**‘Romancing the Throne’: Mme de Maintenon’s Journey from Secret Royal Governess to Louis XIV’s Clandestine Consort, 1652–84**

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Françoise d’Aubigné descended from an eminent but disgraced noble family and was born in a hovel outside Niort prison where her father was incarcerated for murder. But young Françoise used her keen intellect and arresting looks and exploited her family’s distinguished social connections to advance herself in society. In 1652 she married the famous playwright, Paul Scarron (d. 1660), whose glittering circle of contacts gained his widow the prestigious post of governess to the bastard children that Louis XIV sired with Athénaïs de Montespan. This article examines the development of the relationship between the Sun King and Françoise, who soon became one of Louis’ most trusted servants. As their friendship blossomed an unexpected romance ensued, resulting in their secret marriage after the death of Queen Marie-Thérèse in 1683. Events surrounding the clandestine wedding are scrutinized to establish why and when this remarkable ceremony took place in the manner that it did, and to assess what impact this notorious *mésalliance* had on the court at Versailles.

In September 1686 the provost of Versailles, the marquis de Sourches, reflected that Françoise d’Aubigné, marquise de Maintenon, as a balancer of ministerial factions, had temporarily created governmental harmony.[[1]](#footnote-1) Although this assessment rather exaggerates her influence at that juncture, Maintenon had by then undeniably become an immovable fixture at Versailles *auprès du roi*. And it was generally accepted that she had become Louis XIV’s wife, even though in the same year the King’s sister-in-law, Madame, the duchesse d’Orléans, was not able to confirm to her aunt Sophie, Electress of Hanover, whether they had married or not. She was still speculating on the match a year later, writing on 13 May 1687:

Your Grace desires to know whether it is true that the King has married Madame de Maintenon, but truly I am not able to tell. Not many people doubt it, but as long as this marriage is not made public, I find it difficult to believe. And because of what I know of marriage in this country, I do not believe that if they were married they would be as much in love as they are. But then, perhaps, secrecy adds a special spice that other, publicly married people do not have.[[2]](#footnote-2)

Madame was none the wiser eleven months later, conceding to the same correspondent on 14 April 1688 that she had still not been:

able to find out whether or not the King has married his Maintenon. … What is very sure is that this King has never felt such a passion for any mistress as he does for this one. To see them together is something to marvel at, for not a quarter-of-an-hour passes without his whispering into her ear or talking to her in secret, though he has already spent the entire day with her.[[3]](#footnote-3)

This remarkable elevation and union was far from predictable in the 1670s, when Maintenon’s position at court from 1674, as official governess to the bastards that Louis had sired with Athénaïs de Montespan, was tenuous, and obligatory retirement from court a possibility at any moment. Who could have predicted that the most powerful ruler in Europe, after the death of his queen, Marie-Thérèse, on 30 July 1683, would marry an older woman of much lower rank, the widow of a leading *Frondeur*, Paul Scarron, and granddaughter of the renowned Protestant champion, Agrippa d’Aubigné? Nevertheless, closer inspection reveals that this is not quite the stereotypical ‘rags to riches’ story. Françoise may have been born in a hovel outside the prison at Niort and forced to beg as a child after her family’s fortune was squandered by her father Constant, whose transgressions also lost the D’Aubignés their noble title, but she was still well connected. Her godmother, Suzanne de Baudéan, was the daughter of the governor of Niort and married one of Mazarin’s most loyal military commanders, the maréchal duc de Navailles, Philippe II de Montault, who was appointed governor of Louis XIV’s nephew, the duc de Chartres, in 1683.

This article charts the erratic evolution of the relationship between Louis and Françoise d’Aubigné and the extraordinary emotional and psychological experiences she endured before finally submitting to the King’s advances, then becoming his consort rather than his concubine. This was not a premeditated path to power, or even matrimonial ambition, as alleged by contemporaries. It was unclear whether the King would remarry, or simply take another mistress, which would have been untenable for a woman of Françoise’s moral probity that court wags and playwrights considered prudish. But it was an unusual marriage because it remained undisclosed and was clearly a match of conscience and convenience for both parties. This piece therefore serves further to highlight the subtly shifting changes in gender relations and attitudes towards the institution of marriage in Early Modern elite society, as recent works have identified, as well as analysing the aspirations of the participants.[[4]](#footnote-4)

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In spite of her reputed piety, Maintenon’s attitude towards the sacrament of marriage was not one of unbridled enthusiasm. Of the many *Dialogues* that she wrote for her girls at Saint-Cyr, one was entitled *On the Drawbacks of Marriage*, in which one of the interlocutors, Clotilda, asserts that ‘even the best husbands tend to act like tyrants’;[[5]](#footnote-5) and with Alexandrina concluding that ‘a woman commits herself to death and slavery when she marries. There are too many examples to argue the contrary.’[[6]](#footnote-6) Echoing the likes of Christine de Pisan, Marie de Gournay and Mary Astell, Maintenon goes onto to bemoan the feebleness of public men, complaining that they are often selfish, insensitive, predatory, condescending, immoral and easily rendered despondent by misfortune. She also denounced the lack of rational female education and in 1710 lamented social mores that dressed women like dolls and as ribboned ornaments,[[7]](#footnote-7) and she therefore encouraged women to work to retain some measure of independence. But at the same time, Maintenon was no liberal. She declared that women were naturally weak and timid and thus ‘we are destined to obey all our lives’ in a state of necessary dependence, emphasizing that ‘courage is not having any fear. This kind of achievement is not for our sex. It’s acceptable for us to be afraid of ghosts, of thunder and all kinds of danger’.[[8]](#footnote-8)

Maintenon therefore embodied the classic contradiction in agreeing with many members of her sex that in accordance with Biblical strictures they must be submissive to men, who provided security and protection whether they were fathers, husbands, brothers, teachers or confessors, whilst at the same time craving a degree of independence. In consequence, many women successfully conducted aspects of their lives in stark opposition to social mores and patriarchal stereotypes that were increasingly being challenged in the seventeenth century.[[9]](#footnote-9)

Maintenon’s own appalling experiences with men perhaps explain her mixed views on gender relations and marriage. After the death of her criminally dissolute father Constant d’Aubigné (who had been imprisoned on several occasions for fraud, counterfeiting, the murder of his first wife, and plotting against Richelieu), she married the renowned playwright Paul Scarron, on 4 April 1652 as an orphaned sixteen-year-old teenager.[[10]](#footnote-10) Their marriage was allegedly consummated in an unorthodox manner because Scarron, although arthritically crippled and paralysed from the waist down, had nonetheless not lost all of his physical appetites, as revealed in the writer’s often prurient prose, but the match did enable Françoise to evade the cloister. Scarron’s tutelage also furthered Françoise’s education that had been put on a sound footing by her mother and the Protestant Villette family, in whose care Françoise had spent many of her formative years in her parents’ absence.

Young Mme Scarron was also striking as well as intelligent. During an extended eulogy in 1660 by René de Saint-Léger, sieur de Boisrond, Françoise was described as a ‘mouth-watering beauty’.[[11]](#footnote-11) This is confirmed by the infamous nude portrait purported to be Mme Scarron and supposedly commissioned by her suitor and suspected lover, Louis de Mornay, marquis de Villarceaux, who was one of the King’s huntsmen.[[12]](#footnote-12) The painting is still on display today at the château of Villarceaux, where the Scarrons spent several summers in the 1650s with Louis and his cousin, Henri de Mornay, the marquis de Montchevreuil. Henry and his wife, Marguerite Boucher d’Orsay, became lifelong friends of Françoise, whose lively intellect, arresting attractiveness and talent for conversation soon established her as a prominent and popular member of her husband’s famous ‘yellow bedroom’ salon held at their home in the Marais. It was nicknamed the ‘Hôtel de L’Impécuniosité’ because of the pension Scarron received from Anne of Austria of 1,500 *livres* from 1643.

Consequently, Françoise became a familiar figure in the most fashionable Parisian social gatherings hosted by noble, cultural and literary luminaries, who became her firm friends.[[13]](#footnote-13) These included Ninon de Lenclos, who introduced her to Villarceaux,[[14]](#footnote-14) the duc de Richelieu, the maréchal d’Albret, Mme de La Fayette and Madeleine de Scudéry.[[15]](#footnote-15) These experiences were seminal. They inadvertently helped prepare Françoise for her subsequent life at court by immersing her in a similarly distinguished and demanding aristocratic milieu, and crucially introduced her to numerous notables and contacts that would later play an important part in her career first as the King’s governess and then as his wife. Lifelong affinities were cemented with the Noailles, Gramont, Villars, Villeroy and Harcourt-Beuvron families, and friendships founded with individuals like Lamoignon de Bâville, the future Princess des Ursins, Mme de Sévigné, the adopted niece of the maréchal d’Albret, Mlle de Pons, the comte de Guiche, Mme Fouquet and also the duc de Navailles. Importantly, this brought Françoise into closer contact with her godmother, Suzanne, who was appointed *dame d’honneur* of Queen Marie-Thérèse from 1660 to 1664.[[16]](#footnote-16)

When Scarron died insolvent in 1660, Françoise’s influential friends rallied. The maréchal d’Albret, with the support of the duchesses de Navailles and de Montausier, and Mme de Motteville, successfully petitioned the Queen Mother and the *Surintendant* Fouquet to have Scarron’s pension reinstated and augmented after his death in October 1660, and from early 1661 two thousand *livres* were paid annually to the writer’s widow.[[17]](#footnote-17) Mme de Mornay-Montchevreuil employed Françoise as a housekeeper to supplement the income of the young widow, who took care of the household accounts and all of her friend’s affairs, including caring for and educating her children, whilst sustaining her own social contacts as best she could.[[18]](#footnote-18) Françoise appreciated the experience and proved herself to be an adept bookkeeper, manager and governess, which were skills that would serve her well in the future.

Mme Scarron was therefore a respected person of high social standing long before she met Louis XIV. Indeed, in June 1659, Mme Scarron declined a commission to serve Mazarin’s niece, Marie Mancini, in exile, which illustrates the extent to which her qualities were acknowledged by leading courtiers.[[19]](#footnote-19) After Scarron’s death Françoise reputedly indulged in some sort of dalliance with Villarceaux from 1661, but this was terminated in 1662 when she realized that it was compromising her reputation.[[20]](#footnote-20) From that point on Mme Scarron endeavoured always to act with greater caution and humility, binding herself to a rigid devotional Christian code of conduct characterised, perhaps unfairly in Françoise’s case, as *précieuse*, by liberals and mocked by playwrights like Molière, who was patronised by Ninon.[[21]](#footnote-21)

Françoise craved security and respectability, and to enhance her social credentials her friend Mlle de Pons in 1665 took the opportunity of the celebrations commemorating her wedding to the marquis d’Heudicourt, to present the widow Scarron at court for the first time.[[22]](#footnote-22) But Françoise was formally introduced to Louis XIV by another old friend from the Marais, Athénaïs de Rochechouart, marquise de Montespan, in the summer of 1666 at Saint-Germain-en-Laye, where she thanked the King for having renewed and supplemented her pension on 23 February 1666 to 2,700 *livres*.[[23]](#footnote-23) A few months later in June, the bishop of Laon, César d’Estrées, suggested that Mme Scarron accompany the daughter of the duc de Nemours, Marie-Françoise de Savoie, who had married King Alfonso VI of Portugal, to Lisbon as *dame d’honneur*.[[24]](#footnote-24) Françoise was overwhelmed and again declined.[[25]](#footnote-25) But this opportunity reconfirms that she had gradually risen to a degree of prominence and was a trustworthy person of discretion, who possessed talents that made her the obvious person to be entrusted by Montespan with the delicate and difficult task of looking after the illegitimate offspring that the married Athénaïs had begat with the King.

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Montespan first fell pregnant in August 1668 and Mme Scarron had initially been reluctant to take what appeared to be an unseemly commission predicated on infidelity. She only complied when commanded by the King after Montespan became pregnant again in August 1669, which is perhaps why Maintenon later reflected to her adopted ‘niece’, Mme de Caylus,[[26]](#footnote-26) that her ‘favour’ began in 1668.[[27]](#footnote-27) The marquise d’Heudicourt originally recommended the widow Scarron as a suitably qualified character, who could spirit Montespan’s progeny away from the court at St-Germain to Paris, where she would be responsible for superintending their upbringing without raising suspicion after the birth of the second bastard in March 1669.

Thus, we can discern the beginning of a conflict that Françoise would wrestle with for the rest of the King’s life — struggling to reconcile her devotion to morality with a dedication to duty, and this was first challenged in her role as secret governess. To sustain the deceit, Mme Scarron was compelled, often personally, to smuggle the new-born babies away from the court after nightfall to a secret house initially on the rue des Tournelles in Paris and then to a larger property on the rue Vaugirard in 1672 to accommodate a third child, the comte de Vexin, with a fourth, Mlle de Nantes, appearing in June 1673. As Françoise later observed, her former friend Montespan was an ‘indefatigable character’![[28]](#footnote-28) However, this was an extremely stressful vocation and in spite of Francoise’s assiduous exertions, the first child, Louise-Françoise, died shortly after moving residences in the summer of 1672. As Maintenon’s confidante and secretary, Mlle d’Aumale, later recorded in her memoirs:

When Mme de Montespan was on the point of being confined, Mme Scarron was sent for. She carried away the child, hidden under her scarf, concealed herself under a mask, took a fiacre, and returned thus to Paris, not without much fright lest the secret confided to her by the King should be discovered. She herself told us of the extraordinary distress that this charge caused her.[[29]](#footnote-29)

Covertly nurturing these children was also physically challenging, as Françoise later recounted to the girls at Saint-Cyr in October 1717:

This quite singular honour cost me infinite care and trouble; I mounted ladders to do the work of upholsterers and workmen because it was forbidden that they should enter; I did everything myself, the nurses doing nothing by hand for fear that being fatigued would spoil their milk. I often went on foot from nurse to nurse, disguised, carrying under my arm linen and meat, etc; I sometimes passed the entire night with one of the children who was ill, in a small house outside Paris, and returned in the morning to my own dwelling by a small back door, and, after dressing, took a coach which was out in front to transport me to the hôtel d’Albret or de Richelieu so that my ordinary society would perceive nothing and not even suspect that I had a secret to keep.[[30]](#footnote-30)

By 1673 no amount of elaborate tailoring could disguise Montespan’s perennial pregnancies, and Maintenon was installed at the Palace of St-Germain-en-Laye in 1674 as official governess to the children, all of whom had been legitimized in December 1673, thus elevating and glorifying the offspring and by association their guardian. Suddenly finding herself the pre-eminent figure in the d’Aubigné family, in a reversal of traditional patriarchal norms, Maintenon was now responsible for promoting what Jonathan Spangler has called the ‘matriclan’,[[31]](#footnote-31) and thus burdened with requests for financial support and favours from many family members and particularly from her irredeemably profligate brother Charles. He was showered with pensions, tax-farming concessions and even military preferments,[[32]](#footnote-32) but embarrassingly Charles continued to demand more, gambling and womanising wantonly until his death in 1703, and notoriously referring to the King as ‘my brother-in-law’ in public after his sister’s marriage in 1684.[[33]](#footnote-33)

Now that she was installed at court, how did Madame Scarron’s relationship with the King develop? Antonia Fraser has provided the most compelling account of that process to date.[[34]](#footnote-34) Her beauty would have initially attracted the King, but we know he was initially repelled by her stringent piety.[[35]](#footnote-35) However, as the children matured, the King’s interest in them increased, and also in their alluring governess. Commensurately his passion for the demanding and physically ballooning marquise de Montespan began to wane. Athénaïs’ jealousy and enmity towards Maintenon consequently intensified, as reflected in their bitterly ‘sharp disputes’, many of which were about the manner in which the children should be raised. Françoise was often reduced to tears by Montespan’s tirades.[[36]](#footnote-36) After one very lively exchange on 13 September 1674 she complained to her confessor, the abbé Gobelin, that ‘she [Montespan] is incapable of friendship’.[[37]](#footnote-37) And on 27 February 1675, she confided to him that ‘terrible things pass here between myself and Mme de Montespan’.[[38]](#footnote-38)

A critical turning point seems to have come in 1675–6 when Françoise seriously considered retiring from the her position to live alone after rejecting an unflattering offer of marriage from the ossified duc de Brancas-Villars in the summer of 1674. She was eventually dissuaded from withdrawing by the King, who showed such consideration for his governess that court commentators suspected that Montespan’s days as *maîtresse-en-titre* were numbered. Mme Scarron had for some time been considering abandoning the trials and the temptations of court life.[[39]](#footnote-39) She intimated this to Gobelin in January 1675,[[40]](#footnote-40) and then later outlined her ‘project of how I should like to act if I were no longer at court.’[[41]](#footnote-41) Two days a week would be spent visiting friends; two days at home receiving and entertaining them; and the other three devoted to visiting the poor, hospitals and prisons of the parish, with a tenth of her income dedicated to alms and the rest of her energy focused on piety.[[42]](#footnote-42)

This new lifestyle would be facilitated by the purchase of her own residence. Françoise was able to acquire the château at Maintenon and its estates on 28 December 1674, costing 250,000 *livres*, thanks to the generosity of the King. Louis had upped her salary as governess to 2,000 *écus* in March 1673,[[43]](#footnote-43) and in recognition of her accomplishments rewarded Françoise with a monetary gift of 100,000 *livres* in July 1674, and then another gratification of 100,000 *livres* in October.[[44]](#footnote-44) She had notified Gobelin in July 1674 that she was ‘extremely keen to buy an estate’,[[45]](#footnote-45) and clarified why a few months later: ‘my envy to retire has at no point altered: I am useless here’.[[46]](#footnote-46) She informed her brother that her new property was ‘fourteen leagues from Paris, ten from Versailles and four from Chartres; it is beautiful, noble and will bring in ten to eleven thousand *livres* in revenue. *Voilà une retraite*’.[[47]](#footnote-47) And in honour of her services the King also granted Françoise a noble title by erecting her estate into a marquisate.[[48]](#footnote-48) Consequently on 6 February 1675 she proudly told Charles that ‘it is true that the King has named me Madame de Maintenon.’[[49]](#footnote-49)

Montespan herself had encouraged this purchase, anxious to monopolize the King’s favour and thus eager to get Maintenon out of the way. However, the King’s feelings were clearly in flux. Françoise remained beguilingly beautiful and her capacity for companionship and engaging conversation contrasted sharply with the intensity of Louis’ relations with Montespan. Mme de Sévigné highlighted this capacity in letters to her daughter Mme de Grignan. On 26 February 1672, she reiterated that Mme Scarron’s company was ‘délicieuse’,[[50]](#footnote-50) having explained to the same correspondent on 13 January that:

I have supper every evening with Mme Scarron. She has an agreeable and marvellously sensible mind. It is a pleasure to hear her discussing the horrible disturbances of a region [the court] she knows so well, the desperation of that d’Heudicourt just when her position seemed so miraculous, the continual ravings of Lauzun, the black despondency or miserable troubles of the ladies of Saint-Germain ... It is a most interesting thing to hear her talk all about this. This discussion sometimes takes us far and wide, from one moral to another, sometimes Christian, sometimes political. [[51]](#footnote-51)

The Sun King also evidently appreciated the maternal affection lavished on his favourite bastard son, Louis-Auguste, born 31 March 1670 and created duc du Maine, whose physical infirmities demanded extra care and helped create a special bond with his governess that was bolstered by an extended trip they took together to the curative waters at Barèges in the Pyrenees in 1675. They departed in May and were away for six months, during which time du Maine’s health improved dramatically and his limp became less pronounced. As she delightedly informed her brother: ‘M. le duc du Maine is walking and although not very robustly there is hope he will walk like us; you know all the tenderness I have for him and cannot doubt that this happy success of my voyage gives me only great pleasure.’[[52]](#footnote-52) Reports on du Maine’s progress impressed the King and as Voltaire later noted: ‘her letters pleased him greatly; this was the beginning of her fortune, her own merit did the rest.’[[53]](#footnote-53) Significantly at each stage of their journey to and from Barèges, Maintenon and her charge were received and entertained ‘everywhere like the King’, with Françoise recording the magnificent welcome from the aldermen of Bordeaux as they approached the city by boat.[[54]](#footnote-54)

Maintenon’s public performance during this expedition was exemplary. It must also have raised her social profile, and this cannot have escaped the King’s attention. In her *Souvenirs* Mme de Caylus confirms that Maintenon’s favour had increased after her return from Barèges,[[55]](#footnote-55) and Mme de Sévigné observed that Maintenon’s standing had also altered considerably after her jubilant arrival at court in November 1675:

Nothing could be more agreeable than the surprise which greeted the King as he had not been expecting the duc du Maine until the following day; he entered the King’s chamber, supported only by the hand of Mme de Maintenon, which caused great transports of delight; M. de Louvois came to see the arrival of this governess; . . . she supped chez Mme de Richelieu . . . and teases us all that she has not much changed, but it is said that she has.[[56]](#footnote-56)

Over the coming months Louis spent so much time in Maintenon’s company that on 22 July 1676 Sévigné reported that ‘the ladyfriend of Mme de Montespan is more in favour than she has ever been — such favour that she has never been close to before’.[[57]](#footnote-57) This was seemingly confirmed when one month later Louis XIV dispatched his famous landscape gardener, André Le Nôtre, to the château of Maintenon to transform its grounds, prompting Sévigné to note on 26 August that ‘it is true that her favour is extreme’.[[58]](#footnote-58) Mme de Montespan retaliated by taking a restorative trip to the waters at Bourbon in May, and Sévigné duly notified Gringnan, on 29 July 1676, that she had returned much lighter and more dazzling than ever: ‘in a word a triumphant beauty to make all the ambassadors admire.’[[59]](#footnote-59)

Sévigné confirmed on 2 October that Montespan had now regained her ascendancy in the affections of the King,[[60]](#footnote-60) who since the spring had enjoyed a string of flamboyant affairs with the likes of Mme de Soubise, Mlle de Louvigny, Mlle de Rochefort-Théobon and Marie-Elizabeth de Ludres.[[61]](#footnote-61) In the same letter Sévigné also suggests that Athénaïs and Françoise had been reconciled.[[62]](#footnote-62) This had probably been encouraged by the King, who perhaps could not dispense with either at this juncture. Louis was clearly experiencing a period of psychological and emotional turmoil. This may perhaps explain why he embarked on a splurge of sexual conquests to boost his flagging confidence after his infamous failure to lead the army personally into battle on 10 May at Hurtebise near Valenciennes, a decision he was still bitterly and publicly regretting over two decades later, as witnessed by the marquis de Dangeau on 16 April 1699.[[63]](#footnote-63)

A clear manifestation of the King’s reunification with Montespan was the birth of another bastard, Mlle de Blois, who was (rather ironically) born at Maintenon on 4 May 1677. Nevertheless, Françoise refused to care for the child and instead embarked at the beginning of June on another curative trip to Barèges and Bagnères in the Pyrenees with the ailing duc du Maine, compelling the King to charge Jean-Baptiste Colbert’s wife, Marie Charron, with responsibility for the care of his remaining illegitimate progeny. For Françoise’s second voyage the retinue was even more splendid; she was personally attended by three ladies, confirming that Maintenon’s status had been further elevated.[[64]](#footnote-64) Du Maine’s entourage included an *aumônier*, six *valets de chambre* and two retainers selected by Maintenon — a personal physician,[[65]](#footnote-65) Gui-Crescent Fagon, who would later become the *premier médecin du roi*, [[66]](#footnote-66) and a preceptor, the abbé Le Ragois, who was the nephew of Maintenon’s own confessor.[[67]](#footnote-67) Unfortunately du Maine’s health deteriorated to the extent that his distraught governess warned Gobelin on 7 September that the Duke would probably not survive, and they left for the return trip to Versailles a week later on 13 September 1677.[[68]](#footnote-68)

Throughout her absence the governess was in constant contact with the court,[[69]](#footnote-69) and she would clearly have been disappointed to learn of what Sévigné on 11 June 1677 described as Montespan’s ‘triumphant’ restoration in vanquishing Mme de Ludres.[[70]](#footnote-70) The fact that Françoise was clearly disillusioned on her return to court is apparent from her correspondence, complaining to Gobelin on 25 October 1677 that she was languishing at Saint-Germain and hoped that God would ‘break these chains, if it is necessary for my salvation’.[[71]](#footnote-71) Her intention to leave the court is clearly indicated in letters from 1677–9, imploring her brother and his new wife to live more frugally since she would no longer be able to support them so generously once she exited the royal entourage. But she had long suspected that she could lose the King’s favour and her position at any moment, especially once the children had matured, which is why she had assiduously cultivated the friendship of Colbert and also Louvois opportunistically to obtain as much for her family as possible in the 1670s.

Gobelin encouraged Maintenon to remain at court, but ironically it appears that it may have been Mme de Montespan who was primarily responsible for deterring Maintenon from retiring. Athénaïs gave birth to yet another royal bastard, the comte de Toulouse, on 6 June 1678, who was also to be brought up by Mme Colbert. Montespan was therefore anxious to maintain an ally at court, who was popular with the King. Paradoxically, Maintenon was thus also a potential rival, but she was much less of sexual threat than other younger and more ambitious challengers, and was someone who was fundamentally an old friend and who, for the time being at least, would remain loyal and compassionate. Unfortunately, Louis XIV’s roving eyes soon fixated on the stunning teenager Marie-Angélique de Scorailles de Roussille de Fontanges, who had been named one of the *filles d’honneur* of Madame in October 1678.[[72]](#footnote-72)

Fontanges was described by Sévigné as ‘an astonishing beauty’[[73]](#footnote-73) and the King quickly became besotted, prompting Maintenon on 17 March 1679 to ask her confessor the abbé Gobelin to ‘pray to God for me, and pray to God for the King who is on the edge of a great precipice’.[[74]](#footnote-74) The principal casualty of Louis’ new infatuation was Mme de Montespan, whose ‘demotion’ was formalised when she was granted the same rank and privileges of a *duchesse*, awarded two pensions of six and fifteen thousand *livres* on 11 April and appointed *surintendante de la maison de la Reine* three days later to remove her from the King’s proximity. On 22 March, the marquis de Trichâteau reported to the comte de Bussy-Rabutin that Athénaïs had left Saint-Germain for Paris on the 15th in a fit of jealousy.[[75]](#footnote-75) And Montespan subsequently decamped to the château de Maintenon,[[76]](#footnote-76) whose proprietress now also resolved to quit the court for a more ‘tranquil’ existence on her estates.[[77]](#footnote-77)

To prevent this Louis XIV invented a new position in December of that year when constructing the household of the Dauphin’s future wife, installing Maintenon as second *dame d’atour* [mistress of the robes] to the new Dauphine (Marie-Anne-Christine-Victoire of Bavaria) on 7 January 1680, as applauded in the December 1679 issue of the *Mercure Galant*:

As for Mme de Maintenon, this admirable person cannot be praised too much. Never had [a] woman so good and upright a reputation. Her ancient nobility and great beauty first brought her to prominence and later her mind, sparkling with so much brilliance, turned all her acquaintances to friends and admirers. By her virtue she has kept them all . . . and has become the closest friend of the first ladies of the kingdom and conducted herself everywhere so wisely that she merits the friendship of the all the entire court, with the esteem and favour of His Majesty.[[78]](#footnote-78)

Maintenon understandably craved security and stability, but the court was, as Sévigné observed on 17 January 1680, a ‘very stormy’ place,[[79]](#footnote-79) that, as Maintenon later warned the archbishop of Paris, ‘ruins the best of men’.[[80]](#footnote-80) Nevertheless, after herself being nominated to a prestigious post at this very same court, Maintenon was now anxious to stay, informing her confessor on 8 January 1680 that ‘I am truly not able to envisage a retreat soon; it is therefore necessary that I work here on my salvation’.[[81]](#footnote-81) Why did she accept the King’s offer and what was her new agenda? Here is the hinge on which her entire transformation swung.

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Several historians, including Jean Cordelier and François Bluche, have posited that the relationship between Louis and Maintenon had been sexual since the early 1670s.[[82]](#footnote-82) This seems highly unlikely, as has been and will be shown. However, Maintenon’s new determination to remain at court close to Louis proves that an emotional attachment existed, and that her moral compass had shifted dramatically in that she was now romantically, if not yet physically, involved with the King. This new level of intimacy, combined with her prominent promotion, caused a commotion. The reaction to Maintenon’s appointment may have been overwhelmingly positive in the propagandising *Mercure*, but members of the Dauphine’s immediate entourage, like her first *dame d’atour* Mme de Rochefort and her *dame d’honneur*, Françoise’s old friend the duchesse de Richelieu, were conspicuously aggrieved by this astounding elevation of someone of relatively low birth.[[83]](#footnote-83) Many courtiers were also surprised and the Italian chronicler Primi Visconti summarised their views:

Also furious was Mme de Montespan who had hoped to recover her favour with the King entirely, bored as he was with the illness of Mme de Fontanges. The whole court was astonished at the preference made for Maintenon, an unknown person, widow of the poet Scarron ... for whom the charge of the King’s natural children would seem the summit of her fortune. However, it wasn’t long before Mme de Rochefort was honoured by her company as the King spent much time with Mme de Maintenon to the prejudice of his visits to Mme de Montespan and Mlle de Fontanges.

No one knew what to think because of her age; some regarding her as the King’s confidante, others as a go-between, others as a skilful person whom the King would use to help re-write his memoirs. It is certain that her appearance, behaviour and demeanour meant that no one quite knew with whom they were dealing. Many were of the opinion that there simply are men who have a preference for older women over younger ones.[[84]](#footnote-84)

Sourches was more circumspect:

The King therefore no longer had a mistress at the time when I commenced these memoirs, but he had given all his confidence to Mme la marquise de Maintenon, who, by her penetration, her manners and her exactitude in keeping secrets, merited the confidence that the greatest prince in the world honoured her with. He has created a charge expressly for her, having made her second *dame d’atours* of Mme la Dauphine; he has very long conversations with her every day, and this bears witness to the fact that he has for her all the consideration and friendship imaginable.[[85]](#footnote-85)

Mme de Sévigné provides a more insightful account of her old friend’s rise to a position of pre-eminence at court. Court clerics like Bossuet and Bourdaloue had been admonishing the King about his amoral private life for several years, with the former notoriously refusing the sacraments to Mme de Montespan.[[86]](#footnote-86) To counter these criticisms, Louis spent more and more time enjoying Maintenon’s irreproachable company after placing her at court.[[87]](#footnote-87) On 22 March 1680 Sévigné informed Grignan that ‘the favour of *the person with a cold* (as you’ve been calling her this winter) increases daily, as does the hatred between her and the sister of the man who received you so well [Montespan]’.[[88]](#footnote-88) Three days later, Bussy-Rabutin categorically confided to Mme de Montjeu that ‘no-one is on better terms with the King than Mme de Maintenon’.[[89]](#footnote-89) And as Sévigné verified on 6 April:

You are about to learn some news that is no longer a secret … Mme de Fontanges is a duchess with an income of 20,000 écus … Some people say that this establishment smacks of dismissal. I don’t really believe it, but time will show … Here is the present position: Mme de Montespan is out of her wits with anger. She wept a lot yesterday. You can imagine the tortures her pride is going through. It is even more outraged by the high favour of Mme de Maintenon. His Majesty often goes and spends a couple of hours after dinner in her room, chatting with a friendliness and free and easy air which makes that place the most desirable in the world.[[90]](#footnote-90)

Louis XIV clearly appreciated her qualities as an engaging and charming companion, to the continued detriment of Montespan and Fontanges.[[91]](#footnote-91) As Mme de Sévigné shrewdly remarked on 17 July 1680:

No private friend can show more regard and attention to another than the King does to her [Maintenon]: and as I have said a thousand times, she has introduced him to a new land heretofore unknown to him, which is friendly intercourse and conversation without restraint or chicanery; he seems charmed by it.[[92]](#footnote-92)

Sévigné also registered that Maintenon’s prominence made senior courtiers and officials wary of her.[[93]](#footnote-93) A letter dated 21 June 1680 underscores why:

I am told that conversations between His Majesty and Mme de Maintenon have become more frequent and more prolonged, that they last from six o’clock till ten; that the daughter-in-law [the Dauphine] sometimes pays her a short visit; that she finds them each sitting in a high-backed chair, and that as soon as the visit has finished they resume the threads of their conversation. My friend [Mme de Coulanges — Michel Le Tellier’s niece] informs me that one can no longer approach the lady without the greatest fear or respect, and that the ministers pay her court as do the others.[[94]](#footnote-94)

By the autumn of 1680 Maintenon’s triumph was seemingly assured, with Sévigné estimating on 11 September that Maintenon’s favour was ‘supreme’, and that she ‘is still at the very pinnacle of her favour’,[[95]](#footnote-95) thanks to the success of her ‘Cartesian’ conversations.[[96]](#footnote-96) But Françoise was keenly aware that this was generating flatterers and enemies in equal measure and thus mindful of the need to proceed with caution. Mme de Soubise had fallen from grace in January 1680 partly because she reputedly made excessive demands of the King.[[97]](#footnote-97)

Maintenon therefore sensibly commanded her arrogant and indiscrete brother on 6 July 1680: ‘do not speak of my favour, neither in a positive or negative way . . . the court is enraged against me’.[[98]](#footnote-98) Sévigné was concerned that Maintenon’s rivals and detractors were also mounting a campaign to ruin her reputation and credit, but she reflected rationally on 7 July 1680 that ‘my friend’s friend is the machine which conducts all: could she suppose that the world would always remain in ignorance concerning the first part of her life? And what has she to be angry at if it was not told in malice?’.[[99]](#footnote-99) Unfortunately this merely enabled malevolent tongues at court to wag even more waspishly, publicising the fact that she had already been married to a wholly disreputable and debauched *Frondeur*, and before that had been incarcerated with Ursuline nuns, who compelled her forcibly to abandon the faith of her Protestant relatives, many of whom still adhered to their heretical religion. As Primi Visconti noted: ‘Mme de Montespan and the enemies of the new favourite did all they could to trace blemishes in her past and person, as is always the case at court with new elevations.’[[100]](#footnote-100)

In order simultaneously to silence her critics and those of the King, she gained the Queen’s confidence and by August had successfully orchestrated a *rapprochement* between Louis XIV and an elated Marie-Thérèse, which was widely acknowledged.[[101]](#footnote-101) Sévigné communicated to her daughter on 28 August 1680 that:

I am informed that the Queen is very well at the court, and that the complaisance and attention she has shown in the late journey, going to visit all the fortifications and travelling everywhere without complaining of cold or heat, or any inconvenience, has gained her a thousand marks of regard and tenderness. I do not know whether the others have behaved so well.[[102]](#footnote-102)

Consequently, on 18 September 1680 Sévigné notified the same correspondent that she did:

not know which of the courtiers first let it slip: they are calling Mme de Maintenon *Mme de Maintenant* under their breath … This dame de Maintenon or de *Maintenant* spends every evening from eight until ten with His Majesty. M. de Chamarande [*premier maître d’hôtel* of the Dauphine] escorts her there and back openly in front of the whole world.[[103]](#footnote-103)

Within twenty-four months the King’s religiosity had been revived, resulting in a moral reformation at court where piety became fashionable. Contemporaries attributed this transformation to the Dauphine’s second *dame d’atour* because Louis XIV had, as the abbé de Choisy pronounced, ‘sensibly listened to the wise councils of Mme de Maintenon’.[[104]](#footnote-104) Lavallée rightly states that ‘all people of quality, the pope and the bishops applauded the victory of Mme de Maintenon and saw that she had rendered a signal service to the King and to the state’.[[105]](#footnote-105)

So even before the death of the Queen, we can surmise that Maintenon was driven by a desire to do good, even if it overrode her personal happiness, and this increased as her relationship with the King intensified. We cannot doubt that Françoise was a deeply devout and principled person, who took great ‘pleasure from seeing, at the mass, the Most Christian King’.[[106]](#footnote-106) But here a number of stereotypes need to be debunked. Maintenon was not, as often depicted, a miserable domineering puritan, or a malevolent Machiavellian plotting to mastermind the King’s affairs. But neither was she the guileless sacrificial martyr whose sole mission was to secure the King’s salvation, as Mlle d’Aumale posited in her memoirs.[[107]](#footnote-107) Philip Riley has stated that Maintenon ‘relished her new role as wife and moral tutor to “God’s most Christian King”’,[[108]](#footnote-108) and she did indeed describe herself as ‘an instrument of God’,[[109]](#footnote-109) but that was in 1705. By then the messianic mission, encouraged by mentors and confessors, had become more of a burden than a blessing, especially with a monarch whose understanding of religion was extremely ‘simple’ as Madame would conclude in 1696.[[110]](#footnote-110) As John Conley has argued, ‘Maintenon defines true glory as a species of generosity’, or more specifically ‘the glow of a politeness transformed into ardent service of the suffering other’.[[111]](#footnote-111) And in her pedagogical dialogues with the girls at Saint-Cyr, Maintenon talked about how even the King is constrained by the ‘martyrdom’ of ‘service’, and how dedicating oneself altruistically to others becomes ‘sweeter with the passage of each day’ as ‘we become loved and respected’ for it.[[112]](#footnote-112)

Conversely, Maintenon could sometimes behave in a manner confirming the conclusion reached by many contemporaries and historians that she was an obstreperous governess, but she had no desire to control the King. Maintenon acknowledged her inferior status and accepted the contemporary view that her sex was subordinate. In her educational dialogue *On The Necessity of Dependence*, she stated that ‘men very much depend on each other; women even more so; that we are actually weak and timid; that we need to be helped and protected’.[[113]](#footnote-113) Maintenon was also keenly aware that women were not permitted to intervene in public affairs, nor were consorts allowed to interfere in those of a king, as Louis made explicitly clear in his *Memoirs*:

The heart of a prince is attacked like a stronghold … A skilful woman initially sets about to eliminate whoever is not in her interests … No secret is safe with them … There is always some secret council for their advancement or for their preservation … It is in these councils that they decide which side they must take in each affair, what artifices they must use in achieving their undertakings, how to get rid of those who are in their way, how to establish their friends, by what skills to engage us more deeply and hold us more permanently. Indeed, they sooner or later achieve all these things and we sooner or later give in to them without noticing that we are losing or disenchanting our best servants and that we are ruining our reputation … We see in history so many ghastly examples of houses extinct, of thrones overthrown, of provinces devastated, of empires destroyed.[[114]](#footnote-114)

Nevertheless, Maintenon did actively strive to make the King more virtuous and felt obligated to do so, but attempted to accomplish this by persuasion and inspirational conversation rather than exhortation, as her friend the archbishop of Sens, Jean-Joseph Languet de Gergy, and author of *Mémoires sur Madame de Maintenon*, later reflected.[[115]](#footnote-115)

Not everyone welcomed this moral transformation. Madame complained in October 1687 that it had rendered life at court ‘so dull that one can hardly stand it any longer,’[[116]](#footnote-116) and she entirely blamed the ‘old whore’.[[117]](#footnote-117) Indeed, Maintenon did eagerly encourage such reforms, but she was not solely responsible for them. As Bluche has remarked, it is wrong to exaggerate the influence of *dévot* forces in precipitating rapid changes that were in fact ongoing and to a certain extent predictable.[[118]](#footnote-118) The King was now well into his fifth decade and was focusing more on his spiritual salvation than physical recreation. But that is not to say that his worldly appetites diminished. Louis XIV continued to enjoy sexual intercourse on a daily basis into his seventies and ate gluttonously until the last few weeks of his life in the summer of 1715. But an ordered life had become increasingly desirable and even more so after the court’s permanent move in 1682 to Versailles, where decorum needed to be established, as evidenced by the publication in the same year of an etiquette and conduct book, the ‘*Ceremonial*’.[[119]](#footnote-119)

A moral backlash at court and in high society was also inevitable in the 1680s, following the eruption of the infamous ‘Affair of the Poisons’ in March 1679 and the shocking revelations of sorcery and sexual indecency uncovered by d’Argenson’s special tribunal that tried 442 criminal suspects before its closure in July 1682.[[120]](#footnote-120) In consequence a purge was effected at court in June 1682 that saw several distinguished nobles expelled from Versailles in disgrace, having been found guilty of various ‘ultramontane debaucheries’ such as rape, sexual torture and homosexuality.[[121]](#footnote-121) Those involved included some of the highest ranked figures at court, notably the Grand Condé’s nephew, the prince de La Roche-sur-Yon (François-Louis de Bourbon), the prince de Turenne and the marquis de Créquy (son of the Maréchal).[[122]](#footnote-122) Several members of the Dauphin’s entourage were also banished. And the scandal reached even higher and affected the King personally when his own bastard son produced with La Vallière, the comte de Vermandois, confessed that he too had been involved in degeneracy when interrogated by his father, who sent him to fight with the French army in Flanders, where he died at the siege of Courtrai from a fatal fever on 18 November 1683, aged only sixteen.[[123]](#footnote-123)

The King therefore needed to set a moral example and now even more so as the head of an expanding royal family. The Dauphine gave birth to the King’s first grandchild, Louis, duc de Bourgogne, on 6 August 1682, followed by Philippe, duc d’Anjou, on 19 December 1683. As was traditional, Bourgogne’s delivery was witnessed by members of the royal family, plus Mme de Montespan, Maintenon and the duc du Maine, as the King had given permission for his legitimized children to be present apart from Vermandois, who was excluded much to his ‘chagrin’.[[124]](#footnote-124) Projecting a ‘Most Christian’ paternal image was therefore vital at this juncture.

At the same time, the Gallican articles were being championed, Protestantism was being eradicated within France, and Louis XIV’s own qualifications as a Christian prince were being challenged following his failure to assist in repelling the Turks from Vienna in 1683. Moralists other than Maintenon nonetheless continued to rail against impropriety, and the diarist and courtier the marquis de Dangeau noted that Père Bourdaloue used his Christmas Day sermon in 1684 again to ‘attack vice and counselled the King to exterminate it in his court’.[[125]](#footnote-125) Maintenon was therefore advancing, rather than instigating, ethical improvements at court. She also retained her keen sense of humour and fondness for gossip, as illustrated in a letter to Mme de Grignan dated 29 March 1680 from Mme de Sévigné: ‘Maintenon by a hazard made me a small visit of quarter of an hour and recounted a thousand things about the Dauphine…’[[126]](#footnote-126)

Françoise’s continuing preoccupation at court was therefore to attain respectability and an enhanced reputation, both for herself and her relations, and to consolidate her position and fortify her association with Louis XIV and Queen Marie-Thérèse. With a reconciliation between the Queen and the King effected by Maintenon, the position of first mistress was not coveted. As Lavallée astutely remarks: ‘during the years 1681, 82, 83 [the letters of] madame de Maintenon bear witness to a peace of mind in contrast with [previous missives] .... She had achieved her goal, in terms of her ambition (because was she able to predict the death of the Queen?): she had the friendship of the King, the confidence of the Queen, the esteem of *honnêtes gens*.’[[127]](#footnote-127) And as Mme de Sévigné observed: ‘the Lady is above all ... and the soul of this court.’[[128]](#footnote-128) Further proof of this came in the King’s decision in the last week of July 1682 to resolve a dispute that had blown up between the chevalier de Lorraine and the prince de Conti by interviewing, and ultimately reprimanding, the latter ‘chez Mme de Maintenon’.[[129]](#footnote-129)

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As Maintenon’s fortunes rose in the summer of 1681 her relations with the understandably envious Dauphine soured as the King was spending less and less time in her company. The Princess began to refuse the services of her second lady of the wardrobe,[[130]](#footnote-130) but the King intervened and orchestrated a *rapprochement* in September 1682.[[131]](#footnote-131) Nonetheless, the Marquise was increasingly underemployed by the Dauphine, and Maintenon therefore devoted herself to charitable and educational projects. The most successful of these was her school at Saint-Cyr, where the daughters of penurious nobles were given a religious, rational and practical programme of instruction to prepare them for married or conventual life.[[132]](#footnote-132)

Saint-Cyr would become one of the principal preoccupations of Maintenon’s life. The other was her relationship with Louis XIV. She was now to be found constantly at the King’s side and even travelled with him, the Queen, the Dauphin, Monsieur, Madame and a large party of courtiers on an extended visit to inspect garrisons, fortifications and oversee military manoeuvres in Alsace and the Franche-Comté. They left the court on 26 May 1683, without the pregnant Dauphine, and arrived back at Versailles on 20 July. This state of court harmony was shattered ten days later when incompetent ministrations by physicians d’Aquin and Fagon hastened the demise of Queen Marie-Thérèse.[[133]](#footnote-133) Cordelier suggests that Louis and Maintenon had become lovers in Flanders in the summer of 1680 and that Maintenon agreed to become his mistress in August 1681 perhaps to terminate, as Langlois conjectures, Louis XIV’s short dalliance with Mlle Doré.[[134]](#footnote-134) This seems doubtful knowing Maintenon’s sense of propriety and her friendship for the Queen. But after Marie-Thérèse’s death it is clear from the surviving letters and accounts of Maintenon’s intimates, like Mme de Caylus and Mlle d’Aumale, that the King was putting pressure on Françoise, presumably to make the relationship physical, and that she eventually agreed to surrender, but only within a state of matrimony.[[135]](#footnote-135)

With almost all evidence deliberately destroyed and no certificate extant, dating the marriage of Louis XIV and Françoise d’Aubigné is difficult.[[136]](#footnote-136) However, Maintenon’s guarded missives betray that a profound change took place in her life in the late summer and early autumn of 1683 during a retreat to Fontainebleau. She arrived on 5 August, accompanied by her longstanding servant and confidante since the 1660s, Nanon Balbien, plus Mme de Montchevreuil and at least two female attendants.[[137]](#footnote-137) Her stay was extended until the second week in October because the King had sustained injuries on 2 September after falling from his horse in what initially appeared to be a serious riding accident. Fortunately, he had merely dislocated his arm and soon recovered to the relief of courtiers and especially Maintenon, who documented her acute anxiety and admiration for the King’s bravery.[[138]](#footnote-138)

It was, nonetheless, another sharp reminder of his advancing age and mortality, with Sourches recording the previous year that the King had suffered a second debilitating attack of gout in a matter of months, but which this time rendered him ‘lame for several days’ in May 1682.[[139]](#footnote-139) Another jolt came on 6 September 1683, when Louis’ most industrious minister, Colbert, with whom he had enjoyed a close working partnership for over two decades, died from kidney stones.[[140]](#footnote-140) All of these experiences must have deeply unsettled the King, whose disquiet had been palpable when his eighty-year-old Chancellor, Michel Le Tellier, nearly succumbed to a terminal fever at the beginning of September 1682.[[141]](#footnote-141)

The King’s sling was finally removed on 28 September 1683 when Maintenon reported that he was in ‘perfect health’, and took the opportunity in the same letter to her brother to mock the false piety of Montespan’s circle, whose new passion for devotion was motivated by a desperate desire to return to favour:

I believe that the Queen asked God to convert the entire court; that of the King is admirable and those ladies that seemed the furthest from it no longer leave the churches … All our *dévotes* are not at church more often than Mme de Montespan, de Thianges, la comtesse de Gramont, la duchesse du Lude and Mme de Soubise; simple Sundays are like Easter Sundays of times gone by.[[142]](#footnote-142)

This sense of confidence and optimism was lacking from many of Maintenon’s missives from Fontainebleau in August when the horror of the Queen’s unexpected and agonizing death seemed to overwhelm both the King and his favourite. Françoise was also deeply troubled, and this was presumably exacerbated by the King’s persistence that might lead her into potentially sinful circumstances. She was therefore left questioning whether it would be proper for her to remain at court at all. A letter to her friend Marie-Madeleine de Brinon dated 6 August explained that her ‘stifling’ vapours had passed, but that her repose had not returned and that she was therefore ‘not in a good state’. Neither, she added, was the King, who had also been ill for the past two days: ‘[thus] calculate my concerns.’ However, the following day she famously informed her brother that ‘the reason which prevents me from seeing you is so beneficial and so glorious that you could only feel joyful about it’.[[143]](#footnote-143)

Mme de Caylus alleges in her *Souvenirs* that it was shortly after the Queen’s demise that the Master of the Hunt, François, duc de La Rochefoucauld, advised Maintenon that this was ‘not the time to abandon the King, as he has need of you’.[[144]](#footnote-144) Presumably Louis then personally persuaded her to stay, either by agreeing to become engaged, or simply promising to marry her as soon as they had returned to Versailles. Mlle d’Aumale later recorded that she had no doubt that Maintenon was the King’s secret wife, and that modesty prevented her mistress from wanting the marriage to be made public. On the one occasion when they did discuss the subject, the Marquise confirmed that this sometimes made her life at court ‘disagreeable’, but notably elucidated that she did ‘not think I am taken for the mistress of the King’.[[145]](#footnote-145) And the match was not arranged solely to clear Françoise’s conscience. On 12 August Maintenon had urged Mme de Brinon not to tire of praying for the King, who had ‘more need of grace than ever to withstand a condition contrary to his inclinations and to his habits’.[[146]](#footnote-146) Whereas Maintenon was now intending to ‘focus more than ever on securing my salvation’ as she was returning to her ‘natural self’, despite ongoing bouts of insomnia.[[147]](#footnote-147)

How long Maintenon managed to resist the King’s enticements is a moot point, but courtiers and onlookers quickly detected that their relationship had altered. On 10 August, a number of items that the Pope had intended as gifts for the Queen, including the relics of St. Candide, a gold medal, a lapis lazuli crown for a statue of the Virgin and an *Agnus Dei*, were instead conveyed to Mme de Maintenon.[[148]](#footnote-148) And she told Brinon eight days later that she had been so overwhelmed with letters and visitors since the Queen’s death that she had ‘not had time to breathe’, and that she was composing the letter whilst suffering from ‘one of the worst migraines I have ever had’.[[149]](#footnote-149) Evidently distressed and in need of guidance, Maintenon had sent for her confessor, who arrived on the 18th, but she was not able to spare even Gobelin enough time to divulge her true feelings, as she later admitted.[[150]](#footnote-150)

Maintenon defensively, and more insightfully, notified Brinon on 22 August that she had wanted:

with all my heart to hide the present I have received from Rome, because I am so glorified in this world by certain good intentions that are willed by God that I have reason to fear being humiliated and confounded in the next … There is nothing to answer on the point about Louis and Françoise — these are *folies*.”[[151]](#footnote-151)

But a few lines later Maintenon intriguingly added that ‘I would merely like to know why she would not want to’, hinting unmistakeably at matrimonial plans.[[152]](#footnote-152) Rumours that a marriage had taken place, or would be celebrated soon, were already circulating in Paris, as reported by Mlle de Scudéry, from whom Brinon was told to extract all relevant information ‘good and bad’.[[153]](#footnote-153)

Maintenon may have informed her brother on 7 September that ‘we trembled for the King’ following his equestrian accident, but once it had then been established that Louis’ health was not imperilled feelings of contentment and serenity can be discerned in this and subsequent letters, confiding to Charles a few lines later that ‘I am becoming an old woman, very relaxed and very mild’.[[154]](#footnote-154) Evidently Louis had successfully proposed by that date. A communication to Gobelin on 19 September 1683 is more revealing and refers back to their botched meeting the month previously:

I have had the vapours and all that I have suffered has, for some time, troubled my health a little … I greatly regret the last visit that you made. The time was badly employed and you could only sense a proportion of my agitations. They are finished, at least in appearances, and I am in a state of peace from which I shall take more pleasure speaking to you about than the troubles that we have shared.[[155]](#footnote-155)

A letter to her brother on the same day again reveals a tenderness and warmth invariably missing from their exchanges and concludes that she really would like to know that he was happy and loved him ‘more than my aridity permits me to express’.[[156]](#footnote-156)

Multiple mentions in letters around this time of employing the services of the King’s premier valet and confidant, Bontemps, also underscores the extent to which her affinity with the Louis had deepened.[[157]](#footnote-157) Further proof of this new partnership is evidenced in missives that the King instructed Maintenon to compose on his behalf in response to communications addressed to him. For example, after the Queen’s passing, the marquise d’Huxelles had sent her compliments and condolences to the King and to Maintenon, who was honoured and replied on 13 September that ‘the King has commanded me to thank you’.[[158]](#footnote-158) And on 25 September Maintenon notified Montchevreuil, who was supervising the King’s son Vermandois at the siege of Courtrai:

The King has received your letter and ordered me to reply, on his behalf, that he is very pleased that you are happy with M. de Vermandois and exhorts you to make him profit from all that he beholds. I also rendered him an account of the letter you sent to Mme de Montchevreuil, in which you remark that he takes notice of his officers and makes himself beloved by them. This pleases the King, who has charged me to inform you to make, thereupon, all the expenses that you judge appropriate. You are therefore authorised, in whichever way pleases you, and according to your taste, to see your Prince take up his *métier* and to live amongst men. That is better for him than the garden of Diana, and I implore you to tell him, on my behalf, that in order to be able to jest without shame, it is necessary to show that one is capable of more serious things. Add to this little remark one from the governess: all the respectful compliments I owe him....[[159]](#footnote-159)

Vermandois had tellingly decided to write an ingratiating letter to Maintenon from Flanders in mid-September to court her favour and that of the King. The Marquise responded on the 23rd, assuring him that Louis had nothing but praise for his conduct, and advising that in order to continue to warrant it the Prince should know ‘not to have too much deference for advice that he gives you in private to profit from in public’.[[160]](#footnote-160) Accordingly royal family members, courtiers and petitioners from that moment on recognized that Maintenon was now the most effective conduit to the King, as she was now his consort in all but name and the matriarch of Versailles.

Fraser is therefore right to contend that this extended period together at Fontainebleau away from the more formal and crowded court at Versailles forced Louis to reflect on his feelings for Françoise,[[161]](#footnote-161) and finally to determine on a new future for them both. Clearly a date for the wedding had not been set as Maintenon was still ruminating on 19 September whether they would remain at Fontainebleau for a further three weeks, or travel to Chambord or preferably Versailles, although it transpired that the palace was not yet ready for the residence of the court at Christmas, but would be by the end of the month.[[162]](#footnote-162) Consequently the Dauphine was the first of the royal entourage to journey there on 6 October, followed on the 9th by a coach carrying the princesse de Conti, Madame, Monseigneur (the Dauphin), the King and Mme de Maintenon.

Historians like Langlois have therefore identified Maintenon’s letter to Mme de Brinon dated 11 October as proof that the secret marriage took place the night before in the King’s Chapel at Versailles.[[163]](#footnote-163) In this dispatch Maintenon apologises for not having had the time to meet with Marie, or ‘even to recognise herself’, and that the opportunity to put pen to paper had been snatched from much needed moments of rest, or rare instances when the King, now referred to as *on*, was not in her chamber.[[164]](#footnote-164) This date seems plausible and Languet de Gergy, who was the brother of Maintenon’s confessor from 1709, Jean-Baptiste-Joseph, records that he was informed by the archbishop of Narbonne that the wedding was carried out in the presence of the archbishop of Paris, François de Harlay de Champvallon, who gave the blessing, and the premier valet Bontemps. The nuptial mass was celebrated by the King’s confessor, Père La Chaise, who was allegedly wearing a green stole,[[165]](#footnote-165) denoting that the ceremony took place before Advent and was most probably enacted on Saturday 9 October, late at night to maximize confidentiality. Languet adds that Louvois and M. de Montchevreuil were also witnesses to the marriage, as claimed also by Mlle d’Aumale,[[166]](#footnote-166) and Caylus suggests that Mme de Montchevreuil was also present.[[167]](#footnote-167) Her husband, however, would have had to dash back with severe gout over 170 miles from Flanders to attend the service, temporarily abandoning his increasingly unwell young charge, Vermandois, and the siege of Courtrai, which was captured on 6 November. Moreover, Maintenon reported that Montchevreuil in fact arrived back in Paris from the front on 2 December and that she intended to dine with him at Versailles two days later.[[168]](#footnote-168)

The marriage was never declared in public and no documentation exists to authenticate it, although it would evidently have been a ‘morganatic’ contract, thus nullifying any claims that the spouse and her family and potential offspring might make. Physical proof that a secret marriage had taken place manifested itself with the establishment at Noisy in February 1684 of an enlarged version of the school Maintenon had set up at Reuil with Mme de Brinon in 1682.[[169]](#footnote-169) However, the King in council in August 1684 decided to expand the project further, spending 1.4 million *livres* constructing a grandiose academy for 250 girls at Saint-Cyr, which opened as the *Maison-Royale de Saint-Louis* in August 1686.[[170]](#footnote-170) The reconfiguration of the layout of Versailles also signalled that Maintenon’s standing had dramatically altered. Starting in May, Mansart oversaw the expansion and redesign of the Marquise’s suite of apartments located at the top of the Queen’s staircase, where she was installed on 5 December 1684.[[171]](#footnote-171) They were connected to the new chambers of the King, who had taken Montespan’s rooms and joined them to his *petit appartement* (consisting of a gallery and two salons to be repainted by Mignard) via the *Vestibule* or *Salon de l’escalier de la reine* that adjoined the *Salle des gardes pour le roi*.[[172]](#footnote-172)

Subtle inferences hinting that Louis had indeed married Françoise can also be detected in Maintenon’s correspondence. For example, Mme de Brinon was reprimanded by Maintenon in November 1683 and a nun, Mme de Bonnevault, was removed from Reuil on the King’s orders a month later, because both were found guilty of gossiping indiscreetly about the clandestine wedding.[[173]](#footnote-173) Maintenon confessed to Brinon that she had helped to obtain the gift that the King awarded to Montchevreuil on 7 December of 20,000 *écus* to augment his existing pension of 16,000 *livres*.[[174]](#footnote-174) And on 6 January 1684 Maintenon confided to Gobelin that she would have to terminate her letter as the King had continued to talk to her throughout its composition triggering a headache, and thus reinforcing the impression that Louis was almost constantly to be found in the company of his consort as her apartments became the court’s second most important location.[[175]](#footnote-175)

More revealingly, on 18 June 1684, Maintenon warned her brother not to move from Cognac to Paris in an attempt to foster closer connections with his sister, who pointed out it would be ‘bizarre’ as their stations were now profoundly different. She thus counselled Charles to continue to lead a more simple life, whereas hers at court was, by contrast, ‘brilliant’, as she immodestly admitted, but immediately then emphasised that she had not sought this elevation, which had been orchestrated by God.[[176]](#footnote-176) Lavallée contends that this communication demonstrates that the secret marriage took place in the same month,[[177]](#footnote-177) but her description of the court on 24 June as ‘extremely gay and beautiful’ suggests that by then she had already relaxed into her role as an established figure at Versailles beside the King.[[178]](#footnote-178)

Both Maintenon and the King nevertheless continued publicly to employ elaborate ruses to refute suspicions that they had married, and maintained the mystery with some degree of success. After the death of the duchesse de Richelieu on 27 May 1684, Louis XIV offered Maintenon her post of *dame d’honneur* to the Dauphine, which unsurprisingly she refused ‘very generously and very nobly’, as Dangeau recorded.[[179]](#footnote-179) Instead, Françoise’s old friend from the Marais, the duchesse d’Arpajon, sister of the marquis de Beuvron, was appointed *dame d’honneur* on 11 June thanks to Maintenon.[[180]](#footnote-180) On Sunday 13 August 1684 Dangeau witnessed the King admit at supper that, having adjudicated a matrimonial dispute, his council had decided unanimously that second marriages were ‘ill-fated’. But when a *conseiller d’état* suggested that this applied only to private individuals, Louis countered that ‘there are great inconveniences for all sorts of people, without exception’.[[181]](#footnote-181) And in February 1685 the marquis de Sourches registered that ‘great rumours are circulating about the marriage of the King to the Infanta of Portugal, and they say that it was Mme de Maintenon who wanted them to succeed; but all these things are very uncertain, although the son of M. de Croissy [the Foreign Minister] has still not returned from Portugal’.[[182]](#footnote-182)

This smokescreen merely fuelled speculation in the public domain, as this contemporary rhyme attests:

The King to Marly does withdraw,

A husband now and lover no more.

He does what he must at his age;

It is the old soldier’s destiny.

In retiring to the village,

To marry the old local hussy. [[183]](#footnote-183)

Even foreign visitors witnessed that Maintenon was treated regally. An Englishman travelling through France in 1684–5, Ellis Veryard, recorded on his visit to Versailles that:

We have had here a sight of the famous Madam de Maintenon. The people fancy her married to the King but on what grounds I know not. Her age and features are not so charming; but her parts are so very extraordinary that she passes for the wisest of her sex. She is widow to the late ingenious Mons. Scarron. She lives at court, and when she goes abroad, has the King’s equipage and attendants.[[184]](#footnote-184)

Moreover, French courtiers were aware that she was uniquely allowed to sit in an armchair in the royal presence, a favour which infuriated Madame, who was only allowed to perch on a *tabouret* even in her exalted position as the first lady of the court.[[185]](#footnote-185) No wonder Madame was still wondering in 1688 about whether the wedding had actually occurred.[[186]](#footnote-186)

Only a handful of hints in communications exchanged between Maintenon and the bishop of Chartres, Paul Godet des Marais, her confessor from 1689 until his death in 1709, confirm that Louis and Françoise were espoused. The most notorious example appears in a letter written to Louis XIV in the first years of the eighteenth century, when the Bishop referred to Françoise as ‘a woman occupied with the glory of her husband’.[[187]](#footnote-187) Moreover, many of Godet’s better-known directives outline the duties and obligations that, he insists, Maintenon must carry out to support the King and that very much reflected the burdens traditionally borne by dedicated wives. In November 1704, he reminded Maintenon that ‘you are his sanctuary; your room is his domestic church, where God retreats imperceptibly to support and sanctify him’.[[188]](#footnote-188) And on 6 March 1708, Godet more sympathetically conceded that ‘you love someone that you must love; it has become the most harsh cross that you bear and your sentiments are completely different’.[[189]](#footnote-189)

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Why then did Maintenon decide to marry? Antonia Fraser has contended that Maintenon ‘specialized in tender friendship in which passion played no part’,[[190]](#footnote-190) and this may, on the whole, be true. She was evidently flattered by the King’s courtship, but her knowledge of romance and sexual relations, however inadequate, had come from her first husband, her friends from the Marais salons, and romantic novels like *Clélie* that explored the perils of love, desire and arranged marriages,[[191]](#footnote-191) composed in the 1650s by her old friend Madeleine de Scudéry. Indeed, Scudéry supposedly based the character of ‘Lyrianne’ in volume two on the young Mme Scarron herself.[[192]](#footnote-192) One historian has contended that moments of carnal intimacy with the disabled Paul Scarron had left her ‘disgusted’ by sex.[[193]](#footnote-193) But young Françoise’s curiosity must have endured. And as a close acquaintance of Ninon de Lenclos, we may conjecture that in early widowhood she must have engaged in some form of erotic activity with Villarceaux,[[194]](#footnote-194) but regretted it subsequently and thenceforth strove to make herself impervious to the vagaries of excessive passions.[[195]](#footnote-195) As a consequence Maintenon was understandably apprehensive about the act of intercourse, possibly for the first time, with the King, of all people, and dreaded as well the prospect of committing extramarital sin. Hence her need for sacramental reassurance before discharging her nuptial duties. D’Aumale recorded the advice on coition given by Maintenon’s confessor, Godet, who explained that it was a conjugal obligation to indulge the King to prevent infidelity: ‘the faithful wife sanctifies the faithful man, as St. Paul says. How much more the Christian man!’[[196]](#footnote-196)

But how did Maintenon manage to convince the King to take the extraordinary step of marrying his mistress, instead of forging a favourable dynastic alliance with a European princess? With the Bourbon succession seemingly assured (with three grandsons produced by 1686), Louis could now choose a more mature partner, who could fulfil his multifaceted needs. And of course, Maintenon had many appealing attributes. Languet describes Françoise as a prudent, faithful, charitable, generous, altruistic and virtuous individual with a ‘noble heart’.[[197]](#footnote-197) She was also a highly intelligent and handsome companion, a stimulating conversationalist and a dependable confidante. The strength of her relationship with Louis was therefore very much founded on friendship, and the ability to cultivate this successfully was widely esteemed, with Mme de Sévigné recording that this was the talent of which Maintenon was most proud.[[198]](#footnote-198)

Nevertheless, it is clear that sex also played an important part in their marriage, for the King at least. As historians have emphasised, Maintenon retained her sexual appeal and was physically ‘vibrant’.[[199]](#footnote-199) Mignard’s portrait of 1691 depicts a ‘nubile, Rubenesque woman’[[200]](#footnote-200) in her mid-fifties with a shapely body that had not been ravaged by childbirth or gluttony.[[201]](#footnote-201) It is clear that Louis XIV needed regularly to be satisfied sexually, and Maintenon reluctantly acquiesced, but he also wanted a monogamous marriage. Despite his reputation as a philanderer, Mlle d’Aumale observed years later that the King would have remained faithful during the lifetime of the Queen had he married a ‘femme raissonable’.[[202]](#footnote-202) The argument that Louis XIV also needed a matriarchal figure to assist in managing the boisterous young royal family is also compelling, as is the notion that Mme de Maintenon was to a certain extent comparable with the King’s mother, Anne of Austria. She was therefore compatible with the King because of her sense of dignity, probity and unswerving devotion and loyalty. But the role of consort proved to be far more demanding than Françoise originally envisaged.[[203]](#footnote-203)

Writing after her retirement from the court following Louis XIV’s death on 1 September 1715, Maintenon warned the blue class of girls aged 17-20 years about the apparent attractions *Of the Single Life*:

My children, your teacher would like me to speak to you about the single life. Apparently, most of you are enthusiastic about this state in life because you could then avoid the restrictions of marriage and the vowed commitments of the cloister. This view is just not reasonable. There is no state in life where you can avoid the state of dependence that God wants to restrict to persons of our sex. This neutral state, which you call the single life, is actually the most dangerous states. You must take the greatest precautions to avoid losing your reputation in it….

However, in the next breath she pragmatically cautioned that she would ‘never advise you to enter into a bad marriage or marry someone as impoverished as you are’.[[204]](#footnote-204) Maintenon’s marriage to the Sun King had not been without its compensations, but it increasingly became a strenuous ordeal from which she was only occasionally able to escape to Saint-Cyr. Even there she was hounded by petitioners, princes, ministers, bishops and representatives from Rome, all desirous that she exert in their favour an influence that had been conferred by her proximity to the King. Had the wedding been publicly celebrated or acknowledged, Maintenon’s career as queen at Versailles would have been far less taxing, with clearly delineated duties and responsibilities for her to discharge and rituals to perform. As a clandestine consort, there were no clear limitations restricting Maintenon’s activities, apart from the hostility of the court and the initial reluctance of the King to allow women into his private affairs, and these had been overcome by 1699.

As the King aged, and numerous tragedies struck the royal family and the kingdom, Maintenon stoically shouldered these burdens and maintained Louis XIV’s majesty in adversity, whilst compromising her own health and private life. As her confessor, Godet des Marais pointed out in March 1708, “you occupy the place of a queen, but you have only the liberty of a *petite-bourgeoise*.”[[205]](#footnote-205) Nevertheless, she did hold the King in great affection and this was conspicuously reciprocated by the deferential way he treated her in public.[[206]](#footnote-206) Louis’ personal feelings are perhaps more intimately revealed in the locket he wore around his neck for the rest of his life containing a miniature of Françoise, now on display at the château de Maintenon,[[207]](#footnote-207) and the warm personal messages he sent to her, a dozen or so of which have survived. These *billets du roi*, much like modern text messages, are short notelets numbering a handful of lines composed to orchestrate assignations and convey the latest news, often from theatres of war where Maintenon’s relatives were in action. But several are also written in exasperation from council meetings that the King complains have gone on much longer than expected, compelling him to suggest a new rendezvous where he hopes they might meet as it would give him ‘great pleasure’.[[208]](#footnote-208)

It became an almost unparalleled partnership. As Madame de Sévigné astutely observed in a letter dated 27 September 1684: ‘the place of Mme de Maintenon is unique in the world; there has never been one like it, nor will there be again.’[[209]](#footnote-209) Did she love Louis XIV? It is difficult to say, but I would suggest that she loved the King and not the husband because, ultimately, God came first. And she evidently found physical love distasteful, especially when elderly, aged seventy, she still had to yield to the King twice-a-day and complained in vain to her confessor Godet des Marais in 1705 about ‘these painful occasions’.[[210]](#footnote-210) Louis, it seems, never lost the habits of an old soldier, whose demands were commensurately primal. As the years wore on these relentless sexual encounters were increasingly bereft of any pleasure for Maintenon, compounding her sense of guilt and to an extent justifying her dispassionate nature. As Sophie comments in one of Maintenon’s dialogues *On Piety*: ‘Everything that pleases us is bad. We should never let ourselves succumb to it. We have to keep rowing all our lives.’[[211]](#footnote-211) This feat of navigation was presumably to be conducted on the seas of danger and enmity as depicted on the famous allegorical *Map of Tenderness* depicted in Scudery’s novel *Clélie*.[[212]](#footnote-212)

After the King’s death, Maintenon reflected on the nature of her challenging relationship with Louis XIV in a series of confidential conversations with her favourite superior at Saint-Cyr, Mme de Glapion, who transcribed many of them. In one Maintenon declared: ‘what martyrdom I endured; whilst everyone thought me the happiest woman on earth, the very contrary was true.’[[213]](#footnote-213) She went on to explain that ‘it is true that he loved me more than anyone, but only as far as he was capable of loving. For men, when they are not feeling physical passion, have very little capacity for tenderness’.[[214]](#footnote-214) The first eight-year marriage to an older, severely disabled but celebrated writer gave Françoise d’Aubigné an excellent network of eminent contacts and experience of Parisian elite society that would prepare her well for life at court, but her knowledge of romance remained extremely limited. Her second marriage was therefore an acutely steep learning curve. Maintenon ruminated on this exceptional experience in an undated dialogue with the pupils at Saint-Cyr entitled *On Privilege*, the conclusion of which encapsulates the author’s philosophy:

**Claire:** But what about this Prince who so loves you that he has given you honours far greater than those given to other subjects? Isn’t he delighted to give you any pleasure you want?

**The Lady:** This Prince thinks that my only pleasure lies in seeing him & being loved by him.

**Clementina:** What? Without giving you any other sign of his friendship?

**The Lady:** Princes are spoiled from their childhood. As soon as they begin to hear they are told that the greatest possible happiness is just to see them. They build their ideas on this principle. And that’s how they then form their philosophy and their conduct.

**Aurora:** I’m beginning to understand that the quickest way to happiness is to abandon everything in order to attach oneself to oneself to these princes. Then one can acquire happiness by having a share in their greatness.

**The Lady:** But you must add that you must then share all their evils. You will suffer from their defects and their changing moods. You must be interested in only what interests them.

**Lucy:** In that case perhaps they’re not so likeable after all.

**The Lady:** There is nothing so cruel as to sacrifice your life, your work, and your time for someone whom you don’t really love….

**Claire:** What’s the remedy for such a grim situation?

**The Lady:** The unique and universal remedy is devout piety.[[215]](#footnote-215)

Marrying the King meant that Françoise had attained the highest social position she could hope to achieve, but at a price. Instead of enjoying independence in widowhood, like her great friend Mme de Sévigné, she instead opted to enter into a prestigious but onerous union. As the romance faded, Maintenon dutifully subordinated herself to the King’s service, and thus wedded herself to a sacred compact designed to ensure Louis XIV’s health and happiness in his lifetime, and which she hoped, more importantly, would secure it beyond his death.

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2. E. Forster (ed.), *A Woman’s Life in the Court of the Sun King — Letters of Liselotte von der Pfalz, Elisabeth Charlotte, duchesse d’Orléans, 1652–1722* (Baltimore, 1997), p. 53. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. M. Kroll (ed.), *Letters from Liselotte* (London, 1998), p. 55. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
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5. J. J. Conley (ed. and trans.), *Madame de Maintenon: Dialogues and Addresses* (Chicago, 2004), p. 63. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. *Ibid*., p. 65. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. *Ibid*., p. 122. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. *Ibid*., p. 37. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. See J. J. Conley, *The Suspicion of Virtue: Women Philosophers in Neoclassical France* (Ithaca, 2002), p. 155. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. See A. de Boislisle, *Paul Scarron et Françoise d’Aubigné d’après des documents nouveaux* (Paris, 1894). [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. J.-P. Desprat, *Mme de Maintenon, ou la Prix de la Réputation* (Paris, 2003), p. 101; M. Cruttwell, *Mme de Maintenon* (London, 1930), p. 56. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Louis de Mornay was later appointed Lieutenant-Captain in the Dauphin’s light horse: H. Bots and E. Bots-Estourgie (eds), *Lettres de Madame de Maintenon [et] à Mme de Maintenon*, 10 vols (Paris, 2009–17), vol. I, p. 97. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. F. E. Beasley, *Salons, History, and the Creation of 17th-Century France: Mastering Memory* (Aldershot, 2006); A. E.Duggan, *Salonnières, Furies, and Fairies: The Politics of Gender and Cultural Change in Absolutist Fran*ce (Newark, 2005);C. C.Lougee, *Le Paradis des Femmes — Women, Salons, and Social Stratification in Seventeenth-Century France* (Princeton, 1976). [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. See a letter from Ninon to Mme Scarron dated 4 July 1662, in which she alludes to the troubled relationship between Françoise and Villarceaux and the scandalous painting, which Lenclos thought was ‘charming’ and not something to worry about excessively: Bots, *Lettres*, vol. VIII, pp. 57-8. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. G. Mongrédien, *Madeleine de Scudéry et son salon* (Paris, 1946); A. Niderst, *Madeleine de Scudéry, Paul Pelission et leur monde* (Paris, 1976). [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. A. Geffroy (ed*.*), *Mme de Maintenon d’après sa correspondance authentique, choix de ses lettres et entretiens*, 2 vols (Paris, 1887), vol. I, pp. 8-9. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. See M. Langlois, *Mme de Maintenon* (Paris, 1932), p. 17; and M. Langlois (ed.), *Mme de Maintenon: Lettres*, 5 vols (Paris, 1935-9) vol. II, pp. 26-8; and Boislisle, *Scarron*, pp. 125-6. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Geffroy, *Correspondance authentique*, vol. I, p. 21-2. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Boislisle, *Scarron*, pp. 84-5. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. For more see a missive from Ninon to Mme Scarron on 3 June 1662: Bots, *Lettres*, pp. 55-6. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. See M. Dufour-Maître, *Les Précieuses: Naissance des femmes de lettres en France au XVIIe siècle* (Paris, 2008). [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. T. Lavallée (ed.), *Lettres historiques et édifiantes adressées aux dames de Saint-Louis par Mme de Maintenon*, 2 vols (Paris, 1856), vol. II, p. 460. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Following Anne of Austria’s death on 20 January: Boislisle, *Scarron*, p. 132. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Boislisle, *Scarron*, p. 133; Desprat, *Maintenon*, pp. 120-1. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. Caylus, *Souvenirs*, pp. 17-18. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. Marthe-Marguerite, daughter of Françoise’s cousin, Philippe de Villette-Mursay. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. Geffroy, *Correspondance authentique*, vol. I, p. 32. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. *Ibid*., p. 33. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. Comte de Haussonville and G. Hanotaux (eds), *Souvenirs sur Mme de Maintenon: Mémoires et Lettres Inédites de Mlle d’Aumale*, 3 vols (Paris, 1902-5), vol. I: *Mémoire sur Mme de Maintenon*, pp. 54-5. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. Lavallée, *Lettres historiques*, vol. II, p. 461-2. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. See his *The Society of Princes: the Lorraine-Guise and the Conservation of Power and Wealth in Seventeenth-Century France* (Farnham, 2009), chap. 4. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. On this see my forthcoming book, *Queen of Versailles and First Lady of Louis XIV’s France: Mme de Maintenon, 1635–1715* (McGill Queen’s Press), chap. 2. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. L. Norton (ed.), *Memoirs of the Duc de Saint-Simon, 1691–1723*, 3 vols (London, 1999–2000), vol. I, pp. 93-5. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. A. Fraser, *Love and Louis XIV* (London, 2006)*,* pp. 138-207. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. E. Raunié (ed.), *Souvenirs et Correspondence de Madame de Caylus* (Paris, 1881), pp. 52-3. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. Geffroy, *Correspondance authentique*, vol. I, p. 48; Françoise complained in October 1674 to her confessor Gobelin that these exchanges left her ‘overwhelmed by melancholy . . . the situation I find myself in is one full of agitation and nothing is able to put me at my ease’ (Langlois, *Mme de Maintenon: Lettres*, vol. II, p. 107). [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. Geffroy, *Correspondance authentique*, vol. I, p. 48. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. Langlois, *Mme de Maintenon: Lettres*, vol. II, p. 119. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. For example, see the letters to Gobelin on this subject in March 1674 (Geffroy, *Correspondance authentique*, vol. I, pp. 38-9); on 24 July 1674 and 27 March and 30 March 1675 (*Langlois, Mme de Maintenon: Lettres*, vol. II, pp. 87-8, 164-5). See also an *Entretien* of 1717 reflecting on this period (Geffroy, *Correspondance authentique*, vol. I, p. 33). [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. T. Lavallée (ed.), *Correspondance générale de Mme de Maintenon*, 5 vols (Paris, 1865–7), vol. I, p. 247. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. Langlois, *Mme de Maintenon: Lettres*, vol. II, p. 166. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. Lavallée, *Correspondance Générale*, vol. I, pp. 258-60. [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. Boislisle, *Scarron*, p. 148. [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. Bots, *Lettres*, vol. I, pp. 141, 155-56. [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. Geffroy, *Correspondance authentique*, vol. I, p. 41. [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. Geffroy, *Correspondance authentique*, vol. I, p. 53. [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. Langlois, *Mme de Maintenon: Lettres*, vol. II, p. 110. [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
48. The purchase of additional lands expanding the estate meant that the *seigneurie* was redefined with new letters patent drawn up in 1686 and registered in 1688; see Boislisle, *Scarron*, pp. 174-5 and Langlois, *Maintenon*, p. 30. [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
49. Langlois, *Mme de Maintenon: Lettres*, vol. II, p. 118. [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
50. M. Monmerqué (ed.), *Lettres de Mme de Sévigné*, 14 vols (Paris, 1862–8), vol. II, p. 514. [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
51. L. Tancock (ed. and trans.), *Mme de Sévigné: Selected Letters* (London, 1982), p. 116. [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
52. Geffroy, *Correspondance authentique*, vol. I, pp. 73-4: 16 October 1675. [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
53. M. P. Pollack(trans.), *The Age of Louis XIV* (London, 1926), p. 298. [↑](#footnote-ref-53)
54. Lavallée, *Correspondance générale*, vol. I, p. 275. [↑](#footnote-ref-54)
55. Caylus, *Souvenirs*, p. 50. [↑](#footnote-ref-55)
56. Sévigné to Mme de Grignan, 10 November 1675: *Lettres*, vol. IV, pp. 223-4. [↑](#footnote-ref-56)
57. Sévigné, *Lettres*, vol. IV, pp. 535-6. [↑](#footnote-ref-57)
58. *Ibid.*, vol. V, pp. 32, 37-8. [↑](#footnote-ref-58)
59. Sévigné, *Selected Letters*, p. 203. [↑](#footnote-ref-59)
60. Sévigné, *Lettres*, vol. V, p. 86. [↑](#footnote-ref-60)
61. Langlois, *Mme de Maintenon: Lettres*, vol. II, p. 167, n. 100. [↑](#footnote-ref-61)
62. Sévigné, *Lettres*, vol. V, pp. 86-7. [↑](#footnote-ref-62)
63. Dangeau, Philippe de Courcillon, marquis de, *Journal de la cour de Louis XIV*, ed. E. de Soulié, 19 vols (Paris, 1854–60), vol. VII, p. 66. [↑](#footnote-ref-63)
64. Langlois, *Mme de Maintenon: Lettres*, vol. II, p. 200. [↑](#footnote-ref-64)
65. Sévigné, *Lettres*, vol. IV, pp. 445-6, n. 2. [↑](#footnote-ref-65)
66. In 1693. His great uncle Henri was the *médecin ordinaire* of Louis XIII. In 1680 Fagon became *Premier médecin de la dauphine*, then for Queen Marie-Thérèse and the *enfants de France*, and in 1693 was appointed *premier médecin du roi*. [↑](#footnote-ref-66)
67. Lavallée, *Correspondance générale*, vol. I, p. 202, n. 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-67)
68. Geffroy, *Correspondance authentique*, vol. I, p. 88. [↑](#footnote-ref-68)
69. See Langlois, *Mme de Maintenon: Lettres*, vol. II, pp. 253-7; and see Lavallée, *Correspondance générale*, vol. I, pp. 346-53. [↑](#footnote-ref-69)
70. Sévigné, *Lettres*, vol. V, p. 170. [↑](#footnote-ref-70)
71. Lavallée*, Correspondance générale*, vol. I, p. 355-6, p. 356, n. 1. [↑](#footnote-ref-71)
72. D. Van der Crussye, *Madame Palatine, Princess Européenne* (Paris, 1988), p. 219. [↑](#footnote-ref-72)
73. Sévigné, *Lettres*, vol. VI, p. 317. [↑](#footnote-ref-73)
74. Langlois, *Mme de Maintenon: Lettres*, vol. II, p. 302. [↑](#footnote-ref-74)
75. Lavallée, *Correspondance générale.*, vol. II, p. 48. [↑](#footnote-ref-75)
76. Langlois, *Mme de Maintenon: Lettres*, vol. II, p. 303. [↑](#footnote-ref-76)
77. As Mme de Caylus recalls in her *Souvenirs*, pp. 50-1; also see the Duc de Noailles, *Histoire de Mme de Maintenon*, 4 vols (Paris, 1848–52), vol. I, p. 520. [↑](#footnote-ref-77)
78. Quoted in Noailles, *Maintenon*, vol. II, p. 11, n. 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-78)
79. Sévigné, *Lettres*, vol. VI, p. 193. [↑](#footnote-ref-79)
80. 15 November 1695: Langlois, *Mme de Maintenon: Lettres*, vol. III, p. 464. [↑](#footnote-ref-80)
81. Geffroy, *Correspondance authentique*, vol. I, p. 112. [↑](#footnote-ref-81)
82. J. Cordelier, *Mme de Maintenon* (Paris, 1955), pp. 137-43; Bluche, *Louis XIV* (Oxford, 1990), p. 272. [↑](#footnote-ref-82)
83. Desprat, *Maintenon*, p. 189-90; Caylus, *Souvenirs*, pp. 87-8. [↑](#footnote-ref-83)
84. J.-B. Primi Visconti, *Mémoires sur la cour de Louis XIV* (Paris, 1857), pp. 296-7. [↑](#footnote-ref-84)
85. 25 Sept 1681: Primi Visconti, *Mémoires*, vol. I, p. 20. [↑](#footnote-ref-85)
86. Bourdaloue famously preached on the dangers of excessive ‘commerce’, with Sévigné noting on 29 March 1680, that he ‘strikes home without mercy, saying the boldest truths, light where they may, and declaiming vehemently against adultery, caring not who is hurt by it’([M. de Rabutin-Chantal de Sévigné] *Letters from the Marchioness de Sévigné to her Daughter the Countess de Grignan*, 10 vols (London, 1927), vol. VII, p. 46). [↑](#footnote-ref-86)
87. For an official description of the appointment see Lavallée*, Correspondance générale*, vol. II, pp. 97-8. [↑](#footnote-ref-87)
88. Sévigné, *Lettres*, vol. VI, p. 322. [↑](#footnote-ref-88)
89. Langlois, *Mme de Maintenon: Lettres*, vol. II, p. 337, n. 207. [↑](#footnote-ref-89)
90. Sévigné, *Lettres*, vol. VI, pp. 347-8. [↑](#footnote-ref-90)
91. 30 June 1680 Sévigné wrote that: ‘the other day the King spent three hours chez Mme de Maintenon who had a migraine … Mme de Fontanges cries incessantly because she is no longer loved’ (Sévigné, *Lettres*, vol. VI, p. 497). Fontanges began in July 1680 to make regular retreats to the convents at Chelles and Port Royal-des-Champs, where she died after a terminal miscarriage on 28 June 1681, which profoundly shocked the King. [↑](#footnote-ref-91)
92. *Ibid*., vol. VI, pp. 533-4; Sévigné, *Letters*, vol. VII, p. 195. [↑](#footnote-ref-92)
93. See the missive to Grignan dated 7 July 1680: Sévigné, *Lettres*, vol. VI, pp. 510-11. [↑](#footnote-ref-93)
94. Sévigné, *Lettres*, vol. VI, p. 475. [↑](#footnote-ref-94)
95. Sévigné, *Letters*, vol. VIII, p. 14. [↑](#footnote-ref-95)
96. For more on this subject see E. Harth, *Cartesian Women: Versions and Subversions of Rational Discourse in the Old Regime* (Ithaca, 1992). [↑](#footnote-ref-96)
97. Sévigné, *Lettres*, vol. VI, p. 194. [↑](#footnote-ref-97)
98. See the letter and Lavallée’s preliminary note: Lavallée, *Correspondance générale*, vol. II, pp. 112-14. [↑](#footnote-ref-98)
99. Sévigné, *Letters*, vol, VII, p. 178. [↑](#footnote-ref-99)
100. Primi Visconti, *Mémoires*, pp. 296-7. [↑](#footnote-ref-100)
101. Sévigné, *Lettres*, vol. VII, p. 43. [↑](#footnote-ref-101)
102. Sévigné, *Letters*, vol. VII, p. 248. [↑](#footnote-ref-102)
103. Sévigné, *Lettres* vol. VII, p. 78. [↑](#footnote-ref-103)
104. Lavallée, *Correspondance générale*, vol. II, p. 147. [↑](#footnote-ref-104)
105. *Ibid*., vol. II, p. 147. [↑](#footnote-ref-105)
106. As she confided to her confessor on 6 June 1682: Langlois, *Mme de Maintenon: Lettres*, vol. II, pp.432-3. [↑](#footnote-ref-106)
107. Quoted in Desprat, *Maintenon*, p. 221, which is a view favoured by several historians including Bluche, *Louis XIV*, p. 273, and George Couthon: ‘Mme de Maintenan had reconciled the King and the Queen whilst waiting to reconcile entirely the King and God’ (*Le chair et l’âme — Louis XIV entre ses maîtresses et Bossuet* (Grenoble, 1995), p. 187). [↑](#footnote-ref-107)
108. Philip Riley, *A Lust for Virtue: Louis XIV’s Attack on Sin in Seventeenth-Century France* (Connecticut, 2001), p. 98. [↑](#footnote-ref-108)
109. See Lavallée, *Lettres Historiques*, vol. II, p. 162. [↑](#footnote-ref-109)
110. Forster, *Liselotte*, pp. 92-3. [↑](#footnote-ref-110)
111. Conley, *Suspicion of Virtue*, p. 148. [↑](#footnote-ref-111)
112. Conley, *Dialogues*, pp. 58-9. [↑](#footnote-ref-112)
113. Conley, *Dialogues*, p. 62. [↑](#footnote-ref-113)
114. P. Sonnino (ed. and trans.), ‘*Mémoires’ for the Instruction of the Dauphin* (New York, 1970), pp. 246-8. [↑](#footnote-ref-114)
115. [Gergy, J.-J. Languet de and Lavallée, T.], *La famille d’Aubigné et l’enfance de Mme de Maintenon par Théophile Lavallée, suivi des Mémoires inédites de Languet de Gergy, archevêque de Sens, sur Mme de Maintenon et la cour de Louis XIV* (Paris, 1863), p. 164. To prepare the *mémoires*, Languet had copies made of the extensive collection of Maintenon’s letters stored at Saint-Cyr, which are now archived at the Bibliothèque Municipale de Versailles [hereafter cited as B.M.V.]. [↑](#footnote-ref-115)
116. Forster, *Liselotte*, p. 53. [↑](#footnote-ref-116)
117. Kroll, *Liselotte*, p. 52. [↑](#footnote-ref-117)
118. Bluche,  *Louis XIV*, p. 396-8. [↑](#footnote-ref-118)
119. Bluche, *Louis XIV*, p. 349. The notion that ceremony and ritual were not immutable, but in fact necessarily adaptable and flexible, has been persuasively propounded by Jeroen Duindam in various works. See, for example, chapter six: ‘Ceremony and Order at Court: An Unending Pursuit”’ in his *Vienna and Versailles: The Courts of Europe's Dynastic Rivals, 1550-1780* (Cambridge, 2003), pp. 181-214. [↑](#footnote-ref-119)
120. On the affair see J. C. Petitfils, *L’Affaire Des Poisons: Crimes et Sorcellerie au temps du Roi-Soleil* (Paris, 2010); L.W. Mollenauer, *Strange Revelations: Magic, Poison and Sacrilege in Louis XIV’s France* (Pennsylvania, 2007) and A. Somerset, *The Affair of the Poisons: Murder, Infanticide and Satanism at the Court of Louis XIV* (London, 2003). [↑](#footnote-ref-120)
121. Sourches, *Mémoires*, vol. I, pp. 110-13. For more on the licentiousness prevalent at the court and in Paris that staggered French and also foreign observers, whose accounts were no doubt amplified, see chap. 12 entitled ‘Jeux de Princes’, in G. Ziegler (ed.), *The Court of Versailles* (London, 1966), pp. 191-200. Also see J. Swann, *Exile, Imprisonment, or Death: The Politics of Disgrace in Bourbon France, 1610–1789* (Oxford, 2017). [↑](#footnote-ref-121)
122. La Roche was recalled to court in 1684, but kept under surveillance (Dangeau, *Journal*, vol. I, pp. 83-4), and became Prince de Conti in 1685 after the death of his elder brother. [↑](#footnote-ref-122)
123. See the *Gazette* report in Lavallée, *Correspondance générale*, vol. II, p. 330, n. 2. He had been admiral of France and the charge passed to the comte de Toulouse. [↑](#footnote-ref-123)
124. Sourches, *Mémoires*, vol. I, p. 132, n. 4. [↑](#footnote-ref-124)
125. Dangeau, *Journal*, vol. I, p. 83. [↑](#footnote-ref-125)
126. Sévigné, *Lettres*, vol. VI, p. 330. [↑](#footnote-ref-126)
127. Lavallée*, Correspondance générale*, vol. II, p. 147. [↑](#footnote-ref-127)
128. Sévigné, *Lettres*, vol. VI, p. 176. [↑](#footnote-ref-128)
129. During a violent harangue, Conti had publicly accused the Chevalier of denigrating his wife and several members of his circle, which the King condemned as unacceptable for a person of his rank. Sourches notes that Conti received his rebuke with courage and contrition, thus in turn earning the respect of the King: Sourches, *Mémoires*, vol. I, pp. 127-9. [↑](#footnote-ref-129)
130. This acrimony had also been fostered by the duchesse de Richelieu and the Dauphine’s *femme de chambre*, Bessola; see Maintenon to M. de Montchevreuil, 4 July 1681: Lavallée, *Correspondance générale*, vol. II, pp. 187-8, and Langlois, *Mme de Maintenon: Lettres*, vol. II, pp. 389-90. [↑](#footnote-ref-130)
131. See the letters exchanged between Maintenon and the Dauphine: Langlois, *Mme de Maintenon: Lettres*, vol. II, pp. 441-2. [↑](#footnote-ref-131)
132. See J. Prévot, *Madame de Maintenon — la première institutrice de France* (Paris, 1987); P.-E. Leroy and M. Loyau (eds), *Madame de Maintenon: «Comment la sagesse vient aux filles» propos d’éducation* (Courty, 1998). [↑](#footnote-ref-132)
133. The Queen’s feverishness began on 26 July and an abscess was detected under her left arm that was lanced and bled twice over the next few days causing septicaemia. An emetic was then administered that induced vomiting and death a few hours later: Bertière, *Femmes du Roi-Soleil*, pp. 323-4. [↑](#footnote-ref-133)
134. Mentioned by Maintenon in a letter to Montchevreuil on 5 Aug 1681: Langlois, *Mme de Maintenon: Lettres*, vol. II, p. 394. [↑](#footnote-ref-134)
135. For a discussion of this see Lavallée, *Correspondance générale*, vol. II, pp. 302-3. [↑](#footnote-ref-135)
136. Louis Hastier unconvincingly devoted nearly an entire book to it: *Louis XIV et Mme de Maintenon* (Paris, 1957). [↑](#footnote-ref-136)
137. Mlle de Chanteloup was Brinon’s niece and acted as Françoise’s secretary, and the other was Marie-Gabrielle de Breil-Pontbriant, a former pupil at Reuil and future student at Saint-Cyr. [↑](#footnote-ref-137)
138. In a letter to her brother dated 7 September 1683: Bots, *Lettres*, vol. I, p. 483. [↑](#footnote-ref-138)
139. Sourches, *Mémoires*, vol. I, p. 105. The first severe attack, Sourches remarks, came in the winter of 1681, compelling the King to concede that he was now genuinely suffering from gout. [↑](#footnote-ref-139)
140. J. A. Le Roi (ed.), *Journal de la Santé du Roi Louis XIV de l’année 1647 à l’année 1711 écrit par Vallot, D’Aquin et Fagon* (Paris, 1862), p. 159. [↑](#footnote-ref-140)
141. Sourches informs us that Le Tellier fortunately recovered with the help of quinine administered by the ‘famous’ English Doctor Talbot: Sourches, *Mémoires*, vol. I, p. 142. [↑](#footnote-ref-141)
142. 28 Sept 1683: Langlois, *Mme de Maintenon: Lettres*, vol. II 524; Geffroy, *Correspondance authentique*, vol. I, p. 153-4. [↑](#footnote-ref-142)
143. Geffroy, *Correspondance authentique*, vol. I, p. 147. [↑](#footnote-ref-143)
144. Caylus, *Souvenirs*, p. 124. [↑](#footnote-ref-144)
145. Aumale, *Mémoire*, p. 81. [↑](#footnote-ref-145)
146. Langlois, *Mme de Maintenon: Lettres*, vol. II, p. 509. [↑](#footnote-ref-146)
147. Bots, *Lettres*, vol. I, p. 477. [↑](#footnote-ref-147)
148. See Langlois, *Mme de Maintenon: Lettres*, vol. II, pp. 507-8 where the original letter to the ‘very illustrious and very excellent dame Françoise d’Aubigné, marquise de Maintenon’ is reproduced. [↑](#footnote-ref-148)
149. Bots, *Lettres*, vol. I, p. 478. [↑](#footnote-ref-149)
150. Langlois, *Mme de Maintenon: Lettres*, vol. II, pp. 520-1. [↑](#footnote-ref-150)
151. Geffroy, *Correspondance authentique*, vol. I, p. 148-9. [↑](#footnote-ref-151)
152. Bots, *Lettres*, vol. I, p. 480, n. 4. [↑](#footnote-ref-152)
153. Langlois, *Mme de Maintenon: Lettres*, vol. II, pp. 513-14. [↑](#footnote-ref-153)
154. Geffroy, *Correspondance authentique*, vol. I, p. 152. [↑](#footnote-ref-154)
155. Langlois, *Mme de Maintenon: Lettres*, vol. II, p. 521. [↑](#footnote-ref-155)
156. Bots, *Lettres*, vol. I, p. 486. [↑](#footnote-ref-156)
157. Bots, *Lettres*, vol. I, pp. 479, 495, 509. [↑](#footnote-ref-157)
158. Lavallée, *Correspondance générale*, vol. II, pp. 318-19. [↑](#footnote-ref-158)
159. Langlois, *Mme de Maintenon: Lettres*, vol. II, pp. 521-2. [↑](#footnote-ref-159)
160. Bots, *Lettres*, vol. I, p. 488. [↑](#footnote-ref-160)
161. Fraser, *Love and Louis XIV*, p. 206. [↑](#footnote-ref-161)
162. Bots, *Lettres*, vol. I, pp. 487, 491. [↑](#footnote-ref-162)
163. Langlois, *Mme de Maintenon: Lettres*, vol. III, pp. 6-7. [↑](#footnote-ref-163)
164. Bots, *Lettres*, vol. I, pp. 492-3. [↑](#footnote-ref-164)
165. Gergy, *Mémoires*, p. 186. [↑](#footnote-ref-165)
166. Aumale, *Mémoire*, p. 83. [↑](#footnote-ref-166)
167. Caylus, *Souvenirs*, pp. 134-5. [↑](#footnote-ref-167)
168. Bots, *Lettres*, vol. I, pp. 500-1. [↑](#footnote-ref-168)
169. She excitedly informed Brinon on 6 November 1683 that ‘*on* [the King] showed me yesterday the plan for Noisy’ (Bots, *Lettres*, vol. I, p. 496). [↑](#footnote-ref-169)
170. See T. Lavallée, *Mme de Maintenon et la maison royale de Saint-Cyr, 1686-1793* (Paris, 1862), pp. 22-48. [↑](#footnote-ref-170)
171. That initially included two small antechambers, a principal bedroom, a *garde-robe* and a room for her servant Nanon: Langlois, *Mme de Maintenon: Lettres*, vol. III, pp. 85-6; W. R. Newton, *L’espace du roi: La Cour de France au château de Versailles, 1682–1789* (Paris, 2000), pp. 163-64; P. Verlet, *Le Château de Versailles* (Paris, 1985), pp. 208-9, 276-9. [↑](#footnote-ref-171)
172. Newton, *L’espace du roi*, fig. 8; Dangeau, *Journal*, vol. I, pp. 77-8, who also records that Maintenon was also given new ‘very suitable’ apartments at Fontainebleau in October 1686 that were also, he noted, on the ‘same floor as the King’: *Ibid*., pp. 397-8. [↑](#footnote-ref-172)
173. Bots, *Lettres*, vol. I, pp. 498-501. [↑](#footnote-ref-173)
174. *Ibid*., p. 502. [↑](#footnote-ref-174)
175. *Ibid*., p. 504. [↑](#footnote-ref-175)
176. *Ibid*., pp. 530-1. [↑](#footnote-ref-176)
177. Lavallée, *Correspondance générale*, vol. II, pp. 365-6. [↑](#footnote-ref-177)
178. Bots, *Lettres*, vol. I, p. 533. [↑](#footnote-ref-178)
179. Dangeau, *Journal*, vol. I, pp. 18-19; Gergy, *Mémoires*, p. 161, n. 1. [↑](#footnote-ref-179)
180. The positions of *dame d’honneur* to Madame and *fille d’honneur* to the Dauphine were awarded on 8 and 11 June respectively to Mme de Ventadour and to Mlle de Löwenstein, who married the marquis de Dangeau in 1686: Dangeau, *Journal*, vol. I, pp. 24-5. These three became intimate members of Maintenon’s coterie at court. [↑](#footnote-ref-180)
181. *Ibid*., p. 42. [↑](#footnote-ref-181)
182. Sourches, *Mémoires* vol. I, p. 178. [↑](#footnote-ref-182)
183. Caylus, *Souvenirs*, p. 160. [↑](#footnote-ref-183)
184. J. Lough (ed.), *France Observed in the Seventeenth Century by British Travellers* (London, 1985), p. 149. [↑](#footnote-ref-184)
185. For more on court ceremony and the strict hierarchy and problematical nature of seating arrangements, at least in public, see G. Sternberg, *Status Interaction during the Reign of Louis XIV* (Oxford, 2014), pp. 49-71. [↑](#footnote-ref-185)
186. Forster, *Liselotte*, p. 113. [↑](#footnote-ref-186)
187. Fraser, *Louis XIV*, p. 209; the original can be found in the ‘Fonds Patrimoine de la Médiathèque l’Apostrophe de la Ville de Chartres’ — my thanks to Fabienne Talbot, *Conseil général d’Eure-et-Loir*, for this reference. [↑](#footnote-ref-187)
188. Lavallée, *Correspondance générale*, vol. V, p. 283; for the manuscript see B.M.V., Ms. 1461, P. 66, ff. 228-31. [↑](#footnote-ref-188)
189. B.M.V., Ms. 1461, vol. P. 67, ff. 16-24. [↑](#footnote-ref-189)
190. Fraser, *Louis XIV*, p. 195. [↑](#footnote-ref-190)
191. For more on this see See J. DeJean, *Tender Geographies: Women and the Origins of the Novel in France* (New York, 1991), chaps 1-2. [↑](#footnote-ref-191)
192. B. and E.-J.-B. Rathery, *Mademoiselle de Scudéry, sa vie et sa correspondence* (Paris, 1873), p. 58. [↑](#footnote-ref-192)
193. C. Haldane, *Mme de Maintenon: Uncrowned Queen of France* (London, 1970), p. 265. [↑](#footnote-ref-193)
194. See the previous two letters cited from Ninon composed in 1662 in which she analyses their relationship in a deliberately esoteric fashion, but nonetheless repeatedly describes Villarceaux as Françoise’s ‘amant’: Bots, *Lettres*, pp. 55-8. [↑](#footnote-ref-194)
195. As apparently applauded by Ninon in a letter of 25 February 1663 that concludes by extolling the virtues of ‘innocent friendship’: *Ibid.* pp. 58-9. [↑](#footnote-ref-195)
196. Aumale, *Mémoire*, p. 89. [↑](#footnote-ref-196)
197. Gergy, *Mémoires*, pp. 185-7, 244-5. [↑](#footnote-ref-197)
198. Conley, *Suspicion of Virtue*, p. 196. On this subject see L. C. Seifert and R. M. Wilkin (eds), *Men and Women Making Friends in Early Modern France* (Oxford, 2015). [↑](#footnote-ref-198)
199. Riley, *Lust for Virtue*, pp. 94-5. [↑](#footnote-ref-199)
200. *Ibid*. [↑](#footnote-ref-200)
201. Wolf, *Louis XIV*, pp. 326-7. [↑](#footnote-ref-201)
202. Aumale, *Mémoire*, p. 81. [↑](#footnote-ref-202)
203. For an overview, see my chapter: ‘Partner, Matriarch and Minister: Mme de Maintenon of France: The Clandestine Consort: 1669-1715’, in Orr, *Queenship in Europe*, pp. 77-106. [↑](#footnote-ref-203)
204. Conley, *Dialogues*, pp. 109-10. [↑](#footnote-ref-204)
205. B.M.V., Ms. 1461, vol. P. 67, ff. 16-24. [↑](#footnote-ref-205)
206. Forster, *Liselotte*, p. 113. [↑](#footnote-ref-206)
207. Fraser, *Louis XIV*, p. 259. [↑](#footnote-ref-207)
208. For examples see P. Gaxotte (ed.), *Lettres de Louis XIV* (Paris, 1930) p. 94; Lavallée, *Correspondance générale*, vol. III, pp. 293-354 and vol. V, pp. 182, 232-3; B.M.V., Ms. 1461, vol. P. 66, f. 142 and vol. P. 67, ff. 330, 457. [↑](#footnote-ref-208)
209. Sévigné, *Lettres*, vol. VII, p. 289. [↑](#footnote-ref-209)
210. Lavallée, *Correspondance générale*, vol. V, p. 158. [↑](#footnote-ref-210)
211. Conley, *Dialogues*, p. 53. [↑](#footnote-ref-211)
212. DeJean, *Tender Geographies*, p. 56. [↑](#footnote-ref-212)
213. Lavallée, *Lettres Historiques*, vol. I, p. 456. [↑](#footnote-ref-213)
214. *Ibid*., pp. 456-67. [↑](#footnote-ref-214)
215. Conley, *Dialogues*, pp. 56-7. [↑](#footnote-ref-215)