

## 'The Queen's Lover' Signing

WASHINGTON—Francine du Plessix Gray will sign copies of her new novel, “The Queen’s Lover,” on Saturday, June 30, at 2 p.m. at The Hickory Stick Bookshop in Washington Depot.

Ms. Gray’s historical novel reveals the untold love story between Swedish aristocrat Count Axel von Fersen and Marie Antoinette. The romance begins at a masquerade ball in Paris in 1774, when the dashing nobleman first meets the mesmerizing 19-year-old wife of the reclusive prince who will soon become Louis XVI. This electric encounter launches a love affair that will span the course of the French Revolution. As their relationship deepens, Fersen becomes a devoted companion to the entire royal family. Roaming the halls of Versailles and visiting the private haven of Le Petit Trianon, he discovers the deepest secrets of the court. But his new intimacy with Marie Antoinette and her family is disrupted when the events of the American Revolution tear Fersen away.

Moved by the cause, he joins French troops in the fight for American independence. He returns to find France on the brink of disintegration. After the Revolution of 1789 the royal family is moved from Versailles to the Tuileries. Fersen devises an escape for the family and their young children (Marie-Therese and the dauphin—whom many suspect is, in fact Fersen’s son). The failed attempt to escape leads to imprisonment, and the family spends its final days in captivity before the king and queen face the guillotine. Grieving for his lost love in his native Sweden, Fersen begins to sense the effects of the French Revolution in his homeland. Royalists are now targets, and the aristocratic world of his youth is fast vanishing. Fersen is incapable of realizing that centuries of tradition have disappeared, and he pays dearly for his naiveté, losing his life at the hands of a savage mob that views him as a pivotal member of the ruling class. Scion of Sweden’s most esteemed nobility, Fersen came to be seen as an enemy of the country he loved. His fate is symbolic of the violent speed with which the events of the 18th century transformed European culture.

Ms. Gray was born in the French Embassy of Warsaw in 1930 where her father, a specialist in Slavic languages, was a member of the French diplomatic corps. After he died in 1940 (his plane shot down by Fascist artillery) she and her mother emigrated to America, where her mother married Alexander Liberman. Her mother was a noted hat designer and her stepfather a painter, sculptor, and editorial director of Condé Nast.

Ms. Gray attended the Spence School, and Bryn Mawr before graduating from Barnard where she majored in philosophy. In 1957, she married painter Cleve Gray and later had two sons.

Originally a painter, Ms. Gray turned to writing by doing art criticism for Art in America, where she was book editor. In 1965, she began to contribute fiction and political essays to The New Yorker.

Her first two books were nonfiction: “Divine Disobedience: Profiles in Catholic Radicalism” (1970), for which she won a National Catholic Book Award, followed by “Hawaii: The Sugar-Coated Fortress” (1972). Three novels followed: “Lovers and Tyrants” (1976), “World Without End” (1981), and “October Blood” (1985). Her collection of essays, “Adam & Eve and the City” (1987), displays her keen observations of the political, literary, and domestic scene. Her most recent biography was “Madame de Stael” published in 2008.

Ms. Gray has taught at the College of the City of New York, Yale University, Columbia University, and Princeton University, and was writer in residence at the American Academy in Rome. She received the National Book Critics Circle Award in 2006 for “Them: A Memoir of Parents.” She lives in Litchfield County.

This event is free and open to the public. For further information about this event, please visit [www.hickorystickbookshop.com](http://www.hickorystickbookshop.com). Call to reserve an autographed copy if you are not able to attend. The Hickory Stick Bookshop is located at 2 Green Hill Road, Washington Depot; 860-868-0525, [www.hickorystickbookshop.com](http://www.hickorystickbookshop.com).

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