Portraits and Poses

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Portraits and Poses: Female Intellectual Authority, Agency and Authorship in Early Modern Europe.


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In his 1759 Essay on Taste, Alexander Gerard asserted that the contemplation of diverse and select objects was necessary to develop aesthetic discrimination and thereby satisfy the senses: ‘Thus may we always be sure of administering pleasure to the mind, by presenting to its contemplation a multitude of objects, or even, a greater number than it expected to see.’ At the beginning of the eighteenth century, engagement in collecting and connoisseurship became a means not only to develop taste but also to fulfil aspirations for greater social power. For noblewomen in particular the objects and art displayed in their Parisian hôtels and country châteaux were vehicles for the construction of cultural identity. Louise-Bénédicte de Bourbon, duchesse du Maine (1676–1753) and Jeanne-Baptiste d’Albert de Luynes, comtesse de Verrue (1670–1736) were renowned connoisseuses and women of learning in regency Paris. The term connoisseur or connoiseuse denoted a knowledgeable and aesthetically sensitive judge. Connoisseurs formed a community of taste. They stimulated arts’ patronage, and their cabinets and homes became the nexus for a new mode of social interaction that nurtured the arts and sciences. The identity and status of connoisseuses like Verrue and du Maine was further constructed through their portraits, both visual and textual.

This chapter explores Verrue’s and du Maine’s representation – and self-presentation – as a social construct, or pose, enabling a consideration of the deeper cultural meanings inflected through pictorial and literary portraits. The images of du Maine are nuanced compositions. While early portraits of the duchesse conform to the cultural mores of the period, depicting her in mythological guise, she also sat for an atypical, if not unprecedented, portrait at study.
The duchesse made the considered choice of eminent artist de Troy to represent her actively engaged in intellectual pursuits. By contrast, extant painted depictions of Verrue are apocryphal. Tracing Verrue’s savanterie through sales catalogues of her book and painting collections, and through the inventory after her death, allows a more nuanced appreciation of her erudition and the breadth of her collection. Reading contemporary textual and visual portraits of these women through a narrow lens overlooks the manner in which they depict performed gender and power relations enacted by and upon the figures. Instead, a historicised examination of the act of connoisseurship, as articulated through Verrue’s and du Maine’s collections and portraits, allows for an understanding of how art, objects, and architecture conveyed their status and highlighted their intellectual capabilities and artistic taste.⁴
The Duchesse du Maine: Studied Poses

By the middle of the eighteenth century, there were over 450 private cabinets in the townhouses of Parisian connoisseurs. While the term cabinet implies an item of furniture, or a small room or closet, and indeed these collections were once housed in small cabinets, by the early eighteenth century, the cabinet was a room, or often several reception rooms, that allowed for the munificent display of art and precious objects. One of the finest cabinets in Paris at this time belonged to Louise-Bénédicte de Bourbon-Condé, duchesse du Maine (Fig. 1). She was the eighth child of the duc and duchesse of Enghien and, as a member of the reigning Bourbon house, was styled a princesse du sang, or princess of the blood. In 1692, aged fifteen, she was married to the twenty-two-year-old Louis-Auguste de Bourbon, duc du Maine, the favourite illegitimate son of Louis XIV and his mistress Madame de Montespan.

The duchesse du Maine employed architecture as an expression of personal and political power. Nina Lewallen has noted that the duchesse commissioned her townhouse with multiple cabinets, which were spaces, typically encoded as masculine, wherein the owner might undertake intellectual and business pursuits. Lewallen observes that, in the hôtel du Maine, rooms dedicated to the display of collections or books replaced the cabinet de toilette, or boudoir, usually found in the home of a noblewoman. In Architecture Françoise, Jacques-François Blondel found the irregular layout of the hôtel du Maine noteworthy. The architect was critical of the design asserting that, while ‘all the rooms that are easily accessible serve to proclaim the magnificence of an edifice [...] & the interior and exterior decoration correspond’, the small scale of the rooms ‘does not follow the laws prescribed by the rules of the art [of architecture]’.

Of special interest to visiting connoisseurs was the Salon de la Chine. The room displayed the duchesse’s collection of Chinese porcelain and chinoiserie objects, ‘of the greatest magnificence’, rumoured to have cost close to 100,000 livres – an astonishing sum for the time. The collection was important, but of equal value to du Maine was its ability to convey her affluence and nobility. Katie Scott has documented the relationship of architecture to social function in the eighteenth-century hôtel. Du Maine’s Chinese room was located on the first floor in a suite of rooms that formed a hybrid of appartements de société and de parade. The former, Scott observes, were suites of rooms that served social functions as distinct from the formal, ceremonial purpose of the appartements de parade. The first-floor rooms housing the duchesse du Maine’s collections were spaces in which her peers would have gathered to engage in entertainments or intellectual intercourse, but also where she welcomed important visitors. The enfilade nature of the rooms, opening successively from the central Salon Doré, ensured visitors could readily comprehend the abundance and richness of du Maine’s collection and her attendant eminence.
A comparative analysis of the duchesse’s portraits by pre-eminent artist Jean-François de Troy (1645–1730) reveals her personal trajectory: from the more conventional depiction of the noblewoman as Venus, dated 1694, to the ca. 1705 work lauding her study of astronomy. The portraits expose how the duchesse, as she amassed personal power and built her court at Sceaux, constructed a strategic representation of personal authority that still referenced accepted tropes of femininity. Jean-François de Troy was an artist favoured by Madame de Montespan and her children. His 1730 Mercure de France obituary makes particular reference to de Troy’s facility in posing female sitters, noting ‘he was very inventive in giving a woman in his portraits some historical, poetic, or gallantly conceived role, but always appropriate and full of decorum’. He painted at least two portraits of the king’s mistress, Montespan, one in which she is posed as the goddess Diana. He later depicted her son, the young duc du Maine, alongside his sister Louise-Françoise de Bourbon, Mademoiselle de Nantes, who is presented in the guise of Venus. De Troy’s obituary touches on his connection to the family while highlighting his skill as an artist, ‘he joined hereafter, two talents, of representing history and portraiture in several

Fig. 2. Jean-François de Troy (1679–1752), The Feast of Dido and Aeneas: An Allegorical Portrait of the Family of the duc and duchesse du Maine (1704). Oil on canvas. Private Collection. © Photo courtesy of Sotheby’s New York. (Plate 29, p. 377)
inimitably tasteful paintings of families, among which one must mention above all that done for M. le duc du Maine, making reference to a monumental canvas depicting the duc and duchesse du Maine as the ill-fated royal lovers, Dido and Aeneas, surrounded by courtiers (Fig. 2).\textsuperscript{14} De Troy again evoked the goddess of love in his 1694 portrait of the duchesse du Maine depicted as Venus in what appears to be a typical, mythological portrait of a noblewoman of the era. This was painted just two years after her 1692 marriage to du Maine and likely commemorates their union. The duchesse is posed as Venus, accompanied by Cupid and a putto representing love, and the pomegranate fruit in the lower left symbolises fertility. The mythological portrait endows the duchesse, by association, with a patina of the power of the gods. She holds orange blossoms, symbol of eternal love, fidelity, and fertility.

While the portrait seems representative of noblewomen’s portrayals of age, it can be read as an expression of both personal power and discontent. Mary Sheriff has positioned allegorical portraits of women as having the potential to capitalise on the slippage between the heroic competence of the character they are portraying and the sitter’s personal aspirations. Portraits such as this one become the site of resistance as the female form shows what Sheriff terms ‘the “truth” of castration’ – or in this case, resistance to it.\textsuperscript{15} The duchesse du Maine considered her marriage an unequal match, her husband being an illegitimate son, unable to inherit the throne, while she was a royal princess from the house of Condé.\textsuperscript{16} The duchesse d’Orléans more crudely reported the inequity of the match in a letter, stating ‘overtures of marriage have been made from the Cripple to the House of Condé’ – a reference to the club-footed duc’s approach to the exalted Condé family.\textsuperscript{17} One nobleman at court derided the duc du Maine, claiming: ‘He has very little Merit, and a great deal of Vanity […] he is very proud and jealous of his Rank’, but noted that the couple related indifferently rather than acrimoniously, stating ‘he lives in pretty good decorum with his Duchess.’\textsuperscript{18} The solo portrait reminds the contemporary viewer of the duchesse’s elevated premarital status as a princesse du sang, daughter of the Bourbon prince de Condé and the Bavarian princess Palatine. The image claims power and authority independent of that of her husband.

A mere decade later, the duchesse made a more overt statement of resistance to accepted portraiture tropes in The Astronomy Lesson of the Duchess du Maine (ca. 1705) by Jean-François de Troy (Fig. 3). The portrait was painted in her study at Sceaux, a château and estate the duc du Maine purchased for his duchesse in 1700. The Astronomy Lesson is actually a triple portrait – of the duchesse, Nicolas de Malézieu, and the abbé Genest, a poet and member of the Académie Française. A mathematician, astronomer, académicien, and tutor to the duc and duchesse du Maine, Nicolas de Malézieu endowed Sceaux the status of satellite court to the power of Versailles when he called it ‘this exclusive Court that Madame the duchesse du Maine has devoted to herself under the name of l’Ordre de la Mouche à Miel (The Order of the Honey Bee).’\textsuperscript{19}
Fig. 3. Jean-François de Troy, *The Astronomy Lesson of the duchesse du Maine at the château de Sceaux* (ca. 1705). Oil on canvas. © Collection du Musée du Domaine Départemental de Sceaux, Benoît Chain. (Plate 30, p. 377)
Thwarted in her marriage, the duchesse sought to elevate her own status in several ways, including the establishment of l'Ordre de la Mouche à Miel, to which she admitted the favourites from her entourage, even going so far as to mint medals and have yellow sashes sewn to bestow on the members (Fig. 4). The entertainments at Sceaux were magnificent and costly. At her country estate, the duchesse entertained the pre-eminent artists and writers of the era, including the Comte de Caylus, Voltaire, Henault, Montesquieu, and Rousseau, among others.

The setting for de Troy’s depiction of the duchesse du Maine at study are her private apartments at Sceaux. While the portrait purports to be of an astronomy lesson, it functions as a trope, not of learning but of inverted power relations. The duchesse, a princess of the blood, holds the position of influence behind the desk, with her académicien tutor Malézieu cast as her supplicant, perched on a tambour. While the ‘learned male’ figures could be viewed as bestowing a sense of weight and authority to the duchess, it is the duchess who commands the scene. De Troy has depicted her as of a similar stature to the academicians, but in reality, she was so diminutive that instead of the expected laudation princesse du sang (‘princess of royal blood’), she was mockingly known as a poupée (‘doll’) du sang and was said to have the height of a ten-year-old. Even the choice of de Troy as artist speaks to her ambition. At this time, he was an established painter, aged forty-nine, and at the height of his popularity; he had painted portraits of the legitimised children of Madame de Montespan and Louis XIV in 1691, and in 1710, he was the artist chosen to portray the duc d’Anjou (future Louis XV). De Troy uses the portrait of du Maine at study to showcase his versatility; the rendering of sumptuous fabrics – the lustre of

Fig. 4. Henri Roussel, Medal: ‘l’Ordre de la Mouche à Miel’ (1703). Silver. © CGB Numismatique Paris.
the silk and the inviting warmth of ermine – hints at regal connections. The repeated portraits of the duchesse posed as goddess and princess echo her royal blood and her aspirations to raise her status and that of her husband.

In this painting, the duchesse is directing Malézieu’s attention authoritatively to the accoutrements of learning that surround her – the armillary sphere and celestial sphere, and a tome to which she points, indicating the assiduousness of her scholarship, as evinced by the well-stocked library we glimpse through the gathered curtain. A physicist and prominent member of the Académie Royale des Sciences, Jean-Antoine Nollet, would later dedicate a terrestrial globe to his patron, the duchesse, in 1728 (Fig. 5).25 In the painting, her tutor is strangely attired in Roman-style sandals, perhaps a reference to the Socratic mode of teaching that took the more equitable form of argument and dialogue between student and teacher. In the de Troy portrait, the duchesse is seated facing the viewer, elevated in a desk chair. The desk becomes the site of learning, a barrier for those of inferior social status, and a signifier of her erudition. The expected bureau plat – a piece of furniture one would typically find in a man’s study – is swathed in fringed velvet, obscuring the table’s form and therefore its

signification as either masculine or feminine. Elsewhere, her sumptuous robes and the light causing her smooth, powdered skin and rouged cheeks to glow, are less equivocal assertions of femininity. De Troy’s finely balanced painting manages to exalt the duchess’s intellectual authority, reminding the viewer of her power and learning, while remaining a portrait replete with signifiers of feminine, noble beauty.

The portrait, which was displayed prominently at Sceaux, was later remarked upon by Annibale Antonini, an Italian visitor to Paris. His 1749 mémoires recount a visit to the hôtel du Maine, where the duchess entertained the curieux – learned visitors – drawn by the magnificence and taste of her collections. He finds the portrait of the duchess so striking and noteworthy that her other artworks are mentioned only in passing, yet he makes pointed reference to ‘portraits of the family of Monsieur le duc du Maine, done by de Troy the elder, the same who had painted the Madame la Duchesse studying the globe with a master of mathematics’. The portrait was exceptional, or perhaps anomalous, to the extent that its significance was known even to foreign visitors to Paris. If one considers this portrait of the duchesse du Maine at her astronomy lesson an early articulation of image construction, it can be seen as both self-promotion and as a forceful assertion of her status as an erudite, aristocratic woman of power and influence – an influence that remained undiminished despite marriage to a man who was her social inferior. This type of image fashioning is echoed in later savante portraits such as those of Louis XV’s mistress, madame de Pompadour. In Melissa Hyde’s research into Boucher’s portrait of Pompadour at her toilette (1750), she argues that social and gender identity at this time were not simply fixed conditions from birth but an état, or state, which was the product of social performance. Hyde notes that portraits such as Boucher’s evidenced converging discourses of ‘femininity’, artifice, and class, and that such portraits were sites for the fashioning and representation of identity. Elise Goodman, in her exegesis of femmes savantes images, acknowledges this painting as a depiction of the duchesse actively and confidently studying. Goodman argues, however, that the figure of Malézieu exists to augment the duchesse’s knowledge and, by way of contrast, highlight her beauty; the duchesse is labelled the ‘quintessential belle savante’. While this type of contrast is often marked in portraits of the era, here we have a more nuanced depiction of a femme savante: one that existed decades before such images became commonplace. While the figure of du Maine is that of an affluent, attractive noblewoman, her position within the portrait and the conspicuous display of the attributes of her learning demand the portrait be read as paean of learning, not beauty.

While the duchesse was engaged in study from 1696, when she began lessons with Malézieu, her detractors questioned her commitment to academic learning and her aptitude for it. One biographer asserted that
[s]he applied her eye to the telescope, and also to the microscope; in short, instructed herself by fad or fancy, out of passion or caprice, but without becoming one whit more enlightened in general. Through it all she played shepherdess and pastorals by day and by night; supplied ideas to be made into madrigals by her two writers Malézieu and Genest.30

Her endeavours are presented as the passing indulgence of a bored aristocrat – and yet we know that this portrait was painted a decade after she first began lessons – revealing the longevity of her commitment to the study of mathematics and astronomy. Nonetheless, the unflattering picture of a savante-dilettante is partially supported by the reflections of her former lady’s maid-turned-author Margeurite de Launay, baronne de Staal (1684–1750), who presents a provocative insight into her intellectual abilities. On one hand, de Staal observes that ‘[no] one ever spoke with more correctness, clearness, and fluency, or in a nobler and more natural manner’.31 Yet she continues, less flatteringly: ‘Inquiring and credulous, she has desired to acquire all kinds of knowledge; but is satisfied to get them superficially […] she believes in herself just as she believes in God and Descartes, without examination or discussion’.32 The duchess du Maine’s contemporaries paint a chequered picture of a capricious, at times querulous, woman, committed to study and pleasure-seeking in equal measure.

The duchesse’s aspiration to greater power would reach its height and ultimately engender her temporary fall from grace in 1718 when the duchesse plotted a coup to remove Philippe II, duc d’Orléans, as regent and replace him with her husband. The original manuscript documents detailing the conspiracy, along with records of the provost Trudaine’s questioning of the duc and duchesse at Sceaux, reveal an elaborate scheme requiring the support of foreign powers that was doomed to fail.33 When a German visitor to Paris published his travel guide, Séjour de Paris (‘Sojourn in Paris’), he recorded that

[t]he duchesse du Maine also established, in the month of February 1718, an Academy of Dames Savantes, of which there were members Mesdames Dacier, Lambert, l’Héritier & others. But I think that since the duchesse’s disgrace this Academy has closed, as one no longer hears of it.34

The resultant exile from court hampered du Maine’s attempts to expand opportunities for other women in her circle and social milieu to educate themselves.

The depiction of the duchesse’s astronomy lesson powerfully articulates her desire for acceptance as an intellectual equal with her male peers. It is one of the earliest French portraits depicting a woman at study. The image pre-dates the portraits of femmes savantes that proliferated in France from the middle of the eighteenth century, the most famous of which remains the portrait of Émilie du Châtelet at study by Maurice Quentin de La Tour.35 The terms femme savante
or connoisseur/euse require etymological excavation. Aspirational women of erudition and taste, like the comtesse de Verrue and duchesse du Maine, often existed outside the norms prescribed for noblewomen of their time, both in terms of fiscal independence, access to education, and, in the case of the duchesse, determined agency over depictions of herself. As became commonplace, especially after Molière’s usage of the term in his famous satirical 1672 play Les Femmes Savantes (‘The Learned Ladies’), the expression was often used to cast women back into the circumscribed role of wife, mother, and household manager. The eighteenth-century Dictionnaire de l’Académie Française’s (‘Dictionary of the Académie Française’) primary definition of savant/e – which included both male and female iterations of the term – specifies the savant/e as ‘one who is well informed in matters of erudition, of literature, and those who have a deep understanding of the sciences’ and, more generally, ‘one who is well instructed or well informed in some matter’. However, several supplementary meanings establish a pejorative application of the term in contemporary usage, in the sense of affected intellectual posturing. The pejorative exemplar of savant/e asserts: ‘Savant,ante: A [female] person who is too savante, that is to say, she knows things of which she ought to remain ignorant.’ The pejorative definition is unique among several to employ a female subject. The connoisseur/euse is differentiated as someone who has a specialised knowledge of objects or things rather than ideas. The dictionary differentiates male and female forms of the latter term. In reality, the two overlapped, and the connoisseur was often a person with specialised knowledge of one, or in the case of the comtesse de Verrue and duchesse du Maine, several fields of study and collections of objects.

In Molière’s 1672 Les Femmes Savantes, a satire on the education of women, the honnête bourgeois Chrysale exhorts his wife and sister to surrender their academic pretensions:

You ought to burn all these useless objects,
And leave science to the town’s doctors;
Clear away from your attic the long telescope that strikes fear into people,
And the hundred knick-knacks that offend the eye,
Stop seeking to know what happens in the moon,
And involve yourself a little with what happens at home,
Where we see everything seems in disarray.
It is not correct, for many reasons,
That a woman studies and knows so many things.

The women are advised to turn their attention to more fitting tasks: housework, the management of servants and children, and fiscal prudence. An etching by Jean Moreau le Jeune for a 1773 edition of the play depicts fashionably dressed femmes savantes strolling about a library, books askew on the shelves, the accoutrements of learning – including an armillary sphere, bound tomes,
and scrolls – piled haphazardly and inaccessibly on a high shelf (Fig. 6). One of their male suitors, the only figure sporting a symbol of learning – a scroll in his coat pocket – attempts to engage an indifferent lady scholar in discussion. Common to the era was the notion of women as constitutionally unsuited to learning. The principle was inscribed in medical texts of the period, with an eighteenth-century medical treatise proclaiming: ‘The excessive sensitivity of the spirit, & the weakness of the organs, has rendered most women who inhabit cities subject to vapours.’ Education for women was rare and the preserve of the affluent.

The Comtesse de Verrue: Constraint and Accumulation

One of the duchesse du Maine’s contemporaries, Jeanne-Baptiste d’Albert de Luynes, the comtesse de Verrue, also negotiated the performance of gender and self-representation in establishing herself as a connoisseeuse and femme savante. She did so under more challenging personal conditions. Married at thirteen to Joseph Ignace Scaglia, count of Verrua, she matured among the intrigues of the foreign court of Savoy at Turin. Having birthed four children to her
husband by age eighteen, her life was further complicated by a liaison with Victor-Amedée II, duke of Savoy, to whom she birthed a further two children by age twenty-four. Her lover’s determination to control all aspects of her life saw her held a virtual prisoner. Her brother, the duc de Chevreuse, recounted the difficulty of visiting her during his 1696 trip to Turin.  

She eventually made her escape from Turin, returning to yet another form of imprisonment in Paris in 1689. Punitive documents of legal separation from her husband dictated the comtesse remain cloistered in a convent with bars on the windows of her domicile.  

The marquis de Feuquières recorded his own attempts to mediate between the estranged husband and wife, noting the details of the separation:

[...] And what is more, the Lady Verrue, is neither to go to the theatre, to the opera, to the Thuilleries, nor to public dances, nor to pass in the courtyards outside the hours of assemblée, and neither to go to the Foires Saint-Germain or Saint Laurent but only in the morning and only for one hour until midday and if she happens, by unforeseen accident, to find herself in a house where the count, her spouse, arrives she is to remove herself at once, and if she arrives at a house where the count will be, she will not enter there nor go to a place where he will be.

The comtesse’s establishment as a notable connoisseur was predicated on access to funds and dependent on the goodwill of male relations. In the documents of separation, her husband denied her an allowance but allowed her to receive rents from previously granted estates – though at the reduced amount of 12,000 livres annually rather than the 15,000 livres that was her due. She received a further 7,500 livre annuity through an inheritance from her father. The comtesse was a customer of John Law’s private bank, which would later become the Banque Royale. While the bank’s paper currency and trading in shares of Law’s associated Compagnie des Indes would be the downfall of many Parisians after its crash in May 1720, Verrue and her circle predicted the fall and sold their shares for great profit, allowing her to amass even greater wealth than she had inherited. Her companion Jean-Baptiste Glucq, baron de Saint-Port (1674–1748) hailed from a family who were early investors in Law’s scheme. It is likely on his advice, and that of her well-connected family, that Verrue cannily timed the sale of shares to avoid the crash. In her will, the comtesse made several generous bequests to members of her coterie, including gifts ‘to long-time friends Monsieur Glucq de Sainte-Porte [Saint-Port] and Monsieur de Lassé [Lassay] all the paintings, chandeliers and furniture in the cabinets near the bedchamber and in several other rooms.’ The circle she gathered about her correlated, at times, with that of the duchesse du Maine and included the leading lights of noble society, members of the government, and of the académies as well as noted philosophers and connoisseurs like Voltaire, Chauvelin (who was minister of foreign affairs), Mairan of the Académie des Sciences,
l’abbé Terrasson of the Académie Française, fellow connoisseur the comte de Lassay, and Melon (the renowned economist and colleague of John Law). In his Mémoires, her friend the comte de Tessé states that proceeds of actions, or shares, in the Compagnie des Indes facilitated the comtesse’s acquisition of paintings, sculpture, jewels, and property, and allowed her to live in opulence, retaining twenty-five domestic servants for her personal needs. In 1719, with the influx of funds from her investments, she was able to sign a contract for a further two hôtels, adjoining her existing dwelling on the rue du Cherche-Midi, to house her ever-expanding collection.

Verrue contended with challenging constraints beyond the norm for wealthy noblewomen of her time. Even as a woman of elevated status and royal connection, a precondition of her ascendancy as connoisseeuse was her widowhood, which came in 1704. Widows could function in a manner similar to their male counterparts in terms of collecting practices. Their acceptance, however, differed in the ways in which they were perceived, addressed, and depicted in textual accounts. In the latter, we see equal emphasis placed on their dress and manners as on their accomplishments. The accepted paths for an affluent widow in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries were either retirement to a convent or dedication to the underprivileged or to the education of young women. Duchêne, in his research into widowhood in the seventeenth century, noted that a Christian widow’s gestures were required to indicate adherence to

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the dictates of religion and never to be self-serving. Widowhood was either a liberation or a loss of home, contingent on her financial state and her dependence on relatives. The comtesse de Verrue’s contemporary, Dangeau, reported the liberating effects of her widowhood, recording in November 1704 that ‘she has caused the bars to be removed at this time. So she will have her freedom, and she will be in the world as are other women.’

**Depictions as Fictions**

Unlike the case of the duchesse du Maine, none of the extant portraits purported to be of the comtesse de Verrue are verified likenesses. Instead, we find apocryphal portraits – fictions presented as depictions. An etched female figure forms the frontispiece for the catalogue of sale for her art collection. The catalogue was not published widely at the time of her death but was reproduced, with a portrait, in a compendium of sale catalogues a century later. The engraving is by Léon Gaucherel, a nineteenth-century artist, and is either an invented portrait or based on a lost eighteenth-century image (Fig. 7). Gaucherel depicts an attractive woman, coiffed and powdered, complete with beauty spot, the sheen of her décolleté bodice suggesting the lustre of silk. Sheer fabric billows, conveying a sense of movement, as though cropped from an allegorical scene of Diana at the hunt or the awakening of Galatea. Though the image accompanies the proof of Verrue’s connoisseurship, the catalogue of her extensive painting collection, it excludes all signifiers thereof. Another portrait purported to be of the elderly comtesse reappeared in recent times at a Parisian auction house (Fig. 8). It was attributed to the circle of Rigaud and presents a dour though stylish and expensively dressed elderly woman. Tracing its provenance reveals the likelihood of another questionable attribution. Her nineteenth-century biographer Quentin-Bauchart, in an explicatory footnote, details the existence of two other portraits that would date to the period before 1700: one, a miniature, in the cabinet of Jérôme Pichon, and the other he notes as by ’Rigaud or Largillière, belonging to M. le comte de Reiset and decorating the grand salon of his château de Breuil, near Dreux.’ Neither of these have been found.

The turbulent circumstances of her life may account for the dearth of extant portraits of Verrue. Instead, the many textual portraits drawn of the comtesse deputise for painted and etched images. Textual depictions functioned differently from painted portraits. The sitter, or her family members, usually commissioned the latter, which could function as performative visual tropes of status and power. Written depictions, all by male authors in the case of Verrue, underlined the importance of adherence to gendered social mores and the subordination of intellect to signifiers of indolent affluence and femininity. The comte de Tessé’s 1715 description of the comtesse in her library evokes a wealthy connoisseur of art, engaged in learning – though of a more idle, frivolous nature:
‘With her left hand she plays with a snuffbox filled with the well-known tobacco, and with her right she holds up a book from her library [...] that she reads in an absentminded fashion.’ Her nineteenth-century biographer described her collection as one wherein ‘an artistic woman followed her temperament, compulsively, and alongside the theatre for which she had great affection, she assembled novels, memoirs, racy pieces, and spirited French books according to her whims.’ The inference we are led to draw is that she was an indolent woman who amassed a great library of lesser tomes. Her library is described as a place of opulence, with cabinets of marquetry inlay and brass, shutters with inset curtains of green taffeta, the lower sections covered in marble, occupying Fig. 8. École française, entourage de Hyacinthe Rigaud, *Portrait of an Elderly Woman said to be the comtesse de Verrue* (ca. 1720). Oil on canvas. Private Collection. © TAJAN Paris. (Plate 32, p. 379)
a grand room with two windows onto the terrace and garden, leading onto a long gallery decorated with paintings depicting famous men and women of France in equestrian poses. The texts are similar in their insistence on casting Verrue in the role of dilettante.

The catalogue of sale for Verrue’s book collection presents a different figure: one of an erudite woman with diverse interests (Fig. 9). The comtesse was actively engaged with works we would today label feminist literature, including *Le Triomphe des Femmes* (‘The Victory of Women’). She subscribed to the *Journaux de Scavans* (‘The Scholar’s Journal’), of which she held a complete set of issues from 1712 to 1722. Her collection is that of a polyglot, containing books in Latin, ancient Greek, Italian, and French on subjects as diverse as mathematics, astronomy, philosophy, painting (historical and contemporary), and the history of different religions, including Judaism and Islam. The catalogue does not, however, list all works from her vast collection. Some were excised from the sale because they addressed religious querelles and had been condemned by arrêt du Parlement. Others, such as Nicolas Chorier’s *Les Entretiens d’Aloisia* (‘The Encounters of Aloisia’) and Corneille Blessebois’s

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Fig. 9. *Catalogue des Livres de Feue Madame la Comtesse de Verrue* (Paris, Chez Gabriel Martin: June 18, 1737). © Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris.
Du Rut (‘On Heat’), were deemed too licentious for public consumption. The former is sapphic erotica that recounts the sexual initiation of the soon-to-be bride Octavia by her older, wedded female cousin Tullia. The inventory of her books shows that the comtesse was neither rigid nor strictly patrician in her taste. She was a true savante in the sense established by the Académie Française: well informed in matters of erudition. In Femmes Bibliophiles (‘Women Bibliophiles’), Bauchart made a pithy comparison of the duchesse’s and comtesse’s commitment to study, as reflected in their respective book collections. He asserted that the duchesse du Maine was no bibliophile; rather, he called her ‘ambitious in the extreme’ and claimed that, while she had ‘read a great deal, learned a great deal, knowing how to speak on all manner of subjects […] it didn’t follow that she loved books, like those greats of her time, the comtesse de Verrue, and later, madame de Pompadour’.

Excess and Encomia

The inventory after Verrue’s death provides insight into her home and collection. Running to almost one thousand pages, and completed over several months between December 1736 and February 1737, it reveals a collection so extensive and idiosyncratic it is unsurprising three dwellings were required to contain it. In his memoirs, the duc du Luynes, nephew of the comtesse, describes a panoply of objects in her townhouses. He claims the hôtels overflowed with bric-a-brac and multiples of like objects, unfettered by the taste of fellow connoisseurs.

She bought continually and refused nothing of her whims; and when she wanted something, she bought six or even ten more, none of which was necessary, and her whims changed as often as the object […] she appeared to love her family greatly and was often the breadwinner […] she left considerable pensions and money to her domestic staff.

In a similar vein, prolific essayist duc de Saint-Simon recorded an unflattering description of the comtesse, declaring that she acquired without the restraint of a connoisseur, calling her house ‘[a] type of shop, crammed with all that is rarest and most precious of jewels, furniture, porcelain, lights, silver, paintings and even rare books’. There is undoubtedly an element of compulsive acquisition evident in the inventory after death and in descriptions of her collection.

The excess of the comtesse de Verrue’s collection earned her a snide reference in Voltaire’s Apologie du Luxe (‘Apology for Luxury’), a satirical poem critical of excess. Voltaire wrote of her sardonically: ‘the rich are born for great spending, the poor are made for great accumulation’. The open letter that Jean-François Melon, the regent’s secretary and a member of her inner circle, wrote
in her defence, was later published in the 1740 collection of Voltaire’s *Pièces Fugitives* (‘Fleeting Compositions’). Melon asserted that luxury and investment in the arts was a necessity, not only for the circulation of currency but also for the maintenance of healthy industry. He proclaimed Verrue’s importance as a patron of the arts, stating

I regard you, Madame, as one of the great examples of this truth. How many families of Paris subsist solely under the protection you give to the Arts. If one ceased to admire Paintings, Prints and Curiosities of all types: there you would have 20,000 men almost ruined at once, in Paris, & who are forced to go seek employment abroad.

Despite touching on the importance of her collecting practices and influence in the realms of court and politics, it is to her physical attributes that Verrue’s biographer repeatedly returns, declaiming: ‘It was difficult to find a physiognomy more lively, better made to arouse, than that which these biographies present in few words.’ Her eulogy, published in the *Mercure de France* shortly after her death in 1736, conveys a more nuanced portrait of the comtesse as *savante* and *connoisseuse*. While mention is made of ‘her agreeable and engaging manner’, unlike le Blanc’s nineteenth-century encomium, which dwells on her physical attributes, the *Mercure* tribute is unequivocal in its depiction of a discerning collector whose peers admired and respected her. The *Mercure* panegyric describes an accomplished *connoisseuse*: ‘Her love for Paintings was her primary passion, and her House appears a Palace delightfully decorated for the glory and for the triumph of Painting and taste.’

The cabinet housing her art collection is described thus: ‘It is of this type one of the greatest and most valuable collections that there are in Europe, and most desirable, to the liking of many of the most exacting *apréciateurs* [sic].’ Six months later, the newspaper would report on the proceedings of the sale of her art collection, observing her prevailing fine taste for painting and that the sale of both masters and contemporary artists had drawn collectors of note from Paris and elsewhere. Contemporary commentaries and sales catalogues after her death reveal a woman embedded in the culture of collecting, displaying, and commissioning of fine art. What is often overlooked in accounts of the comtesse, which focus on her physical attributes, is the sharp intellect that underpinned her pre-eminence and led to the breadth of her investments. Her strategic imperative was to wield cultural and social authority by amassing and displaying objects of the finest quality – expressions of her *savanterie* – while surrounded by an influential coterie.

During the first half of the eighteenth century, visual and textual portraits of Parisian noblewomen were coded narratives reflecting both the narrow strictures that governed their existence and their attempts at resistance to them. These two exceptional women of early eighteenth-century Paris established
themselves as *connoisseuses* and patrons of the arts, as well as women of learning. They did so despite the strictures and derision, as depicted in texts like Molière’s *Femmes Savantes*, that greeted women who sought a life of intellectual engagement. The painting of du Maine at her astronomy lesson is intelligible on multiple levels: as an expression of her determination to claim power in face of an inequitable marriage; as an assertion of her sagacity; and as a reflection of her social status at the centre of a coterie of scientists and artists. Furthermore, the design of du Maine’s townhouse privileged spaces for displaying her collection. Visitors to the *hôtel*, whose architectural plan advertised the duchesse’s connoisseurship, readily grasped the breadth and brilliance of her collection as an expression and extension of her authority. Contemporary memoirs of Verrue, however, offered equivocal accounts of her discernment and acumen; the male authors of these documents lauded beauty in greater measure than *savanterie*. The comtesse’s testament and inventory after her death, and her addenda on building contracts, coupled with catalogues of her art and book collections, provide greater insight into her intellect and expertise. With widowhood granting freedom from marital strictures, the comtesse de Verrue’s financial acumen allowed her to amass a substantial collection that reflected her diverse interests and idiosyncratic taste. The portraits of these noblewomen were mediated poses: mediation that expressed erudition and agency in the case of du Maine’s portrait at study. They reveal that it was possible for *connoisseuses* of the early eighteenth century to exist outside the normal constraints of their time; though this was predicated on access to funds and relied on the weight of familial power to support their independence. The imagined and vestigial portraits, both textual and visual, are more than depictions of attractive women of learning. They reveal nuanced noblewomen who embraced and, at times, eschewed their prescribed roles, yet retained a place at the nucleus of scholarship, influence, and taste.
Notes

1. Alexander Gerard, *An Essay on Taste with Three Dissertations on the Same Subject by Mr. de Voltaire, Mr. d'Alembert, Mr. de Montesquieu*, London and Edinburgh, Millar and Kincaid & Bell, 1759, 268.

2. David Porter has examined the elaborate networks of social ritual and private fantasy through which material objects participate in the construction of cultural meanings. See David Porter, 'Monstrous Beauty: Eighteenth-Century Fashion and the Aesthetics of Chinese Taste', in *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 2002, 35(3), 396–397. Porter argues that the embrace of the exotic ‘other’ represented a revolt not only against the strictures of classical taste per se but also against narrowly conceived forms of privilege and the male social dominance associated with it. See also Mimi Hellman's discussion of furniture as a social actor in eighteenth-century France: Mimi Hellman, 'Furniture, Sociability and the Work of Leisure in Eighteenth-Century France', in *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 1999, 32(4), 415–445.

3. This chapter has benefited from the insight and advice of Jennifer Milam and Matthew Martin whose ongoing encouragement is a boon. I also wish to thank Lieve van Deinsen and Beatrijs Vanacker for their helpful suggestions.


5. Bettina Dietz and Thomas Nutz, 'Collections Curieuses: The Aesthetics of Curiosity and Elite Lifestyle in Eighteenth-Century Paris', in *Eighteenth-Century Life*, 2005, 29(3), 244. Dietz and Nutz argue that the overlooked collecting culture of eighteenth-century Europe eludes the typology of either the kunst-und-wunderkammer polymathy or the Enlightenment rational classification. Rather, they examine the culture of curiosité, which is predicated on the intellectual interests of the collectors, their personal disposition, and their social values.


7. Ibid., 22.


9. 'Le Salon de la Chine est de la plus grande magnificence; il a coûté seul près de cent mille livres' (Annibale Antonini, *Mémorial de Paris et de ses Environs, nouvelle édition considérablement augmentée*, vol. 1, Paris, Chez Bauch, 1749, 141).


11. Ibid.

12. Ibid., 106. Scott highlights that the enfilade was desirable, as it allowed rooms to be opened to extend the available space, but also because the act of passing through each successive space allowed visitors to measure the status and affluence of the hôtel’s owner.


14. ‘Il joignit après, les deux talens de l’Histoire & du Portrait dans plusieurs Tableaux de Familles d’un gout [sic] inimitable, entre lesquels on doit citer sur tout celui qu’il fit
pour M. le Duc du Maine [...]’ (ibid., 973). The painting incorporates portraits of the du Maine’s children and members of their inner circle. The Mercure asserts that ‘all the people are depicted there with the most precise likeness’ (‘Tous les Personnages y sont dans la avanture la plus exacte’) and continues ‘[This is a] Painting one can call the finest undertaking and a masterpiece of Art’ (‘[…] Tableau que l’on peut nommer le dernier effort & le chef-d’oeuvre de l’Art’).


18. A French nobleman, Characters of the Royal Family, Ministers of State, and of all the Principal Persons in the French Court, with a short account of the French King’s Revenue, and of his Land and Naval Forces, London, Francis Coggan, 1702, 6.

19. ‘[…] cette cour choisie que Madame la Duchesse du Maine s’est attachée sous le nom de l’Ordre de la Mouche à Miel’ (Nicolas de Malézieu, Les Divertissements de Sceaux, Trevoux, Etienne Ganeau, 1712, a/ii)). See also Adolphe Jullien, Les Grandes Nuits de Sceaux: Le Théâtre de la Duchesse du Maine, Paris, J. Baur, 1876.

20. The order’s title referenced her cruel barbs directed at courtiers – derived from the words of the poet Tasso’s Animata, with an inscription after his poem engraved on one side of the medals issued to members: ‘Small she is but she gives cruel wounds’ (‘Piccola si ma fa pur gravi le ferite’). See Hilda M. Ransome, The Sacred Bee in Ancient Times and Folklore, London, Allen and Unwin, 1937, 234.


22. Malézieu is described by contemporaries, unflatteringly, as a man of knowledge but little insight. Lemontey calls him an educated man ‘knowing mathematics, literature, Greek and Latin, improvising verses, planning theatricals, understanding something of business and combining in his servile position the advantages of universal mediocrity’ (Lemontey quoted in Charles Augustin Sainte-Beauve and Katherine P. Wormeley (trans.), Portraits of the Eighteenth Century, Historic and Literary, New York, Knickerbocker Press, 1905, 31). The nature of the relationship between the duchesse and her cicisbeo and tutor was questioned by the duchesse d’Orléans, sister-in-law to Louis XIV. In a letter sent from Versailles to the duchess of Hanover and dated 1701, just a few years before de Troy’s portrait was painted, she claimed the duchesse and Malézieu were lovers (Charlotte Elisabeth de Bavière, duchesse d’Orléans and Ernest Jaeglé (trans.), Correspondance de Madame, Duchesse d’Orléans, extraite des lettres, vol. 1, Paris, A. Quantin, 1880, 268–269). For a discussion of the duc and duchesse du Maine’s relationship and their numerous infidelities, see also Marie-Catherine le Jumel de Barneville, baroness d’Aulnoy and Mr. A. B. (trans), Memoirs of the Court of France. Relating to the Amours of the Duke of Maine, and the Marriages of the Other Illegitimate Children of the French King, London, E. Whitlock, 1697, 75. D’Aulnoy recounts that one of the duc du Maine’s mistresses, Louise de la Vallière, later became mistress to the duc’s father, Louis XIV.


25. The globe’s inscription states it was ‘drawn up according to the latest and most exact observations approved by the gentlemen of the Académie Royale des Sciences in Paris. Dedicated and presented to Her Serene Highness Madame the duchesse du Maine by her very humble and very obedient servant Nollet’ (‘Globe terrestre dressé sur les observations les plus nouvelles et les plus exactes approuvées par Messieurs de l'Academie Roiale [sic] des sciences à Paris. Avec privilege du Roi. Dédié et présentè à S.A.S. Madame la Duchesse du Maine par son très humble et très obeissant serviteur Nollet.’) (Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris. Collection numérique: globes. GE A-1741 and J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles, 86.DH.705.1.) Jean-Antoine Nollet designed and assembled the globe and Louis Borde, a publisher, engraved the map.


27. 'Les Portraits de toute la famille de Monsieur le Duc du Maine, sont faits par de Troy le pere [sic], le même qui a fait celui de Madame la Duchesse, qui étudie la Sphere avec un Maître de Mathématiques' (Antonini, Mémorial de Paris, 141).


31. 'Car personne n'a jamais parlé avec plus de justesse, de netteté et de rapidité, ni d'une manière plus noble et plus naturelle' (Margeurite de Launay, baronne de Staal, Mémoires de Mme de Staal-Delaunay, de M. le marquis d'Argenson et de Madame, mère du Régent, vol. 1, Paris, Firmin-Didot Frères, 1853, 89).

32. 'Curieuse et crédule, elle a voulu s'instruire de toutes les différentes connoissances; mais elle s'est contenté de leur superficie [...] elle croit en elle de la même manière qu'elle croit en Dieu et en Descartes, sans examen et sans discussion' (Margeurite de Launay, baronne de Staal, Mémoire de Madame de Staal sur la fin du Règne de Louis XIV, vol. 2, Paris, Alphonse Lemerre, 1877, 93–94).


34. 'La Duchesse de Maine érigea aussi, au mois de Fevr. 1718 une Academie [sic] de Dames savantes, de laquelle furent membres Mesds. Dacier, Lambert, l'Héritier & d'autres. Mais je crois que depuis la discrace de la Duchesse cette Academie est déja tombée, puisqu'auussi on n'en a plus rien entendu' (Joachim Christoph Nemeitz, Séjour de Paris, Leiden, Jean van Abcoude, 1727, 344).

35. Mary Sheriff, in 'The Naked Truth', discusses the 1740 frontispiece of Institutions de Physique which presents female allegorical figures including truth – a surrogate for Émilie du Châtelet – surmounted by portraits of male scientists to confer authority on the savante.

36. 'Qui sait beaucoup en matière d'érudition, de littérature, de ceux qui sont profonds dans les sciences', 'Qui est bien instruit, bien informé de quelque chose, de quelque affaire' (Académie Françoise, Dictionnaire de l'Académie Française, vol. 2, Paris, 1762, 686).
37. ‘On dit, qu’une personne est trop savante, bien savante, pour dire, qu’elle sait des choses qu’elle devroit ignorer’ (Ibidem).

38. Ibid., vol. 1, 370. The dictionary lists diverse collections to which connoisseurs might dedicate themselves; these encompassed diamonds, paintings and even horses – any field of acquisition where knowledge might be specialised.

39. Molière et Gustave Lanson (ed.), *Les Femmes Savantes*, Paris, Librairie Hachette et Cie, 1900, act II, scene VII, 99–100). ‘Vous devriez brûler tout ce meuble inutile, Et laisser la science aux docteurs de ville; M’ôter, pour faire bien du grenier de céans, Cette longue lunette à faire peur aux gens, Et cent brimborions dont l’aspect importune; Ne point aller chercher ce qu’on fait dans la lune, Et vous mèler un peu de ce qu’on fait chez vous, Où nous voyons aller tout sens dessous. Il n’est pas bien honnête, et pour beaucoup de causes, Qu’une femme étudie et sache tant de choses’.

40. ‘L’excelsa sensibilité de l’âme [sic], & la foiblesse [sic] des organs, ont rendu la plupart des femmes qui habitent les grandes villes sujettes aux vapeurs’ (M. de Beauchêne, *De l’Influence des Affections de l’Âme dans les Maladies Nerveuses des Femmes, avec le Traitement qui Convient à Ces Maladies*, Paris, Chez Méguignon l’aîné, 1783, 1–2). The doctor proves himself more enlightened, however, when he advises against the common treatment of leeches attached to the anus as a cure for women’s ‘vaporous complaints’.

41. While extant documents cannot confirm the acquaintance of Verrue and du Maine, the women would undoubtedly have known of each other, if they did not directly interact. Their social circles overlapped – for example, both entertained Voltaire, and both women commissioned grand townhouses within a kilometre of each other at a similar time – 1715 (du Maine) and 1719 (Verrue).


43. As late as 1704, the king’s emissaries were interceding on behalf of the Verrue family to gain restitution of the confiscated estates. Tessé recounts the duc de Vendôme, head of the French armies in Italy, writing repeated letters of demand on behalf of the comtesse de Verrue. In René de Froulay, comte de Tessé, *Mémoires et lettres du maréchal de Tessé*, vol. 1, Paris, Treuttel et Würtz, 1806, 93–94.

44. ‘Et de plus, par les raisons cy-dessus [sic] exprimées ladite dame de Verrue a bien voulu s’engager de n’aller point aux comédies, à l’Opéra, aux Thuelleries ni aux bals publics, de ne passer aux cours que hors les heures d’assemblée, et de n’aller aux foires Saint-Germain et de Saint-Laurent que le matin sans y pouvoir rester plus longtemps que jusqu’à l’heure de midi au plus tard et mème si par hazard improvu ladite dame de Verrue se trouvait dans une maison où arriverait ensuite ledit sieur comte son époux, elle sera obligée de se retirer à l’instant, comme si elle arrivaït dans une maison où serait le sieur comte de Verrue, elle ne pourra y entrer ou du moins elle ne pourra aller dans le même lieu où il sera’ (Marquis de Feuquières, ‘Lettres’, in *Archives d’Etat de Turin*, reprinted in G. Léris, *La Comtesse de Verrue et la cour de Victor-Amédée II de Savoie, étude historique*, Paris, A. Quantin, 1881, 175).

45. Documents from the *Archives d’Etat de Turin*, quoted in Léris, *La Comtesse de Verrue*, 164; Rochelle Ziskin, *Sheltering Art: Collecting and Social Identity in Early Eighteenth-Century Paris*, University Park, Penn State University Press, 37; see also a discussion.

46. See Arnaud Orain, 'Une Équipe de Modernes', in La Politique du Merveilleux, Paris, Fayot, 2018, 103–111, for further discussion of Verrue as a share investor.

47. Wansart, 'L’entourage', 4; Ziskin, Sheltering Art, 43.

48. See Ziskin, Sheltering Art, for an insightful discussion of the circle of collectors around the comtesse. Ziskin undertakes the remarkable feat of tracing the collections and artworks of Verrue and her circle in a series of detailed appendices (211–272).

49. Testament de Madame Jeanne-Baptiste d’Albert, comtesse de Verrue, September 20, 1736, AN/MC/ET/1/379. Her will contains addenda written in her own hand. Similar documents record that Verrue oversaw works on the dwelling of her sister, the marquise de Saissec, in Paris. Transport par Jeanne-Baptiste d’Albert, comtesse de Verrue [...] en paiement des travaux faits et à faire dans l’hôtel que la marquise de Saissec, sa soeur, fait construire rue de Varenne, June 20, 1712, AN/MC/ET/1/252.


51. Ibid., 94–95. The comtesse was intimately involved in the decoration and commissioning of her own dwellings. A contract for building works dated July 1713 shows her engagement in the renovations undertaken for her country house at Meudon. Her personal addenda in the margins show alterations to the building contract. See Devis et Ouvrages à faire [...] Comtesse de Verrue maison à Meudon, July 27, 1713, AN/MC/ET/1/252.

52. Ziskin, Sheltering Art, 43.


54. ‘Elle en fait ôter les grilles à cette heure. Ainsi elle aura la liberté, et elle sera dans le monde comme les autres femmes’ (Marquis de Dangeau, letter dated 1704, reprinted in Léris, La Comtesse, 185).


56. Portrait of the Comtesse de Verrue, Circle of H. Rigaud, French School, ca. 1720, Paris, Hôtel Drouot, Tajan Auction House Paris, auction April 6, 2016, lot 109. According to the Tajan provenance, the portrait appeared in an exhibition in Paris in 1909 as by an unknown artist and was then displayed at the Berlin Academy in 1910 as Portrait d’Elisabeth Desfontaines, la femme du sculpteur by Pater. It appeared once more in 1956, attributed to Watteau as Portrait de femme âgée.

57. ‘Ce portrait, peint par Rigaud ou Largillière, appartient à M. le comte de Reiset et décore le grand salon de son château du Breuil, près Dreux’ (Ernest Quentin-Bauchart, Femmes Bibliophiles de France (XVIe, XVIIe & XVIIIe siècles), Paris, Damascène Morgand Libraire, 1886, 412).

58. The reason for the lack of portraits in Verrue's middle age may be more prosaic. The marquis de Dangeau recounted, in his published journals, that the comtesse contracted smallpox in 1700, aged thirty, and was scarred as a result of the illness (Philippe de Courcillon, marquis de Dangeau, Journal du marquis de Dangeau, vol. 7, Paris, Firmin Didot Frères, 1854–1860, 256). See also Blanc after Dangeau, Trésor, 15.

59. ‘De sa main gauche elle joue avec une tabatière remplie de ce tabac que nous connaissons; et de sa main droite elle soutient quelque roman de sa bibliothèque [...] qu’elle lit d’une façon distraite’ (Tessé, Mémoires, 1715, quoted in Blanc, Trésor, 1855, 42–43). The inventory after the comtesse’s death (AN/MC/1/380) shows evidence of excess and superfluity in many areas; for example, it lists an immense collection of snuff and snuff boxes, running to several pages.
60. ‘C’est une grande bibliothèque où la femme artiste a obéi à son tempérament, en compulsant, à côté du théâtre qu’elle affectionnait, tout ce qu’elle a pu réunir de romans, de mémoires, de pièces piquantes et de gauloiseries hardies jusqu’à la licence’ (Quentin-Bauchart, Femmes Bibliophiles, 416).
61. Ibid., 418.
63. The full title is listed in the comtesse’s book-sale catalogue as Le Triomphe des Femmes, où il est montré que le Sexe feminin est plus noble & plus parfait que le masculin (‘The Victory of Women, in Which Is Shown That the Female Sex Is More Noble and More Perfect than the Male Sex’), no author, Antwerp, 1700.
64. Catalogue des Livres, 228.
65. Ibid.
66. Actes Concernant la Succession de Madame la comtesse de Verrue, April 1737, AN/MC/ET/1/383. See also Quentin-Bauchart, Femmes Bibliophiles, 416. The books remaining in her house at Meudon were bequeathed to her brother, Louis-Joseph d’Albert de Luynes, prince de Grimbergen.
68. ‘La duchesse du Maine n’était pas bibliophile; […] ambitieuse à l’excès, avait beaucoup lu, beaucoup appris, savait parler de toutes sortes de sujets et tourner les vers […] mais il ne s’en suit pas qu’elle aimât les livres, comme les aimait, de son temps, la comtesse de Verrue, et comme les aima, plus tard, Madame de Pompadour’ (Quentin-Bauchart, Femmes Bibliophiles, 433).
69. ‘Elle achetait continuellement et ne refusait rien à ses fantaisies; et quand elle désirait quelque chose, elle en achetait six fois, dix fois même plus qu’il ne lui en fallloit, et ses fantaisies changeoient souvent d’objet […] Elle paroissoit aimer beaucoup sa famille et était le soutien de cette famille […] elle laisse prodigieusement en pensions et en argent à ses domestiques […]’ (Charles-Philippe d’Albert, duc de Luynes and Dussieux & Soulié (eds.), Mémoires du duc de Luynes sur la Cour de Louis XV (1735–1758), vol. 1, Paris, Firmin Didot, 1860, 131–132). In her last testament (AN/MC/ET/1/379), the comtesse made generous bequests to her domestic staff, with the will recording: ‘Aux domestiques qui restent part à mon service à présent y seront au jour de mon deces [sic] je leur donne à chacun une année de leurs gagnés [sic]’ (‘To the servants who remain in my service or who were so on the day of my death, I leave to each a year’s wages’).
70. ‘Sa maison est moins meublée qu’elle n’est boutique accablée de tout ce qu’il y a de plus rare et de plus précieux bijoux, en meubles, en porcelaines, en lustres, en argenterie, en tableaux, même en livres curieux’ (Saint-Simon and Boislisle (ed.), Mémoires, vol. 7, 595).
73. Ibid., 138. See also Arnaud Orain, *La Politique du Merveilleux: une Autre Histoire du Système de Law*, Paris, Fayard, 2018, 103–111 for a discussion of the comtesse de Verrue and her circle as investors in, and beneficiaries of, the Mississippi Bubble.

74. ‘Il était difficile de trouver une physionomie plus piquante, mieux faite pour réveiller que celle que ces monographies présentent d’un peu terme’ (Blanc, *Trésor*, 1857, 1).

75. ‘Son amour pour les Tableaux étoit sa passion dominante, aussi sa Maison paroissoit elle un Palais heureusement orné pour la gloire et pour le triomphe de la Peinture et du goût’ (‘Obituary of the comtesse de Verrue’, in *Mercure de France*, vol. 1, December 12, 1736, Paris, 2744).

76. ‘Le Cabinet de la Comtesse de Verrue étoit en ce genre une des plus grandes et des plus précieuses Collections qu’il y eut en Europe, et préférable, au gré de beaucoup de juste Apréciateurs [*sic*] [...]’ (ibid., 2745).