'Brilliantly written, mesmerising and totally immersive' Kate Williams

Henrietta Maria



Conspirator, Warrior, Phoenix Queen

LEANDA de LISLE

Praise for *Henrietta Maria*

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'With grace and sensitivity, de Lisle cuts through the misogyny to reveal a different Henrietta Maria . . . De Lisle understands that history is a story of people; she possesses a visceral understanding of the emotions that swirled inside Henrietta Maria . . . She was not England's greatest queen, but she was probably the most remarkable'
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‘A fascinating book about a fascinating woman – Henrietta Maria’s story deserves to be better known, and this book brings her completely alive’
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‘De Lisle turns her attention to Charles I’s wife, Henrietta Maria, similarly shading with nuance a character who can sometimes be reduced to primary-colour simplicity’
History Today

‘Lucid, entertaining and combative revisionist biography’
Paul Lay

‘A triumph of a book which will revise opinion of this “reviled” queen’
Annie Whitehead

‘With supreme skill and style, Leanda de Lisle provides not only a welcome revision of Henrietta Maria’s reputation, but also a revival of her fierce energy and a reanimation of the entire age. A superb and vital biography’
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LEANDA DE LISLE

Leanda de Lisle is the highly acclaimed author of several bestselling and prize-winning books on the Tudors and Stuarts, including *Tudor: The Family Story* and *White King: The Tragedy of Charles I*. She writes and speaks on historical matters for TV, radio and publications including *The Times*, the *Spectator* and *History Today*.

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Conspirator, Warrior, Phoenix Queen

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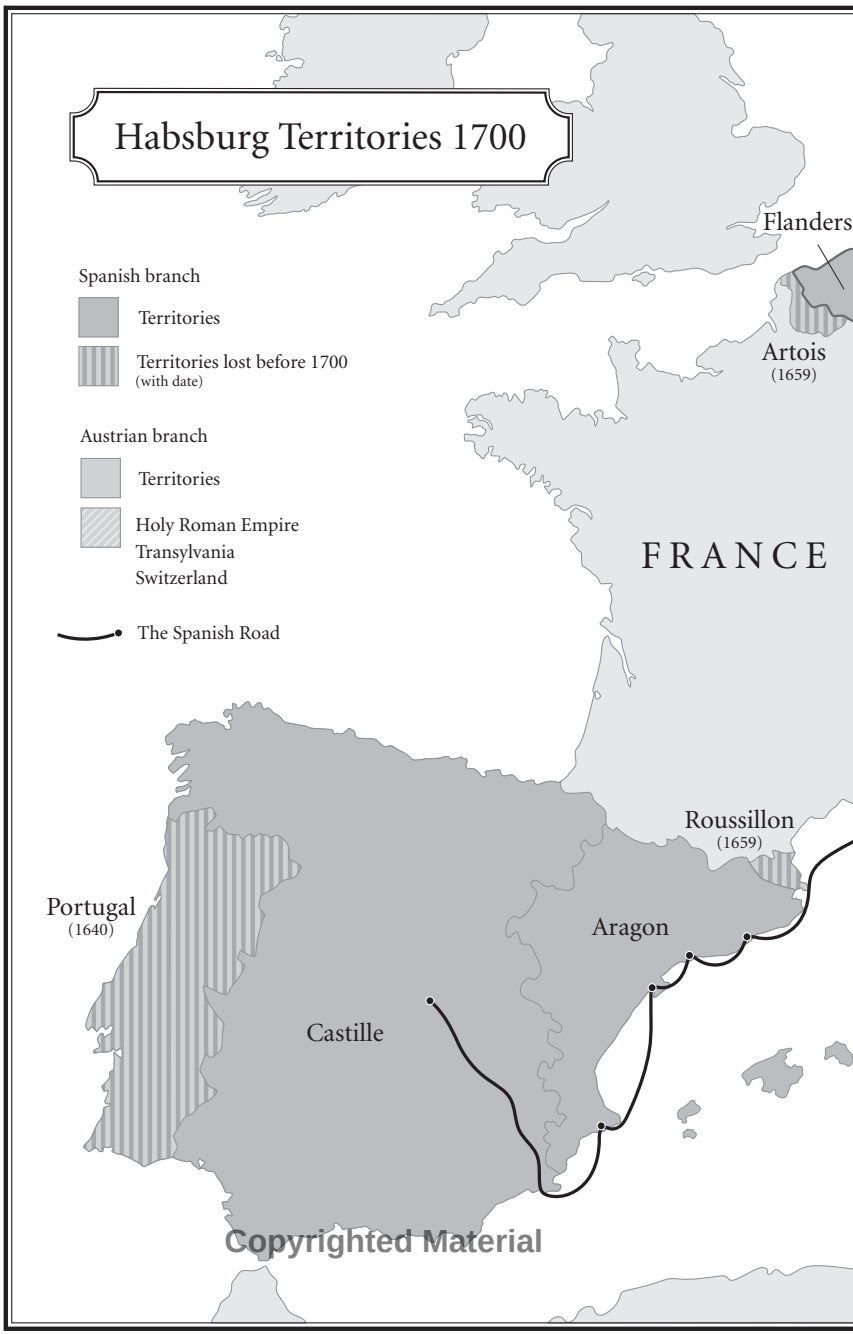
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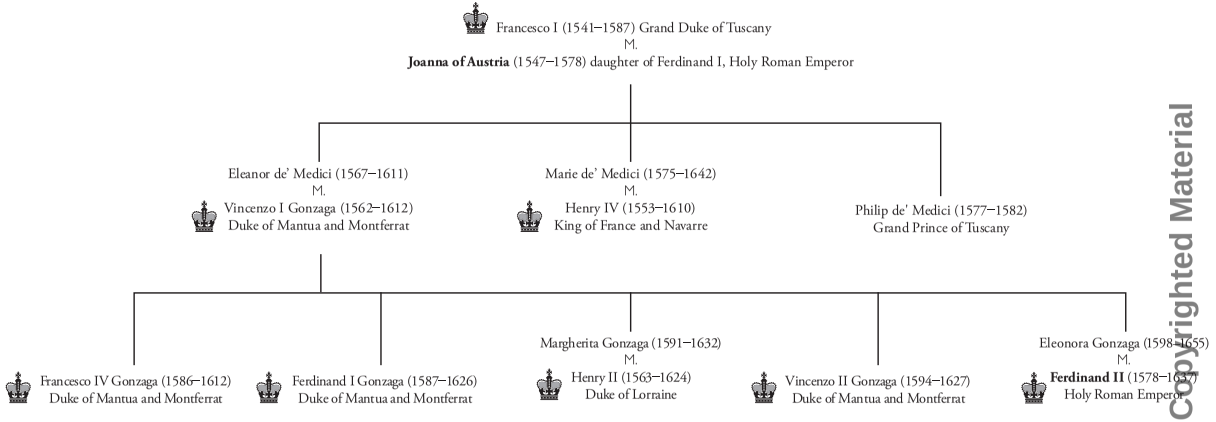

Habsburg Territories 1700
Spanish branch
Territories
Territories lost before 1700
(with date)
Austrian branch
Territories
Holy Roman Empire
Transylvania
Switzerland
The Spanish Road
Flanders
Artois
(1659)
FRANCE
Roussillon
(1659)
Portugal
(1640)
Aragon
Castille
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DESCENDANTS OF FRANCESCO I (DE' MEDICI)

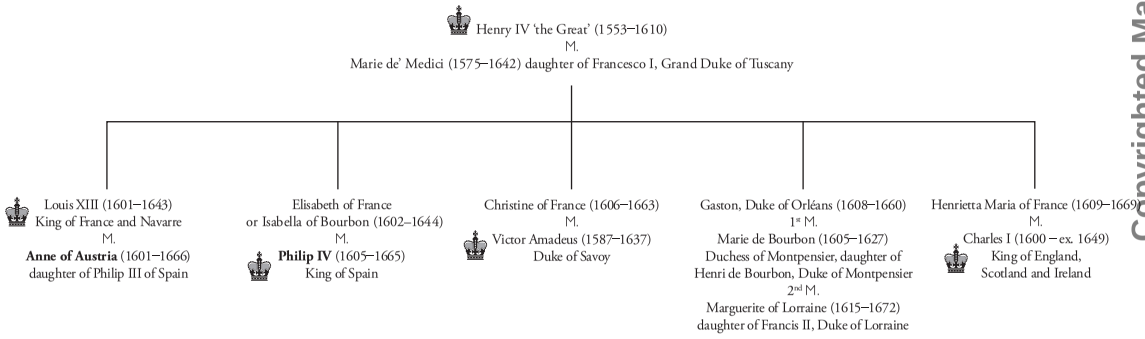
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Names in bold = Habsburgs



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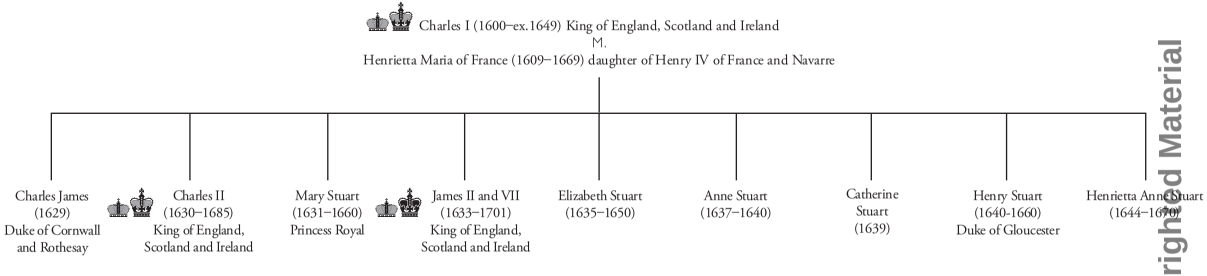
DESCENDANTS OF HENRY IV (BOURBON)

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DESCENDANTS OF CHARLES I (STUART)



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DESCENDANTS OF LOUIS XIII (BOURBON)

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Louis XIII (1601–1643) King of France and Navarre
M.
Anne of Austria (1601–1666) daughter of Philip III of Spain

Louis XIV (1638–1715)
King of France and Navarre
M.
Maria Theresa of Spain (1638–1683)
daughter of Philip IV, King of Spain

Philippe, Duke of Orléans (1640–1701)
Duke of Anjou later Duke of Orléans 'Monsieur'
1st M.
Henrietta of England (1644–1670)
daughter of King Charles I of England,
Scotland and Ireland
2nd M.
Elizabeth Charlotte of Palatine (1652–1722)
daughter of Charles Louis, Elector Palatine

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Preface

Here are some of the things I have often read and heard said about Henrietta Maria: she was 'frivolous', 'extravagant', had bad teeth and skinny arms; she was an adulteress who secretly married Henry Jermyn; she was 'implacably Catholic', she 'made King Charles Catholic' and caused the Civil War; later she proved to be an unloving mother to her son, Henry, Duke of Gloucester, whom she tried to make Catholic because she was a bigot, and finally, at the Restoration she was an irrelevance, nothing more than a shrivelled and miserable old lady. She was, in short, the classic witch-Eve.

Frivolous – so morally weak – Henrietta Maria had been corrupted by the papal Antichrist as Eve was by Satan. Bearing the disfigurement of sin, glimpsed in her bad teeth, she spent extravagantly on clothes and perfumes to project a false beauty which she used to seduce Charles into evil, and so brought sorrow and death to the demi-paradise of England. We not only accept parliamentary propaganda from the past – for example that Henrietta Maria wore the 'breeches' in her marriage – we have promoted new myths to support it. Charles is often described, entirely inaccurately, as a physical weakling and a fop. Nor can she be associated with royalist victory at the Restoration.

This is supported, but only by selective quotation – so we have, for instance, the diarist Samuel Pepys describing Henrietta Maria when he first saw her, still grieving over the death of her son Henry, dressed

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in black, looking very ordinary, and not his later descriptions of her court as more merry than that of the merry monarch, Charles II.

The familiar tropes connected to Eve predate the Reformation and are still used against women of all kinds. But our attitude to Henrietta Maria is also clearly linked to our confessional history. The term 'popish', much bandied around in the seventeenth century, referred to a form of political and spiritual tyranny which hotter Protestants associated with the Catholic Church, but which was deployed quite broadly, often against anti-Puritans. The Catholic association alone remains embedded in our national psyche.

The belief that Protestantism is responsible for the work ethic that built the empire and the emergence of democracy are amongst our most treasured national myths. The converse of this is that Henrietta Maria, the popish Catholic, must be responsible for Charles's authoritarianism. We have bought into the deep state conspiracy theories of the seventeenth century. We have also forgotten the complexity and contradictions of the past. Many of those who fought hardest for 'liberty' against Charles denied it to the slaves they shipped from Africa to the Americas, and to the Catholic Irish they cleansed from their lands. There was no monopoly on virtue or sin. Henrietta Maria's story would not have interested me, however, had it only allowed me to say what she was not: not frivolous, not a fanatic, not weak, not responsible for the Civil War, not an unloving mother – though I am pleased to do so. The interest is rather in revealing the story of who she was and what drove her.

From popish brat to Phoenix Queen I hope her character will emerge in all its light and shade: capable of great kindness, especially to lowly servants, yet also brutally frank, not least with her husband, she was a warrior and a wit, had an acute sense of the ridiculous but also a spiritual inner life that gave her gravitas. She struggled with the admonition to obey her husband and her son as heads of their households and as kings, yet both loved her, and if she could not win their battles for them, no one could have fought harder to do so.

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My biography of Charles I, *White King*, attempted to look at Charles's reign and the Civil War from his point of view. It asked what was the 'divine right of kings' and why did he believe in it? What were his religious beliefs and how did they differ from those of his opponents? Who was the man behind the myths? Why did he behave the way he did? Henrietta Maria was a very important part of his life and I learned that readers enjoyed being introduced to a dynamic queen who was a significant political player. This book tells the story of her life from her point of view.

Although Henrietta spent less than half her life in England with Charles, inevitably there will be a crossover with *White King*. That poses particular difficulties for a writer. I have used a combination of adding new material and trimming old to reshape those sections of the narrative in line with the queen's perspective. Those hoping to meet her great frenemy Lucy Carlisle again will not be disappointed, but there is now a larger cast of women. Indeed another challenge has been the scale of the story. I introduce Henrietta Maria as the Bourbon princess, born into the 'society of princes' who ruled Europe. British history is too often told in isolation, but what happened here cannot be understood without some knowledge of what was happening there. Henrietta Maria's world is one where family quarrels are fought out with armies bringing death to villages, cities, even whole regions. It is also a time when rulers might be killed by their own subjects and co-religionists, if they do not consider them Catholic enough, or Protestant enough.

Henrietta Maria was not yet six months old when her father, the great warrior king Henry IV of France, was assassinated by a Catholic fanatic who disapproved of his alliance with Protestants against the Catholic Habsburgs. She was said to have been very like Henry and she would often invoke her father's name as an example of physical courage and in his friendships to Catholics and Protestants. In this she saw herself very much as his daughter. Her marriage to Charles represented another alliance with a Protestant power aimed against the Catholic

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Habsburgs. Her enmity to that dynasty contrasted with the Bourbon–Habsburg friendship her mother wanted.

Yet Henrietta Maria, named after both her parents, was also very much the daughter of Marie de' Medici. As Henry's consort Marie's influence in France set the standard in Europe for centuries to come on court manners, theatre, luxury goods, and the art of haute cuisine – a standard her daughters would seek to follow. As a widow and ruler Marie showed great confidence in what a woman was capable of, exercising power in a man's world, without apology – a crime for which she has yet to be forgiven.

Marie wished to promote the idea that women in the society of princes could play a vital role in the governance of Europe. Kings of this period saw war as the engine of expansion and the valorisation of that process raised them to greatness. Marie de' Medici's vision was a familial rather than a nationalistic model, with women exercising a civilising influence as wives and mothers that would restrain male aggression. She saw glory in peace, and argued women were inspired by love rather than mere ambition.

After Henry IV's death, Marie used her role as regent to push her agenda forward. When Henrietta Maria was almost six she witnessed the double weddings of her sister Elisabeth to the future Philip IV of Spain, and of Philip's sister, Anne of Austria, to her brother Louis XIII. The shared – and contrasting – experiences of Henrietta Maria's sisters and sister-in-law form another important element of this biography, illuminating the complex role of royal consorts.

Although producing male heirs remained a consort's principal task, there was another challenge the sisters faced. Like their mother, they were foreigners in the lands of their husbands. A question mark hung over their fidelity. Would they be true and loyal, or infect their adopted homeland with the influence of the rival dynasty?

Henrietta Maria faced still greater obstacles to success than her sisters. Anglo-French relations were collapsing even before she reached England. It was, furthermore, a kingdom of a different religion and with

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a king who was an active persecutor of her co-religionists. A year after her arrival in England Henrietta Maria was begging to come home. Yet the mission Marie set for her daughter – to be a good Catholic and a good queen to the Stuart kingdoms while never forgetting her French heritage – was to become a driving force of Henrietta Maria's life. The future was to be an extraordinary adventure as Henrietta Maria fought the odds to overcome many obstacles to achieving her aims. The highs she enjoyed, the friendships she made, the tragedies she suffered, in three countries, in peace and war, are a story of high drama and allow us to see the civil wars from a wider perspective. How far did she succeed in her quest? The verdict of many of her contemporaries in Europe was very different to what we are familiar with in England. She was hailed as a great queen, even a martyr and a saint. Perhaps at the very least, the woman seen as the worst queen consort ever to have worn the crown of the three kingdoms deserves our reconsideration.

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Part One

THE SOCIETY OF PRINCES

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1

A CARPENTER'S WORKSHOP

SEE THE MIDWIFE. WITH HER CLEFT CHIN, NEATLY PLUCKED eyebrows and bold eyes, Louise Bourgeois liked to dress as the professional she was: starch collars and neat ribbed dresses, adorned with a small, shining crucifix.[1] Today, however, on a summer evening in 1601 she is in a Parisian palace. A group of courtiers are milling about after a dinner hosted by a rich financier. She is watching a small wiry man, with a high nose, standing in the middle of the room. Henry IV, head of the House of Bourbon, is 'retelling feats of valour' – largely his own.[2]

Louise Bourgeois's king had fought and won a civil war that had been fuelled by dynastic uncertainty and religious division. As a Protestant, he had led the forces of the Calvinist minority, the Huguenots. Then, in 1593, Henry had converted to the Catholicism of the French majority. His apocryphal comment on this was that 'Paris is worth a Mass'. The civil wars had ended and under the 1598 Edict of Nantes Henry had granted his former co-religionists widespread privileges as well as religious liberty. Protestants and Catholics could both practise their faith in France. Yet dynastic uncertainty remained. Henry had no legitimate son.

Louise's Europe was not a collection of nation states ruled by politicians, or even individual monarchs. It was a place of regions and dialects dominated by ruling families – a 'society of princes' related by blood and marriage. The greatest of these were the Bourbons in France and

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their rivals the Habsburgs. Known as the House of Austria, they had long moved beyond their geographical origins and ruled vast swathes of Europe. Indeed, France was surrounded by Habsburg power.

To the west, the head of the senior branch of the Habsburgs, Philip III, ruled Spain and Portugal, along with their worldwide empires. To the south Philip also held the Duchy of Milan, southern Italy and Sicily. To the east and north, Philip's half-sister, Isabella, and her husband, Albert, ruled the Spanish Netherlands which covered most of modern-day Belgium and Luxembourg, as well as parts of what is now northern France and west Germany. These areas would return to the Spanish crown on Isabella's death in 1633.

Meanwhile, the head of the junior branch of the Habsburgs, the Holy Roman Emperor Rudolf II, held the crowns of Hungary and Bohemia as well as the overlordship of more than 200 Protestant and Catholic territories across central Europe. Even the Pope was afraid that the Habsburgs aspired to become a 'universal' monarchy. France, however, had the advantage of a huge and growing population, while Spain's wealth, as well as its people, was being dissipated in holding down territory across the globe. Henry wanted the Bourbons to supersede the Habsburgs as Europe's leading dynasty. War was a means of expansion, but he could not achieve his aim with armies alone.

The society of princes also required fertile queens and efficient midwives. A bride could bring an alliance, a large dowry, further territory – but their most important role was to deliver heirs and secure the future of a dynasty. Consorts who failed in this regard were rejected, their marriages annulled. The most infamous example was that of Henry VIII of England, who made himself head of his own church in 1533, after the Pope had denied him a marriage annulment. Since then, popes had become more understanding of the needs of monarchs who had no sons.

Henry IV's former wife, Margaret, last of the House of Valois, was a brilliant intellect and once a great beauty, but barren. Their marriage was annulled and she had been replaced by Marie de' Medici, a

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daughter of Francesco I, Grand Duke of Tuscany. 'Whatever else, be pregnant,' Marie's family had warned her when she had left Florence.[3] Less than a year after her wedding she was, and it was Marie that Louise Bourgeois hoped to meet that night.

Louise spotted Marie lounging on a green bed – the colour of fertility. The twenty-six-year-old still wore the stiff Italian fashions of her homeland, which she adorned with a profusion of ornaments and jewels. She had tawny hair and the fair skin of her Habsburg mother, Joanna of Austria, daughter of the Holy Roman Emperor Ferdinand I (who had died in 1564). Marie's natural curves were accentuated by her pregnancy, which was displayed for all to see. Her facial features were small, pretty and as well balanced as those of a well-fed cat.

Henry wanted Marie to use the old midwife who had delivered his many illegitimate children, but on the last occasion his mistress and her baby had died. It had taken days, with the child taken from the mother's womb in pieces, and those around the deathbed had fainted at the horror. Understandably, Marie wanted a different midwife and had asked her ladies-in-waiting to find her someone younger. In Paris most members of the Guild of Midwives did not begin their training until they were past childbearing age, but Louise Bourgeois was still only thirty-eight.

As the dinner guests gossiped and listened to the king's war stories, the midwife was introduced discreetly to the queen's closest friend, a dark-haired young woman with intelligent, deep-set brown eyes called Leonora Concini. She was said to be the daughter of Marie's childhood nurse and a carpenter called Galigai. Yet, despite this modest background and severe bouts of depression, Leonora had been Marie's confidante since they were girls. She had come to France as her hairdresser – a job that allowed them to talk every day – and one at which Leonora excelled.[4] The embarrassment of Leonora's low class had then been solved with a marriage to a Florentine gentleman called Concino Concini.

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Leonora questioned Louise thoroughly on her credentials as a

midwife. She was impressed and, at 11 p.m., as the royal party began to leave, she spoke to Marie. The queen wanted to see Louise immediately, but without the king finding out; so while Henry and the other senior court figures were settling in their carriages, Marie waited in her sedan chair at the top of the palace steps. Louise saw six pages carrying burning torches and the lackeys who carried the sedan standing by it in their livery of blue, red and white. 'I curtsied to the queen who looked at me for about as long as it takes to say the Our Father.'[5] Nothing was said, but later, at the Louvre, Marie told Henry that she thought this 'somewhat young, tall and lively' woman, recommended to her by Leonora, was exactly the midwife she wanted.

Henry asked for Louise's clients to be interviewed and after this process was compete Louise was summoned to see Marie in the Louvre. Louise was happy to offer the queen the expensive extras her richest clients expected. She would, for example, wrap newly delivered mothers in the freshly flayed skin of a black goat to slow post-partum bleeding. Marie told her she just wanted her to attend to the birth of her children as she would to her poorest clients. 'I was never mistaken in anything I chose,' Marie reassured her, and laughed at Louise's surprise, her cheeks turning scarlet.[6]

On 27 September 1601 Marie de' Medici sat in a birthing chair, face to face with three Princes of the Blood. They were junior descendants of past kings of France and there to witness a state event. Marie tried to keep her dignity by remaining silent as she bore down to deliver her child, while Louise and Henry begged Marie to scream, worried that otherwise her throat would swell. Then, at last, the baby was born. Louise announced it was a boy and tears 'as big as peas' rolled down Henry's face. This was the first dauphin – that is, the undisputed heir of a French king – to be born in eighty years, he said. Marie fainted and she was still lying on the floor when the king ushered in 200 courtiers, to celebrate. 'Don't be angry,' Henry told the horrified midwife, 'this child belongs to everyone.'[7]

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The dauphin was named Louis, after the royal saint, Louis IX. Two daughters followed, Elisabeth in 1602 and Christine in 1606. In April 1607, Marie had another son, who died before his christening. A third, Gaston, was born in 1608, prompting an overexcited valet to kiss the first lady of the bedchamber 'so heartily . . . that she was left with only one tooth'. Louise Bourgeois was also embraced, by the Treasurer of France no less, and 'as tightly as a mouse would hold a piece of lard'. [8] The king rewarded Louise with a special cap granted only to highly favoured royal servants: a piece of oblong cloth, folded simply in two, pinned on her upswept hair. No other midwife in France had ever been allowed to wear one. Louise, however, wanted wealth as well as honour. Her husband, although a surgeon, had never earned enough to support his family. She was the principal breadwinner and was determined to demand the maximum salary for her work.

When Marie became pregnant again in 1609, Louise asked her for an annual stipend of 600 ecus. Marie agreed, but Henry had to make the final decision – and so Louise went to the Louvre to see the king. The main royal residence in the winter, the Louvre was a collection of buildings of different periods and styles. The north and east wings, used for government business, were the oldest and remained Gothic in appearance. The western and southern wings were in the modern Renaissance style. These were connected by the beautiful four-storey Pavilion of the King.

In 1601, when Louise had had her first official meeting with Marie de' Medici, the Louvre had still showed the depredations of the years of war. Marie described it as 'half ruined, half built'. Now around 1,500 servants waited on Henry in magnificent rooms laid out by Marie in the Pavilion and it was here, in an apartment facing the river Seine, that Louise Bourgeois had her appointment.

The midwife knew her demand for 600 ecus was extremely steep, but looking after the queen during her confinement made her unavailable to other clients for months at a time. Henry told Louise she could have 300 ecus a year, but that she would receive a bonus of 500 for any

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boy she delivered, and 300 if the baby was a girl. 'More must be given for sons than for daughters,' Henry reminded her.

Louise knew she had done well, even if she had not got everything she wanted. Her salary now amounted to nine times the salary of the midwives in Paris's main hospital, the Hotel Dieu – and she hoped she was about to earn her bonus by delivering another boy.[9] Instead this determined professional was the first face that Henrietta Maria would ever see.

A large room was required for the theatre of a royal birth. It had to accommodate not only the courtiers that would come to see the queen as soon as the baby was born, but also the furniture. This included a state bed of red velvet embroidered with gold, and a grand pavilion that stretched out like a tent in four directions, with thick ropes. There was a 'bed of travail', where the queen would begin her labour, and a 'chair of travail' where she would deliver her baby. These too were covered in red velvet and had their own canopies – symbols of royal authority.

The most suitable room in Marie de' Medici's apartment was occupied by a carpenter she employed to mass-produce seraphic rosaries.[10] They were popular in Italy and meant a great deal to Marie. Beads marked seven decades of prayers, with each decade dedicated to one of the Seven Joys in the life of Mary, the mother of God. In Lent they were dedicated to the Seven Sorrows. It was after Mary – the redeemed Eve – that Marie had been named, and she was proud of it.

According to the Old Testament myth, Eve, the first woman, had been created from Adam's rib to be his companion, but had proved weak, ambitious and lustful. She was corrupted by the Serpent – the most phallic of beasts – and rebelled against God. She then seduced Adam into following her example and so brought about the Fall, when disease and death entered the world. Men claimed all the daughters of Eve shared her vices. In the words of a leading French lawyer, women were by nature 'imbecilic, inconstant, foolish, savage, ambitious, and deceitful'.[11]

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Yet Eve was redeemed in the New Testament story of the Virgin Mary. The first of the Seven Joys celebrated in the seraphic rosary is the Annunciation, when the angel Gabriel tells Mary she is to be the Mother of God. Where Eve brought death Mary will bring eternal life through her son. The last of the Seven Joys is the Assumption when, at the end of Mary's time on earth, God calls her to Him and she is crowned as Queen of Heaven. The story gave women a place of honour, even of power. Eva (Eve) was turned to 'Ave': the salute of the angel Gabriel to Mary.

The room was cleared of the carpentry tools and furnished for the royal birth. An array of the holy relics of St Margaret of Antioch, patron saint of mothers in childbirth, were laid out, including the saint's girdle, which Marie would place on her belly.[12] At five in the evening on 25 November 1609, Marie went into labour. As her ladies-in-waiting left the room Marie handed each of them a newly turned rosary. A few close friends remained, as well as a number of men.

The eight-year-old dauphin, a thickset boy who closely resembled his mother, had been desperate to witness the birth, but Henry had forbidden it. He had, though, allowed his eldest illegitimate son, the fifteen-year-old César, Duke of Vendôme, to do so. The midwife also remembered the monks who knelt in the room praying, their rhythmic chanting of the rosary a pulse of sound: 'Ave Maria, full of grace, the Lord is with thee . . .'

Marie's labour processed rapidly and at 10.30 that night, Henrietta Maria was born. The dauphin was allowed to see his sister straight away. He held her tiny hand, shouting out that she had squeezed his back and that she was laughing at him.[13] His sister was to be named after both of their parents, Henry and Marie – or Maria in Italian.[14] The celebrations for a third daughter were muted. There was no wild kissing and Louise Bourgeois had to accept the lower bonus of 300 ecus. Henrietta Maria's godfather, the papal nuncio Maffeo Barberini, did, however, regard her birth as significant. The time would come, he prophesied, 'when this little princess would be a great queen'.[15]

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2

THE WRONG RELIGION

HENRY FELT UNEASY WHEN HE WOKE ON THE MORNING OF Friday 14 May 1610. He asked for the six-month-old Henrietta Maria to be brought to him along with her two-year-old brother, Gaston, 'to divert his thoughts'.[1] He enjoyed playing with his children, and Henrietta Maria, with her large, laughing mouth, looked just like him, although his own was disfigured by a scar. It had been made by a Catholic fanatic in 1594, who had been aiming for Henry's throat. There had been twenty-three such attempts on his life and he wasn't the only monarch to face such dangers.

After the Reformation a theory had developed that rulers drew their authority from the people, who therefore had the right to depose, or even kill, those of the 'wrong' religion. But what was the 'wrong' religion? For Catholics it was Protestantism, and for Protestants – it was complicated. As the rivalry between the Catholic Bourbons and the Catholic Habsburgs suggested, Catholics were not always on the same side, but their differences had more to do with power politics than faith. They shared the same fundamental beliefs, while Protestants might regard a different brand of Protestant as a heretic or an idolator.

A defining difference between Martin Luther – godfather of the Reformation – and his later rival John Calvin, concerned the Eucharist service. For Catholics the Mass tears away the curtain of time to the very moment of Christ's crucifixion. It is a sacrifice and as such

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requires a priest and an altar. When the priest consecrates the bread and wine they are immediately substituted with God's body and blood. Luther believed God is present in the Eucharist, although not in every element, while for Calvin Christ was not physically present. For many Lutherans, Calvinists were heretics. For many Calvinists, Lutherans were idolators.

In the Europe of 1610 the kingdoms of Sweden and Denmark were Lutheran. The English and Scottish tradition sprang from Reform Protestantism of which John Calvin was part. The Church of England had, however, never embraced full-blooded Calvinism, and had kept the old Catholic structure of an episcopate, that is government by bishops. The Scottish Kirk, or Church, had a more advanced Calvinism, but their king, James Stuart, although a firm Calvinist, saw bishops as an essential prop of royal rule, as well as ordained by God and dating back to the earliest Christian Church.

James had insisted bishops work alongside the Kirk's Calvinist councils, known as presbyteries, and had outlined his arguments in tracts arguing that God had granted kings a divine right to rule. They were the final human arbiter in their kingdom on what the right religion was, and if a king was wrong, then it was for God alone to punish him. These claims hadn't prevented a kidnap attempt against him in Scotland in 1600, backed by anti-episcopal Presbyterians. Nor had it stopped the Gunpowder Plot of 1605, in which English Catholics had hoped to blow him up in Parliament.

As for Henry Bourbon – he was an apostate to many Protestants while a great number of Catholics did not believe his conversion was genuine. Fortune-tellers regularly assured Henry of his doom. There were said to have been new 'portents' of his murder that very day, but Henry had other concerns. He was preparing to lead a war and had an army of 22,000 ready to deploy against his Habsburg rivals. Several strategically important territories on the Rhine had become the focus of a disputed inheritance. Henry was supporting pro-French claimants. The fact they were Protestant was problematic, but the Pope, anxious to

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avoid absolute Habsburg hegemony, accepted his argument that this was a dynastic and not a religious matter.[2]

Henry planned to leave Paris for his army in northern France a few days later. Marie de' Medici was to act as regent in his absence. All his children were staying in the Louvre for important ceremonies he had set in place to associate her with his royal authority. The first, and most significant, ceremony was Marie's coronation which had taken place in the Basilica of Saint-Denis the previous day. Henry thought Marie had never looked so beautiful. She had cleverly updated the archaic coronation costume of the past and dressed in a fashionable, bejewelled gown with a twenty-six-foot blue velvet train, embroidered with fleur-de-lys.

Marie's coronation was to be followed by a formal 'entry' to Paris. Henry left the Louvre at 3.45 p.m. to inspect the preparations. Fifteen vast, painted wood structures had been built across the city, depicting Marie as a supportive wife and the mother of princes. It was considered unnatural – and therefore evil – for a woman to rule, but Marie's love as a wife and mother permitted her to do so in Henry's name.[3] As the royal carriage passed through the long archway linking the inner and outer courtyards of the Louvre, a large man with striking red hair saw Henry had pulled back the heavy leather curtain – glass was not used for another two decades. The king was clearly visible.

The man followed the carriage which jolted down streets packed with traffic and rutted with mud and filth, while Henry discussed his war plans with three companions. The man's name was Jean-François Ravaillac. He was thirty-one and had lived through the civil wars, when the Huguenots had desecrated Catholic churches in his home town of Angoulême and had lynched their clergymen. It angered him that Henry was about to make war against the Habsburgs in what Ravaillac believed was a Protestant cause. Like the man who had tried to kill Henry in 1594, he didn't believe Henry was a true Catholic.

In the rue de la Ferronnerie, two wagons, one loaded with hay, another with barrels of wine, blocked the king's path. As his driver pulled to the left, the carriage lurched, then tipped in a low ditch. One of Henry's

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companions was reading out a dispatch to Henry as Ravaillac climbed, unnoticed, up onto the carriage's raised right wheel. He drew a knife and, bracing himself against a spoke, he struck at Henry three times. Twice he hit Henry's chest. The third blow caught the sleeve of one of the king's companions, as he belatedly raised his arm to defend the king. 'I am wounded,' Henry said, 'it is nothing.' Already, however, he was sinking into unconsciousness, blood gushing from his mouth.

The first moment Marie realised anything was amiss was when she heard the noise of panic and men running in the Louvre. She asked one of her attendants to discover if anything had happened to the dauphin (after all, Henry had left the palace). The woman returned with the news that the king had been injured. Marie dashed to see him. Henry lay on a bed in his dressing room with his doublet open and his exposed shirt soaked in blood. It was evident he was dead. As she staggered in shock, her ladies reached to hold her up.

A witness arriving at the palace shortly afterwards described a scene that 'beggars description. The whole court, shocked and stunned with grief, stood silent and motionless as statues.' The queen was in her chamber, 'very distressed'. Louis was with her, along with a number of princes and lords, 'tears running down their cheeks'.[4]

As the news spread, shops shut and houses were barricaded, while aristocrats galloped through the streets with swords drawn. Law and authority in France had died with Henry. It was a matter of urgency to impose recognition of a new government. Louis was eight years old and weakness at the top would attract predators. As the Old Testament adage ran: 'Woe to the O land where thy king is a child.'[5] Henry's leading adult male royal relatives, the Prince of Condé and the Count of Soissons, were out of Paris. Marie could have waited for them to return and form a government. She did not.

Marie intended to seize power while framing her actions in the context of the permitted feminine roles of wife and mother described in the stations set up for her Grand Entry. Eve was condemned as ambitious

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for ruling Adam – the first man. Yet what of the Virgin Mary, the second Eve? The thirteenth-century philosopher and theologian Bonaventure, who was associated with the promotion of the seraphic rosary, claimed that God would deny Mary nothing in heaven for she had denied him nothing on earth. Mary held power, so, Marie believed, she could also.

Within two hours Marie had secured recognition from the high court of the Parliament of Paris that she was regent for her son. The following day there was to be a formal ceremony to confirm her role. She was anxious that it also consolidate her right to act with full administrative and guardianship powers. To achieve this Marie needed to win the support of Parliament's delegates. She had been trained by the finest actors in Italy – the best in Europe – in how to move and speak in court theatricals. She planned to project a powerful image of a grieving widow to whom Henry had entrusted his legacy and their son.

When the ceremony opened Marie was standing on Louis's right under a canopied throne. She was dressed in black: henceforth she would almost always dress in black. It associated her with Henry as his widow. This was power dressing. She lifted her veil, to reveal a face etched with misery. The delegates had expected Louis to speak first, but it was Marie who did so, making clear her role as regent was not to be a passive one.

Marie expressed her hope they would respect the young king and asked, as a wretched widow, for their help and support. In her care he would always listen to their good advice, she promised. Periodically she paused to sob. Finally, she burst into tears and descended the platform to leave.[6] It was a tour de force. The regency of Marie de' Medici had begun.

Ravaillac had not attempted to evade arrest and was tortured to discover his motives and accomplices.[7] Links were sought to the so-called devots (literally 'the devout') who disapproved of alliances with heretics such as Henry had made. It transpired, however, that Ravaillac was simply a mentally ill man, who had been vulnerable to the more extreme

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language used by those who had attacked Henry's foreign policy.[8] It is the kind of story we still see repeated today.

The execution took place on 27 May, in the Place de Grève where Ravaillac was tortured again before being slowly torn apart by horses.[9] Even this didn't satisfy the crowd. The remnants of flesh and bone were stamped on by the Parisians, stabbed at and eaten, then a bonfire was lit beneath Marie's windows in the Louvre to burn the scraps.

Nine days later Henrietta Maria was carried in the lower hall where her father's body lay for the ritual sprinkling with holy water. Louis's younger brothers wept bitterly.[10] Henry was buried at Saint-Denis where Marie had so recently been crowned on 1 July.[11]

Marie would have no more children and, as an act of kindness to the midwife Louise Bourgeois, who had lost her main income with Henry's death, Leonora Concini gave her one of Louis's cloak bags. It was a gift for her son who was delighted to own something that had belonged to the new Louis XIII. Henrietta Maria took part in her brother's coronation in Reims Cathedral on 17 October 1610.[12] Louis found it hard to play the grave part allocated to him in the ceremony. He was so horrified to be kissed by the leading noblemen that he wiped his face and, when he was led to the altar, he had malicious fun trying to catch a nobleman's train with his foot – a reminder of just how young he was.[13]

While Louis remained with Marie de' Medici, Henrietta Maria and her other siblings were returned to the royal nursery at Château Vieux in Saint-Germain-en-Laye. Set on a hill at the edge of a forest, a two-hour coach ride from Paris, Saint-Germain was a demi-paradise of terraced gardens with flower beds planted, 'like a knot of divers ribbons most pleasing and most rare', of grottos and elaborate fountains.[14] Here she spent the next few years in the care of a distant cousin of her father, Madame de Monglat. Henrietta Maria called her Maman Ga, and her daughter, Madame St George, was her Mamie.[15] Henrietta Maria's actual mummy now had a kingdom to rule and considerable dangers to face.

There was civil unrest, especially in the south, where Catholics and Protestants lived in close proximity. Meanwhile, the leading Prince of

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the Blood, the twenty-one-year-old Henry Condé, claimed that as Louis's senior adult male relative, it was his rightful place to act as protector of the king. Marie deployed all the expertise of the Medici in propaganda to counter his arguments. She commissioned Frans Pourbus the Younger to produce a new kind of portrait for a Queen of France. It showed her wearing her coronation robes, decked in royal symbols. Pamphlets were mass-produced advertising Louis's divine status as king, often with outsized images of Marie at his side.

Marie used the fashionable trope of the 'strong woman' to explain her exceptional role. These were women who, through strength of character, overcame the violent sexual urges to which women were subject and allowed Marie to extend the ordinary female virtue of caring for her children, to caring for the whole of society.[16] Marie did not, however, forget her own children who looked forward passionately, if also anxiously, to her visits. She was a formidable parent who was proud of the quelling power of her gaze, at whomsoever it was directed, and her children not least.

Marie had not known a mother herself. Joanna of Austria had died when Marie was only three, and, as she commented to Louis, Marie and her son were alike in having 'a natural dryness'.[17] Yet she was not uncaring. Marie insisted she was kept informed of everything about her children, 'even in their private pastimes', and fussed over their health. When Henrietta Maria developed a fever in October 1611, Marie ordered that her daughter 'lack nothing that might afford any remedy or solace in her complaint' and sent a physician to ensure her instructions were carried out.[18] The following month her four-year-old second son fell seriously ill. Marie spent days at his bedside, tending her little boy. Sadly, just over a week short of Henrietta Maria's second birthday, he died, his life marked simply as that of 'N. Duc d'Orleans': N standing for '*non nomme*', that is, 'unnamed'.[19]

It says something of Marie that she defended the doctors who had cared for her lost son against criticism, while being in no way complacent. Specifically, she pursued the additional services of a Portuguese

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Jewish doctor called Elijah Montalto. Five years earlier, in 1606, he had treated Marie's friend Leonora for depressive episodes in which she would weep and shriek with such force witnesses feared she would choke. Montalto's prescription was calm, 'a few ordinary physicks', meditative prayer and some morale-boosting almsgiving.[20] This worked well, but Henry, to emphasise his piety, had refused to have a Jew at court and so Montalto had left to work in Florence. Marie persuaded him to return, promising his family the freedom to practise their faith.[21]

Montalto attended on the royal children in the same down-to-earth manner as he had Leonora. In one surviving letter Montalto sets the queen's mind 'entirely at rest' that, while her second daughter Christine was suffering a 'slight irregularity of the pulse', it was nothing to be worried about and he had ordered that all medicines given to her following a tummy upset should be ceased.[22] This was no small thing during a period when doctors liked to be seen to earn their keep, prescribing medication and even performing surgery with very little idea what they doing. Poor Louis had been a victim of just such overtreatment. When he was two days old, panic had set in that his sucking reflex wasn't strong enough. Cuts were made in his mouth that had left him with a lolling tongue and a severe stammer. He barely spoke.

Henrietta Maria saw Louis at ceremonies like those at Easter and other holy days, when he was brought out to heal the sick: a reminder that he was God's anointed. Dressed in purest white he would touch upwards of 900 scrofulous subjects, stumbling over the phrase, 'The king touches you: God heals you.'[23] He was much happier visiting his siblings at Saint-Germain where they would have supper, play cards and enjoy cooking. Louis's speciality was omelettes.

In January 1612, Henrietta Maria's eldest sister, the nine-year-old Elisabeth, moved out of Saint-Germain to join Louis in the adult world of the Louvre. After Henry had been killed, the disputed provinces in the Rhineland had been divided up amongst the German princes, so avoiding the Habsburg domination over them that he had feared. Marie had seized the opportunity to follow a peace policy and was now to

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announce a double marriage alliance. Elisabeth – described as 'pretty as an angel' – was to be betrothed to the six-year-old heir to Philip III of Spain, the future Philip IV. The ten-year-old Louis would marry the Infanta Ana, later remembered as Anne of Austria.

Marie's vision for France's future in Europe was familial rather than nationalistic. Women would exercise a civilising influence within the society of princes, using their roles as wives and mothers to restrain male aggression. She claimed her actions built on Henry's legacy in ending the civil wars in France, by extending it across the continent. The leading dynasties would be bound by faith and blood, while France's domination would be cultural rather than militaristic.

The betrothals were celebrated in three days of court entertainments in Paris that would set the standard in Europe for decades to come. On one day a crowd of 10,000 gathered in the Place Royale to see a procession of princes on horses wrapped in cloth of silver and gold, of elephants, and mocked-up dragons that seemed to fly by themselves. At the centre of the parade was a pedestal supporting representations of the monarchies of France and Spain around which little boys, dressed as cupids, threw flowers and trampled on military weapons.[24] The day ended with a sham fortress bursting into flames while 2,000 rockets were sent into the sky, illuminating the night with the letters M for Marie and L for Louis. Modesty was not amongst her greatest virtues.

That June Henrietta Maria saw Elisabeth wearing strange new clothes – a stiff conical Spanish court dress with a closed neck ruff designed to restrict her movement and breathing. They were a gift from Philip III's half-sister, Isabella, Governess of the Netherlands. It marked a hope for change of allegiance. Marie too had changed costume after the birth of Louis, from Italian clothing to French. When Elisabeth married she would be expected by the Spanish to give up the gaiety encouraged in women at the French court, and which was represented in their more free-moving clothes. Instead, she would take on the character of a Spanish royal consort and use the slow, almost imperceptible gestures that their court etiquette demanded.

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Elisabeth wore her new dress in August 1612 at the signing of the wedding contract, and the Spanish diplomats reported she looked 'very beautiful'.[25] It must have seemed fun for a little girl to dress up in her costume, like play-acting in fancy dress. Yet it reflected a challenge. Consorts like Elisabeth were valuable gifts, offered by one dynasty to another as future mothers of sons, but for the recipients these outsiders were also objects of suspicion. Concerns about where their true loyalties lay were often reflected in accusations of adultery.

The power to change identities, as Elisabeth would from French to Spanish, was also a power held by witches. And witchcraft was another crime levelled against them.[26] The actual marriage between Elisabeth and Philip was, however, years away and seemed to be nothing more than a distant adventure.

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3

THE WITCH'S SPELL

HENRIETTA MARIA WAS GROWING UP FIERCE AND SELF-WILLED. In one of her earliest surviving letters she apologises to her governess for a 'little sulky fit'. She was sorry for it but, she admitted, 'I cannot be right all of a sudden.' She could only promise Maman Ga that 'I will do all I can to content you; meantime, I beg you will no longer be angry with me.'[1] Marie de' Medici was determined to channel her passionate temperament to good. She kept a close eye on her, writing letters to 'My daughter Henrietta' praising her for doing 'the little exercises' her 'good mother' had asked of her while also offering assurances of her 'immeasurably natural affection'.[2]

The education Marie prescribed was light on academics – Marie had never even learned how to write French properly. The focus was instead courtly and religious, highly influenced by the French notion of '*honnêteté*', a religious fashion that invested women with the Neoplatonic qualities of Beauty, Virtue and Love, and which could be used to improve relations between the sexes and more widely in society. Where in the old tradition of the culture of courtly love, women were static objects of desire, it offered a more active role, and there was another fashion that Henrietta Maria would absorb and that drew from *honnêteté*: a style of thought and expression known as '*préciosité*' which promoted a culture of refinement and wit over macho posturing and thuggery.

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