

L'AUGUSTE AUTRICHIENNE: REPRESENTATIONS OF MARIE-ANTOINETTE IN 19th CENTURY FRENCH LITERATURE AND HISTORY

Kalyn Rochelle Baldrige

Dr. Carol Lazzaro-Weis, Dissertation Supervisor

Maria Antonia Josepha Joanna, or as she is most well-known, Marie-Antoinette (1755-1793) spent her entire life under the watchful eye of many. Fashioned from birth as an Austrian aristocrat, she was transported to France at age fourteen to meet and marry the future king of France. From the onset of her arrival, French writers made attempts to capture what they observed. However, personal bias, political leanings, and accepted rumor led them to do more than record what they saw. Rather than simply narrate a scene, these early witnesses of Marie-Antoinette became the interpreters of her thoughts, motives and feelings. As these interpretations grew, they became widely accepted as truth and eventually became the agents leading to Marie-Antoinette's demise, as previous biographers and historians of Marie-Antoinette have amply discussed.

In this dissertation I suggest going beyond an analysis of the literature that led to Marie-Antoinette's death, and examining the numerous times that Marie-Antoinette's story was reinterpreted during the century after her death. I will examine nineteenth-century texts from several different authors and genres, including: the historical biographies of Christophe de Montjoye, Lafont d'Aussonne, Alcide de Beauchesne, Edmond and Jules Goncourt, and Horace de Viel-Castel; the eye-witness testimonies of Jean-Baptist Cléry, Henriette Campan, and Rosalie Lamorlière; the historical fiction of Elisabeth Guénard Brossin de Méré and Alexandre Dumas; and finally the archival compilations of Emile Campardon and Gaston Lenotre. I will examine each author's choice of genre, as well as how contemporary trends in literature, historical studies and even politics influenced their interpretation of Marie-Antoinette.