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## MISTRESS OF THE SUN

By Sandra Gulland

“Teeming with the rich period details that make historical fiction so rewarding, Gulland’s dynamic and nuanced portrait of Louis’ notorious reign thrums with page-turning expediency and deliciously seductive machinations.” – *Booklist*

“[a] captivating jewel of a novel.” – *Historical Novels Review*, Editor’s Choice

“Here’s a warning: *Mistress of the Sun* is dangerously seductive. It’s one of those books that will grab you and hold you captive till the last page is turned.” — *Montreal Gazette*

“Exquisite and fantastic detail . . . to be savored and enjoyed. Take your time with this one; you will not want it to end.” – *Romantic Reviews Today*, Perfect 10 Rating

Historical novelist Sandra Gulland, author of the internationally acclaimed *Josephine B. Trilogy* about Josephine Bonaparte, now returns with her long-awaited novel *Mistress of the Sun* (A Touchstone Paperback Reprint; April 7<sup>th</sup>, 2009; 0-7432-9892-6; \$16.99), set in the magnificent decadence of the seventeenth-century court of the Sun King, King Louis XIV.

Legendary horsewoman Louise de la Vallière is an eccentric woman of humble background, who, against all odds, became the most beloved mistress of the charismatic King Louis XIV. *Mistress of the Sun* begins when young Louise falls in love with a wild white stallion and uses ancient magic to tame him and save his life. This one desperate action of her youth shadows her throughout her life, changing it in ways she could never imagine. As she was warned, “The Devil never gives anything away for free.”

Unmarriageable and too poor to join a convent, Louise enters the royal court of King Louis XIV as a maid of honor. The king is captivated by her horsemanship and striking grace, and as their love deepens, they begin a decade long illicit affair (the King was already married) that brings great joy – and then misery – into their lives. Over time Louise bears Louis four children. She is made a duchess and

reigns unrivaled as his official mistress until dangerous intrigue threatens her position at court and in Louis's heart.

A riveting love story with a captivating mystery at its heart, *Mistress of the Sun* resurrects a fascinating female figure from the shadows of history and illuminates the rash actions we take to capture and tame love. Gulland expertly lures the reader into the life and heart of Louise, allowing for greater understanding of her final fundamental decision to leave her lifelong lover and children for an isolated convent.

Sandra Gulland's work is that rare combination: literary, yet with enormous popular appeal. She is an intensely passionate and talented author who rose quickly in the historical fiction genre through word-of-mouth and a tremendous book club following. This is not by accident: Gulland believes in her fans so deeply she includes them in the editorial process. As the final stage of writing *Mistress of the Sun* (which took eight years to complete), Gulland asked two book clubs to critique the manuscript. Her successful *Josephine B. Trilogy* was the result of this practice, and she has done the same with *Mistress of the Sun*, in conjunction with a book club from A Great Good Place for Books in Oakland, California. The result is a novel that is carefully crafted, historically accurate, and—most importantly—irresistibly engaging.

For more information, visit [www.simonandschuster.com](http://www.simonandschuster.com) or [www.sandragulland.com](http://www.sandragulland.com).

# An Interview with Sandra Gulland

**1. When did you first learn of Louise de la Vallière? There are so many famous women throughout history, especially those with connections to royalty. Why did you choose to focus on la Duchesse de la Vallière?**

I became interested in Louise de la Vallière while doing research on Josephine Bonaparte. Louise captured my interest because of her horsemanship, and the romance of her relationship to the Sun King. She was unsophisticated, a tomboy, from the lower nobility—an unlikely young woman to capture the heart of a powerful and charismatic man like the Sun King (the rock star of kings). How did this come about?

Most of all, I wondered how a young woman at that time would acquire such a high level of skill riding horses. Today she would be considered at an Olympic level of accomplishment. There were so many unanswered questions. She is described as timid, something of a wall flower; yet how did that jive with her prowess on horseback? She was a daring horsewoman, a mistress to the Sun King, a Carmelite nun. The combination of these qualities intrigued me.

**2. You go into great detail in this novel—the descriptions of the clothes, jewelry, palaces, food, parties, etc. paint a very vivid picture. How did you research *Mistress of the Sun*? Was there anything about 17<sup>th</sup> century France that surprised you?**

I love studying the details of daily life more than any other aspect of the research. It's an endlessly fascinating subject. I use the Net a great deal, although my main source of information continues to be books—both memoirs and accounts written during the period as well as historical texts. I record notes on computer, which makes it easy to search and find what I need, when I need it.

It was a difficult period for me to come to understand, in large part because of the intensely spiritual—as well as superstitious—outlook that was fairly universal at that time. Even the mathematician Descartes, founder of the empirical method, believed bad dreams were planted in his head by demons. *This* was a surprise.

Perhaps the hardest part of "time travel" is understanding the ways in which perception was very different from our own—as well as the ways in which it was very much the same.

**3. Have you ever been to France yourself? If so, did you visit any of the locations mentioned in the novel?**

I went to France three times while writing this book. I saw the chateau in which Petite grew up, saw where she was born in Tours, visited the convent (now a school of music) where her aunt Angélique was a nun. In coming to understand her life, I went to Reugny, Amboise, Blois, Fontainebleau, Saint-Germain-en-Laye, Paris (touring the Louvre, the Luxembourg and Vincennes), Vaux-le-Vicomte, and—of *course*, several times over—Versailles. On-site research is essential when writing historical fiction—but it is also one of the great pleasures of the work.

#### 4. Why did you decide to write the epilogue from Louise's daughter, Marie-Anne's point of view?

*Mistress of the Sun* evolved through countless drafts: there have been many endings! I had initially planned to write an afterword, explaining what happened, and to whom. I felt that the reader would want to know. Marie-Anne was, in fact, present at her mother's death: something I found very moving. I chose her first person point-of-view because it felt right, and because Marie-Anne was in a position to inform us of what happened to her brother, her grandmother, her uncle, her *father*—so I gave it a try.

I emailed Marie-Anne's account of her mother's death to my editors, and they loved it. Even so, I wasn't sure if it worked. . . and I didn't really know until I read the novel through from beginning to end (for the hundredth time). Marie-Anne's account made me cry: I knew then that it was the right way to end the novel.

#### 5. How did you get the idea for Diablo? What does he represent to Petite?

Where *do* ideas come from? It's such a dream-like process. In 1990, while I was first learning about the life of Louise de la Vallière, a friend told me a story about healing a horse nobody dared touch. I knitted this account into a short story about Louise—a passionate fable in which she ultimately kills the horse she loves. In this story—the kernel of what ultimately, many years later, became *Mistress of the Sun*—the King's horse, a dangerous black stallion named Hannibal, was dying. Petite is able to approach the horse and save it, thus beginning her relationship with the King.

I started writing the novel version of this short story in 1992. I had just finished writing *The Many Lives & Secret Sorrows of Josephine B.*, the first of what was to become the *Josephine B. Trilogy*, and my agent was looking for a publisher for it. The following year I was offered a contract, so I (rather reluctantly) put the novel about Louise away, planning to return to it once the trilogy was finished.

In 1999, I went to France, to Paris. It was my last research trip for Josephine. On a trip to the Louvre, I wept leaving David's magnificent painting, "Coronation of Empress Josephine," knowing that I would soon be leaving Josephine's world. On the way out of the Louvre, I bought a postcard of a painting of a white horse ("Head of a White Horse" by Theodore Gericault). This was my lifeline to the next book—something to draw me forward, something to help me leave Josephine behind.

This, then, is where Diablo began, with that horse portrait, which I put above my desk. What does he represent to Petite? I think Diablo represents connection with a true and wild animal spirit: her own wild, animal spirit.

#### 6. Are you generally a fan of historical novels? If so, which are your favorites?

I am a fan of what I would call literary historical novels—slow, gritty but poetic novels that often end unhappily. I love Rose Tremain's work—my favorite is *Music & Silence*. Sarah Water's *Fingersmith* is brilliant. Hans Koning's *A Walk with Love and Death* is a spare, elegant historical novel I've read several times over. Geraldine Brook's *Year of Wonder* is a wonder, as is Tracy Chevallier's *Girl with a Pearl Earring*. I loved *Enemy Women* by Paulette Giles. More recently: *The Hummingbird's Daughter* by Urrea has to be one of the best novels I've ever read. *Imposture* by Benjamin Markovits is stunning, as is *Coal Black Horse*, by Robert Olmstead. Sara Gruen's *Water for Elephants* is irresistible. I read these authors with awe. Most recently, *The Boys in the Trees* by Mary Swan: I read this brilliant novel in a reverie of admiration.

**7. What was the greatest challenge in writing a novel based on real people and events from the 17<sup>th</sup> century?**

Any novel based on fact faces a number of challenges: the greatest being crafting a story, a narrative arc out of random events. One has to find the story in the facts, and then allow that story to flower. Often that means letting go of the facts. It's difficult to be true to both, and ultimately the story is what matters most in fiction.

On another level, I feel that truth can be revealed in this way—an emotional truth that may not be evident in the bare facts. On a practical level, logistics in the 17<sup>th</sup> century were never simple. Getting from point A to point B could prove to be extremely complex (at least from our perspective). Ideology, perspective: these were challenging to come to grips with. Intimate details of daily life: these are very hard to uncover. And what in fact *did* happen? There are, invariably, differing accounts. One has to become a sleuth.

**8. Which famous woman throughout history do you find the most remarkable?**

I am most interested in women who are plunged into a role for which they were not raised and are ill-prepared. Josephine, daughter of impoverished nobility, becomes Empress. Louise, a devout, rustic, tomboy daughter of minor nobility becomes the Sun King's official mistress. I think I'd likewise be interested in the story of a princess turned pauper.

Joan of Arc truly was remarkable—but there would have to be something about her that provokes my curiosity for me to be drawn to write about her. "Remarkable" is not enough to make a good story—there has to be more, at least for me. I'm very fond of La Grande Mademoiselle, the Sun King's cousin, for example, a bumbling early feminist who completely (and foolishly) lost her head to love. Athénaïs interests me, as well. What made *her* turn to the Devil?

**9. Petite has such a love of horses. Do you have an affinity for them, or other animals, as well? If not, what is your great passion?**

I am what is called "a horse person"—I have an elderly Thoroughbred, Finnegan, a noble gentleman, if ever there was one. One of the reasons history attracts me is that it is a world of horses. The greatest pleasure in researching Louise's story was learning about horsemanship in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Bone magic really was something used to tame horses, and was believed to make men go mad, "Gone to the river."

**10. You must have discovered so many interesting people in your years of researching *Mistress of the Sun*. Do you plan to focus on one of these characters in your next novel, or would you like to write something completely different?**

There are so many fascinating characters—so many fascinating *stories*—in this period. I will definitely be writing more about them. The hard part will be decided which wonderful story to choose next.



Sandra Gulland, wearing a replica a 17th-century gown she had made, inspired by the gown Louise de la Vallière is shown wearing on the cover of *Mistress of the Sun*

Sandra Gulland was born in Miami, Florida, and lived in Rio de Janeiro, Berkeley and Chicago before moving to Canada in 1970 to teach in an Inuit village in northern Labrador — "an amazing experience," she recalls. Settling in Toronto, she worked as a book editor for a decade before moving with her husband and two very young children to a backwoods log cabin near Killaloe (population 600) in rural Ontario. There, in addition to running *Words &*, an editing services company, co-producing a community newsletter (*The Community News & Confuse*), and serving as volunteer principal in her children's parent-run alternative school, she raised chickens and pigs, grew vegetables ("tried to grow vegetables," is how she puts it), battled blackflies and snowstorms, and developed a lifelong love of horses.

In 1985 she began writing fiction full-time. Ten years later, the first of the novels in the *Josephine B. Trilogy* was published, followed in 2008 by *Mistress of the Sun*. She is now at work on another novel set in the Court of Louis XIV, the Sun King, an era she describes as "endlessly fascinating." An Internet enthusiast, she writes two blogs — *Notes on the Writing Life* (on writing) and *Baroque Explorations* (on research) — and can be found on Facebook, MySpace, Twitter and other sites. She and her husband now live half the year in rural Ontario, and half in San Miguel de Allende, Mexico.

For more information about the author, her research, and work, please visit [www.sandragulland.com](http://www.sandragulland.com).

## Praise for *Mistress of the Sun*

“Suspenseful, evocative, atmospheric, and deliciously satisfying reading, with an immensely appealing heroine.” – Margaret George, author of *Helen of Troy*

"I fell in love with Petite from the moment she tamed her wild, white horse, and I galloped along with her through her undying devotion to one of France's most colorful kings."  
—Anne Easter Smith, author of *Daughter of York* and *A Rose for the Crown*

“Beautifully told and elegantly written, Ms. Gulland's novel, *Mistress of the Sun*, sweeps the reader up and transports them into the opulent world of the 17<sup>th</sup> century French court... In this tale, Louise de la Valliere leaps boldly from these elegantly written pages. She is unforgettable, as is this brilliant novel!” -  
-Diane Haeger, author of *Courtesan* and *The Perfect Royal Mistress*

"No one gets more deeply into the heart and mind of a historical character than Sandra Gulland. In *Mistress of the Sun*, the joys and sorrows of Louise de la Vallière are so real and immediate that I now feel as if Louis XIV's first mistress was a dear friend." -- Susanne Dunlap, author of *Liszt's Kiss*

"An excellent book, glittering and tender and soulful and wise." -- Marilyn Simonds, author of *The Holding*

“As she did for Napoleon's wife (*The Many Lives & Secret Sorrows of Josephine B.*), Gulland skillfully blends fact and fiction to imagine the life of Louise de la Vallière (1644–1710), mistress to Louis XIV, France's Sun King...A supernatural element threaded throughout adds color to Gulland's vivid period imaginings.” – *Publishers Weekly*

“[a] captivating jewel of a novel” – *Historical Novels Review*, Editor's Choice

“...this is a fine telling, bolstered by the strength and sensitivity of Gulland's characterizations.”  
– *Kirkus Reviews*

“Following up her popular trilogy of novels about Josephine Bonaparte, Gulland now gives us an inside look at the magnificent court of the Sun King.” – *Library Journal*

“Teeming with the rich period details that make historical fiction so rewarding, Gulland's dynamic and nuanced portrait of Louis' notorious reign thrums with page-turning expediency and deliciously seductive machinations.” – *Booklist*

“Here's a warning: *Mistress of the Sun* is dangerously seductive. It's one of those books that will grab you and hold you captive till the last page is turned.” — *Montreal Gazette*

“Sandra Gulland, the *doyenne* of the royal historical novel, returns triumphantly like the queens she has written about, in *Mistress of the Sun*. This story of Louise de la Valliere, known familiarly as Petite, who started as the daughter of a knight and made her way up to the court of Louis XIV, reads like clockwork—not mechanically, but rather in a smooth way that combines the historical detail with the fictional dramatization. Gulland's ability to portray both the larger-than-life characters and the passing details of seventh-century France (horseshoes were hung to ward off evil, for instance) creates a convincing canvas on which to imagine a lasting love-struck tale that captivated Dumas in his own

novel about Petite (which even included the return of d'Artagnan). This is popular historical-novel-writing at its most complete. Encore!" – Steve Shapiro, Rainy Day Books

"A delicious tale of romance and intrigue in the court of Louis XIV that will delight even those who cringe at the thought of reading historical fiction." — *NationalPost*

"An irresistible story" — *Ottawa Citizen*

"Vivid, tender and wise, *Mistress of the Sun* shimmers with life. Sandra Gulland has illuminated the choices and dilemmas of a woman of verve and grace." --Shauna Singh Baldwin, author of *We Are Not in Pakistan*.

"Intrigue, illicit love and a woman's difficult choice are among the attractions of *Mistress of the Sun*" – *Hartford Courant*

"What a wonderful novel! Eight years in the making, Ms. Gulland's meticulous research pulls you into every scene, every page...her final decision is the decision of a woman much more world-wise, but one who has not been broken. The final scenes will move you to tears but make you proud to have known Louise de la Valliere. Here's to hoping there won't be another eight years between books for this marvelous author!" – *Books 'n Border Collies Blog*

"Exquisite and fantastic detail... to be savored and enjoyed. Take your time with this one; you will not want it to end." – *Romantic Reviews Today*, Perfect 10 Rating

"A wonderful book, *Mistress of the Sun* by Sandra Gulland is historical fiction at its finest...What I liked most about this book is that you actually feel that you are there as the story progresses and you see the glamour and the pageantry of the court. This is a beautiful story and I loved it. It is well worth the read. Oh yes, at the end of the book, she finds her wonderful white stallion who saves her life." – Norman Goldman, B & N bookseller in Encino, CA

"The story is thoughtful, very readable (you'll definitely get lost in it), and at times even a little steamy (tastefully, of course). Basically, Sandra has put together a thoroughly enjoyable character portrait, in which the reader really will feel like they're inside the protagonist's head." – *Revue Magazine*

"Gulland delights in the details of her surroundings, and squeezes great amusement out of minor characters, like Petite's horrible bore of a stepfather, a self-important marquis...The rest of the story is laced with all kinds of political and sexual intrigue, as well as religious guilt and public suffering. Gulland's gothic touches sometimes seem overripe but not inappropriate in this easily devoured historical romp about a girl, a king, her horse and their nation." – *Salon.com*

"This lively story is rich in period detail...Gulland successfully unfolds the story of Petite and Louis while smoothly weaving in other actual historical personages." – *Rocky Mountain News*

"Gulland does a wonderful job of lifting her novel from the romantic to the more profound issues that assail this young woman...The historical details are compelling: the casual viciousness of court chatter, Louis's insistence on having Louise as his lover, and the disposition of Louise's children...Certainly, women in Louise's position had few options in a male-dominated society, but she shows a generous spirit as a child calming Diablo and in her years with the king, finding peace at last far from the decadence of the royal court." – *Curled Up With a Good Book Blog*