ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract* (1762), trans. by Maurice Cranston (London: Penguin Books; 1968), 49; 56; 53-55. The emphasis is mine.

³² Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Émile*, trans. by Allan Bloom (New York: Basic Books; 1979), 357-58

A woman was to please man and did so by acknowledging and accepting nature's subjugation of her to him. In regards to Madame Élisabeth, she pleased her brother by deferring to his decisions and in spite of whatever concerns she had about them, his status as the family patriarch giving him authority over her life; but, in the eyes of Rousseau, and thereby his revolutionary devotees, Louis XVI's authority as king, as one man over other men, was illegitimate and invalid.

As a female member of the king's family, Madame Élisabeth provides us with a unique perspective on women's paradoxical status within the monarchical rule of the Old Regime and the liberal politics of the French Republic. In the former she was incorporated by birth into the monarch's family, a bearer of royal blood. She was also incorporated into the realm of monarchical politics even though her sex denied her political authority. Furthermore, and more important, the body of a princess was not her own.³³ It was a symbol of the monarchy, and as such, it unendingly represented that institution. It was thereby compelled to perpetually submit to the monarch's authority, including when the king determined to exchange it in an alliance with another ruler. Just as a wife, a daughter, or an unmarried sister were to submit themselves to the family patriarch, be he father, brother, or even uncle, a princess was to obey and accept the monarch's determination. Louis XVI was Madame Élisabeth's beloved brother; but as both the patriarch of her family and her king, she was politically subordinated to him by the gendered power structure of patriarchy in the same manner as all of his subjects, no matter their sex or

³³ My thought here derives from Dena Goodman's observation that when Marie-Antoinette arrived in France in 1770, she could no longer call her body her own. See Goodman's "Introduction: Not Another Biography of Marie-Antoinette!" in Goodman, ed., *Marie-Antoinette, Writings on the Body of a Queen* (New York; London: Routledge; 2003),

estate. Madame Élisabeth lamented, “to be a princess is a terrible burden often, but it is never worse than when it prevents the heart action.”³⁴

With the actualization of liberal politics in France as the Revolution progressed, women’s inclusion in political rights seemed more promising given contract theory’s emphasis on the autonomous individual and its liberation from parental authority upon adulthood. The Constituent Assembly (July 1789-Sept. 1791) worked toward undoing the controversial and somewhat arbitrary parental prerogatives of the Old Regime, notably the letters de cachet and primogeniture. Pre-revolution, parents solicited such letters from the king, granting them the right to imprison a child without hearing if he or she was regarded as disrupting family order and or harming its reputation. The practice was deemed as unfair to all the younger children of a family, including daughters. Both were legally abolished in March 1790; and in the following April, the Constituent Assembly decreed equal rights of inheritance for children of both sexes. Moreover, the subsequent Legislative Assembly (Sept. 1791-Sept. 1792) promulgated a new divorce law, giving both husbands and wives the equal right to sue for it and equal control over their adolescent children afterwards.³⁵ While these laws incorporated French women into civil society, women continued to be excluded from political rights. The feminist movement which emerged sought to rectify this paradoxical exclusion only to be shut out as revolutionaries made Marie-Antoinette, Olympe de Gouges, and other notable women out to be prime examples of women’s disorderly presence in the public sphere.

³⁴ Letter, Élisabeth de France to Mme. Marie de Causans, 8 December 1785. Reprinted in Élisabeth de France, *Correspondance de Madame Élisabeth de France, Soeur de Louis XVI* (Paris: Henri Plon, Imprimeur-Éditeur; 1868), 59-61. Original reads: “[D]’être princesse: c’est une terrible charge souvent, mais jamais elle n’est plus désagréable que lorsqu’ell empeche le coeur d’agir.”

³⁵ Hunt, *Family Romance*, 19-20; 40-42.

“Sexual difference,” writes gender historian Carole Pateman, “and the subordination of women are central to the construction of modern political theory.”³⁶ She finds that with the exception of Thomas Hobbes, contract theorists since the seventeenth century have equated sexual difference with political difference. In Rousseau Pateman locates his segregation of women from the realm of politics in the closeness of their bodies to nature. Women’s ability to bear children and their bodies’ cyclical processes made the “weaker sex” unable to sublimate its passions. For Rousseau, women’s natural potential for disorder threatened men’s political order, hence making it a necessity to social order that they subjugated themselves to men’s authority.³⁷

Moreover, Pateman regards Rousseau as confusing paternal right with patriarchal right through his embedding the individual in the family. In *The Social Contract* he wrote, “[t]he oldest of all societies, and the only natural one, is that of the family; yet children remain tied to their father by nature only so long as they need him for their preservation. As soon as this need ends, the natural bond is dissolved.”³⁸ While the natural bond between a father and a son dissolved upon the latter’s maturity, it only dissolved between a father and his daughter upon her marriage. Unable to fend for themselves in the world, women naturally submitted themselves to the patriarchal authority of fathers and husbands. Thus, and according to Rousseau, women are permanently embedded in the private realm of the family. Yet, as Pateman demonstrates in *The Sexual Contract* (1988), not all fathers are political rulers in the modern world; and furthermore, “the family and political (civil) society are seen as two very different forms of association.”³⁹ Through the liberation of individual adult males from the family, Rousseau regarded the male

³⁶ Carole Pateman, *The Disorder of Women: Democracy, Feminism, and Political Theory* (Stanford: Stanford University Press; 1989), 1.

³⁷ Pateman, *The Disorder of Women*, 5. See also Carole Pateman, *The Sexual Contract* (Stanford: Stanford University Press; 1988), 96-98.

³⁸ Rousseau, *The Social Contract*, 50.

³⁹ Pateman, *The Sexual Contract*, 83.

sex as *the* only sex capable of abstract thought and political creativity. Moreover, the structuring of modern civil society as a “*fraternal patriarchy*” (Pateman’s emphasis) comes from Rousseau’s incorporation of conjugal right into his social contract theory. Pateman thus charges that the alliance between the core French revolutionary values—‘*liberté, égalité, fraternité*’—and their exclusion of ‘*sorority*’ began some time before the Revolution’s outbreak and essentially with Rousseau.⁴⁰

Both feminism and modern liberal politics came about during “an extensive and cultural crisis,” as cultural historian Lynn Hunt observes.⁴¹ So too did the domestic ideology utilized by the political leaders who sought to justify women’s continued segregation from politics. Unlike the English revolutionaries of a century before, the French revolutionaries wrote the legal script from scratch. By theorizing that the family was the essential social unit of the nation, they justified women’s exclusion from politics.⁴² Women’s legal inclusion in civil society at the same time as their omission from the realm of liberal politics was paradoxical; and where Madame Élisabeth was concerned, becoming *Citoyenne* Élisabeth Capet continued the pre-revolutionary denial of political authority to her while depriving her of the personal liberty she attained as a Madame de France. She bridged the inherent contradictions pertaining to women within the conceptualizations of both patriarchy *and* politics before and after the French Revolution’s

⁴⁰ Pateman, *The Sexual Contract*, 5; 77.

⁴¹ Hunt, *Family Romance*, 203. Hunt makes this point in relation to her analysis of both Pateman’s work and Joan Scott’s original article on the paradox, “French Feminists and the Rights of ‘Man’: Olympe de Gouge’s Declaration” (*History Workshop*, no. 28 (Autumn 1989): 1-21.) Hunt criticizes her colleagues’ feminist critique of liberal political theory as being diametrically opposed to feminism. She writes, “For all its virtues in calling attention to the gaps and inconsistencies in liberal political theory, this line of criticism overlooks the serious historical difficulties encountered in the establishment of a ‘liberal’ legal framework (i.e., one based on a notion of the freely contradicting individual) and underestimates the shock that such a theory gave to the old order. . . . [T]he individual was always imagined as embedded in family relationships and that these relationships were always potentially unstable.”

⁴² Jo Burr Margadant, “Introduction: Constructing Selves in Historical Perspective,” chapter in *The New Biography, Performing Femininity in Nineteenth-Century France*, ed. Margadant (Berkeley: University of California Press; 2000), 16-17.

outbreak. In spite of the facts that she was not a feminist challenger of the political authorities *above* her and the relative marginality of her public presence, Madame Élisabeth and her life are no less deserving of being analyzed in terms of gender and historical agency.

Toward a “New Biography” of Madame Élisabeth

The biographical canonization of Madame Élisabeth reached the height of absurdity in the Baroness Agnes de Stoeckl’s brief introduction to Margaret Trouncer’s 1955 biography. She wrote:

Although living in all the luxury and sin of the end of the eighteenth century, we realize that she took no part in the scandals; she was untouched by contact with the vices of Versailles. An aureole of holiness shielded her during her short life, till the dreadful end.

And then we gaze at this white-robed figure, blown by an ill wind on to the other arras, painted like ‘Macbeth’ in black and red—somber (sic), dramatic. Instead of roses, we see blood trickling slowly into the gutter . . . Instead of the glittering rapiers of Trianon, we see the blade of the guillotine, the blade falling with a sharp thud on the swan-like neck of Élisabeth, the sister of Kings.⁴³

It should come as no surprise then that Trouncer recounted at the end of her volume the tale of Madame Élisabeth’s visage appearing before and speaking to one of her former maids shortly after her execution. No one doubted the young woman’s tale because, “[e]verybody thought Madame Élisabeth was a saint, and she was loved and revered by all who were fortunate enough to have known her.”⁴⁴

⁴³ Agnes de Stoeckl, “Introduction,” in Margaret Trouncer, *Madame Élisabeth, Days at Versailles and in prison with Marie-Antoinette and her family* (London: Hutchinson; 1955), 13.

⁴⁴ Trouncer, 318.

This study stands in sharp contrast to Trouncer's and the many other biographies which came before it. Instead of an ideological portrayal of Madame Élisabeth, it is an analysis of her as a historical agent and seeks to define her place within the gender dynamics and political culture of the French revolutionary era, differing from the modus operandi of typical biographies and their efforts to understand her life in a narrative and hagiographic fashion. Instead, this work examines specific moments during Madame Élisabeth's life, as well as her "afterlife," seeing how they relate to the royal family she was born into, the Bourbon monarchy and the republic which replaced it. To borrow a line from the Dena Goodman edited volume which examines Marie-Antoinette in a similar manner: "This is not another biography."⁴⁵

Infused by the paradigmatic shifts in gender analysis and French Revolution historiography, the multiple contributors to *Marie-Antoinette, Writings on the Body of a Queen* (2003) regard their biographical subject as a "site," their individual efforts defining the contemporaneous and posthumous animosity and or fascination felt toward the ill-fated queen. Considering that she was the last queen of Old Regime France, Marie-Antoinette has consistently been at the center of analyses pertaining to both royalty and prominent women in the Early Modern European period. Furthermore, in terms of the historical analysis of queenship, as historian Clarissa Orr notes in *Queenship in Europe, 1660-1815* (2004), Marie-Antoinette appears to be the only queen to have received "sustained analytical—or biographical—attention."⁴⁶ No doubt this is due in part to the wealth of material left to us; but, it as well stems from the continued misperception that Marie-Antoinette had more political authority and influence than she actually did.

⁴⁵ Goodman, "Introduction: Not Another Biography of Marie-Antoinette!" in Goodman, ed., *Marie-Antoinette, Writings on the Body of a Queen*, 8.

⁴⁶ Orr, "Introduction," 2.

In her own time, both Marie-Antoinette's Austrian family and her husband's subjects glossed over the denial of either one to her by the Salic Law. The foundation of her 1770 marriage to dauphin of France was the cementing a political alliance between the Bourbon rulers of France and the Hapsburg ones of Austria; and in spite of the distance between the two courts, both her mother and brother constantly nagged her from afar in their letters. Empress Maria-Theresa of Austria and Holy Roman Emperor Joseph II, persons with actual political authority, desired for Marie-Antoinette to assert herself and Austria's will over the French throne.⁴⁷ When Louis XVI diplomatically refused to support his brother-in-law's ambitious plans to expand the Austrian Netherland port of Antwerp at the expense of Dutch control of the Scheldt River in 1784, Marie-Antoinette confessed to her brother:

I know that, particularly in politics, I have very little influence on the King's thinking. ... Without any ostentation or lies, I let the public believe that I have more influence than I really do because if I did not make them think so, I would have even less.⁴⁸

Seven years later Olympe de Gouges continued to promulgate this miscalculation of the queen's political influence and potential for improving women's status in French society, beginning of the *Declaration of the Rights of Woman* with a direct appeal to the queen, writing:

This revolution will happen only when all women are aware of their deplorable fate, and of the rights they have lost in society. Madame, support such a beautiful cause; defend this unfortunate sex, and soon you will have half the realm on your side, and at least one-third of the other half.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ See Larry Wolff, "Hapsburg Letters: The Disciplinary Dynamics of Epistolary Narrative in the Correspondence of Marie Theresa and Marie-Antoinette," in Goodman, ed., *Marie-Antoinette*, 25-44.

⁴⁸ Quoted and trans. in Evelyn Lever, *Marie-Antoinette: the Last Queen of France* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux; 2000), 160. Arneith, *Marie-Antoinette, Joseph II und Leopold II, ihr Briefwechsel*, pp. 39-40.

⁴⁹ Olympe de Gouges, *The Declaration of the Rights of Woman* (1791), in Darline G. Levy, Harriet B. Applewhite, and Mary D. Johnson, eds., *Women in Revolutionary Paris, 1789-1795* (Urbana; Chicago; London: University of Illinois Press; 1979), 86-87.

As compelling as her story is, and in spite of the fact that the Revolution made her even more of a political actor, Marie Antoinette is not the sole royal woman through whom we can trace the plight of the doomed Bourbon monarchy or of French women at that time. Madame Élisabeth may have been nowhere as near as dazzling and or controversial as her sister-in-law; but, there is value in the historical analysis of a “modest individual,” even if she is a princess.⁵⁰ Caught up in a series of entangled webs—a princess paradoxically compelled to represent the monarchy before an increasingly critical society; one of several frustrated and traditionalist siblings to an ineffectual ruler; conspirator against the well-being of the French people—Madame Élisabeth deserves to be analyzed in a manner which breaks from the traditional biographical mold.

One of the ways in which this work intends to do that is not only through an examination of Madame Élisabeth through the analytical lenses of gender and political culture, but also through what has been termed by historian Jo Margadant as the “new biography.”⁵¹ The complementary rise of women’s studies and women’s history beginning in the late 1960s brought about an increased demand for biographies profiling women, notable ones garnering more attention than obscure yet impactful women, much like the manner in which biographies of Marie-Antoinette outshine those focusing on her sister-in-law, or her predecessors as queen

⁵⁰ This passage draws upon an observation made by Carlo Ginzburg, defending his examination of the sixteenth-century Inquisition trial of the Italian miller Menocchio in *The Cheese and the Worms, the Cosmos of a Sixteenth-Century Miller*, trans. John and Anne Tedeschi (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press; 1976; 1980). Ginzburg writes, “A number of biographical studies have shown that in a modest individual who is himself lacking in significance and for this very reason representative, it is still possible to trace, as in a microcosm, the characteristics of an entire social stratum in a specific historical period, ... Is this, then, also the case with Menocchio? Not in the least. He cannot be considered a ‘typical’ peasant (in the sense of ‘average,’ or ‘in the statistical majority’) of his age; ...” Ginzburg is referring to those analyses which define a subaltern individual or group as “typical” and therefore clearly representative of much broader historical vignette; but, Menocchio is atypical and while his story provides us with insight on the cultural filters of his time, we must be cautious in drawing a macrocosmic conclusion from it. See, p. xx.

⁵¹ Margadant, “Introduction,” 3-10.

consort, and even her husband. Alongside this rise in interest there arose the need to rethink the format and the objectives of biography as both a literary and a historical genre because, as noted American biographer Susan Ware succinctly puts it, “the male plot did not work.”⁵² In spite of the facts that Madame Élisabeth was not a feminist challenger and was instead more of a traditionalist, her heartfelt adherence to Catholicism and to the belief in the monarchy’s authority inspired many of her actions. We cannot help but take away from feminist theory where she is concerned that the personal was political. Her life was a public one and the time has come for biographers and historians alike to no longer overlook her or her historical agency.

This volume is also not *another* biography of Madame Élisabeth in that it regards the princess as a historical “site.” This volume is as well a *new* biography in that it regards Madame Élisabeth, a person who was perpetually in the public eye, as constantly crafting and re-crafting and publicly presenting a “legible” feminine self, one which she felt was credible not only to her core audience, i.e. all of her brother’s subjects, but as well as to her own person. As Margadant observes, “No one ‘invents’ a self apart from the cultural notions available to them in a particular historical setting.”⁵³ The intimate confines of the royal family, the court of Versailles, the Royal Academy of Painting and Sculpture’s *Salon* exhibitions, the gilded cage of the Tuileries palace, the Temple prison, and the Revolutionary Tribunal were all physical and social locations which offered Madame Élisabeth with a limited number of possibilities upon which she constructed and performed a discernable public identity. Being born a princess was one thing; being one was another, and to analyze not just Élisabeth’s historical agency and her location within late

⁵² Susan Ware, “Writing Women’s Lives: One Historian’s Perspective,” *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, Vol. 40, no. 3 (Winter 2010): 413; 429.

⁵³ Margadant, “Introduction,” 2. Margadant’s essay references the work of Habermas, Joan Landes, and Dena Goodman; but, it fails to reference Stephen Greenblatt’s *Renaissance Self-Fashioning* (1980) and its demonstration of the crafting of a socially acceptable public identity, particularly by European courtiers, during the Renaissance and the text’s impact on identity studies.

eighteenth-century French political culture is to as well trace the identity she constructed for herself over the course of time.

The “new biography” permits us the opportunity to liberate Madame Élisabeth from her exceptional woman—virgin martyr—status, and it allows us the opportunity to witness the shifts in the gendering of French society during a critical period in its history.⁵⁴ Moreover, it grants us the opportunity to see the much broader historical picture of the French Revolution from a different, relatively unexplored perspective.⁵⁵ Madame Élisabeth was but one person swept up in that tumultuous event, both witness and victim to it; but an actor in it and associated figure as well to some of its core protagonists, including the revolutionaries who saw to her death and those who sought to resurrect her for their own reasons.

With biography, traditional or “new,” though, there is always the danger of the biographer becoming too attached to her subject. The attachment is expected and obvious in Marie-Thérèse, the Duchesse of Angoulême’s memoir of her imprisonment in the Temple; and yet, her own position within the royal family and Restoration-era France served to moderate the Duchesse’s fond recollection of her late aunt, the volume being not particularly melodramatic or maudlin. If the one person who was with the princess in her last days managed to keep her sentiments in check, others should be able to as well; but that seems improbable when they, as well as the Duchesse of Angoulême, are motivated more by their own interests to produce sentimental commutations than by the biographical subjects they examine. Under the guidance of her uncle, Louis XVIII, the Duchess did not write about her parents, and instead wrote about

⁵⁴ Margandant, 25.

⁵⁵ Ware, 423. Ware in particular notes the observation made by Carl Rollyson in *Biography: A User’s Guide* (Chicago, 2008) that when asked to write a biography, the academically trained historian tends to produce a history as well.

her aunt in a manner which both she and the restored Bourbon monarch felt would resonate with the French, legitimating the royal family's return to power.⁵⁶ As for Trouncer and Madame Élisabeth biographers like her, the goal is to legitimate their reverence of her rather than to know her and or contextualize her place within the wider historical record.

Potentially the only way for this “new biography” of Madame Élisabeth to temper its attachment to its subject is to historiographically approach her and her historical presence through the lens of microhistory. Just as new biography uncovers the cultural notions utilized by an individual over time to fashion her identity, microhistory finds value in the analysis of a singular social outlier, or group of them, who caught the attention of the authorities, and regards them/it ? as an indicative of a broader cultural norm and or contrary to large scale assumptions pertaining to a given place and time.⁵⁷ The two genres differ in that the biographer works to demonstrate the subject(s)'s contribution to history while microhistory's goal is almost the opposite, utilizing the social outlier as an allegorical device by which they examine the culture as a whole.⁵⁸ Biographers do well to learn from the sentimental distance that microhistory's emphasis on the culture provides their field; and yet, to do so runs the danger of losing sight of the subject's humanity. Ultimately these extremes are moderated by doing what has been discussed here before, to regard the biographical subject as a “site,” to examine the many factors by which Madame Élisabeth constituted her agency.

Predominately a phenomenon within European historiography of the late twentieth century, in itself microhistory is a reaction to the large scale analyses of the *Annales* school. Its

⁵⁶ See introductory text and notations in “Narrative of Madame Royale,” in *The Life and Letters of Madame Élisabeth de France*, 210; 233; 238.

⁵⁷ Sigurdur Gylfi Magnusson, “What is Microhistory?” Online article for George Mason University's *History News Network*; posted May 7, 2006 (<http://hnn.us/articles/23720.html>)

⁵⁸ Jill Lepore, “Historians Who Love Too Much: Reflections on Microhistory and Biography,” *The Journal of American History*, Vo. 88, no. 1 (June, 2001): 133; 141.

foundational works examine the sixteenth-century stories of a misguided sixteenth-century Italian miller and the double return of a stigmatized husband in rural southern France, both studies being part and parcel of historiography's much broader "cultural turn".⁵⁹ Yet, as much as microhistorical analyses see themselves as drawing a connection (or contrast) between the individuals they study and the much wider society they inhabited, the inference between the micro and the macro is not necessarily straightforward. Furthermore, it also requires a certain measure of interpretation so that the outlines of the wider societal background onto which the story is projected are more refined, more coherent.⁶⁰ The microhistory of a given individual or group may not be necessarily representative of the whole historical landscape they occupied, but it is representative of at least a section of it.

The discussion of microhistory and the analysis of cultural norms and, more importantly, of women's agency in Early Modern Europe brings the reader around to one historian in particular—Natalie Zemon Davis. While her body of work is woven throughout this volume, reference already made to both the memorable microhistory *The Return of Martin Guerre* (1983) and the insightful analysis of seventeenth-century gender hierarchies in *Women on the Margins* (1995), it is from her renowned 1975 essay "Women on Top" upon which it draws its inspiration. Davis demonstrates that comic and festive sexual inversion operated not so much to undermine social and gender hierarchies, but instead to reaffirm them, all the while providing women with behavioral options by which they could innovatively take action, including politically.⁶¹ In regards to Madame Élisabeth, historians and biographers alike must consider that she was both

⁵⁹ Ginzburg, *The Cheese and the Worms*; and Natalie Zemon Davis, *The Return of Martin Guerre* (Cambridge, Mass.; London: Harvard University Press; 1983).

⁶⁰ Chaunfei Chin, "Margins and Monsters: How Some Micro Cases Lead to Macro Claims," *History and Theory* 50 (October 2011): 342.

⁶¹ Natalie Zemon Davis, "Women on Top," in *Society and Culture in Early Modern France, Eight Essays by Natalie Zemon Davis* (Stanford: Stanford University Press; 1965, 1968, 1973, 1975), 124-151; 131.

witness to and subject of the greatest act of sexual inversion and women's political agency during the French Revolution—the October Days—the crowd of women looking to right the social order by bringing the king and his entire family back to Paris with them. In the years to follow, Élisabeth would herself conceive of righting the social order through her open objection to the limitations placed upon her brother's authority by the Constitution of 1791 and, more imperative, by her visible correspondence with her emigrated brothers, the Comtes de Provence and d'Artois. Before 1789 Madame Élisabeth had a certain measure of political influence, but the events of that year and the ones to follow certainly empowered her to act in a manner by which she hoped France would once again subjugate itself to the absolutist authority of the Bourbon monarchy from which she came, her piety ultimately failing to shield her from centuries of resentment and republican aspirations to make France anew.

Being an eighteenth-century French princess, Madame Élisabeth is not the typical microhistorical outlier. Sister to a king, aunt to his heir, and surrogate mother to his orphaned daughter, she is neither the average woman on the margins during a historical watershed. Furthermore, a political, and thereby public entity, her body may not have been her very own; and no matter the legal and societal denials of political authority to her, Madame Élisabeth was not a powerless individual and she was readily aware of this truth. Still, and for an all too brief and horrific moment, radical revolutionaries recognized it as well, focusing their judgment and their gaze upon her, thereby propelling her into the center of royalist endeavors to revive and redeem the Bourbon monarchy. Commemorated, dramatized, and mythologized in the political culture of the era as a virgin martyr, some of her biographers continued the notion forward without any consideration of how she contended not only with the gender hierarchies within the royal family, but as well in greater French society during such a contested period. The title of

this volume may be *Princess on the Margins*, but by putting Madame Élisabeth at the center of an analysis utilizing gender, political culture, “new” biography, and microhistory as conceptual tools, we finally answer the question posed by the crowd outside Maret’s bookshop on the day her execution—“What were Madame Élisabeth’s crimes? Why did you send to the scaffold that innocent and virtuous person?”⁶² Élisabeth may have been virtuous; but being a royal woman, she was in no way innocent.

The Other Female Figure in the Political Culture of the Time

As a historical actor of the French Revolutionary era, Madame Élisabeth demands her own set of analytical strategies. Considering the numerous textual and visual representations of her from that time, she must be studied in relation to its political culture as well.⁶³ She figured in it both before and after the outbreak of revolution in the summer of 1789. Note the princess’s inclusion in the numerous images depicting Louis XVI saying farewell to his family on the day before his execution. In *Les adieux de Louis XVI à sa famille, le 20 janvier 1793* [Fig. 1.3], painter Roger Viollet represented Madame Élisabeth as an utterly distraught, limp figure in the right margin of his work, the former princess’s face practically hidden by her silk hand-kerchief. Whereas Viollet painted Élisabeth as weakly standing, supporting her overwrought form against the back of a cushioned chair, the painter Charles Benazech built off of the princess’s known piety in his depiction of the scene [Fig. 1.4], showing Madame Élisabeth on her knees, hands clasped in prayer and eyes raised heavenward. A frequently painted and multiply engraved scene, Viollet’s and Benazech’s melodramatic representations of Madame Élisabeth

⁶² See “Prologue,” 3.

⁶³ Peter Burke applies this concept to the handling of royal portraiture in *The Fabrication of Louis XIV* (New York; London: Yale University Press; 1992). See p. 151.



Fig. 1.3. Roger Viollet. *Les adieux de Louis XVI à sa famille, le 20 janvier 1793*. 1793. Oil on canvas; 53 cm x 46 cm. Musée Carnavalet, Paris.⁶⁴

compositionally drew upon a tradition within eighteenth-century French painting of the flaccid and forlorn female form on the margin of a climactic moment, one of the contemporaneously most recognized incidences being the three adult female figures in David's renowned *The Oath of the Horatii* (1785). This compositional similarity aside, Madame Élisabeth elsewhere figured in a number of the images which worked to denigrate and dehumanize the royal family, including in the engraving titled *Les Animaux rares: ou la translation de la ménagerie royale au*

⁶⁴*Les adieux de Louis XVI à sa famille, le 20 janvier 1793*, Musée Carnavalet, accessed January 10, 2013. <http://carnavalet.paris.fr/fr/collections/les-adeux-de-louis-xvi-sa-famille-le-20-janvier-1793>.



Fig. 1.4. Nicolo Schiavonetti (engraver), after painting by C. Benazech. *The Last Interview of Lewis the Sixteenth, with his Family*. Published by Colnaghi & Co. (late Torre's); London. 1794. Engraving.⁶⁵

Temple [Fig. 1.5]. While the anonymous artist reduced the then defunct king to an overstuffed turkey, his wife, children, and sister became readily herded sheep. From the right their sans-culotte shepherd enthusiastically cracks his whip over their heads, in itself a symbolic depiction of the actual reversal authority which took place during the course of the French Revolution.

These images were three among thousands of visual and textual representations produced by the era's political culture. Succinctly defined by Keith M. Baker, political culture is the discourses and practices by which individuals and groups within a given society “articulate,

⁶⁵ *The Last Interview of Lewis the Sixteenth, with his Family*, Gallica, accessed January 10, 2013. <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b84117803/f1.highres>.

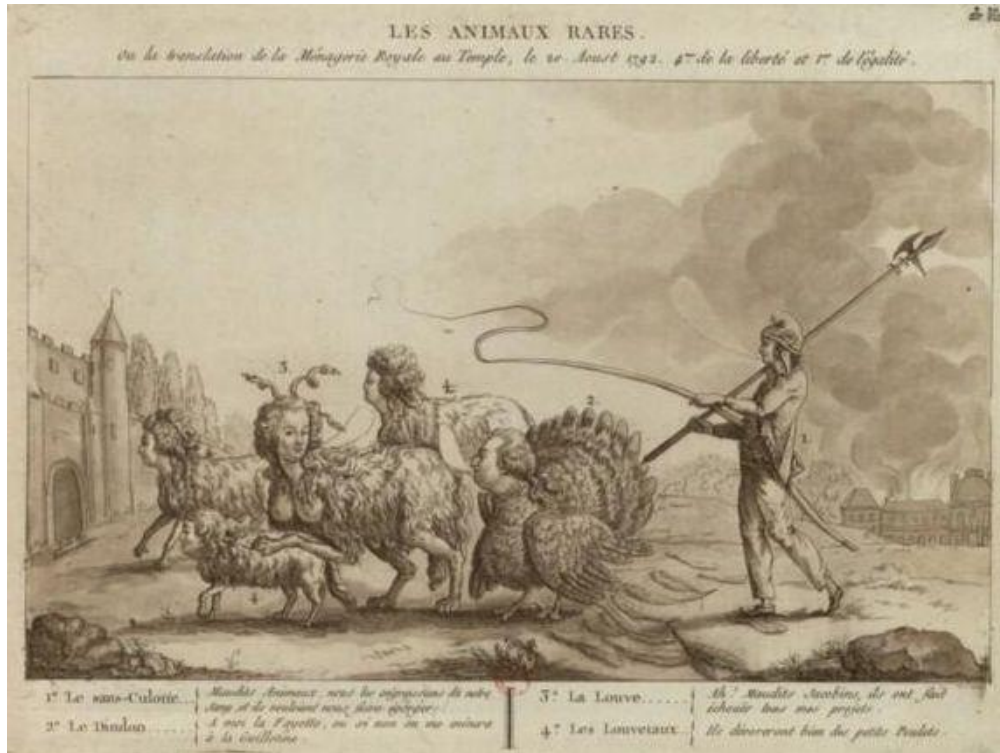


Fig. 1.5. Anon. *Les Animaux rares: ou la translation de la ménagerie royale au Temple, le 20 aoust 1792, 4. me de la liberté et 1. er de l'égalité.* 1792. Engraving.⁶⁶

negotiate, implement, and enforce the competing claims they make one upon another.”⁶⁷ A public personage by virtue of her birth, any and all physical and or representational appearances of Madame Élisabeth entwined her in the political culture of the era, putting her on the boundary between the sphere of the royal spectacle and the sphere of surveillance by an open and critical public. Along with the other members of the royal family and the court, she was part of the extensive and theatrical spectacle by which the monarchy legitimated its authority and

⁶⁶ *Les Animaux rares: ou la translation de la ménagerie royale au Temple, le 20 aoust 1792, 4. me de la liberté et 1. er de l'égalité*, Gallica, accessed on Jan. 10, 2013.

<http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b69487671/f1.highres>.

⁶⁷ Keith M. Baker, “Introduction” of *The French Revolution and the Creation of Modern Political Culture*, Vol. 2, *The Political Culture of the French Revolution*, ed. Colin Lucas (Oxford; New York: Pergamon Press; 1987), xii. Baker writes, “If politics, broadly construed, is the activity through which individuals and groups in any society articulate, negotiate, implement, and enforce the competing claims they make one upon another, then political culture may be understood as the set of discourse and practices characterizing that activity in any given community.” Furthermore he adds, “Political culture is a historical creation, subject to constant elaboration and development through the activities of the individuals and groups whose purposes it defines.” Baker makes this observation as well, with more emphasis on the linguistics of politics, in *Inventing the French Revolution* (1990). See p. 17-18.

superiority, the practice itself beginning in the reign of Louis XIV. Madame Élisabeth was both princess and actor in “the elaborate machinery of absolutism,” her actions representing Louis XVI’s power (and subsequent lack thereof) before the nation.⁶⁸ Not surprisingly when the Bourbon monarchy’s authority ultimately collapsed after August 10, 1792, she continued to figure in the political culture of the time, between the two extremes of the king’s supplicant and aggrieved sister and one of the Temple’s bestial and penned prisoners. Even after her death, Madame Élisabeth continued to figure in it, a victim of a radical, ungodly, murderous and illegitimate regime, her execution questioned by those who saw no purpose in it while ultra-royalists and her own family appropriated the event for their own ends.

Changes in French revolutionary historiography over the last thirty years, as well as in other historiographic fields of inquiry, have been applied to the study of Marie-Antoinette and her presence in the era’s political culture, including in the salacious *libelles*, notably in the work of Chantal Thomas, Lynn Hunt, and Pierre Saint-Amand. This new approach to royal womanhood calls for a new and fresh assessment of Madame Élisabeth and her *publicness* before a politically conscious and increasingly critical society. To not do so is to perpetuate the essential failure of her many biographies, i.e. to canonize her with little or no understanding of why she was a contested figure in that era, a fact testified to not only by the aforementioned images but also, and more importantly, by the very political act of her execution.

The study of French revolutionary political culture emerged in the 1970s, a result of a paradigmatic shift within the historiography of the Revolution itself and across the greater field of historical study. Referred to as “the cultural turn” by some, and as “the linguistic turn” by others, the study of the French Revolution’s political culture has been infused by Habermas’s

⁶⁸ Landes, *Women in the Public Sphere*, 20.

work as well. As noted beforehand, Habermas regarded the French Revolution to be the result of the supplanting of monarchical representational exhibition by public opinion as *the* voice of authority, a process which France's Bourbon rulers contributed to by transposing the representation of itself in the eighteenth century through the relatively nascent public space of the press.⁶⁹ Furthermore, cultural production was commercialized and along with the growth of the press, private individuals came together in salons, coffeehouses, the republic of letters, etc., in order to discuss and critique all that they saw and heard, thereby forming a critical public which no longer took the monarchy's authority at face value and demanded that it legitimate itself.⁷⁰ Thus, Madame Élisabeth and other royal women were compelled to legitimate the king's authority by endearing themselves to the French through the means available to them, particularly through publically exhibited portraiture and charitable acts.

The application of Habermas's theory to an analysis such as this one comes into question for several reasons. First, he is not a historian, but instead a German sociologist. Second, his main concern in *The Structural Transformation* is not the public sphere per se, but instead the demonstration that allegedly open and free contemporary social institutions are deceptively so. As T. C. Blanning points out, Habermas's sights are set upon the twentieth-century's "nefarious 'culture industry,'" but that has not stopped historians of the French Revolution from dropping "his neo-Marxist terminology and assumptions about the socio-economic origins of the public sphere" in their use of his theory as a conceptual tool.⁷¹ To utilize Habermas in this manner is to acknowledge that history is a multidisciplinary discourse, one in which differing dialogues co-

⁶⁹ Habermas, 20-26.

⁷⁰ Habermas, 25-26; 36-38.

⁷¹ T. C. Blanning, *The French Revolution, Class War or Culture Clash?* 2nd ed. (New York: St. Martin's Press; 1998), 26-27. Blanning's short volume is an excellent discussion of the French Revolutionary historiographic debate which emerged as a result of the "cultural turn," revisionist and post-revisionist historians challenging the socialist-Marxist interpretation.

exist, cross-fertilize and challenge one another. Coming from across the academic spectrum, these differing discourses recognize, confront, and celebrate one another, instilling historical analysis with the means by which to approach tired and worn subjects, such as Madame Élisabeth, from a multitude of new perspectives.⁷²

The complexities of the French Revolution and the multitude of persons caught up in it each demand their own set of analytical strategies for understanding and knowing them. There is no particular “methodological Vaseline” by any one of them can be straightforwardly handled and concluded.⁷³ Revisionist and post-revisionist historians of the French Revolution have drawn upon Habermas in this manner as well, garnering conceptual tools from other analyses inside and outside the field, including from the work of American anthropologist Clifford Geertz and French historian and philosopher Michel Foucault. Most certainly the former’s work appears in this analysis as one of many underlying currents, including his observation “that man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun,” Geertz indentifying *culture* as being those webs.⁷⁴ Considering that the central focus of this study is an individual near the political and cultural centers of both the French monarchical and republican spheres of significance, to analyze Madame Élisabeth rather than textually portraitize her essentially works

⁷² The discussion of history as a multidisciplinary discourse in this passage is derived largely from art historian Griselda Pollock’s recognition of this reality in her own field. In *Differencing the Canon: Feminist Desire and the Writing of Art’s Histories* (London; New York: Routledge, 1999), Pollock writes of art history as a field where “[d]ifferences can co-exist, cross-fertilise (sic) and challenge, be acknowledged, confronted, celebrated and not remain destructive of the other in an expanded but shared cultural space.” See p. 11; see also Maria S. Wendeln, *Royal Women, Portraiture, and Salon Criticism in Pre-revolutionary France*, M.A. Thesis (Detroit: Wayne State University; 2002), 20.

⁷³ Linda Nochlin, *Representing Women* (New York: Thames & Hudson, Inc.; 1999), 10. An art historian, Nochlin acknowledges that the methodology she uses to handle each art historical issue is an ‘ad hoc’ methodology. Moreover, she sees her own thought on methodology influenced significantly by anthropologists Claude Lévi-Strauss and Clifford Geertz.

⁷⁴ Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books; 1973; 2000), 5. Emphasis mine.

toward an more interpretative understanding of this princess's place within both the Revolution's historical and historiographic discourses.

Meanwhile, reference has already been made to the latter. *Discipline and Punish, The Birth of the Prison* (1975) and *The History of Sexuality* (Vol. 1, 1976) being amongst his better known works, Foucault philosophically and historiographically explored the very nature of both power and knowledge, finding the two entities to be entwined with one another and persistently utilized as means of social control. Historians and analysts across academia employ elements of Foucault's theories in their work, allowing them to investigate modern society's investment of individual human bodies with significance, the powers that be perpetually incorporating, controlling, examining and scrutinizing them in the various "field[s] of surveillance."⁷⁵ Her physical remains aside, now presumably interned in the Basilica of Saint-Denis outside Paris, Madame Élisabeth continues to exist in letters, memoirs, royal household and prison account reports, paintings, engravings, etc. She also continues to figure in the memory of the French Revolution and in the contestation of its meaning. Foucault ultimately provides the historian with the conceptual tools to better see how she came to be woven into a multitude of discourses, from the royal spectacle which she was born into to the "spectacle of the scaffold" upon which her life ended.⁷⁶

⁷⁵ Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 189. This particular passage regards examinations in all forms—school exams, medical reports, demographic analyses, political surveys, etc.—and how they not only place individuals in fields of surveillance, but as well as in "network[s] of writing." See as well Joan W. Scott's block quotation of this passage at the beginning of her essay "A Statistical Representation of Work, La Statistique de L'Industrie à Paris, 1847-1848," in *Gender and the Politics of History* (New York: Columbia University Press; 1988), 113-138.

⁷⁶ Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 3-6; 32-69. Foucault thoroughly analyzes this phenomenon, i.e. the public execution of the condemned individual, in *Discipline and Punish*, beginning his volume with a recounting of the torturous and dismembering execution of Robert-François Damiens in 1757. Convicted of parricide for attempting to assassinate Louis XV, the public nature of Damien's execution was a visible demonstration of monarchical authority. The French revolutionaries, especially during the radical phase

While Habermas, Geertz, Foucault, and those who employ their theories to enrich our understanding of the French Revolution and its political culture certainly have their place in this work, of particular importance here is the work of French historian François Furet and of those who follow his historiographical lead, notably Roger Chartier in France and Keith Baker and Lynn Hunt in the United States. By looking at the broader timeline of the Revolution, from 1789 to 1799, Furet breaks from the emphasis on 1789 to 1794 by socialist-Marxists historians, thereby pushing past the vision of the Revolution solely as a class struggle and an indicator of capitalism's subsequent economic dominance across Europe. Furet's emphasis is instead upon the "conceptual core" of the Revolution, its philosophical and political origins. To study them is to understand how it ended with the 1799 establishment of Napoleon Bonaparte's "democratically based monarchy [*une royauté de la démocratie*]." ⁷⁷ Furet's work demonstrates that just as language, symbols, rituals, etc., had political significance in France under the Bourbon monarchy, they did as well under the subsequent governments which replaced it, including the Republic which immediately supplanted it and eventually the Restoration of the monarchy with the formalized ascension of Louis XVIII, Louis XVI's and Madame Élisabeth's nearly sixty-year-old brother in 1814. As Lynn Hunt notes, "Neither politics nor the concept of

of the Terror, the phase in which Madame Élisabeth was executed, rotated the concept for themselves, the guillotine becoming a symbol of republican authority. This aspect will be discussed further in this volume, particularly in Chapters 5 and 6, and in relation to analyses which work from Foucault's theses, including Dorinda Outram's *The Body and the French Revolution: Sex, Class and Political Culture* (1989) and the Sara Melzer and Kathryn Norberg edited volume, *From the Royal to the Republican Body, Incorporating the Political in Seventeenth- and Eighteenth-Century France* (1998).

⁷⁷ François Furet, *Interpreting the French Revolution (Penser la Révolution Française)*, trans. by Elborg Forster (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; 1978; 1981), 78-79. Furet and his historiographic followers provide an invaluable and fresher conceptual model by which to examine Madame Élisabeth; yet, and to be discussed further in Chapter 6, "Madame Élisabeth and the Making of the Last Royal Spectacle," political culture historiography runs the danger of seeing French revolutionary politics as being somewhat autonomous from the socio-economic stresses faced by France prior to the Revolution's outbreak and during it. T. C. Blanning makes this observation in *The French Revolution, Class War or Culture Clash?*; see p. 7-8; 59.

the political was invented by the French, but, for reasons that are still not well understood, the French managed to invest them with extraordinary emotional and symbolic significance.”⁷⁸

For her entire life, especially once she came of age and in spite of her marginal position within the royal family, Madame Élisabeth was invested with “symbolic significance,” living under the paradoxical expectation that she publically represent the Bourbon monarchy before a society which was ever more critical of both it and the public presence of women within it and in greater French society. She was a visible ‘prop’ to her brother and the monarchy which they both represented. A troubled political structure by the end of the eighteenth century, the Bourbon monarchy found itself full of contradictions and continually struggled to put forth an image which it could no longer sustain. Critics were readily aware of this reality and eagerly exploited the gap between the monarchy’s representation of itself and the truth.⁷⁹ Madame Élisabeth may not have figured in the political culture of the era as much as other members of her family did, but she did figure in it in her during lifetime and afterward. By locating her in it, this work aspires to represent her anew.

In *Inventing the French Revolution, Essays on French Political Culture in the Eighteenth Century* (1990), Keith Baker notes that history is not the domain of discarded memory, but instead of disputed memory. History challenges and subverts memory, thereby challenging that

⁷⁸ Lynn A. Hunt, *Politics, Culture, and Class in the French Revolution* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 2-3. The central focus of Hunt’s work is to locate a better understanding French revolutionary politics, how they came to be, i.e. their “invention,” the difficulties and ambiguities they faced, and how their inherent weaknesses contributed to their eventual failure, the democratic republicanism which they aspired to being replaced by the “authoritarian solution” of Napoleon Bonaparte. See as well, p. 224-34.

⁷⁹ Thomas E. Kaiser, “Louis Le Bien-Aimé and the Rhetoric of the royal body,” in *From the Royal to the Republican Body: Incorporating the Political in Seventeenth- and Eighteenth-Century France*, ed. Sara E. Melzer and Kathryn Norberg (Berkeley: University of California Press; 1998): 161. See also author’s M.A. thesis, *Royal Women, Portraiture, and Salon Criticism in Pre-Revolutionary France* (Detroit: Wayne State University, 2002), 6.

which has been conceived of as fixed. “History,” he writes, “is memory contested; memory is history controlled and fixed.”⁸⁰ Thanks to the work of Baker and other historians of French revolutionary political culture, it is possible to break from the fixed memory of Madame Élisabeth as the Bourbon monarchy’s virgin martyr and to expose this rather overlooked princess to a new light which challenges the outdated perceptions pertaining to her, in particular the misperception that as she was not a political actor. Lifting back the veil of her marginality within the royal family, one better sees the valuation of her by revolutionaries and royalists alike. Madame Élisabeth, a biographical subject and a historical agent, has many profiles, many of which have yet to be explored.⁸¹

Overview

With the exclusion of the next two chapters, the flow of this volume is fairly chronological. Chapter 2, “The Paradox of *Représentation* and Royal Womanhood in the Salons of the Old Regime” looks at the concept of royal *représentation* in relation to royal portraiture, focusing on the queen’s attempt to remake her public image through the medium; and Chapter 3, “Representing the Monarchy, Representing the Royal Family, Representing Themselves” examines the topic further and in relation to the royal portraits painted by Adélaïde Labille-Guiard. Amongst the liveliest public appearances made by Madame Élisabeth was her portrait which appeared in the Salon of 1787. Underlying this and the other representational appearances was the expectation that royal women were to be on view before the king’s subjects; and yet, as

⁸⁰ Baker, *Inventing the French Revolution*: 55-56. Baker works from the Maurice Halbwach’s *The Collective Memory* (tr. F.J. Ditter, Jr., and V.Y. Ditter, introduction by Mary Douglas (New York; 1980), 78-87.

⁸¹ Margadant, “Introduction,” 4.

historians have shown, there was increasing criticism in the latter half of the eighteenth century directed at both the monarchy and women's presence within it.

The chapter following these two, "La Soeur du Roi," focuses on the life of Madame Élisabeth before 1789. It also examines some aspects of her heritage, but the central focus is on her childhood in the gilded realm of Versailles and her coming of age later on at the nearby chateaux of Montreuil. It was a privileged and luxurious life, but not one without its limitations and its burdens, including royal women's exclusion from political authority. Louis XVI may have imposed restrictions on his sister's time at Montreuil and on who was permitted to the exclusive domain, but having a residence of her own granted the princess with a certain sense of personal liberty.

The subsequent portion of this volume turns toward the period after the French Revolution's outbreak in the summer of 1789. The next chapter, "'La partie étoit belle,' Madame Élisabeth in the Tuileries," derives its title from an engraving of the era which defamed the pre-revolutionary era image of the princess as a pious and beautiful woman. This chapter in particular concentrates of the period between the October Days, when the royal family was forcibly moved from Versailles to the Tuileries palace in Paris, to the fall of the monarchy on August 10, 1792. During this period Madame Élisabeth was a visibly active political agent by accompanying her brother and his family in their abortive escape attempt in June 1791; but, and more important, by communicating with her emigrated brothers as they organized a coalition of foreign leaders willing to take action against revolutionary France. The revolutionaries were well aware of this truth and her intransigence; and they began to despise the woman they came to know.

Chapter 6, “Madame Élisabeth and the making of the Last Royal Spectacle” focuses on Madame Élisabeth and her image in both the medieval keep of the Temple and before the Revolutionary Tribunal in May 1794. As mentioned beforehand, she was found guilty of treason and was so in part on the manner in which she behaved toward her nephew, ultra-royalists acknowledging the eight-year-old boy to be their king, Louis XVII, upon the execution of his father in 1793. Considering the increased hostility toward women’s presence in the public sphere of politics in the autumn of 1793, culminating in part with the National Convention’s decree dissolving women’s political clubs at the end of October 1793, it is a wonder that Madame Élisabeth did not go to the guillotine in the same period as her sister-in-law. After examining her appearance before the Revolutionary Tribunal, the radical revolutionaries justifying their execution of *Citoyenne* Anne-Élisabeth Capet on the grounds that she and numerous others conspired against the liberty of the French people, this chapter examines the visual and textual apotheosis of Madame Élisabeth as artists and biographers transformed her into a virgin martyr. The question as to whether or not Madame Élisabeth was actually a virgin is not of significance in this particular chapter, or the other ones as well; but what is important in it is how the posthumous glorification of her contributed to the re-sanctification of the Bourbon monarchy after its restoration in 1814. Observing that her brother was put to death for his attachment to his Catholic faith, Pope Pius VI declared, “it seems to us impossible to deny [Louis XVI] the glory of martyrdom.”⁸² It was by extension of that papal belief that counterrevolutionary and Restoration artists, writers, and even political figures grounded their elevation of Madame Élisabeth to such an exalted status.

⁸² Quoted and Trans. in Hardman, *Louis XVI*, p. 180

In 1790 Madame Élisabeth wrote, “I have no taste for martyrdom; but that I should be very glad to have the certainty of suffering it rather than abandon one iota of my faith. I hope that if I am destined to it, God will give me strength.”⁸³ The tendency by prior biographers to canonize this particular French princess overlooks her historical agency, as well as fails to recognize her potential as a “site” through which we better understand gender dynamics within both the royal family and revolutionary France. Looking back at the manner in which this analysis approaches a relatively marginal princess from previously unexplored perspectives, including through the analyses of gender, political culture, micro-history, and the “new biography,” we find that martyrdom may have been Madame Élisabeth’s destiny, but it is not the sole lens through which we can know her and the time in which she lived.

⁸³ Madame Élisabeth, to the Marquise de Raigecourt, 30 December 1790. Reproduced and trans. in *Life and Letters*, 57.

CHAPTER 2. THE PARADOX OF *REPRÉSENTATION* AND ROYAL WOMANHOOD IN THE FINAL *SALONS* OF THE OLD REGIME¹

Beginning in 1737, the intent of the biennial Salon exhibitions held by France’s Royal Academy of Painting and Sculpture was to glorify the Bourbon monarchy through the public display of the kingdom’s best art [Fig. 2.1]. The title page of the exhibition catalogs consistently read “suivant l’intention de SA MAJESTÉ.”² Over the course of the eighteenth century both the number of works displayed and public interest in the Salon exhibitions grew exponentially,

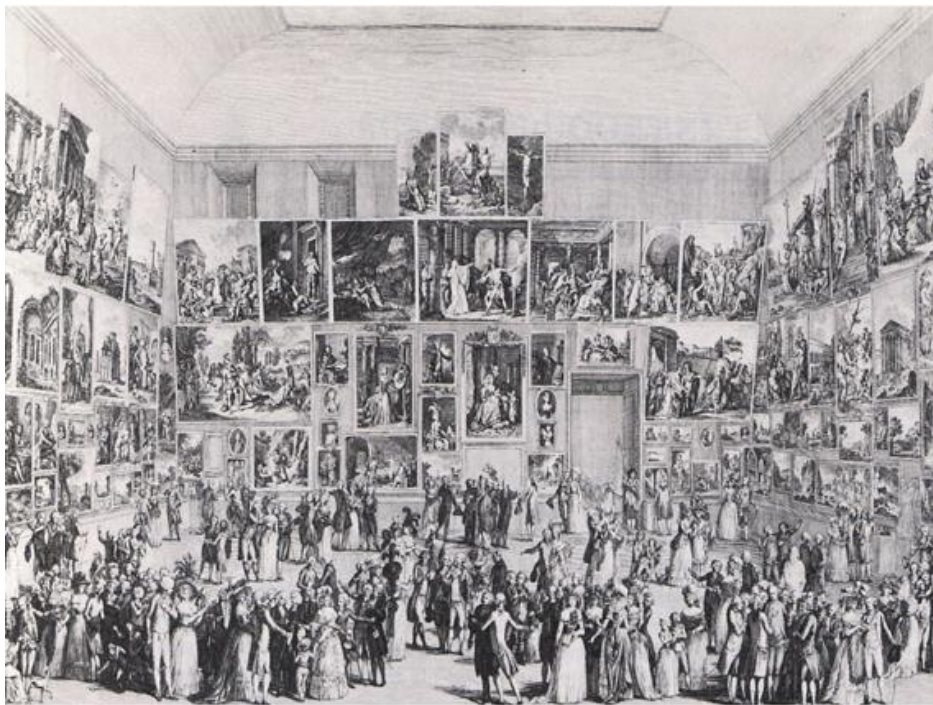


Fig. 2.1: Pietro Antonio Martini, *The Salon of 1787*. 1787. Engraving.³

¹ Portions of this and the next chapter are drawn from the author’s master’s thesis, “Royal Women, Portraiture, and Salon Criticism in Prerevolutionary France” (M.A. thesis; Wayne State University, Detroit: 2002); and “French Princesses ‘In Service of the Throne’ (and Themselves),” conference paper presented at the Sixteenth Berkshire Conference on the History of Women, Toronto, CA, May 23, 2014.

² *Explication des peintures, sculptures et gravures de messieurs de l’Académie Royale, 1787*. Collection Deloynes, Tome XV, no. 367.

³ *The Salon of 1787*, European Institute for Progressive Cultural Policies, accessed Sept. 12, 2012. <http://eipcp.net/dlfiles/0910-ashford3>.

thereby contributing to the evolution of art criticism as a literary discourse, one that would clandestinely voice political, cultural, and social critiques.⁴ In particular, the proliferation of portraits over the century drew a great deal of criticism, leading Louis-Sébastien Mercier, ever the critic of Parisian society and events on the eve of the Revolution, to disparage in the *Tableau de Paris*:

What is wearying and at times revolting is to find a crowd of busts and painted portraits of nameless people, and more often those engaged in anti-popular pursuits. ... as long as the brush sells itself to idle opulence, to mincing *coquetterie*, to snobbish fatuousness, the portrait should remain in the boudoir; but it should never affront the vision of the public in the place where the nation hastens to visit!⁵

The Salons not only added to the monarchy's glory but also provided members of the royal family and the king's closest associates to represent themselves before the French on the monarch's behalf through portraiture. Art criticism of the era is littered with praise and reprimand for these works of art, from acclaim for Jean-Marc Nattier's portrait of Louis XV's consort, *Marie Leszczyńska* (Salon of 1748) [see Fig. 3.11], to Denis Diderot's scathing reception of Mesdames Adélaïde's and Victoire's 1765 portraits by Alexander Roslin [Fig. 2.2 and Fig. 2.3]. Writing for a primarily foreign audience, the prolific *philosophe* had nothing but praise for the artist while expressing almost complete embarrassment on behalf of his fellow Frenchmen, lamenting:

Our two Daughters of France, awkward, stiff, massive, ignoble, tedious, plastered with rouge, very much resemble two hairdressers mock-ups loaded down with beads, combs, ornaments, little chains, pointed tips, tasseled fringes, flowers,

⁴ Thomas Crow, *Painters and Public Life in Eighteenth-Century Paris* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press; 1985; 5th printing, 1995); Bernadette Fort, "Voice of the Public: The Carnivalization of Salon Art in Prerevolutionary Pamphlets," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 22 (Summer 1989): 368-94.

⁵ Louis Sébastien Mercier, "La Sallon de Peinture," *Le Tableau de Paris* (Amsterdam; 1782-1788), 203-206; quoted and trans. in Crow, *Painters and Public Life*, 101; 267, n. 42.



Fig. 2.2. Alexander Roslin. *Madame Adélaïde, fille de Louis XV*. Salon of 1765. Oil on canvas; 65 cm x 54 cm. The Zorn Museum, Mora, Sweden.⁶

Fig. 2.3. Alexander Roslin. *Madame Victoire, Princess of France*. Salon of 1765. Oil on canvas; approx. 65 cm x 54 cm. Helsingborg Museer, Sweden.⁷

festoons, with the entire stock of a fashionable boutique; or, if you prefer, two fat creatures one can't look at without laughing, so shocking bad is their taste. The laces, however, are superb.⁸

Underlying Diderot's biting critique was the long-held sentiment that the arts had significantly deteriorated in France during the reign of Louis XV, the taste for shiny baubles and ornamentation by courtly women receiving much of the blame.⁹ The shame the *philosophe* felt at the sight of the two spinster princesses aside, the two deliberately reappeared before their nephew's subjects in the Salons of 1787 and 1789 [Fig. 3.4 and 3.5]. Alongside these two

⁶ *Madame Adélaïde, fille de Louis XV*, Simil'Art.fr, accessed Jan. 22, 2013.

http://www.similart.fr/sites/default/files/imagecache/diaporama/tableaux_haute_definition/32555.jpg

⁷ *Madame Victoire, Princess of France*, Wikipedia Commons, accessed Jan. 22, 2013.

http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/6/67/Madame_Victoire%2C_Princess_of_France.jpg

⁸ Denis Diderot, *The Salon of 1765*, in *Diderot on Art*, Vol. 1, ed. and trans. by John Goodman (New Haven: Yale University Press; 1995), 78.

⁹ Jennifer Jones, *Sexing La Mode: Gender, Fashion and Commercial Culture in Old Regime France* (Oxford; New York: Berg; 2004), 117.

portraits, and eventually transferring into the princesses' personal collection at Bellevue, was Madame Élisabeth only formal representational appearance in the public sphere of the Salons [Fig. 3.10]. Fundamental to this particular representational appearance via the medium of state portraiture, as well as all other publicly exhibited portraits of royal women, was the paradoxical nature of French royal womanhood itself. As noted before, the body of a French royal woman was a political body, one denied political authority by its sex but one not without the potential to influence the king, his counselors, his court, and by extension, his subjects. As the inscription on the pedestal in Madame Victoire's portrait indicates, the body of a princess was a royal body perpetually "in the service of the Throne," public bodies charged with being physically and representationally on view before everyone. Conversely, and at the very crux of the paradox of French royal womanhood, especially in the latter half of the eighteenth century, royal women publically appeared before a society which was increasingly critical of not only the Bourbon monarchy and the presence of influential women within it, but also of women's presence in the public sphere in general.¹⁰

These images are amongst the liveliest remnants of Old Regime France left to us. They have been frequently studied, and somewhat rightly so, in regards to their producer, Adélaïde Labille-Guiard, one of the four women honorarily admitted to the Royal Academy of Painting of Sculpture. They have also been examined in relation to the multiple portraits of Marie-Antoinette which appeared in the Salons over the course of the 1780s, the critically acclaimed and vilified *Marie-Antoinette and her Children* [Fig. 2.9] by Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun appearing just to the left of the *Portrait of Madame Élisabeth* and the *Portrait of Madame Adélaïde* in the Salon of 1787. My analysis of the representational appearances made first by Marie-Antoinette

¹⁰ Wendeln, "Royal Women, Portraiture, and Salon Criticism," 6.

on multiple occasions and then by Mesdames Élisabeth, Adélaïde, and Victoire in the Salons of 1780s in relation not only to one another, but also with other notable portraits of royal women from the era, demonstrates the valuation placed by the Bourbon monarchy on state portraiture as a medium of royal spectacle, *représentation* investing the image of the royal body with significance. This work also locates these particular royal portraits within the broader political culture of the period and their eventual failure to endear members of the royal family to the French, the queen's portraits unable to remake her public image and the princesses' ones regarded as pompous displays of self-importance. It also shows the monarchy's continued belief in its own absolute authority while failing to see that the French no longer saw it as *the* authority. Moreover, such an analysis provides us with a better understanding of the historic overestimation that late eighteenth-century France and the Bourbon monarchy were being weakened by the presence of influential women within both when the truth was the continued denial of actual legal and or political power to all French women.¹¹

Royal Portraiture and the “*premier Peintre de Mesdames*”

The analytical handling of artwork in a manner which is more historical than art historical can be somewhat problematic. The untrained eye always runs the danger of reading too much into a piece without consideration of composition, stock techniques, and patronage. This a consequence of modern contemporary imagination, one created by the camera and its ability to instantaneously record an event, a location, or person's countenance in a snapshot. Yet, as renowned art historian Francis Haskell observed, just as the camera can lie, artwork from the

¹¹ Madelyn Gutwirth, *The Twilight of the Goddesses*, 86.

past created their own false realities as well.¹² Since the advent of the “cultural turn” in the 1980s, Haskell is one among a number of art historians who have pondered the issue as to whether or not historians can appropriately utilize an image as historical evidence. As art historian Jan de Vries fittingly noted, the historian avoids the reception of a piece as “framed view of reality” through the full recognition of its construction and subjectivity.¹³ Each one of the royal portraits under discussion was a highly structured piece and the Salons’ critics and attendees were readily aware of this truth.

All portraits of royal women which appeared in the Salons over the course of the Eighteenth Century were not just renderings of their sitters’ countenances. Portraits of royal family members, and particularly those put on permanent or limited public display, were state portraits, on the cusp between the genres of history painting and portraiture.¹⁴ According to the hierarchy of genres set forth by the Royal Academy in the seventeenth century and carried through into the eighteenth, the former was accorded the highest standing for its embracement of all the other genres while portraiture received the second highest for its depiction of the human form.¹⁵ Both of the latter derived in history painting and portraiture were highly

¹² Francis Haskell, *History and Its Images: Art and the Interpretation of the Past* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press; 1993), 4.

¹³ Jan de Vries, “Introduction,” in *Art in History / History in Art: Studies in Seventeenth-Century Culture*, ed. David Freedberg and Jan de Vries (Santa Monica: Getty Center for the History of Art and the Humanities; Chicago: University of Chicago Press; 1991), 3-4.

¹⁴ Just as there was a number of notable portraits of royal women which were publicly exhibited during the era of their making, so too was a number of their portraits which were privately held, including the 1750s portraits of Mesdames de France by Nattier which Louis XV commissioned as a gift and decoration for Marie Leszczyńska’s Versailles apartments. Other works to consider with this status are the portrait of Madame Adélaïde in the Uffizi by Liotard, depicting the princess lying upon a plush couch, reading, and wearing Turkish garb; and also, the early 1780s portrait of Madame Élisabeth in a rustic costume by Vigée-Lebrun, discussed in the next chapter.

¹⁵ Paul Duro, *The Academy and the Limits of Painting in Seventeenth-Century France* (New York: Cambridge University Press; 1997), 8.



Fig. 2.4. Charles-Germain de Saint-Aubin. *La Plus prompte façon de faire un portrait*. From *Livres de caricatures tant bonnes que mauvaises*. Page 247. c. 1740-c. 1775. Watercolour, ink and graphite on paper; 187 x 132 mm. Waddesdon, Waddesdon Manor.¹⁶

constructed genres, the methodical production and contemporaneous popularity of the latter derided in Charles-Germain Saint-Aubin's caricature, *La Plus prompte façon de faire un portrait* (*The fastest way to make a portrait*) [Fig. 2.4]. Whether intended for private or public exhibition, the main intent of a formally composed portrait is the promotion of the image the sitter wishes to display to their contemporaries and future beholders.¹⁷ Saint-Aubin's drawing demonstrates the ready awareness on the part of the Salons' public audiences that portraiture was both a high constructed and subjective genre. Critics and the art-going public in the eighteenth century alike were repulsed by the over abundance of portraits in the Salons as the brush continued to sell itself to "idle opulence."

¹⁶ *La Plus prompte façon de faire un portrait*, from *Livres de caricatures tant bonnes que mauvaises*, Waddesdon Manor, accessed June 19, 2014.

<http://collection.waddesdon.org.uk/images/large/collection/books/675.247.jpg>.

¹⁷ Philip Conisbee, *Painting in Eighteenth-Century France* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press; 1981), 113.

“Portraiture,” writes art historian Norman Bryson, “builds on the subject’s own creation of social ‘face,’ the façade the subject presents to the world, the image round which self structures its identity.”¹⁸ Furthermore, those eighteenth-century French portraits which depicted the sitter engaged in virtuous behavior received critical acceptance since they inspired the emulation of virtue in their beholders.¹⁹ The portraits under discussion in this chapter and the next attempted to appeal to the Salon audiences on this level during what would be the waning days of the monarchy, with Madame Adélaïde honoring the memory of her late parents and brother in her portrait while her sister pays homage to the noble sentiment of friendship in hers.²⁰ As cultural historian Peter Burke notes in *The Fabrication of Louis XIV*, portraits of notable personages within a given era demand their own set of analytical strategies: “we must study not only ‘who says what’ but also ‘to whom’ and ‘with what effects.’”²¹ The location of the portraits under discussion in the broader political culture of the period is best done through a rigid examination of the forces underlying their fabrication, the nature of the audience which first beheld them, and the critical reception of these portraits by that audience.

It is important to note that the fundamental purpose of the Royal Academy of Painting and Sculpture, as well as all other academic institutions in France, was to perpetuate the glory of the Bourbon monarchy.²² Beginning in the mid-1760s, the Academy promoted an official campaign to inspire the emulation of virtue in the Salons’ public audiences via the artwork displayed therein. Initiated by the Marquis de Marigny, Louis XV’s *Directeur general des*

¹⁸ Norman Bryson, “Géricault and Masculinity,” in Bryson, et al., *Visual Culture: Images and Interpretations* (Hanover: University Press of New England [for] Wesleyan University Press; 1994), 257.

¹⁹ Richard Wrigley, *The Origins of French Art Criticism: From the Ancien Régime to the Restoration* (Oxford; New York: Clarendon Press / Oxford University Press; 1993), 286; 301; 304.

²⁰ Wendeln, “Royal Women, Portraiture, and Salon Criticism,” 5.

²¹ Peter Burke, *The Fabrication of Louis XIV* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press; 1992), 151.

²² James Leith, *The Idea of Art as Propaganda in France, 1750-1789: A Study in the History of Ideas* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press; 1965), 20-22.

bâtiments and brother to the king's well-known *maîtresse-en-titre*, the Marquise de Pompadour, this campaign was continued in the 1770s and 1780s by the Comte d'Angiviller. Up to 1789, all official commissions went through him, including Jacques-Louis David's *The Oath of the Horatii* (Salon of 1785) and *The Death of Socrates* (Salon of 1787), the latter hanging just below Madame Adélaïde's portrait.²³

An important aspect of d'Angiviller's direction of the Royal Academy was his plan in the 1780s to transform the Louvre into a museum, a national monument exalting both the monarchy and France. Utilizing Enlightenment principles for the systematic collection and presentation of artwork, d'Angiviller intended to make over the palace's Grand Gallery into a location where the artwork contained therein educated the public on good and virtuous behavior.²⁴ With the opening of museums across the continent during the era, museum directors found themselves increasingly concerned with how to make historical figures, past and present, more presentable to contemporary opinion.²⁵ Although it is uncertain if d'Angivillier intended the portraits under discussion to eventually be permanently displayed in the Louvre, it is known that he was ever concerned with how the king and members of his family looked before the French, and that he played a significant role in the commissioning and subsequent exhibition of their portraits in the Salons. Neither Marie-Antoinette's, nor Mesdames Adelaide's or Victorie's, nor Madame Élisabeth's individual bodies were *the* definitive political body in the land; but as members of Louis XVI's family, their actions and their portraits represented him, signifying his absolute authority to his subjects.

²³ Crow, *Painters and Public Life*, 243.

²⁴ Andrew McClellan, "The Musée du Louvre as Revolutionary Metaphor during the Terror," *Art Bulletin* LXX, no. 2 (June 1988): 302-4; and McClellan, "D'Angiviller's Louvre Project," chap. in *Inventing the Louvre: Art, Politics, and the Origins of the Modern Museum in Eighteenth-Century Paris* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press; 1994), 49-90.

²⁵ Haskell, *History and Its Images*, 294.

As for the portraitist herself, Adélaïde Labille-Guiard (1749-1803) was one of the most prominent female painters of the era. The daughter of Claude-Edme Labille, a prominent Parisian haberdasher, her August 1769 marriage to the financier Louis-Nicolas Guiard was “une grande deception” since the couple had very little in common, leading rather separate lives in spite of living under the same roof for the first ten years of their union. The Revolutionary divorce law of 1792 provided them with the opportunity to end their marriage, Labille-Guiard eventually validating her long time relationship with the painter François André Vincent by marriage in 1800. An academician and recipient of the coveted *Prix de Rome* in 1768, Vincent is primarily known for his landscapes and was the son of the miniaturist François-Elie Vincent, one of the masters under whom Labille-Guiard studied, the other being the renowned pastel portraitist Maurice Quentin de la Tour.²⁶ Through the latter figure the savvy historian can draw a connection to the court of Louis XV and his portraits of the Marie Leszczyńska and Madame de Pompadour [Fig. 3.12], but it is through the portraitist’s father and his hiring of a young Jeanne Bécu as a salesgirl in his shop during the early 1760s that one draws a loose connection between the painter and the woman who became the Comtesse du Barry, the woman her royal patrons vehemently despised in their father’s last years.²⁷

Just as the portraits of Mesdames Adélaïde, Victoire, and Élisabeth are entwined with those of Marie-Antoinette from the Salons of the 1780s, so too is their portraitist’s name with that of her fellow portraitist and honorary member of the academy, Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun. Both women were admitted to the Royal Academy of Painting and Sculpture on the same day, May 31, 1783. The distinction granted them the privilege of exhibiting their work in the biennial

²⁶ Anne Marie Passez, *Adélaïde Labille-Guiard, 1749-1803: Biographie et Catalogue Raisonné de Son Oeuvre* (Paris: Arts et Métiers Graphiques; 1973), 10; 37-44.

²⁷ Passez, 8; 50-52.

Salons and attendance of the academicians's assemblies, but their sex denied from them voting rights within that renowned body or from swearing allegiance to it and its rules.²⁸ Furthermore, it continued their forbiddance from the Academy's live model lessons, male nude studies in particular, a prohibition which some women artists defied in the private studios of male artists, including in that of Jacques-Louis David.²⁹ Over the course of the Eighteenth Century the Royal Academy encouraged the admission of talented female artists to their ranks, but not without deeming them to be "exceptional" and proposing to limit their number:

. . . , these admissions, foreign in some fashion to [the Academy's] constitution, must not be repeated too often. [The Academy] has agreed that it will receive no more than four women. It will, however, receive women only in cases in which their extraordinarily distinguished talents lead the Academy to wish, with a unanimous voice, to crown them with particular distinction.³⁰

Presented by Alexander Roslin to the Academy as "*Adélaïde Labille des Vertus, née à Paris, femme de M. Guyard, Peintre de portraits,*" her admission was contingent upon the submission of two *morceaux des reception*, the first being a portrait of the sculptor Augustin Pajou, the second a portrait of the painter Charles-Amédée Vanloo.³¹ While Labille-Guiard's admission was without controversy, the same cannot be said of Vigée-Lebrun's, beginning with the conflict of interest regarding her marriage to the art dealer Jean-Baptiste-Pierre Lebrun, to Marie-Antoinette's request that the Academy make an exception to its rules against academicians'

²⁸ Mary Sheriff, *The Exceptional Woman: Elisabeth Vigée-Lebrun and the Cultural Politics of Art* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press; 1996), 81.

²⁹ On women artists studying in David's studio, see Mary Vidal, "The 'Other Atelier': Jacques-Louis David's Female Students," chap. in Melissa Hyde and Jennifer Milam, eds., *Women, Art and the Politics of Identity in Eighteenth-Century Europe* (Aldershot; Burlington: Ashgate; 2003), 237-62.

³⁰ Jean-Baptiste-Marie Pierre, *Règlement pour l'admission des femmes à l'Académie* (Sept. 28, 1770); in Anatole de Montaiglon, ed., *Procès-verbaux de l'Académie Royale de Peinture et de Sculpture*, vol. 8 (out of 11 vols.) (Paris: Charavay Frères, 1889), 53. Quoted and trans. in Sheriff, *The Exceptional Woman*, 79. Sheriff notes the inherent contradiction in the Royal Academy's manner of incorporating women into the academic body while regarding their admission in to its political one as "foreign."

³¹ *Procès-verbaux de l'Académie Royale de Peinture et de Sculpture*, 1648-1793, Vol. 9 (Paris: M. Anatole de Montaiglon for La Société de L'Histoire de L'Art Français; 1889), 154; 248. See also Passez, 109; 148.

involvement with commercial enterprise in order to advance her admission. D'Angiviller skillfully accomplished it by advising Louis XVI to admit "la Dame *Le Brun*" by royal decree while permanently limiting the number of women in the Academy to four, "[Un] nombre est suffisant pour honorer le talent, les femmes ne pouvant jamais être utiles au progrès des Arts, la décence de leur sex les empêchant de pouvoir étudier d'après nature et dans l'École publique établie et fondée par Votre Majesté."³²

Labille-Guiard's *Self-portrait with Two Pupils*, exhibited at the Salon of 1785, stands as a testament to her artistic talent, her femininity, and her promotion of women's artistic education [Fig. 2.5]. The student in the fashionable *chemise* gown is Mlle. Carreaux de Rosemond (d. 1788) while the one in the brown *robe à l'anglaise* is Mlle. Marie Gabrielle Capet (1761-1818). For Labille-Guiard and Capet the teacher-pupil relationship transformed into a collegial one, the younger woman residing and sharing studio space with her mentor and Vincent until the former's death in 1803. Labille-Guiard's commitment to the cause of women in the arts extended to Maurice de Talleyrand-Périgord speaking on her behalf before the National Assembly in 1791, entering her proposal that the state provide poor young women with an artistic education so that they would have a legitimate occupation, thereby avoiding the pitfalls of public corruption. Unfortunately, she never pursued these plans seriously enough to ensure their implementation; in particular she became one of a number of artists who garnered employment in the early years of

³² M. le Comte d'Angiviller, *Mémoire présenté au Roy par M. le Comte d'Angiviller, le 14 May 1783*, in *Procès-verbaux de l'Académie Royale de Peinture et de Sculpture*, vol. 9, 156-157. For analysis of the controversy regarding Vigée-Lebrun's marriage and its conflict of interest in regards to the Royal Academy's rule against artists' engagement in the commerce of art dealing, see Sheriff, *The Exceptional Woman*, 82-90. See as well Laura Auricchio, "The Laws of *Bienséance* and the Gendering of Emulation in Eighteenth-Century French Art Education," *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, Vol. 36, No. 2, False Arcadias (Winter, 2003): 231-240.



Fig. 2.5. Adélaïde Labille-Guiard. *Self-portrait with Two Pupils*. 1785. Oil on canvas; 210.8 x 151.1 cm. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.³³

the French Revolution by painting portraits its political leaders as their royal and aristocratic patrons emigrated.³⁴

While the *Self-portrait with Two Pupils* advertised her instructor abilities, there are other aspects of the painting's commercial enterprise which cannot be overlooked. With it Labille-Guiard not only effectively demonstrated to the Salon's critics and visitors that a woman artist could indeed paint the human form without the benefit of the Royal Academy's live model sessions, but it also showed her depth of compositional knowledge and her skill in replicating multiple surfaces with paint on canvas, most notably in the sheen of her blue silk dress and the

³³ *Self-portrait with Two Pupils*, Metropolitan Museum of Art, accessed June 22, 2014. http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/images/hb/hb_53.225.5.jpg.

³⁴ Passez, 35; Tony Halliday, *Facing the Public: Portraiture in the Aftermath of the French Revolution* (Manchester, New York: Manchester University Press; 1999), 26-27.

hardness of the Pajou marble bust of her father in the upper left-hand corner.³⁵ All of her works exhibited in the Salon of 1783 drew praise, the author of *Messieurs, Ami de Tout le Monde!* writing, “Voici encore une Artiste qui prouve que les Arts les plus difficiles peuvent être cultivés avec succès par un sexe à qui le préjugé ne permet encore à présent que les grâces & la beauté.”³⁶ Her self-portrait drew the desired attention, with Madame Adélaïde even attempting to purchase the painting; and the portraitist declined the princess’s offer, she did commercially benefit from the piece via the royal commission of the three portraits at the core of this discussion.³⁷

In the days before the *Portrait of Madame Adélaïde* and the *Portrait of Madame Élisabeth* went on display in the Salon of 1787, the Baron of Breteuil, *Secrétaire d'État de ses commandements et finances*, issued the decree recognizing Labille-Guiard as the *premier Peintre de Mesdames*. It began:

Aujourd’hui 10 août 1787, le Roi étant à Versailles, toujours attentive à donner des marques de sa bienveillance aux personnes qui par leur zèle et la supériorité de leurs talents se distinguent dans leur art. Sa Majesté a bien voulu, à cet effet, avoir égard à la demande que Mesdames Adélaïde et Victoire de France lui ont faite de conférer à la De Guiard, member de l’Académie Royale de Peinture et Sculpture, le titre de peintre de ces princesses; lui permet, en conséquence Sa

³⁵ Laura Auricchio, “Self-Promotion in Adélaïde Labille-Guiard’s 1785 *Self-Portrait with Two Students*,” *The Art Bulletin*, Vol. 89, no. 1 (Mar. 2007), 45, 48-52. Also, in “The Laws of *Bienséance* and the Gendering of Emulation in Eighteenth-Century France Art Education,” Auricchio analyzes how Labille-Guiard and other women artists of the era walked a fine line as they were expected to be silent and modest while pursuing the acclaim which could potentially bring them dishonor and or disgrace. A new understanding of emulation emerged with an emphasis on “propriety,” Labille-Guiard’s self-portrait and the female *atelier* depicted in it serving as “alternative model[s] of artistic education” where this was understood. See *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, Vol. 36, No. (Winter 2003): 232-33; 237.

³⁶ Anon., *Messieurs, Ami de Tout le Monde!* (Paris; 1783), 24.

³⁷ *Année littéraire*, 1785 (Collection Deloynes, Tome 14, no. 349); I was directed to this source by Auricchio, “Self-Promotion in Adélaïde Labille-Guiard’s 1785 *Self-Portrait with Two Students*,” 56, 62 n. 94; who in turn was directed to it by Melissa Hyde, “Under the Sign of Minerva: Adélaïde Labille-Guiard’s *Portrait of Madame Adélaïde*,” chap. in Melissa Hyde and Jennifer Milam, eds., *Women, Art and the Politics of Identity in Eighteenth-Century Europe* (Aldershoot; Burlington, VT: Ashgate; 2003), 150, 162 n. 29.

Majesté de prendre ledit titre dans toutes les assemblées et en tous actes public et particuliers tant en jugement que dehors, et, pour assurance de sa volonté, Sa Majesté m'a commandé d'expédier le present brevet . . .³⁸

Whereas Vigée-Lebrun's admission to the Royal Academy had required rather deft political maneuvering by the Comte d'Angiviller on the queen's behalf in 1783, Louis XVI took pride in bestowing this honor upon Labille-Guiard. She may not have been the portraitist to the two most prominent figures in the land, but her contribution to the arts in France earned her royal patronage, including a large commission from the Comte de Provence, and, more important, a distinction which even her rival did not receive.³⁹

Représentation and the Salons as Public Space

Beneath the fabrication of all royal portraits was the seventeenth-century concept of *représentation*. It has been defined as the use of pomp by the monarch, his ministers, his court, and his nobles to establish a "theatre of power," an "aura" around the crown in order to dazzle the common people while maintaining the social hierarchy.⁴⁰ From this arose the notion that the portrait of the king is the king and that even the king's portrait was due the same honors as if he were actually present. Hence, when Louis XIV was physically absent from the Châteaux of

³⁸ AN O¹ 3765, *Brevet de Peintre de Mesdames Adélaïde et Victoire pour la De Guiard de l'Académie de peinture*; reproduced in Passez, 303.

³⁹ In 1788 Labille-Guiard was commissioned by the Comte de Provence to paint *Réception d'un Chevalier de l'Ordre de Saint Lazare par Monsieur, Grand Maître de l'Ordre*, a piece which representationally emphasized the comte's significance to the chivalric order, the newly inducted chevalier kneeling before the seated future king (Charles X; r. 1825-1830). It took the artist two-and-a-half years to complete the piece and it remained in her possession after Provence's emigration. In spite of her political leanings, she was forced to destroy the piece by the Terror government in 1793, the painting and Labille-Guiard both being victims of the revolutionary iconoclasm which swept the country between 1791 and 1794. See Suellen Diaconoff, "Ambition, Politics, and Professionalism," in *Eighteenth-Century Women and the Arts*, ed. Frederick M. Keener and Susan E. Lorsch (Westport: Greenwood Press, Inc.; 1988), 205; and, Diance Kelder, *Aspects of 'Official' Painting and Philosophic Art, 1789-1799* (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1976), 84.

⁴⁰ Burke, 151.



Fig. 2.6: Hyacinthe Rigaud. *Louis XIV*. 1701. Oil on canvas; 289.6 x 159.1 cm. Musée National du Château, Versailles.⁴¹

Versailles, his portrait [Fig. 2.6] rested on the throne in his place.⁴² Meanwhile, *représentation* had several other meanings at the time of its conceptualization, including ‘performance’ or to recall to mind and memory absent objects or personages. To “represent” also meant to take someone’s place, and thus the reigning monarch’s ambassadors, provincial governors, magistrates, queen, and other members of his family represented him. For Louis XVI, the actions of his queen, his aunts, and his sister were to appropriately signify his absolute authority before everyone.⁴³

State portraiture was one of the many means by which this was done and each one of the portraits under discussion contributed in some measure to the greater royal spectacle. When all

⁴¹ *Louis XIV*, University of Nebraska-Lincoln, Center for Digital Research in the Humanities, accessed September 24, 2012. <http://cdrh.unl.edu/louisxiv/eng/images/A3-B2-D10-E7.jpg>.

⁴² Burke, 9; see also Louis Marin, *The Portrait of the King*, trans. by Martha M. Houle (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press; 1988), 169-214.

⁴³ Landes, *Women and the Public Sphere in the Age of the French Revolution*, 18; 20.

three paintings entered the Salons of 1787 and 1789, they were not solely portraits of royal sitters, but instead were venerable representations of Mesdames Adélaïde, Victoire, and Élisabeth. As noted beforehand, the corporal and representational bodies of all three princesses were directly involved in the Old Regime's political fields of power.⁴⁴ To commission Labille-Guiard to produce multiple works, to reveal the finished pieces in the greatest art exhibition in the land, particularly during the heightened period between the calling of the Assembly of Notables in 1787 and the subsequent Estates General in 1789, were the means by which all three women signified Louis XVI's authority to his subjects while reminding the French of their familial connection to him. Each one of them was physically and semiotically located in what Pierre Saint-Amand aptly terms as a "theatrical system of communication."⁴⁵

Intended to enhance Louis XVI's magnificence, these portraits instead did more to embellish the glory of their individual sitters than that of the King. Louis XVI was figuratively and symbolically absent in all three paintings. Additionally, his own retreat into private life within the public realm of the court was reflected in his near representational absence in the Salons, an absence which manifested itself as well in the portraits of Marie-Antoinette which hung there in the 1780s. His only appearance of note there was the large scale portrait of him painted by Antoine-François Callet in the Salon of 1789, the work itself being a stale reincarnation of the *portrait d'appart*.⁴⁶ The manner in which Louis XVI distanced himself from

⁴⁴ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish, the Birth of the Prison*, 25. See also Dena Goodman, ed. *Marie Antoinette, Writings on the Body of a Queen* (New York; London: Routledge; 2003); Lynn A. Hunt, *The Family Romance of the French Revolution* (Berkeley: University of California Press; 1992; 1993); and, Dorinda Outram, *The Body and the French Revolution: Sex, Class, and Political Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press; 1989).

⁴⁵ Pierre Saint-Amand, "Terrorizing Marie-Antoinette," in Goodman, ed., *Marie Antoinette, Writings on the Body of a Queen* (New York; London: Routledge; 2003), 262.

⁴⁶ The *portrait d'appart* was a Rocco device by which the sitter of a portrait was depicted with the noticeable attributes of their daily life and or employment. See David Wakefield, *French Eighteenth-Century Painting* (London: Gordon Fraser; 1984), 13.

his court and his people, including his representational distancing, made his reign out to be the antithesis of kingship's public role. Historian Roger Chartier rightly describes Louis XVI's isolation as a "destructive break" from the ritual embodiment by which the monarchy asserted its absolute authority and sacred nature.⁴⁷

The three portraits at the core of this discussion not only celebrated their royal sitters, but as well reminded the Salons' attendees that all three women were indeed political agents. Each one of them was born into a courtly environment where all individuals attempted to assert their influence upon the definitive political body in the land, their familial closeness to the king readily granting them physical and emotional access to him. France's fictive Salic law and the Bourbon monarchy's absolutist ideology prohibited any and all royal women from inheriting the throne or bequeathing it to any of their female descendents. Mesdames Adélaïde, Victoire, and Élisabeth were readily aware that the throne would never pass to or through them; but, both their and other's understanding of their influence upon the king was not without question, including and particularly by the queen herself, the relationship between all four women being more than tense on a number of occasions.

As princesses, all three women were compelled to represent the monarchy before Louis XVI's subjects, but they did so at a time when women's influence upon and presence in the public sphere of politics had become a growing cause of concern. The Salons themselves one among the many places where women potentially overstepped the bounds of their sex, and for the princesses to physically or symbolically represent themselves as women possessing a certain measure of influence upon the king was undoubtedly a dangerous proposition. For anyone to

⁴⁷ Roger Chartier, *The Cultural Origins of the French Revolution*, trans. Lydia G. Cochrane (Durham; London: Duke University Press; 1991; reprint 1995), 179.

utilize artifice in order to publicly market himself or herself to others was recognized as deceptive, even through the medium of portraiture; and as Rousseau remarked in the *Letter to M. d'Alembert*, “any woman who shows herself off disgraces herself.”⁴⁸ While the public presentation of oneself through the use of artifice was considered morally reprehensible by some, one made by a woman was twice as worthy of condemnation. Moreover, dissimulation was characteristically described as both an aristocratic and feminine quality, the antithesis of transparent republican virtue; and as Lynn Hunt shows in *The Family Romance of the French Revolution*, dissimulation was a significant theme in the revolutionary denunciations of Marie-Antoinette. The extension of this notion to the king’s aunts and sister must be taken into consideration when we look at both their actual lives and all their physical and representational appearances, long before and after the outbreak of the Revolution in the summer of 1789.

In regards to the use of artifice in the medium of portraiture, one recalls Denis Diderot’s comment, “It is the difference between a woman who is seen and a woman who exhibits herself.”⁴⁹ Diderot made this remark in regards to his assessment of the subject matter of *Susannah and the Elders*, the illicit voyeurism of the Biblical tale had been frequently re-imagined by painters since the Renaissance, willing their works’ beholders to gaze at the young maiden as she tries to cover her nudity and uphold her chastity. Yet, the phrase also speaks to portraiture and Diderot’s recognition of the genre’s “inherent theatricality,” the individual sitter presenting himself or herself to be beheld, their outward gaze making eye contact with those who have come to call upon them. For the *philosophe* and his contemporaries, though, a truly successful painting, be it a history piece, a portrait, or a genre painting, was one in which the

⁴⁸ Rousseau, *Politics and the Arts: Letter to M. d'Alembert*, 83.

⁴⁹ Denis Diderot, *Salons*, vol. III, ed. Jean Seznec and Jean Adhémar (Oxford, 1963), 94. Quoted and trans. in Michael Fried, *Absorption and Theatricality, Painting and Beholder in the Age of Diderot* (Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press; 1980), 96-97.

figures engaged themselves in some manner of activity and, more important, skillfully negated the beholder's presence through the preoccupation of the figures' gazes with the activity or one another and not outwardly at the beholder. The main task of a painting, as Michael Fried adroitly analyzes in *Absorption and Theatricality, Painting and Beholder in the Age of Diderot*, was to set itself up as so authentic and uncomposed that it drew the beholder in, arresting and enthralling them, and eventually facilitating their immersion into the work to the extent that the beholder's very existence was denied: “ ‘Une scène représentée sur la toile, ou sur les planches, ne suppose pas de témoins.’”⁵⁰ Nonetheless, where royal portraiture and *représentation* were concerned in both the seventeenth and eighteenth-centuries, the outward gaze of the royal sitter was to engage the beholder. It was a rare occurrence and an honor to have the king or a member of his family behold a given individual, to look at them with the royal gaze. The spectacle of the royal body in three-dimensional and two-dimensional form perpetually supposed witnesses.

Diderot and his contribution to the nascent literary genre of art criticism return the reader to consideration of eighteenth-century painting and the application of Habermas's theories. In *Painters and Public Life in Eighteenth-Century Paris* (1985), art historian Thomas Crow demonstrates that the Salon exhibitions became a public sphere where competing claims about both art and society were made throughout the century and as art criticism crystallized as a literary genre. Crow rightly sees the eighteenth-century exhibition as a “new public space . . . bound up with a struggle over representation, over language and symbols and who had the right to use them.” He continues:

⁵⁰ On Michael Fried's analysis of Diderot's art criticism and the beholder's absorption, see *Absorption and Theatricality*, 92-105; and in regards to portraiture and the genre's “inherent theatricality,” see 109-111. In regards to the Diderot quotation, see *Salons III*, ed. Jean Seznec and Jean Adhémar (Oxford; 1963), 94; quoted and trans. in Fried, 97. Translates as “A scene represented on canvas or on stage does not suppose witnesses.”

If the Salon as a social location seemed mystifyingly fluid and undefined, what other public spaces of assembly and shared discourses might it be like? In what ways did one's experience there overlap with those of the festival, fair, royal entry, marketplace, theatre, . . . ? A combination of historical factors made the conflict over such questions intense, and what might otherwise have been rather esoteric questions of artistic style and subject matter were often caught up in that struggle.⁵¹

With the establishment of regular Salons on a biennial basis in 1737, both the monarchy and its agent, the Royal Academy of Painting and Sculpture, in effect moved the process of artistic consecration out from behind closed doors and subjected it to what historian Roger Chartier refers to as “an arena of contradictory criticism and free appreciation.”⁵² Additionally, the abstract category of “public opinion” emerged in the era as a result of the highly vociferous political culture of the time, most notably the mid-century competing discourses between the monarchy and the *Parlements*, France's judicial bodies. Both entities addressed themselves to the French as “the voice of authority,” in effect transferring authority to the public. The monarchy itself contributed to the supplantation of its own absolutist system of authority through its participation in a system of authority based upon public opinion.⁵³ Therefore the Salons became a political arena in which the monarchy and its associates, including members of the royal family, attempted to secure and legitimate its authority in front of the Salons' audiences. The monarchy and its representatives used *représentation* to make those claims only to have the exhibitions critics declare themselves as voices of authority in their pamphletized and purchasable assessments.⁵⁴

⁵¹ Crow, *Painters and Public Life*, 5.

⁵² Chartier, *The Cultural Origins of the French Revolution*, trans. Lydia G. Cochrane (Durham; London: Duke University Press; 1991; reprint 1995), 161.

⁵³ Keith M. Baker, *Inventing the French Revolution*, 167-199; see especially, 168-72; and, 197-99.

⁵⁴ Crow, *Painters and Public Life*, 5-22. See also Fort, “Voice of the Public: The Carnivalization of Salon Art in Prerevolutionary Pamphlets,” *Eighteenth-Century Studies* (Summer 1989): 368-94.

Since the portraits under discussion represented royal women, it is also important to consider Habermas's recognition that in the modern era political leaders and their associates are "packaged," "displayed," and made "marketable." How the public responds to this "packaging" has proven to be the means by a modern government measures its leader(s)'s popularity and, more important, how much control it has attained over the population's private opinion. Furthermore, Habermas rightly noted that the officiated monarchical exhibitions of artwork in the Eighteenth Century were intended to present works with controlled meanings to a broader public audience. Yet, France's kings, the men whose name the Salon exhibitions were held and meant to glorify, could not control the reception of the artwork contained therein.⁵⁵ As La Font de Saint-Yenne wrote in 1746, "A painting on exhibition is like a printed book seeing the day, a play performed on the stage—anyone has the right to judge it."⁵⁶

Représentation and the spectacle of the royal body attendant to its conceptualization were conceived of during the reign of Louis XIV (r. 1643-1715). The portraits of Mesdames Adélaïde, Victoire, and Élisabeth demonstrate the monarchy's continued belief in the concept and, by extension, the belief in its own sacrality while failing to recognize it no longer spoke to the French as *the* voice of authority. Over time the Salon exhibitions became visually overloaded, every inch of the Salon Carré's walls covered by painted artwork, the expression of the monarchy's absolute authority in them and elsewhere, including in authorized newspapers and texts, and through *représentation* was diminished by the numerous other voices clamoring to be heard. Ultimately, the monarchy was full of contradictions which proved especially difficult

⁵⁵ Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, 218.

⁵⁶ La Font de Saint-Yenne, *Refléxions sur quelques causes de l'état de le peinture en France avec un examen des principaux ouvrages exposés au Louvre le mois d'aoust 1746*, The Hague, 1747; cited after A. Dresdner, *Die Entstehung der Kunstkritik in Zusammenhang des eroupäischen Kunstlebens* (Munich, 1915); quoted and trans. in Habermas, 40.

to deal with while attempting to put forward an image of itself which it could no longer sustain. Its critics both within the Salons and outside the exhibitions were readily aware of this truth and eagerly moved to exploit the gap between the image and the perceived reality.⁵⁷

The Salon Portraits of Marie-Antoinette

The *Portrait of Madame Adélaïde*, the *Portrait of Madame Élisabeth*, and the *Portrait of Madame Victoire* cannot be assessed without giving some consideration of the portraits of Louis XVI's consort which appeared in the Salons of the 1780s. No other royal woman's physical and representational bodies were as contested and criticized in the era as those of Marie-Antoinette. The Salons provided her with an opportunity to publically appear before her husband's subjects in a legitimated, acceptable manner, particularly at a time when there was a great deal of negative public opinion pertaining to her. Undoubtedly, negative criticism of the queen extended as far back as her arrival in France in May 1770, beginning in part with Madame Adélaïde snidely labeling her "*l'Autrichienne*," the Austrian bitch.⁵⁸ Criticism of Louis XVI's foreign-born bride only intensified over the years, especially as the young couple experienced difficulty in conceiving, and as Marie-Antoinette's abandonment of courtly etiquette and lavish lifestyle at the Petit Trianon incited innumerable salacious rumors and vitriolic gossip, much of it spread in the rapidly printed *libelles*.⁵⁹

⁵⁷ Thomas E. Kaiser, "Louis Le Bein-Aimé and the Rhetoric of the royal body," in *From the Royal to the Republican Body, Incorporating the Political in Seventeenth- and Eighteenth-Century France*, ed. Sara E. Melzer and Kathryn Norberg (Berkeley: University of California Press; 1988), 161.

⁵⁸ Bernard Fay, *Louis XVI, or the End of a World*, trans. by Patrick O'Brian (London: W. H. Allen; 1968), 45.

⁵⁹ Lynn A. Hunt, "The Many Bodies of Marie Antoinette: Political Pornography and the Problem of the Feminine in the French Revolution," in Lynn Hunt, ed., *Eroticism and the Body Politic* (Baltimore;

When *Marie-Antoinette en chemise* [Fig. 2.7] by Vigée-Lebrun appeared in the Salon of 1783, listed in the *livret* as *Portrait de la Reine*, the queen's visage had been absent from the exhibition's walls for a decade, her last appearance there being a portrait completed and exhibited by Drouais in 1773, the then future queen depicted as Héb , the Greek goddess of youth.⁶⁰ Her appearance in the Salon of 1783 was indisputably linked to Vigee-Lebrun's recent admission to the Royal Academy, the painter having produced multiple portraits of the queen since 1778. It should be noted that in spite of the queen's fondness for and friendship with the artist, Vig e-Lebrun never received the designation of being Marie-Antoinette's official portraitist, as is falsely assumed by some historians and art historians alike, including Gita May and Auriccho.⁶¹ More important, though, and with consideration that the artist's admission was not without controversy, the portrait of the queen she exhibited in her first Salon proved somewhat scandalous.

London: Johns Hopkins University Press; 1991), 108-130; and Pierre Saint-Amand, "Terrorizing Marie-Antoinette," in Dena Goodman, ed., *Marie-Antoinette: Writings on the Body of a Queen* (New York; London: Routledge; 2003), 253-272.

⁶⁰ *Explication des peintures, sculptures et autres ouvrages de Messieurs de l'Acad mie royale, dont l'exposition a  t  ordonn e suivant l'intention de Sa Majest  . . . dans le grand salon du Louvre* (Paris: 1773), 21. Then dauphine, Marie-Antoinette that year as well appeared alongside the future Louis XVI in Pierre-Antoine de Machy's cityscape, *Monseigneur le Dauphin & Madame la Dauphine aux Tuileries, allant vers le Pont-Tournant le 23 Juin 1773*. See *Explication des peintures* (1773), 19. See also Oliver Blanc, *Portraits de Femmes: artistes et mod les   l' poque de Marie-Antoinette* (Paris: D. Carpentier; 2006), 113.

⁶¹ Gita May asserts in * lisabeth Vig e-LeBrun: The Odyssey of an Artist in an Age of Revolution* (New Haven: Yale University Press; 2005), that the painter received the designation of being Marie-Antoinette's *portraitiste en titre*. See May, 38. Auriccho makes the same assertion in "The Laws of *Biens ance* and the Gendering of Emulation in Eighteenth-Century French Art Education," *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, Vol. 36, No. 2 (Winter, 2003): 231-240; see, p. 233. Yet, Mary Sheriff makes no mention of the distinction in her thorough analysis of the artist's life and *oeuvre*, *The Exceptional Woman:  lisabeth Vig e-Lebrun and the Cultural Politics of Art* (Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press; 1996). Moreover, the artist herself made no mention of the reception of this title in her self-aggrandizing *Souvenirs*, but did mention of her request to the Comte d'Angivillier that Louis XVI be dissuaded from awarding her the ribbon of Saint-Michel for fear of the honor inciting slander. See  lisabeth Vig e Le Brun, *The Memoirs of Elisaeth Vig e-Le Brun, Member of the Royal Academy of Paris, Rouen, Saint-Luke of Rome, Parma, Bologna, Saint-Petersburg, Berlin, Geneva and Avignon* (*Souvenirs*; 1835; 1837), trans. Si n Evans (Bloomington: Indiana University Press; 1989), 95.



Fig. 2.7. Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun. *Marie-Antoinette en chemise*. 1783; Salon of 1783. Oil on canvas; 3'10" x 3'2". Private Collection, Germany.⁶²

Marie-Antoinette's Salon of 1783 portrait entered the exhibition with perfectly harmless intent in its representation of her arranging flowers and wearing a straw hat and a ruched muslin gown with a gold sash. The queen had become accustomed to wearing loose-fitting muslin gowns during her pregnancies, and such comfortable and definitively informal attire was frequently worn by the queen and her female friends at the Petit Trianon and neighboring *Hameau*. The Comtesse de Provence wore a similar gown in her own portrait by the same artist and on display that year as well; and yet, to be publicly exhibited as wearing such attire was readily deemed unacceptable, the critic of the *Mémoires Secrets* remarking:

The two princesses are *en chemise*, a fashion that women have recently come up with. Many people have thought it inappropriate that such august personages should be put on public view clad in garments that they would only wear in the

⁶² *Marie-Antoinette en chemise*, Wikipedia Commons, accessed Aug. 13, 2014. http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/f/f0/Marie_Antoinette_in_Muslin_dress.jpg/461px-Marie_Antoinette_in_Muslin_dress.jpg.

privacy of their palace; it can only be assumed that the artist has been authorized to do so. . .⁶³

Diverting the blame onto Vigée-Lebrun by this newsletter in particular was a covert deflection of criticism against the monarchy by a tolerated entity. As the research of Jeremy Popkin and Bernadette Fort demonstrates, the *Mémoires Secrets* worked not to silence subversive *discours*, but instead to integrate its readers in the creation and broadcasting of “more *discours*” which, on occasion, put notable individuals in a better light at the expense of others. With consideration of the monarchy’s toleration of the anonymously authored chronicle, the historian suspects that the *Mémoires Secrets* may have been an engine by which the monarchy attempted to deflect some of the criticism toward it and the king’s family members.⁶⁴ The holding of Vigée-Lebrun responsible for the queen’s and her associates’ abandonment of more formal attire for simpler forms of dress has extended down through the centuries, art historians Joseph Baillio and Michael Levey individually accusing the painter of eroticizing her aristocratic female sitters and overtly making naturalness *chic*.⁶⁵ Simon Schama goes even further with this gender biased criticism of the painter in his lengthy *Citizens*, seeing her as more responsible than the queen’s dressmaker, Rose Bertin, for conspiratorially perpetuating the fondness for simpler, almost

⁶³ Anon., “Vigée-Lebrun at the Salon of 1783,” *Mémoires Secrets pour servir à l’histoire de la république des lettres en France depuis 1762 jusqu’à nos jours*, vo. 24, 1784, trans. Emma Baker, 4-12; quoted in Steve Edwards, ed., *Art and its Histories: a Reader* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press; 1998), 141.

⁶⁴ Bernadette Fort and Jeremy Popkin, “Introduction: Secret Intelligence / Public Knowledge” in Jeremy D. Popkin and Bernadette Fort, eds., *The Mémoires Secrets and the Culture of Publicity in Eighteenth-Century France* (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation; 1998), 7-8. See also Popkin’s essay in this volume, “The *Mémoires Secrets* and the reading of the Enlightenment,” pp.9-35. In it he notes that the newsletter rarely mentioned authority figures and attacked them even less (p. 27). The author is very appreciative of Popkin personally informing her of his analysis. It has helped her to rethink how the newsletter worked to deflect negative criticism pertaining to and away from the Queen, Mesdames, and their Salon exhibited portraits, and onto the portraitists.

⁶⁵ Joseph Baillio, *Élisabeth Vigée Le Brun* (Fort Worth: Kimbell Art Museum; 1982), 10; Michael Levey, *Rococo to Revolution: Major Trends in Eighteenth-Century Painting* (New York: Thames and Hudson; 1966, 1977; reprint 1985), 154.

improper forms of dress in her female patrons.⁶⁶ Moreover, as Griselda Pollock rightly points out, artists participate in the construction and alteration of a given ideology, even ones of fashion or a cultural trend.⁶⁷ Not surprisingly, and considering the exceptionally negative contemporaneous critical reception of the portrait, the piece was removed from the Salon and replaced with another of Marie-Antoinette in more formal attire.⁶⁸ Recalling the controversy many years later in her *Souvenirs*, Vigée-Lebrun lamented, “the evil tongues could not resist the temptation of saying that I had painted the Queen in her underwear, . . . the slander had already begun.”⁶⁹

The Salon of 1785 provided Marie-Antoinette with another opportunity to remake her representational image through portraiture [Fig. 2.8]. Her portrait in the exhibition that year was painted by the Swedish artist Adolf-Ulrik Wertmüller, the official portraitist of King Gustave III, the queen most likely becoming associated with the artist through Count Axel Fersen, her intimate friend and possible lover.⁷⁰ Depicted in a slightly more formal ivory gown under a rich brown robe, the queen is seen strolling near the Temple of Love at the Petit Trianon with her

⁶⁶ Simon Schama, *Citizens: a Chronicle of the French Revolution* (New York: Vintage; 1989), 220.

⁶⁷ Griselda Pollock, *Vision and Difference: Femininity, Feminism, and Histories of Art* (New York; London: Routledge, 1988), 46-47.

⁶⁸ Sheriff, *The Exceptional Woman*, 145. Sheriff sees the *Mémoires Secrets* as readily publishing gossip about Vigée-Lebrun, but does note its shifting of the blame back onto Marie-Antoinette elsewhere in its reception of the portrait with its statement that the queen “consented” to be painted in such a manner. As for the portrait which replaced it in the Salon of 1783, known as *Marie-Antoinette with a Rose* (1784; copy of 1783 original; Versailles, Musée de Château), it depicts the queen in relatively the same pose, but wearing formal attire.

⁶⁹ Vigée-Lebrun, *The Memoirs of Elisaeth Vigée-Le Brun (Souvenirs)*, 33.

⁷⁰ There has been a good deal of speculation about the extent of the relationship between Marie-Antoinette and the Swedish count, but there is no definitive historical evidence which undoubtedly proves the two had a sexual relationship. Biographer Evelyne Lever notes that in spite of the expressions of sentiment in the letters between the two which remain, as well as the blanked out sections in some of them, this is no proof of a physical relationship but, and somewhat more important, the depth of sentiment contained therein was of a criminal status during that era and especially considering the queen’s social position. See Evelyne Lever, *Marie Antoinette, the Last Queen of France*, trans. by Catherine Temerson (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux; 2000), 164-67.



Fig. 2.8. Adolf-Ulrik Wertmüller. *Marie-Antoinette et ses enfants dans le jardin anglais de Trianon*. 1785; Salon of 1785. Oil on canvas; 276 x 194 cm. National Museum, Stockholm.⁷¹

two eldest children, Marie Thérèse and Louis-Joseph, the dauphin, the young prince clutching his mother's skirt. Such a scene looked to endear the queen to the Salon's attendees, a mother actively engaging with her offspring; but, as the critical reception indicates, Marie-Antoinette was once again criticized for being too candid in one of her portraits, the anonymous critic of one pamphlet commenting that "[l]e portrait d'une Reine demande bien davantage" and should do more to inspire devotion, attachment and respect in its beholders.⁷² Meanwhile, the author of the *Deuxième Promenade de Critès au Sallon* criticized the queen for courting the favor the Parisian bourgeoisie in a fashionable manner; and of the artist he wrote, "M. Wertmuller (sic) n'eût pas

⁷¹ *Marie-Antoinette et ses enfants dans le jardin anglais de Trianon*, National Museum, Sweden; accessed Aug. 14, 2014. <http://emp-web-22.zetcom.ch/eMuseumPlus?service=DynamicAsset&sp=SU5mxm4Yx%2FVbg9LVP7MZLDqo6z5lhONBxez%2FYx5EhVSCZjU0bcvvsnPxkoLiFJnF9QzRY98OZwV1b%0AfnOjhdzPjCrGy%2BOIZxfXys9Yi8S8yOLB1cqikRn6fZqlPqbqrNmy&sp=Simage%2Fjpeg>.

⁷² Anon., *Réflexions Impartiales sur les Progrès de l'Art en France, et sur les Tableaux exposés au Louvre, par ordre du Roi, en 1785* (London; 1785), 28.

donné à la Reine le caractère de dignité qui convient à une tête couronnée.”⁷³ Just as Marie-Antoinette’s public image was in question, so too was her representational one.

The public exhibition of the Wertmüller portrait could not have come at a worse time as well for France’s hapless queen, the scheduled opening of the Salon coming weeks directly after the exposure of the Diamond Necklace Affair, the duped Cardinal Louis de Rohan being arrested on August 15, 1785.⁷⁴ A politically ambitious man from one of France’s most distinguished aristocratic families, the Rohan-Soubise, Marie-Antoinette’s evident disdain for the Bishop of Strasbourg and Grand Almoner of France stemmed from her mother’s own contempt of the man, Rohan blatantly keeping women in his Vienna residence while serving as France’s ambassador at the empress’s court. Knowing of his desire to get in the queen’s good graces with aspirations of attaining a higher office, prostitute and swindler Jeanne La Motte ingratiated herself with the cardinal on the pretense that she was a distant relation and close friend of the queen, eventually convincing Rohan that he could purchase Marie-Antoinette’s favor with monies transported by her to the queen. In time La Motte convinced Rohan that the queen wanted his assistance in secretly purchasing on her behalf the extravagant diamond necklace designed by Parisian jewelers Boehmer and Bassange, the necklace originally ordered by Louis XV for Madame du Barry but eventually rejected by the late monarch on account of its exorbitant price. La Motte cunningly enhanced her deception by arranging a brief late-night meeting between the cardinal and the queen in the gardens of Versailles, Rohan unknowingly meeting with a young prostitute,

⁷³ Anon., *Deuxième Promenade de Critès au Sallon* (London; 1785), 16.

⁷⁴ Sarah Maza, “The Diamond Necklace Affair, 1785-1786,” chap. in *Private Lives and Public Affairs, the Causes Célèbres of Prerevolutionary France* (Berkeley: University of California Press; 1993), 167-211. This is the most thorough, modern analysis of the Diamond Necklace Affair and its implications, particularly where Marie-Antoinette’s name and reputation are concerned. An earlier version of this chapter, “The Diamond Necklace Affair Revisited (1785-1786): The Case of the Missing Queen,” is in *Eroticism and the Body Politic*, ed. Lynn Hunt (Baltimore; London: Johns Hopkins University Press; 1991), 63-89.

Nicole Le Guay, who resembled the queen and wearing a muslin gown akin to the one worn in her Salon of 1783 portrait by Vigee-Lebrun. After this meeting Rohan assured the jewelers that Marie-Antoinette wanted the necklace and would clandestinely pay for it through him, the cardinal acquired the necklace and then handed it over to La Motte.

La Motte and her co-conspirators, including her husband, Nicolas, speedily dismantled the necklace, selling the diamonds and pocketing the money for themselves. Concerned as to when they would receive payment for the necklace, the jewelers sent the queen a cryptic note in July 1785; following a conversation one of them had with the queen's first chambermaid, Madame Campan, the jewelers discovered that the queen had not sought to purchase the necklace and the swindle was brought to light by the middle of August. Rather than taking care of the matter privately, Louis XVI instead decided to hand the case over to France's courts, a somewhat transparent move on his part but one which ultimately exposed Marie-Antoinette to even greater public scrutiny. Of the affair Madame Élisabeth briefly wrote, "A propos de procès, le cardinal est un criminel : Dieu sait quand et comment cela finira."⁷⁵ While Rohan was acquitted for his involvement and La Motte was found guilty, eventually escaping her sentence of life imprisonment and fleeing to England, the name of France's queen was thoroughly drug through the mud, and in spite of her absolute innocence. Prior attacks on Marie-Antoinette's character and her reputation for extravagance readily combined with the literature denouncing women's presence in the public sphere, making the queen's involvement in the whole ordeal actually seem plausible.

⁷⁵ Élisabeth de France to Mme. Marie de Causans, ? November 1785. In Élisabeth de France, *Correspondance de Madame Élisabeth de France, Soeur de Louis XVI* (Paris: Henri Plon, Imprimeur-Éditeur; 1868), 57. Translates as: "Of the trial, the Cardinal is a criminal; only God know when and how it will end."

In *Private Lives and Public Affairs, the Causes Célèbres of Prerevolutionary France* (Berkeley: 1993), historian Sara Maza effectively analyzes the defendants' pamphletized legal briefs (*mémoires judiciaires*) in a chapter dedicated to the Diamond Necklace Affair. She finds that despite the pamphlets and reports which proclaimed the queen's innocence, the ones written in defense of La Motte and Le Guay managed to indict the queen without openly mentioning her name. Essentially, the whole affair had been carried out by one prostitute with the aid of another. "The facts," Maza writes, "that a woman of intrigue reached her goals by claiming royal decent and that she carried out her trickery by having a prostitute masquerade as the queen of France were enough to convince alert readers of the *mémoires* that female powers of deceit were indeed corrupting the monarchy."⁷⁶ Through her elaborate deception of Cardinal Rohan and its eventual revelation, Jeanne La Motte and her accomplices linked the queen's name to prostitution, prostitutes being the most abhorrent of all public women; and, on a more important and definitively concerning note, some of the French seriously believed that Marie-Antoinette's favor and political influence were purchasable. No matter how much Wertmüller attempted to infuse dignity into the queen's portrait, both the artist's and the sitter's efforts to remake her public image were practically futile.

In a quick response to the negative art criticism surrounding Wertmüller's *Marie-Antoinette et ses enfants*, the Comte d'Angiviller commissioned Vigée-Lebrun to paint another portrait of the queen, with her children this time as well [Fig. 2.9]. He felt that only a French artist possessed the skill necessary to imbue the representational bodies of such august personages with the requisite grace and honor they merited. Writing to Jean-Baptiste-Marie

⁷⁶ Maza, *Private Lives and Public Affairs*, 196.



Fig. 2.9. Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun. *Marie-Antoinette, reine de France, et ses enfants*. Salon of 1787. Oil on canvas; 275.2 x 216.5 cm. Musée National du Château, Versailles.⁷⁷

Pierre, first painter to Louis XVI, d'Angiviller related that the queen conceived of the portrait's composition herself, presenting to the French the image of her as a good and loving mother.⁷⁸ Vigée-Lebrun received 18,000 livres for her work, four and half times more than what Wertmüller was paid for his poorly received effort, d'Angiviller referring to the massive finished masterpiece as being more of a "history painting" than a mere portrait of the king's wife and children.⁷⁹

⁷⁷ *Marie-Antoinette, reine de France, et ses enfants*, Chateau de Versailles, Collections; accessed Aug. 20, 2014.

<http://collections.chateauversailles.fr/cc/imageproxy.aspx?server=10.0.10.13&port=14456&filename=objectimages/95-005914.jpg&width=440&bg=F5F6F5&height=256>.

⁷⁸ Robert Darnton, *The Forbidden Best-Sellers of Prerevolutionary France* (New York; London: W.W. Norton & Company; 1996), 226. Moreover, the portrait's composition took after not only the artistic stock technique of the "Holy Family" arrangement, but as well the one utilized by Charles Le Clerq in *La Comtesse d'Artois et ses enfants* (c. 1780; Musée National du Château, Versailles).

⁷⁹ Whitney Chadwick, *Women, Art, and Society*, 2nd ed. (London: Thames and Hudson; 1996), 168-69; Paula Rea Radisich, "Que peut définir les femmes: Vigée-Lebrun's Portraits of an Artist," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 25 (Summer 1992): 449. D'Angivillier's correspondence can be found in *Nouvelles Archives de l'Art Français*, Tome XXII, pp. 132-33.

Marie-Antoinette, reine de France, et ses enfants tried to capture an “almost bourgeois intimacy,” the seated queen surrounded by her children in a compositional pyramid.⁸⁰ Represented in formal court attire and in the Salon de la Paix with Versailles’s celebrated Hall of Mirrors behind the family group, Madame Royale, Marie-Thérèse adoringly leans against her mother while Louis-Joseph, the Dauphin, pulls back the drape on the crib to his mother’s left. A restless Louis-Charles, the Duc de Normandie (and the future Louis XVII), grabs at the French *point d’Alençon* lace trim along the low neckline of the queen’s red velvet *robe à l’anglaise*.⁸¹ The crib should not be mistaken as being for this young prince but instead was intended for the inclusion in the composition of Madame Sophie de France, Louis XVI’s and Marie-Antoinette’s youngest child. Born in July 1786, the fact that this princess was to be included in the portrait is attested to by Vigée-Lebrun’s preparatory pastels depicting the infant peacefully sleeping.⁸² The princess’s untimely death in June of 1787 and propriety prompted the artist to remove the child from the painting, delaying its hanging in the Salon of that year, its absence on the wall earning the portrait and its illustrious sitter the title of “Madame Deficit.”⁸³

⁸⁰ The phrase an “almost bourgeois intimacy” comes from Jürgen Habermas’s discussion on how the palace of Versailles and the court no longer functioned as public sphere of both action and royal representation by the time of Louis XVI’s ascension in 1774, Habermas finding that the French court’s central position in the public sphere was displaced through the regency of Philip of Orléans (1715-23) and his movement of the court to Paris during that his tenure. See Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, 31.

⁸¹ Aileen Ribeiro, *Art of Dress: Fashion in England and France 1750 to 1820* (New Haven; London: Yale University press; 1995), 75.

⁸² Joseph Baillio, “Marie-Antoinette et ses enfants,” *L’Oeil* 310 (May 1981): 54; 59. This article reproduces several of the preparatory pastels, one of which can be accessed at the following web address: http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/c/cc/Sophie_Beatrice_of_France.jpg/.

⁸³ Elisabeth Vigée Le Brun, *Souvenirs* (Chesterland: R. Worthington; 1879), 45. See also, Evelyn Lever, *Marie-Antoinette: The Last Queen of France*, trans. by Catherine Temerson (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux; 2000), 190; Mary Sheriff, “The Cradle is Empty: Elisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, Marie-Antoinette, and the Problem of Intention,” in Melissa Hyde and Jennifer Milam, eds., *Women, Art and the Politics of Identity in Eighteenth-Century Europe* (Aldershot; Burlington, VT: Ashgate; 2003), 164-187; and, Thomas Crow, “Patriotism and Virtue: David to the Young Ingres,” chap. in Stephen F. Eisenman,

Once on view, Louis XVI's subjects beheld his queen's embrace of the eighteenth-century's cult of maternity, the royal children serving as registers of the couple's marriage and their father's paternity. Much as motherhood became the location of women's displaced ambition in that era, and notwithstanding the extended delay the royal couple experienced in conceiving, Marie-Antoinette was a devoted mother, consistently keeping her children close to her and having their Versailles apartments moved closer to her own. Moreover, her personal tutelage of Marie-Thérèse excelled beyond the traditional role of a queen, making her even more of a wife and a mother than any of her predecessors, including Marie Leczinska.⁸⁴ Like the maternal devotion of other women of her time, the queen drew upon Rousseau's affirmation of women's natural roles as wives and mothers in his literature, most notably in his description of the character Sophie in the novel *Émile: Or, On Education* (1762).⁸⁵ A wife and mother, according to Rousseau, showed her true dignity by helping to regenerate society through her residence in the private sphere of the home and raising her children to be good citizens of the state. The *philosophe* pondered:

Is there a sight in the world so touching, so respectable, as that of a mother surrounded by her children, directing the work of her domestics, procuring a happy life for her husband and prudently governing the home?⁸⁶

ed., *Nineteenth Century Art: A Critical History* (London; New York: Thames and Hudson, Ltd.; 1994), 20

⁸⁴ Antoine de Baecque, *The Body Politic, Corporeal Metaphor in Revolutionary France, 1770-1800*, trans. Charlotte Mandell (Stanford: Stanford University Press; 1997), 30-31; 46.

⁸⁵ Gutwirth, *The Twilight of the Goddesses*, 122; 60. In her analysis of the eighteenth-century's cult of maternity, Gutwirth's summation of maternal values as "conservative" better fits the queen's position than Joan Landes's label of "Republican motherhood," queenship being the antithesis of republican values. Also, see reference to Gutwirth's analysis in the "Introduction" of this dissertation.

⁸⁶ Rousseau, *Politics and the Arts*, 87-88. As discussed beforehand, Rousseau's conceptualization of motherhood has been referred to as "Republican motherhood" by several historians, notably Joan Landes in *Women in the Public Sphere*, 129-38. Olwen Hufton criticizes Landes's analysis for being a generic assessment of the eighteenth-century French women. Moreover, Hufton finds Landes's work to have a feminist agenda. See Olwen Hufton, *Women and the Limits of Citizenship in the French Revolution* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press; 1992), xviii.

Marie-Antoinette desperately wished to convey to her husband's subjects that she was devoted to her children, and through them France; but the French did not see her as a mother. France's queens had a long history of not being loved by the people; and as Katherine Crawford demonstrates, xenophobia and their proximity to the reigning monarch contributed to the historic French construction of kings' consorts and or mothers as being "evil foreign queens," the Austrian born Marie-Antoinette dubiously and eventually linked first in the libelous pamphlets to the notorious Catherine de' Medici.⁸⁷ Even her maternity worked against her, starting with the questioning of Louis XVI's paternity as far back as the couple's first child in 1778. Anxieties pertaining to her sexuality and her reproductive capacity made her out to be an "antimother," one who was feared and despised quite some time before the *libelles* transformed her into the hyper-sexed monster that preyed upon her own son.⁸⁸

Drawing upon a wealth of compositional arrangements, from centuries of depictions of the Holy Family, to contemporary history paintings imagining Cornelia, mother of the Gracchi, herself a symbol of virtuous Roman motherhood, Vigée-Lebrun settled upon a tight pyramidal arrangement. Here was France's queen with her true treasures, the absence of a piece of jewelry around Marie-Antoinette's neck being a tacit statement of her innocence in regards to the Diamond Necklace Affair. Yet, Vigée-Lebrun's "academicized" approach unfortunately rendered the queen as stiff and expressionless, her outward gaze at the portrait's beholder

⁸⁷ Katherine Crawford, "Constructing Evil Foreign Queens" in *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 37:2 (Spring 2007): 405-11.

⁸⁸ See Gutwirth on the conceptualization of Marie-Antoinette as an "antimother" in *Twilight of the Goddesses*, 184-85. See as well Lynn Hunt's analysis of her as a "bad mother" in both Ch. 4, "The Bad Mother" in *The Family Romance of the French Revolution*, 89-123; and its earlier inception, "The Many Bodies of Marie Antoinette: Political Pornography and the Problem of the Feminine in the French Revolution," in L. Hunt, ed., *Eroticism and the Politic* (Baltimore; London: Johns Hopkins University Press; 1991), 108-130.

detracting from the maternal sentiment it wished to convey.⁸⁹ “That seriousness of bearing,” writes Thomas Crow in his token analysis of the Vigée-Lebrun’s *oeuvre*, “and self-presentation was crucial in the intended effect of the painting, in that the King’s foreign wife was widely seen to have distracted the amiably simple monarch from his paternal devotion to the nation.”⁹⁰ Such an assessment fails to take into account the express need to remake Marie-Antoinette’s representational image; and yet, replacing the casualness of the Vigée-Lebrun and Wertmüller portraits of 1783 and 1785 with the expected formality and dignity proved critically ruinous.

While some of the contemporary reception focused more on Vigée-Lebrun and her skill, and while others completely failed to comment on *Marie-Antoinette et ses enfants*, those which did zealously found fault with it. In his rather long assessment of the portrait, the author of *L’Ami de Artistes au Sallon* commented, “on se plaint aussi que la Reine, au milieu de ses enfans, n’aie point d’intention dans ses regards.”⁹¹ Meanwhile, the harshest complaint came from *L’Ombre de Rubens au Sallon*: “Allons: La peste du butord; au diable la foule; on ne peut en approcher.”⁹² Then and now, the reader wonders who the author truly regarded to be the “peste,” the crowd viewing the queen’s portrait, as seen in Pietro Martini’s engraving [see Fig. 2.1], or the painting’s royal sitter. Even the paternity of the three children was questioned in *La*

⁸⁹ In regards to Denis Diderot’s coining of the criticism “academicized,” see Fried, *Absorption and Theatricality*, 100.

⁹⁰ Thomas Crow, “Patriotism and Virtue: David to the Young Ingres,” chap. in Stephen F. Eisenman, ed., *Nineteenth Century Art: A Critical History* (London: Thames & Hudson; 1994), 20. In *Vision and Difference: Femininity, Feminism, and Histories of Art* (London; New York: Routledge; 1988), art historian Griselda Pollock notes the structuring of art history as a masculine discourse which held up accomplished male artists as both creative and great while the work of their successful female contemporaries was downplayed as secondary and copyist. Pollock as well sees in the 20th century the perpetuation of the masculine art historical discourse by H. W. Janson, who refused to include women artists in his renowned *History of Art*; and Pollock’s own contemporary, Thomas Crow, with his analytical emphasis on Jacques-Louis David and other notable male artists from the French Revolutionary era. See pp. 20-24.

⁹¹ Anon., *L’Ami des Artistes au Sallon* (Paris; 1787), 34.

⁹² Anon., *L’Ombre de Rubens au Sallon, ou L’Ecole de Peintres, Dialogue Critique*, (Paris; 1787), 15.

Bourgeoise au Sallon, one of its multiple speakers stating, “Que Monsieur le Dauphin, Madame & Monseigneur le Duc de Normandie sont jolis! Ils sont ressemblans.”⁹³ Lastly, and with total disregard of the reality that delay in the portrait’s hanging was a result of Madame Sophie’s unfortunate demise, the *Mémoires secrets* related that officials from the Royal Academy belatedly put the painting on display because they feared the negative critical receptions it did receive. Finding fault for Marie-Antoinette’s stiffness with the artist, the newsletter’s reviewer validated his critique with reference to the evident childhood adulation and maternal tenderness captured by Vigée-Lebrun in her *Self-portrait with Julie*, the painting exhibited in the Salon of 1787 as well.⁹⁴ Critically decried and its central figure vilified, *Marie-Antoinette et ses enfants*’ salvation from destruction during the Revolution simply was the queen’s ordered storage of the work after the death of her eldest son in early June, 1789, her heartbreak making it unbearable to look at his image.⁹⁵

The manner in which all three of Marie-Antoinette’s Salon portraits were critically received demonstrates a failure of *représentation*, neither contemporary reviewers nor Salon attendees regarding France’s queen as being a sacred personage or a true mother. Not surprisingly, no significant portrait of the queen appeared in the Salon of 1789, the last one of the Old Regime. The scandal of others, her own missteps, lingering suspicions about her sexuality, and the absence of another upon whom the French could focus their hatred made it impossible for her, her Salon exhibited portraits, and any of those closely associated with her, including and especially Louis XVI, to curry the favor and respect which she desperately valued. Moreover, the manner in which *Marie-Antoinette et ses enfants* alone attempted to answer the queen’s

⁹³ Anon., *La Bourgeoise au Sallon* (Paris; 1787), 15.

⁹⁴ J. Baillio, “Marie-Antoinette et ses enfants par Mme. Vigée-Lebrun,” *L’Oeil* 308 (March 1981): 31-41; 74-74; and 310; (May 1981): 53-60; 90-91. In particular see, p. 91, n. 29.

⁹⁵ Lever, *Marie-Antoinette: The Last Queen of France*, 207-208.

critics in both the realms of aesthetics and public opinion demonstrates how the monarchy fatally contributed to the undoing of its own authority by giving credence to those who questioned it; and where Mesdames Adélaïde, Victoire, Élisabeth , and their respective Salon portraits were concerned, it remained questionable if *représentation* and their French royal blood would work in their favor instead, garnering adulation for them and the people's submission to the monarchy, or if it would simply contribute to the persistent sense of malaise surrounding Louis XVI and his family.

CHAPTER 3. REPRESENTING THE MONARCHY, REPRESENTING THE ROYAL FAMILY, REPRESENTING THEMSELVES¹

Marie-Antoinette's body, as we have seen, was not her own, and its politicization began some time before her physical arrival at the court of Louis XV in May 1770. Jean-Baptiste André Gautier-Dagoty's engraving depicting the moment when the Austrian Archduchess' pastel portrait by Joseph Ducreux was presented to her future husband stands as testament to this historical truth [Fig. 3.1]. At the center of the scene Louis XV holds the dauphin's hand while gesticulating with his other one toward the dauphine-to-be's visage on the right side of the frame, the absolute monarch effectively blessing the forthcoming union of the young couple, of the royal houses of France and Austria. Members of the royal family bear witness to this unique scene, from Louis XV's multiple unmarried daughters, and the Comtes de Provence and d'Artois, to the youngest members of the family, Mesdames Clotilde and Élisabeth. Furthermore, the dauphin's parents, paternal grandmother, and paternal great-grandfathers many times removed observe the moment through representations of themselves. Louis, the Dauphin and Marie-Josèph of Saxony look down upon the scene from the vantage point of their medallion portraits which crown the full-length portrait of Marie Leszczyńska just behind Louis XV, and Louis XIV and Henry IV tower above the gathering, marble busts of the two great Bourbon kings elevated upon high pedestals on either side of the image. Past, present, and future kings

¹ Portions of this chapter derive from the author's conference papers, "French Princesses 'In Service of the Throne' (& Themselves)," "First-Person Voice: Patronage and Agency in Women's Portraits" panel, *The Berkshire Conference of Women Historians*, Toronto, Ontario (May 23, 2014); and, "An Im/Modest Princess: Two Portraits of Madame Élisabeth de France," *Newberry Library, Center for Renaissance Studies Graduate Student Conference*, Chicago, IL (January 24, 2010).



Fig. 3.1. Jean-Baptiste André Gautier-Dagoty. *Louis XV présentant au dauphin le portrait de Marie-Antoinette par Ducreux*. c. 1770. Engraving. Versailles, muse national des château de Versailles et de Trianon.²

come together in this image, *représentation* as a theatrical aura of power around the reigning monarch at once fused with *représentation* as the recalling to mind of those who are not present and or deceased.

Of particular interest in this unique royal family portrait, and especially to this project, is that it contains one of the earliest depictions of Madame Élisabeth. The then approximately five-year-old princess stands in the lower left foreground, quite near her beloved brother, adoringly looking up at him as she holds the lace veil which covered Marie-Antoinette's portrait before its reveal. The portraitist Ducreux had in fact acquired the privilege of painting the future queen's

² *Louis XV présentant au dauphin le portrait de Marie-Antoinette par Ducreux*, Chateau de Versailles; accessed Feb. 12, 2014. <http://collections.chateauversailles.fr/#e0491648-637d-46ff-9e63-a65d28c466f0>.

portrait in part through his rendering of Mesdames Clotilde's and Élisabeth's countenances (see below, Fig. 4.2). The young princesses represented the Bourbon monarchy into which they were born. The French and Europe's other royal houses were reminded of the two girls' political significance and potential by the rendering and circulation of their portraits, a truth which was hardly lost upon the princesses' grandfather.³

While Gautier-Dagoty's engraving captured Madame Élisabeth as a child in the midst of a somewhat poignant family moment, other engraved images of her appeared at that time as well. Pierre-Adrien Le Beau's etching of the princess [Fig. 3.2], after a portrait by Fontaine, depicts a dignified royal woman, a depiction which belied the princess' actual age and youthfulness. Moreover, the image's beholders were immediately informed of the sitter's location within the body politic, "Soeur de Mgr. Le Dauphin" boldly printed beneath the cartouche, reiterating Madame Élisabeth's physical and symbolic closeness to both the political bodies of the reigning monarch and his successor. While most prints portraits of royal personages gave the impression that they were items of monarchical propaganda, they in fact were not, artists speculating on the popular appeal of images extolling royal virtues and accomplishments. Still, both Le Beau's etching and Louis-Jacques Cathelin's slightly later engraving of Madame Élisabeth [Fig. 3.3] were true instances of royal *representation*.⁴ In regards to the former, the reproduction and distribution of the princess' countenance, as well as of Le Beau's pendant print portrait of Madame Clotilde, was done through the print shop of Chez Henault et Rapilly "Avec Privilege

³ Juliette Trey, "Madame Élisabeth (1764-1794)," in *Madame Élisabeth, une princesse au destin tragique (1764-1794)* (Milan: Silvana Editoriale; 2013), 34.

⁴ On eighteenth-century French print culture and artists speculation on the public appeal of images propagandizing royal virtues and achievements, such as F.-M.-A. Boizot's *The Dauphin Ploughing* (1769), see George Levitine, "French Eighteenth-Century Printmaking in Search of Cultural Assertion," in Carlson, Victor I.; and Ittmann, John W., eds., *Regency to Empire, French Printmaking 1715-1814* (Minneapolis: Minneapolis Institute of Arts; 1984), 10-21; 12.



Fig. 3.2. Le Beau, Pierre-Adrien. *Portrait de Élisabeth-Philippe-Marie-Hélène de France, en buste, de profil dirigé à gauche dans une bordure ovale* (after Pierre François Léonard Fontaine). Before 1774. Eau-forte; 17.9 x 11.3 cm. Versailles, muse national des château de Versailles et de Trianon.⁵

Fig. 3.3. Cathelin, Louis-Jacques. *Madame Élisabeth à l'âge de onze ans* (after Joseph Ducreux). 1775. Engraving; 20.8 x 14.5 cm. Versailles, muse national des château de Versailles et de Trianon.⁶

du Roi.”⁷ Much like their physical bodies, the representational bodies of Madame Élisabeth and her sister were equally subject to the monarch’s determination of their fates, the printmaking culture of late eighteenth-century France providing Louis XV with ample opportunity to widely disseminate the knowledge of potential political alliances via his adolescent granddaughters.

⁵ *Portrait de Élisabeth-Philippe-Marie-Hélène de France, en buste, de profil dirigé à gauche dans une bordure ovale*, Gallica; accessed February 9, 2015.

<http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b84122561/f1.highres>.

⁶ *Madame Élisabeth à l'âge de onze ans*, Chateau de Versailles; accessed February 12, 2015.

<http://collections.chateauversailles.fr/#c3becc42-2a14-4200-b57b-21e76e372b73>.

⁷ *Madame Marie-Adélaïde Clotilde, en buste, de profil à droite, cheveux relevés à bouclettes et rubans, corsage ruché décolleté* by Le Beau, after Fontaine, is available at:

<http://gallica.bnf.fr/proxy?method=R&ark=btv1b6942091d.f1&l=3&r=1024,1024,256,256>.

The origins of the Cathelin engraving on the other hand had more to do with the conceptualization of *représentation* as evoking the memory of an absent loved one. The now lost Ducreux portrait which it was engraved after was commissioned by the Comtesse de Marsan, the princesses' governess. The Comtesse did so at Louis XVI's behest and on the occasion of Madame Clotilde's forthcoming marriage to a Piedmontese prince in the spring of 1775.⁸ While a commemorative element underlay this particular portrait of Madame Élisabeth, as well as those of several others of royal family members with Madame Clotilde taking multiple pieces with her to her new home, one cannot overlook the royal agency in the transport of a marriageable French princess' countenance from one court to another. In the years that followed, the Duke of Aosta, the second son of the King of Sardinia and brother-in-law of Madame Clotilde, supposedly sought the princess' hand in marriage; and yet, a second union between the two royal houses was not to be, the Duke's lesser position deemed inappropriate for a daughter of France.⁹ This particular failure of a negotiated marriage for Madame Élisabeth aside, the incident itself demonstrates how she and other princesses of the era continually symbolized the monarchies into which they were born, perpetually representing them through the fabrication of their portraits followed by the active exchange of their visages between Europe's royal courts.

The Gautier-Dagoty, Le Beau, and Cathelin prints all identify that Madame Élisabeth represented the Bourbon monarchy of France. Each image contains a signifier of the princess' relationship to the reigning monarch, from being depicted in a royal family portrait, and to being identified as "Soeur du Roi" in another. The pre-1774 Fontaine portrait, which the Le Beau

⁸ Juliette Trey, "Madame Élisabeth à l'âge de onze ans," in *Madame Élisabeth, une princesse au destin tragique*, 136.

⁹ [Katherine P. Wormley], "Introductory.—Sketch of the Life of Madame Élisabeth from Childhood until August 10, 1792," chap. in *The Life and Letters of Madame Élisabeth de France*, 9.

engraving was modeled after, even prominently figured in a unique and personal royal family portrait, Madame Élisabeth's likeness reproduced on a *café* cup belonging to a porcelain service set containing representations of Louis XVI's immediate family members on its multiple pieces.¹⁰ In each one of these instances the princess contributed to the aura of the monarchy. It was in this sentiment that her much later Salon of 1787 official portrait by Labille-Guiard was commissioned [Fig. 3.10]. However, the complete lack of reference to her brother in that portrait, as well in the portraits of Mesdames Adélaïde and Victoire from the same period, raises concern because without them there is no marker of the monarchy which she signifies. Borrowing a phrase from art historian Mary Sheriff, Mesdames Adélaïde, Victoire, and Elisabeth appeared in the Salon, but for whom, and as whom, were they appearing?¹¹ For the Bourbon monarchy, the royal family, or themselves?

The three Salon exhibited royal portraits of the late 1780s by Labille-Guiard were definitively instances of royal *représentation*, but much like the 1783 portrait of Marie-Antoinette by Vigée-Lebrun [Fig. 2.7], these works of art contained no symbolism which directly indicated the sitters' relationship to Louis XVI. Of *Marie-Antoinette en chemise*, art historian Mary Sheriff locates one of the portrait's critical failures as not just the queen appearing in attire deemed inappropriate by the exhibition's audience, but as well appearing on her own before her husband's subjects: "Marie-Antoinette appears at the Salon, but for whom, as whom, is she appearing?" Sheriff rightly notes that the portrait of a consort implies that it is a companion piece to a portrait of her king, be it through the pendant display of the royal couple's

¹⁰ Virginie Desrante, "Service à café avec des portraits de la famille royale," in *Madame Élisabeth, une princesse au destin tragique (1764-1794)*, 40. An image of the *café* cup with Madame Élisabeth's portrait can be found at: <http://collections.chateauversailles.fr/#da206514-13ea-4708-9ca6-7835c05e98c2>. The complete service set can be seen by visiting the virtual tour at the 2013 exhibition webpage, in the *Salon turc*, at: <http://Élisabeth.yvelines.fr/visitevirtuelle/#/Salon3/>.

¹¹ Mary Sheriff, *The Exceptional Woman*, 143.

representations together, or through the replication of the king's countenance or symbols associated with him in his consort's portrait.¹² Even in the Gautier-Dagoty engraving, not only is the relationship between Marie-Antoinette's image and that of the dauphin's implicit, as well as that between Louis XV and Marie Leszczyńska, but so too is that of Mesdames Adélaïde, Victoire, and Élisabeth to both the current and future patriarchs of the royal family. However, in the public exhibition of all three princess' portraits in 1787 and 1789, much like the queen's in 1783, there is no indication why they appeared other than for themselves. Louis XVI's aunts and sister ultimately contributed alongside his consort in their own way to the "destructive break with the ritual embodiment of the monarchy" which arose from his known preference for isolation away from the public trappings of kingship, making him over time into a physically and representationally absent monarch.¹³

Madame Élisabeth's representational appearance in the Salon of 1787 has often been overlooked by historians, art historians, and biographers. So too has been the possibility that it may not have been her only appearance in that most public of contemporary art venues, Vigée-Lebrun exhibiting a portrait of an unidentified woman in the Salon of 1783, the artist completing several portraits of the princess in the early 1780s when Madame Élisabeth was in her late teens. Underlying her 1787 appearance, as well as those of her aunts during that period, was the truth that the individual body of a French royal woman was perpetually a political one; and in spite of the denial of political authority to the princesses on account of their sex, Mesdames Adélaïde, Victoire, and Élisabeth still possessed the potential to influence Louis XVI and, by extension, his subjects. While the inscription on the pedestal depicted in Madame Victoire's portrait indicates

¹² See Mary Sheriff, "The Portrait of the Queen," chap. in *The Exceptional Woman*, 143-179.

¹³ Roger Chartier, *The Cultural Origins of the French Revolution*, 179.

that her body and those of her sister and niece were “in the service of the Throne,” all three women were indeed political agents and their portraits figure into the much broader political culture during a period of time when the French increasingly questioned the presence of influential women within the monarchy and the greater society.¹⁴ Through the *Portrait of Madame Adélaïde*, *Portrait of Madame Victoire*, and the *Portrait of Madame Élisabeth*, all three princesses fostered the notion that they had more influence than they actually did because otherwise they, like Marie-Antoinette, had none.¹⁵

The Portrait of Madame Adélaïde (Salon of 1787)

Of the royal women under discussion, Madame Adélaïde (1732- 1800) had a particularly long history of using portraiture as a means of reiterating her royal status in the public spheres of the court and the Salons. While definitely privileged, her personal life is best summed up as “frustrated,” the majority of it being caught between a devoted, religiously devout mother and a father with a vacillating regard for his children and his consort. Long known for having no fear about speaking her mind, Adélaïde’s determined spirit harkened all the way back to her youth, when in 1738 she successfully pleaded with her parents to remain at court while her younger sisters were sent away to the abbey of Fontevraud, the elimination of their respective households saving the crown considerable sums.¹⁶ Whether for a lack of suitable candidates or to save the hefty dowry which a princess entailed, Louis XV only saw to the arrangement of a marriage for

¹⁴ Joan Landes, *Women and the Public Sphere in the Age of the French Revolution*, 66-89. See also Wendeln, *Royal Women, Portraiture, and Salon Criticism*, 6.

¹⁵ See above, 25.

¹⁶ Casimir Stryjenski, *The Daughters of Louis XV (Mesdames de France)*, trans. by Cranstoun Metcalfe (New York; London: Brentano’s; Chapman & Hall Ltd.; 1912), 8, 10.

one of his daughters, Louise-Élisabeth, the eldest, to Don Felipe, Infante of Spain, in 1739.¹⁷ While some of Adélaïde's sisters were perfectly content with being condemned to spinsterhood and relatively independent lives inside the gilded confines of the royal family and the court, she understood much better than they that her body was a political one, the princess even backing a plan in 1766, when she was in her mid-thirties, that she be married to Xavier, the Elector of Saxony, and her nephew, the future Louis XVI, be married to his daughter. Louis XV dismissed the plan and instead determined to cement France's tentative alliance with Austria with the eventual marriage of his grandson to the Archduchess Maria-Antonia.¹⁸

The third of Louis XV's and Marie Leszczyńska's eight daughters, Adélaïde and her brother, Louis, the dauphin, were the two children who witnessed, participated in, and adroitly understood the machinations of court factionalism, especially where their father's favorites were concerned. In regards to Madame de Pompadour, the siblings not only took an oppositional stance toward her and her circle, but as well did so from a definitively politically conservative and religiously devout one, the *parti dévôt* vainly aspiring to "resacralize" the monarchy once the self-indulgent Louis XV passed and the moral dauphin ascended the throne.¹⁹ The plan was for naught with the death of the dauphin in late 1765, Adélaïde eventually taking it upon herself to advise her nephew on his late father's political leanings in the initial days of his reign. Yet, the princess quickly recognized that the season of her influence at Versailles had hastily passed; and with consideration of the strained relationship between Louis XVI's aunts and his young queen,

¹⁷ Stryiński, 54. Stryiński as well suggest that another possible explanation as to why Louis XV did not seek marriages for his other daughters was that Louise-Élisabeth was unhappy in her marriage, the princess returning to her father's court for extended stays on multiple occasions.

¹⁸ Bernard Fay, *Louis XVI, or the End of a World*, trans. by Patrick O'Brian (London: W. H. Allen; 1968), 45.

¹⁹ Dale Van Kley, *The Religious Origins of the French Revolution, from Calvin to the French Revolution, 1560-1791* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press; 1996), 286. See also, Thomas E. Kaiser, "Madame de Pompadour and the Theaters of Power," *French Historical Studies* 19.4 (Fall 1996): 1025-1044.



Fig. 3.4. Adélaïde Labille-Guiard. *Portrait of Madame Adélaïde*. Salon of 1787. Oil on Canvas; 278.c x 194 cm. Musée National du Château, Versailles.²⁰

Adélaïde and her sisters soon determined to purchase the Chateau of Bellevue with funds bequeathed to them by their late mother. Mesdames Adélaïde, Victoire, and Sophie rapidly transformed the Marquise de Pompadour's former estate into a locale where snubbed courtiers and nobles could pay their respects to Louis XV's daughters while airing their grievances and spreading gossip regarding Marie-Antoinette's frequent faux pas and eventual abandonment of courtly etiquette.²¹

²⁰ *Portrait of Madame Adélaïde*, Wikipedia Commons; accessed September 24, 2012. http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/d/d8/Madame_adelaide_de_France.jpg.

²¹ Stryeński, 175.

Considering the princess's staunch conservatism, her 1787 portrait was in itself a political statement of the Old Regime and its absolutist values. The *Portrait of Madame Adélaïde* [Fig. 3.4] compositionally was a *portrait d'appart*, the eighteenth-century device by which pomp and the items accompanying the sitter signified their daily life and or occupation. From the variegated marble floor and the carved wall frieze to the fringed ottoman and the velvet drape hanging down the back of the elaborately carved easel, Adélaïde's portrait signified her royal status as she "represented" herself before the French in a manner akin to one utilized by Hyacinth Rigaud in the Sun King's 1701 portrait [see above, Fig. 2.6], and likewise by Louis Michel van Loo in the *Portrait of Louis XV of France* [1769-71]. Just as her father and great-great grandfather sought to fix their images as the absolute rulers of France and Navarre through their portraits, Adélaïde looked to remind the Salon attendees of her sacred heritage and her position within the royal family. Moreover, Madame Adélaïde signified the formality and the virtue of the old court at a moment when her nephew's authority and his consort's actions were continuously in question.

Some 66,000 visitors attended the Salon of 1787 and the Royal Academy sold over twenty-one thousand copies of its official catalog, the *livret*.²² Like a number of other works listed in the *livret*, the *Portrait of Madame Adélaïde* had a lengthy and informative inscription, itself an attempt to permanently affix both who and what the painting were about.²³ It read:

Au bas des portraits en médaillons
du feu Roi, de la feuë Reine & du
feu Dauphin, réunis en un bas-relief
imitant le bronze, la Princesse, qui est

²² Robert W. Berger, *Public Access to Art in Paris: A Documentary History from the Middle Ages to 1800* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press; 1999), 168-69.

²³ Norman Bryson, *Word and Image: French Painting of the Ancien Regime* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press; 1981), 4.

supposée les avoir peints elle-même,
vient de tracer ces mots:

Leur image est encore le charme de ma vie.

Sur un ployant est un rouleau de
papier, sur lequel est trace le plan du
Couvent fondé à Versailles par le feu
Reine, & dont Madame Adélaïde est
Directrice.

Le lieu de la scène est une galerie
ornée de bas-reliefs, représentant dif-
férens traits de la vie de Louis XV; le
plus apparent retrace les derniers mo-
mens de ce Roi, où, après avoir fait
retirer les Princes, à cause du danger
de la maladie, Mesdames entrent mal-
gré toutes les oppositions, en disant:
Nous ne sommes heureusement que des
Princesses. On y apperçoit (sic) un autre
bas-relief, où Louis XV montre au
Dauphin, son fils, le champ de bataille
de Fontenoy, en disant: Voyez ce que
coûte une Victoire.²⁴

This painting, more than its two pendant portraits, the *Portrait of Madame Victoire* and the *Portrait de feu Madame Louise-Élisabeth de France* [Fig. 3.5 & Fig. 3.6], and the *Portrait of Madame Élisabeth* [Fig. 3.10], sought in some measure to compete with the numerous Salon exhibited portraits of Marie-Antoinette. It did so in political terms and not necessarily in fashionable ones. In her assessment of the painting, art historian Laura Auricchio rightly notes the princess's virtue and familial devotion in the image's iconography; but, Auricchio wrongly sees Mesdames Adélaïde and Victoire as competing with the queen in terms of fashion through their respective portraits, citing as evidence that the two women were amongst the largest clients of Madame Éloffe, one of the noted Parisian dressmakers of the era, and more so than Marie-

²⁴ *Explication des peintures, sculptures et gravures de messieurs de l'Académie royale don't l'exposition a été ordonné suivant l'intention de Sa Majesté par M. le Comte de la Billardrie d'Angiviller, Tome XV: 367 (Paris; 1787), 21-22.*

Antoinette.²⁵ While fashion was definitively political in the eighteenth century, especially at the French court, and not without recognizing that Madame Adélaïde's *robe à la Française* was a statement in itself, the account book of one dressmaker is not enough evidence to go on and such an assessment fails to take into consideration the princess's and the queen's patronage of other dressmakers, including Rose Bertin.²⁶

To assess this portrait in terms of fashion alone as well fails to take into account the historic political expediency of the period in which it was commissioned. While the mid-1780s were marked for the queen by scandal, they were marked by dire fiscal crisis and the desperate need for tax reform for Louis XVI. For Madame Adélaïde, her nephew's difficulties were not only a concern to her because of their familial relationship, but as well through her possession of the Duchy of Louvois in Champagne. Along with her sister Sophie, Adélaïde originally acquired the Marquisate of Louvois in the mid-1770s, the estate supplementing the two women's personal income and independence. With Louis XVI's elevation of the estate to a duchy, the two princesses became seigneurs, the king thereby according his aunts the rights and privileges of persons of such rank. Adélaïde being the sole Duchesse of Louvois after the death of her sister in the spring of 1782, exercised some measure of political authority as her nephew sought to resolve France's fiscal difficulties, first through the calling of the Assembly of Notables in 1787 and second through the Estates General in 1789. While she may have been amongst the

²⁵ Laura Auricchio, *Adélaïde Labille-Guiard, Artist in the Age of Revolution* (Los Angeles: The J. Paul Getty Museum; 2009), 55-56.

²⁶ See Clare H. Crowston, "The Queen and Her 'Minister of Fashion': Gender, Credit and Politics in Pre-Revolutionary France" *Gender & History* 14.1 (April 2002): 92-116. See also, Jennifer Jones, *Sexing la Mode: Gender, Fashion, and Commercial Culture in Old Regime France* (Oxford; New York: Berg; 2004).

delegation of nobles from Champagne to the latter, it was through the former that the king sought her counsel.²⁷

While the monarchy had been beset by political and fiscal crises since the middle of the eighteenth century, Louis XVI was moved in August 1786 to call the Assembly of Notables upon word from his controller-general, Charles Alexandre de Calonne, that the government was on the brink of insolvency, due in large part to loans incurred during France's support of the American Revolution. Seeing his predecessors failures at implementing tax reform through the monarchical bureaucracy, and with some awareness of the French's desire for both political and tax reform, Calonne thought by engaging France's nobility and clergy in the process he would curry public opinion in favor of his proposals, the most controversial being a new land tax to be levied on all property owners regardless of distinction. Calonne calculated he could circumvent opposition to his proposed reforms from the *parlements* with the force of the Assembly behind them, but he significantly miscalculated the delegates' reaction to them when they arrived at Versailles in early 1787. The Notables vehemently opposed Calonne's new land tax, not so much because of its elimination of their tax exemption, but because they already paid both the *vingtième* and the capitation tax. Within months Calonne was dismissed and replaced by one of his staunchest critics, Loménie de Brienne, archbishop of Toulouse.²⁸ "Sa [Calonne]

²⁷Stryieński, 169; 172; 186. Stryieński unfortunately gives no indication of how Madame Adelaide participated as a delegate in the Estates General in 1789; but assuming from her association with the *parti devot* during her father's reign, and from her vehement adherence to the absolutist values and courtly etiquette set down by Louis XIV in the seventeenth century, her disfavor of the revolutionary changes which took shape that summer most likely began with an opposition to the radical notion of voting by head than by estate, the Third Estate ultimately gaining the majority in the embryonic National Assembly.

²⁸James B. Collins, *The State in Early Modern France* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press; 1995), 257-258. See as well Vivian R. Gruder, "A Mutation in Elite Political Culture: The French Notables and the Defense of Property and Participation, 1787," *The Journal of Modern History* Vol. 56, no. 4 (Dec. 1984): 599; 603.

malversation,” wrote Madame Élisabeth, “est si prouvee, ... que je ne crains pas de te mander la joie excessive que j’en ressens et que tout le monde partage.”²⁹

Sometime during this period Louis XVI turned to Madame Adélaïde for guidance. The very nature of her initial advice is unclear, but the aunt and nephew had several long, private conferences which left the king in long and serious thought. The princess was not fond of the controller-general and was among those who met with the king in the days before Calonne’s dismissal on April 8th. Months afterwards it was apparent that Madame Adélaïde continued to give her nephew counsel, very much upsetting the queen. When Marie-Antoinette came upon one of these meetings in September 1787, in the days after a new set of libelous pamphlets had circulated in Paris equating her with Frédègonde, Isabeau de Bavière, and Catherine de Médici, she intimated that the princess should leave. “Vous n’êtes point de trop, madame,” Madame Adélaïde supposedly stated, “il est question de sauver l’honneur de Roi, le vôtre et la nation du danger qui les menace.”³⁰ Ever the upholder of the absolutist regime which she was born into, Madame Adélaïde understood more so than any other female member of the royal family that her body and theirs stood for the Bourbon monarchy. Moreover, she was the one person who connected Louis XVI to his beloved grandfather, religiously devout grandmother, and morally upright father, the image of all three still being dear to her heart.

A portrait is a historical artifact; and since the formalizing of Art History as an academic discipline in the nineteenth century, the *Portrait of Madame Adélaïde* has often been art

²⁹ Élisabeth de France to Madame de Bombelles, 9 Avril 1787. Reprinted in Élisabeth de France, *Correspondance de Madame Élisabeth de France*, 95.

³⁰ M. de Lescure, *Correspondance secrete ineditee sur Louis XVI, Marie Antoinette, la cour et la ville de 1777 à 1792, publiée d’après les manuscrits de la Bibliothèque imperial de Saint-Pétersbourg; avec une preface, de notes, et un index alphabétique par M. de Lescure* (Paris: Henri Polon; 1866), Vol. 2: 119, 124; 180. I was guided by Stryieński to this reference and his volume translates the passage as, “You are not *de trop*, Madame; it is a matter of saving the King’s honour and yours, and the nation from the danger which threatens it.” See Stryieński, 186.

historiographically looked at in terms of its producer and or its sitter's patronage of the arts on multiple occasions. Labille-Guiard is one among many women artists whose contributions to the art historical canon significantly benefited from the paradigmatic shift within the discipline brought on by Second Wave Feminism of the 1960s and the Cultural / Linguistic Turn of the 1980s. Her work, Vigée-Lebrun's, Angelica Kauffman's, and that of many other female artists have increasingly been incorporated into noted art historical surveys, the *Self-Portrait with Two Pupils* and *Portrait of Madame Adélaïde* being Labille-Guiard's most acknowledged masterpieces.³¹ Heidi Strobel assesses royal women's "matronage" of women artists in the late eighteenth century as the expression of their belief that femininity was for women to define, in her multiple royal portraits Labille-Guiard fashioned a femininity which "celebrated aristocratic dignity without raising the issues of dangerous sexuality or frivolous morality."³² Also utilizing the term "matronage" rather than patronage, Jennifer Milam specifically examines "the development of Adélaïde as the maker of her own image," but does so by analyzing her Labille-Guiard portrait in relation to not only its pendant sister portraits, but also the numerous other portraits painted over the course of the mid-eighteenth century depicting Louis XV's and Marie Leszczyńska's multiple daughters.³³ To regard the *Portrait of Madame Adélaïde* in relation to its pendants is a method of art historical analysis, and so too is to look at in relation to Labille-Guiard's oeuvre, including her self-portrait, but there is a critical element which is being overlooked in such contextualizations.

³¹ See both Griselda Pollock, *Differencing the Canon: Feminist Desire and the Writing of Art's Histories* (London; New York: Routledge; 1999); and *Vision and Difference: Femininity, Feminism, and Histories of Art* (London; New York: Routledge; 1988).

³² Heidi A. Strobel, "Royal 'Matronage' of Women Artists in the Late-18th Century," *Woman's Art Journal*, Vol. 26, No. 2 (Autumn 2005-Winter 2006): 3; 6-7.

³³ Jennifer Milam, "Matronage and the Direction of Sisterhood: Portraits of Madame Adélaïde," chap. in *Women, Art and the Politics of Identity in Eighteenth-Century Europe*, ed. by Melissa Hyde and Jennifer Milam (2003), 115-135; 116-117.

To behold the *Portrait of Madame Adélaïde* on its own and in relation to its initial exhibition brings forth the inherent *representation* of the painting. Moreover, it brings forth the reality of Madame Adélaïde's own awareness at the time of its commissioning that the monarchy, the political institution of which she was one of the foremost members, or at least she saw herself as one, was in the midst of a combined political, fiscal, and representational crisis. Of the multiple art historiographical assessments of this portrait, Melissa Hyde's "Under the Sign of Minerva: Adélaïde Labille-Guiard's *Portrait of Madame Adélaïde*" is the one which thoroughly draws upon the *representation* taking place in the painting, even smartly noting, "the essential conceit of the picture is always passed over without comment: the portrait represents Madame Adélaïde *as an artist*, as a woman who, herself, represents."³⁴ Hyde as well observes that in the cultural climate of the period with its defining of ideal womanhood in terms of maternal virtue, Madame Adélaïde met the challenge with the inclusion of the vestal virgin statuette just behind her in the portrait. Hyde also sees the statuette's inclusion as a refutation of the seditious rumor frequently attached to the princess, that the victome de Narbonne, the son of one of her ladies-in-waiting, was her child born of an incestuous relationship with Louis XV.³⁵ Every detail of this painting puts forth a clear and distinct message; and yet, Hyde, much like the other more recent assessments of this painting, leaves out that the princess was someone who Louis XVI turned to for guidance at a critical moment during his reign. Also overlooked is that

³⁴ Melissa Hyde, "Under the Sign of Minerva: Adélaïde Labille-Guiard's *Portrait of Madame Adélaïde*" chap. in *Women, Art and the Politics of Identity in Eighteenth-Century Europe*, ed. by Melissa Hyde and Jennifer Milam (2003), 146. Emphasis Hyde's. Hyde's essay also discusses, in a limited sense, that this was not the first painting depicting Madame Adélaïde as an artist, including a reproduction of the after Hubert Druouais enamel on copper painting titled *Madame Adélaïde Sketching Madame Victoire* (ca. 1750; Baltimore, Walters Art Museum); and of the before 1786 watercolor depiction of her as Minera (Paris, Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal), the virgin daughter of Jupiter, goddess of wisdom, and patron of the arts.

³⁵ Hyde, "Under the Sign of Minerva," 145.

while the Salic Law denied her political authority, Madame Adelaide was a royal woman who attained a certain measure of political rights and personal autonomy as the Duchess of Louvois.

Whether with its pendant sister portraits, or on its very own, the *Portrait of Madame Adélaïde* contains a multitude of semiotic messages. In the politically and culturally charged fields of surveillance which were the Salon of 1787 and the court, it reminded attendees, critics, and the nobility alike that the princess was a woman of some importance. First and foremost it reiterated that she had royal, sacred blood running through her veins, the daughter of a once admired king and his comparatively untarnished consort, and sister to the reigning monarch's good and devout late father. Secondly, and especially toward those who encountered Madame Adélaïde and her portrait within the rarefied confines of Louis XVI's court, it stated that she was a political agent and someone not only with a close familial proximity to the king, but also someone whose guidance he valued during a critical moment, the princess knowing better than most others the paths his father would have pursued. Third, and to everyone who beheld her portrait in what would be the waning days of the Bourbon monarchy, Madame Adélaïde both represents and represented herself as a royal woman who symbolizes not just France's renowned past but, and completely unlike Marie-Antoinette, who has not brought disgrace upon herself, the king, or the monarchy, the very institution which charged her with the duty of contributing to its glory and to do so principally through *représentation*. Born into and coming of age in the public sphere of France's royal court, Madame Adélaïde understood much better than most the other royal women around her that her physical and representational bodies had meaning, the importance or insignificance of which was and continues to be debatable; but, and more important, though, is the reality that the princess conceived of herself as a public figure of some consequence and represented herself as such.

The Portrait of Madame Victoire (Salon of 1789)

A closer inspection of Pietro Martini's *Salon of 1787* (see above, Fig. 2.1) engraving reveals that a Labille-Guiard pastel study of Madame Victoire, capturing her countenance, was displayed alongside the *Portrait of Madame Adélaïde*, wedged in the narrow space to the bottom right of the painting of her older sister and between several sizeable history paintings, including Jacques-Louis David's acclaimed *The Death of Socrates*. This piece and all the pastel studies produced as part of such an important royal commission provided the Salon attendees and posterity with much more "informal," less artificial representations of Mesdames.³⁶ It would take Labille-Guiard another two years to complete and exhibit the full length *Portrait of Madame Victoire* [Fig. 3.5] and the pendant piece to it and to her sister's portrait, the as well full length *Portrait de feu Madame Louise-Élisabeth de France, Duchesse de Parme et de Son Fils* [Fig. 3.6]. Both paintings are noticeably less ceremonious in their *representation* than their slightly older pendant while maintaining.

Today, all three paintings hang in the antechamber of Mesdames' apartments at Versailles. This creates the fiction that the beholder transcends time and space to have a private audience with Mesdames Adélaïde and Victoire at the Chateau de Bellevue, and with the Duchess in Parma. The other locale which the three call to mind is Versailles, all three women spending the majority of their lives at the chateau, the Duchess eventually dying there on one of her many visits. Casimir Stryieński, one of the princesses' biographers, commented that these and their other portraits at Versailles falsely give the impression that Mesdames had more

³⁶ Mary Sprinson de Jesús, "Adélaïde Labille-Guiard's Pastel Studies of the Mesdames de France," *Metropolitan Museum Journal*, Vol 43 (2008): 157.



Fig. 3.5. Adélaïde Labille-Guiard. *Portrait of Madame Victoire de France*. 1788; Salon of 1789. Oil on canvas; 171 cm x 165 cm. Musée National du Château, Versailles.³⁷

Fig. 3.6. Adélaïde Labille-Guiard. *Portrait de feu Madame Louise-Élisabeth de France, Duchesse de Parme et de Son Fils*. 1788; Salon of 1789. Oil on canvas; 272 cm. x 160 cm. Musée National du Château, Versailles.³⁸

significance in their lifetimes than they actually did, this biographer failing to recognize the inherent agency in Adélaïde's and Victoire's commissioning and initial exhibition of these portraits.

The *Portrait of Madame Victoire* and its pendant hung in the Salon of 1789 on either side of a copy of Antoine-François Callet's *Portrait d'appart du Roi Louis XVI* ("dans le grand habit

³⁷*Portrait of Madame Victoire de France*, Musée Histoire de France, Château de Versailles; accessed July 11, 2014. http://www.museehistoirededefrance.fr/images/oeuvres/visuels/896/336_20100208155245.jpg.

³⁸*Portrait de feu Madame Louise-Élisabeth de France, Duchesse de Parme et de Son Fils*, Wikipedia Commons; accessed July 11, 2014. http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/2/22/Louise_Élisabeth_de_France..._-_Adelaide_Labille-Guiard.png/400px-Louise_Élisabeth_de_France..._-_Adelaide_Labille-Guiard.png



Fig. 3.7. Antoine-François Callet. *Portrait d'appart du roi Louis XVI ("dans le grand habit du jour de son sacre")*. Oil on canvas; 278 cm. x 196 cm. Musée National du Château, Versailles.³⁹

du jour de son sacre") [Fig. 3.7]. The king's only representational appearance of any importance in the Salons of the 1780s, this painting captured Louis XVI's bloated, rounded countenance. Originally commissioned in 1779 by the comte de Vergennes, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, with the intent of distributing the king's visage to the courts of Europe, this work was unoriginal in its execution and failed to inspire any form of confidence in the French monarch to its beholders, whether in the Salon, at Versailles, or some other location of note. While compositionally taking after Rigaud's 1701 portrait of the Sun King, this portrait not only

³⁹ *Portrait d'appart du roi Louis XVI ("dans le grand habit du jour de son sacre")*, Wikipedia Commons; accessed July 9, 2014. http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/c/ce/Antoine-Fran%C3%A7ois_Callet_-_Louis_XVI%2C_roi_de_France_et_de_Navarre_%281754-1793%29%2C_rev%C3%AAtu_du_grand_costume_royal_en_1779_-_Google_Art_Project.jpg/425px-Antoine-Fran%C3%A7ois_Callet_-_Louis_XVI%2C_roi_de_France_et_de_Navarre_%281754-1793%29%2C_rev%C3%AAtu_du_grand_costume_royal_en_1779_-_Google_Art_Project.jpg. The above image is mostly likely not the copy which appeared in the Salon of 1789, hence its dimensions differed somewhat. The original portrait was commissioned by the comte de Vergennes, Minister of Foreign Affairs, via the comte d'Angiviller; and it was commissioned with the intent of multiple copies being sent to foreign royal courts across Europe. See below, Marc Sandoz, p. 112, n. 40.

lacks the vibrancy of color but also the vitality of character depicted in its predecessor. There was a relative absence of contemporary art criticism pertaining to this piece, none of the French gazettes mentioning it, and the few pamphlets which did focused on the quality of the artist's work, one critic scathingly commenting that it was not a particularly good resemblance and suggesting that Callet discontinue painting portraits.⁴⁰ The king's portrait failed to alter the negative perceptions pertaining to the Bourbon monarchy and its very exhibition in the months following the Revolution's outbreak was one among the many instances through which the monarchy undid its own authority by appealing to the ever expanding realm of public opinion.⁴¹ Surprisingly, no portrait, whether painted, engraved, or sculpted, of Marie-Antoinette appeared in the Salon of that year, the queen's representational image, in itself one part of her public image, ultimately deemed beyond repair.

Through her portrait Madame Victoire sought to elevate the public's perception of her importance within the royal family, and thereby the nation, when the reality was that she mattered little within both. The fourth of Louis XV's and Marie Leszczyńska's daughters to survive into adulthood, disregard for this princess began with her being sent away with her three younger sisters to the Abbey of Fontevraud in 1738. She was approximately ten years old at the time and the experience had a lasting impact on her life as her frequent fits of nerves were attributed to being made to do penance in the abbey's burial vault.⁴² As Victoire and her siblings came of age, their father instilled in them both a tendency toward self-indulgence and a preference for secluding themselves in the private realms of Versailles. For Victoire, this had the

⁴⁰ Marc Sandoz, *Antoine-François Callet (1741-1823), avec des remarques liminaires* (Paris: Editart-Les Quatre Chemins; 1985), 96; 114-115.

⁴¹ See above: 15, n. 23; 70, n. 53.

⁴² (Jeanne-Louise-Henriette) Madame Campan, *Memoires de Madame Campan sur la vie privéé de Marie-Antoinette*, Vol. 1 (Paris: Cité de livres; 1929), 12. See also C. Erickson, *To the Scaffold*, 66; and Stryienski, *The Daughters of Louis XV* (1912), 14-15

added effect of putting her out of touch with the majority of the French. The *Portrait of Madame Victoire* attempted to bridge that gap, transforming the aging princess into a relatable, approachable figure. While Adélaïde's portrait contained multiple references to her late parents and brother, recalling to mind the glory of Louis XV's reign, Victoire's was rendered in a much less formal manner, the princess appearing out of doors, on a terrace, as she pays homage to an allegorical representation of Friendship.

The Royal Academy's *livret* read:

Portrait of Madame Victoire, pointing out a Statue of Friendship
 The pedestal on which we read:
 Precious to Mortals, and dear to Immortals,
 I have alone, in the service of the Throne, [offered] a Temple and Altars
 By the pedestal is a vase ornamented with a bas-relief
 Representing a sacrifice to friendship, and in the vase, two lilies
 Which are crossed together.⁴³

Romanticism emanates from the *Portrait of Madame Victoire* with the relaxed styling of the princess's blue gown and the bucolic setting. Moreover, the catalog description exudes it as well, emphasizing the princess's loyal devotion to France's throne and to those she holds most dear. Whereas Vigée-Lebrun and Wertmuller failed to appropriately depict Marie-Antoinette's embrace of *sensibilité* in their work, Labille-Guiard successfully met the challenge in this painting. The princess' actual age was not necessarily denied while her virtuous character was upheld, Madame Victoire appealing to the Salon's attendees through the contemporary sentiment.

Madame Victoire wears her heart on her sleeve as her portrait connected with the eighteenth-century cult of *sensibilité*. Popularized by Rousseau's exploration of the duality

⁴³ *Explication des peintures, sculptures et gravures des Messieurs de l'Académie royale dont l'exposition a été ordonnée, suivant l'intention de Sa Majesté par M. le Comte de la Billardrie d'Angiviller*, Tome XVI: 409 (Paris; 1789).

between emotionality and rationality, *sensibilité* became the cultivation of one's own feelings and reason in the pursuit of goodness and virtue, the *philosophe* writing: "The most vicious of men is he who isolates himself the most, ...; the best is he who shares his affections equally with all his kind."⁴⁴ The *Encyclopedie* defined it as "[d]elicate and tender disposition of the soul that makes it easily moved, touched," the chevalier de Jaucourt continuing:

Sensible souls get more out of life than others; good and bad multiply to their benefit. Reflection can make a man of honor; but sensibility makes a man virtuous. Sensibility is the mother of humanity and of generosity; it increases worth, it helps the spirit, and it incites persuasion.⁴⁵

However, this portrait was tinged with dissimulation, no matter Victoire's actual depth of sincerity and virtuosity, the near compulsive and open display of it transforming the paying of homage to a noble sentiment into a rather narcissistic demonstration.⁴⁶ Gazing outwardly at the painting's beholder, the princess draws attention to herself, more so than to the sentiment which she is supposedly honoring, rendering her portrait as being nearly clichéd as the one of Louis XVI next to it in the Salon of 1789.

Furthermore, the exterior setting reveals the sitter's own enjoyment of nature, the princess and her sister known for overseeing the gardening at Bellevue.⁴⁷ Much like their niece

⁴⁴ Rousseau, *Politics and the Arts*, 117.

⁴⁵ Jaucourt, Louis, chevalier de. "Sensibility →." The Encyclopedia of Diderot & d'Alembert Collaborative Translation Project. Translated by Christelle Gonthier. Ann Arbor: Michigan Publishing, University of Michigan Library, 2004. <http://hdl.handle.net/2027/spo.did2222.0000.295> (accessed September 16, 2014). Originally published as "Sensibilité," *Encyclopédie ou Dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers*, 15:52 (Paris, 1765).

⁴⁶ Emmet Kennedy, *A Cultural History of the French Revolution* (New Haven: Yale University Press; 1989), 105-111; 114.

⁴⁷ In *Portraiture and Politics in Revolutionary France* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press; 2014), art historian Amy Freund credits this portrait and *Marie-Antoinette et ses enfants dans le jardin anglais de Trianon* by Adolf Wertmüller with initiating the late eighteenth-century trend of landscape portraiture, a trend which gained some predominance over the course of the 1790s and with a transference of landscape imagery to male portraiture, including, as Freund notes, Jacques-Louis David's *Pierre Sériziat* (Salon of 1795; Oil on wood, 131 x 96 cm.; Musée du Louvre). See Amy Freund, *Portraiture and Politics in Revolutionary Art* (2014), 175-177.

and their niece-in-law, they too played shepherdesses on their estate, occasionally tending to their cows and sheep. Mesdames were themselves not immune to the Romantic taste for the rustic, itself an extension of what Norbert Elias defined as “Aristocratic Romanticism,” the nostalgic sentiment amongst the French nobility of the period for country life and its simplicity.⁴⁸ Mesdames Adélaïde’s and Victoire’s relative insignificance at Louis XVI’s court granted them much more freedom than their relations to enjoy the supposed innocence and naturalness of country life. Consider this passage from a 1787 letter from Madame Victoire to the Comtesse de Chastellux: “I was really enchanted with the fine weather, the beautiful moon, the dawn, and the splendid sun; and then with my cows and sheep and chickens, and the movement of all the work-people, who began their days’ work so light-heartedly.”⁴⁹ No matter the princess’s embrace of nature and sincerity of heart, such a statement reveals her ignorance of the many hardships faced by the French peasantry.

The sentimentality of this portrait does not diminish the political message at its core, but instead enhances it, a French princess appealing to the Salon going public through a popular cultural idea. Moreover, that the *Portrait of Madame Victoire* was a politicized piece is compounded by the existence of and co-exhibition with it pendant, the aforementioned portrait of her late sister. Madame Louise-Élisabeth de France (1727-59) was the eldest of Louis XV’s children, twin sister to Madame Henriette, and the only daughter for whom a marriage was arranged. Her 1739 marriage to Infante Don Philippe furthered the House of Bourbon’s connection to the Spanish throne, the young prince receiving the Duchy of Parma in the settlement of the War of Austrian Succession in 1748, the Duke thereafter establishing the House

⁴⁸ Norbert Elias, *The Court Society*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (New York: Pantheon Books; 1983), 215; 228-31.

⁴⁹ Madame Victoire to Comtesse de Chastellux, 1787. Quoted and trans. in Stryjeński, 154.

of Bourbon-Parma.⁵⁰ It should as well be noted that Louise-Élisabeth's son, depicted as a toddler in this portrait, was in actuality a middle aged man who had ruled the Duchy of Parma for nearly a quarter of a century by the time of the painting's initial exhibition. The Duke's younger sister, Maria Luisa, had become the queen consort of Spain in the year before Labille-Guiard's work was publically displayed. Likewise, while this painting reminded the Salon attendees of France's relationship to the royal houses of Spain and Parma, it also reminded them of another important connection, to the Hapsburgs of Austria, Louise-Élisabeth's eldest child, Isabella, being the first of Joseph II's two brides.⁵¹ The tendrils of French royal blood veined far and wide across the European continent, the significance (or meaninglessness) of which not being lost on the French just as the *Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen* was adopted the day after the Salon's opening, its first article essentially nullifying the "distinction" by which Mesdames Adélaïde and Victoire, their late sister and her offspring were atop the social hierarchy.⁵²

As with the portrait of their sister, the *Portrait of Madame Victoire* and the *Portrait of Duchesse de Parma* represented unconventional methods of service to the throne by royal women other than queen. While the three portraits of the sisters being hung and displayed together infuses their images with power and significance, for the two portraits hung on either

⁵⁰ In 1700, Louis XIV's grandson ascended the Spanish throne after the passing of Charles II. His claim to the throne was via Charles II's half-sister and his grandmother, Maria Theresa of Spain, Louis XIV's first queen consort. Hence, Philip V of Spain was the first Bourbon king of Spain. As for the Duchy of Parma, Empress Maria-Theresa of Austria ceded it to Spain through the Treaty of Aix-la-Chapelle (1748) in settlement of the War of Austrian Succession.

⁵¹ H.R.E. Joseph II comes up in the next chapter, "La Soeur du Roi," in relation to a second alliance by marriage between France and Austria, in particular as a prospective husband for Madame Élisabeth.

⁵² According to Thomas Crow, the *Salons* opened on the feast-day of St. Louis, August 25th, and typically lasted for three to six weeks. See Crow, *Painters and Public Life*, 1. The *Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen* was formally approved by the National Assembly on August 26, 1789. See Marcel Gauchet, "Rights of Man," in *A Critical Dictionary of the French Revolution*, ed. François Furet and Mona Ozouf, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Cambridge, MA; London: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press; 1989), 818-828.

side of Louis XVI's in the Salon of 1789 this alternative feminine political agency came to the foreground. A lifetime of relative privilege made Madame Victoire much less inclined toward court factionalism, her political understanding hampered by her childhood and fundamental education at a distance from Versailles; but those realities did not diminish her sense of duty and loyalty to the monarchy. Even as a spinster princess in her mid-fifties Madame Victoire represented herself to her nephew's subjects as a both a royal woman in touch with contemporary sentiment and a person whose entire life had been devoted to his throne. In her Labille-Guiard portrait the princess performed "proper, noble femininity," serving the Bourbon monarchy in a manner outside reproduction or sex, the portraitist and her royal sitter(s) drawing upon the prudent and representational examples set forth by, of all persons, Madame de Pompadour in her time at court after her physical relationship with Mesdames' father had ended.⁵³ Even the late duchess had served and continued to serve the French throne, her descendents tightening the connections between it and others. In concert together in the Salon of 1789, the three state portraits were definitively an expression of the Bourbon monarchy's continued belief in its sacrality, nearly blind to its gradual deterioration since the death of Louis XIV in 1715.

Absent Louis XVI's *portrait d'appart*, one of the other ways to regard the posthumous portrait of Louise-Élisabeth is in a commemorative light, Mesdames Adélaïde and Victoire commissioning the piece, pictorially affirming the sisterhood of all three royal women. The relationship between portraits of sisters produced in that era created, as art historian Jerrine Mitchell noted, not only a new means of commentary, but also a novel depiction of femininity,

⁵³ Jennifer Milam, "Matronage and the Direction of Sisterhood: Portraits of Madame Adélaïde," in *Women, Art and the Politics of Identity in Eighteenth-Century Europe*, ed. Melissa Hyde and Jennifer Milam (Aldershot; Burlington: Ashgate; 2003), 116-117; 130.

the royal sitters equally sharing their royal parentage and their gender.⁵⁴ From their youth, multiple portraits of the princesses had been produced, notably those painted by Jean-Marc Nattier in the middle of the century, and it is as if they cannot be beheld and or analyzed without consideration of the others. “It is,” writes Jennifer Milam, “as if the daughters of Louis XV could not appear without their sisters,” the princesses gaining in “status and power” when they physically or representationally appeared together.⁵⁵ Yet, there is something to be said for the reality that Mesdames Adélaïde and Victoire requested a posthumous portrait of their eldest sister and not of their many other ones, including Mesdames Sophie or Louise, the latter being the Abbess of Saint Denis and alive at the time of the initial commission. The Carmelite was widely known for her virtue and piety, but neither she nor other sisters had the political self-assuredness that their eldest sister possessed. The Salic Law may have denied royal women of actual political authority but the Bourbon dynasty at least extended across Europe through Madame Louise-Élisabeth. She may have been deceased but her service to the French throne was truly procreative, contributing to the monarchy’s glory without question and or suspicion.

Unfortunately for both the artist and her royal patrons, neither painting was as well received as the *Self-Portrait with Two Pupils* or the *Portrait of Madame Adélaïde*. The author of the *Observations Critiques sur les Tableaux du Sallon de l’Année 1789* praised Labille-Guiard’s quality of work while questioning the handling of Mesdames Victoire’s and Louise-Élisabeth’s

⁵⁴ Jerrine E. Mitchell, “Picturing sisters: 1790 Portraits by J.-L. David,” *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 31.2 (Winter 1997/1998): 176; 181.

⁵⁵ J. Miliam, “Matronage and the Direction of Sisterhood,” in *Women, Art and the Politics of Identity in Eighteenth-Century Europe*, 117.

heads in their respective portraits.⁵⁶ The author of *Les élèves au Salon ou l'Amphigouri* was more merciless in his critique, writing:

..., l'un est feu Madame Louise de France, Infante d'Espagne; quoique ce tableau soit rempli de mérite, & que le talent de son Auteur m'ait toujours été agréable, je to dirai qu'il est âcre d'un bout à l'autre, & qu'elle s'est totalement trompée sur l'effet de ses masses qui sont trop claires, & produisent un effet de verre.⁵⁷

The late princess did not make the impression her sisters so desired upon the Salon of 1789's critics or attendees. Strangely, Mesdames Adélaïde and Victoire did not complete payment for their sister's portrait, the Revolution and possibly a dispute over the price coming into play. Left with a large, unpaid for painting moved Labille-Guiard to display the painting in the Salon of 1791 with the title of *Portrait d'une femme et un enfant à un balcon*, the representation of a royal woman eventually reduced to a commodity for purchase.⁵⁸

The Portrait of Madame Élisabeth (Salon of 1787)

Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun exhibited a total of twelve pieces at the Salon of 1783, nine portraits and three history paintings, including her *morceau de réception* for the Royal Academy, *La Paix ramenant l'Abondance*, the piece in itself demonstrating that she was a woman painter perfectly capable of producing that vaunted genre.⁵⁹ Besides the aforementioned infamous *Marie-Antoinette en chemise* (see above, Fig. 2.7), amongst her portraits were pendant representations of the Comte and Comtesse de Provence, the queen's sister-in-law as well wearing a gown of white muslin, and the *Portrait de Madame Gand*, the painting capturing the

⁵⁶ Anon., *Observations Critiques sur les Tableaux du Sallon de l'Année 1789*, Tome XVI: 410; 29.

⁵⁷ Anon., *Les élèves au Salon ou l'Amphigouri*. Tome XVI: 416; 23-24.

⁵⁸ Passez, 214.

⁵⁹ For a detailed analysis on Vigée-Lebrun's circumventing the Royal Academy's prerogative of naming the subject for an artist's *morceau de réception* and by submitting the piece herself in an effort to be listed in the official record as a history painter, see Sheriff, *The Exceptional Woman*, 74-78.



Fig. 3.8. Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun. *Madame Élisabeth*. 1782; possibly Salon of 1783. Oil on canvas; 110 cm. x 82 cm. Musée National du Château, Versailles.⁶⁰

essence of the future Madame Talleyrand-Périgord’s notoriously frivolous and light-minded character.⁶¹ The artist depicted both herself and the Marquise de la Guiche in rustic costumes. While the painter wears a simple straw hat and informal gown in her self-portrait, she depicted

⁶⁰ *Madame Élisabeth*, Exposition Madame Élisabeth, une princesse au destin tragique; accessed May 21, 2013. http://Élisabeth.yvelines.fr/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/ME_Vigee-684x933.jpg. Vigée-Lebrun recorded in her *Souvenirs* that she painted this portrait of Madame Élisabeth and one copy of it in 1782; and that in 1783 she painted two portraits of the princess, copying one of them. See *Memoirs [Souvenirs]* (Bloomington: 1989), 362.

⁶¹ In the “Pen Portraits” addendum to her *Souvenirs*, Vigée-Lebrun commented, “[T]he fact that Madame de Talleyrand was not particularly intelligent remains undisputed; yet I suppose M. de Talleyrand had enough brains for both of them.” See Élisabeth Vigée-Le Brun, *The Memoirs of Élisabeth Vigée-Le Brun, Member of the Royal Academy of Paris, Rouen, Saint-Luke of Rome, Parma, Bologna, Saint-Petersburg, Berlin, Geneva and Avignon [Souvenirs; 1835; 1837]*, trans. Sián Evans (Bloomington: Indian University Press; 1989), 346-47. Furthermore, this particular portrait currently hangs in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, NY.

the noblewoman as a milkmaid in a peasant girl's red jupon, a garment most likely worn by the Marquise when she visited her good friend, the Queen, at the *Hameau*. Amidst the cataloging of these works in the Royal Academy's *livret* was the portrait of another is no woman, the title for the piece solely being "No. 118. Portrait de Madame ***".⁶² There specific reference or description of this piece in the 1783 *livret*, its measurements omitted from the catalog, and none of the numerous pamphlets which appeared that year make specific mention of it as well. It is quite speculative, but not completely unlikely, that this portrait may have been another portrait of one of Marie-Antoinette's close associates, possibly one of the three pieces painted by Vigée-Lebrun in the early 1780s of Madame Élisabeth. In fact, Olivier Blanc, in his beautiful volume, *Portraits de femmes: Artistes et modèles à l'époque de Marie-Antoinette*, identifies this particular work as the mildly titillating *Madame Élisabeth en bergère* [Fig. 3.8].⁶³

A visually stunning piece, the vibrancy of color and ethereal transparency of the gauze *fichu* being lost in all reproduction of this work, it is nearly without wonder why the sitter's name was omitted from the *livret* if this portrait of Madame Élisabeth did indeed hang in the Salon of 1783. To be depicted in shepherdess costume was not uncommon for the period, the trend in itself an extension of the "Aristocratic Romanticism" of the era, with other French women of note represented in a like manner, including the Marquise de Pompadour, her c.1760 portrait in this vein by Carle Van Loo currently on display in the Petit Trianon.⁶⁴ Moreover, both the depiction and play pretending to be a shepherdess or a peasant girl gained popularity in the latter

⁶² Corporate Author, *Explication des Peintures, Sculptures et Gravures, de Messieurs de l'Académie Royale* (Paris, 1783), 27.

⁶³ Olivier Blanc, *Portraits de femmes: Artistes et modèles à l'époque de Marie-Antoinette* (Paris: Éditions Didier Carpentier; 2006), 181-82.

⁶⁴ For further information on this portrait of the Marquise de Pompadour, consult the following web address: <http://collections.chateauversailles.fr/#e3073d1a-8aaf-4ce9-9917-e5682d3e7254>; accessed July 31, 2015.

eighteenth-century. The queen and numerous aristocratic women drew inspiration from literary characters like the worthy Adélaïde in Jean-François Marmontel's *The Shepherdess of the Alps*. That piece in particular readily lent itself to both operatic comedy and pictorial representation, notably Étienne Aubry's painting of the same name hanging at present in the Detroit Institute of Art. Additionally, and especially relevant to both the period and this discussion, was the Alpine setting and the idealization of rustic life in Rousseau's *La Nouvelle Héloïse*, his widely read epistolary novel which moved many of his eighteenth-century readers to tears.⁶⁵

As the discussion of the *Portrait de Madame Victoire* has shown, members of the French court and royal family were themselves hardly immune to Romantic notions and the cult of *sensibilité*. Marie-Antoinette's *Hameau* at the Petit Trianon was in itself an expression of the queen's admiration for Rousseau and his veneration of returning to nature and simpler pleasures. Writing in the "Preface" of his novel, the *philosophe* remarked that the bucolic setting served as a means of demonstrating to "well-to-do people," pointedly French aristocrats and the Parisian bourgeoisie:

...that rustic life and agriculture offer pleasures they cannot know; that these pleasures are less insipid, less coarse than they imagine; that plenty of taste, variety, discrimination can be found in them; that a man of merit who wanted to retire to the country with his family and become his own farmer could lead a life just as blissful there as in the midst of the city entertainments; that a country housewife can be a charming woman, as full of graces, and graces more affecting, as all the coquettes, ...⁶⁶

⁶⁵ Robert Darnton, "Readers Respond to Rousseau: The Fabrication of Romantic Sensitivity," chap. 6 in *The Great Cat Massacre and Other Episodes in French Cultural History* (New York: Vintage / Random House; 1984), 244.

⁶⁶ J.-J. Rousseau, *Julie, or the Nouvelle Héloïse: Letters of Two Lovers Who Live in a Small Town at the Foot of the Alps* [1761] (Lebanon, NH: Dartmouth College Press; University Press of New England; 1997) 15.

Madame Élisabeth en bergere and its rather coquettish qualities cannot be viewed without consideration of her infamous sister-in-law on two accounts. First, Marie-Antoinette's *Hameau* at the Petit Trianon was in itself an expression of her admiration for Rousseau and his veneration of country life and its simpler pleasures. The queen's admiration was in itself extended to the princess through Louis XVI's gifting of the estate of Montreuil on Versailles' outskirts to his sister in the spring of 1783. One of Madame Élisabeth's early biographers even credits the queen with the presentation of the generous gift, Marie-Antoinette supposedly saying to her sister-in-law upon their entrance into the villa, "Sister, you are in your own house. This is to be your Trianon."⁶⁷ While the princess' residence at Montreuil was relatively brief, her distribution of the estate's produce to her impoverished neighbors and occasional assistance at the medical clinic located on its grounds gave credence to the wider public's belief that Madame Élisabeth was a virtuous and charitable person.⁶⁸

The other important factor to consider in relation to the queen is the aforementioned *Marie-Antoinette en chemise* by Vigée-Lebrun. As art historian Mary Sheriff observes in that painting, the princess' portrait is as well "coded for informality and refers to the artful naturalness of the picturesque." The queen's portrait on display that year had no companion portrait of Louis XVI, leading Salon attendees to ponder not only her immodest attire, but also why she appeared by herself in the first place.⁶⁹ If Marie-Antoinette's portrait had a companion or companions in the Salon of 1783, it was the portraits produced by Vigée-Lebrun in the early 1780s of her female friends who joined in the play pretending at the *Hameau*, including Madame

⁶⁷ *Life and Letters of Madame Élisabeth de France*, 19. There is further discussion of Montreuil and Madame Élisabeth's residence there in the following chapter, "La Soeur du Roi."

⁶⁸ Aurore Chéry, "La vertu de Madame Élisabeth: Montreuil, un anti-Trianon?," in *Madame Élisabeth, une Princesse au Destin Tragique, 1764-1794*, exhibition catalog (Versailles; Paris: Silvana Editoriale for Chateau de Versailles and Yvelines Conseil Général; 2013), 27.

⁶⁹ Mary Sheriff, *The Exceptional Woman*, 166; 151, 175; 143.



Fig. 3.9. Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun. *Yolande-Martine-Gabrielle de Polastron, duchesse du Polignac*. 1782. Oil on canvas; 92.3 cm. x 76.6 cm. Musée National du Château, Versailles.⁷⁰

Élisabeth and the governess to the royal children herself, the Duchess of Polignac [Fig. 3.9]. Perhaps the greatest indicator that *Madame Élisabeth en bergere* was indeed the *Portrait of Madame **** in the Salon of 1783 was the preponderance of aristocratic women depicted in simplified, rustic costumes in the portraits exhibited by Vigée-Lebrun in her first Salon appearance. Not surprisingly, one of the unofficial, pamphletized reviews that year wrote of the artist's portraits as speaking in unison for themselves and quipping, "We are lifelike, and painted with taste; but we are better without rouge."⁷¹

⁷⁰ *Yolande-Martine-Gabrielle de Polastron, duchesse du Polignac*, Château de Versailles; accessed Oct. 9, 2014. <http://collections.chateauversailles.fr/#14897be4-d4fb-461f-aaeb-6436122424a0>. This portrait of the Duchess is compositionally akin to *Madame Élisabeth en bergere* and could instead have been the *Portrait of Madame ****, disdain for Marie-Antoinette's closest associate spreading throughout the court and beyond, thereby prompting the omission of Polignac's name from the Salon of 1783's *livret*.

⁷¹ Jean-Baptiste Pujoux, *Le Songe, ou la Conversation a Laquelle on ne s'attend pas, scene critique. La scène est au Sallon de 1783*, 30. [Nous sommes ressemblans, & peints avec gout; mais nous serions mieux sans rouge.]

No matter the queen's influence upon her husband's sister, or her potential role in the commissioning and styling of *Madame Élisabeth en bergere*, or whether or not the painting actually appeared in the greatest art exhibition in the land, how were the French to behold such a piece? Were women to avert their eyes while the princess' rather impassive gaze intercepted with those of the male beholders who lingered before her?⁷² The portrait lacks all the known signifiers of sexual transgression, such as the broken eggs, dead birds, or cracked jugs in Jean-Baptiste Greuze's multiple depictions of ruined young women painted during that era. The absence of such symbols and the shepherdess costume rendered Madame Élisabeth's virtue as ambiguous, making her probable virginity rather tantalizing for the portrait's male beholders, be they members of the art-going public, courtiers, or even a foreign prince who might one day take her for his bride. Moreover, in visual language of the Rococo the roses in the lower half of the painting were tantalizing metaphors of her available genitalia.⁷³

"[H]ow can she expose herself," wrote Jean-Jacques Rousseau in *The Letter to M. d'Alembert on the Theatre*, "to putting off, by an immodest bearing, he who might be tempted to become her husband? Whatever she may do, one feels that in public she is not in her place."⁷⁴ The manner in which Madame Élisabeth determined to represent herself through the medium of portraiture and where her portraits were displayed during her brother's reign were not without serious consequence. With a few quick mental tugs of the cord on her bodice in this particular portrait, the libertine beholder could easily expose the princess' ample bosom, ultimately seducing her all for himself. Furthermore, and as French historian Aurore Chéry recently noted,

⁷² On women, men, and the gendered reception of somewhat salacious artwork, see Bernadette Fort, "Accessories of Desire: On Indecency in a Few Paintings by Jean-Baptiste Greuze," *Yale French Studies* No. 94, *Libertinage and Modernity* (1998): 147.

⁷³ Gutwirth, *Twilight of the Goddesses*, 9.

⁷⁴ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Politics and the Arts*, 88.

the curvaceous young women in *Madame Élisabeth en bergere* is someone who was hardly a prude; and although it will never be known for certain if this portrait was definitely exhibited in the Salon of 1783, there was enough contemporaneous awareness of both it and the princess' voluptuousness to be alluded to on several occasions in the revolutionary press.⁷⁵

There is a great deal of myth attendant to Madame Élisabeth's virginity and her charitableness, and much like Fleury Richard's 1816 painting titled *Madame Élisabeth assistant à la distribution de lait* (see below, Fig. 7.1), both had more to do with people's imaginations.⁷⁶ While the princess was most likely as pure and virtuous as her contemporaries and early biographers tell us that she was, *Madame Élisabeth en bergere* and contemporaneous awareness of the painting rendered for some those qualities and her sincerity of heart as doubtful. Moreover, the embrace of nature and country life, and the play pretending to be shepherdesses by Madame Élisabeth, Marie-Antoinette, their associates, and even Mesdames Adélaïde and Victoire, exposes royal and aristocratic women's ignorance of the many hardships faced by the French peasantry at the time. Playacting underlay the fabrication of the princess' portrait by Vigée-Lebrun, making Madame Élisabeth out to be a pretty little country maiden; but the portrait itself and its potential exhibition in the Salon of 1783 made both the princess' character and modesty ultimately ambiguous and eventually suspect.

⁷⁵ Chéry, 28-29.

⁷⁶ On Fleury Richard's painting, a copy of which hung in the Salon of 1817 and was commissioned by the Comte d'Artois, the future Charles X, see Juliette Trey, "Madame Élisabeth de France, soeur du roi" in *Madame Élisabeth, une princesse au destin tragique (1764-1794)*, 80-81. Another painting in this vein is Louis Hersent's painting *Louis XVI distribuant des secours aux pauvres pendant l'hiver de 1788* (1817; Salon of 1817), both paintings sympathetically resurrecting the images of executed royals during the first years of the Restoration. The former is visible in this volume, as Fig. 7.1; it can also be seen at: http://Élisabeth.yvelines.fr/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/Distrib-lait_Fleury-Richard-21.jpg; and the latter at: <http://collections.chateauversailles.fr/#73ea7f7e-8451-4fe6-9c4a-6ba2d14d23b3>.

As discussed beforehand, Salon criticism of the period focused more on Vigée-Lebrun's and Labille-Guiard's talent and artistic skills as portraitists than on their aristocratic and royal patrons. Comparisons between the two were and remain to be unavoidable, a Salon of 1789 critic even remarking that there was greater truth in the *Portrait of Madame Victoire* than in the oeuvre of "Madame le Brun."⁷⁷ The contrasts between the two artists aside, their patronage by Louis XVI's consort, aunts, and sister demonstrates not only the women's aesthetic differences, but also a fundamental difference in their understanding of what constituted respectable modes of royal *representation*. Just as the queen's influence upon her sister-in-law cannot be overlooked in *Madame Élisabeth en bergere*, so too was Mesdames in the commissioning, compositional arrangement, and Salon exhibition of the *Portrait of Madame Élisabeth* [Fig. 3.9]. The analytical juxtaposition of these two portraits adds to our historical and art historical understanding of royal womanhood's paradoxical nature and of the eventual undoing of royal *représentation* in the unforeseen waning of Louis XVI's reign.

According to Pietro Martini's engraving of the Salon of 1787 (see above, Fig. 2.1), the princess' portrait by Labille-Guiard hung between the rather more decorous *Marie-Antoinette and her children* by Vigée-Lebrun and Labille-Guiard's full-length portrait of Madame Adélaïde. Beneath the fabrication of all three royal portraits underlay not only the sitters' inherent duty to formally represent the Bourbon monarchy, but also a political expediency, the portraits appearing in the heightened period between the calling of the Assembly of Notables in 1787 and the subsequent Estates General in 1789. Still, Louis XVI's relative representational absence in the

⁷⁷ Anon., *Entretien entre un amateur et un admirateur sur les tableaux exposés au Sallon du Louvre del'année 1789*. Collection Deloynes, Tome XVI: 412.



Fig. 3.10. Adélaïde Labille-Guiard. *Portrait de Madame Élisabeth de France*. 1787; Salon of 1787. Oil on canvas; 146.7 x 115 cm. Private Collection, South America.⁷⁸

Salons of that period and even symbolically in the portraits of his female family members only lent credence to the contemporaneous notion that the monarchy was being effeminated from within.⁷⁹

In *The Fabrication of Louis XIV* cultural historian Peter Burke aptly demonstrates that the genre of royal portraiture was a highly constructed one. The means by which Louis XVI's

⁷⁸ Reproduced from Oliver Blanc, *Portraits de Femmes*, 177. See also *Portrait de Madame Élisabeth de France*, Wikimedia Commons; accessed July 2, 2014.

http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/6/65/Ad%C3%A9la%C3%AFde_Labille-Guiard%2C_Portrait_de_Madame_%C3%89lisabeth_%281787%29.jpg.

⁷⁹ Rousseau, *Politics and the Arts*, 49-50; 100-101. See also analysis on Rousseau's views on women in Joan Landes, *Women and the Public Sphere* (Ithaca; 1988), 66-89; and Sara Maza, *Private Lives and Public Affairs* (Berkeley; London: 1993), 167-73.

beloved sister and aunts formally represented themselves before his subjects was no exception. Multiple persons played a role in the commissioning and the determination of the compositional arrangement for the *Portrait of Madame Élisabeth*, as well as its final placement in the Salon of 1787; and yet, one must not discredit the princess' own involvement in the making of her public image, her Labille-Guiard portrait being the only official instance of appearing before the French in this capacity. Likewise, that the princess' decision to put forth the image of herself as a self-determined young woman in the pursuit of acquired knowledge, as a *femme savante*, is rather interesting when we give consideration to the pious and virtuous manners by which her aunts were represented in their portraits. This portrait, much like the one of her by Vigée-Lebrun, forces the historian to reassess Madame Élisabeth from a fresh perspective and from one which moves past the persistent denial of her political agency by prior biographers and historians alike.

Much like the aforementioned portrait of her aunt which appeared the same year, the *livret* contained an inscription which sought to delimit the painting's meaning. It read:

Madame Élisabeth, peinte jusqu'aux
genoux, appuyée sur une table
garnie de plusieurs attributs de
Sciences.⁸⁰

With all the emphasis on her virtue and religious devotion in recollections and biographies, the princess' other intellectual and artistic pursuits have been largely overlooked. Befitting of a woman of her standing, Madame Élisabeth was an accomplished musician and a skilled artist, several of her pen and ink drawings and watercolors being displayed at the 2013 exhibition, *Madame Élisabeth , une Princesse Au Destin Tragique, 1764-1794*, held at the estate of

⁸⁰ *Explication des peintures, sculptures et gravures de messieurs de l'Académie royale dont l'exposition a été ordonnée suivant l'intention de Sa Majesté par M. le Comte de la Billardrie d'Angiviller*, Tome XV: 367 (Paris 1787), 21.

Montreuil.⁸¹ Beginning at a young age, and alongside her sister, Clotilde, Élisabeth benefitted immensely from the Enlightenment's revolution in the education of young women and was exposed to the works of classical and modern philosophers. The *livret's* declaration of her interest in the sciences was merited, the princess having in her possession a set of detailed maps representing her brother's kingdom and the mathematical instruments necessary for the study of geography and astronomy.⁸² The globe and compass in Labille-Guiard's painting were more than mere props.

The *femme savante* imagery had a particularly long history in France, including as far back as the early fifteenth-century depictions of Christine de Pizan. Within the court itself, it had experienced quite the revival since the ascendancy of Madame Maintenon [Fig. 3.11], Louis XIV's morganatic second wife. Meanwhile, and much more relevant to late eighteenth-century painting and pieces exhibited in the Salons, were the magnificent portraits of Madame de Pompadour produced by François Boucher, François-Hubert Drouais, and Maurice-Quentin de la Tour [Fig. 3.12] which depicted Louis XV's *maîtresse-en-titre* as the quintessential *femme savante*. Exhibited in the Salon of 1757 on a dais, the former was most likely commissioned to commemorate Pompadour's elevation to Lady of the Palace on February 8, 1756, the ceremony itself keeping her officially within the sphere of the court when she no longer shared the king's

⁸¹ Juliette Trey, et al., *Madame Élisabeth, une Princesse au Destin Tragique, 1764-1794*, exhibition catalog (Milan; 2013), 144-45.

⁸² Pascale Mormiche, "Madame Élisabeth: une éducation de princesse au temps des Lumières," in *Madame Élisabeth, une Princesse au Destin Tragique, 1764-1794* (2013), 130-31. In regards to the map set, authored by Robert de Hessein and engraved by Guillaume de La Haye, see entry No. 96, "La France en des carré de dix grandeurs uniformes régulièrement graduées par le nombre neuf don't la mesure el le nivellement établis à perpétuité sur le terrain offriront enfin des bases certaines aux propriétaires et à l'administration" (1784), p. 148. In regards to the mathematical instruments, see the "Coffret-nécessaire de mathématique," which was on display during the exhibition, was visible at the following web address: <http://Élisabeth.yvelines.fr/oeuvres-et-lieux/coffret-necessaire-de-mathematiques/>.



Fig. 3.11. Pierre Mignard. *Françoise d'Aubigné, Marquise de Maintenon*. 1694. Oil on Canvas; 128 cm. x 97 cm. Musée National du Château, Versailles.⁸³

Fig. 3.12. Maurice-Quentin de la Tour. *Portrait of the Marquise de Pompadour*. 1755. Pastel on blue-grey paper; 177.5 cm x 131 cm. Musée du Louvre, Paris.⁸⁴

bed.⁸⁵ The latter, completed the year before the former, more fittingly captured the image the Marquise wished to present to the world, the two portraits containing numerous similar elements but being seated at her cluttered desk elevated the seriousness of the de la Tour portrait when compared to her reclining pose in the Boucher one. This image not only followed in the vein of

⁸³ *François d'Aubigné, Marquise de Maintenon*, Culture.fr, Ministry of Culture and Communication; accessed Jan. 27, 2013. http://www.culture.gouv.fr/Wave/image/joconde/0645/m507704_84-000186-02_p.jpg

⁸⁴ *Portrait of the Marquise de Pompadour*, Wikipedia Commons; accessed Downloaded on Sept. 24, 2012. http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/8/88/Maurice_Quentin_de_La_Tour_-_Marquise_de_Pompadour_-_WGA12359.jpg.

⁸⁵ Elise Goodman, *The Portraits of Madame de Pompadour, Celebrating the Femme Savante* (Berkeley; London: University of California Press; 2000), 22-28. This volume contains a reproduction of Gabriel de Saint-Aubin's *Drawing of Boucher's Portrait of Mme de Pompadour at the Salon of 1757*, from Du Perron's *Discours sur la peinture et sur l'architecture* (1758); see p. 23. It is interesting to note that Saint-Aubin as well mocked the exhibition of this portrait in the Salon of 1757 in his *Livres de caricatures tant bonnes que mauvaises*, in a drawing titled *La verite Surmonte l' Autorité*, pg. 303. Page visible at the Waddesdon Manor website: <http://collection.waddesdon.org.uk/search.do;jsessionid=UThfOCXc+rXUXG8HUWzQ4mn6?id=41811&db=object&page=1&view=detail>.



Fig. 3.13 Jean-Marc Nattier. *Portrait of Marie Leszczyńska*. 1748; Salon of 1748. Oil on canvas; 138.9 x 107 cm. Musée National du Château, Versailles.⁸⁶

portraiture set forth by the Marquise de Maintenon, the woman who Pompadour knowingly modeled herself upon, but also Jean-Marc Nattier's celebrated *Marie Leszczyńska* (Salon of 1748) [Fig. 3.13], Louis XV's queen seen at a moment of serious contemplation upon the text beneath her left arm.⁸⁷ Known for his skill in making his sitters appear relaxed and at ease, and for his portraying his female sitters as goddesses or allegorical representations of the seasons, Nattier shed such compositional trappings to infuse the queen's portrait with intimate, noble simplicity and dignity, prompting the contemporaneous critic Mariette to write:

⁸⁶ *Portrait of Marie Leszczyńska*, Wiki Paintings.Org; accessed Feb. 12, 2013.

<http://uploads8.wikipaintings.org/images/jean-marc-nattier/marie-leszczy-ska-queen-of-france-reading-the-bible-1748.jpg>

⁸⁷ The book under Marie Leczinska's arm is a Bible in the original version of the portrait. In the copy done for the queen's good friend, Président Hénault, the Bible was replaced with a book of philosophical essays. See M. Levey, *Painting and Sculpture in France, 1770-1789* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press; 1972; 1993), 188.

Celui qu'il fit de la reine et qu'on a vu exposé au Salon des Tuileries en 1748, m'a paru un de ses meilleurs ouvrages et que je mets fort au-dessus des portraits des dames de France, qui pourtant ont eu un grand succès.⁸⁸

In spite of the nobleness in both the character and portraiture of the women she modeled herself upon, Pompadour drew immeasurable condemnation from art critics and socio-political theorists alike, from the former for feminizing aesthetics and from the latter for feminizing the monarchy. More relevant to this discussion, no other woman was more associated with the phenomenon of the Rococo than Pompadour, the Goncourts complaining in their assessment of eighteenth-century decorative items that most were identified as “à la Pompadour.”⁸⁹ The sudden removal of Louis XV's finance minister, Philibert Orry, from his secondary post as *Directeur général des bâtiments* and appointment of Parisian financier and Farmer-General Charles-François Le Normant de Tournehem as his replacement was one of the first instances of the royal favorite's powerful influence at court, marking the beginning of her ascent over contemporary aesthetics, the Royal Academy, and state patronage of the arts.

In her youth, Le Normant was Jeanne-Antoinette Poisson's legal guardian, and possibly her biological father, and eventually the arranger of her 1741 marriage to his nephew, Charles-Guillaume Le Normant d'Étiolles. That Pompadour's brother, Abel Poisson, the Marquis de Marginy, succeeded Le Normant as *Directeur* was more than a sign of her family's power, both men taking an active role in the artistic practice and aesthetic program of the Royal Academy, and thereby, the Salons. Even the Royal Academy's pre-revolutionary pursuit of didactic works,

⁸⁸ M. Levey, *Painting and Sculpture in France, 1770-1789*, 188-89. P-J Mariette, *Abécédario*, 6 vols. (Paris: publié par Chennevières Ph. De et Montaignon A. de; 1851-60); quoted in Renard, *Jean-Marc Nattier (1685-1766), Un artiste parisien à la cour de Louis XV* (Saint-Rémy-en-l'Eau: Éditions Monelle Hayot; 1999), 94.

⁸⁹ Melissa L. Hyde, *Making up the Rococo: François Boucher and His Critics* (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute; 2006), 107. The Goncourts were the very prolific French brothers Edmond and Jules de Goncourt who collaborated extensively in their writing efforts, from multiple novels to analyses on eighteenth-century culture and notable individuals.

which were meant to inspire the emulation of virtue in their beholders, dated back to Marigny's 1764 commissioning of a series of paintings depicting Roman emperors in the performance of moral and virtuous acts.⁹⁰ The Marquise's *femme savante* portraits irrevocably were, as art historian Elise Goodman fittingly observes, products of the era's visual culture and their sitter's own self-fashioning of herself as a learned woman, their pride of place in the Salons of the 1750s brazenly advertising to the French the extent of her authority over both state patronage of the arts and the State itself, i.e. Louis XV, and in spite of the fact that their sexual relationship had since come to an end.⁹¹

The selection of the *femme savante* imagery for the *Portrait de Madame Élisabeth*, though, should not be seen as some sort of endorsement of Louis XV's renowned mistress. It instead had to do with Labille-Guiard's apprenticeship under de la Tour, her work compositionally taking after her master.⁹² While there are numerous similarities between the two portraits, the difference of note was the manner in which Labille-Guiard cut off Madame Élisabeth's from below the knee, a fact reiterated in the *livret*. This representationally coded the royal sitter's femininity through the thoughtful positioning of her body and imbuing the portrait with the proper decorum. As art historian Griselda Pollock notes, portraitists accomplish the coding of femininity through the erasure of a female sitter's legs under a sweeping skirt, the care and contained placement of hands on the lap, or an elbow on a table, and turning the body

⁹⁰ Crow, *Painters and Public Life*, 110-113; 154-56; and, Norman Bryson, *Word and Image: French Painting of the Ancien Regime* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; 1981), 209. On the relationship between the Marquise de Pompadour, the Marquis de Marginy, and Charles-François LeNormant de Tournehem, see Evelyne Lever, *Madame de Pompadour: A Life*, trans. Catherine Temerson (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux; 2000; 2002), 22-35.

⁹¹ Elise Goodman, *The Portraits of Madame de Pompadour*, 2; 23.

⁹² Passez, 12.

slightly off-center.⁹³ Nonetheless, and no matter the person or persons who determined the final composition of this piece, the selection of the *femme savante* imagery as the means by which Madame Élisabeth openly represented herself and the Bourbon monarchy in the public sphere of the Salon was a questionable one at that time, the very presence of actual *femme savantes* in the public sphere of enlightened discourse repulsive to Rousseau and like-minded *philosophes*.

The “attributes of the Sciences” in the *Portrait of Madame Élisabeth*, as well as the reminder of them in the *livret*, were critically received not as truth, but instead as fiction. Along with the sheet music and volumes on the table behind the princess, their incorporation into the painting, much like the volume of the *Encyclopédie* behind the Marquise de Pompadour in her de la Tour portrait, built off the compositional motif of seventeenth-century portraits depicting beautiful young women who balanced grace and intellect amidst the self-pursuit of knowledge. The princess’ outward gaze at the portrait’s beholders additionally detracted from the painting’s success, the impression being that Madame Élisabeth has been distracted from her studies rather than contemplating on them, looking off into space and reflecting on what she had just read in a manner akin to Madame de Pompadour and her grandmother in their aforementioned portraits.⁹⁴ The portrait of a royal body, be it a king, his queen, or even a member of his family, presumes witnesses; but, as Michael Fried’s thorough analysis of Denis Diderot’s and his contemporaries’ art criticism has shown, a truly successful painting in the eighteenth century was one which set itself up as so lifelike and uncomposed that its beholders became not only enthralled in the piece,

⁹³ Griselda Pollock, “Feminism / Foucault – Surveillance / Sexuality,” in *Visual Culture: Images and Interpretations*, ed. Norman Bryson, Michael Ann Holly, and Keith Moxey (Hanover: Wesleyan University Press / University Press of New England; 1994), 22.

⁹⁴ E. Goodman, *The Portraits of Madame de Pompadour*, 95-96; 24.

but their existence was ultimately denied as well.⁹⁵ Madame Élisabeth's gaze outward at her beholders prohibited them from being enthralled while the book in her right hand added to the fiction of her intelligence, the anonymous critic in the *Mémoires Secret* crediting Labille-Guiard for ingeniously giving the portrait an "austere tone" and a "serious air" by placing it there.⁹⁶

The *querelle de femmes* began with a discussion about women's education and had long since transformed into a debate over their character and nature by the late-eighteenth century. While some of the era's *philosophes* openly admired the intelligent women of the day, Voltaire's esteem for Émile du Châtelet being a notable example, others despised such women, with the male chauvinism of some verging on misogyny. Finding himself scorned by the Parisian *salonnaires*, Rousseau found fault with the departure in women's education from the path of teaching them to "please men," criticizing the hostesses and the "giddy fellows" who foppishly fawned over them for equally disgracing their sex in his widely read *Émile, or On Education*.⁹⁷ More important, in his most forceful argument against women's presence in the public sphere, the *Letter to M. d'Alembert on the Theatre*, the *philosophe* commented in a footnote that while women could acquire some knowledge, including in science and erudition, through the dint of work, women's intellectual production would never possess "the celestial flame which warms and sets fire to the soul, that genius which consumes and devours, that beautiful eloquence, those sublime transports which carry their raptures to the depths of hearts."⁹⁸ Writing in the middle of

⁹⁵ Michael Fried, "Toward a Supreme Fiction," chap. 2 in *Absorption and Theatrically: Painting and Beholder in the Age of Diderot* (Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press; 1980; reprint 1988), 92-105. See in particular Fried's analysis of Diderot's remark in the *Salon de 1767* about scenes on stage or on canvas as not supposing witnesses, pp. 97-98.

⁹⁶ Bachaumont, *Mémoires secrets pour servir à l'histoire de la République des Lettres en France, depuis 1762 jusqu'à nos jours, ou Journal d'observateur*, London, 1777-1789, 36 vol.; from 1787, t. 36, p. 356; quoted in Passez, *Adélaïde Labille-Guiard*, 172.

⁹⁷ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Émile, or On Education* (1762), trans. Allan Bloom (New York: Basic Books; 1979), 365.

⁹⁸ Rousseau, *Politics and the Arts*, 103.

the century, there were a number of women who fueled his ire with the woman at the core of it being the consummate *femme savante* herself, Madame de Pompadour. Irregardless of the imagery's history within the French court, or of the compositional knowledge shared between a master and his apprentice, the theatricality of Pompadour's portraits and the powerful influence both she and women like her asserted upon the realms of the royal court and French high-society rendered all women's pursuit of knowledge, be it true or feigned, and their presence in the public sphere as suspect.

The granddaughter of one king and sister to another, Madame Élisabeth was a woman born into the public spheres of the French royal court and monarchical politics. The *Portrait of Madame Élisabeth* was thereby a state portrait and its deliberate exhibition in the Salon of 1787 was part and parcel of the much larger and histrionic spectacle by which the Bourbon monarchy legitimated and authorized its absolute authority.⁹⁹ Although her portrait locates the princess within the body politic, in close proximity to the body of the king, the painting failed to contain some reference to the reigning monarch. The Salon of 1787 attendees, historians and art historians thus ponder "for whom?" and "as whom?" was Madame Élisabeth appearing. Furthermore, one must take into consideration if contemporaneous beholders received her appearance in the Salon of 1787 as being an immodest one, especially when one considers Rousseau's aforementioned remark that a woman who shows herself outside the private sphere

⁹⁹ Joan Landes, *Women and the Public Sphere*, 18; 20. Building off of Landes' analysis of Rousseau's position on women's presence in the public sphere in her analysis of the Diamond Necklace Affair, Sara Maza observes that the pre-revolutionary denunciation of female action emerges from a turning point in mid-eighteenth century French political culture by which Rousseau and others critiqued the absolute monarchy's almost feminine overinvestment in the spectacular display of images and the symbolics of power, rather than in the masculine, more concrete, yet abstract, language of the law. Maza, though, fails to mention, and or connect, this turning point with the ongoing debates between Louis XV and the *Parlements* over the king's authority to write and register the law, the debates by which the monarchy's sacrality was ultimately undone, as Jeffrey Merrick's analysis has demonstrated. See Sara Maza, *Private Lives and Public Affairs*, 172-73; and Jeffrey Merrick, *The Desacralization of the French Monarchy in the Eighteenth Century* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press; 1990).

of the home puts men off by an “immodest bearing” was in itself a veiled reference to the Salons and the manner in which they showcased “the ladies and the maidens all tricked out in their very best and put on display in the boxes as though they were in the window of a shop for buyers.”¹⁰⁰

For any and all women in eighteenth-century France, the line between sensuality and sensibility was an especially fine one, and even more so for the royal women who represented a monarchy which was increasingly under scrutiny by the public which it addressed, thereby transferring its authority to that public¹⁰¹. Just as a portrait of a queen consort should suppose it is a companion to one of her king, or should make a modicum of reference to him in any formal representation of herself, so too should the portraits of a reigning monarch’s family members and especially for the women who are still subject to his patriarchal authority. In spite of the exhibition of the portraits of Mesdames Victoire and the late Louise-Élisabeth on either side of Louis XVI’s in the Salon of 1789, the display of the king’s portrait that year being something of an afterthought, those two portraits were commissioned as companions to the *Portrait of Madame Adélaïde*; and the *Portrait of Madame Élisabeth* was commissioned in accord with those of the princess’ aunts, the painting itself most likely joining the others as part of Mesdames’ collection at their château.¹⁰² Display within the princesses’ own private spheres had certain import, reminding visitors to those realms of each sitter’s individual significance. More important, the *representation* of a royal woman before an open and critical public carried a weight of its own, leading some to question the portraitized appearances of such women, as

¹⁰⁰ Rousseau, *Politics and the Arts*, 88; 111.

¹⁰¹ On the finest of the line between sensuality and sensibility, see Maza’s analysis of eighteenth-century aristocratic sponsorship of the *fêtes de la rose* in *Private Lives and Public Affairs*, chap.2 “The Rose-Girl of Salency, from Theatricality to Rhetoric,” 68-111; in particular note, pp. 84-85. On transference of authority to public opinion, see Keith M. Baker above, p. 15; 70.

¹⁰² Passez, 172. In the *provenance* for the portrait Passez notes that on the château de Bellevue’s inventory, completed after Mesdames Adélaïde and Victoire went into exile in 1791, the painting was listed not as the *Portrait of Madame Élisabeth*, but instead as a large oil on canvas work by Madame Guiard, representing a woman holding a book.

Diderot did with Mesdames Adélaïde's and Victoire's portraits by Roslin in the Salon of 1765, and others to not only disparage women's influence on contemporary aesthetics and artistic production, but as well both royal women's influence upon the monarch and the examples set forth by any and all of them.

The Failure of Royal Representation

Queens and princesses were born into the public sphere of monarchical politics, and as such, perpetually obligated to represent both the monarchy and the royal household they were born into, be it physically in person or through a visual and or textual medium. Any body of a royal woman, even her representational one, was theoretically not her own, and in eighteenth-century France, subject to the reigning monarch's determination of its fate, be it through him directly or through the decisions made by his appointed representatives, notably in this analysis, the *Directeur général des bâtiments*, the minister under whose supervision the Royal Academy of Painting and Sculpture and the Salons fell. Weighed down by a series of socio-political and economic crises in the 1780s, Louis XVI himself gave little or no consideration to the manner in which his consort, sister, and aunts represented themselves and, by extension, his reign through the public exhibition of their portraits. His representational dearth in the Salons themselves was in itself an expression of his own lack of concern with the perpetuation and refraction of his very own representational body. Absolutism's and *représentation*'s investiture of the royal spectacle and the image of the royal body with significance, with sacrality, a practice which began in the reign of Louis XIII, reached its apex during that of Louis XIV and was continued forward by Louis XV. This practice was impossible to maintain for a monarch who inherited a kingdom

which was fiscally, politically, and philosophically unraveling. “Perhaps,” and in an age of enlightenment, Louis XVI understood that while representation was power and power was representation, he was nothing more than a man behind the façade, the portrait the Bourbon monarchy presented to the world.¹⁰³

The reception of the *Portrait of Madame Élisabeth* and all the other official portraits of royal women which appeared in the Salons of the 1780s reveals a fundamental truth which the sitters themselves failed to perceive. Each portrait went into the Salons with the intent of endearing Louis XVI’s female family members to his many subjects while they fulfilled their duty of contributing to the aura of his reign, the seventeenth-century conception of *représentation* underlying the fabrication of the social facades which *they* determined to present to the French. While Mesdames Adélaïde’s, Victoire’s, and Élisabeth’s official portraits were better received by critics than those of Marie-Antoinette, the politicization of her body, her “many bodies” continually subjecting every step she took equally to appraisal and vilification, the overall emphasis in both the authorized and unofficial reviews on the painters’ talent and artistic skill operated to praise the artists at the expense of their royal patrons, the princesses and

¹⁰³ Expanding upon Ernst Kantorowicz’s *The King’s Two Bodies: A Study in Mediaeval Political Theology* (Princeton: Princeton University Press; 1957) in *The Portrait of the King*, tran. by Martha M. Houle (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press; 1988), Louis Marin examines the rhetorical chiasmus by which in Louis XIV’s reign the king’s physical-historical body was joined with his juridico-political one through its semiotic sacramental one, i.e. his portrait. Marin writes, “Representation as power and power as representation are a sacrament in image and a ‘monument’ in language where, exchanging their effects, the dazzled gaze and the admiring reading consume the radiant body of the monarch, the former by narrating his history in his portrait and the latter by contemplating one of his perfections in a narrative that eternalizes his manifestation.” At the end of his extensive analysis Marin writes, “... the effect of representation, *makes the king* (emphasis Marin’s), in the sense that everyone believes that the king and the man are one, or that the king’s portrait is only the king’s image. No one knows that, on the contrary, the king is only his image, and that behind or beyond the portrait there is no king, but a man. No one knows this secret, and king less than everyone else perhaps” (emphasis mine). See Marin, 8; 218.

the institution which they represented increasingly viewed as outdated.¹⁰⁴ Moreover, in terms of Madame Élisabeth's portrait exclusively, and aside from the Salons increasingly being cluttered with portraits as the eighteenth century progressed, the rather lackluster critical reception of her official portrait leads us to wonder if she truly figured in the public's imagination as some have led us to believe.

¹⁰⁴ In regards to the conception of Marie-Antoinette having "many bodies" whose femininity ultimately threatened the masculine virility of the French Republic, refer to Lynn Hunt's analysis in chap. 4, "The Bad Mother," in *The Family Romance of the French Revolution*, 94. See also Jacques Revel, "Marie-Antoinette in Her Fictions: The Staging of Hatred," trans. by Terri J. Nelson and Bernadette Fort, in Bernadette Fort, ed., *Fictions of the French Revolution* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press; 1991): 111-129; 114.

CHAPTER 4. LA SOEUR DU ROI

The years 1774 and 1775 were tumultuous ones for the young Madame Élisabeth de France. The former year was marked by the death of her grandfather in May and her eldest brother's subsequent ascension to the throne as King Louis XVI of France and Navarre. Upon word of his ascension, Louis linked his sister's fate with that of his own by promising that they would never part.¹ He made the same promise to their sister, Clotilde, on that fateful day, only to finalize the negotiation of her marriage to Charles Emmanuel, the Prince of Piedmont and heir to the Kingdom of Sardinia, the following year. When the time for Clotilde's departure from Versailles arrived at the end of August 1775, it was an especially emotional event for the young princess with Madame Élisabeth bursting into a fit of tears and desperately clinging to her closest companion. Family members forcibly separated the two princesses who would never see one another again. Writing to her mother the Empress in the days afterwards, Marie-Antoinette recounted:

My sister Élisabeth is a charming child, who has intelligence, character, and much grace; she showed the greatest feeling, and much above her age, at the departure of her sister. The poor little girl was in despair, and as her health is very delicate, she was taken ill and had a very severe nervous attack. I own to my dear mamma that I fear I am getting too attached to her, feeling, from the example of my aunts, how essential it is for her happiness not to remain an old maid in this country.²

¹ Lever, *Marie-Antoinette*, 54. See also Wendeln, "Royal Women, Portraiture, and Salon Criticism," 80.

² Marie-Antoinette to Marie-Thérèse, 15 September 1775. Quoted and trans. in Madame Élisabeth, *Life and Letters*, 7. Original reprinted in Arneth, Alfred von; and Geffroy, Auguste, eds., *Correspondance secreta entre Marie-Thérèse et le cte de Marie-Antoinette*, 3 vols. (Paris : Firmin-Didot frères, fils et Cie; 1874); Tome 2, 374-75. Original passage reads: "Depuis son depart je connais beaucoup plus ma soeurÉlisabeth; c'estunecharmante enfant qui a de l'esprit, du caractère et beaucoup de grace; elle a montré au depart de sasoeurunesensibilitécharmante et bien au-dessus de son âge; cettépauvre petite a été au désespoir, et ayantune santé très-délicate, elles'estrouvée mal et a euuneattaqué de nerfstrès-forte. J'avoue à ma chèremamanque je crains de m'y trop attacher, sentant pour son Bonheur et par l'exemple de mestantes combine ilest essential de ne pas restervieillefilledansce pays-ci." Also a portion of this letter is trans. in Oliver Bernier, ed., *Secrets of Marie Antoinette, a Collection of Letters* (New York: Fromm International Publishing Corp.; 1985; 1986), 174-75.

For the young queen, Mesdames Tantes (her husband's aunts) gave her cause to be concerned about what influence they might have on their young and impressionable niece Elizabeth. Relations between the Austrian archduchess and her husband's aunts were initially rather cordial, in spite of Madame Adélaïde's quip about Marie-Antoinette upon her arrival at Versailles when she snidely referred to her as "*L'Autrichenne*" (the Austrian bitch). In the summer of 1770 Louis XV's spinster daughters, Mesdames, Victoire, Sophie, and especially Adélaïde, moved quickly to enlist their nephew's bride in their ongoing campaign to snub their father's notorious mistress, the Comtesse du Barry; their actions embroiled Marie-Antoinette in court factionalism, and as a consequence court politics.

The king's daughters had a notorious disdain for their father's favorite and, they, alongside their late brother some years before, convinced their sister-in-law Marie-Joseph of Saxony,, the dauphine and mother of Louis XVI and Mme. Élisabeth, to strictly limit her attentions toward the Marquise de Pompadour.³ Involving the dauphine in their little operation stoked Mesdames' sense of pride and importance within court society, only to feel betrayed when the Dauphine, under pressure to acknowledge the king's favorite from both her distant mother and the aging Louis XV, openly remarked to Mme. du Barry on the number of people visiting Versailles on New Year's Day, 1772.⁴ By the time of Clotilde's marriage and departure in 1775, Marie-Antoinette was all too familiar with Mesdames' prudishness and conceited behavior beneath veils of piety and familial devotion in order to be seriously concerned about the example these women were setting for Madame Élisabeth.

³Stryiseński, *The Daughters of Louis XV* (1912), 60-61.

⁴Lever, *Marie-Antoinette*, 37-39; Carolly Erickson, *To the Scaffold: the Life of Marie Antoinette* (New York: William Morrow & Company, Inc.; 1991), 81. See also (letter) Mercy to Maria Theresa, 23 January 1772, in Bernier, ed., *Secrets of Marie-Antoinette*, 86-87. Of the exchange, Mercy informed the Empress that Marie-Antoinette commented, " 'I spoke to her once, but I am determined to go no farther, and that woman will never again hear the sound of my voice.' " See p. 87.

Considering the course of Madame Élisabeth's life took before 1789, it is not difficult for the historian to draw a comparison between her experiences and those of her aunts. In other ways, and especially when considering Elizabeth's receipt of the estate of Montreuil on the outskirts of the city of Versailles in 1783, we see that part of this princess's persona was modeled after the leisured lifestyle of her sister-in-law at the Petit Trianon and the nearby *Hameau*. Undoubtedly, Mesdames Tantes and Marie-Antoinette played a strong role in the formation of Madame Élisabeth's character. They provided her with an example of aloof detachment from political concerns, coupled with using court intrigue to resolve petty interpersonal rivalries. But, in a more formal way, while France's Salic Law denied political status to all French women, there existed enough ambiguity about gender and power relations within the royal family and the court at Versailles which ultimately helped constitute a kind of political agency for royal women, including Madame Élisabeth.

The examples set by other women at court constituted one element in the formation of the Princess Elizabeth's character as she matured. In this chapter, I will examine the process by which Madame Élisabeth came to be a historical actor, in terms of her role models at court, her experiences at the end of the Old Regime and the early years of the Revolution and her own ideas about what it meant to be a princess at this time. I will analyze not only Elizabeth's life experiences, words and actions, but also the ways she was depicted in her portraits, all of which were political documents as well.

“Charming,” “charitable,” and even “angelic” have all been used to describe the princess's visage prior to, and even during, the Revolution; but, as Juliette Trey, curator of the 2013 exhibition *Madame Élisabeth, une Princesse Au Destin Tragique, 1764-1794* at Montreuil, rightly notes, a number of Élisabeth's biographers have focused on the myths surrounding her

death to the detriment of “la richesse et l’originalité de sa personnalité” (“the richness and originality of her personality”).⁵ Furthermore, it is impossible to understand her political agency during the French Revolution, particularly her conservatism and rather unabashed manner of voicing it, without serious reflection on those significant aspects of her heritage and upbringing, as well as on the politically charged environment of Versailles, the dissimulative and intrigue filled locale in which she came of age. Madame Élisabeth’s life prior to the French Revolution was a unique and privileged one, but one in which not only her brother’s personal favor, but as well her physical and familial closeness to him and to other power figures at court, including the Comtes de Provenance and d’Artois, cultivated within her a singular, and often overlooked, royal political consciousness.

Orphaned in her infancy, Madame Élisabeth was cared for in an atmosphere of indulgence and her life prior to the French Revolution was a unique and privileged one. Along with her sister, she received a formal education suitable for a little princess and when she came of age a royal household of her own was created. With her reception of the estate of Montreuil in 1783, her life entered a new phase as she lived rather independently from the strictures of the court while pursuing her own interests. Two contrasting images emerged from Versailles in the 1780s. The first one was the morally bankrupt, foreign born queen who conspired against the French by physically and politically weakening the king. The second one was the image of a charitable and charming princess who wished nothing but the best for her brother’s subjects. She was a good sister and a beautiful princess. They easily loved her.

⁵ Juliette Trey, “Les différents visages de Madame Élisabeth,” in *Madame Élisabeth, une Princesse au Destin Tragique, 1764-1794*, exhibition catalog (Versailles; Paris: Silvana Editoriale for Chateau de Versailles and Yvelines Conseil Général; 2013), 15.

The *Dévo*t Legacy

On Monday, May 7, 1764, the *Gazette de France* announced, “Madame la Dauphine est accouchee heureusement d’une Princess le 3 vers deux heures du Matin” (“Madame, the Dauphine, happily gave birth to a Princess on the third around two o’clock in the morning.”) From that point forward, Madame Élisabeth was perpetually integrated into the royal discourse put forth by the Bourbon monarchy. The announcement continued with the statement that her baptism took place on the day of her birth. Louis XV’s grand almoner, Cardinal Roche-Aymon, administered the holy sacrament, the ritual itself constituting one more act to further the centuries old connection between the Catholic Church and the rulers of France. The ceremony was attended by a number of royal family members, including her father the Dauphin, Mesdames Adélaïde Adélaïde, Victoire, Sophie and Louise, and “Leurs Majestés,” the king and his consort, Marie Leszczyńska.⁶ Understandably, her bedridden mother was not in attendance; in fact Marie-Joséphe de Saxe’s signature was visibly absent from the parish register.⁷ Her brother, the future monarch, and Madame Adélaïde substituted for her godparents, the Infant Don Philippe, duc de Parma, and the Dowager Queen of Spain, Élisabeth Farnèse,. These Stand-ins officially announced the newborn princess’ name as Élisabeth-Philippe-Marie-Hélène de France.

The last of eight children born to the Dauphin Louis Ferdinand and his dutiful consort, Madame Élisabeth was an adored and treasured child. Several months after her birth, Louis XV nominated an extensive list of persons to care for his youngest grandchild [Fig. 4.1], which meant that the *Première Femme de Chambre*, Dame Marie Margueritte Souster Pernot, was

⁶ Anon., “De Versailles, le 5 Mai, 1764,” *Gazette de France* 37 (Paris: May 7, 1764): 147-48.

⁷ *Registre paroissial de Notre-Dame de Versailles, baptêmes 1764 : acte de baptême de Madame Élisabeth*, 1764. Archives des Yvelines (4E 3489). Displayed at “Madame Élisabeth, un Princesse au Destin Tragique”; reproduced in catalog, p. 33.



Fig. 4.2. Attributed to François-Hubert Drouais. *Madame Élisabeth, sœur de Louis XVI*. 1770. Château de Versailles. After Joseph Ducreux, *Madame Élisabeth*, 1768-1769; huile sur toile, 81 cm. x63.5 cm. Versailles, musée des château de Versailles et de Trianon.⁹

certainly significant that one of copy hung in the ministère des Affaires étrangères at Versailles, a not-so-subtle signal that she would one day be a marriageable French princess.¹⁰

In this era of marriages negotiated for political advantage, a potential union between the Bourbon monarchy, in the person of Elizabeth, and another of Europe's ruling families was not completely out of the question, even during her infancy. The body of French princess was a

⁹*Madame Élisabeth, soeur de Louis XVI*, (C) RMN-Grand Palais / Daniel Arnaudet for Exposition "Madame Élisabeth, une princesse au destin tragique"; accessed August 8, 2013.

http://Élisabeth.yvelines.fr/wp-content/themes/olya/functions/thumb.php?src=wp-content/uploads/2013/03/E1_portrait-par-Ducreux-798x1024.jpg&w=684&h=0&zc=1&q=90.

¹⁰ Juliette Trey, "Madame Élisabeth (1764-1794)," in *Madame Élisabeth, une princesse au destin tragique (1764-1794)*, 34. Both the Mme. Élisabeth and Mme. Clotilde portraits by Ducreux were on view at the 2013 exhibition, in the Organerie, as part of an extensive portraiture display of their family tree, containing individual portraits of their parents, paternal grandparents, brothers and sister-in-laws. A photograph of the display is available at the following web address: <http://Élisabeth.yvelines.fr/wp-content/themes/olya/functions/thumb.php?src=wp-content/uploads/2013/03/E1-8029-1024x681.jpg&w=684&h=0&zc=1&q=90>.

powerful symbol of the monarchy into which she was born of and as such, her fate was not her own. Elizabeth, like every other subject, was subject to the will of her king.¹¹ All of her siblings' marriages were negotiated affairs, with her eldest brother's being the most noteworthy. Louis XVI's and Marie-Antoinette's marriage strengthened an alliance between two of Europe's most powerful and fervently Catholic ruling families. Historian Chantal Thomas notes that political alliance via marriage in the early modern period amounted to the "trafficking" of adolescent princesses. Such alliances made them in essence permanent hostages in distant and strange lands, the guarantors of treaties which they typically did not understand the significance of, and ultimately consorts and bearers of children to men they did not necessarily love.¹² Madame Élisabeth would have become one of those 'trafficked' princesses if not for the untimely death of her father just before Christmas, 1765, when she was not quite one-and-a-half.

The person of Louis Ferdinand, the dauphin (1729-1765), was not the representation of absolute power in France, but as heir to the throne and the bearer of sacred blood, he possessed a certain degree of authority both within the royal family and at the court. His formative years were shaped by two notable events: first, his 1745 marriage to the Infanta Marie Teresa Rafaela of Spain, daughter of King Philip and his queen, Élisabeth Farnèse (Mme. Élisabeth's godmother); and the arrival in his father's bed of Jeanne-Antoinette Poisson, Madame d'Etoilles, the following year. Tragically, the Spanish princess died in 1746, several days after giving birth to the couple's only child.¹³ In spite of his overwhelming grief, the teenage widower completely understood his position and married Marie-Joséphe de Saxe by proxy seven months later. As for the latter event, Jeanne-Antoinette's subsequent elevations as the Marquise de Pompadour and

¹¹ See above, 9-11.

¹² C. Thomas, *The Wicked Queen*, 32. See also Wendeln, "Royal Women," 82-83.

¹³ Madame Marie-Thérèse of France survived the loss of her mother but died in infancy.

Louis XV's *maîtresse-en-titre*, a position she held until 1764, had a far reaching effect on both the kingdom and the dynamics of the royal family itself.

The French were not necessarily scandalized by Louis XV's relationship with the Marquise, and later with Madame du Barry; but his numerous extramarital liaisons discredited his monarchy, making him unable to receive communion and thereby powerless to perform the miracle of the royal touch, the act by which the monarch's touch supposedly cured those afflicted with the skin disorder scrofula.¹⁴ The king's transgressions, though, were particularly troubling to the pious heir to the throne and his sisters; and over the course of the "reign" of the woman who both he and Madame Adélaïde referred to as "*maman-putain*" (mama-whore), the dauphin witnessed and became embroiled in court factionalism, definitively entering into them from the oppositional and conservative perspective, furthering his attachment to his religiously devout mother, and eventually becoming a leader of the *parti dévôt* at court.¹⁵

Tracing its origins to the early seventeenth-century opposition within the French court to Cardinal Richelieu's efforts to establish absolutism, the *parti dévôt* persisted into the eighteenth century as a faction that believed in religious and political sensibilities contrary to those of the

¹⁴ Jeffrey Merrick, *Desacralization of the French Monarchy in the Eighteenth Century* (Baton Rouge; London: Louisiana University Press; 1990), 20 -21. According to Marc Bloch's *The Royal Touch, Sacred Monarchy and Scrofula in England and France* (trans. by J. E. Anderson; London and Montreal: Routledge & Kegan Paul / McGill-Queen's University Press; 1961; 1973), scrofula is the inflammation of the lymph nodes, particularly those around the neck, caused by tuberculosis adenitis. In France, the claim that the monarch could cure scrofulous through the simple touch of their hands upon the afflicted dated as far back as the early Twelfth Century, to the reigns of Philip I and Louis VI. Interruption in the performance of the rite began in 1739, resulting from Louis XV's failure to receive communion because of his extramarital affairs. Furthermore, the rite itself fell under question during the era of the Enlightenment, even by Saint-Simon and Voltaire. The last performance of the rite occurred on May 31, 1825, early during the reign of Charles X. See Block, 11-13; 223-28.

¹⁵ Oliver Bernier, *Louis the Beloved, the Life of Louis XV* (Garden City: Doubleday; 1984), 220; Evelyne Lever, *Madame de Pompadour, a Life*, trans. by Catherine Temerson (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux; 2000; 2002), 153; Daniel Roche, *France in the Enlightenment*, trans. by Arthur Goldhammer (Cambridge, Mass.; London: Harvard University Press; 1993; 1998), 261.

reigning monarch.¹⁶The association of Louis Ferdinand and his sisters with this movement over the course of the 1740s through the 1760s pushed those debates into the very heart of the royal family, with Louis XV's children assuming the moral high ground in their ongoing battle against his persistent sexual wantonness and religious impiety. While influenced by the Jesuits and the order's governor, the duc de La Vauguyon, the royal children were also inspired by their much neglected mother's devotion, to take up the *parti dévôt's* defense of the monarchy's sacred nature and religious orthodoxy. Moreover, the dauphin's eventual presence at the king's councils, beginning in 1750, furthered the *parti dévôt's* entanglement of piety with politics while criticizing Louis XV's governance of himself and, by extension, France.¹⁷

Through its association with the heir to the throne, the *parti dévôt* promoted its pro-Jesuitical agenda with the hope of a conclusive victory when Louis Ferdinand became king; and yet, the timing and nature of the *parti dévôt's* strategies ultimately contributed to the gradual undoing of the Bourbon monarchy's authority. As believers in the political-religious hierarchy by which eighteenth-century French society was divided into the Three Estates, as well as in the notion that Roman Catholicism was *the* unifying force of the French, the *parti-devot* was diametrically opposed to the more popular *parti-janséniste*, the followers of Jansenism, in the openly heated mid-century debates between the clergy, the monarchy, and France's law courts, the *parlements*.¹⁸

¹⁶Dale Van Kley, "Piety and Politics in the century of lights," chap. 4 in *The Cambridge History of Eighteenth-Century Political Thought*, eds. Mark Goldie and Robert Wokler (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press; 2006), 110.

¹⁷ Dale Van Kley, *The Religious Origins of the French Revolution, from Calvin to the French Revolution, 1560 to 1791* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press: 1996), 115-16; 140.

¹⁸ Jansenism was the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century theological movement within the Roman Catholic Church based upon the reflections of Cornelius Jansen (d. 1638), the early seventeenth-century bishop of Ypres, on the teachings of St. Augustine (354-430 A.D.). Upholding a particular moral rigor, Jansenists regarded the human race as being depraved as a result of original sin. Hence, an individual's

At the core of the debates was the papal bull *Unigenitus* (1713) which condemned the Jansenist movement, as well as the Jansenists' protracted appeal against it in the *parlements*, and the King's efforts to deny the administration of last rites and burial in consecrated ground to suspected Jansenists. Moreover, by appealing the papal bull in France's law courts, the Jansenists transformed a theological deliberation into a judicial and secular controversy. At the same time Louis XV's relationship with France's clergy was to some extent strained, not by his notorious impropriety, and in spite of his defense of ecclesiastical jurisdiction in regards to Jansenism, but by his attempt to subject the First Estate to the *vingtième* tax, a tax on land, between 1749 and 1751. Louis-Ferdinand came of age politically amidst the persistent and public squabbling between the clergy, the *parlements*, and his father as to which institution truly upheld France's traditions. As historian Jeffrey Merrick fittingly asserts, these debates did more than the Enlightenment's *philosophes* to desacralize the monarchy, undermining "the conjunction of religion and politics that characterized traditional conceptions of kingship and kingdom" in eighteenth-century France, particularly as all three institutions individually asserted to the ever expanding sphere of public opinion that they, and only they, were *the* voice of authority.¹⁹

Resacralization, if not the reiteration of the Bourbon monarchy's sacred nature, was an aim of the mid-eighteenth-century *parti dévôt*. It defend *Unigenitus* as a "symbol of royal

salvation was determined only by God and one's visible willingness to do his command was perceived as a sign of receiving this special grace. Jansenism's proposition of predestination was perceived by some as reiterating the teachings of John Calvin. In France, the movement centered around the disciples of the Abbot of Saint-Cyran (1581-1643), a friend of Jansen and one of the movement's authors; and of particular note, at the convent of Port-Royal in Paris. Several popes declared the movement to be heretical and Clement XI condemned it with the bull '*Unigenitus*' in 1713. For further information, see: John Bowker, *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of World Religions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press; 2000; 2012); E. A. Livingstone, ed., *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* (Oxford: Oxford University Press; 2006; 2013).

¹⁹ Merrick, *Desacralization*, 70-71; 72-72; 76; X.

authority;” and yet, its very questioning of Louis XV’s governance of his physical and spiritual bodies became part and parcel of the contention over the extent of his monarchical authority.²⁰ The *parti dévôt* was also linked to seditious discourse: the author of the libelous *Tanastés* (1745), Mlle. Marie-Madeleine Bonafon, was both a chambermaid of the princesse de Montaubon, and a known associate of the *parti dévôt* at court. Moreover, Mlle. Bonafon’s collaborator and lover, the Parisian printer of her volume, was a man named Mazelin, a valet of Madame de La Lande, and a servant in the Versailles household of Louis Ferdinand and his sisters.²¹ No matter the extent of the author’s association with Louis XV’s children, both she and her text, itself a veiled accounting of the king’s extramarital liaisons, implicated the *parti dévôt*. Not surprisingly over a decade later suspicions arose over the *parti dévôt*’s complicity in Robert-François Damiens’s attempted assassination of the king in early 1757, a suspicion strengthened by the faction’s association with the Jesuits who were believed to have inspired Damiens.²² Whatever the regicide’s political and religious wellspring of motivation, or the extent of the *parti dévôt*’s complicity, the brutal and tortuous public spectacle of Damiens’s execution on the *Place de Grève* only served to further promote the reputation of the monarchy as a despotic institution. Cessar Beccaria acknowledged in *On Crimes and Punishments* (1764), that “[t]he execution of a criminal is, to the multitude, a spectacle, which in some excites compassion mixed with indignation.”²³ Incontestably, the *parti dévôt*’s designs to (re)install a “most Christian king”

²⁰ Van Kley, *Religious Origins*, 286

²¹ Robert Darnton, “Mademoiselle Bonafon and the Private Life of Louis XV: Communication Circuits in Eighteenth-Century France,” *Representations*, Vol. 87, no. 1 (Summer 2004): 104. See also Van Kley, *Religious Origins*, 184; and Lisa J. Graham, *If the king only knew: seditious speech in the Reign of Louis XV* (Charlottesville; London: University of Press of Virginia; 2000).

²² Dale Van Kley, *The Damiens Affair and the Unraveling of the ‘Ancien Régime’, 1750-1770* (Princeton: Princeton University Press; 1984): 84-89; 92.

²³ Cesare Becarria, *An Essay on Crimes and Punishments, Translated from the Italian; with a Commentary, Attributed to Mons. De Voltaire, Translated from the French* (London: J. Almon; 1767):

(*Rex Christianissimus*) on the French throne via Louis-Ferdinand were improbable in a realm where the courtly faction was but one among many that questioned not only Louis XV and the limits of his authority, but also the very institution he stood for and its fundamental nature.

After a protracted illness, the dauphin died of consumption in December 1765 at the Château of Fontainebleau, and with him went the aspirations of the *parti dévôt* and his pious family members to redirect the very character of the monarchy. The Duc de la Vauguyon immortalized the Dauphin's passing through his commission of the *Allegory of the Death of the Dauphin* [Fig. 4.3], painted by the academician Langrenée, and eventually exhibited in the Salon of 1767.²⁴ A somewhat melodramatic composition, the painting depicts Louis-Ferdinand on his death bed and surrounded by his wife and three surviving sons, the future Louis XVI, Louis XVIII, and Charles X, as his eldest son, the departed Duc de Bourgogne, appears from heaven to present him with the crown of immortality. The absence of his daughters from the composition is not all that surprising when one considers the diminution of their political importance on account of their sex; and yet, it is left to the feminized allegorical representation of France, standing behind the Dauphin, to depict the realm's sense of despair over his passing. The loss of the Dauphin had a profound impact throughout the court, even moving an aggrieved Louis XV to

106. See as well Michel Foucault's discussion of Damien's tortuous execution in the introduction of *Discipline and Punish, The Birth of the Prison* (1977), 3-6.

²⁴ Anon., *Explication des peintures, sculptures et autres ouvrages de Messieurs de l'Académie royale, dont l'exposition a été ordonnée suivant l'intention de Sa Majesté... dans le grand sallon du Louvre...* (Paris; 1767). See also: Michael Levy, *Painting and Sculpture in France, 1700-1789* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press; 1972; 1993), 227-28.



Fig.4.3. Louis-Jean-François Langrenée. *Allegory of the Death of the Dauphin*. 1767. Huile sur toile; 4 pieds x 3 pieds. Fontainebleau, Musée National du Château.²⁵

write, “there is every probability (after everything we have seen) that he will not need them (prayers), and that instead it is he who is praying for us, which we desperately need, for his loss has been a dreadful blow to me and my whole kingdom.”²⁶

²⁵ *Allegory of the Death of the Dauphin*, Bentley Global Arts Group; accessed July 16, 2013. <http://render.globalgallery.com/images/266715--600.jpg>.

²⁶ Louis XV to Don Ferdinand de Parme, 30 December 1765. Reprinted in Amiguet, Philippe, ed., *Lettres de Louis XV a L’Infant Ferdinand de Parme*, 3rd ed. (Paris: Editions Bernard Grasset; 1934), 41. Original passage reads: “Il faut faire changer vos prières mon cher petit-fils, mais il y a apparence (après tout ce que nous avons vu) qu’il n’en a pas besoin, et que c’est lui qui prie pour nous, et nous en avons grand besoin, car c’est un furieux coup pour moi, et pour tout mon royaume que sa perte.” Trans. and quoted in Bernier, *Louis XV, the Beloved*, 220. Don Ferdinand was Louis XV’s grandson, and the dauphin’s

A Princess in Her Youth

The death of Louis, the Dauphin, was followed by those of his consort in the spring of 1767 and then his mother in 1768. The loss of the two women has often been regarded in terms of an absence for Marie-Antoinette, the young Austrian archduchess having no-one to personally educate and guide her on the role of dauphine of France and its myriad of courtly expectations when she arrived at Versailles in 1770.²⁷ Meanwhile, and somewhat more important, the loss of Marie Leszczyńska, Marie-Joséphe de Saxe, and Louis-Ferdinand impacted upon all the royal children. The future Louis XVI witnessed his grandfather's leniency towards Mesdames on the one hand and the favoring of his mistress, Madame du Barry, and her associates on the other. His tendency toward indulging Marie-Antoinette, and Madame Élisabeth as well, can be traced to both the former and the latter.²⁸ As for Madame Élisabeth, the death of her mother left her completely orphaned by the age of three; and in spite of this sorrow, being of the bearer of royal blood spared the princess and her sister from the desperate fate experienced by so many other young orphans of that time. While Mesdames Tantes moderately took on the roles of surrogate mothers to their nieces and nephews, appointed caretakers and governesses insured that both Mesdames Clotilde and Élisabeth would appropriately represent the Bourbon monarchy when they formally came of age.

nephew, by Madame Marie Louise Élisabeth de France, the eldest and only daughter of Louis XV and his consort to marry.

²⁷ Lever, *Marie Antoinette*, 30-35; Stephan Zweig, *Marie Antoinette: the Portrait of an Average Woman*, trans. Eden Paul and Cedar Paul (New York: Grove Press; 1932; 1933; 1984), 42-44.

²⁸ Several historians regard Louis XVI's indulging of his consort as solely having to do with the manner in which Louis XV treated Madame du Barry, giving into her whims and showing favor to the court faction around her. I contest this notion in consideration of the favor that the beloved monarch showed to his daughters as well. On Louis XVI's tendency toward indulgence after his grandfather's, see Lever, 34-35.

There was no question of should Mesdames de France be educated or not. How and what they were taught was the issue at hand.²⁹ Educating the two orphaned princesses was both a moral imperative and a political necessity with Clotilde and Élisabeth being potentially exchanged some day with another royal house via an alliance by marriage. They were to be knowledgeable, but not to the extent that they became over educated, “monstrous” *savantes* who put others off. A proper education was to render them less frivolous and to put the two on the path of becoming virtuous women and model mothers since Mesdames Clotilde and Élisabeth perpetually signified the Bourbon monarchy and its authority wherever either they or representations of them went. Without the oversight of either one of their parents, the physical and philosophical upbringing of the two young princesses was put into the hands of the royal governesses and their numerous sub-governesses, the pedagogical practice having a long tradition at the court of Versailles.

Definitively, sending Madame Élisabeth away to be raised and educated in a convent was a possibility which would have reduced her fiscal burden on the crown. As mentioned beforehand, the sending away of Mesdames Victoire, Sophie, Thérèse, and Louise-Marie to the Abbey of Fontevraud saved approximately 800,000 livres annually through the elimination of the princesses’ households.³⁰ With the advent of the Enlightenment, convent education was though increasingly scrutinized while aristocratic mothers took on more of a role in their daughters’ education. A virtuous daughter was a valuable commodity.³¹ Where Madame Élisabeth and her sister were concerned, Mesdames Tantes technically had no authority over how their nieces were

²⁹ Portions of this passage draw upon Dena Goodman’s analysis of young women’s education in late-eighteenth century France. See Goodman, “Designing an Education for Young Ladies,” in *Becoming a Woman in the Age of Letters* (Ithaca; London: Cornell University Press; 2009), 63-100.

³⁰ Stryieński, 10.

³¹ Goodman, *Becoming a Woman in the Age of Letters* 74-84.

to be brought up; but considering the negative experiences several of them had while at Fontevraud, and the blatant manner in which they proffered their opinions, the women most likely voiced their objections to any consideration of sending their brother's daughters away.

Rather than send Madame Élisabeth to a convent school, the governess staff was reinforced by the inclusion of ladies who themselves had been educated at Saint-Cyr, the girls school endowed by Louis XIV and a founded by his morganatic second wife, Madame de Maintenon. At the suggestion of the mother superior at Saint-Cyr, the *gouvernante en titre*, Madame de Marsan, appointed Madame la baronne de Mackau (nee Marie-Angelique Fitte de Soucy) as the sub-governess in charge of caring for and educating Madame Élisabeth and her sister. This noble lady framed the princess' education in a manner which reflected her alma mater.³² Aside from the standard religious instruction, Madame Élisabeth had lessons in art and music, the princess being quite accomplished in both [Fig. 4.4]. Moreover, the Mme. de Mackau's own daughter, Angelique, was approximately the same age as the Madame Élisabeth and the two girls developed a deep friendship that would last over the princess' lifetime.

This friendship is of historic note as well since Angelique, reaching maturity, was married at court to the Baron de Breteuil's protégée, Marc-Marie, marquis de Bombelles³³. The two women faithfully corresponded with one another, Madame Élisabeth affectionately referring to her friend as "mon Bombe." She did the same as well with another friend who she occasionally called "Rage" in her letters, the Marquise de Raigecourt. What is of greater significance is that it was through the established reciprocity of the women's correspondence by

³² Pascale Mormiche, "Madame Élisabeth: une education de princesse au temps des Lumieres," in J. Trey, ed., *Madame Élisabeth, une princesse au destin tragique (1764-1794)*, 129.

³³ Munro Price, *The Road from Versailles: Louis XVI, Marie Antoinette, and the fall of the French Monarchy* (New York: St. Martin's Press; 2003), 46.



Fig. 4.4. Charles Leclercq. *Madame Élisabeth jouant de la harpe*. 1783; oil on canvas, 41 x 32.5 cm. Versailles, musée des château de Versailles et de Trianon.³⁴

which Madame Élisabeth after 1789 freely expressed her concerns about Louis XVI's political weakness and tendency toward vacillation, her personal disdain toward the decisions and decrees of a government which she considered to be illegitimate, and on how her incarceration in the Tuileries severely impinged upon her own sense of personal liberty.³⁵ More important, and as will be more thoroughly examined in the next chapter, it was through her correspondence with these two ladies-in-waiting by which Madame Élisabeth transmitted instructions and intelligence beyond France's borders to the counterrevolutionary cause. They were the means by which she communicated with the emigrated Comtes de Provence and d'Artois; and, especially where the Marquis de Bombelles was concerned, the princess passed on information to Breteuil, her

³⁴ *Madame Élisabeth jouant de la harpe*, Chateau de Versailles; accessed May 9, 2015. <http://collections.chateauversailles.fr/#4b91a428-9bc2-483f-9100-f759f579f6f1>.

³⁵ On reciprocity in 18th-century correspondence, see Dena Goodman, *The Republic of Letters, a Cultural History of the French Enlightenment* (Ithaca; London: Cornell University Press; 1994), 96-97.

brother's appointed Prime Minister-in-exile.³⁶ Unfortunately, the continued reciprocity between the close friends was ultimately deemed as treasonous by Louis XVI's rebelling former subjects.

Returning to the topic of Madame Élisabeth's education, both she and her sister as well benefited from the revolution in women's education that had been sparked by the Enlightenment. While still not nearly as formalized as the education their brothers received, the two princesses were regularly exposed to both ancient and modern philosophy, one of their sub-governesses openly discussing with the girls their comprehension of such texts, including in regards to political theory. Madame de le-Ferte-Imbault, daughter of the renowned *salonnaire* Mme. Geoffrin, supervised the princess' studies of works by the ancient writers Cicero, Seneca, and Sallust; the classical French writers of Descartes, Montaigne, and Corneille; and notable English authors, such as Francis Bacon, Alexander Pope, and John Locke. Unfortunately, the well-rounded and somewhat rigid instruction of Madame Élisabeth came to an end with her sister's marriage and subsequent departure in 1775.³⁷ The princess was thereafter left to continue her studies by herself but they were relatively neglected until she reached adulthood; and for a while Madame Élisabeth gravitated toward the circle around her brother's consort in her youth.

Meanwhile, the discussion of Madame Élisabeth's early years cannot be analyzed without some consideration of the princess' religious devotion and her relationship with Madame Louise de France [Fig. 4.5]. The youngest of Louis XV's and Marie Leszczyńska's children, this

³⁶ In a number of her letters with the Marquise de Bombelles, Madame Élisabeth makes specific references to "ton mari" (trans. "your husband). For example, see Madame Élisabeth to la Marquise de Bombelles, 27 Avril 1790. Reprinted in *Correspondance de Madame Élisabeth de France* (1868), 156. See also M. Price on the Marquis de Bombelles' secret diplomatic missions on Louis XVI's behalf between 1790 and 1792 in *The Road from Versailles*, starting xvi-xvii.

³⁷ P. Mormiche, "Madame Élisabeth: une education de princesse au temps des Lumières", in J. Trey, ed., *Madame Élisabeth, un princesse au destin tragique (1764-1794)*, 130-32.



Fig. 4.5. Anne-Baptiste Nivelon. *Madame Louise en carmélite*. 1770; oil on canvas, 53 x 43.5 cm. Versailles, musée des château de Versailles et de Trianon.³⁸

princess entered the Carmelite convent attached to the Basilica of Saint-Denis in 1770 with her father's permission and eventually became abbess of the cloister. When Louis XVI's declined her request for funds to bolster the convent's coffers, she approached his Keeper of the Seals without his consent. Her tendency towards intrigue often drew her nephew's ire; and when it came to whom Louis XVI should appoint as one of his ministers on a particular occasion, the king snapped back at his pious aunt: “ ‘...I give you warning that if this goes on I shall really have to teach you to mind your own business in [the] future.’ ”³⁹

Madame Élisabeth frequently visited her noble and religiously devout aunt. She as well made frequent trips to Saint-Cyr in order to visit friends who entered its Augustinian convent.

³⁸ *Madame Louise en carmélite*, Chateau de Versailles; accessed May 1, 2015.

<http://collections.chateauversailles.fr/#c3e6bd28-d715-4cac-9245-4884c918121f>.

³⁹ Stryieński, 165. Stryieński identifies the source as “Hardy’s *Journal*”, citing the location as “V, p.70” in the footnote; and he specifies only that the volumes he refers to as “Bibl. Nat., FR. MSS 8261) without providing Simeón Propser Hardy’s full name.

She was particularly moved by the ceremonies in which the religious novices took their vows. From these visits emerged the rumor that the king's sister very desired to take them herself and don a nun's habit. As Juliette Trey points out, there was some validity to the rumors but Madame Élisabeth would to have had Louis XVI's permission to take them. Considering the shortness of her life and Louis XVI's multitude of more pressing concerns, Madame Élisabeth never became a nun.⁴⁰ At the same time, as a princess of France Madame Élisabeth did express a sense of unworthiness in following the example set by Jesus Christ. In 1786 she wrote:

J'aimerais à être riche : eh bien, je me consolerais de ne l'être pas en pensant que j'en suis plus rapprochée de l'imitation de Jésus-Christ, notre maître, notre modèle. Mais si je veux être à lui, ne dois-je pas m'y consacrer tout à fait? La vie religieuse me répugne, mais le monde m'entraîne trop.⁴¹

Irregardless of whether or not Madame Élisabeth truly wished to someday take holy vows, the rumor that she wanted to be a nun only served to add to the public's imagination about her piety and virtuosity.

There is as well a good deal of speculation as to why Madame Élisabeth was never married, her body never utilized in the formation of an alliance between two of Europe's royal houses. For much of her lifespan there was the discussion that she would one day be married to Joseph II, Holy Roman Emperor and Emperor of Austria. In fact, the long standing hope at Versailles of further strengthening the Austrian-French alliance via the two royal individuals dated as far back as 1767, when Madame Élisabeth was only three-years-old. Louis XV that year lamented over the significant age disparity between the two upon word of that Joseph's

⁴⁰ J. Trey, "Madame Louise (1737-1787) en carmélite," in *Madame Élisabeth*, 39. Elsewhere, it is a tendency for some of the princess' biographers to regard Louis XVI needing his sister to remain at Versailles for moral support to him and his family. See Anne Bernet, *Madame Élisabeth, soeur du Louis XVI* (Paris: Éditions Tallandier; 2013), 105-106.

⁴¹ Madame Élisabeth to Madame Marie de Causans, 1 Mars 1786. Reprinted in *Correspondance de Madame Élisabeth*, 76.

second consort had passed.⁴² When the emperor visited his sister and her husband at Versailles in 1777, talk of a possible marriage between the two re-emerged but nothing came of it. Joseph II apparently expressed that he found Madame Élisabeth not to be particularly attractive; and furthermore, he had long since determined never to remarry.⁴³ Undoubtedly, the anti-Austrian faction within the court and the royal family itself would have opposed such a union. Meanwhile, the question remains as to why Louis XVI did not more actively pursue a marriage for his youngest sister. Were there no truly suitable young men of the appropriate royal rank or did he have too many other concerns to even worry over the matter. Nevertheless, and as with the rumors about her wishing to join her aunt at Saint-Denis, Madame Élisabeth's unwed status contributed to the suspicion of her presumed virginity and helped to put her on the path of being mythologized and biographically venerated.

Montreuil

At the chateaux of Versailles, 1783 marked the year in which the *Hameau* was completed. The faux peasant village just within sight of the Petit Trianon provided the queen and her associates with a wide stage to act upon, to play pretend they were getting back to nature à la the characters in Rousseau's beloved novels. In the same year Louis XVI purchased the domain of Montreuil from his children's governess, the Princess of Guéméné (Victoire de Rohan) [Fig. 4.6 – Fig. 4.9]. The princess had fallen into bankruptcy and the king's purchase of

⁴² Louis XV to Don Ferdinand de Parme, 8 June 1767. Reprinted in Amiguet, Philippe, ed., *Lettres de Louis XV à L'Infant Ferdinand de Parme*, 3rd ed. (Paris: Editions Bernard Grasset; 1934), p. 79-80. Louis XV wrote, “ Nous apprimes hier que l'Empereur votre beau frere etait veuf de nouveau, il n'y a je crois que moi qui en soit fache, car j'esperais que cela n'arriverait pas si tot et qu'il pouvait epouser ma petite-fille Élisabeth.”

⁴³ C. Erickson, *To the Scaffold*, 271; Jean de Viguerie, *Le sacrifice du Soir: Vie et Mort de Madame Élisabeth soeur de Louis XVI* (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf; 2010), 27; Prescott-Wormeley, “Biographical Sketch,” *Life and Letters of Madame Élisabeth*, 9; Bernet, *Madame Élisabeth*, 54; 80-82.



Fig. 4.6. Maria S. Wendeln. *Montreuil* (western façade), *Domaine de Madame Élisabeth*. Versailles, France; June 2, 2013.

the estate helped to appease the noble woman's creditors.⁴⁴ He thereby gifted the domain to his little sister, then in her nineteenth year, and did so with the stipulations that she was not to spend her nights there or to permit a man into her entourage until she reached the age of twenty-five.⁴⁵ Her brother was blameless in his insistence and by virtue of his status as both patriarch of the royal family and her king, Madame Élisabeth willingly submitted herself to his authority. Still, being mistress of Montreuil gave the princess a new found sense of individual freedom and personal liberty. For Louis XVI himself, Montreuil served as a means of preoccupying Madame Élisabeth and removing her from the rampant machinations and factionalism at court. By gifting

⁴⁴ Aurore Chéry, "La vertu de Madame Élisabeth: Montreuil, un anti-Trianon?," chap. in *Madame Élisabeth, une princesse au destine tragique, 1764-1794*, ed. Juliette Trey (Milan: Silvana Editoriale; 2013), 27.

⁴⁵ Bombelles, Marc, marquis de, *Journal*, Tome I: 1780-1784 (Geneva: Droz; 1977), 24 Mai 1784, 324. See also Chéry, 28.

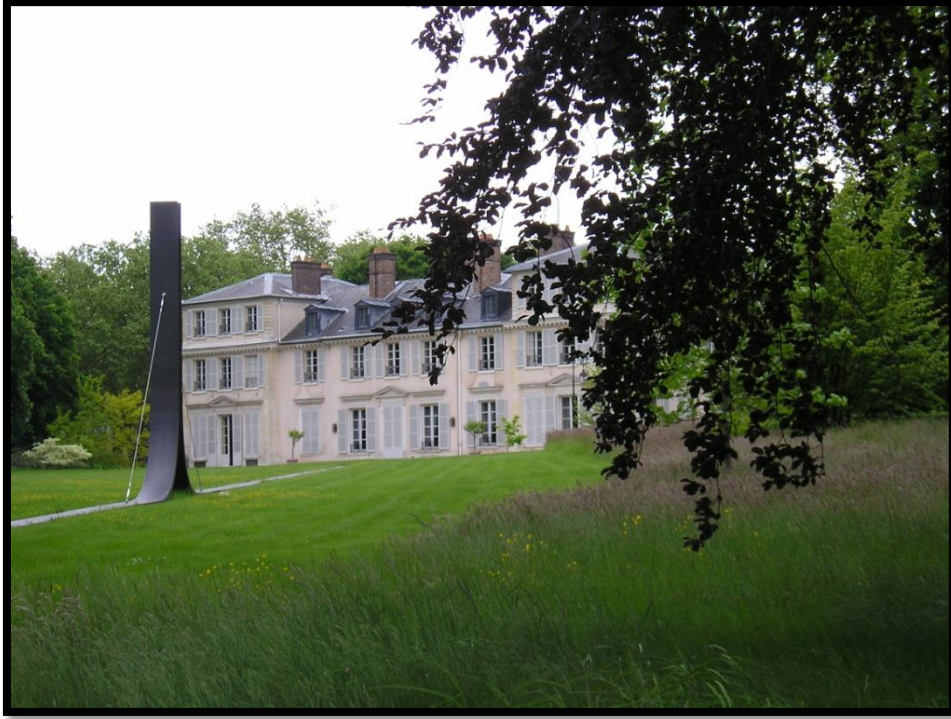


Fig. 4 .7. Maria S. Wendeln. *Montreuil* (eastern façade), *Domaine de Madame Élisabeth*. Versailles, France; June 2, 2013.⁴⁶

it to her he also achieved once again that which he had accomplished by giving the Petit Trianon to Marie-Antoinette and informally exiling Madame Adélaïde to Bellevue—he dissipated the feminine royal voice. The king was well aware of his parent’s and his aunts’ struggles and concerns with the ascent of Madame de Pompadour over Louis XV; and both he and his consort suffered from the designs of the faction surrounding the Comtesse du Barry. Louis XVI personally witnessed the manner in which his grandfather’s reign was complicated and troubled by the influence exerted upon the monarch by the women in his life, including his own daughters. Not to say that Madame Élisabeth demonstrated much interest in her brother’s affairs or in politics at all before the late 1780s, but having an estate of her own kept the princess out of them as she came of age.

⁴⁶ Sculpture installation: Michael Danner, *Vole vers le haut* (n.d., 21st century).



Fig.4.8. Maria S. Wendeln. *L'Orangerie, Domaine de Madame Élisabeth*. Versailles, France; June 2, 2013.⁴⁷

On the other hand, Montreuil was a domain of feminine authority. Madame Élisabeth reigned over her chateau and the surrounding park. There she as well reigned over her own body. Louis XVI's stipulations aside, Montreuil still provided Madame Élisabeth a sense of her own personal liberty and granted her the opportunity to live as she chose; and much like her sister-in-law endeavored for privacy at the Petit Trianon, the princess did the same in her domain. Born in the public sphere of the Bourbon monarchy, a private realm of her own allowed the princess to daily escape the deafening noise and constant surveillance at the court of Versailles. Royalty had no private life but Madame Élisabeth managed to carve one out for herself at Montreuil. Furthermore, she essentially did so without raising suspicion from or disdain by her brother's courtiers.

⁴⁷ Sculpture installation: Béatrice Guichard, *Rond et Carré* (n.d., 21st century).



Fig. 4.9. Maria S. Wendeln. *Pavillon de chasse, Domaine de Madame Élisabeth*. Versailles, France; June 2, 2013.

The princess, like her sister-in-law, had access to the definitive political body in the land; but unlike Marie-Antoinette, Madame Élisabeth's access was not immediate and hence, not the most direct route to Louis XVI. Being the king's sister in essence freed her from courtiers' expectations that she could readily influence him on their behalf. She was a woman born into the public sphere of monarchical politics and the familial bonds of the royal family; but, much like Mesdames Tantes, her sphere of influence was of no great significance and the French regarded her accordingly. In spite of its fictive nature, the Salic Law denied to her both political authority and political importance to Louis XVI's subjects. Represented on the margins of the king's family prior to 1789, Madame Élisabeth evaded the constant surveillance which targeted and denounced other highly visible and influential women without hesitation.⁴⁸ Although

⁴⁸ Maza, *Private Lives and Public Affairs*, 172-73.

speculation about the princess was relatively minimal as she came of age, the image of her which emerged during this period had significance.

In the subtitle of her essay for the 2013 *Madame Élisabeth, une princesse au destin tragique* exhibition catalog, historian Aurore Chéry ponders “Montreuil, un anti-Trianon?” Was it “un correctif des erreurs commises à Trianon”?⁴⁹ These are interesting questions and leads the historian to consider the possibility that Louis XVI gave Montreuil to his sister in an effort to not only distract her away from his affairs, but as well to remove her from the potentially corrupting influence of his wife and her associates. The very immodesty of his sister’s portrait by Vigee-Lebrun was disturbing and while speculative, it is not difficult to imagine Louis XVI being taken aback at the very sight of it. His stipulations were meant to protect Madame Élisabeth from the missteps which invited suspicion and scandal. Aside from Louis XVI limiting her time at the estate and controlling the gender of her visitors, entrance into the gardens was strictly regulated by a contingent of Swiss guards who protected the estate’s perimeter while servants escorted permitted visitors through them.⁵⁰ The rumored misdeeds and debauched behaviors at the Petit Trianon were not to be mimicked by a Madame de France. “The best woman was the one about whom the least was said.”⁵¹

Another thing to consider was and is the reality of the physical location of the two royal residences. The Petit Trianon is not too far from the chateaux of Versailles, but it was still enough of a distance to separate the queen from the constant activity and expectations placed upon her within the immediate sphere of the palace. Both the Petit Trianon and the *Hameau* are virtually on the rural outskirts of the grounds. Entrance into Marie-Antoinette’s private domain

⁴⁹ Chéry, 28.

⁵⁰ AN, K 507; see also Chéry, 28.

⁵¹ Rousseau, *Politics and the Arts*, 48. See also Gutwirth, 132.

was by her invitation only, the queen initially snubbing and then alienating members of the old court. They were aghast at her abandonment of courtly etiquette and vocalized their complaints through word of mouth and in print. In comparison, Montreuil and its park are just down the hill from the chateaux, along the bend where the Avenue of Paris comes into the city of Versailles and runs straight up to the palace. Thousands of people passed by it daily in Madame Élisabeth's brief lifetime there; and while entrance into the princess' domain was as well restricted, its physical connection to the community allowed people ample opportunity to witness the princess' goodness for themselves. While the princess enjoyed the private life that Montreuil afforded her, she was never as self-indulgent as her sister-in-law and showed a much greater concern for her poorer neighbors.

The image of Madame Élisabeth as a chaste and virtuous princess began with her good works in and around Montreuil's pastoral setting.⁵² She spent many afternoons working in the gardens and had a pleasure dairy built on the grounds. As Meredith Martin demonstrates in *Dairy Queens, the Politics of Pastoral Architecture from Catherine de' Medici to Marie-Antoinette* (2011), the aristocratic building of pleasure dairies in Old Regime France was not a new phenomenon in the late- eighteenth century, but there was a marked increase in the number built after 1750. Multiple treatises proclaimed milk's regenerative properties while dairies in contemporary art and literature were frequently associated the structures with women's nurturing qualities. Madame Élisabeth's dairy at Montreuil was one of approximately twenty built on various royal estates in the 1770s and 1780s. The now lost dairy was operated by a Swiss farmer and his family. It was a simple one room structure with adjacent stalls for the animals and seating for the princess' visitors. Madame Élisabeth frequently distributed milk to the orphans at

⁵²Chéry, 30-31.

a nearby church, maternally nurturing the children with whom she unhesitatingly empathized. This is the image of her which the artist Fleury Richard painted after the Restoration of the Bourbon Monarchy in 1814 (see below, Fig. 7.1).⁵³ Along with the distribution of milk to orphans, a portion of the estate's produce was daily given to the local poor. The princess also occasionally assisted at the medical clinic operated by Dr. Louis Lemonnier on the grounds.⁵⁴ She may not have been as religiously devout during this period of her life as some believe, but her charitable enterprises did not go unnoticed and fostered the notion of the princess' maternal qualities in spite of the truth that she was unmarried and physically had no children of her own..

On May 3, 1789, Madame Élisabeth turned twenty-five in the weeks before the opening of the Estates General. She could finally reside at Montreuil on a more independent and permanent basis. It was from there that she spotted the massive throng of Parisian fishwives and their companions approaching on October 5th. She speedily left her much loved home to take refuge with her brother inside the chateau. She left without a thought that she would never return to the place which gave her so much happiness and independence. Several years later she wrote to the Marquise de Raigecourt on how she hoped to see both Montreuil and Versailles when she went out riding on a late spring day. She lamented over the loss of where she had escaped the troubles of the world for so many years and she regarded the revolutionaries' denial of her return there as essentially evil: "C'est ainsi que Dieu tire du mal un bien; il a encore bien des maux à m'envoyer pour me faire parvenir à ce qu'il veut de moi."

⁵³ Meredith Martin, *Dairy Queens, the Politics of Pastoral Architecture from Catherine de' Medici to Marie-Antoinette* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press; 2011), 4-5; 8; 164; 210-11. See also Gutwirth, "The Milk of Human Kindness," in *Twilight of the Goddess*, 178-185.

⁵⁴ Chéry, 27.

The French regarded their king as a good father of his people. His brothers' significance at the court of Versailles and within the royal family itself was diminished by the birth of his two sons, Louis-Joseph, the dauphin, and Louis-Charles, the duc de Normandie. Mesdames Tantes were old, set in their ways and, truthfully, not of much concern to their nephew's subjects. On the other hand, his consort was a politically corrupt Austrian born and feminine threat, a fiscally draining spendthrift, and a hyper-sexual beast, all of whom delighted in all sorts of debauchery in her private little world at the Petit Trianon and the adjoining *Hameau*. In comparison, his yet to be wed sister stood in sharp contrast.

Madame Élisabeth was the good princess, *the* good sister. She daily showed her devotion to brother by doing as he commanded, policing herself by returning to the chateau at the end of the day. She lived semi-independently but she consistently exhibited the nature which was expected no less than from a princess of France. Those who took notice witnessed her doing good works and remarked on her kindness. As Aurore Chéry correctly notes, she was the embodiment of the “parfait princesse” and especially as one who did not go beyond the role assigned to her by Louis XVI and his subjects.⁵⁵ From what little people actually knew of her, it was easy to imagine Madame Élisabeth as a good and virtuous princess, a positive feminine force in the sphere of monarchical politics which had for far too long suffered from the influence and deceptions of corrupt ones, including from the Marquise de Pompadour, the Comtesse du Barry, and eventually Marie-Antoinette. The princess' piety, charitableness, and presumed virginity deflected criticism toward her and gave the French hope that there was a non-threatening feminine force close to the king who was noble, honorable, and wished only the best

⁵⁵ Chéry, 30-31.

for his millions of subjects. “I have never desired anything but the happiness of the French people.”⁵⁶

⁵⁶ “First Examination of Madame Élisabeth by Fouquier-Tinville, May 9, 1794;” reprinted and trans. in *Life & Letters of Madame Élisabeth de France*, 313.

CHAPTER 5. “LA PARTIE ÉTOIT BELLE,” MADAME ÉLISABETH IN THE TUILERIES

Madame Élisabeth leaned forward in the carriage as it rolled past Montreuil and looked at the trees of her beloved domain. “Are you bowing to Montreuil, sister?” asked her brother. “Sire,” she replied, “I am bidding it farewell.” Only the day before she been there in the morning, enjoying the immensely private life she had constructed for herself, she had turned twenty-five just months beforehand so her brother finally permitted her to spend her nights there and away from the constant bustle and intrigue that characterized the Chateaux of Versailles. Her promenade through the garden that early October day came to an abrupt end as the princess sighted the throng of Parisian women, a veritable “vanguard of anarchy,” rapidly approaching. Without a thought that she might never return to her appointed home, Élisabeth quickly mounted her horse and rode up the Avenue de Paris to alert her brother. She urged Louis XVI to take immediate action to suppress the uprising, a demonstration of authority that would undo the emerging factionalism within the nascent National Assembly and forestall future rebellions. She also implored him to leave the châteaux for a location far from Paris, and where loyal men could rally around him with the military might necessary to squash the revolution. Louis XVI gave his sister’s advice some consideration; “[b]ut,” as one of the princess’ biographers summarized, “his firmness gave way before the views of M. Necker, and he consented to negotiate, as power to power, with the rioters.”¹

The princess suffered for her brother’s indecision. She rode in the carriage with him and his family as part of the grim procession that returned to the capital the following day, October 6, 1789. His aged aunts suffered as well; Adélaïde and Victoire were abruptly forced to vacate the

¹ Katharine Prescott Wormeley, “Biographical Sketch,” in *The Ruin of a Princess* (New York: Lamb Publishing Co.; 1912), 24.

Châteaux de Bellevue as the mob passed on its return to Paris. Appalled by the horrid vision of the piked heads of the assassinated National Guardsmen bobbing up and down above the crowd, Madame Élisabeth regarded the whole affair as criminal.² As the fish-wives entered the city, they chanted “We have the Baker, the Baker’s wife and the Baker’s son” and they proclaimed they had Sainte Geneviève, Paris’ patron saint, with them as well, referring to the princess’ virtuosity and religious devotion.³ Installed in the Tuileries palace by the end of the day, Élisabeth astutely ascertained the royal family’s transformed status, from privilege to imprisonment. Writing on October 8, 1789, to the Marquise de Bombelles, the princess bemoaned the alteration in their situation:

My date alone will tell you to what a point our misfortunes have come. We have left the cradle of our childhood – what am I saying? left! we were torn from it. What a journey! what sights! Never, never will they be effaced from my memory. . . . What is certain is that we are prisoners here; my brother does not believe it, but time will prove it to him. Our friends are here; they think as I do that we are lost.⁴

When the Revolution began in 1789, Madame Élisabeth’s status as a princess of France was taken at face value. Her presence at the opening ceremonies of the Estates General in May of that year went without question while her sex, in some regards, shielded her from speculation that she was a woman with the potential to politically influence and or advise her brother. As the previous chapters have shown, Louis XVI’s subjects knew of her but with so much public fascination and criticism focused on her sister-in-law, the public’s interests in the princess and

² Madame Élisabeth to Madame de Bombelles, 13 Octobre 1789. Reprinted in *Correspondance de Madame Élisabeth*, 118-122.

³ K. Wormeley, *Ruin of a Princess*, 28.

⁴ K. Wormeley, “Biographical Sketch,” *Life and Letters of Madame Élisabeth*, 42. See also K. Wormeley, *Ruin of a Princess*, 42. Letter is not reproduced in the *Correspondance de Madame Élisabeth*; but Madame Élisabeth did refer to the royal family’s residence in the Tuileries as imprisonment elsewhere in her correspondence. See Madame Élisabeth to Madame de Bombelles, 6 Décembre 1790; in *Correspondance de Madame Élisabeth*, 215.

her affairs was limited. The Salon of 1787's *Portrait of Madame Élisabeth* was primarily received by the exhibitions' critics and attendees in terms of Labille-Guiard's ability as a painter than in regards to the image the princess officially presented to the French, in part because the eighteenth-century art-going well aware of the highly constructed nature of royal portraiture. Moreover, and as Aurore Chéry noted in "La vertu de Madame Élisabeth: Montreuil, un anti-Trianon?," the princess' supposed virtuosity and charitableness had a good deal to do with the public's imagination.⁵ Nevertheless, when she was forcibly moved with the rest of the royal family and the National Assembly from Versailles to Paris in October 1789, the public's perception of Madame Élisabeth was a relatively positive one and a marginal one at that; but, and especially as the Revolution progressed, it was to change, the "Sainte Genevieve" of the October Days eventually becoming "La partie étoit belle" (the single lady who *was* beautiful) [Fig 5.1].

This chapter focuses on the period in the princess' life from her entrance into the Tuileries palace on October 6, 1789, to the eventual fall of the monarchy in the late summer of 1792. It is a period in which not only the French perception of the princess transformed, but also her own awareness of her status as political agent emerged. In time Madame Élisabeth secretly communicated with her emigrated brothers, the Comtes de Provence and d'Artois, as they sought to rally foreign support to challenge and hopefully squash the rebellion within France's borders. This chapter first looks at Madame Élisabeth's marginal presence in some of the pornographic *libelles* which so vehemently maligned Marie-Antoinette before turning to *Le Rendez-Vous de Madame Élisabeth, Soeur du Roi, avec L'Abbé de S. Martin, Aumonier de la Garde Nationale, dans les Jardin des Tuileries*, the 1790 pamphlet which to date is the only *libelle*

⁵ Chéry, 28-29.



Fig. 5.1: Anon. *[La Partie d'échecs]* : *echequemat j'ai perdu toutes mes pièces 3 je vous ai porté malheur* with Madame Élisabeth, on the far right, identified as “4. La partie étoit belle,” 1791. Engraving.⁶

known to have disparaged the princess' character. From there we move into Madame Élisabeth's role in the Flight to Varennes, the royal family's attempt to escape their “imprisonment” in the Tuileries palace and to the French frontier, the event ultimately undoing the perception of Louis XVI as the “good father” of his people. As will be seen in the following chapter, it also became part of the Revolutionary Tribunal's justification for charging the

⁶ *[La Partie d'échecs]*: *echequemat j'ai perdu toutes mes pièces 3 je vous ai porté malheur*, Gallica; accessed April 4, 2015. [ftp://ftp.bnf.fr/5300/N53009770_JPEG_1_1DM.jpg](http://ftp.bnf.fr/5300/N53009770_JPEG_1_1DM.jpg). The figures in *The Chess Game* are identified as “1.Echequemat. (Guard) 2. J'ai perdu toutes mes pièces. (Louis XVI) 3. Je vous ai porté Malheur. (Marie-Antoinette) 4. La partie étoit belle. (Madame Elisabeth) 5. Je vous avoit conseillé de conserver vos tours. (Abbé) 6. La loi salique te défend de toucher. (Louis-Charles, the dauphin) 7. Elle doit t'appartemir (Madame Royale).” Note how on the left the dauphin and his sister reach for the crown, the former reminding her that the Salic Law prohibits her from having it.

princess with and finding her guilty of treason.⁷ Both Madame Élisabeth herself and the revolutionaries became increasingly aware of the truth that she was a political agent, the former being more comfortable with her status as one, and the latter growing to dislike and eventually hate the woman who they once believed could do no wrong.

This chapter will also examine Madame Élisabeth's correspondence between October 1789 and August 1792, particularly with several of her emigrated ladies-in-waiting, as she not only informed them of the National Assembly's proceedings and her opinion on them, but also expressed her displeasure with Louis XVI's decisions and his inability to assert to his what she believed to be his divinely ordained authority. Furthermore, it is through her correspondence with the Marquises of Raigecourt and Bombelles that the princess communicated with her brothers in exile. Over time, Madame Élisabeth became skilled in speaking of the situation inside the palace in euphemistic terms and eventually resorting to a secret code by the summer of 1792. Here she reveals herself as politically aware and active. Coincidentally, in her last letter to Madame de Bombelles, the princess remarked on the discussion between the National Assembly and the municipal government of Paris over who had the authority to establish order within the capital. The letter was dated August 10, 1792, the Tuileries palace was stormed in the hours after it was dispatched.

Le Rendez-vous of Madame Élisabeth

With the confluence of the cultural turn and the bicentennial of the French Revolution in 1989 came a wealth of analysis regarding the image of Marie-Antoinette in the libelous pamphlet

⁷ L. Hunt, *Family Romance of the French Revolution*, 17.

literature of the era.⁸ While the queen had figured in a select number of salacious *libelles* before 1789, the number and viciousness of the attacks on her character exploded after that date, in both textual and visual terms. Building off the much earlier assessments of this literature offered by Henri d'Almeras and Hector Fleischmann, Chantal Thomas moves beyond their "attempts to link the heroine of the pamphlets to the 'real' Marie-Antoinette" and locates the queen's "unreal double," the Wicked Queen. Thomas rightly regards the pamphlet literature "as an autonomous system endowed with its own rules, its own rhetoric, its particular function." Moreover, that system had existed for decades before the future queen's arrival at Versailles, and rapidly closed in upon her when the public's fascination with the *Austrichenne* surmounted that of Madame du Barry, Louis XV's last favorite and the bane of his family.⁹

Examination and analysis of this literature is the means by which the historian can better understand why the queen, a woman who had no formal authority, was so feared and reviled by her husband's subjects. The analyses of Lynn Hunt and Jacques Revel provide further and relevant guidance, particularly to this project. The latter finds in his seminal "Marie-Antoinette in Her Fictions: The Staging of Hatred" that the very plausibility of the numerous scandalous

⁸ Katherine Crawford, *Perilous Performances: Gender and Regency in Early Modern France* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press; 2004); Lynn Hunt, *The Family Romance of the French Revolution* (Berkeley; Los Angeles: University of California Press; 1992); Jacques Revel, "Marie-Antoinette in her fictions," in Bernadette Fort, ed., *Fictions of the French Revolution* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press; 1991); de Baecque, *The Body Politic Corporeal Metaphor in Revolutionary France, 1770-1800* (Stanford: Stanford University Press; 1997); D. Goodman, ed., *Marie-Antoinette, Writings on the Body of a Queen* (New York; London: Routledge; 2003); Chantal Thomas, *La Reine scélérate: Marie-Antoinette dans les pamphlets* (Paris: Editions du Seuil; 1989).

⁹ Chantal Thomas, *The Wicked Queen, The Origins of the Myth of Marie-Antoinette*, trans. by Julie Rose (New York: Zone Books; 1999), 10-11; 13; 21. In regards to d'Aleras's *Les Amoureux de la reine, Marie-Antoinette et les pamphlets royalistes et révolutionnaires* (1907) and Fleischmann's *Les Pamphlets libertins contre Marie-Antoinette* (1907), Thomas makes note of their differing assessments of the queen, d'Aleras as more favorable while Fleischmann finds Marie-Antoinette more responsible for her actions and, as such, thereby sent to the scaffold. According to Thomas, one strives to exonerate the queen while the other prosecutes her in a manner which draws a direct correspondence between Marie-Antoinette's actual actions and the pamphlet literature against her. Thomas does not, though, recognize the relationship between Fleischman's prosecution and Fouquier-Tinville's.

and fictive stories and statements associated with the queen readily transformed Louis XVI's "real" consort into a "paper queen." The pamphlets were obvious works of fiction, but ones that presented themselves as possessing credible and effective details. Revel writes:

...these pamphlets have collectively proposed a kind of textual staging of Marie-Antoinette and they have done so by utilizing specific themes and devices that made acceptable and plausible the representations of the queen thus circulated. They created a paper queen that, early on, in fact well before the Revolution, gradually replaced the "real" queen until the latter was completely eclipsed.¹⁰

Revel also regards the literature against the queen as part of the much longer process of the monarchy's desacralization, a process which began in the middle of the eighteenth century. He also sees it as part of the centuries old French tradition of denouncing the monarchy and royal family members by aspersions on their conduct, especially their sexual conduct.¹¹ Hence, the literature defaming Madame Élisabeth, no matter how mediocre or minimal, fits into this tradition and the only thing revolutionary about these fictions was the subject of them.

Working from the recognition that the medieval "mystic fiction" of the "King's Two Bodies," one corporeal and mortal, the other the invisible and immortal "body politic," never itself applied to France's queens, Lynn Hunt finds in *The Family Romance of the French Revolution* that Marie-Antoinette's "nonmystical body" represented many things to those who sought to destroy it; that it in fact had "many bodies" which threatened the Revolution. Hunt argues:

These many bodies—hydraulic, to use one of the favorite revolutionary metaphors for counterrevolution—were each in turn attacked and destroyed because they represented the threats, conscious and unconscious, that could be posed to the republic. These were not just ordinary threats, for the queen

¹⁰ Jacques Revel, "Marie-Antoinette in Her Fictions: The Staging of Hatred," trans. by Terri J. Nelson and Bernadette Fort, in Bernadette Fort, ed., *Fictions of the French Revolution* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press; 1991), 111-129; 114.

¹¹ J. Revel, "Marie-Antoinette in Her Fictions," in Fort, *Fictions of the French Revolution*, 113.

represented not only the ultimate in counterrevolutionary conspiracy but also the menace that the feminine and the feminizing presented to republican notions of manhood and virility.¹²

Did Madame Élisabeth also have threatening counterrevolutionary and feminine “many bodies”? Was she a “paper princess”? She appeared briefly in several of the pamphlets attacking her sister-in-law, but other intimates of Marie-Antoinette figured much more prominently in the *libelles*, either in name or euphemistically. But with the coming of the Revolution, the princess increasingly figured in negative depictions of the royal family. While the queen’s taste for privacy had long fueled tales of her debauchery before 1789, Madame Élisabeth’s own privacy was interpreted by the public’s imagination as being about her virtue. Yet, once others were made more readily aware of her physical presence and its threatening potential, especially after her opposition to the Civil Constitution of the Clergy became general knowledge, the Sainte Geneviève of the October Days was no longer.¹³ Even though they were relatively minor with the attacks on Madame Élisabeth never equaling those against either her brother or his notorious wife, the once perfect princess became the “paper” one, her tightly controlled representational body replaced with ugly, bestial, and eventually sexualized ones.

In the *Vente nationale de la ménagerie royale, de tous les animaux vivans, et bêtes féroces, établie aux Thuileries* (1790), the anonymous author not only disparaged the princess’ unwed status, but also insinuated she had taken to overeating like her brother. He wrote:

¹² Hunt, *The Family Romance*, 94. Hunt’s analysis takes into account Ernst Kantorowicz’s own of the “mystic fiction of the ‘King’s Two Bodies’” in medieval England and France; and while she seriously doubts if the doctrine still held in late eighteenth-century France, Hunt emphasizes that it never applied to France’s queens, even those who served as regents for their adolescent sons, such as the much despised Catherine de Medici.

¹³ Madame Élisabeth to Mme. de Bombelles, 28 Novembre 1790. Reprinted in *Correspondance de Madame Élisabeth*, 208-210.

VI. Elizabeth-Veto

Cette femelle aussi mechante que jolie, n'est point encore accouplée, elle mange aussi beaucoup de macaronis blancs. Elle est orgueilleuse, et cependant, elle montre beaucoup de souplesse quand on la regarde fixement. Enfin, elle est aux animaux de la ménagerie ce que les hypocrities sont aux gens de bonne foi. ...¹⁴

The last line is telling about Madame Élisabeth and other members of the royal family, including Adélaïde and Victorie, focused upon in the pamphlet's preceding section, and how their religious piety was increasingly associated with hypocrisy and not having the best interests of the French people at heart, their own royal interests superseding the concerns of others. Furthermore, the author equated Élisabeth's loss of beauty in the eyes of the French with her obvious support of the suspensive veto. She, and the other members of her family, believed that the National Convention owed this privilege to Louis XVI in the constitution they were writing on the basis of his sacred nature.¹⁵ Once transferred from her distant and relatively cloistered life at Montreuil to the constant scrutiny and surveillance of the crowds outside the Tuileries Palace, what the people believed about the princess being a virtuous and charitable woman before 1789 began to dissolve as they became more aware of her status as a political agent. Marie-Antoinette was not the only woman who threatened the Revolution through her close proximity to the body of the king.

¹⁴Dantalle, F. *Vente nationale de la menagerie royale, de tous les animaux vivans, et bêtes féroces, établie aux Thuilleries* (Paris: de l'impr. des patriots, 1790), 6-7.

¹⁵In her 15 September 1789 letter to Madame de Bombelles, the princess reported on the National Assembly's early discussions upon the topic of the suspensive veto and how the debate was complicated by the people's belief in Louis XVI's sacrality. See *Correspondance de Madame Elisabeth de France*, 117. Historian Keith M. Baker notes that the suspensive veto was an early attempt made by the Revolution to reconcile the "inability of national sovereignty with the practice of representation," and that it ultimately led the destruction of the monarchy since, in Louis XVI's hands, it was regarded as frustrating the general will of the people. See Keith Baker, "Sovereignty" in François Furet and Mona Ozouf, eds., *A Critical Dictionary of the French Revolution*, trans Arthur Goldhammer (Cambridge, Mass; London: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press; 1989), 844-59; 853.

Meanwhile, the author of the later *Description of the Royal Menagerie of Living Animals: Established in the Tuileries Near the National Terrace* (1792) looked to dehumanize the royal family in a vein similar to *Vente nationale de la ménagerie royale*. Characterizing Louis XVI as a pig who “DOESN’T HAVE A TAIL,” the Comte d’Artois as a “venomous asp,” Madame Royale as a blood-sucking spider, and Marie-Antoinette as “hideous, frightful” creature which one day hopes to devour the French, “one by one,” the author stops just short of calling Madame Élisabeth a bitch. Nonetheless, his characterization of her was no less brutal:

V. *The Élisabeth Veto*

The sister of the Royal Veto is as nasty as she once was pretty. This evil slut would like to see the nation go to the dogs; but she has a share in the tyrant’s food allowance and she earns her keep well . . . Who does keep her?¹⁶

Ultimately the author questioned what purpose Madame Élisabeth served, asking “Who does keep her?” She and the extended members of the royal family were now viewed as draining the nation fiscally through the crown’s endowment.¹⁷ While vocally regarding the princess as a mooching off the French was not nearly as insidious as depicting her as an overtly sexualized woman and a monster, the erosion of her image in these two pamphlets was part and parcel of the greater denigration of the royal family, the authority of the Bourbon monarchy undone by

¹⁶ Anon., *Description of the Royal Menagerie of Living Animals, Established in the Tuileries Near the National Terrace, With their names, features, colors, and characteristics* (1792). Reproduced and trans. in Chantal Thomas, *The Wicked Queen, the Origins of the Myth of Marie-Antoinette*, 238-246; quote, 242.

¹⁷ Created during the early Revolution, the *liste civile* generously endowed Louis XVI with 25 million livres, revenues in part coming from specific royal domains and from Marie-Antoinette’s dowry. While the households of the Comtes de Provence and d’Artois were maintained through revenues from their domains during this period, some of the funds from each transferring after the brothers’ emigration to Phillippe Égalité, Louis XVI maintained at his own expense the households of Mesdames Adelaide and Victoire, and of Madame Elisabeth. See Ambrogio A. Caiani, *Louis XVI and the French Revolution, 1789-1792* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press; 2012), 56-82; 60.

both political circumstance and an imagery which not only rejected Louis XVI as a “good father” of his people, but also Madame Élisabeth as their “good sister.”¹⁸

Just as Madame Élisabeth’s piety could not protect her from ridicule, especially on account of her politics, it also could not prohibit sexualized speculation about her virtue. It was insinuated that the penetration of the princess’ hymen had been long delayed in a 1790 passage of *Correspondance secreta inedite sur Louis XVI, Marie-Antoinette, la cour et la ville*. The narrator speaks of how the soon to be mayor of the city of Rennes, M. Chapelier, had offered to marry the king’s sister if he will be permitted to spend a night with her. The passage read:

Les plaisants n'ont pas manqué de relever un mauvais propos échappé dans un souper à M. Chapelier. Il s'avisa de dire qu'il passerait volontiers une nuit avec Madame Élisabeth. On a annoncé son mariage future avec cette princesse, et l'on a supposé qu'une perte excessive qu'il a faite au jeu retardait ce hymen. On dit maintenant que près d'être maire à Rennes, de lui donner sa main; qu'il lui représente qu'en qualité de législateur et de maire, il est au dessus de son frère, le Roi; mais on ajoute que la princesse, attachée aux droits des Bourbons, refuse cet honneur.¹⁹

The play of words is interesting here, making the princess’ refusal out to be the turning down of the distinct honor of being deflowered and married to a promising politician in the new nation. Moreover, the reader cannot mistake the leveling of the social hierarchy, the legislator becoming a brother of the king through his hoped for marriage to Madame Élisabeth. Tamer in some regards than the disparagement of the princess’ character in the *Vente nationale de la ménagerie royale* or the *Description of the Royal Menagerie of Living Animals*, and much briefer, this

¹⁸ On the rejection of Louis XVI as a “good father” to his people, see L. Hunt, *The Family Romance*, 49-50.

¹⁹ H. Plon, ed.; *Correspondance secreta inedite sur Louis XVI, Marie-Antoinette, la cour et la ville de 1777 à 1792*, 2 volumes (Paris: Adolphe de Lesclapart; 1886), Tome 2: 427-28. Chery makes reference to this passage in her article for the 2013 exhibition catalog; and while her footnote contains the specific volume and page numbers, the biographic information provided at the end of the volume list another text whose title begins as the same but is wholly different. The *Correspondance secreta inedite sur Louis XVI, Marie-Antoinette, la cour et la ville de 1777 à 1792* is available through Gallica.

passage still served to include Madame Élisabeth in the ever increasing literature that defamed her, her brother, and other members of the royal family, all of them ultimately regarded as obstacles to the progress of the Revolution.

While pamphlets railing against Marie-Antoinette first appeared in the early 1770s, the queen was perpetually located in the public eye by virtue of being at the very center of the royal court. In contrast, scrutiny of Madame Élisabeth remained at a minimum up until her relocation to the Tuileries during the course of the Revolution. Furthermore, as ruthless and suggestive as the visual and textual material hostile to the monarchy was, reference to her in much of it, if she was included at all, was still relatively minimal. Yet, the princess was not completely spared, *Le Rendez-Vous de Madame Élisabeth, Soeur du Roi, Avec L'Abbé de S. Martin, Aumonier de la Garde Nationale Dans Le Jardin Des Tuileries* appeared sometime in 1790.

This tract is an especially unusual piece and, as Chéry rightly notes in the 2013 exhibition catalog, it has not been discussed by the princess' many biographers.²⁰ In part this has to do with the inability to reconcile the historiographic and biographic traditions of viewing Madame Élisabeth as the virgin martyr of the royal family, with the reality of her political agency and the very possibility that she may have been a sexual being. While it is probable that the princess was as virtuous as some of her associates claimed her to be, with the duchesse d'Angoulême attesting that her aunt gave her life over to God at the age of fifteen without taking holy vows, the princess' life prior to 1789 was more about the attainment of a privacy and personal autonomy

²⁰Chéry, 29. It should be noted that once again there is no reference to this pamphlet in one of Madame Élisabeth's most recent biographies, Anne Bernet's *Madame Elisabeth, soeur du Roi* (Paris: Éditions Tallandier; 2013)

akin to that of Elizabeth's aunts.²¹ Meanwhile the absence of *Le Rendez-Vous de Madame Élisabeth*'s in earlier biographies has also to do with its rarity. Currently only three libraries hold copies of the 1790 original publication, including the British National Bibliography and the Bibliothèque nationale de France, with access in the latter being highly restricted, if not impossible.²² It is thanks in part to the occasional appearance of later nineteenth-century reprints of this pamphlet on the rare book market that it is referenced in this analysis of the princess. The complete text is reproduced at the end of this volume.

The plot of *Le Rendez-Vous de Madame Élisabeth* offers nothing original. According to the narrator, the lovers' tryst was well known because the Abbé, a man initially identified as a lowly but handsome priest, shared the letter he received from Madame Élisabeth requesting that they meet and even distributed copies of it. This letter makes the princess the instigator of their union, with Élisabeth pleading that the Abbé meet her at a specific location in the Tuileries' gardens, at precisely 5 o'clock. She writes, "je ne crois pas que vous me fassiez attendre, vous y perdriez trop; ce que j'ai à vous dire intéressera votre bonheur & le mien. Rien ne se peut comparer à l'estime singulière que j'ai pour vous & dont je veux vous donner des preuves," her letter signed "Élisabeth de Bourbon, soeur du Roi."²³ There is absolutely no indication of what it is that the princess intends to give the Abbé out of her singular esteem for him.

²¹ On the duchesse d'Angoulême's assertion that Madame Elisabeth devoted her life to God without becoming a nun, see "Narrative of Madame Royale," in *Ruin of a Princess*, 283.

²² For the holdings in Great Britain, see Worldcat: http://www.worldcat.org/title/le-rendez-vous-de-madame-elisabeth-avec-labbe-de-s-martin-dans-le-jardin-des-tuileries-reimprime-sur-ledition-originale-de-1790/oclc/560016908&referer=brief_results. For the Bibliothèque nationale's holdings, see: <http://catalogue.bnf.fr/servlet/biblio?idNoeud=1&ID=36439457&SN1=0&SN2=0&host=catalogue> The Bibliothèque nationale as well holds several later editions.

²³ Anon., *Le Rendez-Vous de Madame Élisabeth, Soeur du Roi, Avec L'Abbé de S. Martin, Aumonier de la Garde Nationale Dans Le Jardin Des Tuileries* (Paris; 1790), 9.

In this account, the Abbé finds the princess at the appointed location, dressed in a “robe negligee,” and the two spirit away to an out-of-the-way room in a nearby, small hotel. The narrator implies that the Abbé is a lucky man because while higher ecclesiastics pay for the favors of women, as a humble priest he has the unique and special opportunity to be with a French princess, a woman of royal blood, without paying her. Once in their boudoir, Élisabeth immediately professes her unending devotion to the object of her desire. She avows:

Monsieur, j’oublie la sublimité de mon extraction, mon nom, ma famille, ma fortune, et je me plais à descendre dans la classe bourgeoise pour vous appartenir uniquement et cimenter votre félicité si votre âme est touché de mon amour et de ma foiblesse. Je me jette entre vos bras dans la certitude que vous ne trahirez jamais les plaisirs que je vous reserve, et que vous ne me réduirez point à la douleur de rougir à mes yeux de ma tendresse et de pleurer le reste de mes jours dans le fond d’un monastère pour vous avoir aimé au point de vous faire le sacrifice de ma vertu. Oui, Monsieur, je vous aime, et mon amour n’aura d’autre terme que celui de mon existence ou de la vôtre.

Petite fille de Roi, soeur du premier Monarque de l’Europe et des plus illustres Princes et Princesses, je me fais honneur, je me fais gloire de devenir votre maîtresse, de vous avoir pour amant.²⁴

The Abbé responds by declaring his eternal love for the princess, calling Élisabeth the queen of his soul and the idol of his senses. Her image is forever engraved upon his heart. He raises up her “royale” skirt and then proceeds to unbutton his cassock, exposing his “vigoureux priape.” The princess swoons at the sight of it; and when she recovers, Élisabeth cries out, “Ah! . . . , cher amant, que ma tendresse est vive & que ton amour est grand! J’expire, . . . O! mon ami, tu combles ma félicité! Ton Élisabeth n’est heureuse que par toi, son Bonheur est ton ouvrage.”²⁵

The Abbé celebrates his victorious conquest of the princess with a glass of Burgundy. It has come at no expense, the priest having the king’s sister as if she were a penniless and “galante” shepherdess, *Le Rendez-vous*’s author here surreptitiously referencing Madame

²⁴ Anon., *La Rendez-vous*, 11-12.

²⁵ Anon., *La Rendez-vous*, 14.

Élisabeth's 1782 portrait by Vigee-Lebrun. Their love making resumes, the pair copulating no fewer than six more times in a three hour period; and when they prepare to leave the room of their joyous union, the couple look back at the bed, "le trône de leurs plaisirs," and smile happily at one another. The Abbé cannot resist and lifts his "amante docile" up into his arms, carrying her back to the bed which has witnessed so much of "leurs épanchemens & de leurs caresses mutuelles," and makes love to her once again. The narrator thereby comments, "Quel spectacle que la soeur d'un Roi de France jouer le role d'une servante de cabaret, & réparer un lit avec ses mains tendres & délicates conjointement avec un Abbé en grande soutane!"

Madame Élisabeth and the Abbé eventually leave their hotel and walk along the Champs-Élysées back to the Tuileries gardens. They stroll through the grounds for a while before clandestinely slipping into the palace. As they begin to part with a kiss, their passion for one another is so intense that they consummate it once more, the princess trussed up against a marble statue as the Abbé penetrates her. This is followed by the princess putting her hand into his pants, Élisabeth grasping the Abbé's "member viril," the one which has satisfied so many ladies and young girls. She gracefully presents it for herself to pleasure one last time before they finally part. Thereafter the princess returns to her apartment as the Abbé withdraws from the palace, lost in pensive thought, quite satisfied with how delightful his evening has been. The reader soon finds him in the company of friends and "quelques dames," and he thereby proceeds to tell them the sordid details of his adventure. The company is surprised to hear it and they all roar with laughter through the rest of the evening as they exchange tales of their gallant exploits, one of the dames playfully teasing the Abbé about his. One night with Madame Élisabeth quickly transformed the formerly modest priest into an unbridled *libertine*.



Fig. 5.2. [*Relations sexuelles de Madame Élisabeth avec l'abbé de Saint Martin*]; frontispiece for *Le Rendez-vous de Madame Élisabeth, soeur du Roi, avec l'abbé de S. Martin*. Paris, 1790. Estampe.²⁶

The final passage of *Le Rendez-Vous* paints the princess as foolishly devoted to the Abbé de St. Martin. The narrator comments on how all women think about love, but that weakness, as exhibited by Madame Élisabeth, comes from a violent passion that has transformed into a need which makes a woman give into her sexual desires. The princess honestly loves the Abbé and the narrator explains that her constancy to him comes from the pride of taking a single lover, a much more readily forgiven sin. Such a woman should, though, find herself dishonored when it is made publicly known that her sole lover has been less than faithful, a crime which the Abbé has committed. The tract ultimately ends with a statement about the princess' blindness to the infidelity of “ce vigoureux F” as she continues to regularly reward him for his ministrations. The

²⁶ [*Relations sexuelles de Madame Élisabeth avec l'abbé de Saint Martin*]; frontispiece for *Le Rendez-vous de Madame Élisabeth, soeur du Roi, avec l'abbé de S. Martin*, French Revolution Digital Archive, Stanford University Libraries & the Bibliothèque nationale de France; accessed April 19, 2012. <http://frda.stanford.edu/fr/catalog/ss032pf9953>. The author would like to note that this item belongs to the Bibliothèque nationale de France and the relevant bibliographic information can be found at <http://catalogue.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/cb40256591t>.

last lines report that the Abbé is to soon receive Louis XVI's protection and an episcopate in return for pleasing and pleasuring Madame Élisabeth, thereby rewarding an ecclesiastic for his scandalous and licentiousness crimes, sins for which the ancient Church formerly sent persons to the scaffold or to be burnt at the stake.

The actual Abbé de Saint-Martin led a procession of sixty chaplains belonging to the battalions of the National Guard at Paris at the *Festival of the Federation* on July 14, 1790, and he did so wearing his episcopal robes.²⁷ He was most likely Louis-Pierre Saint Martin (1753-1819), a priest who eventually received the distinction of conseiller au Châtelet in 1781 and became known for a four volume history reviewing French customary law during the reign of Louis IX, titled *Les Établissements de saint Louis, roi de France* (Paris, 1786). Sometime after 1789 he abandoned his ecclesiastical vows and married a recent divorcee, a woman from whom he later separated. Saint-Martin went on to serve as an appeals court judge for the four departments on the left bank of the Rhine and then as a counselor to the appeals court in Liege.²⁸ Whether or not Louis-Pierre Saint Martin and the *Festival of the Federation's* Abbé were one in the same, it should be noted that the latter's name appeared in another satirical work from the period.

The *Confession générale de Paul-Eugène Mottier, dit Lafayette, à M. l'abbé de Saint-Martin* (Paris, 1790) essentially links the two by identifying Saint-Martin in its subtitle as “ci-devant conseiller au Châtelet, & actuellement grand aumônier de la Garde-Nationale-Parisienne.” Nonetheless, and while both *Confession générale de Paul-Eugène Mottier, dit*

²⁷ Charles Maxime Catherinet de Villemarest, *The Life of Prince Talleyrand: Accompanied with a Portrait* (Philadelphia: Carey, Lea, & Blanchard; 1834), Vol. 1, 133.

²⁸ Jacques-Paul Migne, *Nouvelle Encyclopédie Théologique, ou Nouvelle Série de Dictionnaires sur toutes les Parties de la Science Religieuse* (Paris: J-P Migne, aux Ateliers Catholiques; 1851), Vol. III, 30.

Lafayette and *Le Rendez-Vous de Madame avec l'Abbé de S. Martin* defamed the ecclesiastic, what remains of significance is how the latter text made Madame Élisabeth out to be the instigator of an explicit lovers' tryst and a foolish woman who was in denial of her lover's indiscretions. One *libelle* focused on the princess was nothing in comparison to the multitude which attacked the queen; but just like Marie-Antoinette, she too was a corrupting sexual and feminine force within the Tuileries, the palace serving as both a royal residence and the seat of the National Assembly.

Moreover, the timing of *Le Rendez-Vous*'s publication speaks to the princess' opposition to the Civil Constitution of the Clergy and the tensions pertaining to it not only within the wider realm of revolutionary politics, but also within the imploding monarchical ones. The Constitution itself became the root of a national schism as it operated to subordinate the Catholic Church in France to the government. While it promoted the redrawing of dioceses in accordance with the new division of France into departments and provided for the local election of priests, the most controversial aspect of the Constitution's implementation was the Constituent Assembly's requirement that all members of the clergy swear an oath of loyalty to the Civil Constitution itself, essentially mandating that they put their loyalty to the French state before their fidelity to the Church in Rome. Approximately half the clergy and only seven bishops swore this oath, thereby creating not only a rift between juring and non-juring French ecclesiastics, but also within the laity with peasants in certain portions of the nation protesting the Constitution's implementation. In the years to come, especially in the Vendée, this discord would boil over into a civil war as the revolutionary government became more radicalized and attempted to dechristianize France.

Louis XVI's public sanction of the Civil Constitution of the Clergy in July of 1790 and of the oath the following December deeply distressed the monarch in private. His fear that this was a mortal sin on his part was further reinforced by Pope Pius VI's issuance of two bulls of condemnation in early 1791.²⁹ Furthermore, it increasingly became a source of tension within the royal family itself, beginning in part with Madame Adélaïde, his long time advisor on matters of Church and State, and the person who best knew his late father's mindset on both. Temporarily moved to the Tuileries during the October Days and permanently installed in the palace with her sister in December 1789, Louis' opinionated, dogmatic and pious aunt had no difficulty in voicing her disapproval of the Constitution and the manner in which it prohibited her from practicing her religious faith; the aged princess refusing to attend any mass administered by a juring priest. Her disdain readily transferred to the other members of the royal family inside the palace. Louis XVI's loved ones increasingly regarded him as weak man and the French themselves, increasingly aware of royal family's stance on the Civil Constitution, thereby clearly understood their position on the Revolution itself.

Madame Élisabeth herself had been concerned with her brother's vacillation and weakness for some time, and even suggested that he should have taken action to punish the nobility for their refusal of his request that they forgo their tax-exempt status in 1787.³⁰ Undoubtedly, her brother's inability to prohibit the revolutionary government's alterations in the practice of religion within France greatly troubled the princess. When the Assembly gave to all French citizens the same religious rights as those that had been granted to Jews under the Old Regime, Madame Élisabeth was furious at this broad extension of religious freedom. She wrote to Madame de Bombelles in late January 1790, "Je ne puiste render combine je suis en colère de

²⁹ John Hardman, *Louis XVI*, 120.

³⁰ C. Erickson, *To the Scaffold*, 271-72. See also Wendeln, "Royal Women," 82.

cedécret. Il faudroit bien mieux se soumettre de attendrec avec résignation la punition que le Ciel nous réserve, car il ne permettra pas que cette faute reste sans vengeance.” She further commented in the letter’s lengthy postscript on her brother’s increasing political weakness and the Assembly’s continued reluctance to improve his position.³¹ Months later, just as the swearing of the oath of loyalty to the Civil Constitution of the Clergy was to take place, the princess again wrote to her former lady-in-waiting about how priests faced being removed from their parishes if they refused to swear it and how any non-juring priest who continued in his duties was to be declared a criminal. For Madame Élisabeth, seeing members of France’s clergy having to choose between their conscience and martyrdom was an egregious indignity.³²

Just as *Vente nationale de la ménagerie royale* insinuated that members of Louis XVI’s family members did not have the best interests of his subjects at heart under their veils of piety, *Le Rendez-Vous de Madame Élisabeth, Soeur du Roi, Avec L’Abbé de S. Martin* sought to directly defame the princess in a manner which unequivocally sullied her virtue. Prior to 1789, so much of popular imagination about the rather private princess believed her to be charitable, pious, and virtuous; but once she was no longer permitted to live privately as she so chose and the French became more acquainted with Madame Élisabeth, it became possible for her to be associated with the threatening characteristic of dissimulation, the trait so despised by revolutionaries who valued transparency. Increasingly described as definitively feminine quality in the eighteenth century, women in the public sphere of politics, including the *salonnaires* and any and all royal women, were regarded as teaching men on how to dissemble and to get what they wanted through the deception of behaving one way in public while conducting oneself in

³¹Madame Élisabeth to Mme. de Bombelles, 29 January 1790 & 31 January 1790. Reprinted in *Correspondance de Madame Élisabeth*, 142-46.

³² Madame Élisabeth to Mme. de Bombelles, 28 Novembre 1790. Reprinted in *Correspondence de Madame Élisabeth*, 208-210. .

the completely opposite manner in private.³³ With the republicans' heightened regard for transparency, particularly as the Revolution progressed towards its more radical phase, *Le Rendez-Vous de Madame Élisabeth* deliberately sought to lift the veil of the princess' supposed virginity, exposing her as a royal woman who had a base and sexual appetite much like the one her sister-in-law was so often accused of possessing. Moreover, and beyond morally bankrupting the Abbé de Saint Martin, making him abandon his vow of chastity, she too was a threatening sexual and feminine force within the king's immediate midst, a force which had corrupted him before the Revolution's outbreak, making him into the weak individual that she and many others perceived him to be, and one which possessed the potential to undo the Revolution itself.

From birth, Madame Élisabeth's body perpetually symbolized the monarchy. While the National Assembly debated between the courses of a constitutional monarchy or a democratic republic, the Revolution's outbreak itself invalidated any and all, past and present representations of and by the princess. The visual and textual torturing of her in engravings and the *libelles* removed the pious disguise and revealed her many monstrous, hideous, and sexually debauched bodies. Ultimately, the paper princess which such works created staged a new found hatred toward her, a hatred which rendered her to be both threatening and suspect.

The Flight to Varennes

Confinement in the Tuileries wore on the royal family. Louis XVI and all the members of immediate family, except for the emigrated Comte d'Artois, shared the palace with the

³³ L. Hunt, *Family Romance*, 96-98.

Assembly, the legislative body meeting in another portion of the complex. Madame Élisabeth occasionally commented in her correspondence on the persistent presence of the crowds outside and the noise; the royal family's arranged retreat to the Château de Saint-Cloud during at the end of August, 1790, was an all-too brief respite. Meanwhile, the Comte d'Artois, who emigrated shortly after the fall of the Bastille in 1789, moved quickly to rally the foreign support necessary to crush the rebellion within his homeland. Beyond France's borders, the Old Regime's supporters plotted its restoration; and within the Tuileries, Louis XVI's family hoped for the same and waited for divine intervention. The continued incarceration in their gilded cage and under constant surveillance made several members readily aware of how the freedoms granted to all citizens by the *Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen* were being denied to them.

With Parisian priests swearing the oath at one of the highest percentages in the land, the royal family's wishes to receive Holy Communion from non-juring priests was definitively frustrated and particularly troubling for the King's pious aunts. The king's aunts eventually determined to emigrate in early 1791, selecting Rome as their eventual destination, and asked for Louis XVI's blessing. Furthermore, and in a display of transparency, Mesdames looked to make their decision known, defending themselves to the municipal government with the argument that their religious faith moved them to leave France. On February 6, 1791 Madame Adélaïde explained herself to her nephew. She wrote:

If the municipality comes I will tell them the same thing [that my action is dictated by my religion], and I do not see upon what ground they would refuse me what is granted to everybody, as you told them and reminded them of the *Droits de L'Homme*. Besides, now that all the arrangements are made, must Europe learn that there is only liberty for license?³⁴

³⁴ Reproduced and trans. in Stryieński, 208. Stryieński locates his source as AN C 58.

As a royal woman with a long history of reading the political situation before her, Louis XV's daughter deftly recognized the inherent hypocrisy in the *Declaration*, seeing both hers and her sister's liberty to freely practice their religion and to travel as they chose as being severely restrained.

Mesdames and a small entourage quietly departed from Bellevue on February 20, 1791, with the chateau thereafter sacked by a mob. Their emigration was hardly immediate as they were held up at Arnay-le-Duc for eleven days while the National Assembly and the local Cote d'Or government debated over whether or not the princesses should be allowed to continue on their journey or be returned to Paris. Adélaïde wrote to the President of the National Assembly during their arrest and appealed to him on the grounds that as *citizensses*, she and Madame Victoire should be accorded the right to freely travel like everyone else.³⁵ Meanwhile, the second letter of the *Lettre bougrement patriotique de la Mère Duchêne* began with a song bidding the princesses farewell, the narrator recognizing that the sound of it was harsh on her readers' ears.³⁶

Mesdames were ultimately permitted to continue on to Rome. Along their journey, the princesses meet up with d'Artois and Madame Clothilde in Sardinia, and then the Marquis and Marquise de Bombelles in Parma. Their eventual audience with Pius VI hardly escaped the satirical print makers, the princesses caricatured as two old hags with sagging breasts and pointed noses brought before a bloated and incapacitated holy father, his bulls condemning the

³⁵Stryieński, 217. Stryieński locates his source as the Musée des Archives, A, 1209.

³⁶[chez Huilhemat], ed.; *Lettre bougrement patriotique de la Mère Duchêne* (Paris: [de l'impr. De Mère Duchêne]; 1791). Second edition, *Second letter bougrement patriotique de La Mère Duchêne où ellefaites adieux à Mesdames*, 1.



Fig. 5.3. Anon., *Présentation de hacquenées au St Pere*. 1791. Engraving.³⁷

Civil Constitution of the Clergy dangling from his right hand, in the *Presentation de hacquenées au Saint Peter's* [Fig. 5.3]. The characterization of the pope as an aged dullard and the princesses as two nannies is further enhanced by the inclusion in their party of a cardinal's mistress, her nanny, and a gentil homme "doing his job," his very erect penis lifting up the back of Madame Adélaïde's skirt. Neither the princesses' age nor their piety spared them from allusions of sexual debauchery on their part as well.

Mesdames Adélaïde's and Victoire's emigration was of consequence, no matter the sisters' relative insignificance to the French or within the royal family itself. It was particularly significant to Madame Élisabeth on two accounts. First, her aunts tried to convince her to come

³⁷ *Présentation de hacquenées au St. Pere*, Gallica; accessed April 24, 2015. <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b6944552n/f1.highres>.

with them; and after they left, they hoped she would eventually join them. She regarded her aunts to be courageous in determining to go but had long since set upon staying with her beloved brother. Secretly corresponding with them through Madame Victoire's chaplain, the Abbé de Lubersac, the princess wrote:

Le désir que vous me témoignez de me voir reunite à celles qui ont tant de bontés pour moi (i.e. Mesdames), m'a fait un grand plaisir; mais il est des positions où l'on ne peut pas disposer de soi, et c'est là la mienne: la ligne que je dois suivre m'est tracée si clairement par la Providence, qu'il faut bien que j'y reste; tout ce que je désire, c'est que vous vouliez bien prier pour moi, pour obtenir de la bonté de Dieu que je sois ce qu'il désire.³⁸

The princess was resigned to her imprisonment.

The second way that Mesdames' emigration was of significance became apparent the Easter Sunday following their departure. Wishing to privately receive communion from a non-juring priest, Louis XVI and his family attempted to leave the Tuileries on April 18, 1791, in order to spend the religious holy day at Saint-Cloud. A huge crowd blocked the palace's eastern gates and rather than clear the royal entourage's path per General Lafayette's orders and eventual pleas, the National Guardsmen joined the protesters in stopping the king's departure. Madame Élisabeth explained to Madame de Raigecourt that the reason for the insurrection was to force Louis to take communion from and hear a homily preached by a juring priest within the Tuileries' parish.³⁹ On Easter Sunday itself, Louis and Marie-Antoinette conceded and attended the mass administered by juring priests at Saint-Germain l'Auxerrois while Madame Élisabeth chose not to join them and remained in the privacy of her room.⁴⁰ The whole ordeal made the

³⁸ Madame Élisabeth to l'Abbé de Lubersac, 15 mai 1792. Reprinted in *Correspondence de Madame Élisabeth*, 406. A portion of this passage appears and is translated in Stryieński, p. 246.

³⁹ Madame Élisabeth to Mme. de Raigecourt, 19 avril 1791. Reprinted in *Correspondence de Madame Élisabeth*, 266.

⁴⁰ Louise Elisabeth de Croy d'Havré, duchesse de Tourzel, *Mémoires de Madame la Duchesse de Tourzel, Gouvernante des enfants de France pendant les années 1789 à 1795*, ed. by François-Joseph, duc des

king all the more aware of his imprisonment. As the man who had granted liberty to the French, his very own freedom was being persistently denied by his subjects.⁴¹ According to popular biographer Antonia Fraser, and perhaps rightly, the mob's actions that day were in part provoked by Mesdames' emigration, Adélaïde's and Victoire's departure spawning rumors that their nephew would eventually follow suit.⁴² Whether or not these rumors truly fueled the mob, Louis XVI still determined shortly thereafter to flee the persistent anarchy in Paris and hoped to soon take refuge in a distant location on France's frontier where he could readily gather the counterrevolutionary military might necessary to restore his absolute authority.

The details of Louis XVI's abortive flight are well known, with the king, his wife, his children and their governess, and Madame Élisabeth all fleeing in disguise on the night of June 20-21, 1791 [Fig. 5.4]. The Comte and Comtesse de Provence also slipped out of the palace the same evening, setting out on a separate route which ultimately took them across the Belgian border. The escape itself was clandestinely planned by Marie-Antoinette and Axel von Fersen, the Swedish count who was long rumored to have been the queen's one-time lover. The royal family's flight through the countryside toward a contingent of loyal troops amassed near the border with the Austrian Netherlands, at the French citadel of Montmédy, was hindered by delays and miscommunications, the king's carriage critically failing to meet up with a military escort outside Somme-Vesle. As the royal caravan pulled away from the relay post at Sainte-Menehould, the establishment's manager realized that the heavy set man identified as a valet in

Cars (Paris: E. PLON et C^{ie}, IMPRIMEURS-ÉDITEURS; 1883), Vol. 1, 284. Available through Project Gutenberg.

⁴¹ Timothy Tackett, *When the King Took Flight* (Cambridge, Mass; London: Harvard University Press; 2003), 44-45.

⁴² Antonia Fraser, *Marie Antoinette, The Journey* (New York: Anchor Books; 2001), 326.



Fig. 5.4. Anon., *Depart de Louis XVI le 21 juin 1791, à minuit et demie : le roi, sa femme sa fille M. de Élisabeth, Mme. de Tourzelle, et un garde du corps portant le Dâuphin, vont rejoindre le fiacre, qui les attend au guichet de Marigny.* Bureau des Révolutions de Paris (Paris), ed. 1791. Engraving.⁴³

the departing party was in fact Louis XVI. In a moment of historical coincidence, news of the king's escape, rapidly spreading over the French countryside, reached Sainte-Menehould about this time and word was immediately sent onward to the neighboring town of Varennes, stopping the royal party less than forty miles from its final destination.

Any statement that Madame Élisabeth was unaware of the escape plans is an inaccurate one.⁴⁴ While the exact details may have been withheld from her, she was readily aware of her brother's new found resolve to regain control of his kingdom. Over a month beforehand she

⁴³ *Depart de Louis XVI le 21 juin 1791, à minuit et demie: le roi, sa femme sa fille M. de Élisabeth, Mme. de Tourzelle, et un garde du corps portant le Dâuphin, vont rejoindre le fiacre, qui les attend au guichet de Marigny*, Bibliothèque National; accessed April 12, 2015. ftp://ftp.bnf.fr/841/N8411366_JPEG_1_IDM.jpg.

⁴⁴ Lever, 250.

alluded to the forthcoming flight in a lengthy letter to her exiled lady-in-waiting, the Marquise de Raigecourt. She wrote:

Nous prenons si peu de précautions, que je crois que nous serons ici lorsque le premier coup de tambour se fera entendre. Si les choses sont menées sagement, je ne crois pas qu'il y ait un vrai danger. Je ne suis pas décidée sur ce que je ferai; mais, jusqu'à ce moment, je ne vois pas jour à prendre congé de ma chère patrie. Cependant, je ne réponds pas que cela n'arrive au premier jour. N'en parle à personne au monde. . . . Plus le moment approche, et plus je dois comme toi, de la plus grande incrédulité. Cependant, les nouvelles de Θ [Comte d'Artois] sont satisfaisantes. Tout le monde dit que les Principautés sont coalisées pour nous. Je le désire vivement, et peut-être trop vivement.⁴⁵

The significance of what the princess wrote was twofold, beginning with informing her devoted friend that even though she would deny if ever asked, she may actually bid farewell to her beloved country at some point in the future.

Moreover, the surreptitious coded reference to her emigrated brother was of greater significance. It indicated the princess' awareness of d'Artois's actions in the rallying of the émigrés and the lobbying of foreign powers to mount a counterrevolution. These activities, as some have observed, put Louis XVI in grave danger, his rebelling subjects readily aware themselves of d'Artois's posturing. This truth dynamically fueled the popular suspicion that the Comte acted with his brother's secret approval.⁴⁶ Ultimately, d'Artois's activities beyond France's borders not only compromised Louis XVI, but their sister as well, lending credence to the notion that she was party to her distant brother's conspiracies. Her private letter to the Marquise before the flight validated it. At the same time, her joining her brother and his family in

⁴⁵ Madame Élisabeth to Mme. de Raigecourt, 11 mai 1791. Reprinted in *Correspondence de Madame Élisabeth*, 273, 275. *Life and Letters* contains a partial translation of this letter, but it is misdated and reverses the two passages. See 62-63.

⁴⁶ Munro Price, *The Road from Versailles*, 122-23.



Fig 5.5. Anon. *Enjambée de la sainte famille des Thuilleries à Montmidy*. 1791. Engraving.⁴⁷ their abortive escape rendered Madame Élisabeth as complicit in her brother's treasonous betrayal, a truth itself reiterated by her inclusion in the derisive print titled *Enjambée de la sainte famille des Thuilleries à Montmidy* [Fig. 5.5]

Whereas it took hours for the royal family to reach the frontier, their return to Paris took several days. The captured caravan was detoured and parade through the communities of Epernay, Dormans, and Château-Thierry. Upon word of the king's arrest at Varennes, the National Assembly dispatched three of its members to meet up with the now heavily guarded entourage. Joined by an adjutant-general of the army, Mathieu Dumas, the more moderate Antoine Barnave and Marie-Charles de Latour-Maubourg, and the more radical Jérôme Pétionnet up with the procession along the banks of the Marne west of Epernay. Barnave first

⁴⁷ *Enjambée de la sainte famille des Thuilleries à Montmidy*, Bibliothèque nationale; accessed April 4, 2015. ftp://ftp.bnf.fr/694/N6947753_JPEG_1_1.jpg. Note the woman with the holding a necklace beneath Marie-Antoinette's skirt is identified as Jeanne de la Motte.

read to the king and then to crowd accompanying him a decree from the Assembly stating the men's commission to ensure the royal family's safe return to the capital. For the next two days, Barnave and Pétion rode in the carriage with Louis XVI, Marie-Antoinette, their children, and Madame Élisabeth as the expanding cortege of rural peasants, guardsmen, and onlookers slowly moved toward Paris. The royal family was reinstated in the Tuileries on June 25, 1791.⁴⁸

The future mayor of Paris and associate of Maximilien Robespierre, Pétion later recounted the journey in his memoirs. He mentioned Madame Élisabeth on several occasions, suggesting in one instance that the princess blatantly flirted with him, her intentions being less than pure. Once again she was the instigator, a woman whose innocence could no longer disguise her base sexual nature:

Madame Élisabeth me fixait avec des yeux attendri, avec cet air de langueur que le malheur donne et qui inspire un assez vit intéri-êt. Nos yeux se rencontraient quelquefois avec une espèce d'intelligence et d'attraction; la nuit se fermait, la lune commençait à répandre cette claret douce. Madame Élisabeth prit Madame sur -son genou, moitié sur le mien; sa tête fiit soutenue par ma main, puis par la sienne. Madame s'endormit, j'allongeai mon bras, Madame Élisabeth allongea le sien sur le nrien. (Nos bras étaient enlacés, le mien touchait sous son aisselle. Je sentais des mouvements qui se précipitaient, une chaleur qui traversait les vêtements ; les regards de Madame Élisabeth me semblaient plus touchants. J'apercevais un certain abandon dans son maintien, ses yeux étaient humides, la mélancolie se mêlait à une espèce de volupté. Je puis me tromper, on peut facilement confondre la sensibilité du malheur avec la sensibilité du plaisir, mais je pense que si nous eussions été seuls, que si, comme par enchantement, tout le monde eût disparu, elle se serait laissée aller dans mes bras et se serait abandonnée aux mouvements de la nature.⁴⁹

Pétion's recollection operated not only to disparage the princess' character, but also to highlight the *verite* that she too was a threat to the Revolution. He continued, commenting on how he politely rebuffed her advances:

⁴⁸ Price, 187-190; Tackett, 76-85.

⁴⁹JérômePétion, *Mémoires inédits de Pétion et memoires de Buzot et de Barbarous accompagnés de notes inédites de Buzot et de nombreux documents inédits sur Barbaroux, Buzot, Brissot, etc.* (Paris: Plon; 1866), 195.

Elle entrecoupait quelquefois mots de manière a me troubler. Je lui répondais avec une égale douceur, mais cependant sans faiblesse, avec un genre d'aus térité qui n'avait rien de farouche. Je me gardais bien de compro mettre mon caractère; je donnais tout ce qu'il fallait dans la position dans laquelle je croyais la voir, mais sans néanmoins donner assez pour qu'elle put penser, meme soupçonner que rien n'altérât jamais mon opinion, . . .⁵⁰

The Republican's self-aggrandizement cannot be missed. He resisted the advances of a royal woman who sought to sexually undermine the Revolution through him. While his assertion that the princess attempted to seduce him was a minor, marginal tale within a much larger one of self-representation, the story itself was suspect with its mediocre verbiage and a semi-licitious discourse which mirrored aspects of *La Rendez-Vous de Madame Élisabeth*. A pious and relatively private woman before the summer of 1789, Pétion's anecdote was one among a limited number of representations which increasingly recalled to the minds of the French that Madame Élisabeth was a woman in the public sphere of politics.

Multiple representations depicting the royal family's aborted escape and subsequent return appeared in the following months. Of note in a number of these images was the caricaturing of Louis XVI as an animal with a human head. Whereas bestial caricatures of Marie-Antoinette predated the Revolution, the queen frequently depicted as a panther, ostrich, or harpy, neither Louis XVI nor his sister were depicted in this manner until the Flight to Varennes. Before *Les Animaux rares: ou la translation de la ménagerie royale au Temple* [Fig. 1.5] transformed Madame Élisabeth into a sheep with a haughty profile and her brother into a stuffed turkey, the entire royal family became the lowest and most vile animals of all in *La famille des*

⁵⁰Pétion, 195-196. In her all too brief analysis of this passage, Chéry links it to references about Mme. Élisabeth's voluptuousness in relation to her 1782 portrait by Vigée-Lebrun. She does though comment on how for his part, Pétion did not let the princess' "universal reputation" stop him from making aspersions against her character. See Aurore Chéry, "La vertu de Madame Elisabeth: Montreuil, un anti-Trianon?," 29.



Fig. 5.6. Anon. *La famille des cochons ramené dans l'étable*. 1791. Engraving.⁵¹

cochons ramené dans l'étable[Fig. 5.6].⁵² As Lynn Hunt notes, this engraving and all the other ones just like it were part of the Bourbon monarchy's ongoing desacralization, a process which began in the middle of the Eighteenth Century, and ones that prepared the way for the eventual destruction of Louis XVI's physical and mystical bodies.⁵³

Much as the slanderous *Vente nationale de la ménagerie royale* played with words, referring to Madame Élisabeth as a "femelle," a term which either meant "female" or "cow," and the *Description of the Royal Menagerie of Living Animals* referred to her as an "evil slut," *La*

⁵¹ *La famille des cochons ramené dans l'étable*, Bibliothèque nationale; accessed April 4, 2015. ftp://ftp.bnf.fr/841/N8411390_JPEG_1_1.jpg. The individuals in this engraving are identified by the BN as Louis XVI, Marie-Antoinette, Louis XVII, the duchesse d' Angoulême, and Louis XVIII. As noted

beforehand, the Comte de Provence (Louis XVIII) successfully crossed the border into neighboring Belgium on the night of June 20-21, 1791; hence, this image contained and broadcasted misinformation.

⁵² Annie Duprat, "Le Langage des Signes: Le Bestiaire dans la Caricature Révolutionnaire," *History of European Ideas*, 16: 1-3 (1993): 202.

⁵³ Hunt, *The Family Romance*, 49-52.

famille des cochons and similar engravings indicate the continued depreciation in Madame Élisabeth's image after the Revolution's outbreak. Representing her as a sow in the wagon with the other pigs who had temporarily escaped their pen was an acceleration in that deterioration and, moreover, endemic of the heightened hostility toward her, her brother, and the entire royal family after their fateful flight. In medieval Christian iconography, swine symbolized the deadly sin of gluttony. References to Louis XVI as a glutton predated the Revolution, but the flight to Varennes sparked an explosion in the nearly sacrilegious cartoons representing him as a fattened pig. In her analysis of this explosion, Annie Duprat regards anecdotes of Louis XVI taking a long lunch at Sainte-Menehould as lending credence to the assumption that he was a glutton, but the metamorphosis in representations of him and or members of his family as beasts with human heads maneuvered to humiliate the royals. Furthermore, the meaning was hardly lost on the French who frequently associated pigs with the butchers who slaughtered them for profit.⁵⁴ Just as with the other members of her family, *La famille des cochons* was not a statement that Madame Élisabeth was destined for slaughter; and yet, the image's deeper meaning made punishing the princess for her treachery actually conceivable.

The Flight to Varennes fundamentally reshaped popular attitudes about Louis XVI and the conceptualization of kingship. Before, he was the "good father" of his people; after, he was not.⁵⁵ The Revolution also served to accelerate the deterioration of attitudes towards his consort, Marie-Antoinette negatively regarded ever since the negotiation of her marriage to Louis. The Austrian archduchess was immediately labeled as the *Austrichienne* upon her arrival at Versailles in 1770. Furthermore, the event itself added to the relentless suspicion that Louis XVI was ever

⁵⁴Duprat, 201-205.

⁵⁵ L. Hunt, "The Rise and Fall of the Good Father," in *The Family Romance of the French Revolution*, 17-52. See also T. Tackett, *When the King Took Flight* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press; 2003).

subject to her threatening feminine authority. As for Madame Élisabeth, her duplicity was hardly marginal in the eyes of the French. It legitimated the libelous discourse that had already begun to describe her as ugly, made her out to be a ferocious and mooching beast, and, worse of all, a less than virtuous woman and a fool.

“If I were king ... “

The reality that Louis XVI's position was even more insecure and ambiguous after the Flight to Varennes was further enhanced by the Comte de Provence's successful escape to Brussels on the same June night. It immediately impacted on the other émigrés, their counterrevolutionary efforts and or designs, and his brother and sister back in Paris. It was as well impacted upon the Baron de Breteuil, appointed Prime Minister-in-exile by Louis XVI and at Marie-Antoinette's suggestion. His diplomatic relations with the European courts on the king's behalf were increasingly compromised with now both Provence and d'Artois leading the counterrevolutionary movement and imprudently negotiating themselves with the foreign powers. More important, Provence immediately ordered Breteuil to desist in his role as Louis XVI's authorized representative, writing to him on July 2, 1792:

..., that the intention of my brother the king is that during his captivity I undertake, in conjunction with the comte d'Artois, everything that may bring about his freedom and the good of the state by negotiation to this end with the Powers for whose help we hope, ... you yourself will be responsible for any action which does not accord with our own.⁵⁶

Louis XVI indeed wrote a *plein pouvoir* which equipped his brothers with limited negotiation powers, but because of his concerns with their temperaments, especially with

⁵⁶ ‘Copie d’une lettre de Monsieur frère du Roi à M. le baron de Breteuil,’ in Marquis de Bombelles diary, unpublished ms, vol. 45, fo. 7, Bombelles papers, Burg Clam, Upper Austria. Quoted and trans. in M. Price, *The Road from Versailles*, 233; 393, n. 4.

d'Artois, he did not grant the sweeping ones which they so desired. Additionally, the king and the queen indicated in their smuggled out correspondence that they wanted the brothers to collaborate with Breteuil and not the former comptroller general, Charles-Alexandre de Calonne. The queen's disdain for the latter was historic and his late-1789 appointment to d'Artois's council concerned the royal couple. Eventually disturbed by the manner in which his brothers handled the negotiations with the armed congress of European powers willing to assist in the counterrevolutionary cause, Louis XVI returned to Breteuil as the diplomat with the authorization to negotiate on his behalf.

The stinging diplomatic fallout between the king and his brothers had repercussions, both within the royal family itself and, more importantly, across France. The revolutionaries continued to perceive the two emigrated princes as acting on Louis XVI's behalf with Provence continuing to communicate with the European sovereigns. He requested their assistance in dealing with the threat that Revolution posed to not only to the Bourbon monarchy and the kingdoms of France and Navarre, but also to their own divinely ordained authorities. To stamp out the revolt in France was to put out the political wildfire before it spread. Meanwhile, d'Artois established a court-in-exile shortly after his emigration and from which he openly proclaimed damnation upon the Assembly and the Revolution which brought it into being. As Marie-Antoinette's letter to Fersen below attests, the court factionalism of the aristocrats, foreign diplomats, and high ecclesiastics which manifested at Versailles in the reigns of Louis XIV and Louis XV found new life within the royal family itself.

Provence's dismissal of Breteuil angered Marie-Antoinette. At the end of October she wrote to the doomed flight's co-planner, Axel de Fersen, venting her frustration with the actions abroad and within the palace itself by her husband's siblings:

Monsieur's [Comte de Provence] letter to the baron [de Breteuil] has astonished and revolted us, but we must have patience and not show our anger too openly at this point; I shall however make a copy and show it to my sister. I am curious to see how she will justify it, given the situation we are in. Our domestic life is hell; with the best will in the world, one can't discuss anything. My sister is so indiscreet, surrounded by intriguers, and above all dominated by her brothers abroad, that we cannot speak to each other, otherwise we would be quarrelling all day.⁵⁷

The fragmentation of the royal feminine voice which Louis XVI achieved through informally exiling Madame Adélaïde to Bellevue in 1774, with Mesdames Sophie and Victoire joining her, and by gifting the Petit Trianon to Marie-Antoinette and Montreuil to Madame Élisabeth, eroded within the expansive confines of the Tuileries. His pre-revolutionary vacillation on how to assert his divine ordained authority, as we have seen, continued inside his new residence. Louis XVI was a king and a man always caught between seeking trusted guidance from his ministers and the conflicting opinions of his loved ones. Mesdames' decision to emigrate over their inability to practice their religion as they so chose attest to this truth. Moreover, the actions of his emigrated brothers comprised his position not only before his subjects, regardless of his oath of allegiance to the Constitution of 1790, but also within the royal family itself. Considering her intransigence, Madame Élisabeth's own political thought was much more in line with Provence and d'Artois; and the failed Flight to Varennes served to only exacerbate the tension between her and her brother's consort as the two women obviously differed on which course of action he should take.

Madame Élisabeth had all the reverence for Louis XVI as a brother and a good father, to both his children and his subjects; but as mentioned beforehand, she had long considered him

⁵⁷ Marie Antoinette to Fersen, 8 July 1791. Reprinted in *Lettres de Marie Antoinette*, ed. M. de la Rocheterie and the marquis de Beaucourt, 2 vols. (Paris: 1895-96), vol. 2, 237. Quoted and trans. in M. Price, *The Road from Versailles*, 237; 393 n. 12.

politically weak and had no difficulty in voicing her concerns in her correspondence with the Marquis and Marquise de Bombelles, and the Marquis and Marquise de Raigecourt. More important, the emigrated ladies-in-waiting served as conduits of information by which the princess shared exclusive knowledge from within the palace with the émigrés. Madame Élisabeth's letters were also expressions of her political voice, especially after the Revolution's outbreak. To read them is to see a woman becoming increasingly more comfortable with her own voice. As her Salon of 1787 portrait attest, she definitely conceived of herself as a political actor before the Revolution's outbreak and in spite of the Salic Law's denial of political authority to her; but it was the royal family's increasingly precarious situation and the rapid deterioration in Louis XVI's position after Varennes which inspired her to act and say as she saw fit, the ever changing situation altering her own positions with the passage of time.

As her letter to the Marquise de Bombelles written in the days after the royal family was moved from Versailles to Paris, Madame Élisabeth's disdain for the Revolution set in early and became deeply entrenched as it encroached upon her brother's authority, her royal status, and their sacred religious faith. These were their birthright as bearers of royal blood, the sainted Louis IX being the most illustrious of their ancestors. But as the National Assembly "bullied" Louis XVI into agreeing with the measures which abolished aristocratic privilege and subjected the Gallican Church to the new government's authority, she refused to be silent.

Perhaps the most incontrovertible statement of Madame Élisabeth's political voice is in her letter to the Marquise de Bombelles dated May 1, 1790. The princess wrote:

You are much more perfect than I am; I consider civil war as necessary. In the first place, I think it already exists; because, every time a kingdom is divided into two parties, every time the weaker party can only save its life by letting itself be despoiled, it is impossible, I think, not to call that civil war.

Moreover, anarchy never can end without it; the longer it is delayed, the more blood will be shed. That is my principle; and *if I were king* (my emphasis) it would be my guide; and perhaps it would avert evils. But as, God be thanked, I do not govern, I content myself, while approving my brother's projects, with telling him incessantly that he cannot be too cautious and that he ought to risk nothing.

I am surprised that the step he took on the 4th of February [declared his love for the Constitution before the Constituent Assembly] has not done him great harm in the eyes of the foreigners. I hope, nevertheless, that it has not discouraged our allies, and that they will at last take pity on us. Our stay here is great injury to our prospects. I would give all the world to be out of Paris. It will be very difficult, but still, I hope it may come about. Though I thought for a moment that we did right in coming to Paris, I have long changed my mind. If we had known, my heart, how to profit by that moment, be sure that we could then have done great good. But it needed firmness; it need not to fear that the provinces would rise against the capital; it need that we should face dangers; had we done so, we should have issued victors.⁵⁸

Plenty of royal and aristocratic women over the course of French history considered themselves as holding dominion over their kings, the Marquise de Pompadour and the Comtesse du Barry amongst them; but only a princess of France with sacred royal blood coursing through her veins could conceive of herself as being king. Astutely seeing that France had plunged into a civil war, she expressed relief that she was not king because she knew that the manner in which she would handle it could only lead to great suffering and bloodshed, things which no ruler of a kingdom, and especially not a pious and virtuous one, should want for their subjects. Furthermore, her accounting for the denial of political authority to her on account of her sex is extraordinary. She saw it divinely ordained by God above and not by the Salic Law, the latter man-made construction essentially reinforcing the holy truth and the former legitimating her submission beneath her brother's patriarchal authority. Neither one though prevented her from regarding Louis XVI as a weak ruler and questioning the manner in which he ruled. The

⁵⁸ Elisabeth de France to the Marquise de Bombelles, 1 May 1790. Reproduced and trans. in *Life and Letters of Madame Élisabeth*, 46-47. (misdated). Also letter is reprinted in *Correspondance de Madame Élisabeth*, 159-60.

thought was almost treasonous but her sex excused her. As she told her former lady-in-waiting, it still did not prevent her from giving her unsolicited guidance to her brother. Her aunt Adélaïde had done so in their youth and her sister-in-law increasingly did as well. Acknowledging her own political agency, Madame Élisabeth acted with a profound sense of righteousness.

Several of the princess' biographers make reference to this letter, especially the statement "si j'étois roi," each one regarding it differently than the other. Antoine Ferrand, author of the first actual biography, *Éloge funèbre de Madame Élisabeth* (1795), leads up to the passage by praising princess for wisely perceiving the political situation in France and even suggest that she should be applauded for it; but he as well ignores the borderline treasonous speech in her statement, explaining that she felt very safe in freely expressing herself to a long time friend.⁵⁹ The Marquise de Bombelles would never betray her to Louis XVI; but one must be reminded that while in exile, she associated with other émigrés and her husband had an active role in the royalists' ongoing negotiations with the European powers.⁶⁰ Furthermore, she was one of the conduits by which the princess transmitted information and guidance to her brothers, both of men continuing to regard themselves as their brother's representatives when they were not.

Meanwhile, two of Madame Élisabeth's most recent biographers have also examined the statement. In *Le Sacrifice du Soir* (2010), Jean de Viguerie analyzes "Si j'étois Roi" in terms of the princess' preceding statement on civil war being necessary in order to right France and how that contradicted Louis XVI's intentions since he did not want to make the same mistake as Charles I, the English sovereign who chose civil war over reconciliation with Parliament and

⁵⁹ Antoine Ferrand, *Éloge funèbre de Madame Elisabeth* (Ratisbonne: Chez Jean Baptiste Rottermundt; 1795), 84-85.

⁶⁰ M. Price, *The Road from Versailles*, 46. For further insight into the closeness of the Bombelles marriage, see Marc Bombelles, marquis de, and Angélique de Mackau Bombelles, marquise de, "*Que je suis heureuse d'être ta femme*": *letters intimes, 1778-1782*, ed. Evelyne Lever (Paris: Tallandier; 2009).

eventually lost his head. De Viguerie explains the following statement not in relation to the denial of political authority to all French women by virtue of the Salic Law. Instead he sees it in terms of the princess having a difference of opinion with her brother but out of respect for his sacred nature, she would not directly question or contract him.⁶¹ As for the other recent biography (*Madame Élisabeth, Soeur de Louis XVI*; 2013), Anne Bernet writes of the statement, “Remarquable déclaration d'intention où la princesse se montrait sous son vrai jour. C'était elle qui parlait en homme, et en roi.” Bernet sees it as Madame Élisabeth recognizing that while the Constitution deprived Louis XVI of much of his authority, and herself of financial independence, it did render unto her the liberty to finally recognized that she too was a political actor. The Constitution transformed her into “La citoyenne Élisabeth de Bourbon, ou Capet,” and gave her the freedom to choose which appellation she preferred.⁶² She preferred neither.

Both Bernet's and de Viguerie's assessments are misguided because they fail to take into consideration Madame Élisabeth's own awareness of her own political agency and voice prior to the Revolution. As one of the privileged individuals with ready access to the definitive political body in the land before 1789, the princess had never been opposed to asserting her influence upon Louis XVI in order to attain what she wanted, including securing positions for the spouses of her closest associates. She also was long acquainted with Madame Adélaïde's unabashed manner of voicing her own political opinions, the king's aunt regularly providing solicited and unsolicited guidance. It caused irritation, especially for Marie-Antoinette as her husband increasingly relied on her more as trusted ministers and advisers emigrated. In some regards Louis XVI's persistent vacillation had to do with his inability to get away from the persons who had always had his ear. More important, the essential difference in how Madame Élisabeth

⁶¹ J. de Viguerie, *Le Sacrifice du Soir*, 83-84.

⁶² A. Bernet, *Madame Élisabeth*, 234-38.

conceived of herself as a political actor after 1789 had to do with how the Revolution impinged upon the liberties she had become accustomed to before its outbreak. It was Louis XVI's weakness in dealing with the revolutionaries and his failure to make a more concerted effort to restore his absolute authority, and thereby her freedoms, which ultimately motivated Madame Élisabeth to act in contradiction to her brother via her correspondence and to momentarily imagine herself upon his throne.

Madame Élisabeth's correspondence after the royal family's re-incarceration in the palace is not without the ethos of the princess being resigned to her fate. She did not consider herself to be a prisoner, but did regard her position as annoying, with the constant supervision of the National Guard and surveillance of discontented Parisians. With the Tuileries gardens secured by sentinels everywhere, the princess escaped the tension inside the palace by spending hours walking through them, as much as three to four hours a day. Because of the muddy conditions, she wore through pairs of shoes rather quickly. This fact is supported by the curious receipts in the archives from a Parisian shoemaker between April and late June 1792 which show the princess went through a pair every two to three days.⁶³

As for her correspondence with the Marquises de Bombelles and Raigecourt, she continued to write to the two women who she lovingly nicknamed "Bomb" and "Rage," but relied increasingly on euphemisms and symbols to discuss all three of her brothers. She also utilized "white" invisible ink and confessed that upon her return to the Tuileries, she burned the letters and papers which she no longer cared "to have read."⁶⁴ She knew all too well that their contents could implicate her, due to the disdain for the Revolution contained therein. She

⁶³*Life & Letters of Madame Élisabeth*, 313.

⁶⁴ Madame Élisabeth to Marquise de Raigecourt, 12 October 1791. Reproduced and trans. in *Life and Letters of Madame Élisabeth*, 73.

continued to update the two on the Assembly's proceedings, interjecting the news with her own biased perspective, but the tone of the letters is much more somber as she asked her recipients to speak with Provence and d'Artois on her behalf. She hoped that the European powers who act on behalf of her brother, but her other two handled the matter concerned her. She was becoming all the more aware that their emigrated status and the manner in which they handled the negotiations compromised not just Louis XVI's position inside his kingdom, but hers as well.

She did write to her brothers with her tone definitely cautious in order not to raise any suspicion. A letter sent to the Comte de Provence shortly after his successful escape effuses thankfulness that he safely made it out of France, the princess commenting, "Dieu veut au moins votre salut. Voilà ce que je desire le plus." Additionally, the princess hopes he will have a pleasant reunion with the others soon, but she advises that he tell the Comtesse to watch what she says so as not to expose herself.⁶⁵ In regards to her other brother, she eventually took it upon herself to write him regards to how, from afar, he spoke of and acted towards Louis XVI and Marie-Antoinette after the fallout between the brothers in the autumn of 1791. What d'Artois said and did became especially concerning after the Convention decreed in early 1792 that all the émigrés were traitors, stripped them of their titles, and immediately moved to confiscate their abandoned properties. On February 19, 1792, Madame Élisabeth wrote to her "dear" brother, informing him in the politest phraseology that he's actions concerned her:

I believe, I who am here on the spot, that you are unjust towards that person [Marie-Antoinette]; you have not at bottom a better friend. ... This estrangement is on all sides a calamity and a suffering; for it casts shadows where friendship

⁶⁵ Madame Élisabeth to *Monsieur*, Comte de Provence, 4 Juillet 1791. Reprinted in *Correspondence de Madame Élisabeth*, 304-305.

ought to shine. ... you will never find a truer, tenderer, more devoted friend than I am to you.⁶⁶

Three days later the princess wrote to her brother again:

..., I promised to add a few words to one I wrote you three days ago, and I am too sincerely your friend not to do so.

I think that the son [Comte d'Artois] has too much severity towards his mother-in-law [the Queen]. She has not the faults for which he blames her. I think she may have listened to suspicious advice; but she bears the evils that overwhelm her with strong courage; and she should be pitied far more than blamed, for she has good intentions. She tries to fix the vacillations of the father (*incertitudes du père*) [Louis XVI], who, to the misfortune of the family, is no longer master, and – I know not if God wills that I deceive myself, but – I greatly fear that she will be one of the first victims of what is taking place, and my heart is too wrung with that presentiment to allow me to blame her.

God is good; He will not suffer discord to continue in a family to which unity and good understanding would be so useful. I shudder when I think of it; it deprives me of sleep, for discord will kill us all. You know the difference in habits and societies that your sister had always had with the mother-in-law; in spite of that she feels drawn to her when she sees her unjustly accused, and when she looks the future in the face. It is very unfortunate that the son has not been willing, or perhaps able, to win over the intimate friend of the mother-in-law's brother [Comte de Mercy, former Austrian ambassador to France]. That old fox is tricking her; and the son ought to have taken the duty upon himself, if possible, and made the sacrifice of being on terms with him in order to foil him and prevent an evil which has now become alarming. Of two evils, the least. All men of his sort frighten men; they have intellect, but what good is it to them? Heart is needed as well, and they have none. They have nothing but intrigue; into which it is unfortunate that they drag so many persons. Others should have been shred than they. ...

The idea of the [Austrian] emperor racks me: if he makes war upon us there will be an awful explosion. May God watch over us! ... It is only God who can change our fate, make the vertigo of this nation (good at bottom) cease, and restore it to health and peace.⁶⁷

The rift between her brothers troubled her but it was how d'Artois handled himself which concerned her more, especially as revolutionary France moved closer to war with the European

⁶⁶ Madame Élisabeth to the Comte d'Artois, 19 February 1792. Reproduced and trans. in *Life & Letters of , Madame Élisabeth*, 76; reprinted in *Correspondence de Madame Élisabeth*, 391. *Correspondence* indicates that the letter was sent via M. le vicomte de Fontenay. I identify “that person” as the queen on the use of “amie” in the following clause.

⁶⁷ Madame Élisabeth to the Comte d'Artois, 23 février 1792. Reproduced and trans. in *Life and Letters of Madame Élisabeth*, 77-79; reprinted in *Correspondence de Madame Élisabeth*, 394-96.

Powers. The prior August Leopold II of Austria (Marie-Antoinette's brother) and Frederic William II of Prussia issued the Declaration of Pillnitz, suggesting the very possibility of foreign intervention in the restoration of Louis XVI's absolute authority. The revolutionaries were further concerned about the large presence of the émigrés in the two rulers territories; and furthermore, the fact that the king's two brothers were amongst them, openly and actively conspiring against the Revolution, was of an even greater concern. No matter what the two men did, their actions were ultimately seen as treasonous. Moreover, and where Madame Élisabeth is concerned, communicating with either one of them was as well, no matter her expression of France's profound goodness, nor her hopes to set d'Artois on the course which she saw as more true.

Two months after her lengthy letter to the Comte d'Artois, the Legislative Assembly declared war on Austria (April 20, 1792). The dark cloud of suspicion hung lower over the Tuileries as the revolutionaries increasingly speculated over the dealings of the palace's inhabitants with their foreign relations, i.e. the Queen with her emperor brother and her Austrian associates, and with their emigrated friends and family, i.e. Louis XVI and his sister with their brothers. The mistrust of Madame Élisabeth was furthered by her continued correspondence with her former ladies-in-waiting and through them, her brothers. To communicate with them was to conspire with the Revolution's enemies and to plot against the people with the intent of annihilating liberty and restoring the tyranny of despotism. The hatred of Madame Élisabeth was never as intense as that toward her foreign-born sister-in-law; but as a woman whose body was from birth perpetually located in the public sphere of royal politics, the liberated French regarded her more and more as someone who could not be trusted.

In the months to follow Madame Élisabeth commenced to address some of her letters to a Madame de Schwarzenwald. This was the pseudonym the princess gave to the Marquise de Bombelles, her friend at that time residing in Switzerland. On May 17, 1792, the princess wrote of her sadness over the losses experienced by the counterrevolutionary war efforts, but she still believed that they would all have their revenge someday. She as well apologized to her “Bombe” about Louis XVI’s reliance on the Marquis in his diplomatic dealings with the European powers and what a sacrifice it must be on the couple. Madame Élisabeth wrote, “Dieu te récompensera de ce sacrifice, mon Coeur, car tu le lui offriras, et il rend au centuple ce quel’on fait pour lui.”⁶⁸ Madame Élisabeth once again spoke of her side’s losses in a letter to “Bombe,” noting that were not as bad as those experienced by the side of the revolutionaries, “les méchants (car il y en a partout).”⁶⁹ The Revolution repulsed her.

With regard to the Marquise de Raigecourt, the princess was not as elusive in addressing her letters to her, but some of the information contained therein provided the counterrevolutionary with valuable intelligence. In a letter dated 18 July 1792 and sent to her friend who was then in residence in bordering Luxembourg, Madame Élisabeth revealed that since the atmosphere in Paris had quieted a bit, three regiments and two battalions of the Swiss guards in the capital were to decamp to Soissons. She also mentions the efforts to raise federal troop numbers. They currently stood at 1,500, but the hope was for 20,000.⁷⁰ A week later she wrote to “Rage” on how some tried to force the gates of the palace but the National guardsmen repelled their efforts. She added, “There is talk of suspending the executive power to pass the

⁶⁸ Madame Élisabeth to Mme. de Bombelles, sous le nom de Mme. de Schwarzenwald, 17 mai 1792. Reprinted in *Correspondance de Madame Élisabeth*, 408-409.

⁶⁹ Madame Élisabeth to Mme. de Bombelles, 19 juillet 1792. Reprinted in *Correspondance de Madame Élisabeth*, 425-426.

⁷⁰ Madame Élisabeth to Mme. de Raigecourt, 18 juillet 1792. Reprinted in *Correspondance de Madame Élisabeth*, 424-25.

time. To pass mine is another manner I go, in the mornings, for three of four hours into the garden.”⁷¹ Also, and of some significance, the princess sent along with several of her letters notes written in a numeric code. They requested of both “Rage” and her husband that her letters be passed onto her brother, the Comte d’Artois. The last of these asked, “Toujours pour M. Ø [d’Artois] j’exige que vous me disiez qui vous a defend de m’écire, et la raison quel’on en donne.”⁷²

On 8 August 1792 she opened a letter to Madame Raigecourt with the following salutation:

J’ail’honneur de souhaiter le bonjour à madame de Raigecourt, et, à la agonie de mon titre de soeur du pouvoir executive, de lui faire mon compliment sur le nouveau citoyen actif ques a belle-soeur vient de mettre au monde.⁷³

For a Princess of France to be transformed in a *citoyenne* through the will of others whose authority she regarded as illegitimate was an agonizing abomination. Meanwhile, two days later she once again wrote to Madame de Schwarzenwald and in reply to her friend’s request of news. The princess wrote that it was very hot in the capital; but of more importance, the transfer of the Swiss guards to Soissons was still in question. Although relatively tranquil at the moment, the maintenance of order inside the capital still hung in the balance.⁷⁴ This letter was dated 10 August 1792, the date of the Bourbon monarchy’s much feared and eventual fall.

⁷¹ Madame Élisabeth to Mme. de Raigecourt, 25 juillet 1792. Reproduced and trans. in *Life & Letters of Madame Élisabeth*, 89; *Correspondance de Madame Élisabeth*, 428.

⁷² Madame Élisabeth to Mme. de Raigecourt, sans date. Reprinted with code and translation in *Correspondance de Madame Élisabeth*, 430.

⁷³ Madame Élisabeth to Mme. de Raigecourt, 8 août 1792. Reprinted in *Correspondance de Madame Élisabeth*, 430-31.

⁷⁴ Madame Élisabeth to Mme. de Bombelles, sous le nom de Mme. de Schwarzenwald, 10 août 1792. Reprinted in *Correspondance de Madame Élisabeth*, 431-32.

The engraving titled *L'Egout royal* depicts the royal family as crawling through a Parisian sewer while the mayor, Jean-Sylvain Bailly, shits [Fig 5.7]. Madame Élisabeth stands just behind the gargantuan Louis XVI with her voluptuous bosom and rounded posterior exposed. She says, "Quickly, get behind my brother," Louis following his consort through the muck as the queen grabs their son's hand. Undoubtedly this engraving, like the aforementioned *Enjambée de la sainte famille des Tuileries à Montmidy*, is an expression of the contemporaneous suspicion by the French, even by members of the royal family, that Marie-Antoinette was in the lead on all of her husband's affairs. In terms of this analysis, this engraving reveals one of the many ways in which Madame Élisabeth figured in the revolutionary consciousness, especially as the royal family's supposed Sainte Geneviève was over time replaced by an unattractive figure who deserved to be mocked.

Born into the monarchical sphere of politics, royal blood in her veins, Madame Élisabeth was always fully aware that she was a political actor. Political authority may have been denied to her but, as a princess of France, she was not without political voice and influence. Her brother's subjects were well aware of this before 1789, but the rather private manner in which she lived prior to the Revolution never raised suspicion. The French were much more obsessed with word of Marie-Antoinette's scandalous lifestyle at the Petit Trianon that it was easy for them to conceive of the king's sister as good and charitable, her religious devotion not going completely unnoticed. Once moved to the Tuileries, to where her brother's subjects could get to know her better, a number of the French found they did not like the woman who they formerly thought of as beautiful. She did not like them as well. Moreover, she despised the Revolution which gave the people liberty. It stole hers outright and she daily prayed for its restoration.



Fig. 5.7. Anon. *L'Égout royal (The Royal Sewer)*. 1791. Engraving.⁷⁵

⁷⁵ *L'Égout royal (The Royal Sewer)*, Bibliothèque nationale; accessed April 4, 2015. ftp://ftp.bnf.fr/841/N8411367_JPEG_1_IDM.jpg.

**CHAPTER 6. MADAME ÉLISABETH AND THE MAKING OF
THE LAST ROYAL SPECTACLE**

In what would be Madame Élisabeth's last letter to Madame de Raigecourt, the woman for whom she forfeited five years of New Year's gifts from her brother beginning in 1784 just so this lady-in-waiting could remain at court, the princess mentions that there is talk in Paris that Louis XVI is going to leave to the Tuileries palace and take up residence in the Hôtel de Ville. There was as well talk of a possible movement in the French capital. She wrote:

Y crois-tu? Pour moi, je n'en crois rien; je crois à du bruit, mais sans résultat. Voilà ma profession de foi. Au reste, tout est aujourd'hui d'un calme parfait. La journée d'hier s'est passée de meme, et, quoiqu'il soit de bonne heure, je crois que celle-ci l'imitera.¹

On the surface, the princess' letter described the atmosphere in Paris as almost peaceful but not without its speculative mutterings, rumor consistently being the fuel which ignited popular unrest since the Revolution's outbreak in 1789. Beneath the surface, and with serious consideration of Mme. Élisabeth's by then long pattern of euphemistically speaking of her brother's inability to act, one reads a lament that the days passed one day after another inside the palace with no change and no hope that it would ever come about. On the other hand, one hears in this utterance of Louis XVI's maneuverings and machinations which both he and his consort hoped would move the war with Austria in their favor, the conflict absolutely necessary for the restoration of his absolute authority over his kingdom.² Unforeseen to Madame Élisabeth, though, the "mouvement très-fort" which ultimately forced Louis XVI to move was not what she or he truly expected. Her letter was dated August 8, 1792.

¹ Madame Élisabeth to Mme. de Raigecourt, 8 Août 1792. Reprinted in *Correspondance de Madame Élisabeth*, 430-31.

² The Legislative Assembly declared war on Austria on April 20, 1792. It did so in part to contend with the ongoing conspiring of the émigrés, especially the Comtes de Provence and d'Artois, with the queen's brother(s) and her Austrian homeland against France.



Fig. 6.1. Pierre Bouillon, designer; Jean-Baptiste V érité, engraver. *Dévouement de M.de Élisabeth dans la journée du 20 juin 1792*. 1794. Engraving.³

Seven weeks prior, on the anniversary of the royal family's doomed flight, a mob of sans-culottes swarmed the Tuileries to protest the king's vetoing of measures which would have strengthened France's war effort. The palace was subsequently invaded with a portion of the intruders charging through the corridors and demanding the head of the *Austrichienne*. One of the anecdotes which emerged from that night was of the princess's unwillingness to abandon her brother as he faced the mob [Fig. 6.1]. Responding to their repeated demands for Marie-Antoinette's head, Madame Élisabeth approached the attackers, presented her chest to their

³ *Dévouement de M. de Élisabeth dans la journée du 20 juin 1792*, Gallica, Bibliothèque nationale; accessed April 28, 2015. <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b6948702p/f1.highres>. Note, the BN gives the full title of this engraving as *Dévouement de M.de Elisabeth dans la journée du 20 juin 1792 : des scélérats crient : où est la Reine ? nous voulons sa tête ! La princesse Elisabeth qui n'avait pas voulu quitter son frère dans ce danger, se tourne vers ces assassins, présente sa poitrine à leurs poignards, et leur dit avec fermeté : la voici la Reine...*

daggers, and hoped that they would take her for the queen. A brave and noble offering no less and one of which word of spread quickly, the *Mercure de France* reporting that the princess said with an admirable tranquility, “S’ils pouvaient me prendre pour la Reine , on auroît le temps de la sauver.”⁴ In the princess’ own description of the incident, in a letter to Mme. de Raigecourt, she does not mention her sacrificial offering, one of her more recent biographers attributing its absence to Mme. Élisabeth’s modesty.⁵ For the woman who had stated she had no taste for martyrdom a few years before, others characterization of her as one began some time before her actual demise. She did though relate to her beloved aunts, “The future seems an abyss, from which we can only issue by a miracle of Providence!”⁶

On the morning of August 10 a crowd of militant revolutionaries converged on the Tuileries. The uprising had been planned for over a month by radical journalists and the sans-culotte leadership with the intent of removing Louis XVI from power and thereby forcing the writing of a new constitution. In the melee the king and his family left behind the protection of the Swiss Guard inside the palace and took refuge inside the Legislative Assembly. Fighting broke out with the outnumbered guards firing on the insurgents, killing over a hundred; and the sans-culottes murdered those guards who fell into their hands. The Legislative Assembly quickly suspended Louis XVI’s authority and immediately called for the election of the National Convention. It as well scrapped the Constitution of 1791 and granted the right to vote to all adult men. When the National Convention convened in the following weeks, at the end of September,

⁴ M. de. La Harpe, ed., *Mercure de France*, Part 1 (1792), 137. Available at:

<https://books.google.com/books?id=ICc0AAAAMAAJ&printsec=frontcover#v=onepage&q&f=false>.

⁵Madame Élisabeth to Mme. de Raigecour, 3 juillet 1792. Reprinted in *Correspondance de Madame Élisabeth*, 416-21; J. de Viguerie, *Le Sacrifice du Soir: Vie et mort de Madame Elisabeth, soeur de Louis XVI*, 112.

⁶ Madame Élisabeth to the Abbe de Lubersac, 25 June 1792. Reproduced and trans. *Life and Letters of Madame Élisabeth*, 84.

it proclaimed France a republic and by doing so abolished the monarchy. Madame Élisabeth thereby underwent another metamorphosis, from a princess of France to the *citoyenne* Élisabeth Capet.

August 10, 1792 marks the beginning of the French Revolution's radical phase. Incarcerated in the medieval keep of the Temple with her brother and his family on August 13th (see above, Fig. 1.5), Madame Élisabeth's future was as abysmal as she feared months beforehand. Not to say that she foresaw her eventual annihilation, the royal family completely cut off from the rest of the world while under the supervision of the Parisian municipal government, but as her niece recounted, she appeared resigned to her fate when the guards came to collect her on a dreary night in early May 1794. What follows examines Madame Élisabeth's "Temple" visage in the Revolution's ongoing political culture, followed by her appearance before the Revolutionary Tribunal, then her execution, and her subsequent apotheosis. Without the former three, the latter would not have occurred, the largely marginalized "real" princess and her traitorous evil doubles momentarily taking center stage in the radical revolutionary discourse before they were ultimately eclipsed by the mythical virgin martyr.

Visualizing the Prisoner in the Temple

On the evening of December 26, 1792 Mary Wollstonecraft wrote to her publisher and friend, Joseph Johnson. Arriving in Paris just days before, she artfully sketched the macabre scene which she witnessed that morning and the nightmarish vision it evoked:

About nine o'clock this morning, the king passed by my window, moving silently along (excepting now and then a few strokes on the drum, which rendered the stillness more awful) through empty streets, surrounded by the national guards, who, clustering around the carriage, seemed to deserve their name. The inhabitants flocked to their windows, but the casements were all shut, not a voice

was heard, nor did I see any thing like an insulting gesture. ... I can scarcely tell you why, but an association of ideas made the tears flow insensibly from my eyes, when I saw Louis sitting, with more dignity than I expected from his character, in a hackney coach, going to meet death, where so many of his race have triumphed. ... I cannot dismiss the lively images that have filled my imagination all the day. –Nay, do not smile, but pity me; for, once or twice, lifting my eyes from the paper, I have seen eyes glare through a glass-door opposite my chair, and bloody hands shook at me. ... I am going to bed—and, for the first time in my life, I cannot put out the candle.⁷

Louis Capet, the former King of France and of Navarre, and formerly the King of the French after 1791, was being transported from the Temple to his trial on the charge of treason. Appearing before the National Convention, the delegates dismissed his defense's claim that it was he who had called the Estates General in 1789, setting the Revolution itself into motion. They unanimously found him guilty on the evidence of his conspiring with the émigrés and the imperial government of his consort's homeland. When it came to the question of his punishment, Louis XVI was sentenced to death by a one vote majority, 360 to 361.⁸ The burning of candles, whether to feel safer in the night or in silent prayer, could not ward off the forces determined to eradicate any and all vestiges of the Old Regime.

In the months following Louis XVI's execution on January 21, 1793, people imagined the transformations in Madame Élisabeth's and Marie-Antoinette's visages. The Polish artist Aleksander Kucharski visited the two women in mourning on several occasions between the end of January and the beginning of April, rendering the women's drawn countenances [Fig. 6.2 and

⁷ Mary Wollstonecraft to Joseph Johnson, 26 December 1792. Reprinted in *The Broadview Anthology of Literature of the Revolutionary Period, 1770-1832*, ed. by D.L. Macdonald and Anne Whir (Buffalo: Broadview Press; 2010), 458.

⁸ Mona Ozouf, "King's Trial," in François Furet and Mona Ozouf, eds., *A Critical Dictionary*, 102-103; and David Jordan, *The King's Trial: Louis XVI vs. the French Revolution* (Berkeley: University of California Press; 1979; 1981), 194.



Fig. 6.2. Aleksander Kucharski. *Madame Élisabeth à la prison du Temple*. 1793. Oil on wood; 64.5 x 53 cm. France; special collection.⁹

Fig. 6.3].¹⁰ Draped in black, the sullen Widow Capet looks out of the portrait at its beholders with haggard eyes as she poses before a stone block wall, a visual reminder unto itself of both her physical location and situation. To its contemporaneous viewers, the reception of this piece split between deep sympathy for the aged woman it represented and visually witnessing the emaciation and caging of a reviled beast. The woman who struggled to improve upon her troubled public image through the official representations of herself in the Salons of the 1780s was no more, the untimely loss of two of her four children, the abolition of her royal status, the

⁹ *Madame Élisabeth à la prison du Temple*, Exposition Madame Élisabeth, une princesse au destine tragique; accessed April 30, 2015. http://elisabeth.yvelines.fr/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/Kucharski_ELIS_PRISON_TEMPLE.jpg.

¹⁰ Juliette Trey, “Madame Elisabeth à la prison du Temple;” and “Marie-Antoinette à la prison du Temple” in *Madame Élisabeth une princesse au destine tragique* (2013), 64.



Fig. 6.3. Aleksander Kucharski. *Marie-Antoinette à la prison du Temple*. 1793. Oil on canvas; 24 x 18 cm. Musée National du Château, Versailles.¹¹

execution of her husband, and the persistent hatred of those who still considered her to be a “wicked” queen written across her face. Furthermore, the eight-year-old Louis-Charles, the boy who some proclaimed as the King Louis XVII of France while others regarded the child as a potential threat to the Revolution, was abruptly removed from his mother’s care on July 3, 1793. The former queen of France was beyond devastated.

Multiple images appeared depicting the “Prisoners in the Temple,” including of the aforementioned trauma [Fig. 6.4]. Seldom omitted from the depictions of such melodramatic moments, Madame Élisabeth still largely remained on the margins of the scene, from the figure catching her fainting niece in the multiple representations of *Le Dauphin enlevé à sa Mere*, to the

¹¹ *Marie-Antoinette à la prison du Temple*, Chateau de Versailles; accessed April 30, 2015. <http://collections.chateauversailles.fr/#cf640bb4-f8bd-4ed2-b3fc-f156d10b9edf>.



Fig. 6.4. Luigi Schiavonetti, engraver; Domenico Pellegrini, designer. *Le Dauphin enlevé à sa Mere : Le Comité de sureté publique de la Convention nationale ayant rendu le 1 Juillet 1793, un decret qui ordonne que le Dauphin sera separé de sa Mere.* 1794. Engraving; London.¹²

weeping veiled figure leaning over the back of a chair in Roger Viollet's *Les adieux de Louis XVI à sa famille, le 20 janvier 1793* (see above, Fig. 1.3). In these images the princess is almost reduced to a compositional stock figure and one which emulates the distraught, forlorn Classical Roman women represented by Jacques-Louis David in *The Victors Bringing Back to Brutus his Sons* (Salon of 1789) and *Oath of the Horatii* (Salon of 1785). Including the supplicant Madame Élisabeth in other depictions of Louis XVI bidding farewell to his family (see above, Fig. 1.4), such supporting emotive and feminine figures heightened the drama of the tableau while filling out the far right or left edge of the compositional pyramid. The incarcerated actual princess was not the many bodied, duplicitous “paper” one derided during her occupancy in the Tuileries, but

¹² *Le Dauphin enlevé à sa Mere: Le Comité de sureté publique de la Convention nationale ayant rendu le 1 Juillet 1793, un decret qui ordonne que le Dauphin sera separé de sa Mere*, Gallica, Bibliothèque nationale; accessed April 30, 2015. <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b69499107/f1.highres>.

her more recently transformed status perpetuated the representation of her on paper and on canvas, even if it was marginal.

Engravers outside France's borders in England, and in the Italian and German states, produced numerous portraits, historical genre scenes, and allegorical representations of royal family's traumatic final years, all for sale to an interested market of counterrevolutionary sympathizers and émigrés. As Alexandra Wettlaufer shows in her analysis of the Bovi series depicting the final years of Louis XVI, such works were as well items of counterrevolutionary propaganda and ones through which insights into the contemporary ideologies on gender and violence were revealed. They were as well an expression of the fear that the social body was dissolving in the face of the Revolution; and while production of counterrevolutionary engravings was prohibited inside France after the declaration of the Terror, royalist propaganda managed to circulate within its borders. Wettlaufer writes:

Thus, while they functioned on the level of generalized propaganda, presenting an alternate mythology or even hagiography of the royal family, many of these counterrevolutionary engravings, ... , engaged in a complex dialogue with contemporary iconography and the art of the recent past, evoking a series of visual and literary intertexts only to co-opt or subvert them, and thus generate a multivalenced meaning that would resonate equally for royalist viewers in England and in France.¹³

Produced in the period immediately after the National Convention's campaign to purge women from the public sphere of politics, most of these images put the defamed former queen at the center of the tableaux, representing her as a devoted wife and mother, constructing Marie-Antoinette as a martyr. To do so subverted the radical republicans' claims to virtue and family values. Furthermore, the visual strategies employed in each engraving attracted the

¹³ Alexandra K. Wettlaufer, "Absent Fathers, Martyred Mothers: Domestic Drama and (Royal) Family Values in *A Graphic History of Louis the Sixteenth*," *Eighteenth-Century Life* 23 (Nov. 1999): 1, 5.

contemporary beholders' eyes with the expectation of eliciting sympathy for the ruined royal family, especially as it was dismembered one by one.¹⁴ As will be seen later in this chapter, it was only through her dismemberment from the Temple's other prisoners and her decapitation via the guillotine by which Madame Élisabeth was positioned at the center of a macabre scene, the supporting actress given the stage long enough to recall to mind that she too was a martyred figure and the royal woman more deserving of the appellation.

Returning to Kucharski's portrait of Madame Élisabeth, there is nothing particularly original or unique about the manner in which he represented his sitter, this portrait being the former princess' final authentic representation. Her blank expression attempts to evoke in the beholder the sad melancholy the unfortunate princess must be experiencing. While it is unlikely that the artist was permitted enough time to do more than sketch the sitter's countenance, this does not account for the rather bland, unemotional manner in which Madame Élisabeth looks out at her portrait's beholders since as a royal woman, she was not to reveal her true emotions and even when her royal status had been abolished.¹⁵ Furthermore, the styling of her visibly gray hair is akin to the hair worn in a number of her other portraits, including several of the copies made by Labille-Guiard after the princess' Salon of 1787 portrait.¹⁶ As with his portrait of the

¹⁴ Wettlaufer: 6;13; 32. On the visual dismembering of the royal family, see Joan Landes, "Representing the Body Politic: The Paradox of Gender in the Graphic Politics of the French Revolution," in Sara E. Melzer and Leslie W. Rabine, eds., *Rebel Daughters: Women and the French Revolution* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press; 1992), 22-23.

¹⁵ In *La famille royale à Paris, de l'histoire à la légende*, Musée Carnavalet exhibition catalog (Paris: 1994), Jean-Marie Bruson asserts that Kucharski's inability to impart more visible emotion on Marie-Antoinette's face in her portrait was due the limitations on his sessions with her inside the Temple. See Jean-Marie Bruson, "Bénazech, Hauer, Kucharski et quelques autres: les peintres des derniers moments de la famille royale," 139-141.

¹⁶ J. Trey notes this as well in her analysis of the painting but instead of drawing the connection to the Labille-Guiard portrait, she instead refers to a miniature portrait of Mme. Élisabeth which was given to the Marquise de Blangy.

former queen, Kucharski evoked Élisabeth's imprisonment in the Temple through the dark brown background behind her, her physical location mirroring the sorrow of her expression.

After viewing a similar portrait while in exile, the Marquise de Bombelles took note of Élisabeth's visible thinness and lamented to the Marquis de Raigecourt:

I like you had the same information about our poor princess. Her thinness is said to be frightening, but her faith sustains her. She is a consoling angel to the Queen and her children. Hope that neither she nor her family succumb from their many heartaches.¹⁷

Madame Élisabeth and the Making of the Last Royal Spectacle

Marie-Antoinette screams out in the night. She pleads, "Au secours, mes amis, au secours! Qui me délivrera du fantôme qui m'obsède?"¹⁸ This is the queen's first line in the pamphlet titled *Dialogue, Entre un Sans-Culotte, Marie Antoinette, Élisabeth sa soeur, Et l'ombre de Louis Capet* (1793?), a ghoulish tale in which the sans-culotte narrator swears his story is not a dream but an actual scene which he witnessed while guarding the Temple's prisoners. Louis XVI's ghost has returned to torment his consort, his eyes filled with fury and vengeance as he carries a dagger with which to kill. When asked by the sans-culotte as to why he has come, Louis replies that after his death three days beforehand he was transported to the Elysian Fields and upon his arrival he encountered his illustrious predecessors, all of them

¹⁷ Marquise de Bombelles to the Marquis de Raigecourt, 22 Avril 1793, in Raigecourt, Marquis et Marquise, *Correspondance du marquis et de la marquise de Raigecourt avlec le marquis et Marquise de Bombelees, pendant l'émigration 1790-1800* (Paris: Société d'histoire contemporaine; 1892), 389. Quoted in *Madame Élisabeth, un princesse au destin tragique*, 64. Trans. by the author.

¹⁸ Rougemont, *Dialogue, Entre un Sans-Culotte, Marie Antoinette, Elisabeth sa soeur, Et l'ombre de Louis Capet* (Paris: Feret; 1793?), 1. Elsewhere in the revolutionary literature of the post-Temple incarceration period, Madame Élisabeth also briefly appears, two lines only, in the pamphlet titled GRAND DEBAT Dans Les Cachots De La TOUR DU TEMPLE, *Entre un Marseillois, un Lillois et un habitant de Longwy; en presence de Louis l'Esclave, sa coquine et son fils, accompagné d'Elisabeth, soeur du Veto, devant Charles Libre, et veritable Lillois, Patriote à petites moustaches.*

shocked to see him carrying his head like the monarchy's patron saint, St. Denis. Finding him undeserving to be with them in the afterlife, Henry IV expelled him from paradise because he had been too subject to the machinations of his ministers and the crimes of his wife. Louis then remarks, "Ils m'ont blame; ... Ce qui me reste à faire, c'est de venir par votre organe demander à mon peuple un pardon authentique de tous les crimes que je n'ai commis que par les conseils d'une méchante femme, sans laquelle je serais encore le Roi des Français."¹⁹

His shaken wife then finds the composure to validate his expulsion and draws Madame Élisabeth into the discussion. Marie-Antoinette states:

Je crois qu'après ta mort tu m'injuries encore. Va, tu n'as été qu'un lâche pendant ta vie; et les suites demontrent bien que tu n'as pas démenti ton ancien caractère. Ma soeur sait combine de fais j'ai voule te rendre à ta dignité premiere, tu t'y est roujours refuse; tu en as été la victim et tu l'a mérité.²⁰

"Shut up, ferocious beast!" Madame Élisabeth lashes back. She continues:

Tu n'as jamais été qu'une personne dissolue et débordée; et si les Français m'avaient consulté, il y a longtems que tu n'existerais plus : tes infâmes menées, tes prodigalités envers d'Artois et surtout envers tes favoris, ont conduit mon frère à l'échaffaud. Sans toi, paisible sur son trône il dicterait encore des loix sages aux Français qui le chérissaient; mais toi, infâme!²¹

The former queen of France cannot believe her ears. Just before he explains how the French sincerely loved Louis XVI, the sans-culotte comments, "Dans le fond, Élisabeth a raison." From the background, on the margin, what Madame Élisabeth says is with reason for, as the sans-culotte explains to Marie-Antoinette, it was she who brought so much misfortune upon the

¹⁹ Rougemont, *Dialogue, Entre un Sans-Culotte*, 4

²⁰ Rougemont, *Dialogue, Entre un Sans-Culotte*, 5-6.

²¹ Rougemont, *Dialogue, Entre un Sans-Culotte*, 6. The mention of the Comte d'Artois in this statement is a reference to pre-revolutionary suggestion that the queen had an incestuous relationship with her husband's brother in the severely censored pamphlet titled *The Love Life of Charlie and Toinette* (1779). Expediently reprinted after the fall of the Bastille in 1789, a number of the newer pamphlets attacking the queen fashioned themselves after it. See Antoine de Baecque, *The Body Politic, Corporeal Metaphor in Revolutionary France, 1770-1800*, trans. by Charlotte Mandell (Stanford: Stanford University Press; 1997), 51-54.

French and her husband. The dialogue ends with Louis XVI's ghost lamenting that the French have been too lenient in letting her live for as long as they have and that her time will eventually come.

In spite of the princess' name in the pamphlet's title, Madame Élisabeth's above statement is her sole part in the dialogue. A fictional statement but a telling one, one in which the actual tension between the two women witnessed while they were in the Tuileries resurfaced within the confines of their new prison. Moreover, while laying all the blame of the Bourbon monarchy's fall on its last queen, the sans-culotte imbues Élisabeth with reason, a noble trait which was not one typically associated with the princess, but nevertheless a highly valued quality in the nascent French Republic. No matter how brief, scripting Madame Élisabeth as speaking with reason reveals that even as Terror was becoming the "order of the day," the public's imagination about and opinion of the princess remained perpetually in flux. How could a former princess of France who was so innocent, pure, charitable, and a good sister to her brother be as well an ugly hag, a captured pig, and a sexually deviant and morally bankrupt fool. The shifts in the identification and representation of Madame Élisabeth were bound to come to a head. They did so on May 10, 1794.

An individual who was by birth a woman in the public sphere of politics, her status as a princess rendering her a political agent under both her then defunct brother's authority and the republican one which had replaced it, Madame Élisabeth's name did emerge in the autumn of 1793 as a feminine threat to the masculine republic. She was initially implicated in the sexual corruption of her nephew, the eight-year-old boy explaining to his alcoholic caregiver and tutor, Antoine Simon, that he had been instructed and encouraged in the "pernicious habit" of masturbating by both his mother and his aunt. They had even enjoyed watching him and on

occasion made him sleep between them in a bed that they shared. Simon immediately transmitted the news to Jacques Hébert, the editor of the radical and incendiary newspaper *Le Père Duchesne* and the *procureur* of the Paris Commune under whose jurisdiction of the Temple fell.

Rapidly deposed by several representatives of the Committee of General Security, the report clearly read that one of Louis-Charles' testicles was severely swollen and in need of bandaging. The boy reported that he had copulated with his mother on several of the occasions when they had laid together. "His mother," the document reads, "advised him never to speak of it."²² Returning the Temple the following day, the officials questioned both Marie-Thérèse and Madame Élisabeth about the boy's habit. His fifteen-year-old sister stoically remained silent on the matter. On the other hand Élisabeth was absolutely shocked and informed her interrogators that Louis-Charles had been committing the act for quite some time. She expressed that it was a delicate topic amongst the three female prisoners and that the boy had persisted in the habit in spite of being scolded by both herself and his mother. Her explanation was essentially worthless in the face of such a damning assertion.

The accusation was itself historic with Antoine Fouquier-Tinville, the Revolutionary Tribunal's prosecutor, raising it during Marie-Antoinette's trial seven days later. Calling the former queen of France the "new Aggripina," he built to the charge by equating the Widow Capet with Messalina, Brunhilda of Austrasia, Frédégonde, and Catherine and Marie de' Medici. In short, he made her out to be an "evil foreign queen," a rhetorical construction which had been utilized against France's foreign-born queens for centuries in order to negate their wifely and

²² AN, W 297, dossier 261. Quoted and trans. in Lever, *Marie-Antoinette*, 296. Author has seen this document on microfilm at the Archives nationales in 2009. The original documents relative to members of the royal family and their time in the Temple are sensitive and access to them is highly restricted.

maternal qualities while conflating the political untruths that they enjoyed too much power from behind the throne.²³ The established historiographic trope itself expressed the fledgling French Republic's fear that if the Bourbon monarchy were to be one day restored, Marie-Antoinette would corrupt it physically and politically through her son. The prosecutor proceeded:

[T]he widow Capet, ... forgetting her quality of mother, and the limits prescribed by the law of nature, has not hesitated to prostitute herself with Louis-Charles Capet her son, [and] according to the confession of the latter, she has committed indecencies with him, the very idea and name of which, strike the soul with horror.²⁴

Sexual transgression with one's own child was a monstrous sin for which there was no penance. The crime of incest itself had transformed over the centuries as one which occurred within the family or between individuals to a crime against the whole of society and thereby the state.²⁵ Marie-Antoinette historically refused to answer the allegation and when pressed, she pleaded to the pornographic tragedy's spectators: "I appeal to all mothers who are present in this auditory—is such a crime possible?" Spontaneously sympathizing with the woman they had so despised, the spectators rowdily booed Fouquier-Tinville. When the Tribunal sent down its verdict, finding the Widow Capet guilty of treason and sentencing her death, it omitted the charge of incest on the document. Still, in the hours before her death, the former queen found the composure to write her last letter and addressed it to Madame Élisabeth, taking a moment to express her fear that her sister-in-law would soon suffer a similar fate because of Louis-Charles' testimony. She wrote:

²³ Katherine Crawford, "Constructing Evil Foreign Queens," *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 37:2 (Spring 2007): 394.

²⁴ Anon. Translator, *The Trial & c of Louis XVI, late King of France, and Marie Antoinette, his Queen* (Lansingburg, NY: Silvester Tiffany for Thomas Spencer; 1794), 24. See also, *Le Moniteur Universel*, no. 25, 16 October 1793.

²⁵ Elizabeth Archibald, "Gold in the Dungheap: Incest Stories and Family Values in The Middle Ages," *Journal of Family History* 22: 2 (April 1997): 2; 9-10; Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, Vol. 1, *An Introduction*, trans. by Robert Hurley (New York; Vintage Books; 1978; 1990), 38; 117.

I have to speak of something which pains my heart. I know how much distress this child must have caused you. Forgive him, my dear sister, remember his age and how easy it is to make a child say anything one wants, and even things he does not understand. ...²⁶

As Joan Landes shows in *Women and the Public Sphere in the Age of the French Revolution*, Marie-Antoinette went to the scaffold in the same period of time as the other noted women who were seen as transgressing the bounds of their sex.²⁷ Her execution, along with those of Olympe de Gouges and Madame Roland, set the example of the justifiable fate for those women who wrongly acted in the public sphere of politics. Madame Élisabeth almost joined them that dark autumn. Rather than zealously attacking her in *Le Père Duchesne* as he had done with Marie-Antoinette, Hebert did not refer to her by name but instead identified her as “la grosse Babet,” soeur of the late Louis Capet.²⁸ He did though play a role in motioning that the former princess be put before the Revolutionary Tribunal in the weeks following the former queen’s appearance, a petition from the municipality of Paris being addressed to the National Convention on November 25, 1793.

The petition began with the claim that the Equality which had been decreed by the Republic was being “violated ... in the most revolting manner” by the continued existence of

²⁶ Marie-Antoinette to Madame Elisabeth de France, 16 October 1793. Reprinted and trans. in Oliver Blanc, *Last Letters: Prisons and Prisoners of the French Revolution, 1793-1794*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Noonday Press, Michael di Capua Books / Farrar, Straus & Giroux; 1987), 126-127. For images of this letter, see also: http://www.histoire-image.org/site/etude_comp/etude_comp_detail.php?i=417.

²⁷ Landes, *Women and the Public Sphere in the Age of the French Revolution*, 163.

²⁸ *Le Père Duchesne*, no. 217; no. 259 in Charles Brunet, ed., *Le Père Duchesne d’Hébert: ou notice historique et bibliographique sur ce journal* (Paris: Librairie de France; 1859), 151; 171. On both occasions, it is suggested that the former princess is to be married as part of a political exchange with another despised political figure. Also, in “Just another Citoyenne? Marie-Antoinette on Trial, 1790-1793,” Elisabeth Colwill shows that Hébert’s initial attacks on the queen were somewhat more subtle in the newsletter’s premier issues, but they intensified after the royal family’s ill-fated Flight to Varennes. See Colwill, “Just Another ‘Citoyenne?’ Marie-Antoinette on Trial, 1790-1793,” *History Workshop* n. 28 (1989): 68-70.

“the vile remains of tyranny, by the prisoners in the Tower of the Temple.”²⁹ It suggested that in order to prohibit Marie-Thérèse and Louis-Charles from repeating the “atrocities committed by the two monsters who gave them birth,” the care of the two children should be transferred from the Commune of Paris to the national government, giving the Republic the opportunity to imprison Louis XVI’s children in a secure prison of its choosing. Once there, the two could readily be raised in a suitable manner which insured the instillation of equality in the former prince and princess. Furthermore, the petition justified the Commune’s request on the grounds that the Parisian municipal government had for over fifteen months been weighed upon by the protracted care of the Temple’s prisoners, citing that the time had come for the two hundred and fifty sans-culottes employed in guarding them be allowed “to return to their regular work.” The petition immediately thereafter suggested that in order to do this: “1st, That you will send the infamous Élisabeth before the Revolutionary Tribunal at the earliest moment.”

Established by decree of the National Convention on March 10, 1793, the Revolutionary Tribunal predated the declaration of the Terror (September 5, 1793). Article one of the decree read:

There shall be instituted in Paris an extraordinary criminal tribunal that will deal with every counter-revolutionary endeavor, and with all attacks on the liberty, unity, and indivisibility of the Republic, and with all plots tending to reestablish the royalty, or to establish any other authority attacking liberty, equality, and the sovereignty of the people, whether those accused be civil functionaries, military men, or ordinary citizen.³⁰

Revolutionary tribunals were established elsewhere around the nation but the capital’s remained to be the one of central focus. Located on the Île de la Cité in the center of the city, on where today stands the Palais du Justice, the Tribunal held its sessions in the dark and dank rooms

²⁹ Drouy, Renard, Le Clerc, Legrand, Dorigny to the National Convention, 25 November 1793. Reprinted and trans. in *Life and Letters de Madame Élisabeth*, 90-91.

³⁰ *Le Moniteur Universal*, no. 71. Quoted and translated in Huet, *Rehearsing the Revolution*, 58-59.

attached to the centuries old Conciergerie, the Merovingian palace itself transformed into an overcrowded and nightmarish prison. The Tribunal quickly became an attraction, men and women from across Parisian society frequenting the proceedings.³¹

During the initial months of its existence, the Revolutionary Tribunal in Paris acquitted the majority of those who appeared before it, amongst them the editor of the radical newspaper *L'Ami du Peuple*, Jean-Paul Marat.³² As for those who found themselves condemned, there was no appeal, the damned sent promptly to Dr. Guillotin's new, efficient, and painless device erected on the Place de la Révolution. Of the 1,046 cases which appeared before it between its inception and January 1794, the Revolutionary Tribunal handed down 381 death sentences. Meanwhile, when the counterrevolutionary purging reached its apex during the actual "Reign of Terror," between June and July 1794, nearly fourteen hundred individuals went to the scaffold, the conviction process further expedited by the promulgation of the Law of 22 Prairial (June 10, 1794) and its outright denial of the defendants' rights to defend themselves.

The Commune's petition that Madame Élisabeth be sent before the Revolutionary Tribunal was referred to the Committee of Public Safety, the de facto executive government of France during the Terror. It sat on it for the next six months while the radical republicans, the Jacobins, tightened their hold on the government as France became further embroiled in the armed conflict with its foreign enemies on its borders and the ongoing counterrevolutionary revolt in the Vendée region of the country. War and persistent suspicion led the Committee's Jacobin leadership to consistently purge its political enemies. At the time of the petition regarding the "Prisoners in the Temple" was made, members of the Girondin faction in the

³¹ Oliver Blanc, *Last Letters: Prisons & Prisoners of the French Revolution*, 57.

³² Marie-Hélène Huet, *Rehearsing the Revolution: The Staging of Marat's Death, 1793-1797*; trans. by Robert Hurley (Berkeley; London: University of California Press; 1982), 23-25.

National Convention were being sent to the guillotine, the process continuing through the end of 1793. Jacques Hebert and some of his ultra-radical, sans-culotte followers were executed in March of 1794. Georges-Jacques Danton, once a close associate of Maximillien Robespierre, mounted the scaffold in the weeks afterward for openly criticizing the Terror's excesses and its ongoing campaign to dechristianize France. The executions of Danton, Hebert, and the Girondins essentially served the Jacobins and Robespierre's unending designs to cleanse the French Republic of any and all persons who posed a political and or philosophical threat to it. Even though she was incarcerated within the thick, deep and ancient walls of the Temple's keep, Élisabeth Capet readily fit their criteria.

The Madame Élisabeth who appeared before the Revolutionary Tribunal on May 10, 1794 was, as Elizabeth Colwill has demonstrated with Marie-Antoinette, to be regarded as "just another Citoyenne" even though she was not.³³ Removed the night before from her prison, the former princess was directly transported to the Concierge in a hackney cart. Discombobulated by being disturbed just as she was going to bed and wet from the rain that dark night, she was informed of the Tribunal's indictment upon her arrival at the prison. It read:

Antoine-Quentin Fouquier, Public Prosecutor of the Revolutionary Tribunal, established in Paris by the decree of the National Assembly, March 10, 1793, year Two of the Republic, without recourse to any Court of Appeal, in virtue of the power given him on the 5th of April following, to the effect that 'the Public Prosecutor of said Tribunal is authorized to arrest, try, and judge, on the denunciation of the constituted authorities, or of citizens,' –

Herewith declares that the following persons have been, by various decrees of the Committee of general safety of the Convention, of the Revolutionary committees of the different sections of Paris, and of the department of the Yonne, and by virtue of warrants of arrest issued by the said Public Prosecutor, denounced to this Tribunal: --

³³ Elizabeth Colwill, "Just another Citoyenne? Marie-Antoinette on Trial, 1790-1793," *History Workshop Journal* n. 28 (1989): 63-87.



Fig. 6.5. N. Schiavonetti Jun, engraver; after D. Pellegrini. *The Princess Elizabeth taken from the Conciergere: When Madame Elizabeth was visited by the deputies of the Revolutionary Tribunal.* 1796. London; Colnaghi & Co.³⁴

1st, Marie Élisabeth Capet, sister of Louis Capet, the last tyrant of the French, aged thirty, and born at Versailles.³⁵

Madame Élisabeth's name was thereby followed by the list of the other twenty-four individuals who stood accused. Two years later the London engravers of Colnaghi & Co. profited off the depiction of her subsequent transfer from the damp horror of the prison to the Revolutionary Tribunal's chambers, a languid young women being pulled through a dark and foreboding corridor by one of her sans-culotte jailers [Fig. 6.5]. For once in the plethora of counterrevolutionary prints Madame Élisabeth appeared at the center of the foreground, allusion to her virtuosity achieved through her striking white gown and the prayer book clasped in her

³⁴ *The Princess Elizabeth taken from the Conciergere: When Madame Elizabeth was visited by the deputies of the Revolutionary Tribunal*, Bibliothèque nationale; accessed April 15, 2015. ftp://ftp.bnf.fr/841/N8412255_JPEG_1_IDM.jpg.

³⁵ Reproduced and trans. in *Life and Letters of Madame Élisabeth*, 93-102.

right hand. The drama of her tragic fate is obviously heightened by the veiled weeping woman standing behind her, a visual reminder of the Marie-Thérèse's perpetual state of mourning. No other image better represented the phrase, "It is unjust but all-powerful gods who demand the slaughter of a young innocent princess."³⁶

The prosecutor made his opening statement, characterizing Citoyenne Élisabeth Capet as an agent of royal tyranny and as an individual who had conspired against her brother's subjects with the "barbarous Antoinette." He began:

[T]hat it is to the family of the Capets that the French people owe all the evils under the weight of which they have groaned for so many centuries. ... The crimes of all kinds, the guilty deeds of Capet, of the Messalina Antoinette, of the two brothers Capet, and of Élisabeth, are too well known to make it necessary to repaint here the horrible picture. ...

Élisabeth has shared all those crimes; she has co-operated in all the plots, the conspiracies formed by her infamous brothers, by the wicked and impure Antoinette, and by the horde of conspirators collected around them; she associated with their projects; she encouraged the assassins of the nation, ... -- in short, the whole uninterrupted chain of conspiracies, lasting four whole years, were followed and seconded by all the means Élisabeth had in her power.³⁷

Before the Tribunal, the once admired and beloved pious princess was unmasked as a traitor to the Revolution.

"The rhetoric of conspiracy," writes Lynn Hunt in her seminal *Politics, Culture, and Class in the French Revolution*, "permeated revolutionary discourse at every political level, but it was above all the watchword of the radicals."³⁸ It was the organizing principle at the core of the revolutionary rhetoric, invading every aspect of the political discourse and dominating the very

³⁶ See above, "Prologue," 1.

³⁷ Transcript reproduced and trans. in *Life and Letters of Madame Élisabeth*, 94-95.

³⁸ Lynn Hunt, *Politics, Culture, and Class in the French Revolution* (Berkeley; Los Angeles: University of California Press; 1986), 38-44; quote on, 41. Hunt credits François Furet on recognizing that conspiracy became the central organizing principle of revolutionary rhetoric.

narrative of the Revolution with plots. Fouquier deliberately spoke in the register of the political and of the sacred voice of the nation, exposing to the Tribunal and its spectators that the defendant's pre-1789 purity and virtue were completely irrelevant. That woman had completely ceased to exist when the Bastille fell and it was her actions over the last four years, her political agency, and "all the means [she] had in her power" by which Élisabeth Capet, sister of the former tyrant, was guilty of treason; and hence, unworthy of being a member of the new republic's citizenry, regardless of the denial of rights and political voice to her and all other citizenesses on account of their sex. Unable to punish her distant emigrated brothers for their crimes, the political discourse moved from the patricidal and the matricidal to the fratricidal as Élisabeth Capet stood before her judges.³⁹

Fouquier-Tinville proceeded in his opening statement to recount some of her most serious crimes. According to him, she had wrongly disposed of national property by sending diamonds to the Comte d'Artois in June 1791 with the intent of helping him to finance his counterrevolutionary plots and assassins. She had maintained a correspondence with her other brother, the man who had "now become an object of derision and contempt to the coalized (sic) Powers on whom he imposed his imbecile and ponderous nullity."⁴⁰ During her residence in the Tuileries, she as well had hurled insults upon the National Guardsmen who had given of their time to protect the former tyrant without compensation. Furthermore, amongst her most horrendous crimes were her actions and behaviors on "the immortal day of 10th of August":

³⁹ In *The Family Romance of the French Revolution*, Lynn Hunt demonstrates that "The Band of Brothers," the fraternity of Republican men distrusted the family and patriarchal authority; and once *the* father was removed from the center stage of politics, tensions began to arise pertaining not only to their own fraternal bonds, but as well toward the place of French women within society. See Hunt, *Family Romance*, 67-71.

⁴⁰ Reproduced and trans. in *Life and Letters of Madame Élisabeth*, 95.

...; it was she who lavished attentions on the assassins, sent to the Champs Élysées by the despot to provoke the brave Marseillais; ... She watched all night hoping to witness the nocturnal carnage. She helped the barbarous Antoinette to bite the cartridges; she encouraged by her language, young girls whom fanatical priests had brought to the château for the horrible occupation.

Her crimes that day did not stop there, Fouquier intimating that she as well plotted the murder of the representatives to the Legislative Assembly. He continued:

[D]isappointed in the hope of all this horde of conspirators, namely, -- that the citizens who came to overthrow tyranny would be massacred, -- she fled in the morning, with the tyrant and his wife, and went to await in the temple of National sovereignty that the horde of slaves, paid and committed to the crimes of that parricide Court, should drown Liberty in the blood of citizens and cut the throats of its representatives among whom she had sought a refuge.⁴¹

Fouquier-Tinville closed his remarks with a statement regarding Louis-Charles. Lesson learned from the late queen's own appearance before the Tribunal the preceding October, he omitted reference to the suggestion that Madame Élisabeth had been involved in an incestuous relationship with her nephew. Still, it was the manner in which she regarded and behaved toward the boy which was treasonous. He concluded:

Finally, we have seen her, since the well-deserved punishment of the most guilty of tyrants who have ever dishonoured [sic] human nature, promoting the re-establishment of tyranny by lavishing, with Antoinette, on the son of Capet homage to royalty and the pretended honours of a king.⁴²

The jurors were thereafter sworn in. They pledged as free men to pay attention to the evidence presented and to listen to what the prosecution and the defense both said without hatred, malignity, fear, or affection. The Revolutionary Tribunal's president, René-François Dumas, thereby proceeded by asking Élisabeth Capet her name, age, location of birth, and location of present residence. This was a simple formality and thereafter drove into his more serious line of questioning, asking Élisabeth's location on the days leading up to the fall of the

⁴¹ Reproduced and trans. in *Life and Letters of Madame Élisabeth.*, 95-6.

⁴² Reproduced and trans. in *Life and Letters of Madame Élisabeth*, 96

Bastille in 1789 and what was her involvement in the plots formulated by the Court at that time to harm the protestors. Informing him that she was “in the bosom of my family” during that time, she denied knowing of any such plots.

Dumas then dove into a line of questioning and rebuttals which tied Élisabeth by name more with her late sister-in-law than her late brother. He inquired as to how she figured in the “infamous and scandalous orgy of the Gardes-du-corps,” referring to the banquet held in early October 1789 at Versailles, the one where it was rumored that Marie-Antoinette encouraged the visiting Flemish regiment to stomp on the tricolor cockade symbolizing the Revolution.⁴³ The rumor spread quickly and fueled the ire of the fishwives who crowded into the Palais Royale on October 5th to protest the rising price of bread, their protest rapidly transforming itself into the historic March on Versailles. As for the Tribunal president’s recollection of that period, he alleged that the former queen had blatantly induced her quests to pledge themselves to the restoration of the absolute tyranny of the Bourbon monarchy through the vicious and bloody smothering of French patriots. When Élisabeth responded that she was completely “ignorant” of said orgy, the president snapped:

You do not tell the truth, and your denial is not of any use to you, because it is contradicted on one side by public notoriety, and on the other by the likelihood, which convinces every man of sense, that a woman so closely allied as you were with Marie-Antoinette, both by ties of blood and those of intimate friendship, could not avoid sharing her machinations and helping with all your power; you did therefore, necessarily, and in accord with the wife of the tyrant, instigate the abominable oath taken by the satellites of the Court to assassinate and annihilate liberty at its birth; also you instigated the bloody outrages done to that precious sign of liberty, the tri-colour cockade, by ordering your accomplices to trample it under foot.⁴⁴

⁴³ Lever, *Marie Antoinette*, 220-21.

⁴⁴ Reproduced and trans. in *Life and Letters of Madame Élisabeth*, 97-98.

Madame Élisabeth's declaration that she was unfamiliar with these acts was worthless. The Revolutionary Tribunal had already determined her guilt without deliberation.

The president then accused her of having a secret conference with her brother in his Tuileries apartments, preparing a plan of attack on the people, on the night of August 9 –10, 1792, to which Élisabeth replied that she had indeed been with her brother that evening but she was unaware of any such plot. Dumas asserted that she dissembled in vain and stated that her denial of guilt, “wounds both truth and probability.” To the jury, she was a woman who over the course of the Revolution had manifested a striking opposition to the present new order to the extent that no matter what she said, she could and would not be believed. Her denials were fruitless because of her participation in the Gardes-du-corp orgy and for assisting the Swiss Guards in loading their weapons as they fired on the protesters in August 1792. Pressed to answer to the statement of “these” facts, Élisabeth replied: “All those acts imputed to me are unworthy deeds with which I was far from straining.”

When the proceedings turned to Élisabeth's dealings with her emigrated brothers, the president pressed her on the whereabouts of the diamonds which had once been in her possession. The diamonds themselves were now considered to be national property. The former princess confessed that she had indeed once had them but had not sent them to the Comte d'Artois by way of the Comte de Provence on the night of the royal family's flight in June 1791. Instead, she had entrusted them to the duc de Choiseul that evening and was “absolutely ignorant” of their fate. Never seeing Choiseul again after their return from Varennes, she had not particularly worried herself about them. Dumas immediately accused her of lying and referred to a *procès-verbal* dated September 12, 1792 which documented the theft of the diamonds and their transference to her brother. Was she not guilty of maintaining a correspondence with “*ci-devant*

Monsieur?” She answered that their correspondence had ended with its prohibition by virtue of her incarceration in the Temple.

Returning to her role in the August 9-10, 1792 massacre, Dumas questioned Élisabeth on her staunching and dressing of the assassins’ wounds. The former princess defended her actions:

Although I gave succor to some wounded men, humanity alone induced me to dress their wounds; I did not need to know the cause of their ills to occupy myself with their relief. I make no merit of this, and I cannot imagine that a crime can be made of it.⁴⁵

“Humanity alone” may have moved her but to the Revolutionary Tribunal, dressing the wounds of the injured men who had fired upon the people was a political act and a criminal one at that.

The president charged:

It is difficult to reconcile the sentiments of humanity in which you now adorn yourself ... All things justify us in believing that you are humane to none but the murders of the people, and that you have all the ferocity of the most sanguinary animals for the defenders of liberty. Far from succoring the latter you instigated their massacre by your applause; far from disarming the murders of the people you gave them with your own hands the instruments of death, by which you flattered yourselves, you and your accomplices, that tyranny and despotism would be restored.⁴⁶

The proceedings then moved to the final charge, that Élisabeth Capet had nursed Louis-Charles in the hope of succeeding to the throne upon which his father once sat. The allegation was essentially without merit on the grounds that the boy had been separated from his mother, aunt, and sister some ten months beforehand; and the last time she had seen him was when she was deposed on the topic of his “pernicious habit” in October 1793. Élisabeth informed her accusers that her nephew was dear to her and that she had indeed “talked familiarly with the unfortunate child” in the hope of comforting him for the loss of his parents. The Revolutionary

⁴⁵ Reproduced and trans. in *Life and Letters of Madame Élisabeth*, 100.

⁴⁶ Reproduced and trans. in *Life and Letters of Madame Élisabeth*, 100.

Tribunal perceived her defense as an admission of guilt and utterly refused to see her tender affection for her late-brother's son at face value. No matter how she treated the boy, her care of him was treasonous.

Dumas closed with one more assertion of the former princess' guilt:

[Y]ou fed the little Capet with the projects of vengeance which you and yours have never ceased to form against liberty; and that you flattered yourself to raise the fragments of a shattered throne by soaking it in the blood of patriots.⁴⁷

Before Élisabeth had an opportunity to respond, Dumas moved on to the next of the twenty-four prisoners who appeared alongside her in front of the Tribunal that ominous day. As with the Citoyenne Capet, sister of the former tyrant, the fates of each one of them had already been determined, rendering them damned political actors and actresses at center of stage in the spectacle of revolutionary republican justice.

As Madame Élisabeth was escorted out of the court room, Fouquier-Tinville turned to the Dumas and commented on how the princess never raised a complaint about being tried alongside so many others. For his part Dumas replied,

What has she to complain of, that Élisabeth de France? Haven't we just given her a court of aristocrats who are worthy of her? There will be nothing to prevent her from fancying she is back in the salons of Versailles when she finds herself at the foot of the guillotine surrounded by all those faithful nobles.⁴⁸

The validity of this statement is unverifiable, much like Robespierre's denial of his involvement in the princess' untimely death mentioned at the very beginning of this volume; and yet, while the princess' early biographers most likely put words into the mouths of her executioners, the inherent revolutionary resentment in such a statement cannot be dismissed completely out of hand. Dumas' statement, fictive or not, was a rewording of a grievance made some time

⁴⁷ Reproduced and trans. in *Life and Letters of Madame Élisabeth*, 101.

⁴⁸ Quoted and trans. in *Life and Letters of Madame Élisabeth*, 103.

beforehand regarding *salonnaires* and *femme savants*, the woman the princess depicted herself akin to in her singular official representation in the Salon: "...every woman in Paris gathers in her apartment a harem of men more womanish than she, who know how to render all sorts of homage to beauty except that of the heart, which is her due" (Rousseau).⁴⁹ Madame Élisabeth was herself a political actor in a cast of thousands, one on the margins of the theatre for much of her life but one who, ever so briefly, took center stage.

Madame Élisabeth was sent to the scaffold by the Revolutionary Tribunal for the crime of treason, a crime which she had committed on multiple occasions. For those who questioned the execution of a woman they considered to be innocent and virtuous, her untimely demise was without explanation. Of the princess' and Marie-Antoinette's executions, as well as those of noted others, Germaine de Staël reflected on the manner in which the spectacle of the scaffold disturbingly became one among many public entertainments during the Terror. She wrote:

The assassination of the Queen, and of Madame Elizabeth, excited perhaps still more astonishment and horror than the crime which was perpetrated against the person of the King; for not other object could be assigned for these horrible enormities than the very terror which they were fitted to inspire. The condemnation of M. de Malesherbes, of Bailly, of Condorcet, of Lavoisier, was the decimation of the glory of France; eighty persons were the victims of each day, as if the massacre of St. Bartholomew were to be kept in a constant state of renewal. One great difficulty presented itself to this government, if the name of government can be given to it; it was the necessity which existed of employing all the means of civilization to carry on the war, and all the violence of the savage state to excite the passions. ... Within view of the executions, the places of public entertainment were filled as usual; ...: in short, all the insipidity and all the frivolity of life subsisted by the side of its gloomiest frenzies.⁵⁰

⁴⁹ Rousseau, *Politics and the Arts*, 101.

⁵⁰ Germaine de Staël, *Considerations on the Principal Events of the French Revolution* (1818 English translation), ed. Aurelian Craiutu (ebook: Liberty Fund, Inc.; 2008), 891-92.

Any and all executions are political acts, demonstrations of an authorized power's authority over those who seek to challenge and or undermine it.⁵¹ On behalf of the French people, Louis XVI was sent to the guillotine on January 21, 1793 as a demonstration of the National Convention's republican authority over the former king of France and the despotic monarchy which he represented. His execution was the annihilation of the king's two bodies, the physical and the mystical, the former defunct, the latter debunked and as such, untransferable. Marie-Antoinette went to the guillotine on October 16, 1793 as an example of the Terror's masculine authority over the feminine threat that she and others posed as women who openly acted in and upon the public sphere of politics. Madame Élisabeth and a "court" of twenty-four other political agents ascended the scaffold on May 10, 1794 at the behest of the Terror's increasingly unstable authority, an authority which maintained itself through the spectacular, the spectacle of the scaffold *and* the spectacle of mass public amusements and festivities.⁵²

The French Republic over and over again appealed to the court of public opinion through the staging of trials and executions, a practice it adopted from the authority which it abolished at its conception, and a practice which would eventually supplant its own authority. The Revolutionary Tribunal, as Marie-Hélène Huet notes, became an "impassible nexus" where the shifts in the representation of a given political actor intersected with the finality of their demise on the stage of the scaffold. "The proclamation of the law," writes Huet, "the posting of the sentence, the admission of the public to the most serious deliberations of the Assembly—in all its

⁵¹ On capital punishment and execution being political acts, see Alain Corbin, *Village of Cannibals: Rage and Murder in France, 1870*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press; 1992).

⁵² For analysis of the radical revolutionaries' efforts to maintain authority through spectacular amusements, see Mona Ozouf, *Festivals and the French Revolution*, trans. by Alan Sheridan (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press; 1988).

activities the Revolution demands a reader, a listener, ultimately a spectator.”⁵³ Behind the walls of the Temple, Madame Élisabeth’s body continued to signify both a defunct monarchy and the counterrevolutionary threat which hoped to restore it. At center stage before the gruesome prop of the guillotine, it represented the same. For the radical revolutionaries who willed it, Madame Élisabeth’s execution and those of thousands of others were understandable and necessary—they were guilty of treason on all counts.

Apotheosis

Although Madame Élisabeth had been a minor and marginal figure in much of the revolutionary press, *Le Rendez-Vous de Madame Élisabeth* being the sole instance where she was at the very center of a libelous and licentious attack, such references were enough to expose her as not being the charitable, pious, and virtuous woman the French imagined her to be before the Revolution. They as well lent credence to the idea that she was a royal and a feminine threat to it. For those who orchestrated her demise there was truth and not fiction in appraising the princess to have effeminated and weakened her eldest brother, to have conspired with her emigrated brothers against the Revolution, and to have instilled the despotism of monarchical tyranny into her nephew. As the evidence presented here attest, the “paper princess” and the “real” one were one in the same. It was the “virgin martyr” one which ultimately eclipsed them both.

The conception of Madame Élisabeth as a virgin martyr was immediate. It began with the hagiographic tales reporting the scent of roses wafting across the *place* just as her head fell

⁵³ M.-H. Huet, *Rehearsing the Revolution*, 25.



Fig. 6.6. Carlo Lasinio, engraver; Domenico Pellegrini, designer. *Le dernier supplice de Madame Anne Élisabeth soeur du Roy Louis XVI : guillottinée le 10 mai 1794.* 1795. Engraving. London?: imprimé par Darbi.⁵⁴

into the basket and of her spirit appearing to one of her devoted, former maids shortly thereafter on the terrace at Montreuil.⁵⁵ Although much less depicted than the deaths of her brother and his wife, and with no one expediently sketching the scene as Mary Wollstonecraft and Jacques-Louis David had done with the former king and queen, the visual representations of Élisabeth's execution compositionally constructed themselves upon the fiction [Fig. 6.6].

The Carlo Lasinio engraving after Pellegrini's design, *Le dernier supplice de Madame Anne Élisabeth*, set the panorama of her tragic end with the church dome of the Abbey of St.

⁵⁴ *Le dernier supplice de Madame Anne Élisabeth soeur du Roy Louis XVI: guillottinée le 10 mai 1794*, Bibliothèque nationale; accessed April 4, 2015. ftp://ftp.bnf.fr/5300/N53009828_JPEG_1_1DM.jpg. Note: The Executioner, Charles-Henri Sanson, stands on the far left of the image.

⁵⁵ Margaret L. Truncer, *Madame Elizabeth: days at Versailles and in prison with Marie-Antoinette and her family* (London: Hutchinson; 1955), 314; 318. See also above, "Prologue," 2. I refrain from identifying the *place* as the *place de Grève* per Dorinda Outram's notation that the time and location of executions during the Terror being continually changed. See Dorinda Outram, *The Body and the French Revolution: Sex, Class and Political Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press; 1989).

Genevieve (the Pantheon after 1791) in the distant background, and a weeping and supplicant Élisabeth kneeling atop the scaffold, firmly clutching a cross in her right hand. There were some reports that she actually exhibited a complete lack of composure in the face of death and requested the executioner replace the scarf covering her neck and shoulders.⁵⁶ Meanwhile, the utter dismay on her face is mirrored by the horrified expression on the executioner's assistant just to her right, the man completely shocked to see that the once respected and virtuous former princess has been brought to the guillotine. The hideous instrument of death looms over the scene in the left margin of the tableau while an audience of spectators occupies the lower right corner. Right up against the scaffold stands a gentleman with spectacles wearing a wig. He readily ogles the "tragedy" which the radical revolutionaries have willed into being. Perhaps he is "the Incorruptible," Maximillien Robespierre.

Even the mob harassing Robespierre outside the bookseller Maret's shop was one of a number of stories which added to the myth of Mme. Élisabeth's martyrdom.⁵⁷ The revolutionary's denial of his culpability in her execution reveals his (and his apologists) own recognition of the princess' virtue. That he may have visited Marie-Thérèse and Louis-Charles in the Temple in following days lends credence to this notion.⁵⁸ Still, Madame Élisabeth's execution served to cleanse France of the monarchical and devoutly Christian threat which she posed, clearing the way for the de facto dictator to will into being the "Republic of Virtue" which

⁵⁶ Outram, *The Body and the French Revolution*, 121. Outram notes that while there are no mythologies which tend to cluster around older married women who went to guillotine, including MA and Mme. Roland, they do surround Madame Elisabeth and other young women who were presumed to be virgins, including Charlotte Corday.

⁵⁷ See above, "Prologue," 2-3.

⁵⁸ Duchess d'Angoulême, "Narrative of Marie-Thérèse de France," in *Life and Letters of Madame Élisabeth*, 284. The princess wrote, "There came a man one day, who I think was Robespierre; the municipals showed great respect for him. His visit was a secret to all the persons in the Tower, who either did not know who he was, or would not tell me. He looked at me insolently, cast his eyes over my books, and after searching the room with the municipals went away."

he envisioned. A month later the much vaunted Festival of the Supreme Being took place on the Champ-de-Mars; and with the last vestige of monarchical despotism removed, Robespierre put himself directly at the head of the celebration which honored the nation's new religion and attempted to erase its centuries old attachment to Roman Catholicism.⁵⁹ In spite of his supposed denial, the living virtuous princess that he and others consider Madame Élisabeth to be posed a threat to his utopia.

The first biography of Madame Élisabeth appeared in the year following her death. *Éloge Funebre de Madame Élisabeth de France* by Antoine-François-Claude Ferrand is a lengthy story of the late princess' all too brief life, from birth to death, and spends a great deal of time emphasizing her piety and virtuosity [Fig. 6.7]. So began the line of continuity by which two centuries of biographers have consistently represented the princess as the royal family's virgin martyr, some recounting her political agency and yet failing to locate both it and the person in the contested discourse of the Revolution. This very much includes the turning of a blind eye toward *Le Rendez-Vous de Madame Élisabeth* by all of them, including by Jean de Viguerie in *Le Sacrifice du Soir* (2012) and Anne Bernet in *Madame Élisabeth, Soeur du Louis XVI* (2013).⁶⁰ Bernet's volume goes even as far as to be bound with a subtitle banner which reads, "the one that should have been king" [Fig. 6.8]. Definitively, Ferrand and other who write of Madame Élisabeth in a similar vein are in essence, as historian Jill Lepore writes, "Historians who love too much."⁶¹

⁵⁹ Marie-Hélène Huet, *Mourning Glory: the Will of the French Revolution* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press; 1997), 46-7.

⁶⁰ Bernet does some analysis on the negative depiction of Mme. Elisabeth in the political discourse of the Revolution in Ch. 10, "Des complots, des revers, des departs," but it is limited and makes absolutely no mention of the *libelle*. See Bernet, pp. 231-289.

⁶¹ Jill Lepore, "Historians Who Love Too Much: Reflections on Microhistory and Biography," *The Journal of American History*, Vo. 88, no. 1 (June, 2001): 129-144.

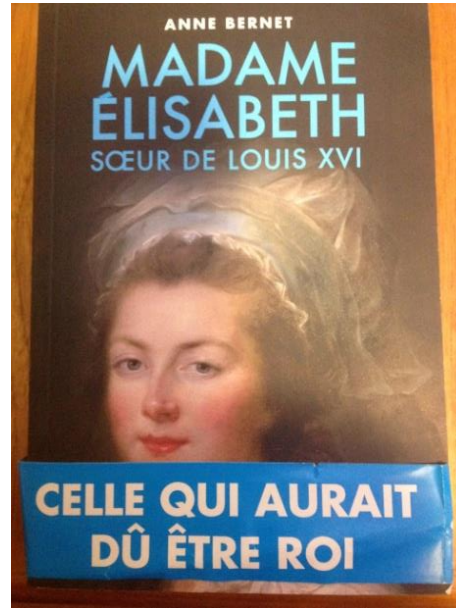
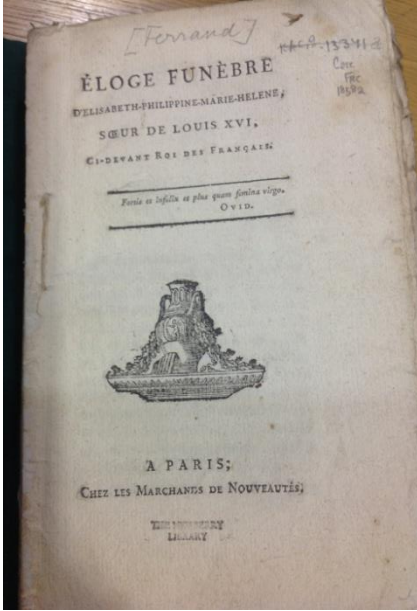


Fig. 6.7 (left). Title page for *Éloge Funèbre de Madame Élisabeth de France* by Antoine-François-Claude Ferrand (1795). Chicago: Newberry Library.

Fig. 6.8 (right). Cover of *Madame Élisabeth, Soeur du Louis XVI* by Anne Bernet (2013). Holland, MI: Private Collection.

Ferrand's volume begins with describing the Mme. Élisabeth as a "gift from God" who bore all of her trials and tribulations without complaint. Happy are those who are destined for Heaven, including the "auguste Princesse dont ma foibte plume ose entreprendre l'éloge."⁶² Furthermore, this biographer credits her "auguste" parents with instilling such a sincere religious devotion into their youngest child in spite of their untimely deaths.⁶³ His profusion of praise for the late princess continues for the next one hundred pages, the bulk of his text filled with numerous stories and anecdotes which demonstrate Élisabeth's goodness and virtuosity. Put to death by an "unbridled wickedness," his "auguste Princesse" could do no wrong.⁶⁴

⁶² Antoine-François Ferrand, *Éloge Funèbre de Madame Élisabeth de France* (Ratisbonne: Jean Baptiste Rottermundt; 1795), 9.

⁶³ Ferrand, 12.

⁶⁴ Ferrand, 10.S

Before he discusses Madame Élisabeth's trial and execution at the very end of his *éloge*, Ferrand asks the reader to consider the status of the poor boy king, Louis XVII, still confined in the nightmarish keep of the Temple and now without the love and affection of his caring aunt. Both he and his sister have been deprived of the woman who has become their mother since the unfortunate death of their actual mother.⁶⁵ By infusing Mme. Élisabeth with maternal sentiment, Ferrand creates the image of her as not only the virgin martyr, but the martyred mother one as well. As the counterrevolutionary engravings constructed Marie-Antoinette as one, his vision did the same, driving home the very illegitimacy of the regime which had ruined the royal family. No ordinary family, but still just a *family* torn asunder by the revolution which Louis XVI never believed would happen when he called the Estates General years before.

Ferrand's analysis of Mme. Élisabeth's trial and subsequent execution is nearly an utter fiction. The only portion which matches up with the actual trial record is the association of her name with those of her three brothers and their crimes. Yet, it still denies her culpability in their treason and asserts that the crime for which she was found guilty was the transgression of boldly identifying her nephew to the Revolutionary Tribunal as "Louis XVII, King of France by the Oracle of Truth and the will of God as well."⁶⁶ It is as well from Ferrand's account of her execution that the reader first hears of the twenty-four others who were guillotined that day paying appropriate homage to the noble and honorable princess as they individually ascended the scaffold's stairs. Ferrand deliberately stages the spectacle of the scaffold in his tragic eulogy in a manner by which Madame Élisabeth's execution symbolizes an assault on France and the body politic by an illegitimate authority. He then deliberately speaks to the "Philosopher" who has condemned all of humanity through his torment of the royal family, telling him to recognize in

⁶⁵ Ferrand, 124-25.

⁶⁶ Ferrand, 123; 126.

Madame Élisabeth's life and death the very fallacy of his atheism and the sins of his ways.⁶⁷ Ferrand does not identify this philosopher but the historian readily has their suspicions.

In the very last passage Ferrand credits Mme. Élisabeth's tragic and untimely demise as initiating the change in the nation by which France delivered itself from the vicious absurdities of republican virtue and the atheism attendant to it.⁶⁸ As Dorinda Outram demonstrates in *The Body and the French Revolution: Sex, Class and Political Culture*, the Revolution was a "series of transformation scenes." Although it is the historical watershed upon which the modern political state is founded upon, the Revolution was itself unable to create a state of its own. Instead, it created a "new and sensitive public space" where competing discourses battled to legitimate one form of government over another.⁶⁹ Ferrand's volume falls into that space in the post-Thermidorian period and regards the much marginalized princess as a charismatic figure whose own Christian virtuosity triumphed over Robespierre's and the radical republicans' own conceptualization of virtue. Ferrand closes the volume with a supplicant prayer that God send France another miracle like Mme. Élisabeth so that both the French people and the World can be made anew.

In 1797 there emerged in Paris the play titled *Élisabeth de France, soeur de Louis XVI; Tragédie en trois actes et en vers* by Doigny du Ponceau. Best described as a pathetic "she-tragedy," this play was as well a piece of religious political propaganda, the audience experiencing a catharsis by witnessing Madame Élisabeth's suffering in her cramped Temple quarters, her dark and dank cell in the Concegerie, and eventually her public torture as a defendant before the Revolutionary Tribunal. Through this progression du Ponceau builds to a

⁶⁷ Ferrand, 128; 130.

⁶⁸ Ferrand, 133.

⁶⁹ Outram, 3.

logical, rational, and Christian explanation for the irrational and pointless suffering inflicted upon his protagonist by a godless abomination. Once again the audience's intended reception is that in the face of an absurd and unjust death, the damned princess consciously accepted her fate because of the depth of her piety and virtuosity.

Du Ponceau's tragedy comes with a biographical background which, like Ferrand's, sings nothing but praise for the play's protagonist. He tells the reader that at a very young age, the princess determined upon and announced her religious devotion, and of how she stoically bore the humiliating scorn and ridicule from numerous courtiers at Versailles. The reader is as well reminded of how she followed the example of Madame Louise and how she put the needs of her brother's family before her own, the princess repeatedly declining Mesdames Adelaide's and Victoire's multiple requests that she reconsider their offer to join them in exile.⁷⁰ Du Ponceau ends with a statement of hope that perhaps one day the horrors of the French Revolution will be far behind them, in the past, and that Madame Élisabeth's grave will be frequently visited. Her memory must be resurrected because it is her "Empire of Virtue" which ultimately triumphs over the Revolution, a barbarism which prolonged the suffering of the royal family until it took the last of them. He writes that after she was guillotined, the executioner held up her head to the people. Upon seeing the head of this good and virtuous princess, the crowd ceased to applaud the senseless butchery.⁷¹

The first act focuses on Madame Élisabeth in the Temple, the play opening with a soliloquy from its protagonist as she awaits the same fate as her late brother and his wife. She has become a mother to their two orphaned children after the demise of Marie-Antoinette. Then

⁷⁰ Doigny du Ponceau, *Elisabeth de France, soeur de Louis XVI; Tragédie en trois actes et en vers* (Paris: Chez Robert; 1797), v-vi.

⁷¹ du Ponceau, vii.

enters the servant Isidore and Élisabeth informs her of how she had a vision of Louis XVI. Her brother did not appear to her covered in blood but in all his heavenly glory in order to announce that her pain was soon to end, followed by her rightful ascension into heaven. She gets Isidore to promise to continue Marie-Thérèse's proper religious instruction after she is gone (Act I, Scene II). Then Élisabeth turns her attention to her niece, the child who she now refers to as "mon enfant," "ma fille." She tells the young girl not to provoke a destiny like hers and makes Marie-Thérèse promise to never avenge her death. Her parents had asked the same because all of their fates have been destined by Heaven above. It is as well far below her royal rank to seek revenge and she should always strive to be as forgiving as her noble ancestor, Henry IV. "La Vengeance," Élisabeth speaks, "dénote un lâche caractere: ' Qui ne sait pardonner n'a qu'une ame vulgaire'" (Act I, Scene III).⁷² Madame Élisabeth is then removed from her niece, two gendarmes and the Revolutionary Tribunal's bailiff coming to collect her (Act I, Scene IV).

The middle act of du Ponceau's work focuses on Madame Élisabeth in the Concegerie as Fouquier-Tinville, Dumas, and the Revolutionary Tribunal's vice-president, Jean-Baptiste Coffinhal, prepare the case against her. The latter two men discuss the truthfulness of Madame Élisabeth's "portrait," that as a respected and virtuous woman, there has never been a slander against her. They ponder that by killing her, it might bring retribution upon Robespierre (Act II, Scene III). As they do, one of the princess' guards provides her with the opportunity to escape but she does not seize upon it (Act II, Scene V). The second act ends with another of soliloquy by Élisabeth in which announces once again to the audience that she is resigned to her fate (Act II, Scene `XIII):

⁷² du Ponceau, 16.

LA mort dans un profond sommeil / Va plonger pour jamais ma pénible existence,
 / De la vie au néant franchissant la distance, / Mes yeux vont se fermer à la clarté
 du jour, / Et mon ame voler au céleste séjour. / Oui, l'immortalité u'est point une
 chimere: / A mon cœur , qui s' plaît , cette espérance est chere, / Elle efface
 l'horreur e l'état où je suis.⁷³

The final act is devoted to Élisabeth's appearance before the Revolutionary Tribunal. When she asks Fouquier-Tinville what her crimes are, he replies that she was a ready accomplice in the former tyrant's many plots and conspiracies to do great harm to his people (Act III, Scene V). In Act 3, Scene VII, a series of individuals testify against the former princess in regards to her involvement with the massacring of the French people on August 10th. While Élisabeth returns to her cell as the jury deliberates, Dumas makes an expression of remorse to those present in the courtroom: "O combien est pénible / La fonction de juge à tout être sensible! / Mon cœur en est saisi de douleur et d'essroi; / Mais je suis citoyen, j'obéis à la loi" (Act III, Scene X). When the verdict comes in, Dumas reads it aloud: "Guilty for the crime of conspiring against the French and is thereby sentenced to death" (Act III, XI). The play then closes with Élisabeth's swan song (Act III, Scene XII):

Je saurai la subir: une injuste sentence / N'a jamais fait pâlir la tranquille
 innocence: / L'honneur ne dépend pas d'un sanguinaire arrêt; / Ma virtue reste
 entiere et je meurs sans regret. / Je lis dans l'avenir : il n'est pas loin peut-être, / Le
 jour où sous la loi tombera votre maître; / Le ciel ainsi que vous s'appête à le
 punir; / Que mon exemple au moins vous apprenne à mourir.⁷⁴

The notion of Madame Elizabeth dying with her virtue intact and without regret finds its greatest reiteration in the biography composed and published by her niece after the fateful Restoration of the Bourbon monarchy, beginning in 1814. She was the only member of the royal family to survive their imprisonment in the Temple, Louis-Charles succumbing in June 1795 to his ill health which resulted in large part from his mistreatment by his tutor and the prison guards

⁷³ du Ponceau, 30.

⁷⁴ du Ponceau, 45.

during the Reign of Terror. Toward the end of 1795 she was released from the Temple in a prisoner exchange between France and Austria. Soon reunited with her exiled French family, Marie-Thérèse eventually married her cousin, Louis Antoine, the duc d'Angoulême, and son of the Comte d'Artois. Between the ascension of her uncle / father-in-law in 1825 and his abdication in 1830, Marie-Thérèse's title was the dauphine de France, the same title her mother had received upon her arrival in 1770; and in the historical millisecond between her husband's own ascension and abdication in the midst of the French Revolution of 1830, she was Queen of France and Navarre.

Marie-Thérèse's memoir of Madame Élisabeth and her own narrative of her time in the Temple after her aunt's removal were both quickly translated into English. In the later nineteenth century a translation of the two texts were compiled with a selection of the tragic princess' letters, as well with the "Journal of the Tower of the Temple" by Jean-Baptiste Cléry, Louis XVI's personal valet. Appearing either under the title of *The Life and Letters of Madame Élisabeth de France, Sister of Louis XVI* (1899) or *The Ruin of a Princess* (1912), the compilation was edited and translated Katharine Prescott Wormeley. Prescott's own bias in her editing cannot be missed, but of more significance is the revelation that the princess' original manuscript contains corrections made to it by her other uncle, the Comte de Provence, King Louis XVIII after the initial restoration of the monarchy in 1814.⁷⁵ This means that while Marie-Thérèse's recounting of her aunt's life and death contains factual information, it is as well a historical fiction, falling into the counterrevolutionary and royalist discourse which strove to expose the godless illegitimacy of not just the radical republicanism of the Reign of Terror, but of the French Revolution as a whole. The conception of Madame Élisabeth as a virgin martyr

⁷⁵ Prescott-Wormeley, [untitled historical background] for "The Narrative of Madame Thérèse of France," in *Life and Letters* (1899), 209.

was a very powerful symbol for the restored monarchy and one which legitimated the Bourbons' efforts to resanctify the monarchy itself. At the same time, the restored monarchy attempted to reassert its own form of absolutist authority upon its kingdom and the subjects contained therein.

In terms of what is relevant within Marie-Thérèse's memoir which might assist the historian in locating Madame Élisabeth within the counterrevolutionary and Restoration discourses, as well as in French historiography, there truthfully is not much but there are a few items which should be noted. First, the fiction that Madame Élisabeth gave herself over to God without taking religious vows at the age of fifteen can be traced to the Duchesse's own narrative. Of her aunt after her mother's removal from the prison, she wrote:

From 1790, when I became in a state to appreciate her I never saw anything in her but religion, love of God, horror of sin, gentleness, piety, modesty, and a great attachment to her family, for whom she sacrificed her life, being never willing to leave the king and queen. She was a princess worthy of the blood of which she came. ... She considered me and care for me as her daughter, and I, I honoured (sic) her as a second mother and vowed to her all those feelings. It was said that we resembled each other in face: I feel that I have her nature; would that I might have all her virtues and rejoin her some day, also my father and mother, in the bosom of God, where, I doubt not, they are now enjoying the reward of death so meritorious.⁷⁶

In the meantime, Prescott-Wormeley's biographical sketch as well borrows from Ferrand's eulogy on several occasions. In its reprinting of Madame Élisabeth's trial transcript from the *Moniteur*, it adds a notation which asserts that when Mme. Élisabeth was asked to identify herself by Dumas, the princess stated: " 'I am named Élisabeth-Marie de France, sister of Louis XVI, aunt of Louis XVII, your king.'"⁷⁷ This reads of Ferrand's assertion that the jury found the princess guilty in part upon her declaration that Louis-Charles was the rightful king of France to the illegitimate Revolutionary Tribunal. Prescott-Wormeley also mentions that the

⁷⁶ d'Angouleme, "The Narrative of Marie-Thérèse of France," in *Life and Letters of Madame Élisabeth*, 283.

⁷⁷ *Life and Letters of Madame Élisabeth*, 96.

Moniteur's omission of the speech made by a one Chauveau-Lagarde to the Revolutionary Tribunal in which he defended Madame Élisabeth. He presumably pleaded:

I call attention to the fact that in this trial there was only a bold accusation, without documents, without examination, without witnesses, and that, consequently, as there was in it no legal element of conviction there could be no legal conviction at all.

I added that ... her answers to the questions just put to her, and that those answers, ... proved absolutely nothing but the goodness of her heart and the heroism of her friendship. ... [and] that a princess who had been a perfect model of virtue at the Court of France could not be the enemy of Frenchmen.⁷⁸

The veracity of this plea is not only unverifiable, but also unbelievable.

Elsewhere, Prescott-Wormeley plagiarizes Ferrand. Without giving him credit, she recaps the tale of the twenty-four other condemned individuals paying homage to the princess as they went to the guillotine.⁷⁹ While this volume has had to refer to Marie-Thérèse's account on multiple occasions, the memoir being the only one written by the individual who actually witnessed Madame Élisabeth's last years and removal from the Temple, the historian regards the words on its pages, as well as those on Prescott-Wormeley's ones, with caution and attempts not to let their inherent biases cloud her reception of them. The latter was too attached to her subject. So too was the former; and although her emotional attachment to her aunt was sincere, Marie-Thérèse's text though cannot escape the historian's critical eye and the very fictions of the French Revolution itself.

In her noted essay on French revolutionary discourse, Bernadette Fort reminds her fellow historians that no other event in French history has lent it sent itself to a number of "commemorative manifestations" and "pervasive" fictionalizations. She writes, "Unlike any

⁷⁸ *Life and Letters of Madame Élisabeth*, 101-102.

⁷⁹ *Life and Letters of Madame Élisabeth*, 104.

other period in French history, the Revolution was extensively narrated, fictionalized, and mythified by its own actors while it was still in the making, and this imposes an incontrovertible fictional paradigm for any subsequent study.” The thread of research and historiography which follows François Furet’s *Interpreting the French Revolution* and its approach through the political culture, the thread that this volume falls in line with, is much more hospitable to the study of the event’s “fictions” than the socio-economic and Marxists interpretations; and yet, even the Marxist readings are as well “mythical” interpretations unto themselves. Hence, it has become virtually impossible for historians to reach a consensus on the French Revolution of 1789.⁸⁰

Combined with the theatrical and visual representations of the princess’ tragic destiny, Madame Élisabeth’s early biographies initiated the thread by which her presumed virginity made it practically impossible to conceive of her in any other way than as a wronged woman and a martyr. The aforementioned more recent volumes themselves follow in their vain; and in spite of the paradigm shifts in French history and historiography, and French society itself, they still have difficulty in beholding Madame Élisabeth in any other manner. The fictions and the myths have become so pervasive that even the author of this volume cannot completely deny the princess’ “presumed” piety, charitableness, and virtuosity; but by figuring her place within the historical discourse without losing sight of her humanity permits the historian to acknowledge the many factors which constituted her historic agency.⁸¹ Furthermore, by approaching through the limited number of contemporaneous biographical, theatrical, and visual representations of her, one becomes increasingly aware of the complex and multiple ways Madame Élisabeth was and

⁸⁰Bernadette Fort, “The French Revolution and the Making of Fictions,” in *Fictions of the French Revolution* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press; 1991), 3-5; 5.

⁸¹ Joan W. Scott, *Only Paradoxes to Offer*, 16. See above, “Introduction,” 9,

continues to be constructed as a political and historical actor. The radical revolutionaries constructed her as a threatening hideous, feminine, morally bankrupt, traitorous pig and whore while royalists and counterrevolutionaries consistently constructed her as the virgin martyr of France's Bourbon monarchs. Is it any wonder that there was an effort to have Madame Élisabeth beatified in the early twentieth century after a nearly a century of mythologization.⁸²

One of tens of thousands of executions which took place between the autumn of 1793 and the summer of 1794, Madame Élisabeth's demise appeared senseless. Even Marie-Antoinette's had meaning in comparison, the total annihilation of a corrupt feminine, foreign-born, hyper-sexual beast which had threatened the French since its arrival in 1770. Some of her husband's emigrated family members had been amongst the first to despise her, the hapless queen's ruin at the hands of an illegitimate regime anticipated and relatively understandable. For a few it was not the shock they professed it to be. On the other hand, Madame Élisabeth's was and without meaning. Her apotheosis gave it one [Fig. 6.9].

⁸² J. Trey, "Les different visages de Madame Élisabeth," in *Madame Élisabeth, une princesse au destin tragique (1764-1794)*, 24. See also, "Madame Élisabeth, Princess of Royal Blood (1764-1794) , Chateau de Versailles. <http://en.chateauversailles.fr/history-/court-people/epoque-louis-xvi/madame-elisabeth-en>.



Fig. 6.9. Augustin Legrand, engraver. *S. A. R. Madame Élisabeth de France, Rejoignant au Ciel - son Auguste famille.* Au pointillé engraving; 13.8 x 11.4 cm.⁸³

⁸³ *S.A.R. Madame Élisabeth de France, Rejoignant au Ciel – son Auguste famille*, Bibliothèque nationale; accessed April 4, 2015. ftp://ftp.bnf.fr/5300/N53009785_JPEG_1_1DM.jpg.

Coda

Madame Elisabeth's remains have a myth and a mystery of their own. After her execution, her head and her body were disposed of in separate mass graves at the Monceaux cemetery. Wishing for his sister to receive a proper Christian burial, Louis XVIII ordered that her remains be located. What was believed to be her body was located but the head was never found.⁸⁴ Madame Élisabeth's presumed remains were translated from Monceaux to the Basilica of Saint-Denis and interned in the Royal Necropolis [Fig. 6.10]. Today they share the vault which contained upon their arrival those of her beloved Tante Louise, the late Abbess of the Carmelite monastery attached to the sanctuary. In 1817 Mesdames Adelaide's and Victoire's



Fig. 6.10. Maria S. Wendeln. *Burial Vault of Madame Élisabeth de France; Mesdames Adelaide, Victorie, and Louise, filles de Louis XV; and Charles de Valois, in the Royal Necropolis inside the Basilica of Saint-Denis.* Paris; May 31, 2013.

⁸⁴*Life and Letters of Madame Élisabeth*, 106-7.

remains were translated from their entombment in the Cathedral of Triste and re-interred alongside their pious and virginal niece and sister. An elaborate marble entombment for the princess alone with a bas-relief medallion portrait and three allegorical figures was proposed at some time in the Nineteenth Century [Fig. 6.11]. Notable of the allegories in this proposal is the one which sits on the monument's base with three cherubic children attached to her, one about to feed from her exposed breast, reinforcing the conception of Madame Élisabeth as a virgin martyr and a martyred mother. The project was never realized.⁸⁵ It is futile to speculate on an explanation.

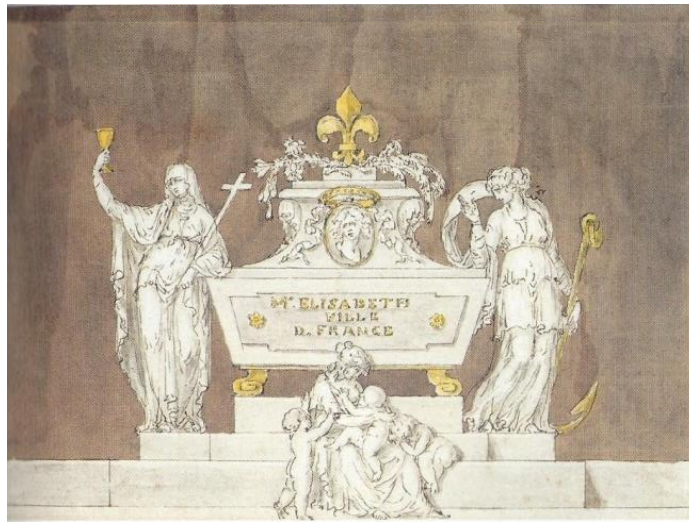


Fig. 6.11. Anon. *Projet pour le tombeau de Madame Élisabeth*. Paris, Musée Carnavalet.⁸⁶

⁸⁵ Philippe Sorel, "Les monuments à Louis XVI aux XVIII^e et XIX^e siècles," in Musée Carnavalet, *La Famille royale à Paris: de l'histoire à la légende: [exposition], Musée Carnavalet, 16 octobre 1993 – 9 janvier 1994* (Paris: Paris-Musées; 1993), 120. See also, Roger-Armand Weigert, *La Madeleine* (Paris; 1983) on L XVIII's plans to refashion the church with monuments to Louis XVI, Marie-Antoinette, and Mme. Élisabeth." Also see Sheryl Kroen, "Revolutionizing Religious Politics during the Restoration," *French Historical Studies*, Vol. 21, No. 1 (Winter, 1998), 27-53; 37, n. 22.

⁸⁶ Reproduced from *Madame Élisabeth, une princesse au destin tragique*, 79.

CHAPTER 7. CONCLUSION

Thirty years after Madame Élisabeth officially represented the Bourbon monarchy in the Salon of 1787 through her portrait painted by Labille-Guaird, and twenty-three years after the end of her physical body, her representational body once again appeared in the Salon [Fig. 7.1]. Depicted as a beautiful young woman distributing milk to orphans at the Montreuil dairy, Fleury Richard's painting recalled to the collective mind of the Salon of 1817 attendees that the sister of the late Louis XVI and the reigning Louis XVIII may physically be gone, but her virtue and good works have transcended the passage of time. Both they and Madame Élisabeth herself were immortal.



Fig. 7.1. Fleury Richard. *Madame Élisabeth de France, soeur du roi*. 1817; Salon of 1817. Oil on canvas; 134 x 175 cm. Versailles, Musée National des Châteaux de Versailles et de Trianon.¹

¹ *Madame Élisabeth de France, soeur du roi*, Madame Élisabeth, une princesse aux destin tragique; accessed April 28, 2015. http://Élisabeth.yvelines.fr/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/Distrib-lait_Fleury-

Commissioned by the Comte d'Artois, Richard's painting was one of the grandest, most idealized items in the restored Bourbon monarchy's discourse legitimating its ascension over the defunct French Republic and the Napoleonic Empire which it spawned.² Along with the aforementioned biography of the late princess in her niece's "Narrative," *Madame Élisabeth de France, soeur du roi* was in some regards an expression of the royal family's ambivalence about Marie-Antoinette, the foreign-born queen's life and troubled memory complicating the monarchy's reiteration of its sacred nature. Without the melodramatic and hagiographic qualities witnessed in so much of the counterrevolutionary discourse of the 1790s, and subtly with the gothic arches of the current Romantic era, the painter staged the scene just so the contemporaneous beholder spontaneously came upon the virginal princess in the maternal act of giving milk to her beloved, adopted children. Long forgotten are the visages of the revolting former beauty, the penned fattened sow, the morally bankrupt sexual deviant, and the traitorous thief and murderer, their marginality in the political discourse of the French Revolution allowing for the public reimagining of Madame Élisabeth as a innocent, good, and virtuous princess whose destiny was sadly a tragic one.

If history is the realm of disputed memory, and memory is history controlled and fixed, Madame Élisabeth's marginality readily facilitated the biographical oversight of her location within the monarchical discourse of royal *representation* and the revolutionary one which contested it. By locating her many bodies in the political field, analyzing the signs they emitted and their contemporaneous receptions, the historian moves past the princess' near canonization

[Richard-21.jpg](#). Exhibited at the 2013 exhibition, no mention was made in the display description or the catalog that this piece is essentially a companion to another royal commission of the period, *Louis XVI distribuant des secours aux pauvres pendant l'hiver de 1788* by Louis Hersent. See digital representation at: <http://collections.chateauversailles.fr/#3b4dbf35-dbcf-4df7-b353-a65d58ff2923>.

² Juliette Trey, "Madame Élisabeth de France, soeur du roi," in *Madame Élisabeth, une princesse aux destin tragique*, 80.

to find that while she was most likely as pious and virtuous as the French believed her to be before 1789, she was indeed a political agent; and although she was one before the call of the Estates General in 1789, it was the French Revolution itself which revealed this truth to both the revolutionaries and the princess. When pressed by Fouquier-Tinville in her deposition on May 9, 1794 in regards to her conspiring “with the late tyrant against the safety and liberty of the French people,” her reply of “I have never desired anything but the happiness of the French people” fell on deaf ears.³ Before the Revolutionary Tribunal Madame Élisabeth momentarily figured at the very center of the revolutionary discourse; but she still remains though to be a princess on the margins of the broad tableau of the French Revolution.

In the 2006 motion picture *Marie Antoinette*, written and directed by Sofia Coppola, and based on the biography *The Journey* by Antonia Fraser, there are only two references to Madame Élisabeth. Both editing and creative license prohibit the movie representation of the princess from aging. When Marie-Antoinette (Kirsten Dunst) arrives at the Châteaux of Versailles, the whole of Louis XV’s court greets her with stares as Mesdames Clotilde and Élisabeth, members of the small contingent of the court’s youngest individuals, greet their new sister and then guide her through the dauphine’s appointed state apartment inside the palace. Just over an hour later into the film, Louis XVI’s sisters reappear to admire their newborn niece, Marie-Thérèse, Madame Royale. Dressed in formal court attire, Madame Élisabeth (Chloé Van Barthold) sits beside her sister-in-law and the queen radiates her joy by putting her arm around the princess’ shoulder, drawing Élisabeth in closer to the adoration of the child who, because of her sex, belongs to the royal women’s feminine and private inner circle and not to France [Fig. 7. 2].

³ “First Examination of Madame Élisabeth by Fouquier-Tinville, May 9, 1794;” reprinted and trans. in *Life and Letters of Madame Élisabeth*, 313-316; 313.



Fig. 7.2. *Marie-Antoinette* (2006).⁴

Yet, instead of being the actual fourteen-year-old girl that the princess was when her future biographer was born, she has been replaced with a child actress, the director in her own way contributing the historic mythologization and misconception pertaining to the film's protagonist and the individuals surrounding her, including Louis XVI's baby sister. Even on film Madame Élisabeth continues to be diminished and marginalized.

To regard Madame Élisabeth as the virgin martyr of the royal family, or even as “une princesse au destin tragique,” is in its own way a continuation of the princess' historic and historiographic marginalization. In its own manner, the 2013 exhibition moved beyond the mythologizing by focusing on the princess' life before the French Revolution, the rooms on the first floor of Montreuil being remodeled and refurbished with period pieces and the exhibit in the

⁴ *Marie Antoinette*, prod. by Ross Katz and Sofia Coppola; written and dir. by Sofia Coppola, 123 minutes, Columbia Pictures, 2006, motion picture.



Fig. 7.3. Didier Saulnier. *Espace 8* from *Madame Élisabeth, une Princesse au Destin Tragique, 1764-1794* exhibition; 2013.⁵

nearby Orangerie containing numerous artifacts from Élisabeth's life prior to 1789. Nonetheless, and with so much emphasis on the princess' life between 1764 and 1789, the exhibit overlooked the princess' historic political agency and even peripheralized its subtitle. Madame Élisabeth's tragic destiny and her life between 1789 and 1794 were reduced to a disembodied corner of the exhibition space in the Orangerie, disembodied because those last years were examined in a small, triangular area on the second floor of the structure [Fig. 7.3]. Moreover, with the dominance in this space of the petit point tapestry worked on by the princess and Marie-Antoinette during the last years of their lives, Madame Élisabeth's imprisonment in the Temple, trial and subsequent execution were reviewed in a moderately lit corner of the space. Even though a blown up reproduction of the melodramatic 1796 estampe titled *The Princess Elizabeth taken from the Conciergerie* (see above, Fig. 6.5) was printed on a panel in this corner within a

⁵ *Espace 8*, Madame Élisabeth, une princesse aux destin tragique; accessed March 27, 2015. <http://Élisabeth.yvelines.fr/wp-content/themes/olya/functions/thumb.php?src=wp-content/uploads/2013/03/E8-8045-1024x681.jpg&w=684&h=0&zc=1&q=90>. The petit point tapestry which dominates this space was just to the right of where this photograph was taken.

corner, there was more emphasis in this subsection upon the early commemorations of the princess, from post May 1794 portrait prints to a detail drawing for a unrealized tomb for the princess' re-internment, an item conceived of in the early days of the Bourbon monarchy's Restoration. The one artifact which most likely dates from the period around the princess' execution is a lock of her blond hair which and its inclusion was easily overlooked.⁶ The average exhibition visitor exits this space, passing back through the adulation of the pre-1789 years, knowing that Madame Élisabeth's fate was a tragic one but, unfortunately, with little real understanding as to why.

Madame Élisabeth was a royal woman by birthright, born into the public sphere of monarchical politics. Her status as a princess of France made her life prior to 1789 one of indulgence, but it as well forever made her a political agent, her physical and representational bodies perpetually symbolizing the absolute authority of the Bourbon monarchy, and constantly providing her with the opportunity to express her opinion to and exert her influence upon the definitive political body in the land and, thereby, all of France. She was a pious and charitable woman, or at least to the extent that others, before and after the French Revolution's outbreak, believed her to be one. She was as well guilty of treason in the sense that her actions and behaviors after 1789 were regarded by the Revolutionary Tribunal to be conspiratorial no matter her devotion to her brother and his family that she took flight with them on June 20, 1791, her good intentions in helping the wounded Swiss Guards on August 10, 1792, and her treatment of her adolescent nephew as her king after January 21, 1793. Essentially Madame Élisabeth was a princess on the margins of history and the French recognized her as such, her Salon exhibited portrait of 1787 nearly overlooked by the attendees and the critics alike, but to the

⁶ J. Trey, et al., *Madame Élisabeth, une princesse aux destin tragique*, 60-79.

revolutionaries she posed a threat as a royal woman who symbolized everything which they sought to eradicate, regardless of where she was physically or representationally located, be it through the distribution of her letters amongst the émigrés or as a nearly forgotten prisoner locked away in the keep of a Medieval castle.

This volume begins with the tale of an angry crowd standing in the Palais Royale outside Maret's bookshop demanding that Robespierre answer the questions, "What were Madame Élisabeth crimes? Why did you send to the scaffold that innocent and virtuous person?" Turning to his companions inside the shop, the revolutionary denied his authorship of the princess' trial and execution, giving credit to his fellow member on the Committee of Public Safety, Collot d'Herbois, and lamented how he was the one who was always held accountable.⁷ A tale told by one of Robespierre's apologists, he was still culpable in not only Madame Élisabeth's trial and execution, but as well as all the other trials and executions which took place during the darkened period between the Fall of the Monarchy in 1792 and his own during the Thermidorian Reaction (July 27, 1794), each one a political act unto itself. It is with the knowledge of that truth by which the historian and biographer transcends the mythologization of the princess and reveals Madame Élisabeth's own political agency, an agency which she was born into and eventually acted upon in spite of its denial on account of her sex by one system of authority, by virtue of the Salic Law, and its denial by another which railed against both the monarchical tyranny that she represented and the presence of any and all women in the public

⁷ See above, "Prologue," 2-3. As for Robespierre's assertion that Collot d'Herbois was the author of the princess' execution, we must seriously consider the story itself to be one put forth by one of the revolutionary's many apologists. Moreover, the debate between Robespierre's or Collot's responsibility in Madame Élisabeth's trial and execution is a moot one when both men sat on the Committee of Public Safety, the *defacto* executive government of France during the Reign of Terror, which held authority above the Revolutionary Tribunal and along with the Committee of General Security.

sphere of politics. Stepping from out of the shadows of time, the historian beholds their sitter anew, studies her countenance, puts pen to paper to sketch it, and after months of portrait sittings and active conversations with the patron and her associates, finally produces a new and candid representation.

APPENDIX.
Le RENDEZ-VOUS
DE
MADAME ÉLISABETH
SOEUR DU ROI
AVEC L'ABBÉ DE S. MARTIN
AUMONIER DE LA GARDE NATIONALE
DANS LE JARDIN DES TUILERIES
(1790)

Ce siècle est le siècle des galanteries. Dans tous les rangs, dans toutes les conditions, on aime le plaisir, & depuis la houlette jusqu'au scepter, tout aime dans la nature.

L'Abbé *de Sainte-Martin*, ci-devant Conseiller au Châtelet de Paris, aujourd'hui premier Aumonier de la Garde Nationale, est assez connu dans les cercles des jolies femmes. Ses aventures, ses bonnes fortunes lui ont donne une réputation égale à celle des Céladons des ruelles. Ses artificieuses complaisances l'ont fait accueillir de toutes les déesses de la Cour, où il a fait naitre à madame Élisabeth, soeur de notre Monarque, le désir de le connoître.

L'Abbé de Saint-Martin fut introduit chez cette Princesse, dont la passion se développa à la première entrevue. Mais le lieu, mais l'instant n'étoient poine favorable pour s'épancher & faire l'aveu de la tendre impression que cet Aumônier avait fait sur son âme. Tout l'entretien ne roula que sur des matières vagues. Madame Elisabeth parloit peu, parloit mal; elle begayoit, & sa langue embarrassée ne pouvoit exprimer clairement les désirs et les besoins de son coeur. [end of pg. 7]

Dans cette gene douloureuse, elle eut recours au stratagem le plus prudent. L'amour est ingénieux pour tirer de peine les amants. Quoiqu'on le représente avec un bandeau & les yeux fermés, il est le plus clairvoyant des Dieux, il franchit grilles & tours.

Madame *Elisabeth* avoit bien prévu que, gênée dans un premier entretien, elle ne pourroit dire ce qu'elle voudroit, ni exprimer ce qui se passoit dans son âme. Elle avoit, en consequence, prepare une lettre, dans laquelle elle avoit peint, avec des couleurs vives, tout ce que la passion la plus tendre & la plus langoureuse inspire à celle qui est blessée, & elle avoit saisi le moment de la lui donner.

Si l'Abbé de Saint-Martin eût été plus délicat, s'il avoit eu seulement du scrupule & de l'âme, ce billet doux, si précieux, auroit été enchâssé dans une boîte d'or, & jamais mortel n'en auroit eu connoissance. Mais la gloriole, la fatuité de cet Abbé révéla tout & afficha son improudence & la foiblesse de madame Elisabeth. Il communiqua le contenu de cette lettre à tous ceux qu'il rencontra; il en donna même des copies, & en laissa prendre à ses amis, à ses connoissances, de manière qu'à force d'être répandue dans les cercles de Paris, elle nous est parvenue telle que nous l'imprimons.

Lettre de Madame Elisabeth, soeur de Roi, à l'Abbe de Saint-Martin, Aumônier de la Garde-Nationale

Depuis longtemps, Monsieur, j'aspirois au plaisir de vous connoître: ma satisfaction a surpassé mon espérance. Je desire que l'impression que vous avez [end p. 8] faite sur mon coeur soit partagé. Si vous êtes sensible à cet aveu, j'aurai l'avantage de vous revoir demain soir, à cinq heures précises, dans le jardin des Tuileries. Je serai assise sur le banc qui est vis-à-vis le grand bassin & je serai seule; je ne crois pas que vous me fassiez attendre, vous y perdriez trop; ce que j'ai à vous dire intéressera votre bonheur & le mien. Rien ne se peut comparer à l'estime singulière que j'ai pour vous & don't je veux vous donner des preuves.

Elisabeth de Bourbon, soeur du Roi.

A Paris, le 10 Novembre 1790

L'Abbé de *Saint-Martin* n'a pas manqué ce précieux rendez-vous. Il s'est promené depuis trois heures & demie dans le jardin des Tuileries pour prouver son exactitude et son empressement à voir la princesse (nous le savons de sa propre bouche). Il a vu arriver madame *Elisabeth*, en robe négligée; elle avoit pris l'allée des Feuillans : il courut à sa rencontre, & tous deux sortirent par la porte de l'Orangerie, & marchèrent jusqu'à Passy, où ils entrèrent dans une petite hôtellerie, & se firent server dans une chambre retirée, tout ce qu'il a été possible de trouver en pareil lieu & en pareille circonstance.

En attendant que la table fut garnie, lorsque le vin fut apporté, que le feu pétillait, madame Elisabeth, assise à droite, près la cheminée & la table, découvrit sa figure & parla à-peu-près en ces termes à l'abbé de *Saint-Martin*, qui étoit place vis-à-vis d'elle à gauche.

On me demandera comment nous avons su cet entretien mystérieux : la réponse est facile, nous l'avons [end p. 9] entendu repeater dix fois à l'heureux Abbé de *Saint-Martin*; & nous croyons faire le plus grand plaisir d'en donner un précis à nos Lecteurs, qui, quoique contents d'être instruits, blâmeront, comme nous l'indiscrétion criminelle de ce sot glorieux, de cet impudent, si indigne de son bonheur & de sa fortune. Hélas! un aimable, un discret chevalier n'auroit pas un sort aussi doux. Voilà comme l'amour est injuste & raisonne si mal. Les amants

le plus délicats, les plus ingénieux sont les plus maltraités; & les hommes les plus engoués de leur sottise figure, de leur esprit borné, sont le plus favorisés des femmes, qu'ils méprisent.

A qui, sexe injuste & bizarre, à qui imputerez-vous vos disgrâces? Ce n'est sans doute qu'à vous-même, à vos caprices & à votre aveuglement. Aussi êtes-vous souvent les tristes victimes de vos injustices & de votre opiniâtreté, aussi payez-vous si souvent vos préférences ridicules & comiques par des regrets, des remords éternels qui ne vous quittent que dans le tombeau.

Je ne prétends pas assurer que l'Abbé de Saint-Martin soit un homme sans mérite. Sa figure n'a rien d'ignoble. A son indiscretion près, il a sans doute de quoi plaire aux femmes. Mais l'Abbé *de Saint-Martin* est un Prêtre, est un homme de cloître. Sa robe ne devrait point flatter une jolie femme; & homme pour homme, il me semble qu'une femme seroit plus excusable d'avoir de la passion pour un aimable cavalier, pour un *Adonis* du siècle. Dira-t-on qu'un Prêtre, un Moine sont plus discrets? Cette assertion n'est pas toujours vraie : tout l'avantage que les femmes rencontrent ordinairement avec les Evêques, les Abbés, [end p. 10] les Prêtres, les Moines, consiste seulement à être mieux payées. Triste consolation ! foible dédommagement du mépris dont ils se couvrent, & de l'impossibilité de figurer jamais dans la société comme femmes légitimes, comme mères & citoyennes entourées de maris estimables & d'enfants qui les chérissent & les respectent. Avec un amant libre de ses volontés, une femme à temperament a du moins l'espérance consolante de devenir la moitié, l'épouse de son amant, & de porter avec honneur, avec fierté, le nom du père de ses enfants.

Ce n'est pas que madame *Elisabeth* eût jamais pu concevoir l'idée de s'unir, par les noeuds de l'hyméne, à un mortel ordinaire, mais il est certain qu'entourée d'Ecuyers aimables et vigoureux, elle n'eût pas manqué d'adorateurs, & qu'elle eût justifié son goût et fait pardonner sa faiblesse. Mais comme il n'est plus temps de la blâmer, nous revenons au discours qu'elle a tenu, à la déclaration qu'elle a faite à son amant croisé.

Je ne vous ai, Monsieur, donné rendez-vous aujourd'hui que pour vous révéler un secret que je ne puis retenir et que vous n'auriez jamais deviné. Votre surprise a sans doute été grande, quand je vous ai remis le billet qui vous a conduit ici; elle aura redoublé en le lisant, mais je vais vous étonner encore bien davantage.

Monsieur, j'oublie la sublimité de mon extraction, mon nom, ma famille, ma fortune, et je me plais à descendre dans la classe bourgeoise pour vous appartenir uniquement et cimenter votre félicité si votre âme est touché de mon amour et de ma faiblesse. Je me jette entre vos bras dans la certitude que vous ne [end p. 11] trahirez jamais les plaisirs que je vous réserve, et que vous ne me réduirez point à la douleur de rougir à mes yeux de ma tendresse et de pleurer le reste de mes jours dans le fond d'un monastère pour vous avoir aimé au point de vous faire le sacrifice de ma vertu. Oui, Monsieur, je vous aime, et mon amour n'aura d'autre terme que celui de mon existence ou de la vôtre.

Petite fille de Roi, soeur du premier Monarque de l'Europe et des plus illustres Princes et Princesses, je me fais honneur, je me fais gloire de devenir votre maîtresse, de vous avoir pour amant. Que toute ma famille en murmure, qu'elle m'adresse les plus violents reproches, je brave toutes leurs representations; rien, non, rien, mon cher Abbé, ne pourra (je vous le jure) altérer mon amour et ma fidélité; usez seulement, mon ami, de précaution et de finesse pour ne point vous compromettre et exposer vos jours que je protégerai de toute l'influence de mon pouvoir et de mon crédit. Soyez ferme et hardi sans être téméraire. Ne craignez point que votre Elisabeth puisse jamais changer de sentiments, ma constance est un sûr garant de notre bonheur et de nos jouissances délicieuses, si vous êtes fidèle. Que le plus grand des Rois vienne m'offrir son scepter et sa couronne, qu'il prodigue à mes pieds les bijoux de l'Orient, lencens des dieux, ses trésors; qu'il cherche à flatter ma vanité par tous les sacrifices brillants que les têtes couronnées peuvent seules offrir à l'objet de leur adoration, tu me verras, cher amant, rejeter avec dédain son diadème et sa main pour ne vivre, pour ne respire que pour toi, et quand mon frère se réuniroit à lui, je serais soured à ses instances et à ses sollicitations. Je braverai toutes [end p. 12] les remontrances pour ne m'occuper que de nos plaisirs et de notre amour.

Tant de protestations furent accompagnées d'un torrent de larmes, mais de ces larmes du sentiment, plus douces que les ris.

Peignez-vous, Lecteurs, la situation de madame Elisabeth éplorée; peignez-vous les transports, les convulsions, les épanchements & les frissons de l'amour! Voilà ce qui agitoit cette Princesse, don't les yeux flamboyants annonçoient les plus violentes ardeurs et le besoin délicieux d'aimer et de jouir.

Représentez-vous aussi un homme stupéfiat, émerveillé & attendri de l'aveu d'une illustrissime Princesse; figurez-vous quell peut être le thermometer de ses sens et la vanité secrète de s'entendre dire des choses si flatteuses, de pouvoir tout, de tout entreprendre avec la certitude de plaire & de faire partager ses feux à une femme du plus haut parage qui soupire & est dévorée des flammes de la concupiscence la plus ardente. Un homme alors, quelque soit la vigueur de sa complexion robuste est toujours saisi, parce qu'il ne peut s'attendre à une aventure si imprévue. C'est ce que l'Abbé de Saint-Martin nous a déclaré de bonne foi.

Mais avant de prélude, pour rassurer son amante éperdue, il lui parla de la sorte:

<<Votre aveu, Madame, me flatte & me pénètre plus encore qu'il ne m'étonne, puisqu'il est vrai que la Providence m'a fait naître pour me réserver la gloire de posséder votre coeur, & jouir dans vos bras des faveurs les plus délicieuses de l'amour; je vous promets, je vous jure, Madame, que je n'aimerai jamais que vous, & que fier & satisfait de votre tendresse, je [end p. 13] n'aimerai, jamais que vous; que le ciel engloutisse mon être dans les abîmes les plus noirs & les plus vils animaux, aux insectes de l'air & de la terre, si jamais votre amant, infidèle à votre tendresse, ingrate & perjure, cesse de vous adorer! O reine de mon âme! idole de mes sens! fille de la volupté! Votre image, gravée en caractères de feu dans mon coeur & mon imagination, ne

sortira jamais de ma mémoire; & avant d'expirer, si ma dernière parole est à Dieu, mon avant-dernière sera pour vous.>>

En prononçant ces mots, l'Abbé de Saint-Martin embrasse tendrement madame Elisabeth, lui passé complaisamment la main dans son sein, la retire, & lève sa jupe royale; il ravage ses appas, les découvre à la lumière, les dévore des yeux; il baise de ses lèvres ces boutons d'albâtre & de rose que l'amour lui-même avoit arrondis de sa main. Sa soutane déboutonnée, sa culotte desserrée, il présenta son vigoureux *priape*, qui, fier d'une si belle conquête, entra impérieusement dans le basin de la volupté.

Madame *Elisabeth*, pâmée, se livre à la fièvre de l'amour; ses soupirs, ses épanchemens, ses trémoussemens facilitent la jouissance. <<Ah! s'écrioit-elle, cher amant, que ma tendresse est vive & que ton amour est grand! J'expire, je me meurs: lâche les flots brûlans du sang qui circule dans tes veines, ne te retire point, enfonce ton dard, qu'il me perce l'âme. O! mon ami, tu combles ma félicité! Ton Elisabeth n'est heureuse que par toi, son bonheur est ton ouvrage.>> [end p. 14]

<<O! ma divine amie, repartit l'Abbé de Saint-Martin, vous n'êtes point une femme, une mortelle à mes yeux, vous êtes une divinité que j'adore!>>

Après ce premier exploit de galanterie, l'Abbé satisfait d'une Victoire qui ne lui avoit rien coûté, releva sa galante Bergère du lit sur lequel il l'avoit assise, où elle s'étoit étendue de si bonne grâce, en élevant sur sa tête ses bras mignons, pour laisser à son amant mitré le privilege de moissonner à aise ses attraits & ses faveurs. Après la douce & mystérieuse affaire (dis-je), l'Abbé, glorieux & tendre, présenta un verre de vin de Bourgogne, & il en but, d'un seul trait, une bouteille entiere. Cela ne surprendra personne. On sait que cet Abbé chérit le jus de la treille au point d'avoir habitude de noyer sa raison dans des flacons de Champagne & Bourgogne. Mais, en cette circonstance, il étoit bien excusable, il venoit de s'énerver, il avoit besoin de nouvelles forces pour renouveler ses assaults voluptueux.

On se remit à table, & nos amans épuisés & non rassasiés de jouir, se restaurèrent l'estomac avec une chère exquisite & les mets les plus succulents & les plus délicats. Ils étoient libres & sans témoins; le rire étinceloit dans leurs yeux; le plaisir, le contentement embellissoient la bouche vermeille de la Princesse, qui avoit laissé ses gradeurs & son faste dans le château des Tuileries, pour jouir entre les bras de l'amour & de la liberté, dans le plus parfait *incognito*.

Cette délicieuse collation dura trois heures pleines, & ne fut interrompue que six fois (si l'on en croit l'Abbé de Saint-Martin), pour se replacer sous le dais du plaisir, & savourer, dans l'opération mystérieuse, le bonheur d'*Eve* & d'*Adam* dans le Paradis terrestre, [end p. 15] c'est-à-dire, en un mot, qu'on ne faisoit qu'un saut du lit à la table & de la table au lit. Quelle vie pour un Abbé! On ne doute point qu'elle ne soit ordinairement l'unique qu'ils adoptent & professent. Mais il n'étoit réservé qu'à l'Abbé de Saint-Martin de jouir avec la pupille de nos Rois, avec la soeur de notre Monarque.

Que de Princes, que de grands Seigneurs, que de Prélats même, à commencer par nos Cardinaux de *Rohan*, de *Loménie*, de *Brienne*, seroient jaloux d'une aussi bonne fortune! Avec quelle ardeur ils offriraient leurs hommages & leurs libations dans le temple de leur divinité!

Après le joyeux & gallant repas, avant de descendre de leur retraite mystérieuse, nos amans jetèrent les yeux sur le lit, sur le trône de leurs plaisirs & se regardant respectivement, ils se sourirent malignement. Ces ris dévoilaient la douce reminiscence de la volupté qui avoit enivré leurs ames & les invitoient à reprendre leurs ébats. L'Abbé de *St.-Martin*, toujours vigoureux, souleva son amante docile, et la reporta dans ses bras, sur ce lit, témoin de leurs épanchemens & de leurs caresses mutuelles. Le sacrifice de *Vénus* se renouvela, mais il fut le dernier dans ce réduit inconnu. Avant de quitter l'hôtellerie, on but un verre de liqueur spiritueuse, et pour la première fois de sa vie, madame Elisabeth & l'Abbé de *St.-Martin*, pour laisser ignorer l'usage et l'emploi de leurs moments, hélas! si doux de trop courts, firent ce lit qu'ils avoient défait si joyeusement ensemble.

Quel spectacle que la soeur d'un Roi de France jouer le rôle d'une servante de cabaret, & réparer un lit avec ses mains tendres & délicates conjointement [end p. 16] avec un Abbé en grande soutane! Faut-il après cet aspect être étonné si *Jupiter* se métamorphosa tant de fois pour plaire aux rebelles bergères qui l'avoient charmé? Doit-on être surprise si le docte *Apollon*, si *Mars* se déguisèrent; si le brave *Alcide* prit la quenouille & le fuseau pour filer aux pieds d'*Omphale*. O amour, divin amour, quelle est ta puissance! Tout est soumis à ton empire, les dieux comme les mortels reconnoissent tes loix, & n'échappent point à tes traits. Les poissons, les volatiles & même les monstres les plus cruels, les plus farouches, s'attendrissent à ta voix & ne peuvent résister à tes inspirations. Il n'est point de climat où ta domination suprême ne s'étende.

La Princesse, accompagnée de son amant, reprit le chemin des *Champs-Élysées*, & d'un pas leste arriva dans le plus tranquille *incognito* au jardin des Tuileries où ils firent quelques tours de promenade sans réfléchir à la route qu'ils avoient faite.

Mais enfin l'instant de se quitter étoit arrivé. On se serroit les mains, on se disoit les choses les plus tendres, on se promettoit de se revoir au plutôt, de s'écrire, on s'enfonça dans une allée somber, on se donna des baisers de flame, qui furent le prelude & l'avant-goût des attouchemens voluptueux. Madame Elisabeth, acculée contre un marbre, fut troussée; elle, de son côté, mit la main à la culotte de l'Abbé de Saint-Martin, & empoigna le member viril, qui fait tant de plaisirs aux dames & aux filles. Madame Elisabeth présentoit sa coquille avec grace, & serroit l'Abbé de Saint-Martin, qui la dardoit à son aise & à sa devotion; enfin, après cette cérémonie naturelle, nos amans se séparèrent.

Madame Elisabeth remonta dans ses appartemens, [end p. 17] après s'être fait reconnoître & conduire par la Garde nationale. L'Abbé se retira tout pensif, tout satisfait de sa soirée délicieuse. Son bonheur lui paroissoit si grand, qu'il avoit peine à se le persuader. Il

parloit tout bas en marchant, & sorti des Tuileries, il prit un carrosse, & se fit reconduire. A peine fut-il rentré, qu'il raconta à plusieurs amis & à quelques dames qui attendoient son retour, son aventure toute récente. Tout le monde fut surprise & éclata de rire. On soupa: la conversation ne roula que sur la galanteries. Une dame de la compagnie plaisanta l'Abbé de Saint-Martin sur ses prouesses, & comme ce *poupin* faisoit encore les doux yeux, il s'attira quelques sarcasmes.

<<Ah! monsieur l'Abbé, lui dit la dame don't il serroit les genoux, si ce que vous nous avez raconté est vrai, vous ne devez pas, en ce moment, être capable de grand chose. Il ne vous doit plus rester que des paroles; d'ailleurs, vous ne devez plus chercher à plaire: votre sort est assez brillant. Voilà, M. l'Abbé, le cas de vous piquer de constance & de fidélité.>>

Il faut convenir que les femmes sont foibles, mais que les hommes sont trop présomptueux. Ils pensent qu'il n'y a qu'à cajoler, qu'à batifoler, pour donner aux femmes l'envie de se prêter au doux mystère. On [end. P. 18] ne fait pas attention que les femmes ne succombent que par occasion, ou par nécessité, toute femme qui réfléchit à l'amour, est toujours rebelle. Ce n'est que quand la passion est violente & qu'elle dégénère en besoin, que les femmes s'abandonnent à leurs désirs. Sans cette circonstance, elle se hérissent sur leur vertu. Il n'y a que la vanité qui les perd. Un homme riche jouit, parce qu'il paie : mais est-il aimé? Non, sans doute, parce que l'argent seul ne rend pas aimable. C'est par cette raison qu'on voit dans le monde tant de femmes richement entretenues par des hommes fortunes qu'elles sacrifient à des jeunes gens don't ils font le sort.

Madame *Elisabeth* n'est pas dans ce cas. Elle aime de bonne foi l'Abbé de Saint-Martin, qui ne l'aime guère, mais qui, pour afficher son bonheur & sa vanité, pour se prévaloir d'un mérite qu'il n'a pas & se ménage une puissante protection, continue de lui faire une cour assidue & de jouir avec elle.

On me demandera comment cette Princesse, tant courtisée, tant flattée par une foule de Seigneurs d'une taille, d'une figure intéressante, reste constamment fidèle à cet Abbé de Saint-Martin. Je répondrai que c'est par orgueil. Une femme n'ignore pas qu'on lui pardonne volontiers une foiblesse pour un seul amant; mais qu'elle est pour jamais déshonorée quand elle se rend publique. D'ailleurs, les mines efféminées des courtisans ne la tentent pas. Elle presume bien, l'ardente commère, qu'elle ne seroit pas mieux, pas si bien service par un Officier, un Gentilhomme de sa maison, que par le rubicon Abbé *de Saint-Martin*, qui, plein de force & de vigueur, a un tempéranment inépuisable. Elle n'a qu'une chose à craindre, c'est de [end p. 19] gagner le joli mal, parce que l'Abbé de Saint-Martin est un libertine effréné de profession, & qu'il prend ses ébats avec des femmes qui appartiennent complaisamment à tout le monde.

Mais cette Princesse ne peut se figurer que son amant lui fasse quelque infidélité, parce qu'elle ne s'aveugle point sur le prix de ses faveurs, dont elle sait que tout mortel seroit jaloux. Sa naissance (il est vrai), son rang, ne lui permettent point de sourire à tout venant. Si la

grandeur a son privilège, elle a sans doute des entraves qui troublent le plaisir & gênent la liberté. Madame Elisabeth a franchi les bornes de la contrainte. Elle voit régulièrement l'Abbé de Saint-Martin tous les jours, elle lui fait les plus précieux cadeaux en reconnaissance de ses bons offices, & nous apprendrons bientôt que ce vigoureux F. sera élevé à l'Episcopat à la sollicitation de son Elisabeth, & que Louis XVI, fatigué de la résistance de sa soeur, finira par accorder sa protection à cet Abbé luxurieux, qui, dans les siècles de la primitive Eglise, eût expié son scandaleux libertinage & sa dissolution publique dans les flames d'un bûcher dévorant, ou eût sur un échafaud.

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ABSTRACT**PRINCESS ON THE MARGINS: TOWARD A NEW PORTRAIT OF
MADAME ÉLISABETH DE FRANCE**

by

MARIA SPENCER WENDELN**August 2015****Advisor:** Dr. Janine M. Lanza**Major:** History**Degree:** Doctor of Philosophy

Princess on the Margins: Toward a New Portrait of Madame Élisabeth de France moves past the overtly sympathetic commemoration of the princess by her associates, family members, and many of her biographers. Rather than perpetuate the virgin martyr myth pertaining to the princess, this work regards Madame Élisabeth as a historical actor. It also moves past the marginalization of the princess in analysis of the French Revolution. She was a woman born into the public sphere of monarchical politics; and even though France's Salic Law denied political authority to her because of her sex, royal womanhood presented Louis XVI's sister with the potential to influence him, his counselors, and by extension, his subjects.

Drawing upon a wealth of conceptual and theoretical tools from history, art historian, philosophy, the "new" biography, and gender analysis, this work also analyzes Madame Élisabeth's political agency and her location in the political culture of the French revolutionary era. Before 1789 the French thought of the princess as the king's kind and virtuous sister, an image which stood in sharp contrast to the negative popular imagination pertaining to Marie-Antoinette. After 1789 the manner in which the French conceived of Madame Élisabeth drastically transformed as her brother's subjects came to actually know her. The princess was an intransigent royalist who actively conspired against the Revolution from within the Tuileries;

and she was amongst the royal family members who criticized Louis XVI for his vacillation and political weakness. The princess also figured in the competing discourses and practices of the period, occasionally taking center stage, especially during her trial and execution in May 1794.

Madame Élisabeth's execution was a political act, the radical Revolutionaries sending the princess to the scaffold for the crime of treason. By acknowledging this truth, this dissertation seeks to avoid the *modus operandi* of the princess' past biographies and recognizes that Madame Élisabeth was a political agent. When pressed by the Revolutionary Tribunal's prosecutor on her role in helping Louis XVI to conspire against the liberty of the French, the princess replied, "I have never desired anything but the happiness of the French people."

AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL STATEMENT

Maria duPuy Spencer Wendeln is an instructor in the Wayne State University Department of History and the Department of Gender, Sexuality and Women's Studies. She holds a B.A. in Art History from the University of Louisville (December 1987). She received her M.A. in History from Wayne State University (May 2002). With the completion of this dissertation and fulfillment of doctoral requirements, Wendeln will thereby hold a Ph.D. in History from Wayne State University (August 2015).

As a graduate student, Wendeln has received multiple awards, including several Graduate Student Professional scholarships, a Summer Dissertation Fellowship, and two travels awards which facilitated on site research at the Archives Nationales, the Bibliothèque Nationale, the Chateau de Versailles, the Musée Carnavalet, the Musée du Louvre, and Madame Élisabeth de France's estate, Montreuil. Wendeln has as well presented twice at the *Newberry Library Center for Renaissance Studies Graduate Student Conference* (Chicago: 2010; 2015), the *Western Society for French History Thirty-eighth Annual Meeting* (Lafayette: 2010), and *The Berkshire Conference of Women Historians* (Toronto: 2014).

Wendeln resides in Holland, Michigan, with her husband of twenty-eight years, Thomas. They have moved extensively, from Louisville, to metro Detroit, to Chihuahua, Mexico, to Loveland, Colorado. They returned to Michigan in 1993 and raised their two daughters in Livonia. Natalie is a student in Clinical Laboratory Sciences at Wayne State; and Carolyn is a student in Astrophysics at Michigan State University. Both plan on following their parents in pursuit of graduate degrees.