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THE QUEEN'S HAIR: MARIE-ANTOINETTE, POLITICS, AND DNA

Desmond Hosford

Among the most jealously guarded relics of the ancien régime are locks of Marie-Antoinette's hair (1755–93). The survival of samples of the queen's hair is fortuitous for more than sentimental reasons and raises issues concerning the political significance of Marie-Antoinette's hair through the centuries. The sociological role of fashion during the second half of the eighteenth century, particularly at the court of France, has long been established, and Marie-Antoinette is a central figure in its study. Although she is typically characterized as either an arbiter of fashion, or, conversely, its victim, there has not yet been a study that politically contextualizes the performative role of Marie-Antoinette's hairstyles. As Dena Goodman has recently noted:

For Marie-Antoinette, the struggle for agency and personal autonomy—the ability to be herself and act according to her own will and desires—was carried out on the public stage and within a set of dynamic forces, within what we might call history itself. She was constantly being identified, constructed, presented, and represented.¹

One fundamental element in this process was the queen's hair, an element of her body that served as a site of agency, an embodiment of her acceptance of or resistance to external forces. As such, Marie-Antoinette's hairstyles functioned as a corporeal element in the establishment of her French identity, served a performa-

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tive role within the context of French queenship, and continued to operate as a site of dynastic agency even after her death.

Marie-Antoinette's hair was already political before she married the dauphin Louis Auguste (1754–93) in 1770. “Bella gerant alii, tu, felix Austria nube” [“Other nations wage war, you, happy Austria, marry”] was the Habsburg family motto and the youngest daughter of the empress Maria-Theresa (1717–80) was to be the pledge of faith in the alliance between the traditional enemies France and Austria. The marriage negotiations took four years, and from 1768 a concerted effort was made to provide the archduchess with a French education. As a future queen of France, it was vital that Marie-Antoinette's body appear as French as possible. This was not just a question of social etiquette, but a critical symbolic matter. France was governed by Salic law, which prohibited inheritance through or by women. The law was ancient, and according to Guy Coquille's *Institution au droict des François* (1588):

The King is Monarch, & has no companion in his Royal Majesty. Exterior honors may be communicated by Kings to their wives, but that which is of his Majesty, representing his power and dignity, resides in his person alone.²

The queen of France was always a foreigner, she could never be French, and her children were not her own, but “les enfants de France.” Before the queen's body assumed its performative role as the vessel through which Bourbon dynastic power would pass during the generation of the king's sacred body, it must first be inscribed with the appropriate “exterior honors.” Among the most evident corporeal indications of Marie-Antoinette's suitability to bear a king of France was her comportment, the formation of which was entrusted to the French dance virtuoso Jean-Georges Navarre. But Marie-Antoinette's physical movements were not the only element of her being that needed to be gallicized, and on 11 November 1768, the empress wrote to her chancellor, Prince von Kaunitz: “I am also impatient to know what is happening with my daughter's confessor and who will be chosen. I would also like to have a hairdresser, if one may be sent.”³ The abbé Vermond, a *docteur de Sorbonne*, was chosen as Marie-Antoinette's confessor and tutor assuring an appropriately French mental development. Even the archduchess's teeth must be properly French, and on 27 November the marquis de Durfort, French ambassador to Vienna, reassured the French Foreign Minister at Versailles, the duc de Choiseul, that a French dentist named Laveran had been charged with correcting the archduchess's teeth.⁴

One reason why the empress asked for a French hairdresser was that Louis XV (1723–74), who had only seen miniatures, was becoming impatient for a portrait of her daughter. Although several had been painted, Maria-Theresa had not judged any of them to be worthy of France.⁵ Louis XV engaged Joseph Ducreux (1735–1802) to paint Marie-Antoinette's portrait and sent him to Vienna with Larseneur, the renowned Parisian hairdresser. Larseneur's task was a delicate one as his art was required to minimize the effect of a Habsburg forehead that was too high for French taste, thus modifying the appearance of Marie-Antoinette's body so that it would conform to French expectations. This apparent corporeal modification was important since a portrait could only present the ex-

terior signs of Marie-Antoinette's character, and those signs, if they were to signal that the archduchess had been thoroughly gallicized, all needed to be French. Of Larseneur's work the baron Nény wrote to the comte de Mercy-Argenteau (1727–94), Maria-Theresa's ambassador to France:

His manner is simple, decent, but at the same time very advantageous to the face, and I am already convinced that our young ladies, who for some time have worn mountains of curls on their heads, will give them up to be coiffed à la Dauphine.⁶

Not only would the future dauphine's coiffure emphasize her new French affiliation, but through her, French fashion and culture would achieve another international triumph through the adoption of Larseneur's coiffure by other Austrian ladies who would thus appear at least partly French.

Ducreux's first portrait was rejected by the empress,⁷ but his second work, which succeeded in France, survives, and Jean-Baptiste Charpentier's (1728–1806) copy of the second portrait shows the result of Larseneur's art (fig. 1).⁸ Comparing this portrait with a slightly earlier one possibly by Martin van Meytens the Younger (1695–1770) reveals some notable differences (fig. 2). Van Meytens's portrait projects more grace than Ducreux's. The primary reason for this is that van Meytens employs physical gesture and Ducreux does not, focusing instead on Marie-Antoinette's face without distraction, a choice that necessarily draws more attention to the archduchess's hairstyle. Larseneur's coiffure is more careful than the Austrian style, with no free-flowing curls on top or behind, each strand of hair neatly placed. Although Larseneur's coiffure, like the Austrian style, is powdered, the original portrait shows that it also allows the natural blond hair color to appear, an effect enhanced by the work's overall blue and yellow color scheme (a fortuitous combination in light of the topos of the gold Bourbon lilies on a blue background). Similar contrasts may be observed between Austrian and French hairstyles in other portraits of the same period including Franz Xavier Wagen-schoen's (1726–90) portrait of Marie-Antoinette at the harpsichord (c. 1770)⁹ and another work by Ducreux, also from 1769, showing the archduchess in a silver gown and wearing the same hairstyle as in Ducreux's second portrait.¹⁰

In a symbolic context, Marie-Antoinette's French coiffure was a crucial corporeal manifestation of her submission to France and worked in conjunction with more extroverted expressions of her new identity, such as her adoption of the French language. On her journey to France in the spring of 1770, the chief magistrate of Strasbourg welcomed Marie-Antoinette to his city in German, but she replied, "Do not speak German, monsieur, from today I understand no other language but French."¹¹ Marie-Antoinette's assimilation of French culture was so effective that as an adult she could no longer speak her mother tongue.¹² One commemorative medallion from 1770 celebrating Marie-Antoinette's marriage to the dauphin depicts her with an appropriately French hairstyle.¹³ It also signals her political and cultural situation:

Marie-Antoinette Archduchess
Sister Of The Emperor
Dauphine Of France
Born In Vienna 2 *Novber* 1755



Figure 1. Jean-Baptiste Charpentier after Joseph Ducreux, *Archduchess Marie-Antoinette*. Versailles, Châteaux de Versailles et de Trianon. Photo: Réunion des Musées Nationaux / Art Resource, NY.



Figure 2. Martin van Meytens the Younger (?), *Archduchess Marie-Antoinette*. Vienna, Schloss Schönbrunn. Photo: Erich Lessing / Art Resource, NY.

From The Most August Blood She Sprang
 And Her High Birth Is Her Least Merit
 She Was The Ornament Of A Brilliant Court
 Today All the Gods Inspired By Love
 Through Her Marriage Complete The Happiness Of France¹⁴

Almost every similar official reference to Marie-Antoinette names her “Marie-Antoinette d’Autriche, reine de France et de Navarre,” reinforcing her permanent status as an outsider even though she had adopted a French exterior and mode of expression. Aware of this, Maria-Theresa instructed her daughter, in French, that “It is absolutely necessary to practice what the court is accustomed to doing,”¹⁵ but she also ordered: “Restez bonne Allemande!”¹⁶ [“Remain a good German!”]. The inherent status of the queen of France as an outsider had historically made the nation uneasy, something that was somewhat justified when the ambitious empress of Austria was the queen’s mother. A queen of France was permitted to sit on her husband’s council if he granted permission, and Maria-Theresa was counting on her daughter’s eventual influence there.

As dauphine, Marie-Antoinette had adopted the appropriate external signs that marked her as belonging to France, but she, unlike the previous two queens of France, would not maintain a docile stance, and her hair became a corporeal site for the enactment of personal agency. A few months after her daughter’s marriage, Maria-Theresa had told her “It is for you to set the tone at Versailles,”¹⁷ and this is precisely what Marie-Antoinette did as soon as she became queen in 1774. It was at about this time that, as Madame de Genlis recalled, “Léonard arrived, and all the women hairdressers fell into disdain and oblivion.”¹⁸ The memoirs of Léonard Alexis Autier (1751?–1820), Marie-Antoinette’s hairdresser, are problematic in that they are largely apocryphal. They do, however, often contain a degree of truth supported by other sources. Although Larseneur was not retired and pensioned until 1780 and the *comptes de la maison de la reine* do not mention Léonard in the capacity of *valet de chambre coiffeur* until 1779, he was serving the queen long before this and, according to the memoirs, had first dressed Marie-Antoinette’s hair when she was dauphine. Léonard’s first creation for Marie-Antoinette had required only a simple bit of chiffon,¹⁹ but his second coiffure was epoch-making:

The dauphine . . . has a head seventy-two *pouces* tall from the bottom of her chin to the summit of her coiffure . . . My happy ideas were realized: the pyramidal coiffure of Marie-Antoinette created a sensation at the Opéra. People crushed each other in the parterre . . . to see this masterpiece of learned audacity.²⁰

Jean-Baptiste-André Gautier d’Agoty’s (1740–86) portrait from 1775 (fig. 3) shows the queen’s “coiffure pyramidale,” a slightly complex powdered creation with an aigrette and strand of diamonds, a blue silk ribbon, and feathers. The height of this style increased with time and a plate from the *Cabinet des modes*, a fashion publication of the period, depicts the queen in 1778 wearing the same hairstyle, taller this time and with a red ribbon, the feathers more elevated.²¹ These hairstyles quickly became politicized in their ornamentation which frequently contained figures, some more subtle than others, referring to current events. Following the death of Louis XV in 1774, one *coiffure allégorique* carried



Figure 3. Jean-Baptiste-André Gautier d'Agoty, *Marie-Antoinette*. Detail. Versailles, Châteaux de Versailles et de Trianon. Photo: Réunion des Musées Nationaux / Art Resource, NY.

a miniature cypress tree on one side and a cornucopia on the other representing mourning for Louis XV and hope for the new reign. In 1778, France entered the American War of Independence, and the *pouf à la victoire* was a towering edifice containing laurel branches in celebration of a military victory.²² The remarkable *coiffure à la Belle Poule* was inspired by the French frigate of that name and featured a complete model of the ship which had won a battle against the English *Arethusa*. The *coiffure à l'Indépendance ou le Triomphe de la Liberté* was another variation on the theme (fig. 4).

Such politicization of hair was a sign of the extravagance of the 1770s, much of which was inspired by Marie-Antoinette. François Métra's *Correspondance secrète* records some examples of the queen's capillary fancies:

The queen imagined for her sleigh rides a hairstyle that . . . brought women's coiffures to a prodigious height. Several of these coiffures depict tall mountains, fields covered in flowers, silver brooks, an English garden; an immense plume supports the entire edifice from behind.²³

This effervescence was easily perceived as frivolity, and in February 1775, Maria-Theresa complained of it to Mercy, who assured her that: "It is true that the hairstyles with feathers have been carried to a sort of excess, but the queen is only following a fashion that has become widespread."²⁴ Mercy's attempt to white-wash the truth was not entirely effective and in May of that year, Maria-Theresa chastised her daughter:



Figure 4. *Coiffure à l'Indépendance ou Le Triomphe de la Liberté*. Photo: Réunion des Musées Nationaux / Art Resource, NY.

Likewise I cannot help but touch upon a point that many of the papers repeat to me too often: it is the hairstyle that you wear. They say that from the roots it measures 36 *pouces* high and with all the feathers and ribbons that hold all of that up! You know that I have always been of the opinion that one should follow fashion moderately, but never carry it to excess. A pretty young queen full of charms has no need of all these follies. Quite the contrary. A simple hairstyle suits her better and is more appropriate for a queen. She must set the tone, and everyone will hurry to follow even your smallest errors . . .²⁵

Marie-Antoinette's response is noteworthy: "It is true that I am a bit occupied by my hairstyle, and as for the feathers, everyone wears them, and it would look extraordinarily out of place not to."²⁶ A French hairstyle had been among the first external manifestations of Marie-Antoinette's French acculturation. In this case both she and Mercy argued that fashionably extravagant coiffures were necessary for her continued assimilation in France. This despite the fact that according to both Léonard and Madame Campan, the queen's *première femme de chambre*, it had been Marie-Antoinette who began the fashion.²⁷ In exercising agency

over her own hair, Marie-Antoinette was turning on its head the original political reason for her having adopted French hairstyles, namely acculturation, and could cleverly defend her extravagance. Now it was Marie-Antoinette who, at least on some level, controlled the fashion, which she, as queen of France, was in turn obliged to uphold. To further strengthen her position, Mercy mentioned to the empress that the king himself, despite the rumors that had made their way to Vienna, did not request that the queen curb her exuberance: “This gift [of an aigrette] was made without any suggestion or remark concerning coiffures, and the king has never given the least indication that he disapproves of this type of hairstyle.”²⁸

The first state portrait that Marie-Antoinette sent to her mother, painted by Elisabeth Vigée-Lebrun (1755–1842) in 1778 and now housed in Vienna’s Kunsthistorisches Museum, most likely minimizes the height of the queen’s coiffure.²⁹ Several other portraits of the same period, including one from the atelier of Antoine-François Callet of the princesse de Lamballe (among Marie-Antoinette’s most intimate friends), depict hairstyles of a more striking size.³⁰ The fact that no portrait depicts the queen with a truly excessive hairstyle suggests that she and everyone else was aware of the inherent conflict between such extravagance and the dignity of her station. During his visit to France in 1777, the emperor Joseph II, Marie-Antoinette’s brother, had remarked that her coiffure was “much too light to carry a crown,”³¹ and continued to ask her about it after his departure.³² The topic became a point of contention between the empress and her daughter who nonetheless continued to exercise agency over her own body. Hairstyles achieved such heights that ladies were obliged to kneel in their carriages, even placing their heads at the window,³³ giving rise to innumerable caricatures, many of which had the queen’s features.

The conflict between fashion and the queen’s dignity quickly assumed social and financial ramifications. The materials required to construct such monumental coiffures, including jewels and exotic ostrich and heron plumes, were costly, and Madame Campan recalled that:

Immediately everyone wanted the same hairstyle as the queen, to wear feathers and garlands . . . The expenses of young ladies were greatly increased, mothers and husbands complained, some fools ran up debts, there were upsetting domestic quarrels, many marriages went cold or split apart, and the general rumor was that the queen would ruin all French ladies.³⁴

Mercy had made similar reports to Maria-Theresa as early as 1775. Despite Marie-Antoinette’s initial popularity, there had been a fear and mistrust of the Austrian alliance and of *l’Autrichienne*,³⁵ who might easily be perceived as setting out to ruin the French and bleed the treasury, weakening the nation in favor of her homeland.³⁶ In this context the queen’s hair was a matter of state, but rather than serving to assimilate the outsider, it was readily perceived as a weapon for the foreigner.

The queen’s hair played a particularly important performative role at court. In France, the sovereign’s *lever* [rising] was one of the most important court ceremonies. Its significance had been solidified by Louis XIV, who made the privilege of attending his *lever* a mark of courtly status. Like the king’s *lever*, the

queen's *toilette*, which included the dressing of her hair, was a ceremony to which only the most privileged members of the court were admitted. A portrait by Gautier D'Agoty dating from 1775 depicts Marie-Antoinette in her bedchamber holding her harp as her hair is about to be dressed.³⁷ The queen's *coiffeur* stands beside her with his assistant, feathers wait upon the dressing table. This is not Léonard who, because he did not have a court appointment when the work was painted, would not have been admitted to the official *toilette*. In fact, Léonard did not serve the queen every day since: "The queen, fearing lest the taste of her *coiffeur* be lost in ceasing to practice his profession, wished for him to continue serving many ladies of the court and in Paris."³⁸ In order to consult with Léonard and her dressmaker, Rose Bertin, Marie-Antoinette altered the procedure of her *toilette*. Madame Campan explains this:

During the first years of the reign, dressing took place in the bedchamber and according to the laws of etiquette . . . But when fashion began to occupy the young queen more seriously, when coiffures attained such a prodigious height that the *chemise* had to be passed from below . . . dressing ceased taking place in the bedchamber, and the queen took leave of everyone as she left her *toilette* and retired to her *cabinets* to dress.³⁹

Madame Campan's observation contains several important elements, not the least of which is the fact that the queen's hair was usually still dressed in ceremony, reinforcing its central performative role in her *toilette*. Marie-Antoinette's assertion of agency in her withdrawal to dress in private was one among many simplifications in etiquette that profoundly angered a court whose entire *raison d'être* had become based on ceremonial advantages. That the queen's hair continued to be dressed before elite members of the court attests to the importance of the *toilette* as an act of courtly service, originally a privilege, but now felt to be the right of certain courtiers to serve their queen in an intimate capacity, something which largely defined a courtier's social status.⁴⁰ The partial withdrawal of this right, and the queen's willingness to bypass the sacrosanct laws of courtly etiquette, dangerously undermined the respect upon which her prestige was based, and to which she, as a foreigner, was not inherently entitled, particularly since she had not yet produced any children. One threatening *chanson* that ran the streets mocked:

Little queen of twenty years,
You who treat people so badly,
You will go back over the border
Laire, laire, laire lanlaire, laire lanla.⁴¹

Marie-Antoinette's excesses during the 1770s had been criticized, but when the queen curtailed such luxury she was again found to be at fault. In 1778, Marie-Antoinette gave birth to a daughter, which did not solidify her political situation, but the birth of a dauphin in 1781 meant that she had finally fulfilled her duty to France. Unfortunately, according to Léonard, "At the end of the year 1781, that is to say, when the queen had given to France the first Dauphin, who died in 1789 . . . Her Majesty was in danger of losing the charming locks whose suave color had passed into fashion under the name *cheveux de la reine*."⁴²

Léonard's solution to the queen's predicament was no less than to cut her hair and to abandon the imposing coiffures that he had created. Instead, he invented the *coiffure à l'enfant*, a simple *style frisé* with curls in the back, which characterized the second half of the reign (fig. 5). This simplification of the queen's hairstyle was also effected in her attire as she entered the age of maturity. However, the queen's new simplicity was as unpopular as her former extravagance. One fashion that Marie-Antoinette adopted, a loose-fitting simple gown of muslin, became known as the *chemise à la reine*. In 1783, Vigée-Lebrun painted the queen in such a gown, and the work was so severely criticized when it was exhibited at the Salon of the Académie royale de peinture et de sculpture that year that the painting had to be withdrawn (fig. 6).⁴³ One of the fundamental problems with this portrait was that Marie-Antoinette had allowed herself to appear as an individual woman, rather than as the queen of France, in a work shown to the public. This transgressed the laws of royal representation in France, destabilizing the performative elements of the queen's station. Marie-Antoinette "en chemise" lacks any external manifestation of her status as queen, and this was unnerving, because already, as *l'Autrichienne*, Marie-Antoinette was perceived as dangerous. Previously, the rumor had been that the queen's profligacy, dragging all French women in its wake, would ruin the country, but now the silk industry attacked the queen's simple attire. Marie-Antoinette was accused of attempting to destroy a vital part of the French economy by wearing imported fabrics including muslin and cotton⁴⁴ for a gown whose style had originated in England, another of France's traditional enemies. In this portrait, Marie-Antoinette was even accused of appearing in her undergarments,⁴⁵ and one might observe that her hair, too, is almost entirely undressed. With such importance placed upon the performative aspects of the queen's *toilette*, it is not surprising that this portrait, of which the queen's hair is an important element, was readily perceived as a blatant act of disrespect for French propriety concerning the external manifestation of royal dignity, a subversive rejection of queenly representation, and a national degradation which one commentator labeled "France, in the guise of Austria, reduced to covering herself with straw."⁴⁶ The responsibility for this portrait was placed squarely on Marie-Antoinette without whose authorization the work could never have been displayed.⁴⁷ Marie-Antoinette's attempt to exercise agency over her own hair and dress had failed, and the new version of the portrait painted by Vigée-Lebrun that same year is clearly a retreat. In the second version of the portrait, the queen's blue silk gown, as characterized by the baron von Grimm, is "a garment more appropriate to her station,"⁴⁸ and her hair is carefully dressed and powdered (fig. 5).

As an enactment of corporeally inscribed personal agency, Marie-Antoinette's choice of elaborate hairstyles, although criticized, still functioned within the performative arena of royal representation. The studied artifice of such extravagance results from the servitude required of others to produce it, thus the importance of ceremonies such as the *lever* which were a performative aspect of the royal power which could demand such service.⁴⁹ In the case of her portrait "en chemise," the difficulty for Marie-Antoinette was largely that the assertion of her agency could never successfully operate independently from the "external honors" accorded her by the king, without which she loses her already tenuous



Figure 5. Elisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, *Marie-Antoinette ("en chemise")*. Hesse, Private Collection. Photo: Bridgeman-Giraudon / Art Resource, NY.



Figure 6. Elisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, *Marie-Antoinette ("à la rose")*. Versailles, Châteaux de Versailles et de Trianon. Photo: Réunion des Musées Nationaux / Art Resource, NY.

French identity and becomes a full embodiment of the foreign threat represented by Austria.

The hatred that gradually focused on Marie-Antoinette was frequently manifested in caricatures. In a great number of these, including pornographic pamphlets that depict Marie-Antoinette's alleged deviant sexual behavior, the illustrations portray her with carefully dressed hair, another important indication that the queen's hair was a crucial identifying element.⁵⁰ In some cases it was the excesses of the 1770s hairstyles that allowed the queen to be easily identified, and in others the coiffure was of a more recent style, both being equally effective targets for attacks on her morality within the performative context of queenship.

The queen's hair had played a crucial role in the structuring of her queenly identity and how Marie-Antoinette dealt with this had significant political ramifications. After the fall of the monarchy in 1789, Léonard continued to dress the queen's hair at the Tuileries, and both Marie-Antoinette and Louis XVI placed an inordinate amount of trust in the *coiffeur*. During the attempted escape from France in June 1791, Léonard was not only charged with delivering Marie-Antoinette's jewels to her sister in Brussels,⁵¹ but was responsible for what may have been the decisive blunder at Varennes. Due to the delay of the royal family en route, the duc de Choiseul had, for some inconceivable reason, entrusted Léonard with alerting the troops at Sainte-Ménéhould and Clermont that the royal family would not be arriving. Of his own unauthorized volition, Léonard also took the fatal initiative of passing the same news to the marquis de Bouillé at Varennes, which ultimately resulted in the royal family being left defenseless upon their arrival and forced back to Paris. More than one observer remarked that the queen's hair had turned white, so harrowing was the journey back to the capital. Immediately following her ordeal, Marie-Antoinette sent a few locks of her whitened hair to the princesse de Lamballe in a ring bearing the inscription "Blanchis par le malheur" ["Whitened by unhappiness"].⁵² In this case the queen's hair had, quite beyond her control, become a physical manifestation of her political and personal distress.

Marie-Antoinette no longer had Léonard to dress her hair. When the royal family was imprisoned in the tour du Temple, Cléry, the king's valet and their only servant, dressed it for her.⁵³ The rituals of dressing the queen's hair and her daily change of clothes at noon were symbolic remnants of Versailles etiquette and a sign of self-respect. In a cruel English caricature of the separation of Louis XVI from his family before his execution, the queen is shown in ragged, dirty clothes, stockings fallen, one shoe missing, her hair disheveled. This image is an inversion of the traditional image of the queen of France, and this inversion became particularly important after the death of Louis XVI. As we have seen, only the king's person was sacred, and without him to accord "exterior honors," the queen no longer had a reason to exist. Still, as a prisoner in the Conciergerie, Marie-Antoinette's hair remained a symbolic element of queenly representation. According to Rosalie Lamorlière, Marie-Antoinette's last servant:

Since her arrival at the Conciergerie, her coiffure was very simple. She divided her hair in the front after having applied a bit of scented powder. Madame Hardel, with one end of a white ribbon of about one

aune in length, joined the ends of her hair, tied them tightly, and then gave the ends of the ribbon to Madame who crossed them herself and fixing them at the top of her head gave her hair (which was blond and not red) the form of a moveable braid.⁵⁴

Serving the *ci-devant reine* at her simple *toilette* remained a privilege, and Rosalie records that some tried to take this privilege by force. On one occasion:

The Queen, removing her night bonnet, took a seat and said to me with the kindest voice: *Rosalie, you shall do my braid today*. Hearing these words, the concierge rushed forward, seized the comb, and said loudly while pushing me back: *Leave it, leave it, it is for me to do*. The princess, astonished, looked at Lebeau with an air of majesty that it is impossible for me to describe. *I thank you*, she said, and immediately rising, she folded her hair herself and put on her bonnet. . . . Thanking Lebeau, she decided that henceforth she would dress her hair herself.⁵⁵

That Marie-Antoinette reclaimed control of her hair is important. Madame Hardel's braiding of the queen's hair was an echo of the performative exchange between sovereign and subject. Marie-Antoinette's refusal to allow her hair, her body, to be submitted to Lebeau's unwelcome force was perhaps the only time in her life that she succeeded in fully asserting independent corporeal agency. According to Rosalie, during the three months of her imprisonment, Marie-Antoinette occasionally trimmed her own hair,⁵⁶ and when the *ci-devant reine* was to appear before the Revolutionary tribunal, she took special care of her coiffure:

That evening, knowing that she was to appear before the public and her judges, she gave, for the sake of propriety, a bit of height to her hair. She also added to her linen bonnet, bordered with a little decoration, the two loose ribbons that she kept in a cardboard box, and under these mourning ribbons she carefully placed a bit of black crêpe, giving her a pretty widow's coiffure.⁵⁷

A portrait surreptitiously painted by Alexandre Kucharsky (1741–1819) in 1793, and now housed in the Musée Carnavalet in Paris, shows this *coiffure de veuve*.⁵⁸ The queen's hair, although barely visible, is blond again, and Rosalie mentions only two areas around the temples that were white, something that Marie-Antoinette consciously associated with politics by remarking that it was caused by the attack on Versailles in 1789.⁵⁹

In political terms, Marie-Antoinette's *coiffure de veuve* had significant implications. By adopting as best she could a coiffure of mourning, the *ci-devant reine* was employing a physical manifestation of her ties to the Bourbon dynasty and to France. In this case, it was she who chose to do so, corporeally reinscribing her dynastic association. However, again according to Rosalie, Marie-Antoinette did not dress her hair in mourning on the day of her execution. This may well have been a conscious final attempt to assert the personal agency that would allow her to reclaim her own body, removing any physical reference to the Bourbon dynasty much as she had in her portrait "en chemise." As with the portrait, she failed since before she had even left her cell, the executioner Samson brutally cut Marie-Antoinette's hair and placed it in his pocket.⁶⁰ The queen's hair, which had been of such concern as one aspect of her acculturation, could now act nei-

ther as a sign of “exterior honors” nor as a site for the assertion of personal agency. Jacques-Louis David’s cruel sketch of Marie-Antoinette on the way to her execution is evidence of this.⁶¹

Even after her death the queen’s hair continued to have political significance. In 1815, when the bodies of Louis XVI and Marie-Antoinette were exhumed, the prince de Poix still remembered Larseneur’s coiffure, and upon seeing the remains of the queen’s head recalled: “This high forehead, still imprinted with majesty, brought to France the fashion of gathering the hair on that part of the head.”⁶² For the prince de Poix to recall Larseneur’s coiffure after forty-five years was an important testament to its success as an element of acculturation. The *majesté* that the prince de Poix refers to is not that of the Austrian archduchess but of the French dauphine and queen.

Remarkably, the queen’s hair continues to play a role with profound dynastic ramifications. The duc de Normandie, Marie-Antoinette’s second son, who would have reigned as Louis XVII, died in the Temple in 1795, a ten-year-old child abused by his state-appointed guardians. Almost immediately, rumors began to circulate that a substitution had taken place and that the son of Louis XVI and Marie-Antoinette was still alive. One pretender, a Prussian named Naundorff, was particularly convincing and is buried in Delft as Louis XVII. In the 1940s and 50s, the results of tricoscopic tests carried out on samples of hair from Naundorff and the dauphin, some of questionable provenance, were inconclusive and the mystery of whether Louis XVII had really died in the Temple remained. At the end of 1999, French historian Philippe Delorme organized for DNA tests to be carried out on locks of Marie-Antoinette’s hair and the mummified heart presumed to belong to Louis XVII and kept in the royal crypt at St-Denis. Once again, more than two centuries after Marie-Antoinette’s death, the queen’s hair was of political and historical import. The tests revealed the same DNA signature in the queen’s hair and in the dauphin’s heart, definitively proving the extinction of the senior branch of the house of Bourbon.⁶³

Marie-Antoinette’s hair played a central performative role in the corporeal inscription of her identity as dauphine and then as queen of France. It also became a site of her attempt to assert personal agency, an attempt which had social and political ramifications that were often negative since the assertion of this agency was frequently perceived as being in opposition to her sacred duties as queen. In this context the queen’s coiffures not only mirrored the evolution of her character, but were sometimes perceived as tools for a dangerous foreigner seeking to undermine the stability of the nation. In prison, Marie-Antoinette was, perhaps for the only time in her life, able to exert fully autonomous agency over her hair, reclaiming, if only for a brief time, this element of her own body. Finally, through the exhumation of the queen’s remains and with the aid of modern science, the queen’s hair has continued to play a performative dynastic role, a unique case of the historical significance of eighteenth-century hair.

NOTES

1. Dena Goodman, ed., *Marie-Antoinette: Writings on the Body of a Queen* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 3.

2. Guy Coquille, *Institution au droit des François* (Paris: A. Langlier, 1607), 3. All translations in this article are my own. "Le Roy est Monarque, & n'a point de compagnon en sa Majesté Royale. Les honneurs extérieurs peuvent estre communiqez par les Roys à leurs femmes; mais ce qui est de sa Majesté, representant sa puissance & dignité, reside inseparablement en sa seule personne."

3. Cited in Philippe Delorme, *Marie-Antoinette* (Paris: Pygmalion, 1999), 23. "Je suis aussi impatiente de connaître où reste le confesseur de ma fille, et qui sera choisi. Je voudrais aussi avoir un friseur, s'il pouvait m'en envoyer."

4. Delorme, *Marie-Antoinette*, 27.

5. Marguerite Jallut, *Marie-Antoinette et ses peintres* (Paris: Noyer, 1955), 9–10.

6. Cited in Delorme, *Marie-Antoinette*, 26. "Sa manière est simple, décente, mais en même temps très avantageuse au visage. Et je suis persuadé d'avance que nos jeunes dames, qui depuis quelque temps portaient des montagnes de boucles sur la tête, les quitteront pour se coiffer à la Dauphine."

7. Jallut, *Marie-Antoinette et ses peintres*, 10–11.

8. Ducreux's copy of his second portrait is now housed in a private collection. A color reproduction of the work may be found in Philippe Hausman's and Marguerite Jallut's *Marie-Antoinette* (New York: Viking, 1971), 10.

9. Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum. A color reproduction may be found in Antonia Fraser's *Marie-Antoinette: The Journey* (New York: Doubleday, 2001), 137.

10. Musée du Château de Versailles, inv. dessins, 1207.

11. Henriette-Louise de Waldner de Freundstein, baronne d'Oberkirch, *Mémoires de la baronne d'Oberkirch sur la cour de Louis XVI et la société française avant 1789* (Paris: Mercure de France, 1970), 45. "Ne parlez point allemand, monsieur, à dater d'aujourd'hui, je n'entends plus d'autre langue que le français."

12. Jeanne-Louise-Henriette Genet de Campan, *Mémoires sur la vie privée de Marie-Antoinette, reine de France et de Navarre*, 2 vols. (Paris: Baudouin Frères, 1823), 1:40.

13. Versailles, Musée du Château de Versailles, inv. 2152.

14. "Marie-Antoinette Archiduchesse / Soeur De l'Empereur / Dauphine De France/ Née A Vienne Le 2 Novbre 1755 / Du Sang Le Plus Auguste Elle A Reçu Le Jour / Et Son Moindre Merite Est Sa Haute Naissance / Elle En Fit L'Ornement D'Une Brillante Cour / Aujourd'hui Tous Les Dieux Inspires Par L'Amour / Comblent Par Son Hymen Le Bonheur De La France."

15. Maria-Theresa, empress of Austria, *Correspondance secrète entre Marie-Thérèse et le comte de Mercy-Argenteau, avec les lettres de Marie-Thérèse et Marie-Antoinette*, 3 vols. (Paris: Firmin-Didot, 1874), 1:2. "Il faut se prêter absolument à ce que la cour est accoutumée à faire."

16. Cited in André Castelot, *Marie-Antoinette* (Paris: Crémillé, 1989), 19.

17. *Correspondance secrète entre Marie-Thérèse*, 1:84. "C'est à vous à donner à Versailles le ton."

18. Stéphanie Félicité, comtesse de Genlis, *Mémoires inédits de madame la comtesse de Genlis*, 10 vols. (Paris: Ladvocat, 1825), 2:224. "Enfin, Léonard vint, et toutes les coiffeuses tombèrent dans le mépris et dans l'oubli."

19. Léonard Autier, *Journal intime de Léonard*, ed. André Castelot (Paris: Sfelt, 1950), 108–110.

20. Autier, *Journal intime*, 119–22. "La dauphine . . . a soixante-douze pouces de tête depuis le bas du menton jusqu'au sommet de sa frisure . . . Mes heureux sentiments se réalisent: la coiffure pyramidale de Marie-Antoinette avait fait fureur à l'Opéra. On s'était écrasé au parterre . . . pour voir ce chef d'œuvre de savante audace."

21. A reproduction of this image may be found in Stella Blum, ed., *Eighteenth-Century Fashion Plates in Full Color: 64 Engravings from the "Galerie des Modes," 1778–1787* (New York: Dover, 1982), 13.

22. A reproduction of this image may be found in Blum, ed., *Eighteenth-Century Fashion Plates*, 3.
23. François Métra, *Correspondance secrète politique & littéraire*, 18 vols. (London: Adamson, 1787–1790), 1:158. “La reine a imaginé pour ses courses de traîneaux une parure de tête qui . . . porte les coiffures des femmes à une hauteur prodigieuse. Plusieurs de ces coiffures représentent des montagnes élevées, des prairies émaillées, des ruisseaux argentins, un jardin à l’anglaise; un panache immense soutient tout l’édifice par derrière.”
24. *Correspondance secrète entre Marie-Thérèse*, 2:298. “Il est vrai que la parure en plumes est portée à une sorte d’excès, mais la reine ne fait en cela que suivre une mode qui est devenue générale.”
25. *Correspondance secrète entre Marie-Thérèse*, 2:306. “De même je ne peux m’empêcher de vous toucher un point que bien des gazettes me répètent trop souvent: c’est la parure dont vous vous servez; on la dit depuis la racine des cheveux 36 pouces de haut, et avec tant de plumes et rubans qui relèvent cela! Vous savez que j’étais toujours d’opinion de suivre les modes modérément, mais de ne jamais les outrer. Une jolie reine, pleine d’agrèments, n’a pas besoin de toutes ces folies; au contraire, la simplicité de la parure fait mieux paraître, et est plus adaptable au rang de reine. Celle-ci doit donner le ton, et tout le monde s’empresera de cœur à suivre même vos petits travers . . .”
26. *Correspondance secrète entre Marie-Thérèse*, 2:308. “Il est vrai que je m’occupe un peu de ma parure, et pour les plumes, tout le monde en porte, et il paraîtrait extraordinaire de n’en pas porter.”
27. Campan, *Mémoires*, 1:95.
28. *Correspondance secrète entre Marie-Thérèse*, 2:298. “Ce cadeau [d’une aigrette] a été fait sans aucune remarque ni aucun propos sur les coiffures, et jamais le roi n’a donné la moindre marque qu’il désapprouvât ce genre d’ajustement.”
29. A reproduction may be found in Mary D. Sheriff’s *The Exceptional Woman: Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun and the Cultural Politics of Art* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1996), 103.
30. Musée du Château de Versailles, inv. 9818.
31. Mathurin Lescure, ed., *Correspondance secrète inédite sur Louis XVI, la cour et la ville de 1777 à 1792*, 2 vols. (Paris: Plon, 1866), 1:61.
32. *Correspondance secrète entre Marie-Thérèse*, 2:504.
33. Campan, *Mémoires*, 1:96.
34. Campan, *Mémoires*, 1:95–6. “On voulait à l’instant avoir la même parure que la reine, porter des plumes, des guirlandes . . . La dépense des jeunes dames fut extrêmement augmentée; les mères et les maris en murmurèrent: quelques étourdies contractèrent des dettes; il y eut des fâcheuses scènes de famille, plusieurs ménages refroidis ou brouillés; et le bruit général fut que la reine ruinerait toutes les dames françaises.”
35. The last seven letters of *autrichienne*, “chienne,” means “bitch” in French. This slur became employed against Marie-Antoinette with increasing frequency.
36. The fear of this situation was particularly manifest during the Revolution in caricatures such as that entitled *La Panthère autrichienne* [*The Austrian Pantheress*]. A reproduction of this image may be found in Goodman, ed., *Marie-Antoinette*, following 138.
37. A color reproduction of this painting may be found in Castelot, *Marie-Antoinette*, 144.
38. Campan, *Mémoires*, 1:100. “La reine, craignant que le goût de son coiffeur ne se perdit en cessant de pratiquer son état, voulut qu’il continuât à servir plusieurs femmes de la cour et de Paris.”
39. Campan, *Mémoires*, 1:91. “L’habillement du corps se faisait, pendant les premières années du règne, dans la chambre et selon les lois de l’étiquette . . . Mais lorsque les modes occupèrent plus sérieusement la jeune reine, lorsque les coiffures devinrent d’une hauteur si prodigieuse qu’il fallait passer la chemise par en bas . . . l’habillement cessa d’avoir lieu dans la chambre; et la reine faisait un salut général en quittant sa toilette, et se retirait dans ses cabinets pour s’habiller.”
40. Norbert Elias, *The Court Society*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (New York: Pantheon, 1983), 78–104.

41. Campan, *Mémoires*, 1:91. "Petite reine de vingt ans, / Vous qui traitez si mal les gens, / Vous repasserez la barrière / Laire, laire, laire lanlaire, laire lanla."

42. Léonard Autier, *Souvenirs de Léonard, coiffeur de la reine Marie-Antoinette*, preface by Jules Clarté, introduction by Maurice Vitrac and Arnould Galopin (Paris: Fayard, 1905), 102. Léonard's observations on Marie-Antoinette's thinning hair are confirmed by several sources including Madame d'Oberkirch (*Mémoires*, 1:130). "À la fin de l'année 1781, c'est-à-dire lorsque la reine eut donné à la France ce premier Dauphin qui mourut en 1789 . . . Sa Majesté fut menacée de perdre cette charmante chevelure dont la suave couleur était passée dans les modes sous le nom de cheveux de la reine."

43. A discussion of this portrait and the polemic surrounding it is found in Sheriff, *The Exceptional Woman*, 143–79.

44. Stella Blum, *Eighteenth-Century Women*, exhibition catalog (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1981), 138.

45. Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, *Souvenirs*, 2 vols. (Paris: Des Femmes, 1986), 1:65.

46. Cited in Henri Bouchot, "Marie-Antoinette et ses peintres," *Les Lettres et les Arts* 1 (1 January 1887): 46. "La France, sous les traits de l'Autriche réduite à se couvrir d'une panne."

47. Bachaumont, Louis Petit de, ed., *Mémoires secrets*, 36 vols. (London: Adamsohn, 1777–89), 24:9.

48. Friedrich Melchior Freiherr von Grimm, *Correspondance littéraire, philosophique, et critique*, 16 vols. (Paris: Garnier, 1877–82), 13:442.

49. Louis Marin, *Le Portrait du roi* (Paris: Minuit, 1981), 35.

50. Discussions of pornographic depictions of Marie-Antoinette include Chantal Thomas, *La Reine scélérate: Marie-Antoinette dans les pamphlets* (Paris: Seuil, 1989) and Lynn Hunt, "The Many Bodies of Marie-Antoinette: Political Pornography and the Problem of the Feminine in the French Revolution" in Goodman, ed., *Marie-Antoinette*, 117–138.

51. Lescure, ed., *Correspondance secrète inédite sur Louis XVI*, 2:529.

52. Campan, *Mémoires*, 2:150–151.

53. Jean-Baptiste Henet de Cléry, *Journal de ce qui s'est passé à la tour du Temple suivi des Dernières Heures de Louis XVI par l'abbé Edgeworth de Firmont et de mémoire écrit par Marie-Thérèse Charlotte de France*, ed. Jacques Bosse (Paris: Mercure de France, 1968), 63.

54. "Déclaration de Rosalie Lamorlière" in Émile Campardon's *Marie-Antoinette à la Conciergerie* (Paris: Gay, 1863), 187. "Sa coiffure, depuis son entrée à la Conciergerie, était des plus simples: elle partageait ses cheveux sur le front après y avoir mis un peu de poudre embaumée. Madame Hardel, avec un bout de ruban blanc, d'une aune environ, liait l'extrémité de ses cheveux, les nouait avec force et puis donnait les barbes de ce ruban à Madame, qui les croisait elle-même et les fixait sur le haut de sa tête, donnait à sa chevelure (blonde et non pas rouge) la forme d'un chignon mouvant."

55. Lamorlière, "Déclaration," 187–88. "La Reine, ôtant son bonnet de nuit, prit une chaise et me dit avec une voix aimable: *Rosalie, vous allez faire aujourd'hui mon chignon*. En entendant ces paroles, le concierge accourut, se saisit du démêloir et dit tout haut, en me repoussant: *Laissez, laissez, c'est à moi à faire*. La princesse, étonnée, regarda Lebeau avec un air de majesté qu'il m'est impossible de dépeindre. *Je vous remercie*, ajouta-t-elle; et se levant aussitôt, elle ploya ses cheveux elle-même et posa son bonnet. . . . remerciant Lebeau, elle se détermina à se coiffer dorénavant elle-même."

56. Lamorlière, "Déclaration," 194.

57. Lamorlière, "Déclaration," 202. "La veille, sachant qu'elle allait paraître devant le public et devant les juges, elle donna par bienséance un peu d'élévation à ses cheveux. Elle ajoûta aussi à son bonnet de linon, bordé d'une petit garniture, les deux barbes volantes qu'elle conservait dans le carton; et sous ces barbes de deuil elle avait ajusté proprement un crêpe noir, qui lui faisait une jolie coiffure de veuve."

58. A color reproduction may be found in Fraser, *Marie-Antoinette*, 453.
59. Lamorlière, “Déclaration,” 194.
60. François Macé de Lépinay and Jacques Charles, *Marie-Antoinette: du Temple à la Conciergerie* (Paris: Talandier, 1989), 59.
61. This image is reproduced in several biographies of Marie-Antoinette, including Castelot, *Marie-Antoinette*, facing 416.
62. Edmé-Louis Barbier, *Notice sur l'exhumation de leurs majestés Louis XVI et Marie-Antoinette* (Paris: Normant, 1815), 23. “Ce front élevé, encore empreint de majesté, avoit amené en France la mode de réunir les cheveux sur cette partie de la tête.”
63. Philippe Delorme, *Louis XVII, la vérité: Sa mort au Temple confirmée par la science* (Paris: Pygmalion, 2000).