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“Beyond the Light of the Sun King: Court Clothing as Adornment, Femininity, and Agency”

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Acknowledgments

I believe in angels
When I know the time is right for me
I'll cross the stream
I have a dream
- ABBA

These lyrics are from one of my favorite ABBA songs and they have been applicable to different situations in my life. As of recently, believing in angels has meant believing that my grandfather is supporting me from the beyond. I dedicate my completion of my thesis to my grandfather whose dream was to explore the world. While he did not accomplish his dreams, I hope that through my studies of history and dedication to French studies provided him the comfort that someone in his family traveled far even if these travels were confined to the world of academia.

The completion of this thesis brought me to many unfamiliar places through the various research processes I encountered. At times, I faced the challenge of fatigue however I was extremely privileged to have a support system that always pushed me to continue. The mental reminder that I am the first of many in my family encouraged me to follow this privileged path even though I had to deal with the unknown. While I uncovered new paths and felt enthusiasm along the way, I also had fear that I would not be able to achieve everything set out for me. Crossing the metaphorical barrier of a stream was done by me however the support that I had throughout this journey was crucial to my perseverance. I want to use this section of this essay to express my gratitude for the many individuals that showed me kindness and patience throughout the journeys of writing this thesis and my undergraduate studies.

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Mi mama que siempre me ha empujado a ser todo lo que yo quiero. Sin ella y su confianza en mí, yo nunca me arriesgar o teñir el valor en mi misma para seguir adelante. Gracias por enseñar me hacer apasionada y no dejar poro mis miedos. Cada dia estoy agradecida con dios porque tu eres mi mama. Todo lo que yo disfruto es por ti y tus sacrificios.

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CONTENTS

Introduction

When people think of fashion today, the MET gala, A-List celebrities, and *Vogue* magazine come to mind. What these three things have in common is clothing. To onlookers, clothing displayed by these events and media is a sign of wealth and power, and it is. The admiration for these events, individuals, and forms of media do not stem from simple awe but rather fascination towards lifestyles and goods that are not accessible to everyone. Exclusivity is what piques people's interest because it creates a sensation of scarcity and want. When tying together exclusivity, social stratification, and the ability to climb the social ladder, an individual feels further compelled to attain something that not everyone can access and that can offer them the ability to elevate themselves socially. Luxury fashion/clothing is an example of this phenomenon because it is not an item that can be acquired by everyone. Due to its exclusivity, it has become a marker of the privileges an individual has, depending on brand, material, and leisure activities associated with the article of clothing.

Thinking about fashion historically, most people refer back to images of what they imagine people wore in the past.Visualizations of homely peasants' dresses or gothic Victorian attire often come to mind. Throughout history, there has been a fixation on understanding how elite individuals dressed because it offers a glimpse into an exclusive environment that many people desire to enter. Additionally, this exclusivity is a topic that piques the interest of social and cultural historians. *The Culture of Clothing* by Daniel Roche, a historian of Old Regime France, sets out to investigate how fashion worked among various populations and not solely the upper classes.[1] What makes his work significant, in the field of 18th-century French social history, is that it is often referred to in other works that investigate similar ideas. Jennifer Jones, a

[1] Daniel Roche, *The Culture of Clothing: Dress and fashion in the 'ancien regime'* (Cambridge, UK:Cambridge University Press, 1994), 501.

historian 18th-century France, wrote in her monograph, which investigates how fashion was gendered,

> "Perhaps more than any other scholar, French historian Daniel Roche has unmasked the dynamic urban culture growing within the traditional economic structures and social rhythms of the early-modern world. For more than two decades, Roche's research has breathed life into the everyday world of Parisians, permitting us to peer into their houses, their wardrobes, and their mentalities".[2]

Through Jones's statement, the greater significance of Roche's work to this field is highlighted. She points out his dedication to investigating the seemingly "normal" aspects of everyday life in Old Regime France. His goal in focusing on the mechanics of creating and engaging with clothing was to help historians think of clothing beyond the adornment of the wealthy and elite, and to consider clothing as a source of life and culture. Through the various lenses that Roche's book provided, clothing or costumes are exposed to be active agents and not mere garments. Roche explained that clothing dictated the attitudes of the lower classes towards labor and people of other economic ranks because they were the individuals who created these garments. When discussing the labor required to create these fashionable clothing items and how garment workers were perceived, Roche wrote,

> "The constant insistence on the manual dexterity of the workers, their good taste, their creative fantasy, their technical imagination and their capacity to invent new forms and combine decoration and colours in a constantly changing and subtle manner, conferred on the aristinate the function of repository of the 'proofs of the sagacity of the human spirit', to quote d'Alembert". [3]

Roche was highlighting the reliance that there was on clothing workers to create the garments that the elite wore in the court. Roche quoted Jean Le Rond d'Alembert, Denis Diderot's collaborator in writing the *Encyclopédie*, because of his greater understanding of the functions of

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[2] Jennifer Michelle Jones, *Sexing La Mode: Gender, Fashion and Commercial Culture in Old Regime France* (Oxford: UK: Berg, 2004), 75.
[3] Roche, *The Culture of Clothing,* 450.

clothing, its creators, and how Old Regime French society engaged with it.[4] The point of this quote is to highlight the unaccounted labor that garment workers engaged in and how they were the backbone of the fashions displayed at court. Court fashions, again, were active agents in creating social hierarchies because they created labor divisions that came with privileges and displayed those privileges. Clothing was not random pieces of cloth or fabrics that were placed together but rather curated pieces of adornment. Today, the inability to travel to a specific time leads people to revert to viewing fashion as mere articles of clothing that make a specific style. The intentionality behind the manner in which people decided to dress is overlooked and misunderstood. Roche's monograph provides a nuanced view to clothing because it brings awareness to how clothing contributed to aspects of life and culture in Old Regime France. His work provides a basis to understand the depth of body adornment especially through clothing during Old Regime France.

During the 17th century, fashion became a topic of discussion when talking about morality. This discussion questioned the morality behind the luxury of clothing and changing the ways that a person chose to present themselves. At the heart of these discussions were religious motivations and beliefs because France was experiencing the effects of the consolidation of the Catholic Reformation.[5] Casuist theologians were individuals dedicated to comprehending and rationalizing Christian beliefs to determine the severity of a person's sins. Given that the 17th century was full of religious reform and transformation, casuists bore the brunt, addressing issues of morality. Clothing was intertwined with casuists' duties of addressing sins and moral dilemmas because attention to physical appearance was perceived as a form of vanity and the

[4] Roche, *The Culture of Clothing,* 404; 450.
[5] Majorie Meiss, *Is My Tailor a Sinner? Fashion, Economics, and Moral Theology in Moral Modern France* (Cambridge: MA: The MIT Press, 2024), 13.

purchasing of luxury goods as an unnecessary distraction.[6] As the producers of clothing whose morality was being debated, tailors were at the forefront of morality discussions because their role in creating clothes that were viewed as sinful made them directly related to acts of sin.[7] Sumptuary laws were another example that demonstrated how clothing and the purchasing of luxury goods were at the center of discussions about morality. Sumptuary laws, which restricted the purchasing of luxuries, were enacted throughout the early modern period by the monarchy as a way to restrict what the nobility could wear in order to create hierarchy.[8] Sumptuary edicts that were passed in the late 17th century limited people's ability to decorate themselves with lace, gold, and silver fabric.[9] These restrictions on clothing were also extended to the general French population because social hierarchies existed beyond the bounds of Louis XIV's court. In this way, the monarchy was able to uphold the social distinctions and hierarchies that supported it.

While a purpose for passing sumptuary laws was to limit people's ability to access certain goods in order to create social distinctions, sumptuary laws were also used to restrict people's ability to engage in overconsumption.[10] *Philosophes* and religious figures were critical of overconsumption in general and the consumption of luxury goods in particular, because it was seen as frivolous, and women often were the most critiqued about their consumption patterns.[11] The image of a female court member required a great amount of work to maintain because of the elaborateness of their costumes. Common features in female courtier attire were large wigs, detailed gowns made with expensive fabrics, and great amounts of makeup. Female courtiers also faced critiques to a greater extent, in comparison to men, because women were questioned

[6] Meiss, *Is My Tailor a Sinner?*, 15.
[7] Meiss, *Is My Tailor a Sinner?*, 15.
[8] Roche, *The Culture of Clothing*, 49.
[9] Jones, *Sexing la Mode*, 31.
[10] Jones, *Sexing la Mode*, 9.
[11] Jones, *Sexing la Mode*, 88.

about their modesty due to their clothes providing more bodily exposure.[12]Additionally, they were critiqued about the physical distortion caused by the manner in which they adorned themselves.[13] During the 16th century, structured garments that stiffened the torso and dramatized the lower body became popular amongst women.[14] The farthingale was an example of a garment that distorted the female body in this manner.[15] Those who were the greatest critics of how female courtiers dressed were the *philosophes*, because they were participants in the Enlightenment which promoted thinking about individualism and morality. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, an 18th century philosopher, was an outspoken critic of women's relationship with clothing. He denounced certain fashions, such as whale boned corsets, and called for simpler clothing items so that women could fulfill their "innate" and "natural" role of seducing men.[16] While he was only born at the end ofLouis XIV's reign, Rousseau critiqued the courtiers' habits and behaviors that were remnants of Louis's court. Furthermore, he was invested in the conversation about morality and fashion, especially in regards to women. His manner of viewing clothing reduces female courtiers' motivations for why they dressed in certain manners to a mere judgment that they were not making themselves desirable enough for men. While ideas of beauty were connected with physical representation and etiquette at court, female courtiers' goal to dress in a particular manner was not always about presenting themselves as more attractive. Women of the court had their own motives to follow court etiquette in order to hold their positions and standings with the King. Dressing the part of a courtier for women was not always about being attractive; rather it was about their ability to be successful in the court of Louis XIV.

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[12] Meiss, *Is My Tailor a Sinner?*, 18.
[13] Meiss, *Is My Tailor a Sinner?*, 15.
[14] Meiss, *Is My Tailor a Sinner?*, 14.
[15] Meiss, *Is My Tailor a Sinner?*, 14.
[16] Clare Haru Crowston, *Fabricating Women: The Seamstresses of Old Regime France, 1675-1791* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001), 64.

In *Sexing la Mode: Gender, Fashion, and Commercial Culture*, Jennifer Jones builds upon Roche's discourse about the ways that clothing held great social currency. Jones differentiated her work from Roche's by focusing on a gendered lens in order to demonstrate the ways that clothing was feminine and feminized. In the beginning of her monograph, she discussed how *la mode*, fashion of that time, was something that both men and women engaged with, however the relationships between clothing and the genders were distinct from one another.[17] Jones's reason for why fashion was not yet seen as significant to women was because it was dominated by mercantilism, an economic system through which nationalist ideas were upheld through the prioritization of exporting goods rather than importing goods.[18] Mercantilism was considered a fundamental approach to the economy and to clothing during the reign of Louis XIV because the king's goal was to show Europeans and those outside the court the power of France.[19] A way that the King achieved making France distinguishable as a grand European power was through the control of the fashions that courtiers wore. For instance, Louis XIV established the *grand habit,* the expected attire for the courtiers, in 1670 and made it mandatory for female courtiers to follow it.[20] Select male courtiers were given the opportunity to wear the *justaucorps à brevet*, warrant coats, and wearing this article of clothing granted these men the privilege to follow the King on his excursions at Versailles and Saint-Germain.[21] The purpose behind enacting these rules and expectations at court was not only to create an image of unity that displayed the power of the court but also to distinguish courtiers based on their standing with the King.[22] While Louis XIV aspired to be an absolute monarch and was thought to be the person who dictated the way people lived, Jones asserts that there were people who aided in creating

[17] Jones, *Sexing la Mode*, 9.
[18] Jones, *Sexing la Mode*, 11.
[19] Jones, *Sexing la Mode*, 10-11.
[20] Jones, *Sexing la Mode*, 25.
[21] Jones, *Sexing la Mode*, 24.
[22] Jones, *Sexing la Mode*, 24.

Old Regime France especially through their influence. By bringing this point to light, Jones was able to transition to the discussion about women because they were often the courtiers who influenced court fashions.[23] The significance of women having this influence was that it demonstrated that Louis XIV did not control as much as he believed he did, but also women's inevitable involvement with clothing.

This time period was plagued by a battle for power grounded in fashion within Louis XIV's court, highlighting how clothing was a tool for social stratification. Through the analyses of how different socioeconomic classes engaged with fashion, Roche's monograph uncovered the various ways that clothing garnered meaning, and therefore had the ability to provide status. Roche's work will be used to understand the social and cultural environment of the Old Regime France in order to comprehend why clothing gained beyond monetary value. The value that clothing had was not inherently understood or acknowledged, but it held meaning in everyone's lives. Some individuals, more specifically the populations like the bourgeoisie who could afford to follow changing fashions, had the ability to further understand how fashion was a tool for social stratification. Other individuals, such as those of lower socioeconomic standing, could not afford to be up-to-date with the latest fashions, but they still were able to build an intimate relationship with clothes. Due to their lack of accessibility to clothes because of their lack of funds, they were not able to purchase items as frequently. Therefore, they found ways to maintain their clothing. Whether it was having clothing of darker shades or clothing made out of heavier and more durable material, clothing served a more practical purpose for working class individuals. Their limited ability to buy clothing as a form of conspicuous consumption made their relationship to clothes more intimate because they could not easily replace their clothes and

[23] Jones, *Sexing la Mode*, 11.

therefore had to care for them more.[24] On the other hand, courtiers engaged in the conspicuous consumption of clothing because they understood that dressing the part of a courtier was vital to the overall performance of court life.

Clare Haru Crowston, another historian of Old Regime France, added to the conversation between Roche and Jones by identifying that the credit economy was what influenced the relationship that men and women had with clothing. Credit was defined in various ways, but when discussing fashion, gender, and Louis XIV, it can be defined as a "pervasive force" that provided esteem or reputation to those who engaged with it.[25] This paper will draw from Jones and Crowston's works, as I will be focusing on how the experiences with clothing between female and male courtiers differed from one another. When thinking about these monographs in discussion together, Old Regime France's credit economy can be viewed as less gendered, however the presence of women in fashion was grander and more established. This statement is being made due to the various accounts, that are provided by Crowston and Jones, of women's intimate relationship with their seamstresses. Jones presented these relationships between courtiers and female clothing workers through her discussion about *les marchandes de modes*, female guilds for fashion merchants.[26] A point that Jones brought attention to was that the *marchandes de modes* emerged because of reliance on female fashion workers. Female fashion workers, who were members of the *marchandes de modes,* were the main individuals who decorated court costumes.[27] Being in this position gave them responsibility of ensuring that the courtiers were presented the way that they should exemplifying how critical the *marchandes de modes* were to the court. Furthermore, their gender was a key factor in this relationship because

[24] Roche, *The Culture of Clothing*, 218-220.
[25] Clare Haru Crowston, *Credit, Fashion, Sex: Economies of Regard in Old Regime* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2013), 22.
[26] Jones, *Sexing la Mode*, 91-92.
[27] Jones, *Sexing la Mode*, 92-93.

the *marchandes de modes* requested for the right to share the ability to create women's clothing with tailors in 1675.[28] Their justification for gaining this privilege was that female customers required their modesty to be respected therefore women garment workers should be able create women's clothing. [29]

Jones's entire monograph was dedicated to explaining how femininity was closely tied to fashion; however, Crowston's book did not suggest that to the same extent as Jones's work, due to it being focused on the credit economy of Old Regime France. Jones's work was published nine years prior to Crowston's monograph, and she relied on female courtiers' narratives, often taking form as letters and memoirs, and printed primary sources such as *Le Mercure Galant* and *Tableau de Paris*. On the other hand, Crowston utilized dossiers from merchants, account books, and written debates from academics and philosophers of the time. Due to the differences in the primary sources that they utilized, each historian's work was either more or less gendered. By relying on primary sources that offer more insight into finances and intellectual thoughts, Crowston's was less gendered because she was focused on demonstrating how the credit economy functioned with clothing. In this paper, I focus on the gendered and socioeconomic issues with engaging in fashion during Louis XIV's reign, therefore I am in agreement with Jones on fashion being gendered in Old Regime France. I merge Crowston's ideas about clothing and social economics with Jones's ideas about how clothing became gendered in order to highlight how gender, socioeconomic positions, and clothing work together to place an individual in the existing hierarchy of Old Regime France.

When thinking about how fashion was gendered, noble women offer case studies that convey how intimate their relationship was with clothing and adornment of their bodies. Noble

[28] Jones, *Sexing la Mode*, 101.
[29] Jones, *Sexing la Mode*, 101.

women of the court used clothing as a way to maintain the status quo within the court or to attain power. The male courtiers used their influence to dictate clothing trends or societal views on clothing. While court women were not seen intentionally dictating fashion styles at that time, they were actively having conversations about clothing and indirectly influencing how people dressed. Those outside of the court encouraged the clothing patterns of the nobility by mimicking their way of dressing. I will argue that women had a more fraughtful relationship with clothing however everyone was a key player in the making of French fashion. Creating a culture surrounding fashion and physical adornment was a collective effort, whether or not individuals were intentionally participating, however everyone's part would be different.

Within the discussion of French fashion, the grander role of women has to be acknowledged. For this work, fashion can be defined as the popular clothes or articles of dress that were worn at this time. The realm of fashion has always been a field where women's presence is undeniable. There are various reasons for why this is, but fashion offering a means of social survival for women is one of the most important reasons. Fashion was an area in which women had the ability to exert their agency because what they chose to wear would create a positive or negative representation of them. There were limitations, though, on how much these women were able to exert agency through clothes, as Louis XIV dictated the standards of clothing in courtlife and courtiers were at the King's whim to follow these expectations.[30] To further understand the women of the court's engagements in fashion, court life has to be analyzed and comprehended.

The first chapter of this paper explores the hierarchies at the court of Louis XIV, 1643-1715, and how these hierarchies were upheld through the clothing that courtiers wore. The first section of this chapter sets out to explain the nuances within the population of the nobility.

[30] Jones, *Sexing la Mode*, 9.

The nobility was split into two groups, landed and robe nobility, based on how they came to hold their power. Many of the robe nobility came to power through the purchasing of offices and positions, which was the opposite manner of how the landed nobility came to their rank. This difference caused hierarchies to emerge because landed nobility did not always acknowledge the robe nobility's noble status due to the way that they came to acquire it. These hierarchies became apparent at ceremonies, and the ways that the nobility and court members adorned themselves.[31] The second section of this chapter will look into how clothing attained its social value and became a tool in climbing the social ladder of the court. As previously mentioned when discussing Diderot and d'Alembert, there were great efforts placed on creating clothing pieces that were deemed "fashionable" and "appropriate." These efforts from garment workers and the King's rule determined the value of clothing, and this value showed one's place in society. While exploring the fashions of the court, this section offers the underlying reasons for why people wanted to engage with these clothes and why those reasons were based on people's desire to garner or maintain power. After analyzing the ways that clothing gained its value and the relationships that those outside of court had with clothing, the third section of this chapter will look at the specific styles and forms of physical representation that the courtiers engaged with. By looking at what the courtiers were specifically wearing, the hierarchies and functions of the court were exposed because there were rules and etiquette that determined how a courtier dressed. Furthermore, the relationship between the courtiers and clothes exposed the attitudes that Old Regime France had towards luxury and consumption.

Chapter two of this paper, *The Secret Lives of Noble Wives*, sets out to understand the nuanced relationships women had with the ways that they chose to physically represent themselves. Women of the court had rules and forms of etiquette that they had to follow in order

[31] Stenberg, *Status Interaction during the Reign of Louis XIV*, 39-41.

to ensure they could integrate into court life. While being in the court of Louis XIV was a privileged experience, courtiers had to sacrifice parts of their identity to uphold the status quo in the court. Women gave up more of their agency and power, which was already restricted, causing further frustrations. To understand female courtiers' attitudes towards adornment and fashion, their memoirs and letters are used to see their more intimate feelings towards clothes. This chapter focuses on three female courtiers: Madame Elizabeth Charlotte, referred to as Liselotte and the wife of Philippe I duc d'Orléans, Madame de Montespan, and Madame de Maintenon. While these women were members of the court and are investigated in this paper because of their influence, they all had distinct experiences due to their varied relationships with the King and their backgrounds. Courtlife during Louis XIV's reign is associated with luxury and extravagance. Versailles is an example of the demonstration of wealth that the King set to convey to his subjects and the rest of the world.[32] However, it was not only Louis's doing in creating this image of grandeur, as every courtier had a role that they played. Courtwomen were critical players within the King's court life because they upheld the rules and norms of court life that were set for them. If these women were not proponents of the demonstration of luxury within Louis XIV's court, the court would not have become what it was. These women placed significant attention on how they presented themselves because they were expected to do so, but also for social survival in the court. Fashion was a weapon in a battleground where women remained vulnerable due to their gender. Various noblewomen in Louis XIV's court described their experiences and the standards that were set for them to uphold in letters and other correspondences. The experiences of these women varied because they garnered power and status in different ways. Some women were born with status, while others had to find power through the relationships that they made, especially the mistresses of Louis XIV. Despite their

[32] Jones, *Sexing la Mode*, 10.

background differences, they understood that clothing was a tool that could help them survive courtlife. The accounts of these women are important because they closely engaged with clothes and therefore understood the intentionality of using clothing as a tool for maintaining their positions and social stratification. Not only will the relationship between fashion and women be understood but also their attitudes towards one another and the expectations set for them.

Chapter three, *Beauty Is Where You Find it,* uses the lens of non-courtiers to show how they comprehended the use of fashion in social settings. To preface, the scope of this lens is limited to the bourgeoisie and aristocracy, because they were the individuals who were not part of the court and could not afford all the latest fashions, but they were able to understand the importance of clothing. This was due to their ability to buy publications, such as periodicals, which discussed court fashions, and fashion plates, which demonstrated pictorially what the courtiers wore. It is important to note that these sources showed the court in an agreeable way because of the King's control over the arts and the press. The image that was presented to the world and those outside of the court was an idealistic view of the court and its function. In reality, the court had divisions based on one's relationship to the King and individual power. The court was a competitive environment as courtiers strove to maintain and garner power by being in favor of the King, which at times caused hostility amongst the courtiers. Louis XIV ensured that there was an overall image of union by utilizing various forms of media in order to demonstrate the power and glory of the kingdom.

To observers from afar, Louis XIV's court took the form that he wanted: a lavish and exclusive environment. This carefully curated image of the court could not have been created without the use of appearance that took form as etiquette and physical adornment of the body through clothing. Maintaining this appearance was not only vital to maintain the illusion that was

being at court, but also crucial for the courtiers to maintain their power and status. The exclusivity of the court ensured that the courtiers were often at close proximity with one another which allowed the courtiers to be critical of one another over the minutest details. This is most apparent through the interactions between female courtiers who had more precarious statuses that motivated them to maintain their power to the best of their ability. Beyond women at court, all interactions and engagements that a courtier participated in were calculated because of the expectations set for them. These social rules, especially the ones regarding clothes, were set or encouraged by Louis XIV. As his rule is investigated throughout this paper, it becomes apparent that Louis XIV choreographed a performance at his court to show the grandeur of his absolute rule. At a closer glance, it is revealed that there were many individuals, especially women, who influenced the decisions and behaviors at court, which shows how Louis XIV's rule was not absolute. Even though Louis XIV's rule is shown to be more complicated, he still showed that he controlled many aspects of their daily lives especially through his influence on the press. While following the expectations and etiquette of the court was a nuisance for the courtiers, they and others outside the court followed these rules in order to maintain or achieve power.

Chapter One - *La Famille est le Noyau de la Civilisation*

> "My last observation is that despite everything I have said about the court of France, there is still a great deal of constraint and deception in many people's conduct. Since most of them are motivated only by self interest or ambition, they must avoid the appearance of anything that might work against this interest, and they must appear attached to the things that conform to the taste and temper of the present reign."[33]

In this statement, Exéchiel Spanheim, Elector of Brandenburg and a German Protestant, was describing his concluding thoughts about his visit to Louis XIV's court in Saint-Germain-en-Laye. Before 1682, Saint-Germian was the primary venue for the courtiers because it was the King's main residence.[34] The transition to Versailles began in 1672, but courtiers continuously visited Saint-Germain because the King was frequently there.[35] The official move to Versailles in 1682 caused prolonged celebration, but also concerns over the 'carefree' environment that Versailles created.[36] The description of court behavior written by Spanheim was applicable to Versailles and Saint-Germain, but the different environments induced different forms of interactions amongst the courtiers. Throughout the reign of Louis XIV, there was concern regarding how courtiers presented themselves because they were the image of France and an extension of the King. Spanheim's remarks show that in his view the courtiers, the individuals at court, were performing to meet the King's expectations. These expectations took form as following court etiquette, which meant attending certain rituals and dressing in the proper attire for these events.[37]

The first section of this chapter is dedicated to presenting the relations at court and how courtiers engaged with one another depending on their status and background. These differences

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[33] William Beik, *Louis XIV and Absolutism: A Brief Study with Documents,* (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2000), 80.
[34] Beik, *Louis XIV and Absolutism,* 51.
[35] Gillette Ziegler, *At the Court of Versailles: Eye-Witness Reports from the Reign of Louis XIV* (New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., Inc., 1966), 147.
[36] Ziegler, *At the Court of Versailles*, 192.
[37] Jones, *Sexing la Mode*, 9.

are further explored in this section by analyzing how ceremonies were reflections of the hierarchies present at the court of Louis XIV. The positions and status that an individual held at court were representations of who they were, where they came from, and their relation to the King. While every person with status, position, or rank was viewed differently, they served the greater purpose of displaying France's grandiosity and power.

While courtiers were expected to attend certain rituals and ceremonies, not all of these gatherings were accessible, and this exclusivity served a purpose. Hierarchies at the court were created through the rituals and ceremonies to which only certain people had access. At the King's *lever*, or morning ceremony, only a select few were allowed to view the King wake up. In his first experience at the court, Spanheim described this ceremony in his correspondence. He wrote,

> "My first observation is that although the custom has been established that devoted courtiers attend the king's *lever* every morning, there are nevertheless various levels of admission. First come those who have the right to be admitted to the *petit lever*…the officers of the chamber such as the first gentleman of the chamber on duty, the grand master of the wardrobe, the first valet of the bedroom serving for that quarter, and the king's readers."[38]

Strikingly, the King's closest family members were not guaranteed a viewing of one of the King's most intimate ceremonies. Their lack of admission shows that the hierarchy at the court was not determined exclusively by familial ties to the King; rather it was determined by the services an individual provided him and the connections they had. While individuals who were not born into nobility had the ability to climb the social ladder at court, there were key distinguishing factors between these groups of individuals. Most of these distinctions presented themselves as forms of etiquette, especially at ceremonies where specific articles of clothing were mandated. For example, the ability to wear mantles was not offered to everyone, and they

[38] Beik, *Louis XIV and Absolutism,* 78.

became more exclusive as courtiers and nobles sought to wear them.[39] Mantles, referred to as *manteaux* in French, were outerwear garments worn in high ceremonies by the individuals who could wear them, which were primarily aristocrats.[40] Mantles were accessible to the individuals who were able to afford them and, even then, specific designs and fabrics used for a mantle would make this article of clothing more exclusive.

Patterns, designs, and fabrics used to create articles of clothing, beyond mantles, were all socioeconomic distinguishers inside and outside the court. An example of this was how rural society, more specifically the individuals who engaged in laborious work, wore darker and more solid colors. The reasoning behind these choices was that their clothes had to withstand the demands of agricultural work.[41] While this chapter does not center on the lives of the individuals outside the court who did not directly engage with fashion, it is crucial to understand the ways in which they interacted with clothes to highlight how clothes created exclusivity. Through this exclusivity, clothes became a tool for social stratification because the ability to wear a specific article of clothing was an indicator of a person's socioeconomic status. The individuals who physically made these garments had a significant role in helping curate the court and determining how clothes were a tool for social stratification.

The third section of this chapter will present the materials and efforts that composed the courtiers' clothing. The questions being addressed in this section are why were the courtiers wearing them and how did these clothes gain value? By exploring the commercial revolution and consumerism, other relationships with clothing, such as creating and altering clothes, will convey the intimate aspects behind the craftsmanship of making clothing. The investigation into the

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[39] Giora Stenberg, *Status Interaction during the Reign of Louis XIV* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 97.
[40] Stenberg, *Status Interaction during the Reign of Louis XIV*, 98-99.
[41] Daniel Roche, *A History of Everyday Things: The Birth of Consumption in France, 1600-1800* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 201.

craftsmanship behind these articles of clothing conveys the efforts of the garment workers, the debates about consumption and the French economy, and the social tiers within the fashion sector. While garment workers were oftentimes not members of the court, they engaged with the courtiers and attained an insiders' look at how the court functioned. Their work was a reflection of the King's vision for France, which was a deeply divided society of which the court stood at the top. Even though this was the case and becoming a court member was a sign of being part of an exclusive group, this exclusive environment had further divisions within it.

Spanheim outlined hierarchies in this letter by stating, "The *second entrance* is ordinarily reserved for princes and lords of the above-mentioned first rank… After a certain length of time it is reopened, and the courtiers are allowed to enter freely, some of whom are first summoned by name in accordance with their reputation at the court before the others are admitted."[42] The *second entrance* refers to the *grand lever,* where a larger group of individuals was able to observe the King's morning routine. Spanheim's description shows that noble titles and connection to the King did hold weight in certain situations, but their influence was limited because they did not guarantee entry to the *petit lever,* which was a more intimate ceremony. Spanheim illustrated the hierarchies of the court by discussing who was in attendance in the most intimate ceremonies of the King and who was later able to join in more open ceremonies.

The positions listed by Spanheim were positions that involved serving the King and were given to the important nobles. While the individuals in these positions were actively ensuring that the court functioned the way the King desired, they were not servants, and receiving these positions was a great honor. For example, the grand master of the wardrobe was a position that stressed the importance of dressing in proper court attire, demonstrating how significant fashion was in Louis XIV's court. The Grand Masters of Ceremonies were not listed by Spanheim, but

[42] Beik, *Louis XIV and Absolutism: A Brief Study with Documents,* 78.

this position was a prolonged role that involved the assigned nobles to take charge of ceremonial duties.[43] There were hierarchies within these committees, as other members controlled the daily routines at the court, which was a privilege that not every member of the group of Grand Masters of Ceremonies had.[44] These positions were occupied by senior officers, and included the positions of Grand Master of the Household and the First Gentlemen of the Bedchamber.[45] All these positions were assigned roles in the theatrical image of the court of Louis XIV and they served the purpose to exemplify the power of France.

Everything about the court was curated because there was a grander mission of upholding the King's absolutist power and France's grandeur. Nobility and courtiers were not the only ones subjected to the King's objective in molding Old Regime France. Louis XIV's vision for Old Regime France was to create a nation that seemed powerful because of its strong government and united by creating a hegemonic image of his court, despite there being hierarchies inside and outside of it.[46] Crowston described the making of Old Regime France as theatrical due to everyone playing a role that was controlled by the King.[47] The roles that nobles acquired through their connections or noble birth were honorary positions, but not all roles were made equal. The way a member of the court laid claim to a position and the power that came with it determined their status. A courtier's ability to meet the expectations of the court revealed to the King that they were worthy and capable of being in their granted role. There was a self-serving aspect in this performance, because of the advantages that the courtiers received from conforming. Conforming meant remaining in power but also losing self agency. Each courtier sacrificed an amount of agency as they negotiated aspects of their life to succumb to the King's rule.

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[43] Stenberg, *Status Interaction during the Reign of Louis XIV*, 14.
[44] Stenberg, *Status Interaction during the Reign of Louis XIV*, 14.
[45] Stenberg, *Status Interaction during the Reign of Louis XIV*, 14.
[46] Beik, *Louis XIV and Absolutism: A Brief Study with Documents,* 1-2.
[47] Crowston, *Credit, Fashion, Sex : Economies of Regard in Old Regime France*," 9.

This conformity was shown through the participation of courtiers in dressing their part as a courtier. In the second section of this chapter, the specific fashions of court dress are investigated. Positions and ranks were not made equal, therefore not all fashions were attainable to all court members. Part of the performance aspect of creating France's grandiose image was the hierarchies created in fashion through the regulations placed on clothing. Seventeenth-century fashion and engravings are utilized in this section to show what the courtiers were exactly wearing and how these clothing items were presented. The goal of this section is to ultimately provide a picture of how the court looked through the images of clothing presented in these fashion plates and how the court looking in this grand manner was important to the French national identity.

The way that the court was presented was not solely reliant on the King's vision and the courtiers' willingness to follow court etiquette. There were also actors, such as the King's financial advisors and garment workers, outside the court who helped propel material culture. The relationships that individuals outside of the court had with clothing highlight that engagements with clothing were not only limited to the adornment of the body.

Keep Friends Close….Enemies Closer: Politics of the Court

When Spanheim was discussing the self-interest of many courtiers, he did not elaborate that the courtiers engaged in individualistic behavior because they had to compete for their given roles in the court. *La nobesse de robe*, the robe nobility, were the members of the nobility who got their status because of being given offices from the King or their ability to purchase them.[48] Before the 17th century, royal officeholders, the individuals who carried out the functions of justice and taxation in the French provinces, acquired their roles through powerful connections.[49]

[48] William Beik, *Louis XIV and Absolutism*, 7.
[49] William Beik, *Louis XIV and Absolutism*, 7.

During the 17th century, royal officeholders became more responsive to the King's interests and policies because of the emergence of the system of *venality of office*.[50] This system allowed wealthy people to purchase official posts for life and to pass them on to their heirs.[51] Prominent positions were filled by those who could purchase them, and the benefit of acquiring these positions was that they received noble status and exemption from the *taille*, a land tax on the peasantry.[52] Thus, the benefits from attaining these positions and the limitations of acquiring them created an atmosphere for competition. By allowing individuals who are not guaranteed nobility status to attain rank, many wealthy individuals would attempt to take advantage of this limited opportunity. This limitation created the environment for competition, and it would be further exacerbated because of the need for powerful connections to garner power.

Despite having positions of power, the nobles of the robe did not have access to the court. Their inability to enter court life demonstrates the extreme exclusivity of court culture. These wealthy individuals purchasing positions only bought an office and demonstrated their support to the King. Prominent robe nobles were able to be part of the French parlements that looked over administrative operations and monitoring the business operations of the French government.[53] The fact that they purchased their positions led to judgment from the courtiers and landed families because they were viewed as "new arrivals." [54] The courtiers' attitudes towards the robe nobility showcased that there were various layers to how elite an individual could become.

Entering the court, there was a different environment that was defined by performance and the origin of an individual's power. The engagements between courtiers were tactical because there was an understanding that certain connections offered a point of advantage in the

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[50] William Beik, *Louis XIV and Absolutism*, 7.
[51] William Beik, *Louis XIV and Absolutism,* 7.
[52] William Beik, *Louis XIV and Absolutism,* 7.
[53] Beik, *Louis XIV and Absolutism,* 8-9.
[54] Beik, *Louis XIV and Absolutism,* 9.

court. This was due to the proximity one had to the King and whether an individual was born into the court. Everything in the court of Louis XIV was choreographed, and this choreography manifested itself beyond clothing and adornment as it dictated how courtiers stood in ceremonies. In *Status Interaction During the Reign of Louis XIV,* Giora Stenberg, an Old Regime France historian, described the configuration of weddings:

> "A combination of objects and positions marked the division of ranks…Thus, royalty came first, closest to the altar and enjoying a canopy armchair, and a prie-Dieu, covered by a fleur-de-lised violet-velvet mat (*drap de pied*) that extended to middle of the platform. Next, still on the mat, came the dauphin and the Children of France, each provided with a cushion (*carreau*) and a stool.The following ranks formed the last three rows: first, the Granddaughters of France, at the edge of the mat; then, outside it and behind them, the Princes of the Blood; and finally, the Legitimated Princes and Princess."[55]

The organization of a wedding ceremony conveys how elaborately choreographed and planned ceremonies were because of the need to convey an individual's importance. Even though there were great efforts placed to ensure that these ceremonies were configured properly, there were positions that remained ambiguous or created exceptions to the order. For instance, ambassadors were chosen by their ruler to represent their country in foreign areas, and they also had their own affluence.[56] Members of the Roman Catholic Church were another source of tension, because they held power due to their spiritual connections. At center-stage, there was the altar that represented spiritual authority but also the power of the King, which was derived from God.[57] For any ceremony, there were these complications with the organization of courtiers, clergy members, and aristocrats, but it was important that this choreography of hierarchy was achieved to display the levels of power.

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[55] Stenberg, *Status Interaction during the Reign of Louis XIV*, 32.
[56] Stenberg, *Status Interaction during the Reign of Louis XIV*, 32.
[57] Stenberg, *Status Interaction during the Reign of Louis XIV*, 33.

Courtiers were regarded differently because of their background, either making them more respected or judged. Returning to the robe nobility, they faced criticism because their positions were bought, which made members of the court who were born into nobility wary of their ability and worthiness. Jean-Baptiste Primi Visconti, an Italian member of the court, wrote in 1675,

> "The great nobility are subject to even more upheaval, for whether they are in the country, at court, or in the army, they inevitably ruin themselves with their expenditures. They avoid living in towns other than Paris, so that they will not have to dispute issues of precedence with the members of the parlements and the other judges. A citizen who devotes himself to the law receives no consideration, and the only persons who appear noble are those who follow a military career. I have noticed many bourgeois families are not considered noble, even though they have provided distinguished service as councillors and presidents [in parlements] for two, even three hundred years. In a sense this is proper because such posts are venal and open to purchase by the first person to arrive."[58]

Visconti thus made a clear distinction between the robe nobility and the nobility who were granted their titles through lineage. While this distinction was made, the robe nobility viewed themselves as part of the nobility despite not fitting the "traditional" standards that Visconti discussed. Those who were not born into nobility and purchased "venal" positions were described as insufficient and lacking merit. Visconti justified the lack of recognition of the robe nobility's noble status because they did not have to "earn" their positions. While it is contradictory to say an individual was not worthy of noble status because of the lack of work placed into attaining this title, those born into nobility did not have to work for their titles, either. This contradiction exposes that there was a hierarchy that determined how nobility was viewed in Louis XIV's court. Visconti made an exception for those who participated in the military, referred to as the sword nobility, revealing that there were exceptions in this hierarchy.

[58] Beik, *Louis XIV and Absolutism,* 69.

Oftentimes, those in the military risked their lives fighting for France, displaying merit, which was a characteristic that Visconti did not recognize in the robe nobility. While the robe nobility were not guaranteed members to the court and not recognized as "worthy" of noble status, they were contributors to the administration and functioning of Old Regime France.

Entering court life and becoming a courtier required a connection to the King, relation to the aristocracy, or being born into the court.[59] Despite these qualifications, there were other less common manners for individuals to become courtiers. Ducal titles offered the ability to attain rank at the court of Louis XIV without meeting any of these requirements.[60] *Ducs et pairs*, dukes and peers, were positions granted by the King and registered by the *parlement* that offered a permanent position in the court.[61] *Ducs à brevet*, patented dukes, acquired their positions through personal favors.[62] These positions became permanent because of primogeniture that allowed the first born son to acquire his parent's title.[63] The ability to enter Louis XIV's court, an extremely exclusive social group, aided in creating an environment for competition for power that defined social interactions by making them more tactical and intentional.

The engagements between courtiers were calculated because there was an understanding that certain connections offered a point of advantage in the court. This was due to the proximity one had to the King and whether an individual was born into the court. Courtiers were regarded differently depending on their background, either making them more respected or judged. Being born into the court versus entering court life through the purchasing of positions or connections with courtiers, created a clear distinction that set standards for the decorum an individual had to uphold. The level of scrutiny and judgment a courtier received also depended on their gender.

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[59] Stenberg, *Status Interaction during the Reign of Louis XIV,* 18-19.
[60] Stenberg, *Status Interaction during the Reign of Louis XIV,* 19.
[61] Stenberg, *Status Interaction during the Reign of Louis XIV,* 19.
[62] Stenberg, *Status Interaction during the Reign of Louis XIV,* 19.
[63] Stenberg, *Status Interaction during the Reign of Louis XIV,* 19.

Due to the court of Louis XIV being created through an illusion that required performance, all courtiers had to sacrifice aspects of their identity to conform.

Part of Louis XIV's understanding of being King was to create an illusion of a unified kingdom. While the politics of the court provided a micro perspective that exposed how the court community was fragmented, the King attempted to resolve any social conflicts in the court in order to ensure that his reign was not disrupted by these issues.[64] Part of addressing these conflicts, especially those involving status and rank, was through clothing. During the wedding of Marie-Louise of Orléans, Louis XIV's niece and granddaughter of France by birth, she wore attire that undermined her status as a bride and the French royal house.[65] This event was important politically for the King and the overall French kingdom because it was a union between two countries, Spain and France, who had been at war.[66] Although all ceremonies were choreographed, this ceremony was planned considering every detail, as it was a start of a new relationship between both countries.[67] Marie-Louise's mantle was decorated with *fleurs-de-lis,* golden lilies and a symbol of the dynasty, and the amount that bordered her mantle was indicative of her rank.[68] The mantle that she wore was decorated with three rows of the *fleurs-de-lis* which grouped her with the Daughters of France.[69] Furthermore, surpassing two rows of the *fleurs-de-lis* was a privilege given to the Princesses of the Blood.[70] The attire that Marie-Louise wore was suitable for a princess at her coronation, but this ceremony was not that event, and Marie-Louise only had the status of being a granddaughter of France by birth.[71] This situation resulted in an addition of a fourth row of the *fleurs-de-lis* to the dauphine's, Louis

[64] Stenberg, *Status Interaction during the Reign of Louis XIV,* 170.
[65] Stenberg, *Status Interaction during the Reign of Louis XIV,* 40.
[66] Stenberg, *Status Interaction during the Reign of Louis XIV,* 27.
[67] Stenberg, *Status Interaction during the Reign of Louis XIV,* 27.
[68] Stenberg, *Status Interaction during the Reign of Louis XIV,* 41.
[69] Stenberg, *Status Interaction during the Reign of Louis XIV,* 41.
[70] Stenberg, *Status Interaction during the Reign of Louis XIV,* 41.
[71] Stenberg, *Status Interaction during the Reign of Louis XIV,* 40.

XIV's daughter-in-law, mantle in order to ensure rank was portrayed correctly at court.[72] While the King later disapproved of this alteration to the amount of *fleur-de-lis* on mantles, this disapproval demonstrated his desire to avoid social conflict at court because he ensured that any usurpers would not be able to make this change on mantles in order to respect the order of the court. Fashion and appearances were vital to the organization of the court, but also to avoid any havoc emerging from misrepresentation of ranks and statuses.

Despite the complexities of the French court and nobility, all the individuals in this demographic had the ability to engage with fashion because of their ability to afford the latest fashions. Furthermore, many of these individuals desired to participate in the realm of fashion because of their want to maintain or gain power. These attitudes towards clothing reveal how clothing and appearances unified the individuals in the court of Louis XIV and the noble populations even though these groups were fragmented. At a large-scale, Old Regime France was presented as a unified nation with social hierarchies that were made apparent through appearances involving clothing and etiquette. While there was an illusion of union throughout France, there were disagreements amongst the courtiers and nobility that conveyed the complicated relationship they had with one another. The proximity of courtiers created a tight-knit community where they were able to observe and understand each other's places in the court and society. Not all members of the nobility were part of the court, but they still competed with one another for power and favor from the King. This rivalry amongst the nobility and court members was what helped make fashion and appearances social markers. Maintaining appearance, especially through clothing, was a way for courtiers and noble members to reiterate their ability to follow the etiquette set out for them and distinguish themselves. Fashion, clothing,

[72] Stenberg, *Status Interaction during the Reign of Louis XIV,* 41.

and overall physical representation, if following the rules of the court, acted as a tool in the contentious environment in Louis XIV's court.

Sourcing the Source

> "Our magistrates have well understood this mystery. Their red robes, the ermine in which they swaddle themselves like furry cats, the palaces in which they give judgement, the fleurs-de-lys, all this pomp was precisely necessary, and if doctors did not wear cassocks and slippers and lawyers did not wear square caps and excessively ample gowns four times too wide, they would never have duped the world, which cannot resist this so convincing display."[73]

Blaise Pascal, a French philosopher and mathematician, wrote this in his *Pensées*, an incomplete book about his thoughts that consisted of religious beliefs and philosophical critiques. In this section, he discussed the relationship between humans and imagination, and how imagination is the foundation of belief. Pascal related these ideas about imagination to the relationship between clothes and people. Courtiers were seen as courtiers because of their ability to represent themselves in that manner. By suggesting that people are what they wear, Pascal implied that people give value to clothes and therefore they have the ability to hold power. Through the understanding of the relationship between female courtiers and clothes, the power of clothing is highlighted, because these women used fashion as a means to exert and maintain power. Now, the new questions that emerge are: how did clothing gain this significance in Old Regime France? Were there specific articles of clothing that offered more leverage to gain power and influence? Why did specific fashions hold more power than others, and who was involved in determining the significance of clothing?

A significant aspect of court life was physical representation of the courtiers through clothes, makeup, and other forms of adornment. Returning back to mantle wearing and its role in

[73] Blaise Pascal, *Pascal's Pensées* (New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., Inc., 2006), 26.

ceremonies, its train length was a signifier of a person's status at court.[74] The longer the train of a mantle was, the more status a courtier had. The reasoning behind this was because there was more involvement required in its usage because of the need of train bearers, the individuals who held a courtier's train.[75] Train bearing is an example of how clothing was performative, because it required individuals to choreograph where the wearer would walk and what the bearer would hold.[76] While bearing someone else's train was a mark of coming from an inferior position, it remained a privilege to engage in this act, since not everyone had the opportunity to be near these individuals of higher ranks.[77] Train bearing was an intimate, choreographed act because it offered the responsibility of taking care of the representation of the individual who was wearing the train. Train bearing demonstrated that there was actual planning occurring when determining how to present a courtier beyond the simple act of choosing what to wear. However, wearing a train was not a privilege granted to many courtiers and therefore they resorted to simply dressing the part of a courtier. Before understanding what dressing like a courtier meant under the rule of Louis XIV, comprehension about how clothing gained its value has to be attained.

Consumption habits in 18th-century France were being revolutionized because of changes in commercial culture. In this essay, commercialism is defined as the prioritization of profits through commerce.[78] Commercial culture, meaning the encouragement of various forms of consumption, created intrigue for individuals to purchase material goods, especially clothing, in Old Regime France. During the 17th century, fashion was dictated by the elite because it comprised the few individuals who could afford to engage in fashion, however commercialism

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[74] Stenberg, *Status Interaction during the Reign of Louis XIV*, 25.
[75] Stenberg, *Status Interaction during the Reign of Louis XIV*, 25.
[76] Stenberg, *Status Interaction during the Reign of Louis XIV*, 25.
[77] Stenberg, *Status Interaction during the Reign of Louis XIV*, 43.
[78] Cambridge Dictionary Advanced Learner's Dictionary & Thesaurus, s.v. "commercialism (*n.*)", accessed 11 April 2026. https://dictionary.cambridge.org/us/dictionary/english/commercialism.

altered that dynamic.[79] Commercialism allowed for more information regarding material goods to become more readily available to the masses. To understand how commercialism functioned, the ways that Louis XIV's absolutist rule invaded consumption habits, especially at the court, have to be investigated.

During the time of Louis XIV's rule, France was a mercantilist nation focused on creating a distinctive French style that upheld his absolutism.[80] The way that Louis influenced how courtiers dressed was through his absolutist visions that promoted French glory in France and throughout Europe.[81] The King controlled what the courtiers wore and mandated them to support French clothing industries by limiting their ability to engage with foreign fashions.[82] Louis's vision for male court clothing was that it would uphold ideas of masculinity, absolutism, and commerce.[83] There were various fashions that upheld these ideas, but the King's preference did not reign absolute. For instance, women's relationship with court costume was more nuanced, because it offered a means of social stratification to a greater extent in comparison to men. Salic law, a law that barred women from inheriting any titles or legitimizing any political power in the French crown, ensured that women were excluded from having legitimate rule in the political system, therefore making them more socially constrained than men.[84] Due to clothing providing opportunity for them, women did not view clothing in the same way as men, and they placed greater attention on how other female courtiers presented themselves. This attention created space for these women to be influenced by each other because they were aware of the effect and impressions that the clothing of other women had in the court.

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[79] Jones, *Sexing la Mode*, 4.
[80] Jones, *Sexing la Mode*, 9.
[81] Jones, *Sexing la Mode*, 10.
[82] Jones, *Sexing la Mode*, 10.
[83] Jones, *Sexing la Mode*, 12.
[84] Jones, *Sexing la Mode*, 11.

While women had their own distinct relationships with clothes, men also paid attention to what they wore because of the status that clothing brought and solidified for them. The extent of attention that women placed on clothing and the critics placed on how female courtiers dressed themselves was what distinguished the relationship that both genders had with clothing. Despite the different expectations and criticisms that male and female courtiers received, how and what an individual was wearing held immense importance in the court.

Figure 1: *Cavalier en Manteau,* H. Bonnart, Costumes Èpoque Louis XIV, courtesy of The Morgan Library & Museum

Translation:

Right: Wrapped in his coat — The iron hanging from his belt

Left: This rider awaits some exciting adventure — it barely stays in the sheath

This image, *Cavalier en Manteau* or Rider in a coat, provides an example of the mantles that courtiers were wearing. While the identity of the man in the image is unknown, his position as a cavalier demonstrates that he was at the top of the military hierarchy.[85] Those in the cavalry were identifiable because of arms and units displayed on their uniforms.[86] The decorations on their mantles displayed their power. The man's mantle does not display elaborate decoration, but it shows long length, indicating status, and the text below the image shows how male wardrobe was tied to ideas about masculinity. The text states that the mantle has a sheath, a compartment that holds and protects a word. This statement is a double entendre because the image literally shows that there is a sword in this man's sheath, but it also suggests that his sword was a symbol for his male reproductive organ. The inability of the sword remaining in the man's sheath before an exciting adventure is symbolic of male erection before sexual intercourse. Ideas of masculinity were riddled throughout fashion plates as innuendos, such as this one, because clothing was tied to ideas of gender. Due to clothing having social significance, there were critiques over how individuals dressed and these critiques differed based on a person's gender. For instance, women received the brunt of religious condemnation due to ideas of modesty presented by the Catholic church.[87] In a letter discussing her daughter's visit to the French Court in 1718, expressed her disdain of promiscuous women to Raugrafin Luise, the first lady-in-waiting to Electress Sophie who was Liselotte's aunt.[88]

> "In particular she cannot get used to the sight of ladies, many of them bearers of great Names, who right in the opera lie down in the laps of men whom supposedly they do not hate. My daughter keeps calling out to me, 'Madame, Madame!' I say, 'What do you want me to do about it, child? These are mores of the time.' 'But they are nasty," says my daughter, and so they are".[89]

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[85] Roche, *The culture of clothing*, 235.
[86] Roche, *The culture of clothing*, 235.
[87] Roche, *The culture of clothing*, 38.
[88] Forster, *A Woman's Life in the Court of the Sun King: Letters of Liselotte von der Pfalz,* xxxvii.
[89] Forster, *A Woman's Life in the Court of the Sun King: Letters of Liselotte von der Pfalz,* 210-211.

While this excerpt does not directly discuss female courtiers being promiscuous through their clothing, it highlights the duality of how men and women's sexuality was viewed. The *Cavalier en Manteau* showed a man's desire for sexual ventures and Liselotte's excerpt highlights the judgement women received for pursuing their own sexual desires. These differences in perspective illuminate that there were ideas of etiquette that were gendered as women were not given the same liberty of sexual expression while highly regarded men were expected to be sexual beings. Gender constructs in Old Regime France made this image of a man's mantle an example of the attire that a highly regarded man would wear and the masculine attitude that he would carry. The manner that a courtier's behavior and clothing was associated with gender illuminated how the impact of physical adornment went beyond aesthetics.

The image presented of the *Cavalier en Manteau* was a representation of the *Homme à la mode*. The *Homme à la mode* often appeared in 17th century literature, and this term was used to describe a man of fashion.[90] As Crowston explains, this man of fashion was a preferred individual at court who was able to maintain this preference through his credit.[91] Throughout the 18th century this term changed, and the *Homme à la mode* became more associated with male courtiers who were seducing women.[92] Rather than losing his status, the *Homme à la mode* gained more power through these sexual relationships with women.[93] The *Cavalier en Manteau* is representative of the *Homme à la mode* because of his ability to be fashionable and the insinuated desire for intimacy. The *Homme à la mode* demonstrates how sexuality and gender were intertwined with clothing and physical appearances. Masculinity being a key feature in fashion is blatant through the *Cavalier en Manteau* and *Homme à la mode.* While clothing

[90] Crowston, *Credit, Fashion, Sex : Economies of Regard in Old Regime France*," 99.
[91] Crowston, *Credit, Fashion, Sex : Economies of Regard in Old Regime France*," 99.
[92] Crowston, *Credit, Fashion, Sex : Economies of Regard in Old Regime France*," 99.
[93] Crowston, *Credit, Fashion, Sex : Economies of Regard in Old Regime France*," 99.

carried more than just aesthetic significance, the materials and processes of creating garments was what allowed for them to gain social and monetary value. The mantle was one of the ways an individual at court showcased their status, and the materials used to create these objects for adornment were also markers of a person's status.

Material culture will be explored in this section to offer an explanation of how clothes became a useful tool for assimilation to court life and social stratification. Part of comprehending the power of clothing is understanding the attitudes towards clothing, and these ideas will be explored through France's commercial revolution. The commercial revolution during Old Regime France was propelled by the venues, the press and other forms of media, that Louis XIV had control over. While his priorities did not lie in directly controlling these venues, he infiltrated them to assert ideas about how the court should appear, especially through etiquette and clothing. Beyond what the King had control over, these ideas of how the court should look were reasserted through the oral conversations, commentary, and gossip between the courtiers.[94] The discourse surrounding material goods, especially clothing, gave them social and cultural significance because they were a reflection of people's values. Already discussed was gender, but there were also ideas about morality and discipline intertwined with the making of these clothes. "Sourcing the source" means knowing the materials that were utilized in the production of articles of clothing, but it also means comprehending where clothing got its social value.

Dressing the part of nobility was key to distinguish oneself from the rest of France's population and a demonstration that one belonged to a higher echelon. Madame de Maintenon encouraged women from her patronage, despite their socioeconomic standing, to dress appropriately by wearing dress bodices and full skirts to convey an appropriate appearance.[95]

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[94] Crowston, *Credit, Fashion, Sex : Economies of Regard in Old Regime France*," 12.
[95] Clare Haru Crowston, *Fabricating Women: The Seamstresses of Old Regime France, 1675-1791* (Durham, NC: Duke Univ Press, 2001), 34.

Bodices were considered "appropriate" dress wear for women because the act of wearing one showed self discipline due to its rigidness and compression on the body.[96] The push for women to maintain an adequate uniform conveyed that there was a social benefit in participating in these fashions. The social benefits for court women were determined by their ability to wear the latest fashions in their intended forms. Despite some of these fashions being intentionally established, there was controversy surrounding them culturally and religiously.

Lace was one of the clothing materials that rose to popularity in the wardrobe of European elites and that was a subject to religious and moral critiques. At the end of the 16th century, lace was displayed on many clothing items such as gowns, collars, and wrists on both men and women.[97] Due to the amount of labor used to create lace, it became a luxury item that only the wealthy could afford. The use of lace was limited to the wealthy, and they adorned themselves with it for aesthetic and demonstrative reasons. It became a topic of debate for two primary reasons: the belief that it promoted promiscuity amongst women and whether the intention behind wearing lace was immoral because of vanity.[98]

Lace was associated with a woman's promiscuity because of changes made to women's gowns that revealed or exaggerated the body's silhouette during the 17th century. The farthingale, similar to a crinoline, and mantua were both articles of clothing for women that presented their bodies disproportionately.[99] The modification of the body caused by clothing was seen as provocative, especially when the body was made to accentuate certain parts.[100] While these articles of clothing became the expected attire at court, they remained contested. Religious arguments against these styles rose because they were seen as alterations of the "sacred" physical

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[96] Crowston, *Fabricating Women: The Seamstresses of Old Regime France*, 34.
[97] Meiss, *Is My Tailor a Sinner?*, 15.
[98] Meiss, *Is My Tailor a Sinner?*, 15.
[99] Meiss, *Is My Tailor a Sinner?*, 14-15.
[100] Roche, *The culture of clothing*, 433.

body. Overall, the enhancement of beauty was part of the debate about the morality of vanity because alterations to one's physical appearance was viewed as immoral.

The relationship between the courtiers and clothing did not occur solely because of aesthetic desires. Rather it was achieved through the opportunity that clothing provided. While the focus has been on how clothing presented a world in which women held and could attain power, it also offered economic and social opportunities. Economic opportunities presented themselves through the consumer culture of 17th-century France. New styles of clothing with different textiles emerged and were popularized by courtiers creating opportunities for trade, commerce, and skilled work. In addition to the monetary gains from the booming fashion industry, individuals who contributed and worked for this world gained closer proximity to the courtiers and by extension received more power. A dependence was created on clothing to enter this world.

Dress to Impress

One of the vital features of performing as a courtier was wearing the proper attire that complemented an individual's position and rank. This section investigates what the courtiers were wearing as well as how these articles of clothing differed from one another depending on a person's rank. Furthermore, the specific ways that courtiers tried to outdo one another at court will be discussed to reiterate how clothing was used as a defensive tool in an environment that bred a competition for power. Dressing to impress was a practice at the court of Louis XIV, and the courtiers embellished themselves in a manner that displayed this form of thinking.

Various forms of clothing were exclusive because they were expensive or could only be worn by aristocrats or courtiers. For instance, mantles were reserved for individuals of rank and became more exclusive based on the materials that were used to create them. Additionally, many

people could not even afford to know what the latest fashions were in the court of Louis XIV because the sources that conveyed the manner that courtiers adorned themselves were limited to those who could afford the leisure of being informed about more "frivolous" matters.[101] Dressing to impress was an exclusive practice due to the fact that the majority of Old Regime France could not afford to engage in conspicuous consumption.

Being knowledgeable of the latest fashions and being able to adorn oneself with them was the first step in the process of dressing to impress. Not only was the ability to access these forms of media a sign of privilege and wealth, but also the ability to afford the labor required to adorn oneself in the fashions of the court. As discussed earlier, the usage of certain fabrics was a display of one's wealth because not all fabrics were affordable to the general French population. Part of what made certain fabrics inaccessible was the labor behind creating these fabrics such as lace or the difficulty of obtaining silks. Another crucial aspect was that those who created these articles of clothing and adornment were oftentimes skilled workers. The work required to make court attire was labor not anyone could engage in, therefore making the work of seamstresses and tailors valuable. The seamstresses and tailors who garnered important wealthy clients became celebrities.[102] Their ability to navigate through social hierarchies was a demonstration of how producing clothing was valued in French society.

While the value of clothing was apparent in Old Regime France, court attire did not begin to become a specific and official way of dressing until the late 17th century.[103] Before specific fashions became official aspects of court clothing, courtiers wore elite dress.[104] For men this took the form as wearing petticoat breeches and adorning themselves with lace ruffles, ribbons, and

[101] Roche, *The Culture of Clothing*, 476.
[102] Jones, *Sexing la Mode*, 85.
[103] Jones, *Sexing la Mode*, 21-22.
[104] Jones, *Sexing la Mode*, 21.

bows.[105] For outer layering, men wore doublets, a padded jacket, that was oftentimes left to expose the silk or linen shirt they wore under.[106]

Figure 2: *Homme de qualité,* H. Bonnart, Costumes Epoque Louis XIV Box III, courtesy of The Morgan Library & Museum

[105] Jones, *Sexing la Mode*, 21.
[106] Jones, *Sexing la Mode*, 21.

Translation:

Right: Along with this knightly air	Protects him against him against this mutinous love
Left: There is a kind of beauty in a heart of which is inhumane	If this galant hides what is in his breast

This image provides a visual representation of how court men were dressed during the reign of Louis XIV. Although this fashion plate does not provide a specific date for when it was created, it is part of a collection at the Morgan Library & Museum that depicts court attire of Louis XIV's court, therefore reflecting what was fashionable during the late 17th century. The title *Homme de qualité* literally means a "man of quality," therefore indicating that this was one of the set standards of how men should be dressing. The man is wearing a padded jacket, which served as his outermost layer of clothing. Additionally, this image shows breeches which were a staple in men's fashion during Old Regime France. Although the image does not directly discuss the materials that were used to make this costume, they were shown through ruffles, gold, and feathers located on the man's hat. The materials utilized in making this costume contributed to making him a "man of quality" because these materials were reserved for specific members of the court and were highly regarded.

According to Roche, throughout Old Regime France, there were various commonalities in women's clothing: "skirt and petticoat, *mantua* (or mantle), apron and stiff bodice (*corps de robe*). [107] While the presence of these clothing pieces is apparent through the fashion plates in this paper, they are not what Roche described. Roche groups the *mantua* with a mantle, however the prominence of the mantle predates that of the *mantua*. Madame de Maintenon popularized the *mantua*, a dressing gown that was fastened by a sash, and it was worn during less formal occasions.[108] The *mantua* was a looser gown that revealed the underskirt, therefore making it a

[107] Roche, *The culture of clothing*, 120.
[108] Jones, *Sexing la Mode*, 21.

more informal article of clothing.[109] On the other hand, the mantle had been used commonly in the court for social distinguishment and as a form of formal attire. The usage of the mantle has a longer history in the court because of its ability to create social distinctions amongst courtiers, which was vital during ceremonies as previously discussed. The *mantua* did not have the same ability to promote social hierarchies at court because of its association with the *déshabillés*, informal attire.

Women wore a two-piece dress ensemble that included a *jupe de dessus* or *manteau* that acted as a skirt and a boned bodice, *le corsage*.[110] The *manteaux* that women wore were similar to the ones that men wore because they both had trains and its length was an indicator of the individual's rank.[111]

[109] Jones, *Sexing la Mode*, 22.
[110] Jones, *Sexing la Mode*, 21.
[111] Jones, *Sexing la Mode*, 21.

Figure 3: *Dame de qualité en manteau,* N. Bonnart, Costumes Époque Louis XIV III, courtesy of The Morgan Library & Museum

The image above displays a woman wearing a *manteau* but also other clothing pieces that were worn by men. Similarly to men, they had their shirts or blouses, *la chemise*, exposed from under

their dress.[112] The significance of men and women adorning themselves with the same pieces, even if they took on different forms, showed the way that the court was unified. There was a set attire for male and female courtiers, and while there were differences in these attires because of gender, they were similar because it established the courtier's position. Similar features in attire at the court of Louis XIV supports the idea that the King wanted a unified court because these costumes aided the courtiers in fitting into this environment. Despite these similarities that ensured a certain look was set for the court, court attire was not stagnant and it experienced various changes.

During the second half of the 17th century, transitions in how courtiers dressed occurred. For women, they experienced court clothing becoming more formal, and different sectors of their life began to require specific forms of clothing.[113] While *déshabillés* and other modes of dress for leisure had taken form, they became more established at the end of Louis XIV's rule.[114] This was partly due to the influence that the mistresses of Louis XIV had on court attire. His last mistress, Madame de Maintenon, helped facilitate these changes as she popularized specific garments for different occasions and conditions.

[112] Jones, *Sexing la Mode*, 21.
[113] Jones, *Sexing la Mode*, 21-22.
[114] Jones, *Sexing la Mode*, 21.

Figure 4: *Fille de qualité en déshabillée d'hyver*, N. Arnoult, *Recueil des modes de la cour de France*, circa 1670, courtesy of the Los Angeles County Museum of Art

Figure four shows the *mantua* and its association with more casual wear in the court. The title of this fashion plate is *Fille de qualité en déshabillée d'hyver,* which translates "Girl of quality in casual winter style." Not only was specific attire designated to different occasions but also weather. Maintenon's popularization of the *mantua* was part of the transition of making court attire more formal and dignified. By having specific articles of clothing for different

occasions, a standard was being set for how courtiers should be dressing and a transition to a more rigid set of court rules occurred. For the summer, printed calicoes, *indiennes*, were popularized due to their being lighter garments.[115] *Indiennes* demonstrate how court clothing also differed by seasons. The changes made to women's clothing at the later part of the 17th century demonstrated that court expectations were being even more cemented and that clothing was not confined to a specific moment in time. The exacerbation of court expectations through clothing could be accredited to Louis XIV's control over consumption and his desire to make France seem as a grand country.

The transitions being made in attire were most experienced by men, however this did not mean that women's fashion did not experience great developments either. One of the most significant changes was the modification of the suit. During the 17th century, France, Spain, and England were feuding over power that transformed to nationalist attitudes.[116] These nationalist ways of thinking translated into limitations of what the people from each country could wear. For instance, in Spain, Philip IV barred people from wearing embroidered clothes, lace, and wearing long hair because it resembled the French style.[117] The English rebellion towards French style took form in 1665, when Charles II decided to omit French lace and silks, and only wear English textiles.[118] On the contrary to Spain and England, Louis XIV embraced English styles by adopting overcoats and vests.[119] The English influence was presented at Louis XIV's court as the *justaucorp*s, a long jacket that extended to the knees.[120] The *justaucorps* transformed to the

[115] Jones, *Sexing la Mode*, 21.
[116] Jones, *Sexing la Mode*, 22.
[117] Jones, *Sexing la Mode*, 22.
[118] Jones, *Sexing la Mode*, 22.
[119] Jones, *Sexing la Mode*, 23.
[120] Jones, *Sexing la Mode*, 23.

justaucorps à brevet, warrant coats, that offered privileges to male courtiers who decided to take residence at Versailles.[121]

Figure 5: *Extraordinaire du Mercure*: *Quartier de Janvier*, Jean Donneau de Visé, January 1678, page 55, courtesy of Bibliothèque Nationale de France

> "...The coiffures are getting higher every day. I think they will finally have to make doors taller, for otherwise these ladies will no longer be able to go in and out of the rooms". [122]

This excerpt is part of a letter from Liselotte to Raugraf Karl Ludwig, her father and the Elector of Palatinate, written in 1688.[123] In this letter, Liselotte was describing the efforts that female courtiers were making in order to stand out at court. What Liselotte humorously highlighted was that female courtiers were willing to sacrifice practicality through their usage of

[121] Jones, *Sexing la Mode*, 24.
[122] Forster. *A Woman's Life in the Court of the Sun King: Letters of Liselotte von der Pfalz,* 59.
[123] Forster. *A Woman's Life in the Court of the Sun King: Letters of Liselotte von der Pfalz,* xxxv.

coiffures, wigs, in order to stand out at court. *Coiffures* were becoming normalized in the court of Louis XIV despite their impracticality. Figure five is a fashion plate that shows that *coiffures* were becoming a standard at court because the purpose of this plate was to highlight what was being worn during the spring. While the *coiffure* that was depicted on this fashion plate was not as large as what Liselotte described in her letter, practicality was not something most courtiers considered when adorning themselves. Part of the court attire was impracticality. Whale boned corsets were another example of impracticality in court attire, especially for women, because they restricted movement. Court attire could be ostentatious and pompous primarily to highlight a person's rank, however, as mentioned previously, court attire also transformed to include garments for different occasions. Although Liselotte suggested that courtiers' had some freedom to wear impractical court attire, Louis XIV made efforts to ensure that the courtiers were wearing costumes that corresponded with their rank.

While there were courtiers attempting to outshine one another through their ability to keep with the latest fashions, the King limited this liberty for other courtiers and noble members. There were specifications for what exactly a courtier should or should not be wearing depending on their status or rank. For instance, the privilege to wear scarlet gowns lined with ermine was given to magistrates because of their position.[124] These features on clothing were restricted to the magistrates because "the scarlet recalled to the imperial magistrature and ermine symbolised nobility and integrity." [125] Other positions or ranks that had less prevalence wore less and less luxurious materials. The Chamber of Accounts, the sector in charge of administrating France's finances, offered an example of how materials became less and less luxurious for positions that were viewed as less pertinent. The *présidents* wore silk velvet, then king's men wore satins, and

[124] Roche, *The Culture of Clothing*, 40.
[125] Roche, *The Culture of Clothing*, 40.

lastly the commissionaires of audit wore modest taffetas.[126] The dwindling quality of materials for the members of the Chamber of Accounts demonstrates how hierarchy determined and restricted what people wore. This hierarchical organization was not limited to the Chamber of Accounts as it was seen at ceremonies and other social gatherings at court. This separation of ranks and statues allowed for distinguishment of power, but following the court's dress code established that a person belonged in the court of Louis XIV.

« *La famille est le noyau de la civilisation »* translates to "the family is the core of civilization". The close environment and the push for unification at the court of Louis XIV minimized the distance between the courtiers in order to show how the court was consolidated. The King's motive for depicting the court in this manner was that the court was a reflection of him and how he managed the country, which he was supposed to reign absolute over. While there were various members at court who were not blood relatives of the King, everyone at court acted as one group because of the grandiose example they were setting for the rest of Europe. Clothing, etiquette, behavior, and other forms of physical representation were employed to visually solidify this image. Even though they were unified by the similarities in their behavior and physical adornment, these aspects of representation served as a way to distinguish courtiers based on their rank, position, and status. Similarly to families, the court was intended to be unified to ensure that they could represent the best of Old Regime France.

[126] Roche, *The Culture of Clothing*, 40.

Chapter Two - *Express Yourself:* Secret Lives of Noblewives

"There is nothing new at court. They are following their usual pattern. The ladies are pretty, proper, and in good humor because they are well entertained and rich. They are the only ones. Everyone else grovels, and there is neither joy nor contentment at Saint Germain, where their majesties will spend the winter. This decision annoys me greatly because to get [to Saint Germain] in time to see the king or his ministers, you have to leave [Paris] an hour before dawn in this weather. It is also very expensive to stay at the inns there".

- Saint Maurice, 1669 [127]

The marquis of Saint Maurice wrote this assessment of the dynamics of Louis XIV's court as part of a collection of letters to the Duke of Savoy where he described court life in Saint Germain. This being one of his earlier accounts about his life at court, beginning in 1667 and ending in 1673, conveys his awareness of the courtiers' whereabouts and expected behaviors.[128] The behaviors of the individuals at court were described as regimented and performed. Indeed, they were performing to maintain the "untouchable" and "unreachable" image that the court held. Court women were given a one-dimensional description as they are only described in good light because of the life they lived at court. Everyone else, seemingly, felt constrained and burdened by the expectations of court life. Men were the individuals that often engaged with the King or ministers for work, and therefore having to see the King at Saint-Germain created an inconvenience because of the difficulties during the journey there. While Saint Maurice's excerpt offers insight into the gender dynamics at court, he assumed that the court women were not engaging in any labors or struggles to maintain their images.

Saint Maurice's excerpt offers nuance to the superficial image of Versailles because his writings offered dimension by highlighting some of the frustrations of primarily male courtiers. To the overall public of Old Regime France, Versailles was an illusion of luxury, wealth, and everything a person could desire. While this illusion was not just a mere image as those who

[127] Beik, *Louis XIV and Absolutism: A Brief Study with Documents*, 65.
[128] Beik, *Louis XIV and Absolutism: A Brief Study with Documents,* 56.

were at Versailles were the wealthiest individuals in France, there was a performance aspect. The reality was that these individuals had great amounts of wealth but they had to demonstrate it to deepen the wealth disparity. This performance aspect had different definitions for men and women, however they were contributing to the overall image of the court.

This chapter relies on the letters written by courtiers, particularly women, and the memoirs of Louis XIV's mistresses to investigate the unique challenges that court women faced, especially that of performing their roles as courtiers. Referring to these women as noblewives, even if they were the mistresses of the King, helps to distinguish them within the court of Louis XIV. Their close connections to the reign at that time or individuals closest to him offered them official and unofficial noble status. The relationship that the mistresses had with the King gave them notoriety but also power that served as a form of protection from the scrutiny they received. A key difference between the performance of female and male courtiers was that women were forced into a more superficial role and therefore they were more concerned about what they wore and their overall appearance. What is meant by superficial was that there was more focus on how court women presented themselves which forced them to prioritize their physical appearance. Male courtiers were forced to present themselves to meet the standards of the court however women were more attentive to their appearance because the stakes were higher for them. The judgements and power limitations placed on women made their experience at court more precarious.

While many of the court women were focused on the manner in which they presented themselves at court, their experiences were not the same because of their backgrounds and the specific role that they played. Each of these women played the role of a courtier; however, amongst the courtiers, they were also designated another position depending on their relationship

to the King. Using these correspondences and memoirs offers a more intimate understanding of the frustrations that these women had, because these personal modes of writing offered an outlet to express their grievances with no judgment and the reality of their stories. Madame de Montespan, Françoise Athénaïs de Rochechouart de Mortemart, prefaced her memoirs by stating the purpose of writing them:

> "The reign of the King who now so happily and so gloriously rules over France will one day exercise the talent of the most skilful historians. But these men of genius, deprived of the advantage of seeing the great monarch whose portrait they fain would draw, will search everywhere among the souvenirs of contemporaries and base their judgments upon our testimony. It is this great consideration which has made me determined to devote some of my hours of leisure to narrating, in these accurate and truthful Memoirs, the events of which I myself am witness".[129]

Montespan stated that her purpose in writing these memoirs was to preserve the truthfulness of court narratives by writing her experiences with honesty. While personal perspectives are influenced by the judgments of the individual writing them, they still provide insight about what they write about. With all the writings of each woman that will be investigated, their personalities become apparent by what they choose to focus on and where their frustrations stem from. Whether their words were intended for a singular person or future historians, the written experiences of female courtiers illuminate the inner workings of court life through their grievances and personal stories.

Liselotte

Elizabeth Charlotte, also referred to as Liselotte von der Pfalz and *La Palatine*, was the wife of Louis XIV's brother, Philippe I duc d'Orléans, and a close acquaintance of the King.[130] Liselotte came from German nobility before her marriage to Philippe, which gave her a different

[129] Madame la Marquise de Montespan, *The Memoirs of Madame de Montespan, Complete* (Project Gutenberg, 2006), chapter I. https://www.gutenberg.org/files/3854/3854-h/3854-h.htm.
[130] Forster, *A Woman's Life in the Court of the Sun King: Letters of Liselotte von der Pfalz,* ix.

perspective of how nobility functioned. Liselotte's German noble ties hung on a precarious thread because of the tumultuous marriage between her parents that resulted in a de facto marriage.[131] In her early years, she was sent off to live in Hanover with her family which included her aunt Sophie, the Electress of Hanover. She was encouraged to marry Philippe to create a strategic alliance between the Palatinate and France, and Liselotte proceeded with the union because she felt it was her duty.[132] Despite placing her country of origin first in her concerns, she was unable to protect it due to issues regarding the sovereignty of the Palatinate that led to destruction of its countryside and small towns.[133] The Palatinate was claimed by Louis XIV, in the name of Liselotte, and he attempted to push French rule onto the land after the passing of Liselotte's father and brother, who had no children.[134] The successor to the Palatinate did not accept French rule, leading to the destruction of the land through a policy of scorched earth.[135] Her marriage thus did not provide Liselotte the safety that she had in mind for her country or her overall sense of self. Liselotte faced tragedy throughout her time in the French court, but the death of her oldest son caused her request to Louis XIV to permanently join a convent.[136] She was nevertheless forced to remain in court life at the King's request, as he believed it was her "duty" to perform as a member of the royal family despite her urge to return home.[137] Liselotte's troubles at court seemed endless because of the tragedies she faced and the critiques she received for her identity.

Liselotte's non-French origins were a point of contention for the courtiers, especially the women, who competed for power. In her memoirs, Madame de Montespan, one of the King's

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[131] Forster, *A Woman's Life in the Court of the Sun King: Letters of Liselotte von der Pfalz,* xvi.
[132] Forster, *A Woman's Life in the Court of the Sun King: Letters of Liselotte von der Pfalz,* xvi.
[133] Forster, *A Woman's Life in the Court of the Sun King: Letters of Liselotte von der Pfalz,* xviii.
[134] Forster, *A Woman's Life in the Court of the Sun King: Letters of Liselotte von der Pfalz,* xviii.
[135] Forster, *A Woman's Life in the Court of the Sun King: Letters of Liselotte von der Pfalz,* xviii.
[136] Forster, *A Woman's Life in the Court of the Sun King: Letters of Liselotte von der Pfalz,* xvii.
[137] Forster, *A Woman's Life in the Court of the Sun King: Letters of Liselotte von der Pfalz,* xviii.

mistresses, often referred to Liselotte and her mannerisms as the "Princess Palatine" or simply "Palatine" rather than mentioning Liselotte by her name. The choice of referring to Liselotte by her background displayed the lack of acceptance there was for non-French backgrounds, especially German backgrounds, within the court. In a confrontation between Montespan and Liselotte about the manner in which Liselotte referred to her, Montespan recalled saying to her, "'Madame, you managed to give up your religion in order to marry a French prince; you might just as well have left behind your gross Palatine vulgarity also.'"[138] Liselotte changed her religion to enter the French court, but those actions were not enough to assimilate into this environment because she was constantly reminded of her Palatine background.

Despite Liselotte's inability to fully integrate herself in the court, she placed effort on upholding court customs. She made it her mission to uphold her "*métier* of being Madame" by attending the court's events such as weddings, baptisms, and other ceremonies.[139] Liselotte had an advantage in that she was aware of noble customs and therefore had the ability to maintain the status quo. The relationship that Liselotte had with clothes provided her a safety net against the criticism she received for her non-French identity. This relationship between Liselotte and fashion was revealed through her letters, which also exposed her frustration with court life. What was significant about her letters was that she often wrote to individuals outside of the court, which allowed her to vocalize her critiques and grievances with no remorse. In a letter to her Aunt Sophie from 1701, Lislotte wrote, "I had to receive the King and Queen of England in ceremony, in an outlandish costume: a white linen band over my forehead and over that a bonnet tied under the chin…With that I wore a gown of black cloth with sleeves down to the fists; on the

[138] Madame la Marquise de Montespan, *The Memoirs of Madame de Montespan, Complete* (Project Gutenberg, 2006), chapter xli. https://www.gutenberg.org/files/3854/3854-h/3854-h.htm.
[139] Forster, *A Woman's Life in the Court of the Sun King: Letters of Liselotte von der Pfalz,* xxix.

sleeves was a strip of ermine … on the gown also ermine."[140] This excerpt is a demonstration of her frustration with the attire she was wearing in a ceremony for British monarchy. Her dissatisfaction with this costume is significant, because it shows that clothing had the impact to change the attitudes of court women, therefore exposing its control over them. If Lislotte had been neutral about what she was wearing, the significance of her feelings towards clothing would not be conveyed or the importance of clothing in a courtier's daily life. Not only does Liselotte's frustration reveal the power of clothing, but it also demonstrates her discontent with following court customs. Furthermore, this specific letter was from a collection that was written by Liselotte after Philippe passed, therefore providing explanation for her irritability conveyed in the letter and her attire because she was dressed in all black. While this excerpt does not make it known what the ceremony was exactly about, it reveals the attire that was expected for court women to wear during mourning.

[140] Forster. *A Woman's Life in the Court of the Sun King: Letters of Liselotte von der Pfalz,* 133.

Figure 6: *Portrait d'Elisabeth Charlotte, Duchesse d'Orléans, en pied,* N. Bonnart, 16 November 1671, courtesy of Bibliothèque Nationale de France

Translation:

Right: Without those rare virtues that shine from her soul
And which show well her quality
Left: In the mourning of the court covered by darkness;
One would not know what she would be sister-in-law to the King

The image above conveys Liselotte's willingness to dress in this attire, despite her unhappiness, which highlighted how important it was for her to follow court expectations even if she did not desire to do so. By following court expectations, one was able to maintain their appearance, and in Liselotte's case that meant dressing the part of a female courtier. Furthermore, the translation of the text in the image suggests that courtiers would not have been aware of Liselotte's status if her "special virtues" did not shine through. Dressing in this manner, made Liselotte blend into the court; however the manner that she carried herself highlighted her status. The text reiterates the idea that clothing has symbolism because it was used as a way to display Liselotte's loss and also the state of the court. A reason for why Liselotte was able to blend in with the courtiers was because of the dark colors everyone was wearing, therefore causing her to look like every other courtier. Part of playing the role of a courtier was to be able to determine how to dress for various occasions and understand the uniform that was expected to be worn. Upholding court etiquette through wearing court attire brought frustration to Liselotte, but there were other engagements that were part of court etiquette which also caused discontentment.

Court engagements were requirements for courtiers, and they all had different responsibilities. Given Liselotte's proximity to the King, expectations were set higher and were more demanding, which often caused her irritability. In a letter dated February 10, 1701, Liselotte wrote to her aunt Sophie:

> "Yesterday I had the joy of receiving Your Grace's letter of 31 January upon my return from church, where they had smeared ashes on my brow. I said that I did not need this because it is only for those whose amusements during carnival might make them forget that they are moral. But since I had spent the first days of carnival being sick and the last days being bored by watching poorly danced minutes, I said that the pleasures of carnival had by no means prevented me from being mindful of my morality. I added that I also have a spleen that reminds me of it enough and more than enough. But since it is the custom, I had to put up with this smearing of ashes…"[141]

[141] Forster. *A Woman's Life in the Court of the Sun King: Letters of Liselotte von der Pfalz,* 129.

Based on the description of the religious practice that Liselotte engaged in and the date of the letter, it can be assumed that Liselotte was participating in Ash Wednesday, a Christian denomination holy day. Her having to engage in this religious practice can be assumed to be one of her duties given that France was a Catholic nation. Based on the manner that she described this practice as only the "smearing of ashes," her irritability towards being forced to attend this event was apparent in that she did not see the religious value in this tradition by not discussing its significance. Additionally, her attitude towards this practice, no doubt based in her Protestant background, was further revealed by the way that she discussed the reason for her presence at the church and how her attendance was something that she had to put up with. Liselotte's irritation towards mandatory events and making appearances was something that she coped with because of her position. While she had these sentiments towards her obligations, she viewed the importance of engaging in them by still making appearances and performing as a courtier.

Part of following the performance aspect of the court was respecting the rigidity of the choreographed life the courtiers had to live. Part of this life with many rules and regulations was the *jours d'appartement*, which structured courtiers' daily lives by dedicating Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays for festivities facilitated by the King during specific hours.[142] Beyond the structure that the *jours d'appartement* provided to the courtiers, there were formalities that the courtiers had to familiarize themselves with. Liselotte wrote to her sister, Electress Wilhemine-Ernestine, in 1682:

> "Then all the men of the court assemble in the King's antechamber and all the women meet at six in the Queen's room. Thereupon everyone goes to the salon of which I spoke, and from there to a large room where there is music for those who want to dance. From there one goes to a room where the King's throne stands. There one finds various kinds of music, concerts and singing. From there one goes into the bedchamber, where three tables for playing at cards are set up, one for the King, one for the Queen, and one for

[142] Forster. *A Woman's Life in the Court of the Sun King: Letters of Liselotte von der Pfalz,* 38-39.

> Monsieur…When the King and the Queen come into the room, no one gets up from the game". [143]

Liselotte utilized the entirety of this letter to explain in detail how the *jours d'appartement* were arranged. From this excerpt, it is evident that the *jours d'appartement* were lengthy and involved great amounts of willingness to participate. Initially, Liselotte was intrigued by the *jours d'appartement; however* as time progressed, she saw how the time she had to sacrifice in these festivities impeded her ability to prioritize what mattered to her. In 1688, Liselotte's daughter fell severely ill, but she was not able to look after her because of the *jours d'appartement*. While describing her frustration with this situation, Liselotte wrote to Duchess Sophie:

> "So all I can do is to recommend my poor child to God Almighty…On Monday I received more bad news about my daughter, which again made me shed bitter tears…that evening I had to attend the *appartement* with red eyes. On Tuesday we again chased the stag, but I did not chase away my discontentment, as Your Grace can easily imagine… I wish with all my heart that I could serve the children of the Raugrafin. I would be so glad to do it, but what can I do? I am not even allowed to take care of my own children". [144]

Liselotte's frustration with the *jours d'appartement* became apparent in this excerpt because she expressed her desire to be with her daughter rather than partaking in *jours d'appartement* activities. Furthermore, the emotional state that she describes herself to be in conveys that the *jours d'appartement* were an inconvenience and a nuisance that did not allow her to look after her children. Ultimately, Liselotte's dissatisfaction and irritation for the courtier lifestyle stemmed from the overall performance of being a courtier. This performance was not solely maintaining appearances through etiquette and clothing, but sacrifices to integral parts of a courtier's identity.

As the previous excerpts exposed, Liselotte cared a lot about her children. This care for her children took form of ensuring they were set up for a successful life at court by guaranteeing

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[143] Forster. *A Woman's Life in the Court of the Sun King: Letters of Liselotte von der Pfalz,* 38-39.
[144] Forster. *A Woman's Life in the Court of the Sun King: Letters of Liselotte von der Pfalz,* 58-59.

they had the ability to play the role of a courtier. Her children were subjected to these obligations and Liselotte placed great emphasis on ensuring that they were able to meet court expectations. While Liselotte was frustrated with the labor required in maintaining her image as a French aristocratic woman, she took pride in being able to mark herself a French courtier.[145] She continued to ensure that she was an exemplary member of the court by enforcing that her daughter maintained this image through dictating her relationship with clothes, especially in her marriage. During this time, there was great emphasis placed on a woman's *trousseau* which could be best interpreted as a woman's acquired wardrobe before marriage.[146] Liselotte was proud of her daughter's collection of gowns, because they were a marker of her wealth and position in society. When discussing her daughter's *trousseau* in a 1698 letter, Lislotte wrote, "I don't think the Duke of Lorraine will consider my daughter ill-provided for; she has twenty thousand crowns' worth of linen, and great quantities of laces and embroidery."[147] What was significant about this excerpt is that Liselotte stated specific articles of clothing and by doing so, she revealed what the nobility was wearing. Another interesting point is that Liselotte wanted to make known that her daughter was being provided for by her family. By making this point, Liselotte showed that she valued ensuring appropriate court appearances through clothing by guaranteeing that her daughter had access to court fashions. The splendor that Lislotte had in noting the material goods that her daughter has been provided with was a demonstration of how significant the idea of attaining luxury goods, especially clothing, was important to perpetuating ideas of wealth within Louis XIV's court.

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[145] Jones. *Sexing La Mode*, 47-48.
[146] Jones. *Sexing La Mode*, 17-20.
[147] Forster. *A Woman's Life in the Court of the Sun King: Letters of Liselotte von der Pfalz,* add page number.

While Liselotte understood the importance of court adornment and etiquette, she also understood that the court experienced great changes. She acknowledged that clothing was cyclical and trends were fleeting. Liselotte wrote to her aunt Sophie in 1709,

> "In thirty-eight years since I came to France I have changed coaches and had new ones built only four times. But the linens are renewed every three years; the old ones go to the first chambermaid. One does not really own anything here; all the linens, nightgowns, and petticoats belong to the first chambermaid, all the dresses from one year to the next belong to the first lady-in-waiting, as does the lace".[148]

Liselotte discussed the cycle of fashion as she referred to how clothing articles were passed down the ranks as soon these fashions were out of style. What this cycle of clothing reveals was that there was a social hierarchy intertwined in the world of fashion. Those of higher rank afforded the luxury of having the latest fashions, however servants were able to be adorned with fashions that were not accessible to everyone. Lower class women copied the styles of servants because they were the individuals with access to the fashions that the courtiers and aristocrats were wearing.[149] Even though servitude was often an indicator of a person's lower standing in society, being a servant was a job that involved close interactions with those of higher standing and therefore not one that anyone could acquire. While old fashions trickled down the social hierarchy and revealed a person's socioeconomic status, servants muddled this hierarchical pyramid.

While Liselotte placed a notable amount of effort into maintaining the court's status quo through clothing, she felt alienated by her own presence in the court because of her feminine identity and religious background. Liselotte maintained power by following court expectations, especially through physical indicators of the French identity, however she lost agency over her self expression. A troubling aspect of court life for Liselotte was its superficiality because she

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[148] Forster, *A Woman's Life in the Court of the Sun King: Letters of Liselotte von der Pfalz,* 177.
[149] Roche, *The Culture of Clothing*, 144.

had minimal interest in upholding norms surrounding beauty. In a letter from 1711, Liselotte wrote,

> "I know many ladies here who smear their faces with this white balm after it has been prepared with spirits of wine. The late Monsieur once wanted to smear it on my face, but I could never stand it and would rather keep my wrinkles than smear white stuff on my face. For I hate all makeup and do not want rouge for myself…".[150]

Liselotte's discussion about makeup shows that she does not desire to wear makeup or engage in what the majority of people are doing. This excerpt seems to contradict Liselotte's effort to maintain court customs through appearance by her refusal to wear makeup, but Liselotte's efforts were only limited to ensuring that she upheld this status quo. To her this was not achieved through being "beautiful" but rather it was achieved through looking presentable. In part, this could be accredited to her age because she was no longer as capable to maintain appearances as she once had been. Her letters at the beginning of the 18th century describe her having physical issues such as foot and knee pain.[151] These issues only progressed with time, which limited Liselotte's ability to participate in her engagements as she once had. The refusal to wear makeup was due to her limited ability to present herself as a courtier, however she also did not feel the need to wear it. Liselotte made it clear that she did not care about being perceived as "beautiful," and that her interests were on her hobbies and upholding her morality. When describing portraits painted of her, Liselotte wrote in 1699 to her aunt Sophie,

> "Not one of my portraits resembles me very much; my fat is in all the wrong places, which is bound to be unbecoming; I have a horrendous, begging your leave, behind, big belly and hips, and very broad shoulders; my neck and breasts are quite flat, so that, if truth be known, I am hideously ugly, but fortunately for me I do not care one whit. For I do not desire anyone to be in love with me and know that those who love me as friends are interested in my character and not in my appearance…". [152]

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[150] Forster. *A Woman's Life in the Court of the Sun King: Letters of Liselotte von der Pfalz,* 184.
[151] Forster. *A Woman's Life in the Court of the Sun King: Letters of Liselotte von der Pfalz,* 184.
[152] Forster. *A Woman's Life in the Court of the Sun King: Letters of Liselotte von der Pfalz,* 117.

Liselotte explicitly expressed that despite her being displeased with the depictions of her that her portraits displayed, she did not ultimately care, because her acquaintances valued her as an individual. Even though Liselotte cared about how her and her family presented themselves at court, she also conveyed that she cared about her individuality. The conflict between her upholding the status quo because of the court's expectations and what she truly valued was the source of frustration that Liselotte expressed in her letters discussing appearance and court etiquette. The nuanced relationship between Liselotte and her feeling of necessity to uphold the court's expectations conveys that courtiers had to give up aspects of their agency to perform. Liselotte's irritability throughout her experience at court was due to the forced discomfort of negotiating her likes and the standards that were set for her.

Through Liselotte's letters, a multitude of experiences in the court of Louis XIV are brought to light. The treatment towards non-French natives can be seen as hostile because there was a push for these individuals to assimilate or their background preceded them despite their ranking in the court. While this may not be true for all the courtiers, judgment towards individuals who were not from French background still occurred and Liselotte's letter exposed that. Her letters also highlighted the expectations of the court through her frustrations towards upholding decorum and the ways that she supported her daughter ingraining herself into court society. While Liselotte placed great effort into meeting the status quo of the court, she felt agitated by the expectations that limited her ability to do what she enjoyed. What makes the experience of female courtiers unique was that they faced limitations because of their gender and they further felt limited because of court expectations.

Madame De Montespan

The politics at court conveyed that those closest to the King were the individuals who had the most sway in the court. Oftentimes, the King's closest associates were his mistresses. The mistresses' connection to the King offered these women protection, but this relationship was also a basis for judgment from the courtiers. The validity of their influence and power was questioned because the foundation of their relationship with the King was seen as illegitimate due to France being a Catholic nation.

When considering that France was a Catholic country and the King's divine right to rule stemmed from Catholic beliefs, contradictions between the country's ideology and King's actions became visible. The King received his absolute power from his connection to God, which allowed his power to remain primarily unchallenged by the majority of French people who followed Catholicism. However, Louis XIV's relationships with his mistresses created complications with his image, because these relationships did not follow Catholic beliefs. While the perception of the King faltered because of these relationships, his mistresses at court bore the majority of the brunt of criticism. Madame de Montespan faced scrutiny not only because of the nature of the relationship she had with Louis XIV, but also the time of the relationship. When Montespan became the King's mistress, he was at his prime and as a result, he was more involved with his duties of being a monarch and managing France.[153] The more attention that the King received, the more attention that was placed to those surrounding him including his mistresses.

Despite the contradictory nature of these relationships bringing religious critiques, the King's mistresses continued to have a great amount of involvement and sway within the court.

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[153] Tracy Adams and Christine Adams, *The Creation of the French Royal Mistress: From Agnès Sorel to Madame Du Barry* (Pennsylvania: Penn State University Press, 2020), 15.

While the women of court were often viewed as one dimensional, their actions were calculated and contributed something to their image. For the mistresses of Louis XIV, they were concerned with being fully devoted to the King publicly and privately.[154] This loyalty to the King was what guaranteed their position in the court because their relationship with him was what offered them access to the court. While this placed them in a vulnerable position because they were at the King's disposal, it also provided them safety. The mistresses were subject of many criticisms, but ultimately they had to be respected because of their proximity to the King. Due to their unconventional position and the protection that they received from this relationship with the King, the mistresses had insightful narratives because they were performing as well as being strategic with their positions by attempting to keep them for as long as possible. These narratives and accounts took form as memoirs from Madame de Montespan and Madame de Maintenon. Louis XIV had more mistresses than these two women, but Montespan and Maintenon's narratives offer a unique lens to the inner workings of the court not only because of their position, but also because of their legacy. Montespan was Louis XIV's mistress during the most notable years of his reign, which is important to note when grasping the importance of her influence on the court.[155] On the other hand, Maintenon was the King's last mistress. Her being the last mistress did not make her less influential in comparison to the previous mistresses. Due to the King aging, she was able to take more initiative in the court because he was no longer as strong-willed as he was when he was younger.[156] Before understanding the ways that Madame de Maintenon was able to influence the court, Montespan's narratives and experiences have to be analyzed to understand the pressures and rewards of being the King's mistress.

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[154] Adams, *The Creation of the French Royal Mistress*, 111.
[155] Adams, *The Creation of the French Royal Mistress*, 113.
[156] Adams, *The Creation of the French Royal Mistress*, 131-132.

Madame de Montespan was a favored mistress by the King and the court because of her ability to integrate herself into court life. She knew how to maneuver through the court and charm courtiers because she had noble ties. She had a close relationship with Maria Theresa, who was Louis XIV's first wife, partly because of her position as a *damoiselle d'honneur*, a lady in waiting.[157] Her background offered great help when playing the role of the King's mistress because her noble connections gave her the same familiarity with the court customs, in a similar way to Liselotte. However, sharing this similarity of coming from a noble family did not bring these two women together, especially because of Montespan's mistress status. Montespan wrote in her memoirs, "I had also been told that, in society, she referred to me as 'the Montespan woman.' I…said to her: …I have the honour to inform you that, in the exalted society to which you have been admitted, one can no more say 'the Montespan woman' than one can say 'the Orléans woman'". [158] This encounter that Montespan has with Liselotte revealed their unpleasant relationship with one another. By calling Montespan 'the Montespan woman,' Liselotte showed her disapproval of Montespan's position in the court as a noble person because she removed the "de" from her name. Oftentimes, the "de" in a noble person's name was an indicator of their noble ties. The unpleasantness that Liselotte had for Montespan was reciprocated. Montespan wrote, "Had she not been lucky enough to make this grand match, her extreme ugliness would assuredly have doomed her to celibacy, even in Bavaria and in Germany. It is surely not allowable to come into the world with such a face and form, such a voice, such eyes, such hands, and such feet, as this singular princess displayed".[159] This negative physical description of Liselotte conveys the mutual dislike between both women and Montespan's disapproval of

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[157] Adams, *The Creation of the French Royal Mistress*, 117.
[158] Montespan, *Memoirs*, vol. 1: 213–14.
[159] Françoise Athénaïs de Rochechouart de Mortemart, *The Memoirs of Madame de Montespan, Complete* (Project Gutenberg, 2006), chapter xli. https://www.gutenberg.org/files/3854/3854-h/3854-h.htm.

Liselotte's physicality. Montespan suggested that Liselotte was fortunate enough to be in the position, not because of her looks, but because of mere luck of being able to marry the King's brother. It is apparent that one's appearance mattered, especially through Montespan's passionate description of Liselotte. Nevertheless, a courtier's ability to network or the social opportunities provided through noble connections provided a foundation to attain power. Clothes or makeup further helped courtiers play their roles, but these roles came from how fortunate a person was to be at close proximity to the King and other nobility.

Montespan's experiences highlight the precarity of being a king's mistress because all her actions had the potential to be ridiculed. To cover her pregnancies, Montespan wore full skirts, known as *la robe battante* or *l'innocente*, and Liselotte used this attire to criticize her.[160] In a letter from 1721, Liselotte wrote:

> "I much prefer formal court dress to the *manteau*, but now I have to wear it because I am ill, otherwise people would laugh at me. One looks too chamber-maidish in the *manteau* to enjoy wearing it. The full skirts everyone is wearing are not at all to my liking, they look unmannerly, as if one had just gotten out of bed. The *manteau*, of the kind that I wear, is nothing new, Madame la Dauphine used to wear it. The fashion of the slovenly skirts was first launched by Madame de Montespan, who used them to cover up her pregnancies". [161]

While Liselotte was primarily providing her critiques and beliefs on court fashion, her discussion about the new style of skirts is an example of the judgment that Montespan received for her actions, which in this case was what she chose to wear. Montespan's attempt to hide her pregnancy was most likely out of concern of judgment from the courtiers. The children that Montespan had with the King were deemed illegitimate because they were born outside of wedlock. Using these large skirts, she attempted to avoid any attention being brought to her

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[160] Adams, *The Creation of the French Royal Mistress*, 122.
[161] Forster, *A Woman's Life in the Court of the Sun King: Letters of Liselotte von der Pfalz,* 272.

pregnancy, but in doing so, she brought attention to a new style. The popularity of this style of skirt came from Montespan's influence demonstrating her ability to dictate court style.

Figure 7: *Madame la Marquise de Montespan*, Robert Bonnart, Collection Michel Hennin, Estampes relatives à l'Histoire de France, 1694, courtesy of Bibliothèque Nationale de France

In the image above, Montespan was illustrated wearing courtly fashions of that were popular during her time at court, such as ruffles, laces, and bright colors. Most notably, she was

wearing a *manteau*, the clothing style that she helped establish at court. While it was not stated that her gown was a *manteau*, it had the features of a *manteau*. For instance, there is a structured bodice, a skirt that fell to the floor, and had short sleeves that ended with rows of lace.[162] This portrayal of her shows what Montespan was wearing at court and the specific style that she helped popularize. Although her notoriety tainted how she was perceived at court, she was able to follow court fashions in order to maintain her position and also establish them.

Even though the power of female courtiers was limited through Salic Law, they were able to influence the actions of courtiers and therefore the actions of the general French population. Even though their power and influence are not often acknowledged when considering how the image of France became of lavishness and opulence, they worked behind the scenes by swaying different members of the court and court styles. Their influence was unconventional however it showed that power in the court presented itself in unique ways.

[162] Jones, *Sexing la Mode*, 9.

Maintenton

Figure 8: *Madame de Maintenon*, courtesy of Bibliothèque Nationale de France

"I must confess that I am thoroughly angry with the King for treating me like a chambermaid, which would be more fitting for his Maintenon, for she was born to it, but I was not". [163]

Madame de Maintenon, Françoise d'Aubigné, entered court life with the help of her powerful connections as the governess of the illegitimate children between the King and

[163] Forster, *A Woman's Life in the Court of the Sun King: Letters of Liselotte von der Pfalz,* 44.

Madame de Montespan.[164] Prior to her entrance to court life, she married the poet Scarron to escape her family's poverty, but Scarron left her a widow with no wealth.[165] Throughout her time at court, Louis XIV became enchanted by Maintenon and it was speculated that they were married in 1684.[166] This marriage was never publicly acknowledged due to the controversy of her background as a widow and her lower social rank.

Jean-Baptiste Primi Visconti, an Italian member of the court, noted while visiting Saint-Germain in 1680, "The whole court was astonished at the preference shown for [Madame de] Maintenon, an unknown person, widow of the poet Scarron… No one knew what to think, for she was old. Some regarded her as the king's confidante, others as an intermediary, others as an able person whom the king was using to write his memoirs…".[167] Visconti analyzed the ways that the courtiers engaged with one another and by doing so, he illuminated the thoughts that courtiers had about Madame de Maintenon. While Madame de Maintenon was critical of Liselotte's non-existent French background, it was contradictory for her to criticize Liselotte when she did not uphold traditional French values considering her widow status. Being a widow did not deter the king from continuing his relationship with Maintenon, however it remained a point of judgment for other courtiers because of the unconventional status of being a widow. This marriage was morganatic, leaving no title or rank to the spouse or offspring of the couple, because of their different statuses.[168] The marriage was not made public because of Maintenon's background as a widow and her lower rank standing in comparison to the King. Courtiers were critical of these aspects about Maintenon's life but she had protection from the King, because his power extended to his mistresses. Even though her ability to make appearances was limited

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[164] Gamaliel Bradford, "Madame De Maintenon," *The Virginia Quarterly Review* 6, no. 1, 1930, 65.
[165] Bradford, *Madame de Maintenon*, 65.
[166] Adams and Adams, *The Creation of the French Royal Mistress*, 132.
[167] Beik, *Louis XIV and Absolutism: A Brief Study with Documents,* 63.
[168] Adams and Adams, *The Creation of the French Royal Mistress*, 132.

because of the judgments she would have received, she had greater sway in the court through her ability to network and create alliances with powerful male members of the court.

The positions of power and protection from the King were heavily guarded by the mistresses who benefited from them. When Mademoiselle de Fontanges, Marie-Angélique de Scoraille de Roussille and the Duchess of Fontanges, and Louis XIV were showing interest for one another, Maintenon attempted to dissuade Fontanges from having further feelings for the King.[169] In her *Instructions à Saint-Cyr*, Maintenon wrote, "I employed this time in trying to persuade her to leave the King and that such an action would be beautiful and praiseworthy. I remember that she answered me heatedly: 'But Madame, you speak to me abandoning a passion as though it were as simple as stepping out of a chemise'".[170] Maintenon's attempt to convince Fontanges to stop pursuing the King is apparent through her report of this interaction and while she does not clearly state that this would benefit her, it was an action that ensured her survival. To improve her conditions after being left a widow, she had to navigate the court and guarantee her position as a mistress because it guaranteed her comfortable position in society.

All the mistresses of Louis XIV had their own grievances due to the notoriety that their relationship with the King brought them. Madame de Montespan dealt with the judgments of Liselotte and the negative exposure of being a mistress of the King while he remained married. Maintenon had to endure the judgment of the male courtiers because of the ways she was able to influence other male members of the court. Madame de Maintenon recognized her power and used it to her advantage by influencing the decisions of the male court members. Before the ministers had their meetings with the King, Maintenon spoke to those she had a relationship with

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[169] Adams and Adams, *The Creation of the French Royal Mistress*, 130.
[170] Gillette Ziegler, *At the Court of Versailles: Eye-Witness Reports from the Reign of Louis XIV* (New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., Inc., 1966), 179.

to ensure her interests and concerns were expressed.[171] Due to her relationship with the King, she had greater authority over these ministers and therefore they felt pressure to be on her good graces as their positions depended on her satisfaction with them.[172] Her ability to manipulate her status to maintain more power became one of the primary topics for judgment from the Duc de Saint-Simon, Louis de Rouvroy.[173] Saint-Simon was critical of Madame de Maintenon and the other mistresses of Louis XIV because he believed that their sole desire was to influence the King's decisions.[174] There were instances where this was true because Madame de Maintenon had called in ministers before meetings with the King to exert her demands that she wanted to communicate in these meetings.[175] Saint-Simon's memoirs discuss the power Madame de Maintenon had over the King and France's affairs, more specifically her control over the ministers.

> "As for state matters, if Madame de Maintenon wished to make them succeed, fail, or turn in some particular fashion (which happened much less often than where favours and appointments were in the wind), the same intelligence and the same intrigue were carried on between herself and the minister. By these particulars it will be seen that this clever woman did nearly all she wished". [176]

This excerpt conveys the extent to which Madame de Maintenon had influence over the affairs of France. Furthermore, Saint-Simon implied that regardless of any challenges or objections to Madame de Maintenon's desires, she was going to receive what she demanded. The amassed power and influence that the mistresses of Louis XIV had signaled that his court could not have become what it was without them. This relationship between Madame de Maintenon and the ministers confirms that the image of extravagance created during the reign of Louis XIV

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[171] Crownston. *Credit, Fashion, Sex,* 27.
[172] Crownston. *Credit, Fashion, Sex,* 27.
[173] Crownston. *Credit, Fashion, Sex,* 25.
[174] Crownston. *Credit, Fashion, Sex,* 26.
[175] Crownston. *Credit, Fashion, Sex,* 26.
[176] Louis de Rouvroy, *Memoirs of Louis XIV., by the Duke Saint-Simon* (Project Gutenberg, 2006) chapter LXXVII. https://www.gutenberg.org/files/3875/3875-h/3875-h.htm#link2HCH0077.

was not his sole doing. The competition of power that was present in Louis XIV's court dictated the future of Old Regime France, as courtiers wanted their own interests met. This raises the question, to what extent did Louis XIV actually dictate what occurred in the court and how much of Old Regime France can be accredited to other individuals like his mistresses?

Spanheim addressed this question in his letter of 1682 by writing,

> "Everything is more planned, more constrained, less free, less open, less joyful than the habitual genius of the French nation [would suggest], especially its courtiers, with the result that even the entertainments and festivals that the king gives for the principal ladies of the court seem all the less enjoyable in that they appear to be organized to please Madame de Maintenon, and they still seem to be governed by constraint". [177]

This quote demonstrates the power and influence that Maintenon had over the King and the events that he held. This is important because the events, especially festivals, that the King held were a representation of him, his power, and the overall power of France.[178] By dedicating these festivals to Madame Maintenon, the King was showing the extent of his affections towards her. His adoration for her offered her great sway in the court by allowing her to influence events such as festivals. As the King aged, Madame de Maintenon gained more influence at court. Montesquieu wrote, in letter 104 in his *Persian Letters*,

> "People say that one can never know the character of a western king until he has undergone the two important tests of his mistress and his confessor; we shall soon be watching those two struggling for control of the king's mind; then there will be some great battles! For, when the king is young these two powers are always rivals, although when he is old they become reconciled, and join their forces…When I arrived in France, I found the late king completely under the control of women, and yet, considering the age he had reached, I believe he had less need of women than any other monarch on this earth". [179]

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[177] Beik, *Louis XIV and Absolutism: A Brief Study with Documents,* 80. This quote is a continuation of the first quote in chapter one.
[178] Roche, *A History of Everyday Things,* 115.
[179] Charles Louis de Secondat, baron de La Brède et de Montesquieu, *Persian Letters* (New York and Oxford:Oxford University Press, 2008). 246

This excerpt was part of a letter written in 1717, which is two years after Louis XIV passed. While the exact date of when Montesquieu last visited the King was not given, Montesquieu stated that the King was mature in age during this visit. Montesquieu discussed aging in this letter in order to highlight the changes in challenges that the King faced as he aged. The influence of women was present throughout the King's reign, but his ability to limit these influences decreased as time progressed. Maintenon was able to have greater influence in the court because of the King's age and his inability to rule as he once did.

The adoration and devotion that Louis XIV had for Maintenon are apparent through his willingness to follow her and satisfy her desires. In a series of letters that Liselotte wrote to Electress Sophie during the early 18th century, she showed that the King's aging was making him weaker in his rule and that Madame de Maintenon began taking charge. She wrote,

> "Although the old woman is our worst enemy, I wish her a long life for the King's sake. For everything would be ten times worse if the King should die now. He loves this woman so terribly that he would be sure to follow her to the grave". [180]

Liselotte admits to not being fond of Maintenon but she also reveals that at this point in time the King needs her in order to continue to maintain the court and France. Liselotte admitting a need of Maintenon shows the extreme reliance that the King had on her, because Liselotte did not view Maintenon as worthy of being a queen. In 1696, she wrote in a letter to her aunt Sophie,

> "The master's passion for that woman is quite amazing; everyone in France says that as soon as the peace is concluded the marriage will be made public and the lady will assume her rank. That is another reason why I am glad I am not to be the first, for then at least I will come after a proper princess and will not be obliged to present the shirt and the gloves to the lady". [181]

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[180] Forster, *A Woman's Life in the Court of the Sun King: Letters of Liselotte von der Pfalz,* 191.
[181] Forster, *A Woman's Life in the Court of the Sun King: Letters of Liselotte von der Pfalz,* 96.

Liselotte expressed contentment with not holding the first rank at court after the Queen because she understood the expectations of being at close proximity to the King. By not having this position at court, she was alleviated from further expectations such as giving the queen her clothing during *lever*. Liselotte was satisfied with not having first rank because she does not have to personally serve Madame de Maintenon, who she viewed as an undeserving queen. She expressed her negative views of Maintenon by undermining her position. By referring to Maintenon as "the lady," Liselotte displayed that she did not view her as worthy of being the wife of the King. Indeed, Liselotte often mentioned that Maintenon was of lower rank and therefore could not be queen. Despite Liselotte and Maintenon being unconventional members of the court, they were bonded through the critiques they received, even if they were from each other at times. These judgments were reflections of the debates, especially about the morality of female courtiers, occurring at the time, and they were used as mechanisms to compromise each other's status.

While these women faced critiques, the discussion of them was a symbol of their influence because if they had not been influential, they would have been swept under the rug. Furthermore, these critiques exposed the vulnerabilities and their strengths of these women. In comparison to the rest of the women at court, Maintenon held an unprecedented amount of power over the King and therefore the nation. The King's declining health and inability to uphold his duties to full capacity allowed for Maintenon to ascend as his unofficial prime minister and political advisor.[182]

The judgments and the criticisms that these women made of each other demonstrate how competitive the court environment was. Despite being heavily criticized by other female courtiers, Maintenon helped established a more relaxed environment for women at court through

[182] Adams and Adams, *The Creation of the French Royal Mistress*, 131.

the normalization of wearing more comfortable attire.[183] Montespan introduced the *manteau* during her time at court, however Maintenon aided in popularizing this garment and other courtly attires for different occasions.[184] During her time with the King, *déshabillés* became more popularized and female courtiers became less restricted by court attire.[185] Court clothing and overall court expectations created a rigid experience for female courtiers, however they continued to maintain appearances to limit the judgement they received and maintain their statuses. The remarks made by female courtiers were critiques of one another and responses to the expectations placed on them. Previously mentioned in chapter one, clothing was used as an instrument to attain and maintain power within the court because it was a form for courtiers to showcase their ability to follow court etiquette. Shown through the experiences of Louis XIV's mistresses, women were able to leverage power and reap other benefits at court by adapting to the environment.

In his *Lettres Persanes*, Montesquieu wrote,

> "People in Persia complain that the kingdom is governed by two or three women; it's far worse here in France, where women in general govern, and seize the authority not just to make decisions wholesale, but even to apply them retail".[186]

What Montesquieu, an 18th century French philosopher, was saying about his observances was that they revealed to him that the French monarchy had become overpowered by women. Previous to this discussion, he discussed how Madame de Maintenon attained control of the King and therefore the country. He later suggests, in this letter, that women have gained power of the French government and overall France. The influences that women had at the court of Louis XIV are undeniable and they show that the King did not reign absolute.

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[183] Jones, *Sexing la Mode*, 21.
[184] Jones, *Sexing la Mode*, 22.
[185] Jones, *Sexing la Mode*, 22.
[186] Crowston, *Fabricating Women: The Seamstresses of Old Regime France,* 174.

Concluding the discussion of women's placement at court and relationship with power and clothing with Madame de Maintenon reveals the real extent of Louis XIV's rule. While the King attempted to maintain and showcase his absolute power, this power was faltered by the influences of female courtiers. Even though female courtiers were constrained by the expectations at court, they were able to excel in attaining power despite their frustrations and the judgments they received. Lastly, the experiences of the female courtiers highlight the intensity of the competition for power at court because they were willing to sacrifice their agency in order to wield power.

Chapter Three - Beauty Is Where You Find It

Court fashion was exclusive to court members because of accessibility and the permission to wear certain clothing articles based on rank. However, individuals, specifically the bourgeois, wanted to replicate what the courtiers were wearing. To understand why they would want to replicate these fashions is to understand why people want to engage with luxury. When determining what was luxury in the fashion sector, the idea of necessity emerged.[187] As previously mentioned, those who engaged in arduous labors dressed in darker colors. This was due to the need to preserve their clothes because they did not have the ability to repurchase them due to financial limitations. It was necessity that drove people who engaged in these labors to wear darker colors. Those who were able to wear lighter colors, lighter fabrics, or embroidered clothes were the individuals who had the luxury to not participate in strenuous labor and could treat their clothes as dispensable. Dispensability of clothing was determined by wear, which was subjective depending on a person's socioeconomic status, and its place in fashion for that time. These attitudes towards clothing and having the choice of choosing how to represent yourself physically was what determined the role a person had in the fashion industry.

This chapter sets out to investigate the King's involvement in the world of fashion and how that dictated what the courtiers were wearing. In the previous chapter, the King's absolute power was questioned because of the influences that his mistresses had on the court, but in this chapter his direct usage of power will be analyzed. This analysis will be primarily done in the first section of this chapter which looks at French periodicals, such as the *Mercure Galant and* the *Extraordinaire du Mercure Galant.* Examining these periodicals reveals the ways that the King influenced the press and therefore people's attitude towards clothes.

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[187] Daniel Roche, *The Culture of Clothing,* 274-275.

The second section of this chapter analyzes the creation of fashion plates and the relationship that the consumers of these plates had with them. When analyzing these fashion plates, one can see that there was a pattern of who created them. Many of the fashion plates in this paper were created by Sébastien Leclerc and the Bonnards. Both Leclerc and the Bonnard family rose to fame because of their work showing court fashions in an accessible manner.[188] The rising demand for fashion plates throughout the 18th century was what propelled these engravers into fame. The desire for these plates was fueled by the digestibility of imagery because there was a population of people who could not read; however the plates allowed these individuals to know what was deemed fashionable.[189] Initially, fashion plates were not available to the illiterate population because of the price to manufacture them, but this changed as the press developed.[190] The King controlled aspects of the press through his authority over which artists received the most attention. His authority was not direct as he had his ministers, like Jean-Baptiste Colbert, and other officials concern themselves with how to manage the press and other forms of media. His impacts on the media and press were among the venues he influenced. They were central to communicate the image that Louis XIV wanted to present because these were vital forms of news and information consumption.

Louis XIV's influences were not only seen in fashion periodicals and plates, but also seen through paintings, festivals, and other forms of media. These forms of art and events served as exhibitions of what the court was supposed to look like. Jean-Baptiste Colbert, a French finance minister, played a significant role in developing various academies of art and sciences, which were elite institutions for the skilled artists to elevate their crafts.[191] These artists who were

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[188] Oded Rabinovitch, *A learned artisan debates the system of the world: Le Clerc versus Mallemant de Messange* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2017) 603; Antony Griffiths, Review: *La Dynastie Bonnart* (What city? UK: Print Quarterly Publications, 2019), 103.
[189] Daniel Roche, *The Culture of Clothing,* 477.
[190] Cite roche
[191] Jones, *Sexing la Mode*, 125.

admitted to these academies often were the individuals who created the representations of the court of Louis XIV. These artists were selected by the King's ministers to be allowed into these institutions as they could represent the cultural and social interests of the King. Furthermore, courtiers often sponsored these artists to create portraits of them or other forms of art for them. It is clear that these artists had connections to the court, and these connections allowed them to create the art and texts that represented the court.

All these demonstrations of court life were carefully curated and performed by the courtiers. This illusion of opulence, power, and wealth was a mere image because the King decided with intention what the public could view. Artists, engravers, publishing houses, and ministers were characters who aided the King in ensuring that France took on the image that he desired. As the analysis of Louis XIV's impact on media and the arts is conducted, it is clear that he played the greatest role in creating France's image of grandeur. Throughout this essay, pitfalls in his reign have been exposed especially due to his relationship with women. Despite the King's weak points and critiques given about his rule, he demonstrated unparalleled power over French culture through his control of what was culturally and socially significant.

Le Mercure Galant

Le Mercure Galant was a French magazine, from the late 17th century to the early 18th century, which published poems, marriage announcements, news, and updates on the latest fashion.[192] The writer of *Le Mercure Galant* was Jean Donneau de Vise, an author with connections to Louis XIV's court.[193] Many of the artists who were creating images and forms of printed media had connections to the court or were sponsored by the King. Donneau's family had worked for the King and he received a royal pension of 15,000 *livres* by 1697 for the *Mercure*

[192] Crowston, "Credit, Fashion, Sex : Economies of Regard in Old Regime France.". 107.
[193] Crowston. "Credit, Fashion, Sex : Economies of Regard in Old Regime France". 107.

Galant. [194]Donneau was concerned with French fashion because he understood the power in being *en vogue* within 17th-century social hierarchies.[195] The illustrators of the featured fashion prints were Jean Lepautre and Jean Berain, and images of this sort were found in *L'Extraordinaire Galant*, a quarterly issue of *Le Mercure,* which focused more on fashion.[196] Through the association and work with Jean Donneau de Vise, Jean Lepautre and Jean Berain had the same access to Louis XIV's court, making their illustrations a credible source to understand the attire that courtiers wore.

While these images and other materials were being produced, they initially were not accessible to the masses. The usage of media was what helped non-courtiers attain the knowledge of what was in style, however not every individual had the accessibility to the latest fashions despite desires of emulating what courtiers were wearing. These forms of media were not accessible to all individuals because they were not affordable for many, therefore the main consumers were the bourgeoisie. These forms of media consisted of fashion dolls, the French press, and fashion engravings.[197] Fashion engravings and fashion plates became more accessible and preferred by the bourgeois because they illustrated what the courtiers were wearing in a more timely manner as they were easier to produce.[198] The bourgeois invested in fashion plates and other forms of media that discussed what the courtiers were wearing in order to be able to distinguish themselves in society. [199]

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[194] Jones, *Sexing la Mode*, 43.
[195] Crowston. "Credit, Fashion, Sex : Economies of Regard in Old Regime France". 107..
[196] Crowston. "Credit, Fashion, Sex : Economies of Regard in Old Regime France". 107.
[197] Roche, *The Culture of Clothing*, 476.
[198] Roche, *The Culture of Clothing*, 471-475.
[199] Roche, *The Culture of Clothing*, 476.

Figure 9:

Habit D'Hyver (1678)
Extraordinaire du Mercure Galant
Bibliothèque Nationale de France
Lepautre, Jean; Berain, Jean

Translation:
Habit D'Hyver = winter clothing/fashion
Grande Coeffe de gaze Brodée = large embroidered headdress
Palatine de Marte = shoulder cape
Brasselets ou noeuds de Diamans = bracelets or knots of diamonds
Manchon de pluche de couleur = colored plush fur muffs
Robe de velours noir et les noeuds de diamans = black velvet dress and diamonds bows/knots
Hermine sur une jupe de dessous noire = ermine on a black underskirt

Figure nine, *Habit D'Hyver*, was featured in the January 1678 issue of the *Extraordinaire du Mercure Galant* and offers a depiction of the proper attire for the winter. While there were no known restrictions on who could read *Le Mercure Galant*, the depicted articles of clothing were not accessible to everyone, as they were of high value and quality. For instance, the *ermine sur une jupe de dessous noire* was hermine on a black underskirt, and furs of any animal were primarily accessible to the wealthy due to the labor involved in making fur clothing items. It is important to note that this plate is located in the *Extraordinaire du Mercure Galant* and not the *Mercure Galant* because they were distinct journals. Before showing the first fashion plates of this publication, the writer wrote:

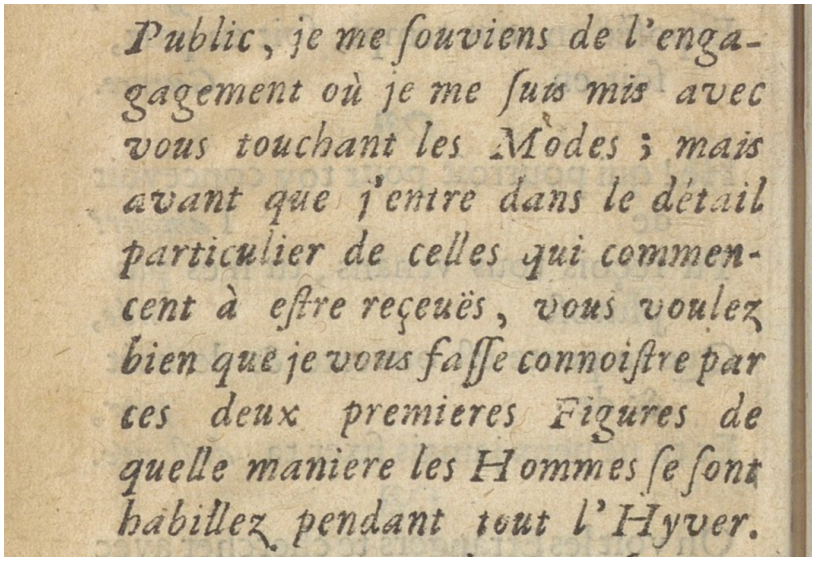
Public, je me ſouviens de l'enga-
gagement où je me ſuis mis avec
vous touchant les Modes ; mais
avant que j'entre dans le détail
particulier de celles qui commen-
cent à eſtre reçeuës, vous voulez
bien que je vous faſſe connoiſtre par
ces deux premieres Figures de
quelle maniere les Hommes ſe ſont
habillez pendant tout l'Hyver.

Figure 10: *Extraordinaire de Mercure*: *Quartier de Janvier*, Jean Donneau de Visé, January 1678, courtesy of Bibliothèque Nationale de France

Translation: "I remember the promise that I made with you touching the fashions, but before I enter into the particular details of those which are beginning to be received, you would be pleased that I show you these first two figures of the way the men dressed all winter".

This excerpt highlights the intentions of Visé for writing this specific publication, which was discussing fashion. The *Mercure Galant* brought attention to the gossip, activities, and news of

the court, but the *Extraordinaire du Mercure* was dedicated to the discussion of fashion. The *Extraordinaire* was not the only publication that emerged from the *Mercure Galant* that was dedicated to discussing fashion, though. Throughout the later half of the seventeenth century, fashion journals and periodicals emerged in response to the *Mercure* and they drew stylistic inspiration from the *Mercure* to gain the intrigue of its consumers.[200]

While plates, like figure seven, cannot be found in the *Mercure Galant* publications on *Gallica*, a digital library part of Bibliotheque Nationale de France, there are a variety of reasons why. The *Mercure Galant* existed in a variety of forms that all discussed court life, however its conversation on fashion was limited. Fashion magazines that existed at the same time of the *Mercure* were not as organized; however the *Mercure* helped set an organizational structure through the development of Gallant journalism.[201] A key feature of the *Mercure Gallant* was that it used the literary device of letter writing style.[202] By writing in this style, the gallant journalist hoped to create an intimate relationship with the reader to garner their confidence and attention.[203] Illustrations, similar to figure three, were not a critical aspect of the *Mercure,* as there would only be a dozen produced by the end of the 17th century, and they would completely disappear in 1730.[204]

The *Mercure* itself did not extensively discuss fashion, but more fashion journals and periodicals that were inspired by the *Mercure, s*uch as the *Extraordinaire du Mercure,* emerged in the late 17th century. In addition to their discussion of fashion, another part of their appeal was that they became more specific when it came to their audience. Part of the lack of extensive discussion on fashion and usage of illustration helped initiate the first works of the feminine

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[200] Roche, *The Culture of Clothing,* 478-479.
[201] Roche, *The Culture of Clothing,* 478.
[202] Roche, *The Culture of Clothing,* 479.
[203] Roche, *The Culture of Clothing,* 479.
[204] Roche, *The Culture of Clothing,* 479-480.

press.[205] This emergence of the feminine press allowed for a more diverse perspective on fashion due to the variety of authors and writers. Oftentimes, the writers had pseudonyms because they did not present themselves in their true identity as there would be men who disguised themselves as women and vice versa.[206] These new and different journalistic voices created further demand for more information on clothing habits and consumption, which inspired another emergence for journalism discussing fashion.[207] The *Mercure* was focused on presenting information of the court, but it left its audience wanting a more detailed discussion on fashion, which led to a wave of emerging fashion periodicals and journals.

While the fashion periodicals and magazines had great prominence in the world of fashion, they still remained inaccessible to many including those who were part of the bourgeoisie. Fashion plates and engravings emerged as a response to the inaccessibility of fashion magazines, which allowed more people to be informed about court activity.[208]

Fashion Plates

Possessing fashion plates in the 17th century was as much an intimate action as deciding what to wear. A way that this can be seen is through the collections of fashion plates that exist. Many of the fashion plates that were used for this thesis were from the collection, *Costumes époque Louis XIV [print] : collection of plates representing the manners, customs, and costumes of the period* at the Morgan Library & Museum. Throughout the research process, another collection of the fashion plates emerged from the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, LACMA. This collection is the *Recueil des modes de la cour de France, 1670- circa 1693*. Both of these

[205] Roche, *The Culture of Clothing,* 479-480.
[206] Roche, *The Culture of Clothing,* 480.
[207] Roche, *The Culture of Clothing,* 480.
[208] Roche, *The Culture of Clothing,* 11.

collections feature the same fashion plates, however the one from LACMA was bound and did not include any plates with blemishes. In the image below, the plate on the left is from the Morgan Library and the picture on the left is from LACMA.

Figure 11A (left): *Homme de qualité,* Costumes Epoque Louis XIV, courtesy of The Morgan Library & Museum

Figure 11B (right): *Homme de qualité,* Jean Berain, *Recueil des modes de la cour de France 1670- circa 1693*, Los Angeles County Museum of Art

Both of these plates display the same image: the backside of a man of status dressed in winter attire. While these images display the same man, they have great differences between them that indicate they were placed in different collections. The most notable difference pertains to the

colors in both images. On the left image, the man is wearing brown stockings with breeches while in the left image has these articles of clothing in blue. Another difference in color can be seen with the soles of the shoes: the image on left shows black soles while the image on the right displays red soles. These details seem miniscule, but they show that these images were not easily reproduced during the late 17th century. The differences in color are detailed enough to indicate that there was an intentionality when selecting the color of certain articles of clothing. While there are limitations in the comparison of both images because of methods of digitization, it is undoubtedly clear that they are colored differently.

Figure 12 (left): *Madame la Marquise de Montespan,* Robert Bonnart, 1694, courtesy of Bibliothèque Nationale de France

Figure 7 (right): *Madame la Marquise de Montespan*, Robert Bonnart, Collection Michel Hennin, Estampes relatives à l'Histoire de France, 1694, courtesy of Bibliothèque Nationale de

France

Fashion plates were not originally colored, and they were later altered to have color in order to convey what the articles of clothing shown looked like or the purchaser's aesthetic preferences.[209] The action of coloring a fashion plate was a delicate task that professionals had to complete because of the amount of detail needed to decorate these plates.[210] Not only were these fashion plates colored, but they were also "dressed". "Dressing" a fashion plate went beyond adding color because it meant adding fabric, gold, feathers, or other textile materials to showcase a more accurate image of what the depicted clothing garments looked like.[211]

[209] Katheryn Norberg and Sandra Rosenbaum, *Fashion Prints in the Age of Louis XIV* (Lubbock:TX: Texas Tech University Press, 2014). 85-86.
[210] Norberg, *Fashion Prints in the Age of Louis XIV*, 86.
[211] Norberg, *Fashion Prints in the Age of Louis XIV*, 86.

Figure 13: *Chrestien V. Roy de Dannemarc,* Costumes Du Cour Louis XIV I, courtesy of the Morgan Library & Museum

Figure thirteen is a "dressed" fashion plate that depicts King Christian V of Denmark. Both images on figure thirteen are from the same fashion plate, however the image on the right was magnified to highlight the materials utilized in the process of "dressing" this plate. By magnifying this image, various textiles, such as gold embroidery, can be seen. The amount of detail placed into "dressing" this image is exemplary of how much care the purchaser had for these plates. Due to these plates initially being sold colorless and in singles, the buyer would have to buy various different plates to create a collection and sponsor an artist to adorn these images. The willingness to alter these fashion plates with such detail conveys that the fashion plates were not solely depictions of court fashion, but images that the consumers held dear because of the greater significance of clothing.

Another indicator of the intentionality and care behind creating collections of fashion plates was the maintenance of them. While primary sources, especially those on paper, deteriorate with age, the amount of effort placed into caring for them helps in their preservation. The purchasing of these fashion plates oftentimes involved the binding of them in order to create a collection. The image of *Homme de qualité*, figure 10B, at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art is an example of an illustration that was bound into a book, the *Recueil des modes de la cour de France*. In comparison to the *Homme de qualité* image from the Morgan Library, which was not binded, there is less visible deterioration. The intent of placing these fashion plates into a book and binding them was to preserve them for an individual's safekeeping. Other loose fashion plates, meaning that they were placed in a binded book, that are held at the Morgan Library have endured deterioration.

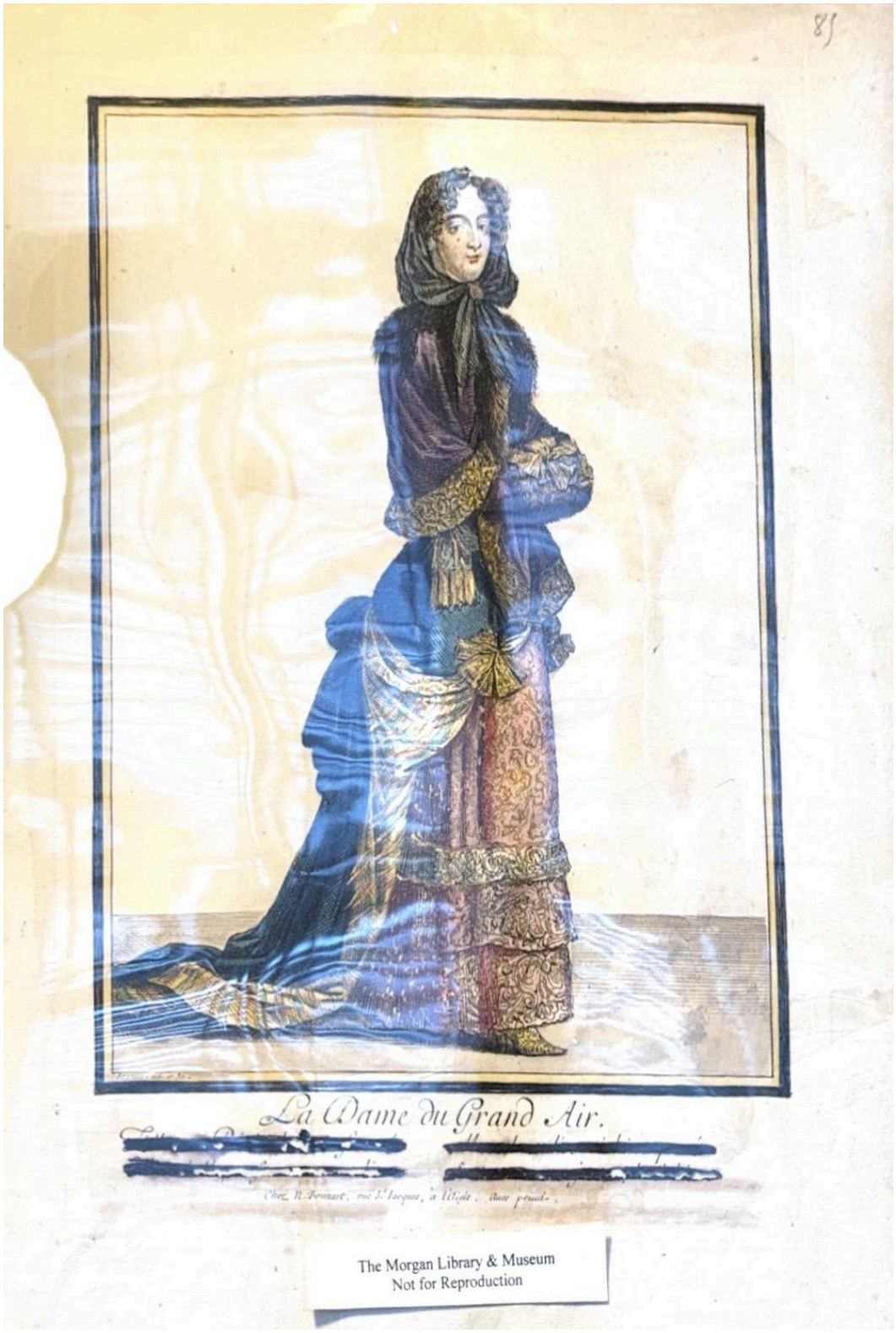

Figure 14: *La Dame du Grand Air*, Costumes Epoque Louis XIV Box III, courtesy of the Morgan Library & Museum

This image highlights the level of corrosion loose fashion plates experienced because of physical redaction of the text. The text was crossed over with ink that was acidic resulting in the visible damage of the fashion plate. The overall choice to make alterations to these fashion plates reflected their significance to their owners. Modifications done to these plates required attention to detail. These modifications could only be done through the understanding of their meaning and the significance of the material goods that were depicted.

Not only were these fashion plates examples of how much attention people placed into understanding clothing, but also the King's influence on printed media. The influence of the King is visible in media produced about the court and clothing because of the manner that it displayed both interconnected worlds. A way that Louis XIV demonstrated his control over printed materials was through fashion plates. At the bottom of these plates, people can find the publishing house and the names of the individuals who produced these plates. For the image below, Nicolas Bonnart can be identified as the artist because his name and address are stated as "*N. Bonnart, rue St. Jacques à l'Aigle*".[212] Following the information provided about the producer of the image, many fashion plates state "*avec privil du roy,*" which translates to "with the privilege of the King." The information below many fashion plates helps indicate who created these images and demonstrates the King's influence on printed media, especially those that depict the court.

[212] "Nicolas Bonnart I", The British Museum, https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/term/BIOG146833.

Figure 15: *Homme en grand deuil,* N. Bonnart, Costumes Epoque Louis XIV, courtesy of The Morgan Library & Museum

Similarity to etiquette and physical appearance, the efforts placed into creating these journals, periodicals, and fashion plates showcase the elaborateness of Louis XIV's reign. These forms of media did not emerge out of thin air, but rather they were created with the influence of the King in order to control the narrative of his court. The ability for aristocrats and the bourgeoisie to purchase these plates also indicates that the impact of creating them went beyond pleasing the King's tastes. The creation of these plates and other forms of media offered the opportunity for people to engage with what was in fashion, if they were able to afford to do so. Considering that there were large populations in France who could not purchase these images or periodicals, the social hierarchies created through fashion and clothing are reiterated. The classes that did not engage in this consumption of media were not granted the opportunity to do so because of a socioeconomic disparity that the rule of Louis XIV heavily relied on.

LA FIN: ***A La Mode***

Figure 16: *Dame a sa toilette*, Costumes Du Cour Louis XIV I, courtesy of the Morgan Library & Museum

Before leaving the Morgan Library, which I visited to view some of the fashion plates featured in this paper, one of their librarians insisted I look at their collection of "dressed" fashion plates. Before my research on fashion plates, I was confused on what she meant about

“dressed” plates because I was only familiar with the plates that I had already viewed. She explained to me that what made these plates “dressed” was that fabric was added onto them at a later time to show how the clothing actually looked. This raised great curiosity in me, and I proceeded to ask the 5W’s: who, what when, where, why. Not all the questions could not be answered because no one in the room knew who, what, when, and where. However, the librarian and I discussed the motives for why someone would obtain these plates and meticulously alter them to show how the fashions at court looked like.

The first way we addressed this question was by asking why I was at the Morgan Library viewing the collections of Louis XIV court costume fashion plates. I was there because I was writing this paper to understand the importance of clothing and the intimate relationship that people have with it. With this answer, I determined a possible reason for why: someone came back to “dress” these plates because they saw value in what these individuals at the court of Louis XIV were wearing. As argued throughout this paper, clothing was not simply just clothing. Clothing was a culmination of people’s efforts, abilities, and desires. At that point, I did not have the amount of knowledge on fashion plates that I have now but as I continued with my research, my idea about why someone would dress these plates was progressively validated. The buyers or collectors of these fashion plates diligently altered them because they cared about what was being depicted. The intention behind choosing what to wear or modifying a fashion plate supports the idea that clothing was more than its monetary value, but rather it held cultural and social significance.

Louis XIV’s influence over clothing was a way to organize his court and the hierarchies present in French society. His court served the purpose of handling France’s administrative needs but also upholding his power as King and the power of France. Clothing played a role in the lives

of France's administrators, courtiers, and the overall population by acting as a tool for social distinguishment. This did not occur naturally, rather decisions from Louis XIV and his associates showed that there was an intentionality when determining what was in fashion and how these fashions should be presented at court.

The works of Daniel Roche, Clare Haru Crowston, and Jennifer Jones were vital for my work as they provided historical information and context on clothing from Old Regime France. Furthermore, their work helped explain how appearance was fundamental to the court of Louis XIV. Roche's work offered an explanation for how clothing gained its social value through the analysis of the labor processes behind creating clothing and the ways that Louis XIV influenced fashion. Crowston and Jones, despite analyzing separate sectors and clothing's different social impacts, discussed heavily the relationship between gender and clothing. With all these works, I was able to historically situate my primary sources, fashion plates and prints, that were accessed at the Morgan Library & Museum.

The features of my work that differentiate it from those of Roche, Crowston, and Jones was the reliance on fashion plates, court correspondence, and the press. This thesis was focused on understanding the inner workings of Louis XIV's court to illuminate how clothing was used as a tool in an environment that was riddled with competition for power. This competition was not even because everyone had a different standing at court or their social mobility was hindered by existing perceptions of them. Female courtiers were the individuals who experienced this unfair battle as they were more scrutinized on their ability to uphold etiquette and present themselves with modesty. Analyzing female perspectives at the court of Louis XIV not only highlighted differences in gender expectations but also the intensity of maintaining appearances. While every courtier was expected to uphold a certain image to showcase the court in a unified

light, gender and different statuses exposed that the court was more heterogeneous than it appeared. Despite clothing being a tool that distinguished an individual from those of lower ranks or helped others assimilate into court culture, it could only be effectively employed through the understanding of how court politics functioned.

While the criticizers of those who devote themselves to fashion may base their critiques on their moral judgments and religious beliefs, clothing and physical appearances remain a consistent feature in people's daily life. The onlookers of the MET gala and consumers of fashion magazines engage with the analysis of these exclusive environments, because clothing connects these individuals with the wealthy and elite. This connection is what unifies everyone but also creates hierarchies. The court of Louis XIV is part of a legacy that shows how clothing has greater significance than its monetary or aesthetic value. What made the court of Louis XIV unique was the amount of intention that was placed in making physical adornment and representation part of a country's identity. Mobilizing the courtiers into wearing court attire that corresponds to their rank and status was a large-scale movement to create social hierarchies. Reflections of these social hierarchies exist today as people continue to consume media that depicts what wealthy elites wear and how they behave, in hopes to mimic their ways of living and delve into a world that was made to be exclusive.

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