

Marie Antoinette's World: Intrigue, Infidelity, and Adultery in Versailles

Will Bashor

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Will Bashor puts Marie Antoinette's tumultuous life under the microscope in his historical analysis, *Marie Antoinette's World*.

Marie Antoinette has long been shrouded in secrecy and scandal, from her marriage to indecisive Louis XVI to her gruesome demise. But the French court was a hotbed of debauchery, excess, and greed long before her coronation. Bashor traces over a century and a half of scurrilous royal affairs, particularly those involving—or allegedly involving—France's most infamous queen.

The book begins with Louis XIII, who built the palace of Versailles as a sanctuary for himself and his male friends and lovers. From there, the story becomes ever more outrageous, chronicling the rise and fall of royal favorites and mistresses, and the proliferation of venereal disease. It even explores the possibility that Marie Antoinette herself was infected. And yet the book's most shocking revelation is not the endless parade of sexual scandals, but rather the unhygienic treatment of majestic Versailles.

Marie Antoinette was forever surrounded by gossip regarding her intimate relationships with people of lesser social standing, extravagant gambling, and risqué parties. Likewise, she, her predecessors, and her contemporaries were the subject of vicious rumors on every topic, from impotence and same-sex liaisons to incest and pedophilia.

Analysis of Marie Antoinette's handwriting and astrological charts is used to glean further insight into her moods and actions, while extensive quotes from eighteenth-century propaganda show that the queen's bad behavior was well known outside of Versailles, used to stoke the public's anger at the self-indulgent royals. A brief discussion of the queen's gender-nonconforming friend is couched in questionable terms.

Bashor's thorough discussions reveal that Marie Antoinette was neither an angel nor a demon, but rather a complex, flawed human being. *Marie Antoinette's World* is a frank portrait of the queen and the many scandals that plagued her reign and legacy.

EILEEN GONZALEZ (July / August 2020)

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