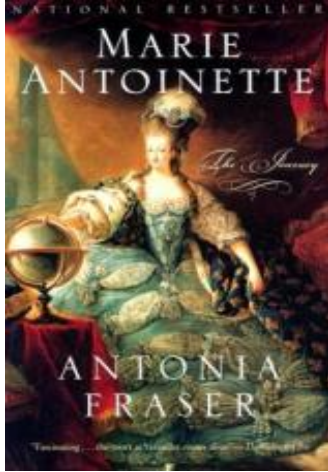


Marie Antoinette: The Journey

by Antonia Fraser



About the Book

France's beleaguered queen, Marie Antoinette, wrongly accused of uttering the infamous "Let them eat cake," was the subject of ridicule and curiosity even before her death; she has since been the object of debate and speculation and the fascination so often accorded tragic figures in history. Married in mere girlhood, this essentially lighthearted, privileged, but otherwise unremarkable child was thrust into an unparalleled time and place, and was commanded by circumstance to play a significant role in history. Antonia Fraser's lavish and engaging portrait of Marie Antoinette, one of the most recognizable women in European history, excites compassion and regard for all aspects of her subject, immersing the reader not only in the coming-of-age of a graceful woman, but also in the unraveling of an era.

Discussion Guide

1. How important was Marie Antoinette's childhood in Austria? historical enemy of France? in influencing her career? Would it ever have been possible for an Austrian princess to have a satisfactory life in France?
2. Was Marie Antoinette's relationship with her mother, the Empress Maria Teresa, a damaging or a supportive element of her life?
3. Marie Antoinette's marriage to the Dauphin, later Louis XVI, remained unconsummated for seven and a half years. What effect did this have on her character? and her relationship with her husband?
4. Were the accusations of extravagance and frivolity leveled against Marie Antoinette justified? both during her own lifetime and since? Marie Antoinette was also the target of numerous vicious libels about her sexuality. What part did these libels play in blackening the image of royalty in France, and how valid were they?
5. Assess the political role of Marie Antoinette in the years shortly before the French Revolution: Should she have tried

to influence Louis XVI more or was she correct to let history take its own course?

6. Marie Antoinette was a patron of the arts and a nature enthusiast. Is philanthropy an essential part of the royal role?
7. Once the French Revolution started, Marie Antoinette could probably have escaped by herself, or with her little son disguised as a girl. Instead she saw it as her duty to remain at the King's side. Knowing that she was an unpopular queen, why did she make that decision?
8. Marie Antoinette's courage and composure at her trial and execution aroused widespread admiration at the time, even from her enemies. How much had her character changed since her youth? Or were such qualities always latent in her personality?

Author Bio

Dame Antonia Margaret Caroline Fraser, DBE (born 27 August 1932), née Pakenham, is an Anglo-Irish author of history, novels, biographies and detective fiction, best known as Lady Antonia Fraser. She is the widow of Harold Pinter (1930-2008), the 2005 Nobel Laureate in Literature, and, prior to her husband's death, was also known as Antonia Pinter.

Critical Praise

"Absorbing as ever. Fraser's blend of insight and research persuade us that this unfortunate queen deserves neither the vilification nor the idealization she has received."

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