



Marie Antoinette: The Last Queen of France

By Evelyn Lever

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In MARIE ANTOINETTE, Evelyn Lever draws on a variety of resources, including diaries, letters, and firsthand accounts, to write this sumptuous, addictive delight. From family life in Vienna to the choke of the guillotine, this gripping work combines a fast-paced historical narrative with all the elements of scandalous fiction: Marie's wedding at Versailles to Louis XVI, the French court, boredom, hypocrisy, loneliness, allies, enemies, scandal, intrigue, sex, peasant riots, the fall of the Bastille, mob rule in Paris, imprisonment, and, finally, execution.

From primary source documents Lever fashions an insightful glimpse into the French court at Versailles. The characters of court are expertly drawn. There is the dashing Axel Fersen, Marie's great love; Maria Theresa, the scheming mother trying to place her daughter on the Hapsburg throne; the legendary Madame du Barry, lover to Louis XV; and, of course, Marie herself.

Luxuriously evocative of the Versailles court, historically sharp and witty, and detailing the compelling story of Marie Antoinette's life, Evelyn Lever's biography entrances readers.

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

This highly readable translation of French historian Evelyne Lever's 1991 biography captures all the drama and pathos of Marie Antoinette's short life. Born in 1755, this carefree, fun-loving daughter of Austrian empress Maria Theresa inherited neither her mother's political shrewdness nor her sense of duty. She was married off at 14 to the stolid, clumsy French Dauphin, who would not fully consummate their marriage for another seven years, at which point he was King Louis XVI and their marital difficulties were the subject of public ridicule. She consoled herself by retreating to the artificial village she constructed at Trianon, where she could be free of the court etiquette she hated and indulge in expensive amusements that only increased her unpopularity. Her rare incursions into politics were just as ill judged; she alienated the French nobility with attempts to further Austria's diplomatic goals, and from the first rumblings of revolution in 1788, she influenced Louis to take a hard line on royal power when compromise might have saved the monarchy and prevented their executions in 1793. Lever does not soften Marie Antoinette's faults or downplay her poor judgment, but most readers will finish this absorbing narrative feeling very sorry for a pretty, goodhearted, but fundamentally frivolous woman thrown into a historical moment whose demands were beyond her. --

Wendy Smith

From Publishers Weekly

This romantic portrait of the queen who was reviled and eventually executed by the French revolutionaries transforms the woman who supposedly said "Let them eat cake" from a symbol of the cruelty of class politics into a quaint sovereign. Lever, a French historian who has written biographies of Madame de Pompadour and other figures of the French court, sees Marie Antoinette as a fashionable and frivolous victim of salacious rumors. While she admits that her subject had a "complete lack of insight into the aspirations of the majority of the French people," Lever portrays Antoinette as the novelistic heroine she always wanted to be, not an actor on the political stage. Her "voluptuous bosom," "fleshy mouth" and "supple neck," Lever writes, were unspoiled by her "slightly protruding blue eyes," and she "knew better than any other sovereign how to bring to perfection the aristocratic art of living of prerevolutionary France." Although a compelling narrative, the book doesn't do justice to the weighty moral and political themes Marie Antoinette's life and death raise. The queen, it is clear, was a political disaster, managing to alienate both a sizeable section of the courtly aristocracy and the starving masses. Her extravagance and counter-revolutionary impulses provoked "incredibly venomous" lampoons (and, of course, her death). But Lever never takes up these components of her life. Rather, she repeatedly ascribes acts of revolutionary violence to "madness" perpetrated by "madmen." Energetically researched in Paris, Vienna, even Sweden (the home of the queen's dark, handsome beau, who also "looked exactly like the hero of a novel"), the book is evocative, but romance, rather than historical analysis, takes precedence here. 8 pages of b&w photos not seen by PW. (July)

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From Library Journal

Lever is a noted French historian who has written several biographies on major players in the turbulent events of late 18th-century France, and this is her first book to be translated into English. She shines a penetrating light on the opulent Versailles subculture and the queen whose royal excesses served as a major catalyst for the revolutionary upheaval of 1789. Through the skillful use of memoirs and other primary documents, Lever creates an empathic picture of Louis XVI's headstrong wife. Marie Antoinette never grasped the nuances of French court politics. Her haughty manner, extramarital romances, and extravagant spending habits served as grist for the palace rumor mill and for the pamphleteers bent on destroying the monarchy. Yet Marie Antoinette also displayed courageous devotion to her family and the Royalist

cause Deven as the guillotine blade dropped on her royal neck. This is an absorbing work of meticulous scholarship and easily supplants any recent biographies of the tragic queen (e.g., Carolly Erickson's *To the Scaffold*, LJ 3/1/91). Recommended for academic and public libraries.

-DJim Doyle, *Sara Hightower Regional Lib., Rome, GA*

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Users Review

From reader reviews:

Dorothy Payne:

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Bethany Eng:

Marie Antoinette: The Last Queen of France can be one of your starter books that are good idea. Many of us recommend that straight away because this book has good vocabulary that can increase your knowledge in vocab, easy to understand, bit entertaining but still delivering the information. The author giving his/her effort to set every word into enjoyment arrangement in writing Marie Antoinette: The Last Queen of France but doesn't forget the main point, giving the reader the hottest and also based confirm resource facts that maybe you can be one of it. This great information can drawn you into new stage of crucial pondering.

Michelle Huffman:

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