

ABSTRACT

Title of Dissertation: LIBERTY, GENTILITY, AND DANGEROUS
LIAISONS: FRANCOPHILIA IN THE EARLY
REPUBLIC, 1775-1800

Nicole Mahoney, Doctor of Philosophy, 2020

Dissertation directed by: Professor Richard Bell
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This dissertation investigates the various and occasionally competing streams of French culture generated in several different arenas – print culture, polite society, marriage, and gender performance – in the last quarter of the eighteenth century. My work makes the case that Francophilia was both consequential to early American culture and a continuing source of gentry power in the post-revolution years of the United States. Analysis of American architectural spaces, decorative arts, literature, and cultural landscapes reveals that aristocratic urban Americans fashioned and displayed ideologies, from the personal to the political, by way of the pageantry of French gentility.

From Boston to New York to Philadelphia, affluent Americans used the performance and spectacle of French luxury to enhance their cultural prestige and political authority at home. Despite contradictions and ambiguities in Franco-American relations, Francophilia remained a powerful way for elites, especially women, to assert aesthetic propriety and cosmopolitanism in the 1780s and 1790s. These early Americans,

seeking ways to present themselves as genteel, erudite, and worldly, saw copying French culture and performing it as a way to make themselves—and sometimes their new nation—appear culturally sophisticated.

My dissertation therefore challenges scholarship that judges Anglicization and Anglo culture by its capacity to create uniquely American sensibilities and identities. In particular, French-language periodicals, salons, sociability, aristocratic émigrés, and libertine philosophies in the United States highlight how Americans in the highest echelons of society reproduced, used, and consumed French gentility to express cultural refinement and perform cosmopolitan identities, recasting themselves as more than provincial former British subjects. French proclivities and Francophilia could, therefore, be mobilized by patrician Americans as another form of self-fashioning. Even as news of the increasing violence of the French Revolution reached the United States and the posture of American political allegiances shifted in relation to France, the cultural capital of French elegance did not fade in the American imagination.

LIBERTY, GENTILITY, AND DANGEROUS LIAISONS:
FRANCOPHILIA IN THE EARLY REPUBLIC, 1775-1800

by

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Table of Contents

Abstract	ii
Acknowledgements	ii
Table of Contents	viii
List of Figures	x
Introduction	1
French Treaties and Amis During the Revolutionary Era	4
Francophilia and Anglophilia: Cultural Melees and Society Fêtes	8
Historiography and Methods	15
Chapter Outlines	21
Chapter One: Print Liaisons	25
“The Utility of Two Worlds” and French-Language Periodicals in the United States	25
<i>Courier de l’Amérique</i>	30
<i>Courier de Boston</i>	45
Conclusion: A Literary <i>Pas de Deux</i>	64
Chapter Two: Social Liaisons	65
“‘She Shone a Goddess, and She moved a Queen:’ Salonnières and the Creation of National Political Culture in the Early Republic	65
Prelude of the American Salonnière	69
New York	80
Philadelphia	108
Washington, D.C.: The End of the Salonnière	121
Interlude	126
Presidential Plateau: Putting French Gentility Center Stage	126
Chapter Three: Sexual Liaisons	133
A Libertine in the Republican Court: The Scandalous Marriage of Maria Matilda Bingham and the comte de Tilly	133
French Libertinage: From Crébillon fils to Sade	141
Performing Libertinage: A “very extraordinary event”	148

Madame de Tilly: “a Real French woman”	162
Conclusion: Contesting Patriarchy	171
Chapter Four: Private Liaisons	174
The Boudoir in the Early Republic	174
The Eighteenth-Century Boudoir in France.....	180
Translating Privacy and Pleasure: The American Boudoir.....	197
Behind the Mask: Authenticity in the American Boudoir	211
Conclusion: The Libertine Moment.....	219
Conclusion	221
Bibliography	226
Archival and Manuscript Documents	226
Newspapers	227
Published Primary Sources	230
<i>Founders Online</i> , National Archives and Records Administration	233
Secondary Sources	236

List of Figures

Figure 1: <i>Ticket for the Meschianza</i> , 1778. Graphics Collection, Print Department, Library Company of Philadelphia, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.	10
Figure 2: Sarah Livingston Jay’s dinner and guest list, 1787 and 1788. John Jay Homestead State Historic Site, Rye, NY.	89
Figure 3: Plateau, France, ca. 1789. Object number: W-105/A-E. Mount Vernon Collections, Mount Vernon, Virginia.	126
Figure 4: Venus and Two Cupids, France, 1790. Object number: W-2133. Mount Vernon Collections, Mount Vernon, Virginia.	127
Figure 5: The A. Alfred Taubman Gallery, The Donald W. Reynolds Museum and Education Center, Mount Vernon, Virginia.....	131
Figure 6: William Birch, <i>View in Third Street, from Spruce Street, Philadelphia, 1800</i> . Print Department, The Library Company of Philadelphia, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.	134
Figure 7: William Birch, <i>Lansdowne, the seat of the late Wm. Bingham Esq. Pennsylvania, 1809</i> . Print Department, The Library Company of Philadelphia, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania..	136
Figure 8: Jean-Antoine Watteau, <i>L’Embarquement pour Cythère</i> , 1717. Musée du Louvre, Paris.	145
Figure 9: Jean-Honoré Fragonard, <i>L’Escarpolette</i> , ca. 1767, The Wallace Collection, London.	146
Figure 10: Thomas Lawrence, <i>Maria Mathilda Bingham with Two of her Children</i> , ca. 1810-1818. Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.....	169
Figure 11: François Boucher, <i>La Toilette</i> , 1742. Museo Nacional Thyssen-Bornemisza, Madrid.....	185
Figure 12: Jacques-François Blondel, <i>Plan du premier étage de l’aile du Midi du château de Versailles, Paris, ca. 1735</i> . Département Estampes et photographie, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris.....	186
Figure 13: Pierre Antoine Baudouin, <i>La Nuit</i> (Night), n.d. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, New York.....	188
Figure 14: Pierre Maleuvre after Sigmund Freudenberg, <i>Le boudoir</i> , History of Manners and Customs of the French (series), 1774. National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC.....	190

- Figure 15: Marquis de Sade, *La Philosophie dans le boudoir*, title page and verso, 1795.
Département Réserve des livres rares, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris. 196
- Figure 16: Number of checkouts annually for *Les liaisons dangereuses, ou, Lettres recueillies dans une société, & publiées pour l'instruction de quelques autres* / Par M.C. ... de L. ... (Paris: Chez Durand neveu, 1782). City Readers: Digital Historic Collections at the New York Society Library, New York, NY. 202
- Figure 17: Number of checkouts annually for *Dangerous connections: or, letters collected in a society, and published for the instruction of other societies* by M. C... de L... (London: Printed for T. Hookham, 1784). City Readers: Digital Historic Collections at the New York Society Library, New York, NY. 203

Introduction

The guest list was monumental: eleven hundred people clutched tickets to the event. Women made appointments with hairdressers for four o'clock in the morning. Out of breath and sweating, tailors, milliners, and dressmakers had worked around the clock for days. Summoned from the French army, thirty cooks helped to prepare the feast. As many as ten thousand spectators crowded the streets to catch glimpses of the elegant invitees arriving in their courtly carriages. A temporary dancing room sixty feet wide and forty feet long built just for the occasion and decorated with large pillars and classical paintings on the ceiling skirted a formal garden adorned with cedar and pine branches arranged into private groves. At nine o'clock, a brilliant display of fireworks lit the sky as guests danced to the music of the orchestra or promenaded serpentine garden paths. At midnight, under three large tents, invitees sat at seven tables, each one large enough to accommodate fifty people, to enjoy an exquisite collation of dishes, followed by rich cakes and all the fruits of the season.

The host, French minister to the United States the chevalier de la Luzerne, entertained a privileged guest list that night: George Washington, Benjamin Rush, John Dickinson, Robert Morris, Thomas Paine, the comte de Rochambeau, and more. Poets and merchants, lawyers and ministers, painters and scholars, new money and old, Whigs and former Tories, southerners and northerners, Germans and Irish, military generals, Native chiefs, and Quaker women all feasted under the same canopy. No expense was spared and no American of standing or status dared to miss the celebration for the French dauphin. It was July 15, 1782 in Philadelphia, where the new American Congress was

meeting, and the party was to celebrate the birth of the dauphin of France, the heir to the French throne, the crown prince of the Bourbon monarchy.¹

“Human nature in this instance,” remarked Dr. Benjamin Rush after the party, “seems to be turned inside outwards.” Pride and ego and wartime, for an evening, seemed to have evaporated. In Rush’s account of the evening, he acknowledged the paradox:

How great the revolution in the mind of an American! to rejoice in the birth of an heir to the crown of France, a country against which he had imbibed prejudices as ancient as the wars between France and England. How strange! for a protestant to rejoice in the birth of a prince, whose religion he had always taught to consider as unfriendly to humanity. And above all how new the phenomenon for republicans to rejoice in the birth of a prince, who must one day be the support of monarchy and slavery.

In Rush’s reckoning, Americans’ enthusiasm for the chevalier’s party in honor of the dauphin demonstrated the maturity of this newly independent country. Only a few months earlier, in April 1782, the United States and Great Britain had begun peace negotiations in Paris to end the Revolutionary War. With grace and acuity, men and women of diverse ranks had forgotten regional and political strife: they “behaved to each other as if they had been members of the same family.”²

The Franco-American wartime military alliance had seeped into a cultural one: the joint victors in a revolution against King George III delighted in the opportunity to fête together the prince of France, the son of Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette. Americans eagerly embraced the courtly extravagance and luxuries provided by their French allies

¹ Benjamin Rush, “The French Fête in Philadelphia in Honor of the Dauphin’s Birthday, 1782,” *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 21, no.2 (1897): 257-262. The account of the celebration in Philadelphia in honor of the dauphin’s birthday, given on Monday evening, July 15, 1782, is extracted from a letter by Dr. Benjamin Rush to a lady.

² Rush, “The French Fête,” 259.

for the party, all intended to recreate the pageantry of Versailles.³ But the unanimous and harmonious embrace of French culture by diverse Americans would not last. Wartime cooperation had propped up this demonstration of Franco-American magnanimity in a massive, though exclusive, pageant reveling in the choreography of the French royal court.

The celebration of the birth of the French dauphin in Philadelphia was the beginning of a much larger transatlantic phenomenon: the embrace of various streams of aristocratic French culture by aristocratic urban Americans in the wake of the Revolutionary War.⁴ I argue that Francophilia was both consequential to early American culture and a continuing source of gentry power in the last quarter of the eighteenth century. From Boston to New York to Philadelphia, affluent Americans used the performance and spectacle of French luxury to enhance their cultural prestige and political authority at home. Despite contradictions and ambiguities in Franco-American relations, Francophilia would prove to be a powerful way for elites, especially women, to assert aesthetic propriety and cosmopolitanism in the 1780s and 1790s. These early Americans, seeking ways to present themselves as genteel, erudite, and worldly, saw

³ Louis XIV supported a court-based culture of patronage and political coercion. He skillfully used performance and spectacle at Versailles and in Paris to enhance his prestige and authority. Lauren R. Clay, *Stagestruck: The Business of Theater in Eighteenth-Century France and Its Colonies* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2013), 3-4.

⁴ For the purposes of this dissertation, I define the American aristocracy as the highest social order of American society. The American aristocracy comprised the wealthiest members of society who wielded the greatest political power. Although some members of the aristocracy may have had less actual money than other rich merchants, the status commonly derived from the longstanding social position of one's family, hereditary land ownership, and generations of inherited wealth. I use the terms "aristocrat," "elite," and "upper class" interchangeably. Nobles, on the other hand, possessed more formal privileges and members of the nobility were ranked immediately under royalty. Nobles are legally recognized by hereditary titles and honorifics.

copying French culture and performing it as a way to make themselves—and sometime their new nation—appear culturally sophisticated.

French Treaties and Amis During the Revolutionary Era

The chevalier de la Luzerne's elaborate 1782 party in Philadelphia had been many months in the making. From the early stages of fighting after the Battles of Lexington and Concord, France supported Americans in their struggle for independence.⁵ King Louis XVI allowed clandestine aid to flow to the rebellious American colonists. Idealistic French officers such as Gilbert du Motier, marquis de Lafayette volunteered their military expertise to help train and lead the Continental Army.⁶ After the American victory at Saratoga in 1777, France openly acknowledged and continued to uphold its military support for the American colonists. Signed in February 1778, the Treaty of Alliance with France required that neither the United States nor France agree to a separate peace with Great Britain and that American independence must be a condition of any peace agreement. In addition, the Treaty of Amity and Commerce, signed on the same day, promoted trade and commercial ties between the two countries.⁷ In July 1780, an

⁵ Published in January 1776, Thomas Paine's *Common Sense* issued a direct appeal to Spain and France for assistance in defeating the British, offering them an opportunity for revenge: both nations had lost territories and prestige to Great Britain after the Seven Years' War. Thomas Paine, *Common Sense; Addressed to the Inhabitants of America* (Philadelphia: R. Bell, 1776).

⁶ For the most recent biographies of the marquis de Lafayette, see Lloyd S. Kramer, *Lafayette in Two Worlds: Public Cultures and Personal Identities in an Age of Revolutions* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996); Harlow Giles Unger, *Lafayette* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2002); and Laura Auricchio, *The Marquis: Lafayette Reconsidered* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2015).

⁷ French motives had more to do with the persistent Franco-British rivalry than the justness of the American cause. France hoped to drive a wedge between the different parts of Britain's American empire, thereby strengthening the French empire in relative terms and restoring its traditional role in the European balance of power. Both treaties were negotiated in Paris by the American diplomats Benjamin Franklin,

expeditionary corps of French troops under the leadership of the comte de Rochambeau landed in Rhode Island. The next year, Rochambeau, Lafayette, and George Washington along with several thousands of French and American troops pushed British General Cornwallis to surrender in October 1781 at Yorktown, Virginia.⁸ When Washington and Rochambeau dined under the canopy at the chevalier de la Luzerne's in July 1782, the United States and Great Britain already had begun peace negotiations in Paris to end the Revolutionary War.

For the next twenty years, amicable economic and social ties between France and the United States, including American trade with the French Caribbean, drew French-speaking men and women to the United States.⁹ Most famously, François Jean de Beauvoir, marquis de Chastellux, a French officer in Rochambeau's army, traveled extensively in the United States before he returned to France in 1783 and published a popular travel journal in 1786, an English edition of which became available the next year.¹⁰ However, like most of the French officers who volunteered to fight in the

Silas Deane, and Arthur Lee. Simeon Deane, brother of Silas Deane, delivered the Treaty of Alliance and the Treaty of Amity and Commerce with France to Congress on May 2, 1778. Congress ratified both treaties on May 4, 1778. Twenty years after they were signed, Congress annulled both of these treaties on July 7, 1798, during the height of the so-called Quasi-War with France.

⁸ For a detailed history of the extensive French and Spanish military and financial support to the Americans during the Revolutionary War, see Larrie D. Ferreiro, *Brothers at Arms: American Independence and the Men of France and Spain Who Saved It* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2016).

⁹ Many historians have analyzed the importance of French Huguenots in North America. For the most recent scholarship on the Huguenot diaspora in North America, see Jon Butler, *The Huguenots in America: A Refugee People in New World Society* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983); Jonathan M. Beagle, "Remembering Peter Faneuil: Yankees, Huguenots, and Ethnicity in Boston, 1743-1900," *The New England Quarterly*, 75 no. 3 (2002): 388-414; Bertrand Van Ruymbeke and Randy J. Sparks, eds., *Memory and Identity: The Huguenots in France and the Atlantic Diaspora* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2003); Catharine Randall, *From a Far Country: Camisards and Huguenots in the Atlantic World* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2009); and Geoffrey Treasure, *The Huguenots* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013).

¹⁰ Fluent in English, the marquis de Chastellux (1734-1788) was one of the principal liaisons between George Washington and the comte de Rochambeau. Prior to returning home to France, Chastellux received

Revolutionary War, few Francophone visitors came to stay. French-speaking men and women mostly traveled to the United States to engage in trade, purchase land, or to escape political turmoil. Thousands of Francophone refugees arrived from France's eastern Caribbean colonies of Martinique, Guadeloupe, and Saint-Domingue. Some of these French Caribbean refugees were wealthy white enslavers such as Médéric Louis Élie Moreau de Saint-Méry, a lawyer born in Martinique, educated in Paris, dedicated to defending slavery, and early leader of the French Revolution who lived in exile in Philadelphia for several years in the late 1790s.¹¹ Across the United States, some aristocratic French refugees arrived with dreams of establishing utopian farming communities, hoping to reconstitute themselves as the privileged class of the *ancien régime*. Many of these colonies quickly collapsed, often falling prey to fraudulent land deals such as the Scioto Company's settlement at Gallipolis in southeastern Ohio, and many settlers returned to France after their colonial ventures had ended in failure.¹² The

honorary degrees from the College of William and Mary and the College of Philadelphia (later the University of Pennsylvania). The American Academy of Arts and Sciences as well as the American Philosophical Society made him an honorary member. *Voyages de M. le marquis de Chastellux dans l'Amérique septentrionale dans les années 1780, 1781 & 1782* (Paris: Prault, 1786). *Travels in North America, in the Years 1780, 1781, and 1782* (London: G. G. J. and J. Robinson, 1787).

¹¹ For more on Moreau de Saint-Méry, see Laurent Dubois, *Avengers of the New World: The Story of the Haitian Revolution* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 2004) and François Furstenberg, *When the United States Spoke French: Five Refugees Who Shaped a Nation* (New York: Penguin, 2014).

¹² Looking to build a perfect society based on what France might have become without the Revolution, French aristocrat Claude-François de Lezay-Marnésia attempted to create a utopian refuge along the banks of the Ohio River. Hostilities between the U.S. Army and Native American tribes prevented the marquis from claiming the 20,000 acres he had purchased from the Scioto Company. He returned to France, financially and psychologically troubled, and barely escaped the guillotine before dying in poverty. Claude-François de Lezay-Marnésia, *Letters Written from the Banks of the Ohio*, ed. Benjamin Hoffman, trans. Alan J. Singerman (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2017).

French refugees also established the colonies of Asylum (central Pennsylvania, 1793), Vine and Olive Colony (Alabama, 1816-1825), and Champ d'Asile (Texas, 1818). See Rob Mann and Diana DiPaolo Lorne, "Keeping Up Appearances: Dress, Architecture, Furniture, and Status at French Azilum," *International Journal of Historical Archaeology* 5, no. 4 (2001): 281-307; Kent Gardien, "The Splendid Fools: Philadelphia's Origins of Alabama's Vine and Olive Colony," *The Pennsylvania Magazine of*

vast majority of Francophone refugees, however, was either formerly enslaved men, women, and children, or poor white laborers. The presence of refugees formerly enslaved in the French empire in many American port cities shaped American politics in important ways, influencing changes in slave laws and trade policies and fueling debates over the abolition of slavery.¹³

An influx of politically influential yet mostly penniless French *émigrés* (political refugees) exacerbated American political debates as the United States tried to remain neutral after the fall of the Bastille in 1789. They were, however, hardly a unified group: some were opposed to the direction of the French Revolution and others threatened by its violence. One émigré in particular stands out for creating dangerous liaisons between France and the United States. Terribly corrupt, Charles-Maurice de Talleyrand-Périgord descended from one of France's noblest families and served as the crooked bishop of Autun and then administrator of church finances before he became a leading voice of reform in the early years of the French Revolution. After fleeing Paris, he landed in the United States in 1794 where he launched himself into brash land speculation and enthusiastically engaged in high society, being elected to the American Philosophical Society in 1796. Back in France the next year, he humiliated American special envoys in

History and Biography 104, no. 4 (1980): 491-507; Kent Gardien, "Take Pity on Our Glory: Men of Champ d'Asile," *The Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 87, no. 3 (1984): 241-268; and Rafe Blaufarb, *Bonapartists in the Borderlands: French Exiles and Refugees on the Gulf Coast, 1815-1835* (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2005).

¹³ Ashli White, *Encountering Revolution: Haiti and the Making of the Early Republic* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2012). White argues that the Haitian Revolution and the white and mixed-race refugees who fled to the United States forced Americans to confront the paradox of being a slaveholding.

what became known as the XYZ Affair.¹⁴ Most of the aristocratic émigrés returned to France by the end of the century, but they helped create a hefty cultural wake during some of the most consequential years for American history.

With revolutionary change in France also came political instability, violence, and calls for radical social change that frightened many Americans.¹⁵ Secretary of State Thomas Jefferson became the leader of the pro-French Democratic-Republican Party that celebrated the republican ideals of the French Revolution and seized upon the close ties between some émigrés and their Federalist supporters to charge them as too courtly and aristocratic. Secretary of the Treasury Alexander Hamilton led the Federalist Party, which viewed the French Revolution with skepticism and decried what it saw as the hypocrisy of the Republicans, noting that Jefferson and other members of this party had many aristocratic French friends as well.

Francophilia and Anglophilia: Cultural Melees and Society Fêtes

Elite Americans did not all and did not always embrace French culture and language. In fact, the chevalier de la Luzerne's extravagant soirée in 1782 was not the first nor the most grandiose wartime party enjoyed by Philadelphians. The chevalier's French fête was, I suggest, a staged cultural retaliation to the Meschianza, an extravagant farewell party given in honor of British General William Howe in May 1778 in

¹⁴ For an excellent account of Talleyrand's time in the United States, see Furstenberg, *When the United States Spoke French*.

¹⁵ As the French Revolution degenerated into violent factionalism and civil war during the early 1790s, American conservative northeasterners reacted in profound terror. Rachel Hope Cleves, *The Reign of Terror in America: Visions of Violence from Anti-Jacobinism to Antislavery* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

Philadelphia while the British still occupied the city.¹⁶ Organized chiefly by Major John André, the eighteen-hour Meschianza (a play on *mescolanza*, the Italian word for medley) began with a regatta carrying Howe and other officers down the Delaware River to their disembarkation at Walnut Grove, the abandoned estate of American patriot Joseph Wharton. There, more than four hundred elite loyalist Philadelphians and British members of high society attended a mock medieval jousting tournament between two groups of British officers, the Knights of the Blended Rose and the Knights of the Burning Mountain. André designed dozens of costumes, created mottos and standards for each side, designated squires, heralds, and trumpeters to join the knights, and assigned fourteen young unmarried women whom he costumed as turbaned Turkish maidens to the knights. Two young enslaved men dressed in sashes and silk pants “wearing large silver clasps round their necks and arms” held onto the stirrups of the lead officer’s horse as he rode into the pavilion.¹⁷ Following the mock joust, the guests proceeded to the mansion for refreshments and dancing, passing through two triumphal arches adorned with naval and military trophies. After dark, a climatic fireworks display lit up the sky above the arches. Guests dined and danced until dawn in a 180-foot long tent decorated with silk flowers, ribbons, and hundreds of candles reflecting in the mirrors along the walls. It was a true medley of performance: military ceremony, theater, masquerade, chivalric ritual, and display of patriarchal order. The Meschianza, it must have seemed to many

¹⁶ General Sir William Howe (1729-1814) faced growing criticism after the surrender of General John Burgoyne at the Battle of Saratoga in October 1777. He was recalled from North America soon after. Admiral Richard Howe (1726-1799) requested approval to resign after he learned of his brother’s impending departure.

¹⁷ “Particulars of the Mischianza exhibited in America at the Departure of Gen. Howe. Copy of a Letter from an Officer at Philadelphia to his Correspondent in London. May 23, 1778,” *The Gentleman’s Magazine* 48 (August 1778): 354.

Philadelphians, celebrated the drama of imperial pageantry and scripted military maneuvers while relegating the contemporaneous violent warfare to offstage.¹⁸

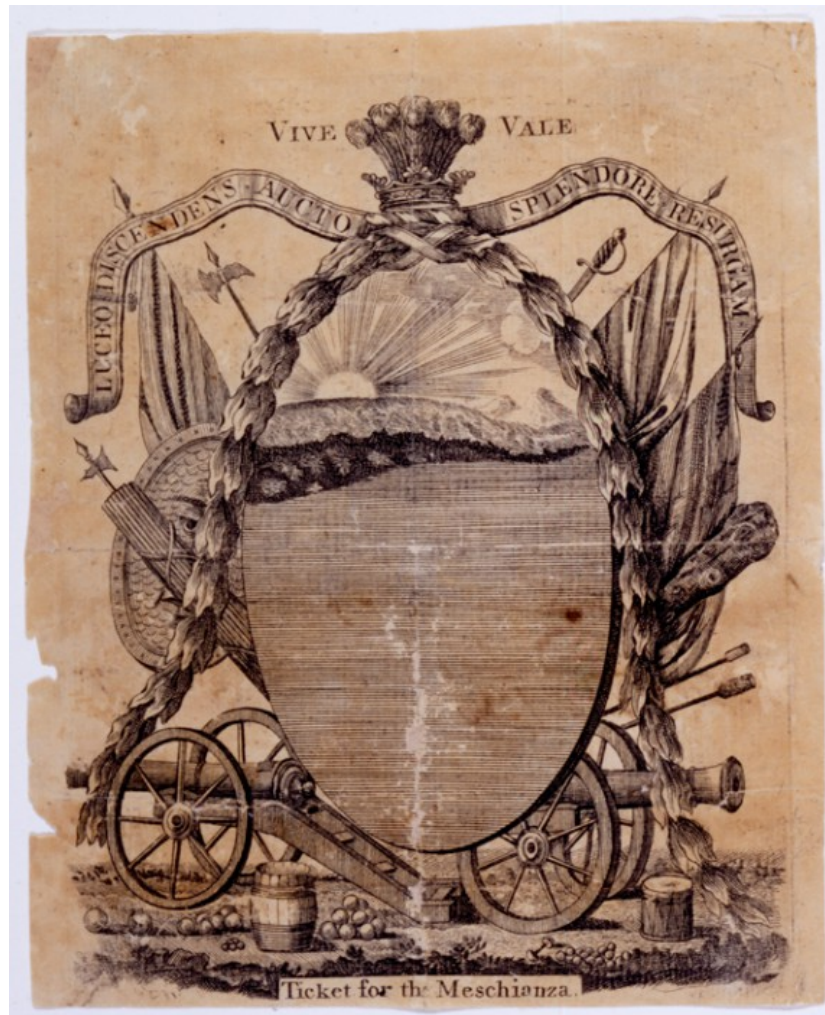


Figure 1: *Ticket for the Meschianza, 1778*. Graphics Collection, Print Department, Library Company of Philadelphia, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Inside the shield the sun sets over the sea and General Howe's crest sits on top of a wreath flanked by the Latin phrase "Vive vale" (Farewell and be happy).

¹⁸ My description of the Meschianza is based on an article by David S. Shields and Fredrika J. Teute, "The Meschianza: Sum of All Fêtes," *Journal of the Early Republic* 35, no. 2 (2015): 185-214. Their narrative is derived from two contemporary accounts written by Major John André, one to a friend in London dated May 23, 1778 and the other to Peggy Chew dated June 2, 1778. The first letter was published in *Gentleman's Magazine* (London) in August 1778. I also consulted Mary Kate Robbett, "Meschianza," Washington Library, Center for Digital History, Mount Vernon, Virginia.

As an enterprise in imperial identity, the Meschianza magnified emulative elite colonial Anglicization—the means by which Americans increasingly modeled their lives on British polite society.¹⁹ Before the Revolution, the expansion of the British economy had marked a point of pride for ambitious colonists as mercantile port cities such as Boston, New York, Philadelphia, and Charleston flourished as major centers of commodity exchange and distribution for the British empire.²⁰ Colonial mimetic impulses led many ambitious Americans to embrace the trappings of British gentility: estate inventories from the middle of the eighteenth century reveal that even modest American farmers and artisans owned books, ceramic plates, glassware, metal cutlery, and silk items imported from London. Tea, once a luxury, became a necessity.²¹

¹⁹ Jack P. Greene, “Independence and Dependence: The Psychology of the Colonial Relationship on the Eve of the American Revolution,” in *Imperatives, Behaviors, and Identities: Essays in Early American Cultural History*, ed. Jack P. Greene (Charlottesville: University of Virginia, 1992), 177-178. Even with shiploads of British commodities and people, disparities existed between conditions of life in America and in Great Britain. As Jack Greene has argued, elite colonial Americans were troubled quickly by the limits of Anglicization, specifically its failure to recreate the societies they had left behind in the Old World. Soon enough, Greene contends, elite Americans became desperate for structure: “It was this fear [of not becoming anglicized enough] that moved a number of men on the eve of the pre-Revolutionary debate to propose the creation of an American aristocracy, a titled patriciate that would provide the colonies with a ‘complete’ social structure on the British model and bolster colonial society against the forces of disorder and instability that had worked so effectively against the anglicization of the colonies from their initial settlement.” This essay was written originally for a special bicentennial issue of *Le Monde*, no. 9739 (17 May 1976) under the title “De la resistance à la revolution.”

²⁰ T. H. Breen, *The Marketplace of Revolution: How Consumer Politics Shaped American Independence* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004). Breen argues that the coming of the American Revolution cannot be understood without a consideration of the scope, scale, and penetration of a prior consumer revolution. American colonists from the 1740s onward, he contends, were drawn into the advancing juggernaut of British manufactured goods—a sensuous stream of textile, ceramic, glass, metal, and printed goods that reached into virtually every American household. As objects of desire and avenues of choice, these British goods became a common ground of American identity, a materialized “imagined community” that, Breen claims, determined the shape and trajectory of the evolving revolutionary mobilization.

²¹ The most careful analyses of American consumption in the eighteenth-century are those conducted by scholars of material culture. See Robert Blair St. George, ed., *Material Life in America, 1600-1860* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1988); Richard L. Bushman, *The Refinement of America: Persons, Houses, Cities* (New York: Vintage Books, 1992); John Brewer and Roy Porter, eds., *Consumption and the World of Goods* (New York: Routledge, 1993); Katharine Martinez and Kenneth L. Ames, eds., *Material Culture of Gender, The Gender of Material Culture* (Winterthur, DE: Henry Francis du Pont Winterthur Museum, 1997); T. H. Breen, *The Marketplace of Revolution: How Consumer Politics Shaped American Independence* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004); John Styles and Amanda Vickery, eds., *Gender,*

Through Anglicization, many American patrician families expected to legitimize their wealth and power as well as recreate what they perceived as the stability and order of stratified English society. Eager to prove themselves as members of British aristocracy, these elite Americans imported British fashions, literature, and furniture, copied British architecture, sent their sons to school in London, and surrounded their manor homes with elaborate formal English-style gardens.²² Anglicization, then, was an attempt by Americans to graft the refinements of the Old World upon the rawness of the New.²³

The extent and significance of Anglicization, however, remains in dispute.²⁴ American colonists, especially those in the upper echelons of society, were never simply

Taste, and Material Culture in Britain and North America, 1700-1830 (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2006); David Jaffe, *A New Nation of Goods: The Material Culture of Early America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011); Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, et al, eds., *Tangible Things: Making History Through Objects* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015); Robert DuPlessis, *The Material Atlantic: Clothing, Commerce, and Colonization in the Atlantic World, 1650-1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015); Zara Anishanslin *Portrait of a Woman in Silk: Hidden Histories of the British Atlantic World* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016); and Cary Carson, *Face Value: The Consumer Revolution and the Colonizing of America* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2017).

²² Ignacio Gallup-Díaz, Andrew Shankman, and David J. Silverman, eds. *Anglicizing America: Empire, Revolution, Republic* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015).

²³ Anglicization was not exclusive to American elites. Elisa Tamarkin charts American Anglophilia from the Revolutionary War to the Civil War and argues that popular devotion to British traditions was instrumental to the psychological innovations of democracy and egalitarian politics in the United States. Elisa Tamarkin, *Anglophilia: Deference, Devotion, and Antebellum America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007).

²⁴ Kenneth A. Lockridge, *A New England Town: The First Hundred Years: Dedham, Massachusetts, 1636-1736*, 2nd ed. (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1985), 75-78. In his case study of Dedham, Massachusetts, Kenneth Lockridge compared the conditions of the small colonial New England town with those of English peasant villages: "If some Old World villages offered many of the beneficial conditions found in New World Dedham, it is even more true that New World Dedham embodied many of the traditional conditions found in most Old World villages." Here, then, is a fine example of Anglicization not on an elite scale, but of farmers in an "unmistakably 'American' society." The main point, however, of Lockridge's study—the splintering of Dedham as a utopian community under the pressures of individual opportunism—proves the failure of Anglicization to solve the problem of identity formation in new American societies. Old World impulses toward perfection, he argued, could not be easily transplanted to

emulative consumers eager to purchase the products of Britain.²⁵ Furthermore, British measures of gentility proved too easily imitable. So many ordinary colonial Americans adopted some of the accoutrements associated with British gentility that those cultural symbols soon lost their exclusivity. Although average folks lacked the means to build mansions or dress in fine silks, they found substitutes for the expensive trappings of British style. A small painted clapboard house might have a fashionable parlor decorated with inexpensive manufactured fabrics. Working parents instructed their children in posture and manners and sent them to school. What historian Richard Bushman calls “vernacular gentility” was thoroughly ensconced in the emerging middle class by the end of the eighteenth century as small merchants, artisans, well-off farmers, and shopkeepers came to believe that they, too, should live virtuous, genteel lives.²⁶

My dissertation challenges scholarship that judges Anglicization and Anglo culture by its capacity to create uniquely American sensibilities and identities. In the wake of independence, I argue, many urban affluent Americans progressively turned their cultural gaze towards France. As they sought to resist forms of British cultural domination, mercantile coastal elites endeavored to establish practices of etiquette, sociability, and political performance that would recast them as more than provincial former British subjects.²⁷ The costly trappings and complex aesthetics of the French

New World social circumstances. For a more recent study of Anglicization, see David S. Shields, *Civil Tongues and Polite Letters in British America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997).

²⁵ For an excellent study of consumption in the British Atlantic, see Zara Anishanslin *Portrait of a Woman in Silk: Hidden Histories of the British Atlantic World* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2016).

²⁶ Richard L. Bushman, *The Refinement of America: Persons, Houses, Cities* (New York: Vintage Books, 1992), xiii.

²⁷ Great Britain and its colonies spent most of the eighteenth century at war with France. From the beginning of the rivalry between England and France in the fourteenth century through the end of the

noblesse, they hoped, would distinguish them as members of the American gentry and the governing class of the new republic. During the reign of Louis XV (1715-1774), the standards of French polite society had served as universal markers of gentility and refinement. French language, French literature, French luxury goods, French fashions, French cuisine, French art, and French manners gradually spread across Europe and then across the Atlantic from the epicenters at Versailles and Paris.²⁸ In the absence of official titles of nobility, the performance of French aristocratic culture especially by American women made Francophilia a dangerous, powerful, and controversial organizing concept in post-Revolutionary American social and cultural history.

Four years after the Meschianza in Philadelphia in 1782, the chevalier de la Luzerne's party for the French dauphin initiated a dramatic cultural contest among Americans in the upper echelons of society. As the British lumbered to the negotiating table in 1782, the chevalier de la Luzerne orchestrated a dramatic performance that beguiled twice as many guests as the Meschianza and showcased the ostentation and manners of which the French empire was capable. While the Meschianza entertained mostly loyalists and British officers in occupied Philadelphia, the French party near war's end displayed to swaths of Americans what they had won in addition to independence:

Second Hundred Years' War in 1815, these two countries remained perpetual antagonists. This almost continuous warfare helped to sharpen a sense of national identity among American colonists and British continentals: it provoked a proud feeling of belonging to a powerful European nation as together Britain and her colonies battled a foreign foe. Especially after colonial militiamen and British regulars fought side-by-side during the Seven Years' War (1754-1763), Americans felt more British than ever before. Common experiences of battle and victory, British military investments in American security, and the defeat of the Catholic French reinforced British nationality among American colonists. They famously vaunted their proud allegiance to Great Britain by erecting a statue of King George III on Bowling Green in New York City in 1770.

²⁸ Dena Goodman, *The Republic of Letters: A Cultural History of the French Enlightenment* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1994).

peacetime alliance with the most resplendent and refined court of Europe. It was a scripted display of cultural arms and the French had just taken center stage.

Historiography and Methods

This dissertation is not about the Franco-American alliances that took place on battlefields or in political treatises, but rather about the ways in which elite Americans performed and used markers of French gentility in parlors and behind closed doors in northeastern coastal cities. Upper class men and women achieved these performances, I argue, by taking up social rituals, etiquette, and ideologies based on those of the French aristocracy. In the early years of the American republic, government leaders struggled to define their authority amid what Joanne Freeman calls the “barely controlled chaos of national public life.” Without a titled nobility, a royal court, or a party system, customs, manners, and a rhetoric of honor emerged, according to Freeman, to stabilize the frenzied political landscape. Petty gossip and duels easily exasperated the subtleties of polite society. The reputations of genteel men and women in the early republic were fragile: they were frantically seeking authority and claim to elite status in an unstructured national arena and in a government of undecided character.²⁹ But on what tenets did this culture of honor and propriety rest? I interrogate the French exemplars of American polite society, the social and political glissades that made American men and women graceful. My analysis rests on the insight that French polite society emerged as a paragon

²⁹ Joanne B. Freeman, *Affairs of Honor: National Politics in the Early Republic* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), xvii.

of gentility and structure after the Revolutionary War because of its ability to reinforce social order in the United States.

While many other historians have analyzed the flow and direction of cultural change in the early republic, few have looked to France for its precedents. The most recent book on this topic is François Furstenberg's *When the United States Spoke French: Five Refugees Who Shaped a Nation* (2014). Furstenberg describes the profound cultural and political impact of five former French *constituants* (members of the National Constituent Assembly) who fled to Philadelphia in the early 1790s seeking asylum from anti-aristocratic violence during the Reign of Terror. Philadelphia at the end of the eighteenth century, Furstenberg argues, was "as French as any American city could be" and a "part of the French Atlantic world." The arrival of the French *constituants* was not the beginning of a new era of French cultural influence in America, but it "served as a catalyst, accelerating a great cultural reorientation that was already underway."³⁰ I expand on Furstenberg's work by examining how French culture became particularly influential among leading American women and men. In other words, I am focused on what American women did with French genteel culture, not necessarily what French people did in the United States. Furthermore, I look beyond a handful of French men and delve into the lives of a large cast of upper-class American women too in order to trace more fully cultural demonstrations of French aristocracy.

Three other monographs on French social and political influences in the early republic provide equally valuable context for my research. Susan Branson's *These Fiery*

³⁰ François Furstenberg, *When the United States Spoke French: Five Refugees Who Shaped a Nation* (New York: Penguin Press, 2014), 109, 129, 136.

Frenchified Dames: Women and Political Culture in Early National Philadelphia (2001) argues that elite and middle-class white women exploited several key features of aristocratic life in Philadelphia, including salons, theaters, and the wide availability of international writings (especially reports of the French Revolution) in order to achieve a higher standing in the culture and politics of the new nation. Branson asserts that the French Revolution was a “defining event” not only in American political culture, but also in the expansion of women’s public roles in the United States. She contends that despite attempts by social conservatives to quell their emerging political and social power—typified by William Cobbett’s derogatory label of “these fiery Frenchified dames”—elite women in the 1780s and 1790s not only participated in partisan political displays by way of print culture, fashion, salons, theater, and political celebrations, but also initiated discussion about women’s rights and place in national life.³¹ My research contests some of Branson’s insights and I aim to prove that the French Revolution was less of a turning point than she asserts. French culture, especially salons, flourished years before and years after the French Revolution: astonishingly, even the Reign of Terror did not quell elite Americans’ appetites for French refinement and decorum.

In the early republic, many newly independent elite Americans expressed anxiety and insecurity born of their colonial past. Still craving validation from British audiences, ruling Americans at the same time hoped to forge a sovereign nation and celebrate a national identity distinct from that of the mother country. Kariann Yokota’s *Unbecoming British: How Revolutionary America Became a Postcolonial Nation* (2011) examines

³¹ Susan Branson, *These Fiery Frenchified Dames: Women and Political Culture in Early National Philadelphia* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001), 143.

these competing urges—what she calls “unbecoming British”—and argues that “lingering colonial dependence” shaped the new nation “without a cohesive sense of what they would become afterwards.”³² I argue that some political and social leaders of the United States had broader and stronger visions outside those of the British empire. Many Anglo-American elites aspired not only to move beyond their colonial outsider status, but to surpass British aristocrats in their wealth, status, and refinement. They waged their struggle to “unbecome British,” in part, by dropping British markers of civility and, I argue, picking up French ones.

Many methods of nation building in the early republic that historians have already studied were, I argue, descendants of the French court. In Catherine Allgor’s *Parlor Politics: In Which the Ladies of Washington Help Build a City and a Government* (2000) elite women’s social skills proved crucial to some of the major political successes and failures in the early decades of the national government in Washington, D.C. From the administration of Thomas Jefferson to that of Andrew Jackson, soirées, dinner parties, and seemingly endless rounds of social calls provided both women and men with a space in which to interact informally and unofficially. In short, Allgor’s is a story about the wives and daughters of early national political leaders and the invented social rituals integral to capital politics. In this world, women such as Margaret Bayard Smith became skilled lobbyists for family and friends seeking positions.³³ The story that Allgor tells,

³² Kariann Yokota, *Unbecoming British: How Revolutionary America Became a Postcolonial Nation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 11.

³³ Catherine Allgor, *Parlor Politics: In Which the Ladies of Washington Help Build a City and a Government* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2000). The standard narrative, based on the work of Linda K. Kerber and Mary Beth Norton, is that although women were personally politicized by the Revolutionary War, neither the war nor the new Constitution changed their status. Both Norton and Kerber argued that the American Revolution inspired a new valuation of women’s roles within society and sped their integration into the civil polity, but domestic traditions still condemned highly educated or active

however, is not a novel one. Early federal women built the social and cultural scaffolding for the new American government and engaged consciously in politics in New York and Philadelphia long before the capital moved to Washington. This dissertation deprovincializes the history of the political culture of the early republic: it was not an establishment based on purely republican values, but one based on a transatlantic tradition of restricted access to power and deep privileges for elites.

The chronology of this dissertation focuses on the last twenty-five years of the eighteenth-century from the Declaration of Independence to Thomas Jefferson's inauguration in Washington, D.C. in 1801. The question of how the French Revolution figures in American Francophilia is a complex one, particularly in matters of class or when the relationship to a specifically French radicalism was at stake. I try to address these issues as they arise, certainly when the fantasy of France is reckoned against American foreign affairs in the early republic.³⁴ Even as news of the increasing violence of the French Revolution reached the United States and the posture of American political allegiances shifted in relation to France, the cultural capital of French elegance did not fade in the American imagination. At some moments, as I see it, Francophilia in the United States was like reaching for a mirage: Americans hoped to claim a French

women as perverse threats to family stability. For literature on female political involvement in post-Revolutionary America, see: Mary Kelley, *Learning to Stand and Speak: Women, Education, and Public Life in America's Republic* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006); Rosemarie Zagarri, *Revolutionary Backlash: Women and Politics in the Early American Republic* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007); Mary Beth Norton, *Liberty's Daughters: The Revolutionary Experience of American Women, 1750-1800* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1980); and Linda K. Kerber, *Women of the Republic: Intellect and Ideology in Revolutionary America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980).

³⁴ For a study of French views of the early republic, see Durand Echeverria, *Mirage in the West: A History of the French Image of American Society to 1815* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968).

affiliation to a bygone era, that of *ancien régime* elegance, rococo splendor, and firm social order. Sometimes it was born of an urge for cosmopolitan validation and at other times a nostalgic impulse. In France, the “Frenchness” that elite Americans loved in the late 1780s and throughout the 1790s no longer existed. Because the love was a fantasy but its effects real, my interests are not with France but with the United States.³⁵

I use *Les liaisons dangereuses* (1782), an epistolary novel of sexual intrigue by Pierre Choderlos de Laclos, as a loose metaphor for the connections between France and the United States at the end of the eighteenth-century. Former lovers, the vicomte de Valmont and marquise de Merteuil—aristocratic allies turned enemies—compete in sexual gamesmanship buried beneath layers of nuanced social performances and recounted in letters from unreliable narrators. Their shared amoral libertine philosophy corrupts the hearts of innocent people and ruins virtuous lives for sport. They both use performances of gender to their advantage: Valmont thrives on his displays of upper-class male privilege and Merteuil on her one-woman feminism. The themes and elite maneuvers of the novel extend imperfectly to the Franco-American liaisons of the revolutionary era. Steeped in militarized rhetoric of conquests, threats, and reparations, the narrative hinges on beguilement and seductive schemes executed through dramatic acting and wily letters among aristocrats; not unlike the plots of the Citizen Genêt Affair (1793), the Jay Treaty (1795), the XYZ Affair (1797-98), the Alien and Sedition Acts (1798), and the Quasi-War (1798-1800). Franco-American liaisons were both dangerous and binding: the two nations had fought side-by-side against the British and shared a

³⁵ Elisa Tamarkin charts a similar phenomenon in the ways in which antebellum Americans longed for a provincial “Englishness” that perhaps never existed. Elisa Tamarkin, *Anglophilia: Deference, Devotion, and Antebellum America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), xxxiii.

revolutionary fervor for some years yet the inevitable competition between them became a vehicle for articulating radically different visions of *liberté, égalité, and fraternité*.

Chapter Outlines

French gentility helped eighteenth-century Americans to answer a series of questions about their own identities by providing eager republicans with a collection of cultural symbols and moral codes that they could use to debate and assert their claims to social and political legitimacy. French-language periodicals, salons, sociability, aristocratic émigrés, and libertine philosophies in the United States highlight how Americans in the highest echelons of society reproduced, used, and consumed French gentility to express cultural refinement and perform cosmopolitan identities, recasting themselves as more than provincial former British subjects. French proclivities and Francophilia could, therefore, be mobilized by patrician Americans as another form of self-fashioning. Analysis of American architectural spaces, decorative arts, literature, and cultural landscapes reveals that many aristocratic urban Americans performed and displayed ideologies, from the personal to the political, by way of the pageantry of French gentility.

This study begins with an examination of French-language periodicals and newspapers in the early republic, the print liaisons that connected some educated American elites to the French language. Most newspapers in the United States at the time printed news from faraway places; much local news spread by word-of-mouth. American newspapers, especially those critical of the early Federalist party such as Philip Freneau's *National Gazette* and Benjamin Franklin Bache's *Aurora* in Philadelphia, also carried all

the news of the French Revolution. Yet between 1780 and 1800 Francophone immigrants began at least twenty-one serials in six cities in the United States. All of these newspapers were short-lived and left their publishers financially insolvent. Few of them had published newspapers before immigrating to the United States. Why then did so many Francophone publishers launch French-language newspapers in the early republic and who did they imagine would read them? Chapter 1 investigates the development, content, producers, and readers of French-language newspapers by way of two representative case studies from different cities: the *Courier de l'Amérique*, which ran in Philadelphia in 1784, and the *Courier de Boston*, published in Boston in 1789. French newspapers such as the two examined in this chapter made French culture accessible to an elite American readership eager to showcase their cosmopolitan erudition and align themselves with the *lingua franca* of the eighteenth century.

Chapter 2 delves into the world of American salons and the political culture of the early republic. Salons in France have long been lauded as meritocratic settings where women, writers, and philosophers created the Enlightenment.³⁶ While salons in colonial America were decidedly literary affairs, salons in the early republic institutionalized practices of etiquette, sociability, and political performance that shaped the minds and manners of the American governing class. How would authority, socio-political rituals, and ceremony operate in an ostensibly democratic society? Many urban elite American

³⁶ The literature on gender and the Enlightenment is vast. For some of the most important works on French salons, see Joan B. Landes, *Women and the Public Sphere in the Age of the French Revolution* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988); Steven Kale, *French Salons: High Society and Political Sociability from the Old Regime to the Revolution of 1848*, rev. ed. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005); Dena Goodman, *The Republic of Letters: A Cultural History of the French Enlightenment* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994); and Antoine Lilti, *Le monde des salons: Sociabilité et mondanité à Paris au XVIIIe siècle* (Paris: Éditions Fayard, 2005).

women, I argue, performed aristocratic elements of the *ancien régime* French salon to manage social change and to maintain day-to-day control over the criteria of elite status. As informal channels of power, salons were a rigid technology of the French aristocracy that some elite American women employed to advance their own practice of and visions for the political culture of the United States. Salons standardized social liaisons in two ways: first, among the governing affluent elites of the early republic; second, by a shared political culture between the aristocrats of France and those of the United States.

The third chapter investigates personal and political ideologies of notions of scandal, seduction, disgrace, and sentiment at the end of the eighteenth century through the clandestine marriage of Maria Matilda Bingham and the comte de Tilly in Philadelphia in 1799. The daughter of United States Senator William Bingham and renowned salonnière Anne Willing Bingham, fifteen-year-old Maria Matilda eloped with a penniless French count more than twice her age against the wishes of her parents who quickly petitioned the state for a divorce. This episode was a small but telling battle in an ongoing struggle to define and control marriage, money, and sexuality in the face of foreign influence in the early republic. French libertine literature drifted across the Atlantic providing many astute American readers with a framework for consuming salacious liaisons among the aristocratic classes, such as this one between Bingham and Tilly.

The final chapter interprets the multiple meanings of the boudoir in France and in the United States over the course of the eighteenth century. From its inception in early eighteenth-century France as a devout woman's personal room, the boudoir became synonymous with illicit sex and aristocratic dalliance by the end of the century. Few

instances of boudoirs built into American homes, even of the wealthiest women, existed in the late eighteenth century. I argue, however, that the idea of the French boudoir provided for well-educated, affluent white American women a cerebral space for fostering an interior life based on intimacy, privacy, literacy, and female pleasure. Print culture offers one way to try to grasp the images evoked in the minds of late eighteenth-century American men and women when they thought about sexuality, individuality, and privacy. The boudoir manifested the aesthetic interplay of interiors—both architecturally and psychologically—between privileged French and American women. It was a liaison of female privacy of the mind and solitude; a dance of seduction and play.

Chapter One: Print Liaisons

“The Utility of Two Worlds” and French-Language Periodicals in the United States

Just about four months after Congress had ratified the Treaty of Paris in January 1784, the federal government was in serious trouble. Secretary of the Continental Congress Charles Thompson wrote from Annapolis to Thomas Jefferson in Philadelphia on May 19, 1784: “there is reason to apprehend a dissolution of the Confederacy.”¹ Jefferson wrote back to Thompson two days later with more troubling news. A French immigrant called the chevalier de Longchamps assaulted François Barbé-Marbois, a French diplomat to the United States, on the streets of Philadelphia. Near the Coffee House on Market Street teeming with passersby, Longchamps shouted at Marbois, threatened him publicly, and hit him with a cane.² Jefferson reported that the French diplomat Marbois had been obliged “in his own defence to box in the streets like a porter.”³ The Marbois-Longchamps affair became a cause célèbre in the immediate aftermath of the Revolutionary War launching fierce disputes about whether the Frenchman should be tried in France or in the United States. It captivated the reading public in Philadelphia as they scrutinized the authority of the new and fledgling federal

¹ To Thomas Jefferson from Charles Thomson, 19 May 1784, *Founders Online*, National Archives.

² *Respublica v. De Longchamps*, 1 U.S. 111 (1784), Pennsylvania Court Oyer and Terminer. The assault occurred in Philadelphia on May 19, 1784.

³ Thomas Jefferson to Charles Thomson, 21 May 1784, *Founders Online*, National Archives.

government which depended on legitimacy and sovereignty from its citizens.

Surprisingly, a French newspaper in Philadelphia (rather than the Anglophone press) broadcast the details of the Marbois-Longchamps affair, publicizing the actions of the French government to undermine American jurisprudence.

The Marbois-Longchamps affair dominated the pages of the *Courier de l'Amérique*, the first of many French-language newspapers printed in the United States that reflected Americans' quest for cultural and intellectual sovereignty from Great Britain as well as cosmopolitan legitimacy in the early republic. Although they were short-lived and usually left their publishers and investors financially insolvent, French newspapers multiplied in the early republic.⁴ American readers could find many of the same articles and much of the same information, with a few notable exceptions, in English newspapers as in French newspapers. Why, then, did francophone immigrants launch so many French newspapers? Why did they think bilingual Anglo-Americans would want to read them? French newspapers magnify the intersection of American readers and French intellectual and political culture. The French press anchored a claim to privilege, I argue, for both readers and publishers by being part of an elite reading community measured by cosmopolitanism and intellectual elitism. The French language had a longstanding reputation as the language of the learned elite—it was the *lingua franca* of the eighteenth century—and it served as social capital for ambitious francophone immigrant printers and publishers as well as members of the gentry eager to

⁴ Some publishers of French-language periodicals in the 1790s counted on francophone refugees from France and Saint Domingue to sustain their subscription lists. But the francophone population in the United States in the 1780s was much smaller. Publishers in the 1780s almost certainly hoped to attract bi-lingual Anglo-American readers.

demonstrate their cultural and intellectual cultivation, an aspiration that often transcended national politics concerning the French empire.⁵

Between 1780 and 1800, Francophone publishers began at least twenty-one serials in six cities in the United States. Philadelphia, Boston, and New York published the most French periodicals—nine, three, and three respectively. French editors launched two periodicals in Charleston and the same number in New Orleans.⁶ There was no “typical” francophone periodical in the early republic. Rather, the “French press” consisted of a diverse collection of serialized publications, some entirely in French and some in both French and English, and engaged with a wide range of Atlantic world endeavors, whether mercantile, intellectual, or political. Some of these French newspapers and journals prioritized news articles from France and Europe; others translated and reprinted articles from local English-language newspapers. Some devoted their pages to lengthy philosophical tracts; others to exchange rates or Congressional proceedings. Despite constant financial insecurity, francophone publishers, editors, and writers invested their time and money in the French press year after year, issue after issue. It was not until 1810 that the number of French periodicals in Philadelphia, New

⁵ For eighteenth-century debates on French syntax, linear sentence structure, and the elevation of French as the language of reason and truth, see Harold Mah, “The Epistemology of the Sentence: Language, Civility, and Identity in France and Germany, Diderot to Nietzsche,” *Representations* 47, Special Issue: National Cultures before Nationalism (1994): 64-84. The *philosophes*—and notably Voltaire in his *Encyclopedie* entry on the French language—vigorously promoted the classical clarity of the French language.

⁶ Many French newspaper editors in New Orleans and Charleston started newspapers seeking the support of their fellow francophone refugees in the wake of the violent uprisings in Saint Domingue. French newspapers in these two cities generally failed to succeed because their editors underestimated the number of French-speaking residents, many of the editors arrived in the United States destitute, and the transitory nature of refugees meant that their already modest subscription bases only dwindled over time. See James W. Hagy and Bertrand Van Ruymbeke, “The French Refugee Newspapers of Charleston,” *The South Carolina Historical Magazine* 97, no. 2 (1996): 144 and Samuel J. Marino, “Early French-Language Newspapers in New Orleans,” *Louisiana History: The Journal of the Louisiana Historical Association* 7, no. 1 (1966): 309-321.

York, and Boston finally began to decrease; only sixteen French periodicals appeared in those northern cities during the next fifty years.⁷

Scholars have examined how the production and distribution of books, pamphlets, newspapers, broadsides, and other printed ephemera shaped the Revolutionary era. But there is no agreement about the widespread political and cultural impact of print culture, or whether print had an impact on the development of a new nation at all. Trish Loughran argues forcefully that a national print culture did not exist in the early republic, at least prior to the adoption in the 1830s and 1840s of steam presses, canals, and railroads. On the other hand, Steven Carl Smith contends that alongside Philadelphia and Boston, New York “helped build the new nation in print” by developing sophisticated distribution networks that delivered thousands of books regionally and nationally. Most recently Joseph Adelman argues that printers—artisans who labored in a manual trade but also mingled with the elite—used their commercial and political connections to directly shape

⁷ The research for this chapter is supported by a database of sixty-seven French-language periodicals printed in the United States from 1780-1826. I constructed this database using several sources. First among these is the Library of Congress *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers* directory. To supplement that directory, I searched numerous libraries and digital archives, including the Boston Athenaeum, Harvard University Houghton Library, the American Antiquarian Society, the John Carter Brown Library, the New-York Historical Society, the Historical Society of Pennsylvania, the Wisconsin Historical Society, and the Library of Congress. I also consulted numerous works on bibliography and the history of printing, including Isaiah Thomas, *The History of Printing in America, with a Biography of Printers, and an Account of Newspapers*, vol. II (Worcester, MA: Press of Isaiah Thomas, Jr., 1810); Clarence S. Brigham, *Journals and Journeymen: A Contribution to the History of Early American Newspapers* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1950); Samuel J. Marino, “The French-Refugee Newspapers and Periodicals in the United States, 1789-1825” (PhD diss., Columbia University, 1982); and Jeffrey L. Pasley, *The Tyranny of Printers: Newspapers Politics in the Early American Republic* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2001). Until the 1770s, only one (possibly two) French-language texts had been printed in Philadelphia. In the 1790s, 110 French texts from broadsides and pamphlets to gazettes and books to song sheets and catalogues flooded the streets and shops in Philadelphia. At least eight Frenchmen and six Anglo-Americans sold French books in Philadelphia, constituting a vibrant book trade. Catherine Hébert, “French Publications in the Age of the French Revolution: A Bibliographical Essay,” *Pennsylvania History: A Journal of Mid-Atlantic Studies* 58, no. 1 (1991): 38.

Revolutionary political ideology and mass mobilization.⁸ Yet what these scholars fail to address is anything other than Anglo-American print culture and English-language publications.

Early American print culture was not an only Anglo-American and English enterprise. Francophone publishers and editors and their partnerships with local printers in Boston, New York, and Philadelphia engaged in extensive interurban and interstate trade, coordinating efforts to circulate their papers in distant cities. Bilingual French-English newspapers especially appealed to members of the urban elite upper-classes who hoped to hone their French language skills by reading columns side by side. While readers of French periodicals in the United States may not have considered the broader significance of their reading, the circulation of French papers along the eastern seaboard generated possibilities for shared cultural experiences.⁹

The story of the French press in the early republic was not a product of innovation or prosperity. In the face of economic and political uncertainty in the two decades following the Revolutionary War, francophone publishers and editors demonstrated steady ambition and endurance. However, most publishers ceased their papers in worse financial straits than when they had started. Historian Catherine Hébert concluded that Philadelphia's French-language publications in the 1790s were "more a testimony to the

⁸ Trish Loughran, *The Republic in Print: Print Culture in the Age of U.S. Nation Building, 1770-1870* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007); Steven Carl Smith, *An Empire of Print: The New York Publishing Trade in the Early American Republic* (University Park, Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2017); Joseph M. Adelman, *Revolutionary Networks: The Business and Politics of Printing the News, 1763-1789* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2019).

⁹ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (New York: Verso, 1983). This chapter specifically draws on Anderson's concept that imagined communities became possible because of the "convergence of capitalism and print technology" (46). See Chapter 3: The Origins of National Consciousness.

spirit of enterprise and the level of activity of numerous refugees than to the publishers' success." Francophone publishers persisted "against all odds," she claimed, "to keep the Francophone community informed and reach a wider public through bilingual publications and translations."¹⁰ Immigrant francophone publishers and the readers of their publications sought political and cultural legitimacy through the French language. The history of the French press in the early republic serves as a gauge of not only the intellectual and social aspirations of anglophone readers and francophone publishers but also the performance of cosmopolitanism on the part of American ruling elites.

Courier de l'Amérique

Witnesses offered conflicting accounts of the 1784 street fight between Longchamps and Marbois, but the French minister to the United States the chevalier de la Luzerne wasted no time declaring the attack "a violation of the Rights of nations." In a letter to President of Pennsylvania John Dickinson on the day of the attack, he made clear his intentions to have Longchamps "severely punished" for his offenses against the French diplomat, and for the United States to accept responsibility for protecting diplomatic legations on American soil.¹¹ The feud and its subsequent coverage in the newspapers threw into question for the American republic the power of Congress to negotiate with foreign nations and the sovereignty of the government. The Articles of Confederation limited the power of Congress in conducting foreign policy, hamstringing

¹⁰ Catherine Hébert, "French Publications in the Age of the French Revolution: A Bibliographical Essay," *Pennsylvania History: A Journal of Mid-Atlantic Studies* 58, no. 1 (1991): 56-57.

¹¹ From Chevalier de la Luzerne to John Dickinson, 19 May 1784, *Pennsylvania Archives*, Series I, Volume XI, (Philadelphia: Joseph Severns & Co., 1855), 462-464.

its power to protect and even to define the specific rights of diplomatic personnel in the United States. Congress for the most part ignored the law of nations, as it was understood by Europeans, and declined to enforce that tradition in the new nation.¹² Vital concerns regarding both the source and shape of American foreign policy came to the fore of state and national politics in the early republic by way of a French brawl on the pages of a French newspaper.

The controversy began with the chevalier de Longchamps's deceitful claims to French nobility. A former member of the French military, Longchamps arrived in the United States in September 1783 and promptly married an estimable Philadelphia Quaker whose family opposed the match. Their concerns were not unfounded. In the years following the Revolutionary War, several French "adventurers" used fictitious names and pretended to be aristocratic Frenchmen to court local Philadelphia women. Accounts of these French con artists often appeared in Philadelphia newspapers, warning young women to beware of charming Frenchmen quick to ask for their hands in marriage.¹³ To shore up his spurious reputation, Longchamps called upon the French minister Luzerne in 1784 to "recognize some papers concerning his Birth and character." When Luzerne refused his requests, Longchamps appealed to Marbois, the minister's secretary who had

¹² G. S. Rowe and Alexander W. Knott, "The Longchamps Affair (1784-1786), the Law of Nations, and the Shaping of Early American Foreign Policy," *Diplomatic History* 10, no. 3 (1986): 201-202. In *Federalist No. 42*, James Madison argued that the Articles of Confederation "contain no provision for the case of offences against the law of nations; and consequently leave it in the power of any indiscreet member to embroil the Confederacy with foreign nations." James Madison, "The Powers Conferred by the constitution Further Considered," *New-York Packet* (New York, NY), Jan. 22, 1788.

¹³ See, for example, Mrs. Abishag, "Friend Bailey," *The Freeman's Journal* (Philadelphia, PA), March 24, 1784 and Leander, "Messieurs Printers," *Independent Gazetteer* (Philadelphia, PA), April 3, 1784.

no authority to confirm the claims.¹⁴ After Longchamps attacked Marbois on the street in Philadelphia, Luzerne wrote to President of Pennsylvania John Dickinson that Longchamps was “a Frenchman with no character, who gives himself for a noble man, though he is the nephew of the wife of my steward.”¹⁵ In a letter to James Madison in May 1784 after the attack, Thomas Jefferson referred to Longchamps as “a Frenchman of obscure and worthless character.”¹⁶

For all its sensational detail, the Marbois-Longchamps affair produced a scholarly scandal. The French government insisted that Longchamps be returned to France to be tried for infringing on the rights of a French diplomat. The state of Pennsylvania refused, claiming its own right to bring Longchamps to trial for the “violent assault and battery by him lately made in the City of Philadelphia.”¹⁷ In a letter to Secretary of Congress Charles Thomson two days after the assault, Thomas Jefferson expressed his doubts about which nation held jurisdiction over the case: “whether it is in the syllables and letters of the law that a Frenchman committing an outrage may be delivered up to his master for punishment is matter of dubiety.”¹⁸ Jefferson wrote to Madison: “I doubt whether the laws of this state have provided either to punish him sufficiently here or to

¹⁴ From François Barbé-Marbois to John Dickinson, 17 May 1784, *Pennsylvania Archives*, Series I, Volume XI, (Philadelphia: Joseph Severns & Co., 1855), 461-462.

¹⁵ From Chevalier de la Luzerne to John Dickinson, 19 May 1784, *Pennsylvania Archives*, Series I, Volume XI, (Philadelphia: Joseph Severns & Co., 1855), 462-464.

¹⁶ From Thomas Jefferson to James Madison, 25 May 1784, *Founders Online*, National Archives.

¹⁷ Resolution of Congress for the Arrest of Longchamps, 29 May 1784, *Founders Online*, National Archives.

¹⁸ From Thomas Jefferson to Charles Thomson, 21 May 1784, *Founders Online*, National Archives.

surrender him to be punished by his own sovereign.”¹⁹ After absconding twice from officers, Longchamps finally stood trial in Philadelphia in June 1784 and the Pennsylvania Supreme Court sentenced him to two years in prison and a fine in October 1784.²⁰ The affair reverberated far beyond the courtroom and long after the trial.

At least one American politician suspected more serious wrongdoing on the part of Longchamps and the French. Charles Thomson believed that the “atrocious and unprovoked outrage” committed by Longchamps (whom he believed to be a spy working for the British during the Revolutionary War) bore “strong marks of a premeditated design to embroil us with France.” Thomson wrote to Benjamin Franklin in August 1784 that “what makes this still more probable is the palliating account given of this affair in a paper newly set up here as if for the purpose entitled the ‘*Courier de l’Amérique*,’ and which is conducted by Boinod & Gaillard two strangers who came to this place last fall about the same time as Longchamps.” Despite being written in French, the newspaper, according to Thomson, “evidences a marked inveteracy against France and a strong desire to excite fears and jealousies or at least to give an unfavorable impression of her.” He felt confident that careful readers of the newspaper “will guard against the influence of the poison they [the authors] mean to convey.”²¹ The French newspaper that Thomson so avidly accused of inciting anti-French sentiment, the *Courier de l’Amérique*, sensationalized the Marbois-Longchamps affair in almost every issue and created a whirlwind of news stories and reportage in Philadelphia.

¹⁹ From Thomas Jefferson to James Madison, 25 May 1784, *Founders Online*, National Archives.

²⁰ Rowe and Knott, “The Longchamps,” 204-207.

²¹ From Charles Thomson to Benjamin Franklin, 13 August 1784, *Founders Online*, National Archives.

The violent street brawl between Longchamps and Marbois began a remarkable streak of legal reporting in the *Courier de l'Amérique*, the first French-language newspaper printed after the Treaty of Paris. If Congress had hoped to settle the Longchamps case quietly, it was woefully disappointed. Almost every issue of the newspaper recounted the trial of Longchamps, what the *Courier* referred to as “la cause importante” (the important cause). From the first issue on July 27, 1784, the editors of the *Courier* provided coverage of the three-month trial in full, devoting column after column to the affair, including the speeches of counsel on both sides, testimony from witnesses, and public opinions.²²

English-language newspapers soon followed suit, translating, reprinting and modifying articles from the *Courier*. The day after the first issue of the *Courier* appeared at the end of July 1784, the *Freeman's Journal* in Philadelphia printed its first coverage of the trial. The short paragraph demanded why Longchamps, “punished before he is condemned, and forcasting the sweets of the Bastile” in Philadelphia had not been released from jail on bail: “What is become of the *Habeas Corpus* act? To what distant country is that sacred bulwark of our liberties fled?”²³ English newspapers began major coverage of the trial on August 4. The publishers of the *Freeman's Journal* admitted that they had attempted to press the French minister and American lawyers for information on

²² The *Courier de l'Amérique* published by Boinod and Gaillard in Philadelphia ran from July 27 to October 26, 1784, almost the exact length of the trial of Longchamps.

²³ *Freeman's Journal* (Philadelphia, PA), July 28, 1784. The *Freeman's Journal* also printed a proclamation from John Dickinson calling for the arrest of Longchamps with a reward of 500 dollars to the person who apprehended him and brought him to the city jail (June 9, 1784).

the trial, but the French minister refused because it was “an affair between the king his master and the United States, it was not in his power to intermeddle in our publication.”²⁴

Throughout the summer of 1784, other Philadelphia newspapers copied coverage of the Longchamps trial from the *Courier*. The *Pennsylvania Packet* reprinted the most articles from the *Courier*, announcing on August 7: “The following account of the important Cause of the Chevalier de Longchamps, is taken from the *Courier de l’Amerique*, published in this City.” However, the *Packet* gradually fell behind in the frequency of its installments—it reported on the October 8th sentencing of Longchamps in the November 24th issue of the newspaper.²⁵ The *United States Chronicle* in Providence, Rhode Island, and the *South Carolina Gazette* reprinted word-for-word the first column translated from *Courier* that had appeared in the *Packet*.²⁶ At the end April 1785, almost one year after Longchamps had attacked Marbois on the street in Philadelphia, newspapers along the eastern seaboard still printed articles about the trial of Longchamps and the international controversy it had stirred.²⁷

Francophone immigrants from Holland, Daniel Boinod and Alexander Gaillard arrived in Philadelphia in the autumn of 1783 and opened a bookstore before they began

²⁴ *Freeman’s Journal* (Philadelphia, PA), Aug. 4, 1784. The *Freeman’s Journal* also printed coverage of the trial on Aug. 4, 11, and 18, 1784.

²⁵ *Pennsylvania Packet* (Philadelphia, PA), Aug. 7, 19, and 28; Sept. 11 and 27; October 14 and 30; and Nov. 24, 1784.

²⁶ *Pennsylvania Packet* (Philadelphia, PA), Aug. 7, 1784; *United States Chronicle* (Providence, RI), Aug. 19, 1784; *South Carolina Gazette* (Charleston, SC), Aug. 26-28, 1784.

²⁷ See, for example, the *Independent Journal* (New York, NY), April 6, 1785; *Connecticut Journal* (New Haven, CT), April 13, 1785; *Providence Gazette* (Providence, RI), April 16, 1785; *Columbian Herald* (Charleston, SC), April 18, 1785; *United States Chronicle* (Providence, RI), April 21, 1785. The *Independent Journal* reported on September 29, 1787 that Longchamps had died in a duel with another Frenchman the week prior. According to the article, Longchamps received “a ball in the groin, and died immediately.”

to publish the *Courier de l'Amérique*.²⁸ In March 1783, brothers Jacobus and Jan Anthony Murray, printers and booksellers in Leiden, Holland wrote a letter of introduction in French to John Adams in Paris negotiating peace terms to end the Revolutionary War on behalf of “two very close friends of ours who are planning to go and live in Philadelphia, where they would like to set up a bookstore.” According to the Murray brothers, Daniel Boinod and Alexander Gaillard, were both Swiss nationals living in Holland. They had “acquired a considerable collection of the best books available” to “meet all potential demands of connoisseurs of European books in America.” Boinod was a lawyer “particularly devoted to education” while Gaillard had once managed a French boarding school in Holland but had been forced to withdraw due to poor health. The Murray brothers asked Adams to “recommend them to whatever persons in America you deem capable of helping with their plan.”²⁹ From Paris, Adams responded to the Murray brothers that Boinod and Gaillard, though they will be certainly met with “Protection and Hospitality” in Philadelphia, may not find success immediately after the war “as there will probably be many Rivals, and no great Plenty of Cash.” He advised Boinod and Gaillard to contact “his Excellency the Governor of Pensylvania, Mr. Dickinson, to Genl. Mifflin, to Mr. Wilson or to Dr. Rush.”³⁰

²⁸ From Charles Thomson to Benjamin Franklin, 13 August 1784, *Founders Online*, National Archives.

²⁹ From Jacobus and Jan Anthony Murray to John Adams, 16 March 1783, *Founders Online*, National Archives. C. W. F. Dumas also wrote a letter to John Adams asking him to recommend Boinod to his colleagues. To John Adams from C. W. F. Dumas, 24 April 1783, *Founders Online*, National Archives.

³⁰ From John Adams to Jacobus & Jan Anthony Murray, 28 March 1783, *Founders Online*, National Archives. John Adams later recommended Boinod in a letter to Thomas Mifflin. From John Adams to Thomas Mifflin, 28 April 1783, *Founders Online*, National Archives.

Once in Philadelphia, the two Dutch immigrants swiftly earned acclaim from wealthy elites in the United States as distinguished book importers. A number of newspapers carried advertisements for several weeks in early 1784 for Boinod and Gaillard's bookshop, which was a typical practice. Advertisements in the *Pennsylvania Packet* and *Independent Gazetteer* announced that the "Booksellers and Stationers, lately from Europe" had published a catalog of the books for sale "TO THE FREE AMERICANS" in their shop on Second Street near Vine Street. After congratulating Americans on "that glorious Revolution," Boinod and Gaillard declared that they wanted to open a bookstore in Philadelphia out of "not so much the desire of gain as that of living among a free people."³¹ Boinod and Gaillard frequently imported academic French-language books on science, history, geography, literature, grammar, math, and philosophy from Holland and France.³² Thomas Jefferson was a loyal customer and supporter of their bookstore; he paid for books from Boinod and Gaillard several days in a row in November 1783 and again in April and May 1784 before he left for Paris.³³ Jefferson recommended the shop to James Madison: "I have had from Boinod & Gaillard a copy of Mussenbroeck's cours de Physique. I would recommend to you to get it, or I will get that and any other books you want from Boinod."³⁴ From Annapolis, James

³¹ *Pennsylvania Packet* (Philadelphia, PA), Jan. 24, 1784; *Independent Gazetteer* (Philadelphia, PA), Jan. 31, 1784 and Feb. 14, 1784.

³² Boinod & Gaillard Papers, Collection: Am.0258. Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, PA.

³³ Thomas Jefferson Memorandum Books 1783 and Thomas Jefferson Memorandum Books 1784, *Founders Online*, National Archives. A list of the books, most of them French titles, that Jefferson purchased from Boinod and Gaillard is printed in Julian P. Boyd and others, eds., *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson, Volume 7* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1953), 240-41.

³⁴ From Thomas Jefferson to James Madison, 20 February 1784, *Founders Online*, National Archives. Jefferson references the natural philosophy book by Petrus van Musschenbroek (1692-1761), *Cours de Physique expérimentale et mathématique, ... traduit par M. Sigaud de la Fond* (Paris, 1769).

Monroe purchased books from Boinod and Gaillard by way of Jefferson in Philadelphia in May 1784.³⁵ In response to a letter from Boinod and Gaillard in February 1784, George Washington praised the two booksellers: “To encourage Literature & the Arts, is a duty which every good Citizen owes to his Country, & if I could be instrumental in promoting these, and in aiding your endeavours to do the like, it would give me pleasure.” Admitting fully that he did not read French, Washington requested fifty-six volumes (eight titles, some in French and some in English) from Boinod and Gaillard including a French-English dictionary and a French grammar book.³⁶ Perhaps Washington truly aspired to learn French or perhaps he was more interested in creating the impression of wanting to learn French. Either way, it was the genteel status of the French language that convinced George Washington to purchase dozens of books that he could not read.

Perhaps after half a year of operating their bookstore with no “desire of gain,” Boinod and Gaillard looked elsewhere for income. With limited knowledge of the economics of the trade and as relatively new immigrants to Philadelphia, they began another risky business venture, marked in the late eighteenth century by ruthless business practices, shifting loyalties, and hardship: publishing a newspaper. And they decided to make a bold political statement on top of a financial risk. Their newspaper would be in French.

³⁵ From Thomas Jefferson to James Monroe, 21 May 1784, *Founders Online*, National Archives.

³⁶ From George Washington to Boinod & Gaillard, 18 February 1784, *Founders Online*, National Archives. None of these titles appear in the inventory of Washington’s library which was made after his death, and no record has been found in Washington’s cash accounts in Ledger B of his having made any payments to Boinod and Gaillard in 1784 or 1785.

Six weeks before the first issue of the *Courier de l'Amérique*, Boinod and Gaillard drummed up publicity for it by advertising their French newspaper in other Philadelphia newspapers. Allegedly established “at the solicitation of their friends,” the *Courier de l'Amérique* would benefit “every class in society” and “it will be the duty and the interest of every officer, freeholder, merchant and trader in the United States to encourage this Paper.” Boinod and Gaillard called upon several men in their printer-publisher network to help sell the *Courier*. As the printing trade depended heavily on the circulation of ideas and information, publishers such as Boinod and Gaillard had to cultivate relationships far and wide with other printers, ship captains, merchants, writers, and businessmen to build their commercial and literary networks in the United States.³⁷ Readers could subscribe to or purchase their gazette at Boinod and Gaillard’s bookstore on Arch Street and Fourth Street, at the shop of Scottish immigrant printer and bookbinder Robert Aitken near the Coffee House, from bookseller Thomas Siddons on Front Street, or at the store of the newspaper’s printer, Charles Cist.³⁸

Charles Cist printed the *Courier de l'Amérique* from his book and stationary shop on Second Street in the heart of the Philadelphia printing district. Born in St. Petersburg, Cist partnered with another immigrant Melchior Steiner, a native of Switzerland, in Philadelphia in 1775. As an immigrant duo, Cist and Steiner perhaps combined resources—financial and cultural—to establish themselves in the printing trade and to appeal to multilingual Philadelphians. For the next six years, their firm printed texts in

³⁷ Joseph M. Adelman, “Trans-Atlantic Migration and the Printing Trade in Revolutionary America,” *Early American Studies* 11, no. 3 (2013): 516-544.

³⁸ “French Gazette,” *Freeman’s Journal* (Philadelphia, PA), June 16 and 30, 1784; *Pennsylvania Packet* (Philadelphia, PA), June 17 and 24, 1784. “A Newspaper,” *Independent Gazetteer* (Philadelphia, PA), June 19 and 26, 1784; *Pennsylvania Packet* (Philadelphia, PA), June 17 and 19, 1784.

German, French, and English and often secured printing contracts from Congress. Their most prominent and profitable imprint was Thomas Paine's *The American Crisis*, which they issued in 1776 in both English and German versions. Cist and Steiner dissolved their partnership during the war and Cist continued his printing career on his own, moving his business four times in the following decade.³⁹

The timing of the first issue of the *Courier de l'Amerique* was propitious for Cist. Wartime violence and economic upheaval destabilized the printing industry and he was perhaps looking for new business opportunities and income once peace had been declared. At the beginning of June 1784, Cist announced in the *Freeman's Journal* that he had recently received a new set of English and German types and that he had for sale school books in French, English, Latin, and German.⁴⁰ Cist worked to attract customers to his printing business by being capable of serving multilingual readers. It was perhaps no coincidence that Boinod and Gaillard—recent Francophone immigrants in Philadelphia—partnered with Cist, another Francophone immigrant but one who had lived and worked in the city for almost a decade. Famous patrons such as Thomas Jefferson might have driven foot traffic into their bookstore, but Boinod and Gaillard needed the social and professional networks of a francophone printer to get their newspaper up and running.

Aside from its coverage of the Marbois-Longchamps affair in the summer of 1784, the contents of the biweekly *Courier de l'Amérique* resembled those of other

³⁹ Boyd Childress, "Charles Cist, Philadelphia Printer," *The Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America* 85, no. 1 (1991): 72-75. For an article on the experiences of immigrant printers, editors, and publishers, see Joseph M. Adelman, "Trans-Atlantic Migration and the Printing Trade in Revolutionary America," *Early American Studies* 11, no. 3 (2013): 516-544.

⁴⁰ *Freeman's Journal* (Philadelphia, PA), June 9, 1784.

French and English newspapers in Philadelphia at the time. Most issues reported the usual run of news paragraphs from American cities such as New York, Hartford, and Richmond and from European cities such as Rome, Vienna, Paris, Hamburg, Constantinople, and the Hague in addition to listings of “prix courants” (current prices) for imports and exports. The August 10th paper reported the arrival of the marquis de Lafayette in Philadelphia where he was greeted by “*huzzas*” and a visit to City-Tavern “aux acclamations répétées du people” (to the repeated cheers of the people). In some issues, the *Courier* related legislative news, notes on the arrival and departure of ships, and letters from abroad expressing enthusiasm for hot air balloons or the theory of animal magnetism espoused by Franz Mesmer. One issue contained a supplement announcing the formation of the Humane Society of Philadelphia, established to save people from drowning.⁴¹

Boinod and Gaillard had reason to suspect the end of the *Courier de l'Amérique* by the end of the summer of 1784. First, they had made several enemies among the Philadelphia elite when they publicly denounced a gift of one hundred books by the French king to the University of the State of Pennsylvania.⁴² In August 1784 Signer of the Declaration of Independence, Pennsylvania judge, and university trustee Francis Hopkinson ordered Boinod and Gaillard to retract their criticism or else face a major loss of subscribers. Other Philadelphia newspapers reprinted the dispute and, despite the

⁴¹ *Courier de l'Amérique* (Philadelphia, PA), July 30, Aug. 10, Aug. 20, Sept. 21, Oct. 12, 1784. Boinod & Gaillard Papers, Historical Society of Pennsylvania. Collection: Am.0258.

⁴² Founded by Benjamin Franklin, the College of Philadelphia was transformed into the University of the State of Pennsylvania during the Revolutionary War. It was renamed the University of Pennsylvania in 1791.

negative publicity, Boinod and Gaillard refused to rescind their statement.⁴³ At the end of September 1784 Boinod wrote a letter in French to John Adams admitting “our affairs have not been going so well, and that is not surprising given the extreme scarcity of money.” He confessed that Hopkinson “does not cease to create problems for us, however, and we have for some time experienced much discouragement.” Boinod enclosed a copy of the *Courier*, no doubt wishing for Adams’s approval, endorsement, and, most important, money.⁴⁴

The other two problems facing the *Courier* were out of the control of the paper’s publishers. One was the conclusion of the trial of Longchamps—which had filled the bulk of the *Courier*’s pages. It ended in early October and the publishers perhaps witnessed a significant drop-off in readership after the sentencing. Worse still, Gaillard became seriously ill.⁴⁵ On October 26, 1784, Boinod and Gaillard declared that the circulation of *Courier* would be suspended due to “obstacles auxquels ils ne pouvaient s’attendre” (obstacles they could not have expected).⁴⁶ Gaillard died sometime in the fall of 1784 and the paper never recovered. In November, Boinod announced in the *Freeman’s Journal* that the “partnership of Boinod & Gaillard” had been “lately

⁴³ *Pennsylvania Packet* (Philadelphia, PA), Aug. 8, 10, and 12, 1784; *Freeman’s Journal* (Philadelphia, PA), Aug. 11, 1784; *Independent Gazetteer* (Philadelphia, PA), Aug. 11, 1784.

⁴⁴ From Daniel Boinod to John Adams, 28 September 1784, *Founders Online*, National Archives.

⁴⁵ On December 31, 1784, Boinod paid Abraham Chovet “ten pounds ten shillings for my attendance to proscriptions on Mr. David Gaillard deceased during his last illness.” Boinod & Gaillard Papers, Historical Society of Pennsylvania. Collection: Am.0258.

⁴⁶ *Courier de l’Amérique* (Philadelphia, PA), Oct. 26, 1784.

dissolved by the demise of the latter.”⁴⁷ Boinod continued his business as a bookseller but not his French newspaper.

The *Courier de l'Amérique* by Boinod and Gaillard was just the first of many French periodicals in Philadelphia. Several Francophone émigré printers arrived in the wake of revolutionary upheaval in Saint Domingue and France in the early 1790s to a city that had by then already established itself as the printing capital of the United States. Philadelphia printer and publisher John Parker revived Boinod and Gaillard's *Courier de l'Amérique* for about nine months from December 1792 to August 1793.⁴⁸ An outspoken royalist and antiabolitionist journalist from Saint Domingue, Louis F. R. A. Gaterneau published briefly the *Radoteur* in the summer of 1793 circulating bloody accounts of the events in Le Cap.⁴⁹ The *Radoteur* was the precursor to the *Courrier politique de la France et de ses Colonies* which ran from September 1793 to March 1794, also edited by Gaterneau and printed by John Parker, who had just ceased publication of the second *Courier de l'Amérique*.⁵⁰ Gaterneau later partnered with Médéric-Louis-Élie Moreau de Saint-Méry, a former revolutionary leader of Paris turned Philadelphia bookseller, to continue his journal as the *Courier de la France et des colonies* for about five months from 1795 to 1796.⁵¹ Edited and printed by Peter Parent, the *Courier Français* espoused

⁴⁷ *Freeman's Journal* (Philadelphia, PA), Nov. 24, 1784.

⁴⁸ The semiweekly *Courier de l'Amérique* (Philadelphia, PA) ran from December 4, 1792 to August 20, 1793, printed by John Parker at 259 Second Street in Philadelphia.

⁴⁹ James Alexander Dun, *Dangerous Neighbors: Making the Haitian Revolution in Early America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016), 107. *Le Radoteur* (Philadelphia, PA), June 28, 1793- September 3, 1793.

⁵⁰ *Courrier politique de la France et de ses Colonies* (Philadelphia, PA), September 19, 1793-March 17, 1794.

⁵¹ *Courier de la France et des colonies* (Philadelphia, PA), October 15, 1795- March 14, 1796.

a more pro-republican outlook and became the longest-running French newspaper in Philadelphia, often published daily from 1794 to 1798.⁵²

Another Saint Dominguan refugee, Claude-Corentin Tanguy de la Boissière used the Francophone press in Philadelphia to unify white colonists residing in the United States and as a vehicle to call for a restoration of white hegemony on the island. Tanguy published three bilingual French-English newspapers in two and a half years in Philadelphia to disseminate his ideology. With the help of John Parker, Tanguy published a continuation of his colonial paper, the *Journal des révolutions de la partie française de Saint-Dominque*, in Philadelphia beginning in September 1793.⁵³ Tanguy later started a bilingual newspaper called the *Étoile américaine* for the first half of 1794, printed by Moreau de Saint-Méry which espoused a constant vitriol against Saint-Dominguan commissioners Sonthonax and Polverel.⁵⁴ Tanguy also edited the bilingual *Niveau de l'Europe et de l'Amérique septentrionale* in partnership with Pierre Egron, another émigré from Saint-Domingue.⁵⁵ French minister plenipotentiary Pierre Auguste Adet warned the French government that the paper gave a precious advantage to the United States over France in the fields of science, commerce, political economy, and arts. The minister advised that the *Niveau de l'Europe* end its publication and that Tanguy be

⁵² *Courier Français* (Philadelphia, PA), April 15, 1794- July 3, 1798.

⁵³ Ashli White, *Encountering Revolution: Haiti and the Making of the Early Republic* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010), 95-98. In an early issue, Tanguy issued a call in for colonists to meet at Oehlers Hotel, where in September 1793 they formed the *Colons de Saint-Dominque réfugiés aux Etats-Unis*, an association of Saint-Dominguan colonists dedicated to affirming their (white) French citizenship and republican character. *Journal des révolutions de la partie française de Saint-Dominque* (Philadelphia, PA), Sept. 24, 1793-Jan. 29, 1794.

⁵⁴ Dun, *Dangerous Neighbors*, 107-108. *Étoile américaine* (Philadelphia, PA), Feb. 1, 1794- May 3, 1794.

⁵⁵ The *Niveau de l'Europe et de l'Amérique septentrionale* (Philadelphia, PA) ran from Oct. 1, 1794 to Jan. 27, 1796. It was printed by William W. Woodward.

recruited to publish “pour nous et pour nous seuls” (for us and only us).⁵⁶ The newspaper ceased publication one month later. It would be ten years before another French newspaper began publication in Philadelphia.⁵⁷

Courier de Boston

In September 1788, three months after the ratification of the Constitution, Paul Joseph Guérard de Nancrède made a long and eloquent appeal to the American public to learn French. “This language seems to be necessary to America,” he wrote in the *Massachusetts Centinel*. Nancrède predicted enormous economic and commercial power “gaining strength every year” for the new country. He argued that “a sign of communication, as universal, if possible, as that trade itself, must be agreed upon, and what other can it be than the French language?” French would “open a source of knowledge” by which “commerce, navigation, philosophy, the necessary arts, &c. ... beneficial to the citizens of the United States” would flow. He chided: “there can be little excuse for a Republican, not to be conversant in the language in which Montesquieu, Rousseau, Voltaire, Raynal, &c. and the profound Helvetius have written.”⁵⁸ The key to American independence and the realization of Enlightenment ideas in the United States, Nancrède’s manifesto implied, was the French language.

⁵⁶ Pierre Auguste Adet to the Minister of Foreign Relations, 28 December 1795, *Correspondence of the French Ministers to the United States, 1791-1797*, vol. 2, Annual Report of the American Historical Association, ed. Frederick J. Turner (Washington: 1904), 808-810.

⁵⁷ The triweekly trilingual (English, French, and German) *Der Pelican* (Philadelphia, PA) began publication on October 28, 1805 and ended on February 21, 1807.

⁵⁸ *Massachusetts Centinel* (Boston, MA), Sept. 17, 1788.

Aptly, Nancrède placed this announcement directly under a notice in the same newspaper for his private French-language evening school, which he taught in addition to French classes at Harvard. But his ambition to spread Francophilia extended beyond his classroom. Nancrède took it as his mission to provide the language “necessary to America” to the citizens of Massachusetts by publishing a weekly French-language newspaper, the *Courier de Boston*, which he introduced in April 1789, just one month after the federal government began operating under the new Constitution in New York. He also published the first French textbook in America in 1792, owned a French book shop in Boston and later in Philadelphia, and translated, wrote, and published political books and pamphlets in French during his forty-year career propagating the French language in the United States.⁵⁹ His oeuvre was part and parcel of a larger outpouring of French texts published in the first two decades after the Revolutionary War.

Born in France, Paul Joseph Guérard de Nancrède served in the French expeditionary force with the comte de Rochambeau in the Revolutionary War, landing at Newport, Rhode Island in the summer of 1780. While in Newport, the eighteen-year-old Nancrède perhaps read the *Gazette Française*, the service newspaper of the French fleet and the first French-language newspaper printed on United States soil. A four-page weekly newspaper, the *Gazette Française* supplied a digest of important news events translated from American newspapers specifically for French officers. The chevalier de Maulevrier was either the printer or the officer in charge of the Royal Press and John

⁵⁹ Madeleine B. Stern, “Joseph Nancrède, Franco-American Bookseller-Publisher, 1761-1841,” *The Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America* 70, no. 1 (1976): 1-88.

Jastram, an enlisted man, was probably the newspaper's editor.⁶⁰ After the war, Nancrède spent a few years back in France, then returned to the United States, settled in Boston, and by 1787 Harvard had appointed him an instructor in French. Fellow Revolutionary War veteran and probable editor of the *Gazette Française* John Jastram taught French at Harvard from 1786 to 1787 and perhaps helped Nancrède secure his appointment. Not long after, Nancrède married Hannah Dixey in Boston in November 1788 and she bore him nine children over the next fourteen years.⁶¹

Nancrède promptly worked to distinguish himself as an authority on the French language and a central figure in the Francophone community in Boston. At the end of September 1787, he published a two-part "ESSAY on the simplest mode of learning the FRENCH LANGUAGE" in the *Massachusetts Centinel*, published by staunch Federalist Benjamin Russell. The first part of the essay chronicled the difficulty and frustration Bostonians faced, according to Nancrède, when trying to learn French by themselves. Nancrède suggested that the "gentlemen of this town" could learn the language more

⁶⁰ The ship *Neptune* carried aboard a press known as l'Imprimerie Royale de l'Escadre. For six months the official press of the fleet was set up on land at 641 Rue de la Pointe (then called Water Street, now Washington Street) in Newport. The *Gazette Française* consisted of at least seven issues and one supplement, totaling thirty pages. The first issue was printed on November 17, 1780 and the last known issue was dated January 2, 1781. While on shore in Newport, the press also printed at least four copies of François Jean de Beauvoir, Chevalier de Chastellux's *Voyage de Newport à Philadelphie, Albany, &c.* (1781) and a French Roman Catholic almanac for 1781. Allen J. Barthold, "Gazette Française, Newport, R.I., 1780-81," *The Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America* 28 (1934): 64-70; John Eliot Alden, ed., *Rhode Island Imprints, 1727-1800* (New York: R. R. Bowker Company, 1949): 628, Appendix B: A Table of Printers and Booksellers of Rhode Island Imprints, 1727-1800; Howard M. Chapin, *Calendrier français pour l'année 1781 and the printing press of the French fleet in American waters during the Revolutionary War* (Providence, RI: Preston & Rounds, 1914): 1-5.

⁶¹ *Massachusetts Centinel* (Boston, MA), Nov. 12, 1788. Although he was Catholic, Nancrède married Hannah Dixey at Trinity Church, Boston. They were married by the Rev. Samuel Parker who would later become Bishop of the Protestant Episcopal Church in Massachusetts. Historian Madeleine Stern concludes that Hannah Dixey was Episcopalian. The first Catholic mass in Boston was celebrated on November 2, 1788 (the week prior to Nancrède's wedding) by the Abbé Claude Florent Bouchard de la Poterie. Madeleine B. Stern, "Joseph Nancrède, Franco-American Bookseller-Publisher, 1761-1841," *The Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America* 70, no. 1 (1976): 16-17.

easily if they were “properly aided by an intelligent master.” Rather than committing complete sentences to memory, Nancrède advised teaching adults all the rules of the language in a way that “he will every day make new discoveries.”⁶² Nancrède also translated from French to English a column on the American fishing industry and another on the American fur trade that newspapers in Boston, Salem, New York, and New Jersey reprinted.⁶³

Advertisements in local newspapers in the early republic drove everyday commerce and Nancrède capitalized on them to promote himself as a premier teacher and translator of French. He publicized his work as a translator “from English into the French language, and from French into English, done with fidelity and expedition” at No. 13 Cornhill in Boston.⁶⁴ Boston’s *Herald of Freedom* announced that Nancrède’s evening school would open on October 6, 1788, meeting four times a week and “those who design to become Pupils are requested to leave their names at the Boston Book-Store, No. 59, Cornhill.” In the same ad, Nancrède proposed a regular weekly club for any gentleman “who has some knowledge of the language” to practice speaking French two hours a week.⁶⁵ More than simple grammar lessons and routine translations, Nancrède was teaching and selling the language “in which Montesquieu, Rousseau, Voltaire, Raynal, &c. and the profound Helvetius have written,” an opportunity that appealed to the status

⁶² *Massachusetts Centinel* (Boston, MA), Sept. 29, 1787 and Oct. 3, 1787.

⁶³ *Massachusetts Centinel* (Boston, MA), May 7, 1788 (on fishing); *Independent Chronicle* (Boston, MA), July 17, 1788 (on fur trade), reprinted in the *Salem Mercury* (Salem, MA), July 22, 1788, *New-York Packet* (New York, NY), July 29, 1788, and the *New-Jersey Journal* (Elizabethtown, NJ), July 30, 1788.

⁶⁴ *Massachusetts Centinel* (Boston, MA), June 25, 1788 and July 5, 1788; *Independent Chronicle* (Boston, MA), July 3, 1788, and July 17, 1788; *Independent Gazetteer* (Philadelphia, PA), Sept. 1, 1788.

⁶⁵ *Herald of Freedom, and the Federal Advertiser* (Boston, MA), Oct. 2, 1788 and Oct. 6, 1788.

anxieties experienced by elites and offered paths for social advancement to middle-class Americans.⁶⁶

The week before the election of George Washington as the first president in January 1789, Nancrède began advertising his newspaper Boston. About three and a half months before the first issue, he proclaimed in the *Massachusetts Centinel* that the purpose of his French-language newspaper was “to inform foreigners, and above all, merchants, in their own language, of the natural, moral, and political resources of this country.” The *Courier de Boston* would be “the Interpreter, the Organ of every citizen” and would prove “beneficial to the Commerce of America.” Nancrède anticipated more subscription-paying readers from Canada, the West Indies, and Europe than from the United States. Congress, he imagined, would use such periodicals as his to “propagate true ideas” throughout Europe. According to Nancrède, the “rapid success” in France in the early 1780s of *Letters from an American Farmer* by J. Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur ignited even more fervor abroad for publications describing the “MAJESTY OF CONGRESS to nations who scarcely know that there is one existing.” He admitted that the “undertaking of a paper, in a language, which is not yet prevalent in America, is arduous” and counted on his “perseverance” to begin publication just as soon as he could secure a sufficient number of subscribers.⁶⁷ Nancrède took the subtitle of the *Courier de*

⁶⁶ *Massachusetts Centinel* (Boston, MA), Sept. 17, 1788. On educational advertisements in newspapers prior to the American Revolution, see Carl Robert Keyes, “Selling Gentility and Pretending Morality: Education and Newspaper Advertisements in Philadelphia, 1765-75,” *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 141, no. 3 (2017): 245-274.

⁶⁷ *Massachusetts Centinel* (Boston, MA), Jan. 3, 1789. *Letters from an American Farmer* by J. Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur is a series of twelve letters, each describing a different aspect of life or location in colonial British North America. Although only moderately successful in America, *Letters* was immediately popular in Europe upon its London publication in 1782.

Boston—"L'Utilité des deux Mondes" (The Utility of two Worlds)—from the motto of the Gallo-American Society, a Parisian group founded in 1787 committed to the promotion of commercial and intellectual exchanges between France and America.⁶⁸

By the following week in January 1789, Nancrède had secured four men in Boston to receive subscriptions for his French newspaper: Benjamin Russell (a staunch Federalist publisher and printer of the *Massachusetts Centinel* on State Street), Benjamin Guild (bookseller at the Boston Book-Store and circulating library at no. 59 Cornhill), John Boyle (printer and bookseller on Marlborough Street, no. 18), and James White (printer and bookseller at Franklin's Head in Court-Street).⁶⁹ What emerges from these advertisements for the *Courier* that Nancrède placed in Boston newspapers are the contours of a network of booksellers and printers not only willing to take subscriptions and handle money for him but who were also deeply involved in supporting the French press in Boston and the development of the francophone community there.⁷⁰ Politics did not prevent printers and booksellers from hoping to cash in on the cultural and financial capital of the French press.

Advertising for the *Courier de Boston* extended well beyond Boston, spanning the length of the eastern seaboard of the United States for several months. Isaiah Thomas's

⁶⁸ Etienne Clavière and Jacques-Pierre Brissot de Warville founded the Société Gallo-Américaine to support transatlantic friendships in Paris, to assemble information on the commerce of the United States, and to further reciprocal trade relations between the two countries.

⁶⁹ *Herald of Freedom, and the Federal Advertiser* (Boston, MA), Jan. 9, 1789; *The Boston Directory* (Boston: John Norman, 1789).

⁷⁰ Not all Francophone connections in Boston were amiable. In June 1789, Nancrède placed an ad in two Boston newspapers about a theft from his home. He had welcomed into his home a Frenchman named Lambert who had recently arrived in Boston from the West Indies and this man stole from Nancrède specie, bank bills, silver, and clothes amounting to about 400 dollars. Nancrède offered a reward of 30 dollars to the person who apprehended the thief and returned the stolen goods. *Independent Chronicle* (Boston, MA), June 4, 1789 and *Massachusetts Centinel* (Boston, MA), June 13, 1789.

Massachusetts Spy in Worcester and the *New-Hampshire Spy* announced with enthusiasm Nancrède's proposal for the *Courier de Boston*, which was to be printed by Benjamin Russell: "From the abilities of those gentlemen, we doubt not this new publication will merit the encouragement of the publick."⁷¹ The *New-Jersey Journal* exalted Nancrède to be a "celebrated literary character...known among the Literati of Europe and America."⁷² Thomas Greenleaf, the printer and publisher of the *New-York Journal*, told his readers that he would receive subscriptions for the *Courier de Boston* on behalf of Nancrède, who he exaggerated as "a French gentleman whose literary abilities are well known both in France and America."⁷³ After Nancrède began to publish the *Courier de Boston*, newspapers in New York and Philadelphia regularly boasted of the French newspaper's success.⁷⁴ The brief tenure of the *Courier*, however, suggests that notices for it in other American newspapers may have overestimated its achievements and the achievements of its publisher. What mattered more, perhaps, was not the longevity of the *Courier* or the literary or business skills of Nancrède, but the fact that they were French.

Many American booksellers and printers who agreed to support the *Courier de Boston*, either by accepting subscriptions on behalf of Nancrède or by selling copies of his newspapers, did so because they hoped a French-language publication would raise the tenor of their own shops and publications by association. The *Independent Gazetteer* in

⁷¹ *Massachusetts Spy* (Worcester, MA), Jan. 15, 1789; *New-Hampshire Spy* (Portsmouth, NH), Jan. 20, 1788.

⁷² *New-Jersey Journal, and Political Intelligencer* (Elizabethtown, NJ), Jan. 21, 1789.

⁷³ *New-York Journal* (New York, NY), Feb. 26, 1789 and March 5, 1789.

⁷⁴ See for example: *Gazette of the United States* (New York, NY), May 2-6, 1789; *New-York Journal* (New York, NY), May 7, 1789; *Pennsylvania Packet* (Philadelphia, PA), May 13, 1789.

Philadelphia recommended that its readers “join in the applause which is bestowed on the editor” of the *Courier de Boston* and encouraged them to practice “the language of our allies, with whom our connection grows every day more extensive, and promote a more general correspondence between us and foreign nations, and extend to other countries the influence of those political principles, which have raised America to her present pitch of greatness.”⁷⁵ France had raised the United States up in war; Americans counted on her to raise them up in peace, too.

Samuel Hall, not the Federalist Benjamin Russell, printed the *Courier de Boston*. Hall began printing in Newport, Rhode Island, in the early 1760s with Ann Franklin, the widow of Benjamin Franklin’s brother James, then set up shop in Salem, Massachusetts for seven years before relocating to Cambridge, then to Boston, and back to Salem.⁷⁶ Hall returned again to Boston after the war in 1785 and opened a printing shop and a book and stationary store in Cornhill, no. 55, just down the road from where Nancrède would settle by 1789.⁷⁷ With three decades of printing experience in four cities, Hall perhaps coached the immigrant Nancrède in the American publishing industry and provided access to extant American social and economic circles.

⁷⁵ *Independent Gazetteer* (Philadelphia, PA), July 27, 1789. Reprinted on July 28, 1789; July 29, 1789; July 30, 1789; Aug. 4, 1789; Aug. 5, 1789; Aug. 6, 1789; Aug. 7, 1789; Aug. 10, 1789; Aug. 11, 1789; Aug. 12, 1789; Aug. 13, 1789; Aug. 15, 1789; Aug. 17, 1789; Aug. 18, 1789; Aug. 20, 1789. Eleazer Oswald, printer of the *Independent Gazetteer*, accepted subscriptions for the *Courier de Boston* at the Coffee House in Philadelphia. He announced the price as “Two French Crowns and an Half, per annum.”

⁷⁶ Isaiah Thomas, *The History of Printing in America, with a Biography of Printers, and an Account of Newspapers*, (Worcester, MA: Press of Isaiah Thomas, Jr., 1810); vol. I, 395-396; vol. II 262, 270-271. Samuel Hall briefly partnered from 1762-1763 with Ann Franklin, who continued the printing business for thirty-five years after her husband James’s death. Hall published the *Essex Gazette* in Salem, Massachusetts.

⁷⁷ The 1789 Boston Directory lists Nancrède as “instructor of the French language” at “William’s-court, Cornhill” and Samuel Hall as “printer and bookseller” at no. 55, Cornhill.

Between Hall and Nançrède, their networks of printers and publishers brought the *Courier de Boston* well beyond Cornhill and circulated it hundreds of miles along the Atlantic coast. Besides the four printer-booksellers in Boston who sold the *Courier*, readers could subscribe to or purchase it in Salem by way of John Dabney and Thomas Cushing, publishers of the *Salem Mercury*.⁷⁸ New Yorkers could find the *Courier de Boston* at the shop of staunch antifederalist printer of the *New-York Journal* Thomas Greenleaf as well as at the office of his crosstown rival Federalist John Fenno (who had worked for Benjamin Russell's *Boston Centinel*), publisher of the *Gazette of the United States*.⁷⁹ During the first months of Washington's administration, printers and booksellers of diverse political convictions promoted reading and hearing French voices in the United States.

Nançrède directed his Philadelphia readers to Irish immigrant printer Mathew Carey, another man with ties to two worlds. Carey had spent time in exile in Paris and while there worked at Benjamin Franklin's Passy press and met the marquis de Lafayette, who later financed Carey's business in Philadelphia.⁸⁰ According to the newspaper's footer, the *Courier de Boston* also would be sold "chez les principaux Imprimeurs des

⁷⁸ Isaiah Thomas, *The History of Printing in America, with a Biography of Printers, and an Account of Newspapers*, vol. II (Worcester, MA: Press of Isaiah Thomas, Jr., 1810): 264. After his return to Salem in 1781, Samuel Hall took over the printing of the *Salem Gazette*, which was later printed by Thomas Cushing.

⁷⁹ Jeffrey L. Pasley, *The Tyranny of Printers: Newspapers Politics in the Early American Republic*, 51. For a study of Greenleaf and democratic opposition in the 1790s, see Jeffrey L. Pasley, "Thomas Greenleaf: Printers and the Struggle for Democratic Politics and Freedom of the Press," in *Revolutionary Founders: Rebels, Radicals, and Reformers in the Making of the Nation*, ed. Alfred F. Young, Gary B. Nash, and Ray Raphael (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2011), 355 – 373.

⁸⁰ Joseph M. Adelman, "Trans-Atlantic Migration and the Printing Trade in Revolutionary America," *Early American Studies* 11, no. 3 (2013): 538.

Etats-Unis” (at the principal printers in the United States).⁸¹ Nancrède anticipated a wide francophone readership: he imagined the wholesale embrace of and veneration for news and literature from the French-speaking world.

Nancrède published the *Courier de Boston* weekly beginning in April 1789. It was a heady time to launch a newspaper and the next six months proved to be perhaps the most remarkable half year in the history of the Atlantic world. The first five issues announced the first meeting of the American Congress, reported the elections of George Washington as president and John Adams as vice president, and printed a list of the first American senators and representatives. Two months later, the *Courier* published the text of George Washington’s first inaugural address in parallel columns—English on the right with a French translation on the left. Nancrède also translated and printed articles about American congressional debates on the Bill of Rights, price regulation for sugar and molasses, taxes on items such as salt and tobacco, and ongoing violence between Native American tribes and white settlers. In some issues, Nancrède devoted the entire last page to “Prix courants”—the current exchange rates between Boston and major European cities for commodities such as wine, rum, tobacco, rice, sugar, butter, coffee, candles, and cotton.⁸²

During the summer of 1789, news of the French Revolution percolated into American newspapers and American consciousnesses. Deeply embedded in the Atlantic World, early national Americans regarded the French Revolution as an event of profound

⁸¹ *Courier de Boston* (Boston, MA), April 23, 1789.

⁸² *Courier de Boston* (Boston, MA), April 23; April 20; May 7; May 14; and May 21, 1789.

international significance and local consequence.⁸³ Nançrède and the *Courier de Boston* were no exception. His French newspaper increasingly focused on the unfolding of the French Revolution and the precarious political events developing there. Nançrède published accounts of the opening and dissolution of the Estates General at Versailles, the subsequent formation of the National Constituent Assembly, reports of the work of Jacques Necker (the finance minister for Louis XVI), and the “millions” of pamphlets in Paris concerning the political crisis there—a testament, according to Nançrède, to the ongoing fortitude of the liberty of the press in France. It related the drafting of the Declaration of Rights by the Marquis de Lafayette, it quoted Rousseau, and it reprinted speeches given by King Louis XVI. On September 24, 1789, the journal announced: “France: Révolte, Massacre, Confusion, Tranquillité” followed by an almost hour-by-hour account of the storming of the Bastille.⁸⁴

Nançrède enriched these domestic and foreign news reports with several feature articles. They tackled diverse subjects including domestic and international free trade, land speculation, and the science of government. One notable piece gave advice to potential French immigrants to America. The article remarked on the distinct presence of a middle class (what the article called a “happy mediocrity”) in America, the relative unimportance of birth, the abundance of fertile land, and the emphasis on toil: “En un

⁸³ Rachel Hope Cleves, *The Reign of Terror in America: Visions of Violence from Anti-Jacobinism to Antislavery* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 2-5. Rachel Hope Cleves argues that discourses of the violence of the French Revolution pervaded American print culture from 1792 (the rise to power of the radical Jacobin club) to 1865 (the fall of the Confederacy).

⁸⁴ *Courier de Boston* (Boston, MA), May 28; June 11; Sept. 17; Sept. 24; Oct. 1, 1789. This was not the first newspaper account in the United States of the events of July 14, 1789 in Paris. The *Pennsylvania Packet* printed the first report of the fall of the Bastille on September 15, 1789, the same day that it printed the entirety of the United States Constitution.

mot, l'Amérique est une terre de travail, & non pas ce que les François appellent un pays de *cocagne*" (In a word, America is a land of work, and not what the French call a land of milk and honey).⁸⁵ Other articles focused on local events such as the commencement ceremony at Harvard, the activities of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, and a grand dinner given by the Society of the Cincinnati.⁸⁶

Despite its breathless reporting on the new American democratic government and collapse of the French *ancien régime*, the journal did not prosper and Nancrède announced abruptly the suspension of the journal on October 15, 1789, after six months and twenty-six issues. He disclosed in its final issue that two robberies had depleted his funds, but it was his modest list of subscribers—many of whom never paid for their subscriptions—that most likely forced Nancrède to give up the journal. Nancrède's final note to readers suggested that the paper might resume the next spring, if 400 or more subscribers could be secured.⁸⁷ He never published another issue of the *Courier de Boston*.

Like for other early American newspapers, subscriptions sustained the *Courier de Boston* and Nancrède was not the only one who could not collect his debts. Many newspaper publishers went bankrupt not for want of subscribers, but on account of their delinquency. Weary of asking subscribers for money, some newspaper printers accepted

⁸⁵ *Courier de Boston* (Boston, MA), June 4, 1789. The French *pays de cocagne* translates in English as "land of plenty" or "land of milk and honey."

⁸⁶ *Courier de Boston* (Boston, MA), June 18; July 16; Aug. 20; Oct. 1, 1789.

⁸⁷ *Courier de Boston* (Boston, MA), Oct. 15, 1789. Perhaps predicting the end of the *Courier de Boston*, Nancrède began advertising his French evening school again, soliciting Boston parents to enroll their children in his French classes in August 1789. He had not placed any ads for his French lessons in ten months, since October 1788. *Massachusetts Centinel* (Boston, MA), Aug. 8, 1789 and Aug. 19, 1789.

payment in goods and food in lieu of cash.⁸⁸ Historian Charles Steffen reminds us that subscription numbers do not tell the full story of a newspaper's reach. As the ideology of republicanism stressed the importance of a well-informed citizenry, eager readers in the early republic devised strategies to subvert the newspaper subscription system: they refused to pay for their subscriptions, borrowed newspapers from friends and neighbors, or stole from doorsteps, shops, and the post office. "Each day across the nation," Steffen estimates, "hundreds of thousands of newspapers were being read for free." While often forcing hard-working publishers and editors to the brink of financial ruin, nonpaying readers "ensured that the new republic would be blanketed in newspapers."⁸⁹ In the case of Nancrède, the blankets of newspapers would be in French.

Advertisements were the other chief source of revenue for newspaper publishers. Revenue from advertising skyrocketed during the early national period; some newspapers in large cities in the 1790s devoted 50-75% of their four folio pages to advertisements.⁹⁰ There was an incentive then for editors to keep delinquent subscribers on the books and to sign up subscribers who would probably never pay a dime for their papers. The more widely a newspaper was circulated (or believed to be circulated), the more attractive it appeared to advertisers and an editor could calculate that money lost to unpaid

⁸⁸ Clarence S. Brigham, *Journals and Journeymen: A Contribution to the History of Early American Newspapers* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1950), 25-26.

⁸⁹ Charles G. Steffen, "'Newspapers for Free: The Economies of Newspaper Circulation in the Early Republic,'" *Journal of the Early Republic* 23, no. 3 (2003): 382-84. Quotes on p. 384.

⁹⁰ Brigham, *Journals and Journeymen*, 29-30. For a study of advertising in colonial American newspapers, see Emma Hart, "A British Atlantic World of Advertising?: Colonial American 'For Sale' Notices in Comparative Context," *American Periodicals: A Journal of History & Criticism* 24, no. 2 (2014): 110-127.

subscriptions might be made up in advertising revenue.⁹¹ Nancrède, however, never printed a single advertisement in the *Courier de Boston* and was never able to offset otherwise the financial loss of unpaid subscriptions. Like dozens of other French- and English-language newspaper publishers, Nancrède fell victim to the same problem of deadbeat subscribers, freeloaders, and thieves refusing to pay for a valuable commodity: news.

The end of the *Courier de Boston* was not the end of Nancrède's career in French publishing.⁹² In 1792, while still teaching at Harvard, Nancrède published *L'abeille Françoise* (*The French Bee*), the first textbook printed in the United States designed to teach the French language. Printed wholly in French by Joseph Belknap and Alexander Young in Boston, the 352-page book included a mélange of stories, fables, dialogues, letters, and short essays meant to be “utile à ceux qui étudient la langue françoise, et amusant pour ceux qui la connoissent” (useful to those who are studying French, and amusing to those who know it). Fictional dialogues narrated conversations between famous men in history, some of whom lived at the same time such as Francis I (King of France 1515-1547) and Henry VIII (King of England 1509-1547) and others who never would have met each other such as ancient philosopher Plato and François Fénelon, a seventeenth-century French Roman Catholic archbishop and theologian. Essays in the book considered both philosophical dilemmas such as the cause of fear and the meaning

⁹¹ Steffen, “Newspapers for Free,” 385-86.

⁹² By March 1796, Nancrède had opened a printing and book shop on Marlborough Street in Boston where he primarily sold imported books from France. Later, he worked as a translator and writer. He relocated his business to Philadelphia in 1812, and by 1825 he had returned to France where he still occasionally published political writings and maintained his interest in Franco-American affairs. Madeleine B. Stern, “Joseph Nancrède, Franco-American Bookseller-Publisher, 1761-1841,” *The Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America* 70, no. 1 (1976): 1-88.

of despotism as well as historic interests such as the biography of Caesar and a eulogy of Newton. More provocative essays addressed the frivolity of women and how to educate them, the pleasures of the soul (or heart), and consumerism among Americans. In the back of *L'abeille française*, Nancrède supplied a list of subscribers who had paid in advance for the book or promised to purchase it upon publication.⁹³

Often publishers declared that a list of subscribers would be printed as part of the text of a book, but many frequently fell through on this promise.⁹⁴ Some book publishers claimed that lack of space prevented them from including a list of subscribers or blamed subscriptions agents for not returning lists of subscribers to them in time for publication. Yet some publishers also neglected to include a subscription list because the list was too meager to warrant printing.⁹⁵ Printers often struggled to secure subscriptions for even the best-known authors. A 1795 edition of Susanna Rowson's *Trials of the Human Heart* had fewer than one hundred and fifty subscribers and a 1797 American edition of Rousseau's

⁹³ Paul Joseph Guérard de Nancrède, *L'Abeille française, ou Nouveau recueil, de morceaux brillans, des auteurs François les plus celebres. Ouvrage utile à ceux qui étudient la langue française, et amusant pour ceux qui la connoissent* (Boston: Belknap and Young, 1792).

⁹⁴ Americans showed their support for a wide variety of projects, such as road surveys, privateering enterprises, private postal delivery, fire insurance companies, coffeehouses, clubs, concerts, circulating libraries, and hot air balloons by pledging a subscription. Subscriptions imparted decidedly public exchanges. A book buyer could walk into a store, browse the shelves, purchase a book, and walk out perhaps with that recent acquisition in a bag. However, publishing and bookselling by subscription rested on an overt agreement between a publisher and the person who pledged in advance to buy that book. The terms of the agreement preceded the publication of the book and did not need to take place in a bookshop. Regional and national networks of printers, booksellers, and publishers promoted book subscriptions in pamphlets, by circulating the book manuscript, or by placing advertisements in the nation's growing network of newspapers. Subscribing to books was just another way that Americans publicly displayed their approval, their money, their names, and by extension their reputations to a project or matter they supported. Donald Farren, "Subscription: A Study of the Eighteenth-Century American Book Trade" (PhD diss., Columbia University, 1982), 2, 10, 13-14.

⁹⁵ Farren, "Subscription," 157-59. In Connecticut in the eighteenth century, only 28 out of the 103 books published by subscription contained a list of subscribers printed in them.

Social Contract had only two hundred subscribers.⁹⁶ Some subscription campaigns for books were successful: William Gordon's *History of the Rise, Progress, and Establishment of the Independence of the United States* had 1,124 subscribers in 1789.⁹⁷ Among books published by subscription in the eighteenth century, finding a list of subscribers' names in the actual text was rare.

It is remarkable, then, that Nancrède published *L'abeille française* in 1792 with what seems to be a complete list of subscribers. The book's "Liste des Souscripteurs" tallies 187 names, an impressive number compared to the 200 subscribers for Rousseau. It is a veritable index of the Boston aristocracy, with a few omissions and a few additions from other parts of New England and the mid-Atlantic. At least 51 of the subscribers to Nancrède's French textbook were Harvard graduates and at least 37 of those Harvard graduates were members of Phi Beta Kappa honor society. Attorneys, politicians, doctors, and ministers dominated the subscription list. John Quincy Adams, Samuel Breck, John Hancock, Dr. John Warren, Joseph Willard, Francis Dana, James Lovell, Francis Lowell, and Robert Treat Paine counted as subscribers. Some were Unitarians, others were Methodist or Congregationalist. Some were loyalists during the American Revolution; others were patriots who served as delegates to the Continental Congress or signed the Declaration of Independence or the Articles of Confederation. Ten women subscribed to *L'abeille Française* including Sophia Willard (the daughter of Harvard

⁹⁶ Cathy N. Davidson, *Revolution and the Word: The Rise of the Novel in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 86-87.

⁹⁷ Steven Carl Smith, *An Empire of Print: The New York Publishing Trade in the Early American Republic* (University Park, Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2017), 71. For a study of the subscription trade as related to William Gordon's *History of the Rise, Progress, and Establishment of the Independence of the United States* in 1788 and 1789, see Smith, *An Empire of Print*, 54-58.

president Joseph Willard and who would later marry Chief Justice of the Massachusetts Supreme Court Francis Dana). Madame Fitz-Patrice (Fitzpatrick), a French widow living in Dorchester, Massachusetts and Madame Laugier de Tassy, wife of a French historian, count as two out of the six people who bear francophone last names. In its broadest terms, the list paints a singular social and gendered portrait of the subscriber to Nancrède's French textbooks: elite, white, wealthy, professional men in Boston. The governing class of Boston in 1792, regardless of their political or religious convictions, publicly proclaimed themselves in support of French erudition, self-cultivation, and Nancrède, a Revolutionary War veteran born in France who taught at Harvard. By subscribing to *L'abeille Française*, Boston's gentry hoped to declare themselves on par with the French elite.

To be sure, book buying (or book subscribing) and book reading are not causally related. Some of the subscribers to *L'abeille française*, such as John Quincy Adams, Timothy Alden, John Appleton, and Samuel Breck were fluent in French for certain. Many of the Harvard graduates perhaps had some training in French or hoped to hone their French reading skills by subscribing to a French textbook. However, dozens and dozens of subscribers probably did not read and never would learn to read French. Why then did non-francophone Americans subscribe to Nancrède's French book? Achieving urban elegance and cosmopolitanism required the acquisition of genteel goods and behaviors, be it dancing, playing the piano forte, or speaking French. Whether or not they could read it, *L'abeille française* contributed to a suit of efforts by wealthy early Americans to demonstrate both the appearance of refinement (by displaying the French

book in their homes) and perhaps their mastery of reading French.⁹⁸ Again, the act of publicly subscribing to a French book—lending their names and credit to the paratext—allowed status-conscious Americans to associate themselves with the genteel practice of learning French and the elegant act of speaking it. It was the performance of elite intellectualism; it was the theatre of education.

Not long after Nancrede's publication of the *Courier de Boston* and *L'abeille françoise*, two more French newspapers appeared on the streets of Boston. Begun in December 1792, the weekly *Courier Politique de l'Univers* promised to provide an impartial perspective of the current affairs of France. The journal's prospectus vowed to give readers a "succinct account of all the events which have there occurred since the year 1788" in addition to all regular news from the Caribbean. The Abbé Louis de Rousselet, a French Catholic priest, edited the paper and Joseph Bumstead printed it at his shop on Union Street. Bumstead and Benjamin Russell, editor of the *Columbian* (formerly *Massachusetts Centinel*), accepted subscriptions for the *Courier Politique* at their shops in addition to "the different Printers, in the United States and in the West-Indies." Originally designed to appear only in French, a postscript announced that the paper would be published in both French and English "to conciliate the favour of the publick."⁹⁹

John Quincy Adams provided at least some of the English translations for the *Courier Politique*. Adams remarked in a letter to his father in December 1792: "The first

⁹⁸ On the association between gentility and the French language in the colonial period, see Carl Robert Keyes, "Selling Gentility and Pretending Morality: Education and Newspaper Advertisements in Philadelphia, 1765-75," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 141, no. 3 (2017): 245-274.

⁹⁹ *Columbian Centinel* (Boston, MA), Nov. 21, 1792.

number only has been published, and the Editor has forwarded one of them to you which he will continue to do. The translation of that part of the paper will be done by me, and I imagine the paper itself will not be continued long after that publication [of the summary of the French Revolution] is finished.”¹⁰⁰ The life of the *Courier* was even shorter than John Quincy Adams expected. Rousselet left Boston on a mission to Guadeloupe (where he was guillotined in October 1794) and the newspaper ceased publication after at most six issues in mid-January 1793.¹⁰¹ No extant copies of the *Courier Politique de l’Univers* have been located.¹⁰²

The third and final French newspaper in Boston during the early republic perhaps never progressed beyond its prospectus. The broadside heralding the *Courier des deux Mondes* promised to provide readers with a “tableau fidelle des transactions qui se passent en Europe” (true picture of the transactions happening in Europe) and that “les États-Unis vont prendre leur place parmi les puissances de la terre” (the United States will take its place among the powers of the earth).¹⁰³ The *Salem Gazette* announced that a local bookstore would accept subscriptions for “A Weekly Paper, in the *French*

¹⁰⁰ John Quincy Adams to John Adams, 16 December 1792, *Founders Online*, National Archives.

¹⁰¹ The *Courier Politique de l’Univers* (Boston, MA) ran from December 10, 1792 to mid-January 1793. Percival Meritt, “Note on the *Courier Politique de l’Univers*, Boston, 1792-1793,” *Publications of the Colonial Society of Massachusetts*, vol. XXIV, Transactions 1920-1922 (Boston: Published by the Colonial Society of Massachusetts, 1923), 296-299.

¹⁰² Brief references to the *Courier Politique* appear in the *Columbian Centinel* (Boston, MA) on December 12 and December 26, 1792 and January 9, 1793, and in the *Argus* (Boston, MA) on January 8, 1793. An article in the *Columbian Centinel* on January 19, 1793 directed subscribers of the *Courier Politique* to Joseph Bumstead’s printing shop to collect their reimbursements.

¹⁰³ George Parker Winship, “Two or Three Boston Papers,” *The Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America* 14, no. 2 (1920): 79-81. The broadside is at the Peabody Essex Museum. There was no mention of the *Courier des Deux Mondes* in Benjamin Russell’s *Columbian Centinel*, which usually announced French publications in Boston.

language—to be published in Boston” in February 1794.¹⁰⁴ No extant copies of the *Courier des Deux Mondes* have been located. The next French periodical published in Boston began in 1849.¹⁰⁵

Conclusion: A Literary *Pas de Deux*

Francophone newspaper publishers in the early republic faced many of the same challenges as English-speaking publishers: developing networks within the printing trade, negotiating national and international politics, maintaining a sizable subscription base, collecting reliable information, and securing sufficient business to remain solvent. In the process, francophone publishers confronted an additional struggle: they had to sell not only their French newspapers but the French language to Americans. Though French periodicals in the early republic led short lives, the facts of their publication prove the social capital of Francophilia in the early republic. For the many Anglo-American readers who could find the same information in American newspapers, purchasing, subscribing to, or reading a French newspaper showcased their accordance with French identity and affiliation to France in the early republic. It was a reading *pas de deux*—a literary dance for two, one uplifting the other.

¹⁰⁴ *Salem Gazette* (Salem, MA), Feb. 25, 1794.

¹⁰⁵ The first issue of *Le Bostonian: Journal des Salons* (Boston, MA) appeared on May 12, 1849. It was published weekly by Parisians Gaudet and Bailleul. Directed toward students of the French language, it was entirely in French and focused on literature, fine arts, music, and fashion. The last archived issue is dated June 30, 1849.

Chapter Two: Social Liaisons

“She Shone a Goddess, and She moved a Queen:” Salonnières and the Creation of National Political Culture in the Early Republic

In February 1786, Abigail Adams presented Anne Willing Bingham to King George III and Queen Charlotte in London and remarked that she “felt not a little proud of her.” As the first American ambassador to Great Britain, John Adams had his first audience with George III just about six months earlier in June 1785. Egos were tender and decorum imperative at the Court of St. James’s. In Abigail Adams’s mind, the court “could not produce an other so fine woman” as Anne Bingham. Adams boasted of the elegantly dressed Bingham: “She had prepaired herself in France for this occasion, and being more fleshy than I have seen her before, she is consequently handsomer than ever.” Adams compared Bingham at the Court of St. James’s to Helen of Troy in front of the Spartan chiefs as Homer described in the *Iliad*: “She Shone a Goddess, and She moved a Queen.” Other courtiers asked in hushed whispers if Bingham was an American and ladies pressed into the crowd “to get a sight of her.” An English Lord, reported Adams, declared that Bingham was “one of the finest Ladies to present, that I ever saw.”¹ It was a proud moment for Anne Bingham, for Abigail Adams, and for the United States.

¹ Abigail Adams to John Quincy Adams, 16 February 1786, *Founders Online*, National Archives. Abigail Adams slightly misquoted the *Iliad*. “She moves a goddess, and she looks a queen!” Alexander Pope, trans., *The Iliad of Homer*, Book III, line 208. The Continental Congress ratified preliminary articles of peace on April 15, 1783 and ratified the Treaty of Paris on January 14, 1784. For more on classical learning

What had prepared Anne Bingham so exquisitely for the Court of St. James's in France was the Enlightenment salon. American women in the 1780s and 1790s hoped to capture the refinement and the austere court rituals they performed in Paris and at Versailles and import them to the United States to increase the respectability and legitimacy of their country in the eyes of foreign observers and their families at home. The French salon entered the United States at a critical point in American nation building. The United States had no consuls, no embassies, and no titled royalty. In an era of uncertain fortunes and volatile hierarchies following the Revolutionary War, elite women such as Anne Bingham and Abigail Adams worked to declare social and cultural independence from Great Britain by embracing a practice unmistakably French: the salon. Amid fierce political debates concerning the influence of foreign nations in the United States, aristocratic women directed the current of early American political culture, I argue, by way of French gentility. The acceptance and persistence of the salon in the last quarter of the eighteenth century marked a critical change in how Americans conducted politics. It was the expert replication and performance of rigid French social ceremonies by American salonnières that helped to legitimize Americans on the world stage, elevate the social prestige of the governing class, and reinforce a nascent American social order. My research shows that even as the posture of American political allegiances shifted in relation to France and news of the increasing violence of the French Revolution reached the United States, the cultural capital of French elegance never faded in the American imagination.

and Abigail Adams, see Caroline Winterer, *The Mirror of Antiquity: American Women and the Classical Tradition, 1750-1900* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2007).

Based on their Enlightenment-era counterparts in Paris, American salonnières regulated complex codes of political gentility and sociability. Four major features defined salons on both sides of the Atlantic in the eighteenth century: regular feminine governance, luxurious domestic space, select company, and polite conversation. As an astute hostess, the salonnière held enormous aesthetic and social power over her devotees. From her tastefully appointed parlors, to her cliquish guest list, to her gracious conversations, and to her flawless etiquette, salonnières played deciding roles in transatlantic intellectual, political, and power networks.² Salons gave elite women and men access to informal political discourse, created a federal political culture based on French decorum, and maintained elite class structure based on women's sociality. American salonnières converted gendered, domestic, social hospitality into implicit political power by way of French cultural capital.

Several early American salonnières travelled to France in the 1780s and 1790s and attended French salons before setting up their own salons at home. Inspired by the spirited French women of the Enlightenment, American women such as Sarah Livingston Jay, Abigail Smith Adams, and Anne Willing Bingham imported the Parisian salon to the United States and adapted it to fit the needs of the early republic rather than the French aristocracy. They made salons informal places of bipartisan political discussion. French salonnières gathered like-minded men and women of the Enlightenment for intellectual, artistic, and civil debate and education. On the other hand, American salonnières, acting

² Norbert Elias located the “civilizing” influence of women in the shift from a feudal warrior society to the court society and also argued that the courts of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries allowed for more equality between men and women than existed at any other time in European history. Norbert Elias, *Power and Civility*, vol. 2 of *The Civilizing Process*, 1st American ed. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1982), 77-82.

as political power brokers, convened men and women of disparate political opinions and characters to facilitate political business beyond government halls. French salonnières counted on men to bring their ideas to the national stage; American salonnières brought the national stage to their parlors.

We need no reminders that American Revolution did not grant women the right to vote, though they were citizens. That said, many white women determined to make a mark on the political culture of the new nation.³ By establishing salons and bringing together political leaders of diverse and sometimes disagreeing standpoints, salonnières created access for themselves to political discussions and affairs and asserted themselves as full members of the body politic. They succeeded in creating a fragile but enduring conception of elite white women as political actors that was critical to ongoing nineteenth-century discourses about gender and political rights. The story of the salon in the early republic is one of declension and erasure, but it is also a story of ideals and political participation that endured in absence of the vote.⁴

³ The standard narrative, based on the work of Linda Kerber and Mary Beth Norton, is that although women were personally politicized by the Revolutionary War, neither the war nor the new Constitution changed their status. Both Norton and Kerber argued that the American Revolution inspired a new valuation of women's roles within society and sped their integration into the civil polity, but domestic traditions still condemned highly educated or active women as perverse threats to family stability. For literature on female political involvement in post-Revolutionary America, see: Mary Kelley, *Learning to Stand and Speak: Women, Education, and Public Life in America's Republic* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006); Rosemarie Zagari, *Revolutionary Backlash: Women and Politics in the Early American Republic* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007); Mary Beth Norton, *Liberty's Daughters: The Revolutionary Experience of American Women, 1750-1800* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1980); and Linda K. Kerber, *Women of the Republic: Intellect and Ideology in Revolutionary America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980).

⁴ Although the period after the Revolution produced no collective movement for women's rights, women built on precedents established during the Revolution and gained an informal foothold in party politics and male electoral activities. Yet this opening for women soon closed. By 1828, women's politicization was seen more as a liability than as a strength, contributing to a divisive political climate that repeatedly brought the country to the brink of civil war. Zagari, *Revolutionary Backlash*.

Prelude of the American Salonnière

The content and form of the American salon descended from eighteenth-century French Enlightenment salons hosted in Paris and at Versailles, the epicenters of intellectual discourse and sociability during the reigns of Louis XV (1715-1774) and Louis XVI (1774-1793). Salon gatherings in France were well-regulated practices of high society meant to replicate the sophistication of the palace court in the private home.⁵ Salons were decidedly urban and domestic affairs.⁶ French salonnières hosted well-to-do receptions in city estates or townhomes usually once but sometimes twice a week. These upper-class women cultivated centers of enlightened thought and facilitated the exchange of news and ideas by entertaining *philosophes* eager to unveil their ideas to *le monde*. A new style of domestic architecture called the rococo *hôtel* (an aristocratic town house) incorporated rooms called *salons* and *salles de compagnie* where most salon conversation

⁵ The shadow of Jürgen Habermas looms large in the historiography of French salons and their role in the “public sphere” as a “category” of bourgeois experience. In his seminal work, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, Habermas argues that both the Parisian salon and the London coffeehouse functioned as places for social interaction outside the private sphere (the home) and the sphere of public authority (the state/court). The work originally appeared in German in 1962. Triggered largely by its translation into French in 1978 and then into English in 1989, the dominance of Habermas’s work in salon historiography has come under criticism from several angles in the past three decades. Many scholars argue that the salons were not part of an oppositional public sphere as Habermas suggests, but were instead an extension of court society. Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, trans. Thomas Burger with Frederick Lawrence (Cambridge, MA: The Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, 1989), 31-43. For criticism of Habermas’s theories on salon culture, see: Joan B. Landes, *Women and the Public Sphere in the Age of the French Revolution* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988); Steven Kale, *French Salons: High Society and Political Sociability from the Old Regime to the Revolution of 1848*, rev. ed. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005); Dena Goodman, *The Republic of Letters: A Cultural History of the French Enlightenment* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1994), Antoine Lilti, “Sociabilité et mondanité: Les hommes de lettres dans les salons parisiens au XVIIIe siècle,” *French Historical Studies* 28, no. 3 (2005): 415-445; and Antoine Lilti, *Le monde des salons: Sociabilité et mondanité à Paris au XVIIIe siècle* (Paris: Éditions Fayard, 2005).

⁶ In her analysis of French salons, Joan Landes argues that salons and salonnières “belonged to the city” in that they were “part of a movement to define a new center, that of the capital.” Joan B. Landes, *Women and the Public Sphere in the Age of the French Revolution* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988), 23.

took place over lengthy dinners.⁷ Idealistic notions of politesse, sociability, and *civilité* dictated ancien régime salon conversations: they were tools of an aristocracy determined to control the delicate balance between exclusivity and openness, so that they could both produce close social cohesion among the members of the upper-class and create a vehicle for the dissemination of traits meant to characterize the larger French gentry.

Unfortunately, salons left no archives. There are no records of salon conversations, no minutes, no list of members, and no documents examining the precise number, location, or composition of salons. What exists, however, are the correspondences and diaries of salonnières and the testimony of their guests. These writings reveal, in remarkable social historical detail, who participated in elite intellectual and social circles and how women forged and then maintained the rites and rituals of federal-era polite society.⁸ Eighteenth-century men and women, however, did not call these gatherings “salons.” Before the French Revolution, a salon was a French architectural term designating a large room with an arched ceiling typically in a European château or royal home. The term “salon” only began to signify a domestic space in which one hosted guests in the early nineteenth century.⁹ Contemporary letters, diaries, and

⁷ Michael Dennis, *Court and Garden: From the French Hôtel to the City of Modern Architecture* (Cambridge, MA: Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, 1988), 91-117.

⁸ Some fictional accounts of salon conversations exist in print. Benjamin Franklin Bache printed the reported conversation of several young women, all actively involved in political issues, in the *Aurora* (Philadelphia, PA) on January 20, 1791. See also: *Effusions of Female Fancy* (New York, 1784), Richard Johnson’s *Tea-Table Dialogues* (Philadelphia, 1789), and Charles Brockden Brown’s novel *Alcuin* (1798/1815).

⁹ I agree with Antoine Lilti that it is somewhat anachronistic to discuss the “salons of the eighteenth century,” as doing so runs the risk of overestimating the existence of an autonomous institution, when in fact many diverse forms of hospitality prevailed in genteel society. Antoine Lilti, *The World of the Salons: Sociability and Worldliness in Eighteenth-Century Paris*, trans. Lydia G. Cochrane (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 6.

correspondence refer to them as “circles,” “at homes,” “drawing rooms,” or “societies.” I posit that these regular social gatherings held in private homes and hosted by women do indeed constitute an American salon culture.¹⁰

The form of the American salon defines its character. Salons were held any day of the week, usually in the afternoons or evenings, and in any private, domestic setting such as a parlor, drawing room, or dining room. There was no explicit coordination or collaboration among salonnières as to the exact details of a salon, although they must have competed for guests if two or more salons fell on the same evening. There were no discernible differences between a salon held in Philadelphia or in New York. The elaborate rituals of calling and being called on were essential for maintaining social relationships among the nascent American gentry, but these short, unscheduled visits were more random and the formalities of such visits were less regulated than salons.¹¹ What American salons had in common was a shared French pedigree and rigidity of protocol based on the French aristocracy.

Madame Geoffrin, perhaps the most influential Enlightenment salonnière in France, hosted artists, writers, foreign dignitaries, men of letters, and aristocrats at her home on the rue Saint-Honoré in Paris. Dena Goodman argues that Geoffrin “invented the Enlightenment salon” by hosting her salons earlier in the day to allow for longer

¹⁰ David S. Shields and Frederika J. Teute argue that the “Republican Court and its doings were matters of common knowledge among literate Americans” before the rise of progressive historians in the early twentieth century. From the 1920s to about the 1990s, many historians did not, in fact, recognize the meaningfulness of salons and the Republican Court. David S. Shields and Frederika J. Teute, “The Republican Court and the Historiography of a Women’s Domain in the Public Sphere,” *Journal of the Early Republic* 35, no. 2 (2015): 171.

¹¹ For more on nineteenth-century calling practices, see: Merry Ellen Scofield, “House of Cards: The Politics of Calling Card Etiquette in Nineteenth-Century Washington,” *Common-Place: A Journal of Early American Life* 16, no. 4 (2016).

conversations and by standardizing a specific day of the week for her salon gatherings.¹² Along with Julie de Lespinasse and Suzanne Necker, Geoffrin transformed the salon “from a noble, leisure institution into an institution of the Enlightenment.”¹³ She hosted two weekly dinners: a Wednesday dinner devoted exclusively to men of letters and a Monday dinner frequented by artists as well as men of letters. Madame Geoffrin also hosted grand dinners and received visits every day between five in the afternoon and nine.¹⁴

Salons serve as a valuable source of evidence that historians of eighteenth-century France know well.¹⁵ There is ample literature on the cultural import of French salons, a subset of a larger body of work debating the role of Enlightenment women in the public sphere.¹⁶ Studies from the last three decades in particular reflect major historiographical debates about the degree to which—if at all—women reigned in salons.¹⁷ For Dena

¹² Goodman, *Republic of Letters*, 90-91.

¹³ Dena Goodman, “Enlightenment Salons: The Convergence of Female and Philosophic Ambitions,” *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 22, no. 3 (1989): 331.

¹⁴ Lilti, *The World of the Salons*, 16.

¹⁵ This French historiography dovetails with influential studies that investigate salons elsewhere in Europe at the same time. Elizabeth Montagu, a prominent British salonnière, hosted “bluestocking” women—intellectual and elite ladies—regularly at her home in London’s Mayfair. See Sylvia Harcstark Myers, *The Bluestocking Circle: Women, Friendship, and the Life of the Mind in Eighteenth-Century England* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990). On British and German discourses of liberty by feminist reformers, see Alessa Johns, *Bluestocking Feminism and British-German Cultural Transfer, 1750–1837* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2014). Rahel Varnhagen hosted one of the most prominent salons in Berlin and later in Vienna in the early nineteenth century. See Hannah Arendt, *Rahel Varnhagen: The Life of a Jewess* (London: East and West Library, 1958).

¹⁶ Major studies of women’s roles in political culture in eighteenth-century France include: Catherine Cusset, *Les romanciers du plaisir* (Paris: Honoré Champion Éditeur, 1998); Arlette Farge, *Dire et mal dire: L’opinion publique au XVIIIe siècle* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1992); Keith Baker, *Inventing the French Revolution: Essays on French Political Culture in the Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); and Lynn Hunt, *Politics, Culture, and Class in the French Revolution* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984).

¹⁷ Joan Landes’s research on French literary women and politics recreates public-sphere theory from a feminist point of view. Although women wielded surprising influence and power in *ancien régime* court

Goodman, French salonnières not only ruled the center of the salon but also at the center of the “practices of intellectual sociability and discourse which defined the Enlightenment Republic of Letters.” Salonnières, Goodman argues, governed the critical project of the Enlightenment: “Her role as civilizer was the historical key to the realization of sociability and civilization. In the civilized world of the Republic of Letters, she was both the basis of social order and the governor of its discourse.”¹⁸

The literature on colonial American salons largely agrees that there was a period of time when elite women regularly hosted gatherings in their homes but mostly for entertainment and good conversation. David Shields tracks the rise of the colonial American salon with the advent of tea table conversation which, he argues, attracted “men of sense” to these social occasions “by extending the promise that conversation with women would be to their advantage.” Although simple “chat was the art of the tea table,” according to Shields, American women observed that “salons had given French women a hand in affairs of state by incorporating men of affairs into a conversation superintended by women.”¹⁹

Perhaps the best-known salonnière of colonial America, Elizabeth Graeme Ferguson presided over a community of women poets who circulated writings in the

culture and in salons, Landes asserts, the French Revolution later relegated women to the home and created a rigidly gendered, essentially male bourgeois public sphere in which women “came to be politically silent.” Landes, *Women and the Public Sphere in the Age of the French Revolution*, 2.

¹⁸ Goodman, *The Republic of Letters*, 3, 5-6. Other scholars of Revolutionary-era France, however, are not convinced of salonnières’s access to political power. Steven Kale diminishes salonnières in positions of political power as “an optical illusion that magnified and made remarkable what was simply an aristocratic alternative to the dissipation of court life and the servitude of the Victorian private sphere.” Kale, *French Salons*, 40, 228. Antoine Lilti further depreciates the eighteenth-century salon by foregrounding the idea of worldliness (*le mondanité*). Salons, he argues, were based primarily on the practice of hospitality and “the absence of an explicit objective other than sociability itself.” Lilti, *The World of the Salons*, 7, 20, 22, 39.

¹⁹ Shields, *Civil Tongues and Polite Letters*, 106, 119.

Delaware Valley.²⁰ After the death of her mother in 1765, she regularly hosted Saturday evening salons for a decade at her family's country seat in Horsham, Pennsylvania, and at her father's home on Chestnut Street in Philadelphia. A habitué of Ferguson's salons, Dr. Benjamin Rush recorded a description of her "presiding genius":

Saturday evenings were appropriated, for many years during Miss Graeme's winter residence in the city, for the entertainment, not only of strangers, but of such of her friends of both sexes as were considered the most suitable company for them. These evenings were, properly speaking, of the Attic kind. The genius of Miss Graeme evolved the heat and light that animated them. ... Upon these occasions her body seemed to vanish, and she appeared to be all mind.²¹

During a trip to England in the early 1760s, Ferguson recorded her impressions in a journal that circulated among the literati of Philadelphia. Later, she contributed to the *Pennsylvania Packet* and the *Columbian Magazine*, often under the pseudonym Laura. Most of her writing, however, remains in manuscript, including her letters, petitions, psalm paraphrases, odes to the seasons, devotional poems, comments on Rush's medical inquiries, and neoclassical poetry. Her most extensive work was the translation and versification of François Fénelon's *Les Aventures de Télémaque* (1699) into English.²²

²⁰ Ferguson's literary network included Rebecca Moore, Annis Boudinot Stockton, Hannah Griffiths, Anna Young Smith, Susanna Wright, and Deborah Pratt. Annis Boudinot Stockton composed at least 125 poems, several of which she published, and hosted a salon at the Stockton mansion that lasted well into the early republic. Carla Mulford, ed., *"Only for the Eye of a Friend": The Poetry of Annis Boudinot Stockton* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1995), 9.

²¹ Benjamin Rush manuscripts, vol. 40. Library Company of Philadelphia. Ferguson kept a diary chronicling her years as a salonnière in Philadelphia and her year spent in England. The diary has not been preserved but Dr. Rush read it and commented on it.

²² Shields, *Civil Tongues & Polite Letters*, 126; Rodney Mader, "Elizabeth Graeme Fergusson's 'The Deserted Wife,'" *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 135, no. 2 (2011): 151; Anne Hollingsworth Wharton, *Salons, Colonial and Republican* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Company, 1900), 13-23; Carla Mulford, ed., *"Only for the Eye of a Friend": The Poetry of Annis Boudinot Stockton* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1995), xv. The Library Company of Philadelphia, the Historical Society of Pennsylvania, and the William Smith Papers at the University of Pennsylvania Archives and Record Center contain the bulk of Ferguson's writings. Most of the recent historiography and criticism on eighteenth-century Anglo-American literature considers Ferguson a leading poet. See especially Shields, *Civil Tongues & Polite Letters*, 120-140; Anne M. Ousterhout, *The Most Learned Woman in America: A Life of Elizabeth Graeme Fergusson* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University

Colonial American salons, such as Ferguson's, were decidedly literary affairs and political dynamism was cursory if not absent altogether from them.²³

Beyond the salonnière herself, salons required the creation of a beautiful setting. As the eighteenth-century progressed, cooking, working, eating, and sleeping moved away from parlors to render them exclusively a place for tea, cards, wine, and above all conversation. The mansion houses built in mid- and late-eighteenth-century America “embraced formal entertainment as their governing idea” and parlors, with no economic purpose, received the highest degree of decorative detail and cost more than any other room. Salonnières went to great lengths to cultivate stages on which genteel sociability could be performed. Craftsmen and artisans dreamed up new accoutrements for formal entertaining such as elaborate tea equipages, tureens, punch bowls, wine coolers, card tables, spoons specifically designed for dessert and on and on.²⁴

Salon culture persisted in the decades following 1776 and studies of salonnières in post-Revolutionary American society are not new. In the second half of the nineteenth

Press, 2004); Susan M. Stabile, *Memory's Daughters: The Material Culture of Remembrance in Eighteenth-Century America* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004); and Nicole Eustace, *Passion Is the Gale: Emotion, Power, and the Coming of the American Revolution* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008). For some of Ferguson's published writings, see the following pieces signed by “Laura” or “Laura Maria” in the *Pennsylvania Packet* (Philadelphia, PA): “To Men of the World,” April 27, 1782; “On the Death of a very worthy Person,” May 13, 1784; “Lines on Beauty,” Oct. 30, 1789; and “Ode to Reflection,” Sept. 23, 1790, page 2.

²³ However, during the Revolutionary War rumors suggested that Ferguson was embroiled in two curious episodes, both involved schemes to bring about peace negotiations favorable to England. Ferguson was never charged with treason and her friends never doubted her sympathy to the American cause. “Elizabeth Graeme Ferguson,” *Notable American Women, 1607-1950, A Biographical Dictionary*, vol. 1, ed. Edward T. James (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 1971), 611. Her husband Henry Ferguson was a loyalist and there was no doubt about where his loyalties laid. The Continental Congress confiscated Graeme Park in 1778. The property was returned to Elizabeth Ferguson in 1781.

²⁴ On parlors as distinctive architectural features of genteel homes, see Bushman, *The Refinement of America*, 118-122. For more details regarding the development of material culture for polite society, see Bushman, *The Refinement of America*, 46-58. Quote from page 120.

century, historians Rufus Griswold, Elizabeth Ellet, and Anne Hollingsworth Wharton copiously quoted from contemporaries who remarked on the charms, beauty, and grace of the nation's elite women during the federal period.²⁵ Wharton explains the existence of American salons as a product of individual enthusiasm: "it has always been the ambition and delight of a certain class of superior women to rule and shine in a social atmosphere somewhat different from that of the conventional ball and dinner."²⁶ What these nineteenth-century historians did not fully consider, however, was how American women exerted political and cultural power and made decisions about the direction and mode of American politics in their salons in the early republic.

More recently, scholars have emphasized the social and political skills that elite women wielded as crucial to some of the major political successes and failures in the early decades of the national government. Susan Branson credits women's activities during the French Revolution as the inspiration not only for the increased presence of elite women in American politics but also the emanant discourses concerning women's political places in the 1790s. The presence of women became "important or even central" to the nation's political culture as both Federalists and Democratic Republicans competed for the allegiance of women in order to promote the legitimacy of their claims to represent the best interests of the entire nation.²⁷ Catherine Allgor expertly details

²⁵ Rufus Wilmot Griswold, *The Republican Court; or, American Society in the Days of Washington* (New York: D. Appleton, 1855); Elizabeth Fries Ellet, *The Women of the American Revolution*, 3 vols. (Philadelphia: George W. Jacobs & Co., 1848-1850); Anne Hollingsworth Wharton, *Colonial Days and Dames* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Company, 1894); and Anne Hollingsworth Wharton, *Salons, Colonial and Republican* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Company, 1900).

²⁶ Wharton, *Salons, Colonial and Republican*, 11.

²⁷ Susan Branson, *These Fiery Frenchified Dames: Women and Political Culture in Early National Philadelphia* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001), 143.

Washington women as “political actors in their own right” who built the “extraofficial structures” that were vital to the new United States capital.²⁸ In a series of conference papers delivered in the mid-1900s and early 2000s, Fredrika J. Teute and David S. Shields reevaluated the relevance of the Habermasian public sphere and women’s role in early national politics and life by focusing on the Republican Court.²⁹

These narratives are sound, yet there are crucial aspects of elite American women’s roles as salonnières and the French provenance of federal political culture in the early republic that remain ripe for analysis. For one, American salonnières explicitly chose to set up their salons in the manner of *ancien régime* French aristocratic salons. They did not deviate far from their French predecessors, even though they might have changed the rules to suit an egalitarian republic more than a monarchy. It was a tactic that positioned elite American women as powerful designers of the sociopolitical aesthetics of the early republic. Second, during the turmoil and violence of the French Revolution and especially after the Reign of Terror in 1793, American salonnières did not cease their operations. Salons, notably those in the federal capital hosted by the Federalist president’s wife, continued to dictate and facilitate national political culture. Finally,

²⁸ Catherine Allgor, *Parlor Politics: In Which the Ladies of Washington Help Build a City and a Government* (Charlottesville, VA: University Press of Virginia, 2000), 1, 81.

²⁹ The *Journal of the Early Republic* published a series of conference papers by Teute and Shields in the summer 2015 issue along with an introduction by François Furstenberg and David Waldstreicher and five review essays by scholars in various disciplines. They presented the Republican Court as a site where women played a central role and where historians could make interdisciplinary collaborations and contributions pertaining to archival work, close reading, material culture, feminist historiography, Federal-era politics, theater and performance studies, the history of emotions and sensibility, and international historiographies. François Furstenberg and David Waldstreicher, “Re-introducing the Republican Court,” *The Journal of the Early Republic* 35, no. 2 (2015): 165-167.

salons were austere affairs: they were not fun. Salonnières, often reluctant ones at that, organized salons to direct the informal channels of power in the nascent republic.

American salons enlarged an already vibrant public arena to include women.³⁰ Eighteenth-century white American men largely excluded women from their social, intellectual, and political circles created in and around taverns, coffeehouses, libraries, historical societies, colleges, and museums.³¹ Upper-class men and women could, however, socialize together in public at dancing assemblies. Although dancing assemblies and salons shared some defining features, —they were both regular social gatherings for elites characterized by theatricality—assemblies were much larger than one woman’s social network, required a paid ticket, were organized by male dancing masters, and took place in large storehouses, classrooms after hours, taverns, or halls. Colonial American men and women attended dancing assemblies to showcase their physical grace, latest fashions, conversational skills, and refined manners. To attend an assembly, one had to be a subscriber (a man invited to be member who paid a fee) or sponsored by a subscriber. Ladies needed to hold non-transferable tickets bearing their names. Regardless of one’s wealth or social standing, it was never possible to appear at assemblies unsponsored. Dancing assemblies helmed by men functioned as basic gates to genteel American society.³²

³⁰ For an excellent study of sociability among men and women, see Cassandra A. Good, *Founding Friendships: Friendships between Men and Women in the Early American Republic* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015).

³¹ See Shields, *Civil Tongues & Polite Letters*, especially Chapter Three, “Coffeehouse and Tavern,” Chapter Six, “The Clubs,” and Chapter Seven, “The College, the Press, and the Public.”

³² The literature on dancing assemblies is not ample. See Richard L. Bushman, *The Refinement of America: Persons, Houses, Cities* (New York: Vintage Books, 1992), 50-51; Lynne Matluck Brooks, “The Philadelphia Dancing Assembly in the Eighteenth Century,” *Dance Research Journal* 21, no. 1 (1989): 1-6;

Established in 1748, the Dancing Assembly of Philadelphia began to institutionalize genteel feminine behavior under the direction of men. The dancing assembly met at first in Andrew Hamilton's warehouse on the wharf in alternating shifts: one group of eighty members gathered one Thursday evening, and another group of eighty members gathered there the following week. In its first season, the list of fifty-two subscribers included some of the most elite surnames in Philadelphia: Bond, Bingham, Hamilton, Shippen, and Willing.³³

The wealthy gentlemen who carefully controlled the assemblies, sometimes called "managers" or "masters of ceremony," laid down strict rules governing dancing assemblies. They determined the hours and number of meetings, election of managers, availability and prices of subscriptions and guest tickets, and regulation of dances. Managers controlled dancers and dances, each set of which required ten couples carefully arranged by him.³⁴ In his memoir of his journey in America from 1780-1782, the marquis de Chastellux, who had served as a major in the French expeditionary forces during the Revolutionary War, described the Philadelphia Assemblies as "methodical amusements." He recounted one incident when a manager who "exercised his office with great severity" scolded a young woman who had missed her turn on the dance floor because she was talking with a friend: "he came up to her, and called out aloud, *give over, Miss, take care*

and Zara Anishanslin, "Dancing Assembly," *Encyclopedia of Greater Philadelphia* (2017). For a description of colonial British American balls, see Shields, *Civil Tongues and Polite Letters*, 145-157.

³³ Philadelphia Dancing Assembly Records, Society Collection. Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

³⁴ Philadelphia Dancing Assembly Records, Society Collection. Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

*of what you are about; do you think you come here for your pleasure?”*³⁵ Men exclusively presided over dancing assemblies. Women attended as guests, contestants for male admiration among ambitious crowds. To wield more political and social power, leading American women forged an even more exclusive and elite echelon of polite society that they could govern: the salon.

New York

In the 1780s and 1790s, Sarah Livingston Jay sat at the summit of New York high society. Born into the great Livingston dynasty, she was the daughter of New Jersey Governor William Livingston and married John Jay in 1774, who at the time was a promising young lawyer from a well-to-do merchant family.³⁶ But more than her affluent genealogy and advantageous marriage made Sarah Livingston Jay an influential woman in the early republic. She was a politically keen thinker who worked to promote her own political visions alongside those of her husband. Acting outside formal channels of power, Jay advocated for the inclusion of women in systems of familial politics and diplomacy. She communicated her political thinking in her correspondence with family members and by carrying on the rituals of the French salon for American women in New York. Jay used the salon to build social, cultural, and symbolic capital for herself, her family, and her nation based on her expertise in French sociability.

³⁵ Marquis de Chastellux, *Travels in North-America, in the Years 1780, 1781, and 1782* (London: G. G. J. and J. Robinson, 1787), 316.

³⁶ John Jay's paternal grandfather Augustus was a French Huguenot who fled France after the revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1685 and eventually settled in New York where he established a thriving mercantile business. John Jay's father Peter Jay became a wealthy commodities trader in New York and married Mary Van Cortlandt, the daughter of a wealthy Dutch American merchant and politician in New York City. Both John Jay's father and grandfather invested in the slave trade.

In the midst of the American Revolution in 1779, Sarah Livingston Jay left her young son Peter Augustus with his Livingston relatives in British-occupied New York, nearly died in a shipwreck while crossing the Atlantic, and once in Europe suffered the death of her newborn daughter Susan.³⁷ She was accompanying her husband on a diplomatic mission to Madrid where they spent more than two years trying to securing Spanish recognition of American independence, financial support from the Spanish court, and a treaty of alliance and commerce.³⁸ Her sacrifices for American independence were not few.

Sarah Jay's letters home, especially those addressed to her mother and her sisters, provide remarkable evidence of her political vision and the political power expressed in women's letter writing.³⁹ Writing within the genre of the familiar letter which mimicked the ease of intimate conversation, Jay used her pen to preserve ties with far-flung

³⁷ Sarah Livingston Jay to Susannah French Livingston, 12-26 December 1779. Freeman et al., *Selected Letters of John Jay and Sarah Livingston Jay*, 65-69. Sarah Livingston Jay wrote a detailed account of her transatlantic crossing in a letter to her mother. Jay's newborn daughter Susan died in August 1780; she was less than one month old. Sarah Livingston Jay to Susannah French Livingston, 28 August 1780, Freeman et al., *Selected Letters of John Jay and Sarah Livingston Jay*, 90-92. After the frigate upon which they were travelling to Europe was severely disabled during a storm, the Jays landed in Martinique where they enjoyed the hospitality of William Bingham. Bingham made his fortune during the war as an agent of the Continental Congress in the Caribbean and returned to Philadelphia an immensely wealthy man. John Jay purchased an enslaved man named Benoir in Martinique.

³⁸ Landa M. Freeman, Louise V. North, and Janet M. Wedge, eds., *Selected Letters of John Jay and Sarah Livingston Jay: Correspondence by or to the First Chief Justice of the United States and His Wife* (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2005), 126-127. Sarah Livingston Jay accompanied John Jay on two diplomatic missions: first to Spain (22 January 1780 - 21 May 1782) and then to France (23 June 1782 - 16 May 1784). As minister plenipotentiary for the United States, John Jay was neither welcome nor accepted in Spain.

³⁹ On the importance of family correspondence during the revolution, see Konstantin Dierks, *In My Power: Letter Writing and Communications in Early America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011), 191-92, 234.

relatives, to cope with wartime uncertainties, and to express her political convictions.⁴⁰ In a letter to her sister, Jay sent home confidential and detailed reports of what she considered to be her brother Henry Brockholst Livingston's improper political behavior in Spain marked by "constant captiosness & sulkiness."⁴¹

In observing Spanish society in a letter to her sisters in 1780, Jay cherished her own: "Where is the country (Switzerland excepted) where Justice is so impartially administered, industry encouraged, health and Smiling plenty so bounteous to all as in our much favored Country? And are not those blessings each of them resulting from, or matured by freedom, worth contending for?" But Jay stopped short of an all-out call to arms: "But whither, my pen, are you hurrying me? What have I to do with politicks? Am I not myself a woman, & writing to Ladies? Come then, ye fashions to my assistance."⁴² Jay's rhetorical questions—"What have I to do with politicks? Am I not myself a woman, & writing to Ladies?"—bear out her frustration at her government as well as her own self-censorship. Moving to Spain at the behest of the Continental Congress, living for the most part without her husband, pregnant, speaking no Spanish, and denied formal recognition by the Spanish court, Jay conceivably felt isolated and exiled in Spain, but

⁴⁰ For a close analysis of women's economic lives and spousal letter writing during wartime, see: Sara T. Damiano, "Writing Women's History Through the Revolution: Family Finances, Letter Writing, and Conceptions of Marriage," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 74, no. 4 (2017): 697-728.

⁴¹ Sarah Livingston Jay to William Livingston, 24 June 1781, John Jay Papers, Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Columbia University, New York. The letter closes with an endorsement from John Jay to show the letter to Governor Livingston if Henry's "misrepresentations" should warrant it. Apparently, the letter was never delivered to the governor. Sarah Jay also criticized what she judged to be the unsuitable political behavior of those outside her family circle, especially those she saw as self-serving opportunists in federal service. Sarah Livingston Jay to Catherine W. Livingston, 16 July 1783, John Jay Papers, Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Columbia University, New York.

⁴² Sarah Livingston Jay to Catherine and Susan Livingston, 4 March 1780. Freeman et al., *Selected Letters of John Jay and Sarah Livingston Jay*, 74.

nevertheless cheered the freedom she found at home in the United States. Perhaps too her rhetorical strategy served to prove her adeptness at political observation: she quickly discerned the hostility of the Spanish government toward her and her family's presence there (Spain did not yet recognize American independence) and stopped herself short of writing too much political commentary on the lack of "Justice" she found in Spain for fear of Spanish officials reading her letter, interception of her letter en route to New York by another foe, or even by a friend. Jay's rhetorical questioning of her own political statements would perhaps dissuade a hasty reader of studying too carefully her political sentiments.⁴³ And she had reason to worry about others reading her letters. Susan Livingston complained to her sister that her letters were intercepted even though they travel with the Congressional dispatches. Jay's sister Catherine sometimes used a grid cypher code in her letters and John Jay sometimes enclosed government dispatches and materials in his letters to his wife.⁴⁴ After two and a half years in virtual isolation in Spain, the Jays moved to Paris where John Jay was a member of the American delegation tasked with negotiating the peace terms to end the Revolutionary War.⁴⁵

⁴³ Sarah Jay spoke no Spanish and made few acquaintances in Madrid. The high cost of living prohibited her from traveling about Spain with her husband. John Jay was never formally received by the Spanish court despite his following the Spanish king from palace to palace. The Jays were accompanied to Spain by Sarah's brother Henry Brockholst Livingston, a woman whom the Livingston family enslaved named Abbe, John Jay's twelve-year-old nephew Peter Jay Munro, and John Jay's private secretary William Carmichael.

⁴⁴ Susan Livingston Symmes to Sarah Livingston Jay, December 1780; Catherine W. Livingston to Sarah Livingston Jay, 10 July 1780; and John Jay to Sarah Livingston Jay, 1780 (identifier: Columbia.jay.08028), Papers of John Jay, Columbia Digital Library Collections, Columbia University Libraries.

⁴⁵ The Jays arrived in Paris on 23 June 1782. Among John Jay's goals as a member of the American delegation that negotiated peace terms with England was to preserve, in addition to a lasting peace, a record of the negotiations and respectability for Americans among European powers.

The Jays enjoyed an active social life in Paris and a resolute acceptance by the French aristocracy that established their credibility with the international diplomatic corps. Time in Paris taught Sarah Jay how to perform politics in unofficial channels. Two days after arriving in Paris in June 1782, Sarah Jay received a warm letter of welcome from Marie Adrienne Françoise de Noailles, marquise de Lafayette, wife of the famous marquis who had defeated British forces at Yorktown with George Washington a year earlier.⁴⁶ Their home in Paris, the Hôtel de Lafayette, had become a de facto headquarters for Americans in Paris—including Benjamin Franklin and John and Abigail Smith Adams—who met there every Monday to dine with the Noailles family.⁴⁷ Other young members of the liberal French nobility who had fought in the Revolutionary War including the comte d’Estaing, the comte de Rochambeau, the chevalier de Chastellux, and the comte de Sarsfield also extended hospitality to the Jays.⁴⁸ In her first letter to her mother from Paris, Jay described her sincere happiness upon being received cordially in France: “I became again reconcil’d to the lot of humanity.”⁴⁹ Madame de Lafayette and Jay quickly became friends and maintained a warm, ongoing relationship.⁵⁰

⁴⁶ Adrienne de Noailles to Sarah Livingston Jay, correspondence, 25 June 1782 and 29 June 1782, Papers of John Jay, Columbia Digital Library Collections, Columbia University Libraries. For another invitation, see marquis de Lafayette to Sarah Livingston Jay, 11 October 1782, Papers of John Jay, Columbia Digital Library Collections, Columbia University Libraries. Sarah Jay wrote back to the marquis de Lafayette accepting the dinner invitation on 31 October 1782.

⁴⁷ André Maurois, *Adrienne: The Life of the Marquise de La Fayette*, translated from the French by Gerard Hopkins (London: Jonathan Cape, 1961), 130.

⁴⁸ See the editorial note: “Paris Embraces the Jays,” *The Selected Papers of John Jay*, vol 3, 1782-1784, edited by Elizabeth M. Nuxoll, (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2013), 219-220.

⁴⁹ Sarah Livingston Jay to Susannah French Livingston, correspondence, 28 August 1782, Papers of John Jay, Columbia Digital Library Collections, Columbia University Libraries. Griswold, *The Republican Court*, 98-99.

⁵⁰ Griswold, *The Republican Court*, 98. In a letter to Mary White Morris, Jay wrote from Paris in November 1782: “The Marchioness [Marie Adrienne Françoise de Noailles] is a most amiable woman who

The warm welcome of Jay in Paris from the French court signified more than polite hospitality for a foreign visitor. It meant that Jay was successfully operating the levers of unofficial power in France. Just as her husband's role was to negotiate a peace treaty, Jay's job was to develop liaisons between the French court, foreign diplomats, their families, and her family. Jay wrote to her sister in March 1783 that she had dined with the comte de Rochambeau, "the Spanish Ambassador for Versailles, the Spanish Ambassador for Naples & the Spanish Minister plenipotentiary for England &c. & highly entertained me by the many civil things he said of America. We have since recd two invitations to dine with him."⁵¹ Reciprocal invitations to dinner signaled success for Jay. Miss Abigail (Nabby) Adams Smith wrote in 1785 from Paris about Jay: "Every person who knew her when here bestows many encomiums on Mrs. Jay: Madame de Lafayette said she was well acquainted with her, and very fond of her, adding, that Mrs. Jay and she thought alike, that pleasure might be found abroad, but happiness only at home, in the society of one's family and friends."⁵²

Jay was thoroughly impressed with Marie Antoinette. In a letter to Mary White Morris, Jay exclaimed: "The Queen has lately returned to Versailles after a residence of 8 or 10 Weeks at Passey— while there I used sometimes to have the pleasure of seeing her at the Plays. She is so handsome & her manners are so engaging, that almost forgetful of

express'd her inclination to see America in very flattering terms, & I could not forbear assuring her that if she ever honor'd us by a visit, she would find that her Character there had already prepar'd the Americans to receive her in a manner, that would convince her that the Marquis, tho' much esteem'd, was not the only one of his Family that they respected.—" Freeman et al., *Selected Letters of John Jay and Sarah Livingston Jay*, 123. Mary White Morris married Robert Morris in 1769.

⁵¹ Sarah Livingston Jay to Catharine Livingston, 16 March 1783, Papers of John Jay, Columbia Digital Library Collections, Columbia University Libraries.

⁵² Abigail Adams Smith, [correspondence 1785], quoted in Griswold, *The Republican Court*, 98.

republican principles, I was ever ready while in her presence to declare her born to be a queen.— There are however many traits in her Character worthy of imitation even by republicans, & I cannot but admire her resolution to superintend the education of Madame Royale her daughter.”⁵³

As an unofficial diplomat, Jay engaged with American dignitaries as well as European, relationships that undergirded her might on both sides of the Atlantic. She moved naturally among a group of peacemakers in Paris, both American and British, including Alice De Lancey Izard, Dorcus Montgomery and her son Robert, Matthew and Ann (Nancy) Ridley, Thomas and Robert Morris Jr., John Paul Jones, and Thomas Barclay. In letters to her sister Catharine Livingston, Jay recognized that salon sociability, though sometimes tiring, was her job: “Paris is indeed very agreeable & our engagements almost too many.” Jay described to her sister in 1782 the social events of court society and the women of her “Circle”:

Among all the pleasures which Paris affords (& they are not few) none of them gratify me like the frequent opportunity of seeing my Country-men.— At present you would be surpris’d to see what a Circle we form when collected. We have rec^d. an agreeable addition to our society by the arrival of M^{rs}. Ridley the day before yesterday. — M^{rs}. Price & M^{rs}. Montgomery have the suit of rooms over my head in this same Hotel & M^{rs}. Izard lives directly opposite & has two daughters that are grown up. there are three days in the week that we take tea & play Cards at each others houses, besides meeting upon other occasions— I was telling young Franklin the other day that he must aid me in contriving a Ball when Peace is concluded.⁵⁴

⁵³ Sarah Livingston Jay to Mary White Morris, 14 November 1782, Papers of John Jay, Columbia Digital Library Collections, Columbia University Libraries.

⁵⁴ Sarah Livingston Jay to Catharine W. Livingston, correspondence, 14 December 1782, Papers of John Jay, Columbia Digital Library Collections, Columbia University Libraries. Ann (Nancy) Richardson Ridley married merchant Matthew Ridley in England in 1775. She died months after childbirth in Paris in January 1784. Ridley later married Catherine Livingston (Sarah Livingston Jay’s sister Kitty) in 1787. Mrs. James Price was the wife of an English merchant who lived in Montreal before the Revolutionary War. James Price left for France in the summer of 1781. Dorcas Armitage Montgomery was a young widow from Philadelphia and a close friend of Sarah Franklin Bache. In 1767 she married Robert Montgomery who died three years later at sea at the age of 27. They had two sons together, one of whom also died in 1770.

Though no evidence exists that Jay hosted a ball in Paris to proclaim American independence, she at least campaigned for widespread recognition and celebration of an American victory and the legitimacy of American negotiations in Europe. She wrote to her sister that Lady Julianna Penn and her children “are near neighbors & often with us they are an agreeable addition to our social parties.”⁵⁵ Cloaked in the language of domesticity, Jay used the architecture of the Parisian *hôtel* in which she lived to demonstrate the conviviality she had secured with the Ridley, Montgomery, Izard, and Penn families. In July 1783 with peace in sight, Jay wrote to her sister: “I shall be very happy to see Mr. & Mrs. Bingham at Paris, shd the business of the American Commissioners be compleated [*sic*] in the course of the summer, probably Mr. Jay will have the pleasure of seeing them in England.”⁵⁶ Sarah Jay worked as an unofficial diplomat alongside her husband in Europe to maintain relationships with important American families—the Morrisises, Montgomerys, Izards, Penns, Bingham, Churches, and Adamses—and used the politics of letter writing and the politics of gentility to support the project of American independence and the larger role of women in it. By veiling her work and her writing in the language of domesticity, Jay was able to serve in a diplomatic capacity alongside her husband on behalf of the new nation.

Margaret Izard and Charlotte Izard were the two eldest daughters of Ralph and Alice De Lancey Izard. “Young Franklin” was William Temple Franklin.

⁵⁵ Sarah Livingston Jay to Catharine Livingston, correspondence, 16 March 1783, Papers of John Jay, Columbia Digital Library Collections, Columbia University Libraries.

⁵⁶ Sarah Livingston Jay to Catharine Livingston, correspondence, 16 July 1783, Papers of John Jay, Columbia Digital Library Collections, Columbia University Libraries.

On her return to the United States in 1784, Sarah Livingston Jay brought back some precious souvenirs: two daughters and the French salon.⁵⁷ The Jays continued to reign over high society in New York and built a large stone house on Broadway featuring glass sent from France for the windows.⁵⁸ In the style of celebrated Enlightenment salonnières, Sarah Jay hosted exclusive weekly gatherings in her new home for genteel men and women to socialize and to discuss politics outside of the formal halls of government. Jay's "dinner and supper list" for 1787 and 1788 (Figure 1) is a rare documentary record of the guests who came to dine at the Jays's New York home when John Jay was Secretary for Foreign Affairs. Many of the same guests probably frequented Jay's Thursday evening salons and the dinner list allows us a glimpse at who the Jays wanted—and maybe needed—in their closest circle. Jay's extensive dinner list of more than 190 people includes well-known names of foreign statemen, diplomats, and ministers such as the Spanish ambassador Diego de Gardoqui, the comte de Moustier (French minister to the United States) and his sister-in-law the marquise de Bréhan, the comte de La Forest (French vice consul to the United States), and Prussian military officer Baron von Steuben.⁵⁹ Leading Americans such as Aaron Burr, Governor George

⁵⁷ Maria Jay was born in Madrid in February 1782. Ann (Nancy) Jay, the Jays's fourth child, was born in Paris in August 1783. The Jays reached New York on July 24, 1784. Sarah Jay's brother Henry Brockholst Livingston was lost at sea on his return voyage to the United States during the war. John Jay's father also died while the Jays were in Paris. Abbe, the enslaved woman Sarah Jay claimed to own, fled her enslaver while in Paris.

⁵⁸ "A Man of Property," *The Selected Papers of John Jay*, vol. 4 (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2015), 6-9. Ferdinand Grand sent glass from France for the house's windows. The house was completed by the spring of 1786 and bore the number 8 Broadway, later changed to 133 Broadway. The property extended in the rear to New Street.

⁵⁹ Von Steuben became an American citizen by an act of the Pennsylvania legislature in March 1783 and the New York legislature in July 1789. He established a residence in 1784 at a country estate in Manhattan called the "Louvre" (present-day 66th to 75th Streets on the Upper East Side) that had been owned by David

Success at Jay's weekly salons depended on the flawless performance of narrow definitions of politesse and sociability. In a letter to her mother, Nabby Adams Smith critiqued a dinner at Jay's home in New York in the spring of 1788 which featured many of the names recorded in Jay's dinner list: "Yesterday we dined at Mr. Jay's, in company with the whole *corps diplomatique*; Mr. Jay is a most pleasing man, plain in his dress and manners, but kind, affectionate, and attentive; benevolence is portrayed in every feature. Mrs. Jay dresses gaily and showily, but is very pleasing upon a slight acquaintance. The dinner was *à la mode Française*, and exhibited more of a European taste than I expected to find." Smith commented on a number of Jay's guests, including the Spanish ambassador Diego de Gardoqui who was "as chatty and sociable as his countryman Del Campo," Elizabeth Bowdoin Temple was "civil," and her husband Sir John Temple (the first British consul-general to the United States) was "more of the gentleman than I ever saw him." Unfortunately, Anne Flore Millet, the marquise de Bréhan (an artist and former lady-in-waiting to Marie Antoinette), who had accompanied her brother-in-law the comte de Moustier (the French minister to the United States) who was a "a handsome and apparently polite man," became ill and went home before dinner. Adams's letter hinted at the rumors suggesting that the widowed French minister was carrying on an affair with his married sister-in-law, but she insisted "so little of truth can be known, that I cannot pretend to form any kind of judgment" of the couple.⁶¹

⁶¹ Abigail Adams Smith to Abigail Smith Adams, 20 May 1788, quoted in Griswold, *The Republican Court*, 91-92. Diego María de Gardoqui (1735-1798) was Spain's first ambassador to the Continental Congress and while in New York resided at No. 1 Broad Way. After the death of her sister in 1783, the marquise de Bréhan formed a life-long attachment to her widowed brother-in-law. She was an artist and friend of Thomas Jefferson. The marquise and her son Armand Louis Fidèle de Bréhan travelled with the comte to Moustier to the US. His mission to the United States was a failure almost from the start.

One can only imagine the art of conversation practiced around this table in May 1788. In the wake of Shays's Rebellion, Elizabeth Bowdoin Temple's father and Governor of Massachusetts James Bowdoin had lost reelection a year earlier in April 1787 to John Hancock and in the following year worked diligently toward the ratification of the Constitution. Recently married to her father's secretary Colonel William Smith in London in 1786, Nabby Adams Smith was the daughter of the first American ambassador to Great Britain, eating dinner with the Spanish ambassador (whose country had refused during the war to recognize formally John Jay as minister plenipotentiary and only honored American independence after a peace treaty had been signed with Great Britain), the British consul-general (who had served as a customs and revenue official for the crown in the 1760s and 1770s), and the French minister (whose illicit affair with his married sister-in-law unnerved their American hosts). In the face of vigorous opposition to the ratification of the Constitution in New York, John Jay published essay numbers two, three, four, five, and, following an illness, sixty-four of the *Federalist* in the fall of 1787, in addition to his more influential pamphlet "An Address to the People of New York" written in the spring of 1788. It must have required Sarah Jay's utmost maneuvers, both political and social, to command such competing personalities and political convictions all seated at the same table, maneuvers she no doubt mastered in Paris.

Sociability in New York played no small role in matters of state and diplomacy. And women sometimes cast the deciding vote. By the end of 1788, James Madison wrote in code to Thomas Jefferson in Paris concerning the French minister the comte de Moustier and his relationship with his sister-in-law the marquise de Bréhan (italicized words were encoded by Madison):

*Moustier proves a most unlucky appointment. He is unsocial proud and niggardly and betrays a sort of fastidiousness toward this country. He suffers also from his illicit connection with Madame de Brehan which is universally known and offensive to American manners—she is perfectly soured toward this country. The ladies of New York (a few within the official circle excepted) have for some time withdrawn their attentions from her. She knows the cause is deeply stung by it views every thing thro the medium of rancor and conveys her impressions to her paramour over whom she exercises despotic sway.*⁶²

Madison complained that while travelling in the United States the French minister and his mistress “often neglect the most obvious precautions for veiling their intimacy.”

According to Madison, “Both the count and the marchioness are particularly unpopular among their countrymen here” and many people “are anxious for a new diplomatic arrangement.”⁶³ It is not apparent which of the “ladies of New York” still welcomed the French minister and his mistress by the end of 1788; Sarah Jay’s dinner party in May 1788 was just three months after the comte de Moustier had arrived in the United States in February and perhaps his affair had not yet been widely known.⁶⁴ Madison made plain to Jefferson though two important assertions about women’s political sociability in New York at this time. First, there existed an “official circle” of women in New York who worked in unofficial diplomatic capacities on behalf of the state, hosting foreign dignitaries and facilitating meetings with political leaders of often opposing political views. Second, after the “ladies of New York” began to ignore and neglect the marquise de Bréhan, she persuaded the French minister “over whom she exercises despotic sway”

⁶² From James Madison to Thomas Jefferson, 8 December 1788, *Founders Online*, National Archives.

⁶³ From James Madison to Thomas Jefferson, 8 December 1788, *Founders Online*, National Archives.

⁶⁴ The comte de Moustier arrived in New York on January 18, 1788. From Thomas Jefferson to William Short, 29 March 1788, *Founders Online*, National Archives. John Jay wrote to Thomas Jefferson “that an improper Connection subsists between him [Moustier] and the Marchioness. You can easily conceive the Influence of such an opinion on the Minds and Feelings of such a People as ours.” From John Jay to Thomas Jefferson, 25 November 1788.

of the malice, hostility, and “*rancor*” of the Americans towards them. Despite an amiable visit with the Washingtons at Mount Vernon in November 1788, the comte de Moustier and the marquise de Bréhan were, according to Jefferson, “furiously displeased with America” and Versailles recalled the comte de Moustier in early spring 1789.⁶⁵ The French minister left New York in October 1789 and George and Martha Washington moved into his house in Broadway, buying much of the French furniture he left behind.⁶⁶

Sarah Jay was not the only salonnière in New York. Salon culture flourished among patrician men and women eager to create impressive social rituals and win political clout in the American capital. In a letter to her mother in September 1788, Nabby Adams listed the regular salon gatherings in New York. One could attend a salon almost every night of the week: “on Tuesday evenings Miss Van Berkell and Lady Temple see company; on Thursdays, Mrs. Jay and Mrs. Laforey, the wife of the French Consul, on Fridays; Lady Christiana, the *Presidentess*; and on Saturdays, Mrs. Secretary—.”⁶⁷ The names of all of these women also appear on Sarah Jay’s dinner list.

⁶⁵ “furiously displeased with America,” Thomas Jefferson to Maria Cosway, 14 January 1789, Julian P. Boyd et al., eds. *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1950), 14:445–46. For the French minister’s visit to Mount Vernon, see Washington’s diary entries for November 1788, *Founders Online*, National Archives. Thomas Jefferson wrote from Paris to John Jay in March 1789: “I suppose du Moustier will have received his leave of absence before you receive this.” From Thomas Jefferson to John Jay, 14 March–11 May 1789, *Founders Online*, National Archives.

⁶⁶ Amy Hudson Henderson, “Material Matters: Reading the Chairs of the Republican Court,” *Journal of the Early Republic* 35, no. 2 (2015): 287–294

⁶⁷ Abigail Adams Smith to Abigail Adams, 7 September 1788, Adams Family Correspondence, vol. 8, Adams Papers Digital Edition, Massachusetts Historical Society. Miss Van Berckel was the daughter of the first Dutch minister to the United States; Lady Temple was Elizabeth Bowdoin, the wife of Sir John Temple, the first British consul-general to the United States; the comte de La Forest served as the French vice consul to the United States and married Catherine Marie Le Cuillier de Beaumanoir in New York in 1787; Lady Christiana Stuart was the wife of Cyrus Griffin, the last president of the Continental Congress; Hannah Harrison Thomson was the second wife of Charles Thomson, secretary of the Continental Congress.

In January 1789, Abigail Adams wrote to her sister one of the most vivid descriptions of salon life in federal-era New York:

on Monday Evenings Mrs. Adams Receives company. That is her Rooms are lighted & put in order. Servants & Gentlemen and Ladies, as many as inclination, curiosity or Fashion tempts, come out to make their Bow & Curtzy, take coffe & Tea, chat an half hour, or longer, and then return to Town again. On Tuesday the same Ceremony is performed at Lady Temple's, on Wednesday at Mrs. Knox's, on Thursdays at Mrs. Jays' and on Fryday at Mrs. Washingtons.⁶⁸

There seems to have been only a little explicit salon coordination among women in New York. That is, there may have been two salons on the same evening and the schedule revised over time, perhaps depending on who was in town or illness. Friday evenings, however, were special. Martha Washington began hosting on Friday evenings in 1789, the time that had been reserved by Lady Christiana Stuart, the wife of Cyrus Griffin, the final president of the Congress of the Confederation.⁶⁹ These salonnières comprised the haut monde of New York and their salons offered regular access to unparalleled opportunities for informal political conversations outside formal channels of power. Salonnières created “The Room Where It Happens”—that exclusive backstage where deals were made and bargains struck not only off the record, but beyond the earshot of a sometimes-antagonistic public.⁷⁰

⁶⁸ Abigail Smith Adams to Mary Smith Cranch, 24 January 1789, “New Letters of Abigail Adams, 1788-1801,” edited by Stewart Mitchell, *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society* 55 (1947): 120. The first session of Congress met in New York City on March 4, 1789.

⁶⁹ Cyrus Griffin served as the last President of the Congress of the Confederation from January 22, 1788 to November 2, 1788. It was a mostly ceremonial position with no real authority.

⁷⁰ Leslie Odom Jr., Lin-Manuel Miranda, Daveed Diggs, Okieriete Onaodowan, and the cast of *Hamilton*, “The Room Where It Happens,” recorded 16-21 August 2015, Act Two, track 5 on *Hamilton: An American Musical*, Atlantic, compact disc.

Beginning just days after her arrival in New York in at the end of May 1789, Martha Washington hosted salons at the presidential residence on Friday evenings from about 7:00 to 9:00 p.m. for mixed company.⁷¹ Her husband was always present—but only as a guest and not in any official presidential capacity. Martha Washington was a reluctant salonnière. In a letter to her niece Fanny Bassett Washington at Mount Vernon, Martha clearly chafed at many of the restrictions imposed by her new public role as First Lady. She wrote from New York, just months after George Washington had assumed the presidency, “I live a very dull life hear and know nothing that passes in the town - I never goe to the publick place - indeed I think I am more like a state prisoner than anything else.”⁷²

While Martha Washington only shared her reluctance at hosting weekly events in private letters, her guests generally did enjoy her salons. In one of the most detailed descriptions of Washington’s salons in Philadelphia, Abigail Adams wrote in a letter to Cotton Tufts in February 1791 that the drawing room was “as full as her Britanick majesties Room, & with quite as Handsome Ladies, and as polite courtiers.” The salons were “usually very full of the *well Born and well Bred*.” Guests enjoyed coffee, tea, ice cream, and lemonade, “as they chat with each other and walk about.” Adams wrote that

⁷¹ Congress rented a house at 3 Cherry Street in New York, formerly home to presidents of Congress, to serve as the first official residence for George and Martha Washington. It was owned by Samuel Osgood. Then they lived in a house owned by Alexander Macomb on Broadway from February 23 to August 1790. The comte de Moustier had occupied Macomb’s house until his recall in October 1789. Louis Guillaume Otto, chargé d’affaires of the French embassy from 1784 to 1792, agreed to give up Macomb’s lease to the French legation two and a half months early in order to accommodate the Washingtons. Martha Washington arrived in New York on May 27, 1789.

⁷² Martha Washington to Fanny Bassett Washington, 23 October 1789, in *Worthy Partner: The Papers of Martha Washington*, ed. Joseph E. Fields (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1994), 220. Fanny Bassett married George Washington’s favorite nephew George Augustine Washington at Mount Vernon on 15 October 1785. After her first husband’s death in 1793, Fanny Bassett Washington married George Washington’s secretary Tobias Lear in 1795.

“fine Ladies shew themselves, and as candle Light is a great improver of Beauty, they appear to great advantage; this shew lasts from seven, till Nine oclock comeing & going during those hours, as it is not Etiquette for any person to stay Long.” On other days of the week, Adams described, “any Lady who is in habits of intimacy may visit mrs Washington with the same freedom & take Tea with her as unceremoniously as my good Aunt, your Lady will with me.”⁷³ Women socialized among themselves, made calls, paid visits for tea, or joined each other for dinner or cards any day of the week, but those long-standing social ceremonies ran adjacent to the *au courant* routine of weekly salons that recreated the aristocratic, choreographed rituals of the French noblesse in American homes.

Salons were not democratic gatherings of an egalitarian republic. They were an exclusive, rigid, and highly regulated technology meant to exclude anyone who was not elite and white. The Governor of Maryland Colonel John Hoskins Stone remarked that Washington’s salons were “numerously attended by all that was fashionable, elegant, and refined in society; but there were no places for the intrusion of the rabble in crowds, or for the mere coarse and boisterous partisan—the vulgar electioneerer—or the impudent place-hunter—with boots, and frock-coats, or round abouts, or with patched knees, and holes at both elbows.” He observed the only guests admitted to a reception at the Washington home were “those who had either a right by official station to be there, or

⁷³ Abigail Adams to Cotton Tufts, 6 February 179[1], *Founders Online*, National Archives. Cotton Tufts was a Massachusetts physician and cousin of John Adams.

were entitled to the privilege by established merit and character; and full dress was required of all.”⁷⁴

While they excluded all non-elite white people and even elite white people who did not hold an impressive enough place in society, Martha Washington’s salons were made possible by the forced labor of African American men and women whom the Washingtons claimed to own. George and Martha Washington forced seven enslaved men and women to move to New York City with them and work in the presidential household. According to Erica Armstrong Dunbar, the Washingtons were “unwilling to even think about abandoning the use of black slaves” when they moved to New York from Mount Vernon. The president and his wife carefully chose the enslaved men and women who they brought north: only those slaves who they considered “loyal” and therefore less likely to attempt escape.⁷⁵ The two enslaved men who would have been present at Martha Washington’s salons were Austin and Christopher, who served the Washingtons in New York as waiters and butlers. They were trained in eighteenth-century Southern protocol at Mount Vernon and would have been seen by their enslavers as reliable and presentable to an elite Northern social circle. Perhaps alongside additional free black or white servants, Austin and Christopher would have worked to make Martha Washington’s salons a success: from answering the door to serving food and drinks to clearing away dishes and glasses at the end of the evening. They were symbols of wealth

⁷⁴ Griswold, *The Republican Court*, 165. John Hoskins Stone led the 1st Maryland Regiment during the Revolutionary War and served as the governor of that state from 1794 to 1797. William Sullivan, *Familiar Letters on Public Characters; and Public Events from the Peace of 1783 to the Peace of 1815* (Boston: Russell, Odiorne, and Metcalf, 1834), 76.

⁷⁵ Erica Armstrong Dunbar, *Never Caught: The Washingtons’ Relentless Pursuit of Their Runaway Slave Ona Judge* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2017), 25.

for the Washingtons. Well-dressed and well-versed in genteel hospitality, they would have been on display proudly in the Washington's drawing room.⁷⁶

Martha Washington was not the only one who turned to the courtly rituals of the French monarchy to organize the political culture of the new republic. George Washington also used French ceremonies to create a relief valve; a type of safety valve used to control or limit the pressure in a system. Inspired by the custom of the French monarch and in an effort to protect his working hours, George Washington began in May 1789 to hold levées on Tuesdays between 3 and 4 p.m. for gentlemen only while the government was in session. Devised by King Louis XVI at Versailles, the levée (from the French word *lever*, meaning to get up or to rise) was a daily ritual that provided moments of intimacy and accessibility to a monarch.⁷⁷ These brief visits offered limited but consistent access to the President for members of the legislature, judiciary, other government offices, and foreign dignitaries.

Washington's levées were an unvarying series of introductions and greetings and required a strict decorum. Invited guests had to know what to do before they entered the room. The President's levées took place in the dining rooms of his presidential residences, from which all chairs had been removed. He stood in front of the fireplace fully clad in a black velvet suit, a powdered wig, yellow gloves, knee and shoe buckles,

⁷⁶ Dunbar, *Never Caught*, 28-29, 44.

⁷⁷ The levée at Versailles comprised the grande entrée (a privilege for nobles to have a private word with the king while he was still undressed in bed), the première entrée (guests were allowed into the king's room while he dressed), and the grand lever (the king passed into chambers where the rest of court awaited him and joined him as he attended mass (this marked the official start of the royal's day). Washington consulted with Alexander Hamilton and John Adams regarding presidential etiquette and the practice of holding levées. From Alexander Hamilton to George Washington, [5 May 1789], *Founders Online*, National Archives; From George Washington to John Adams, 10 May 1789, *Founders Online*, National Archives; From George Washington to John Adams, 10 May 1789, *Founders Online*, National Archives.

and he carried a ceremonial sword. An invited guest entered the room, walked directly to the president, heard his name announced by an aide, bowed, and then joined a circle standing around the room. After all the guests had taken their places, the President, beginning on the right, moved around the circle calling each man by name and exchanging a few words with him. When Washington resumed his position in front of the fireplace, the visitors silently bowed one by one before Washington and then left the room in succession. At four o'clock, the ceremony was over.⁷⁸ The well-worn rituals of the French monarchy were alive and well in George Washington's dining room.

Some Americans immediately condemned levées as excessive, intense reverberations of European courts that undermined the purpose of an egalitarian republic.⁷⁹ In a letter to James Madison in July 1789, US Attorney General Edmund Randolph charged that the presidential levées had “awakened a degree of jealousy” among elected representatives and represented “every thing, as marching with furious rapidity, towards monarchy.”⁸⁰ Virginia politician David Stuart wrote “on good authority” to George Washington in 1790 that the “old Patriot” Patrick Henry complained in Richmond about the etiquette at Washington's levées: “that there was more pomp used there, than at St James's” and that Washington's “bows were more distant & stiff—” than those at the court of Britain's King George III.⁸¹ In his notes on the first meetings of

⁷⁸ Sullivan, *Familiar Letters on Public Characters, and Public Events*, 89-90.

⁷⁹ For more on celebrations of Washington in the early republic, see: Simon P. Newman, “Principles or Men?: George Washington and the Political Culture of National Leadership, 1776- 1801,” *Journal of the Early Republic*, 12, no. 4 (1992): 485-488.

⁸⁰ To James Madison from Edmund Randolph, 23 July 1789, *Founders Online*, National Archives.

⁸¹ To George Washington from David Stuart, 2 June 1790, *Founders Online*, National Archives.

Congress in New York, Senator William Maclay of Pennsylvania declared Washington's levées "offensive" because the president presented himself in public only during stated times "like an Eastern Lama." They were, according to Maclay, little more than "empty Ceremony" from which "I fear we shall follow on, nor cease till we have reached the summit of Court Etiquette, and all the frivolities fopperies and Expence practised in european Governments."⁸² Philadelphia's *National Gazette* published a letter in 1793 from "A Farmer" predicting that presidential levées would provoke "a monstrous revolution in the opinions of the people of this country" because "some of the officers of government had deviated from the true principles and practices of republicanism." The letter accused Washington of aspiring "to become a king" by "the monarchical practices of administration" and of being "misled by evil counsellors."⁸³ The Republican Court had earned its name for good reason.

The Washingtons' salons and levées persisted despite these attacks by the clout of their pleasantness and usefulness for conducting political business informally. Senator Maclay, who despite his fierce dislike of the levées, attended almost every Tuesday levée hosted by the president during the first Congress as he considered it part of his "duty" as a senator—though an "Antirepublican" one and a "feature of Royalty" at that. But even as a reluctant guest at Washington's levées, Maclay accepted the political utility found there: "I went to the levee. I was rather late, Most of the Company were coming away. I felt easier than I used to do and I believe I had better attend every day until I finish the

⁸² *The Diary of William Maclay and Other Notes on Senate Debates*, eds. Kenneth R. Bowling and Helen E. Veit (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988), 21, 70. David Stuart became a relative of Washington's when he married Eleanor Calvert Custis (the widow of Washington's stepson John Parke Custis) in 1783.

⁸³ A Farmer, "To the Editor of the *National Gazette*," *National Gazette* (Philadelphia, PA), Feb. 2, 1793.

affair of Davy Harris.”⁸⁴ David Harris was Maclay’s favorite brother-in-law who had asked for the senator’s assistance to secure a federal job after his failed career as a Baltimore merchant in the 1780s. Levées, much like salons, undergirded a world of familial patronage in the early republic where elite men and women could advocate for family members through informal channels of power.

Salons did not disappear when the guillotine and violent periods of political turmoil terrorized France. News of the Reign of Terror unleashed by Maximilien Robespierre and the thousands upon thousands of executions dispensed under Jacobin rule reached the United States by late 1793. After the National Convention executed the French king in January and queen in October 1793 to international condemnation, Federalists became increasingly hostile toward the French Revolution and Democratic-Republicans consequently accused Federalists of being pro-monarchy and anti-republican.⁸⁵ In an early 1793 article from Philip Freneau’s pro-republican *National Gazette*, one author asks: “Shall it be said... that [you] have descended from the dignity of freemen, and have become *levee hunters*? —are there any levees in France since the downfall of the monarchy? France has thrown away her rattle, and we have taken it

⁸⁴ *The Diary of William Maclay and Other Notes on Senate Debates*, eds. Kenneth R. Bowling and Helen E. Veit (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988), 349 (28 December 1790), 75 (12 June 1789).

⁸⁵ As the French Revolution degenerated into violent factionalism and civil war during the early 1790s, American conservative northeasterners reacted in profound terror. Rachel Hope Cleves, *The Reign of Terror in America: Visions of Violence from Anti-Jacobinism to Antislavery* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

up.”⁸⁶ Representative of the order and privileges of *ancien régime* France, salons persisted in the early republic as a signifier of patrician authority and elite supremacy.

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On December 11, 1793, Margaret Izard Manigault thought she might be going into labor, but it was a false alarm. She was about nine months pregnant with her fifth child and had just moved to New York in the fall to escape the yellow fever epidemic. Her trunks and baggage had not yet arrived from Philadelphia and after a brief stay at an uncomfortable boarding house, she began to set up her household in rented apartments.⁸⁷ But her pregnancy and move from Philadelphia to New York did not stymie her social calendar. In fact, she was busier than ever.

For the next two weeks, Manigault’s diary entries prior to giving birth at the end of December 1793 document acutely the relentless demands of genteel society—and the lengths to which women would go to maintain their places at the center of it. The day after her false labor, Manigault was making her rounds in polite society. She sat in a studio for an hour and a half while having her portrait painted—a portrait which would omit her pregnancy—and chatting in French with two men. Then, she made a call to Elizabeth Laurance, who was eating dinner at the time and accepted Manigault’s apologies for the interruption.⁸⁸ That evening, Manigault dined at the home of Maria

⁸⁶ “To the Officers of the Philadelphia Militia,” *National Gazette* (Philadelphia, PA), Jan. 19, 1793. The article is signed “MIRABEAU” but the early leader of the French Revolution died of heart failure on 2 April 1791.

⁸⁷ Margaret Izard Manigault papers (Accession 0502), diary, 11 December 1793. Hagley Museum and Library, Wilmington, DE. Hereafter cited as Margaret Manigault diary.

⁸⁸ Elizabeth Lawrence Allen Laurance was the wife of John Laurance, a lawyer, veteran of the Continental Army, delegate to the Continental Congress, and ardent Federalist. In the 1790s, he served in the New York

Livingston and her diary entry for that evening provides a remarkable tableau of the stifling rigidity of sociability demanded by the early republic's ruling class. The hostess of the evening was Maria Livingston who, according to Manigault, had "lost that disagreeable stiffness" and "gained a degree of embonpoint which becomes her. She does the honors of her house very pleasantly." Manigault generally enjoyed the evening, during which she detected every hint of character and wealth: "Everything was well conducted. I found Mrs. Robinson an unaffected, pleasing, genteel woman. Not at all handsome. She has lately arrived here, & is come with her husband to take possession of a considerable estate, said to be worth 1500 pounds a year."⁸⁹ But the evening was not entirely pleasant.

John Jay and Sarah Livingston Jay were there and Manigault particularly loathed her. After the dinner at the Livingstons, Manigault wrote in her diary:

Alas! -- The Chief Justice of the United States & his little sharp faced, grinning _____ were there. Those sweet smiles which are evidently a mask for company must appear highly ridiculous to one who has frequently seen that face deformed by anger. Whenever I observe that unnatural, fixed grin upon a countenance, Je m'amuse à en démonter les traits, & je me figure ce visage comme il se présente au mari, qui surement le voit souvent sans souris affecté. [...] But one must always suspect the eternal smile.⁹⁰

Senate, US House of Representatives, US Senate, and as a judge on the US District Court for the District of New York.

⁸⁹ Margaret Manigault diary, 15 December 1793. This entry refers a dinner party on Thursday, December 12, 1793 at the Livingston's home. Maria Livingston (1770-1828, daughter of Walter and Cornelia Schuyler Livingston) married Philip Henry Livingston (1769-1831, son of Philip Philip and Sarah Johnson Livingston) in May 1788. Embonpoint is most often used to describe people who are plump, but not unattractive. It derives from "en bon point," a phrase from Middle French that means "in good condition."

⁹⁰ My translation: "I enjoy dismantling features, and I imagine this face as it looks to her husband, who surely sees it often without a mannered [or affected] smile." Margaret Manigault diary, 15 December 1793.

It was Jay's artificiality, her "mask for company," that annoyed Manigault, who imagined that John Jay more often saw his wife without such an amiable smile. But context is important. And there was more than Jay's "unnatural, fixed grin" that probably irked Manigault.

Although Manigault's diary reveals no explicit reason for her animosity towards John or Sarah Jay, the nuances of polite society and political culture in New York in 1793 may reveal some potential explanations. The domestic contest over what kind of relationship should be pursued with revolutionary France dominated American politics in the 1790s. After accepting Washington's nomination as Chief Justice in 1789, John Jay faced major Franco-American dilemmas: France's declaration of war with Great Britain, the disastrous actions of French envoy Edmond-Charles Genêt, and news of the wholesale violence across France during the Terror in 1793. John Jay sat at the heart of these affairs and he used all his resources to stem the pro-French tide in the early 1790s.⁹¹ Manigault's father Ralph Izard, one of the wealthiest men of Charleston's planter-merchant elite, was at the time a Senator from South Carolina and her family's allegiance to France was firm. When Margaret Manigault was about eight years old, her father moved his entire family to Paris in 1776 to aid the cause of American independence by

⁹¹ Following France's declaration of war with Great Britain early in 1793, Jay drafted a neutrality proclamation for Washington. Jay's draft espoused a doctrine of nonalignment that would serve as the basic principle of foreign policy under the Washington administration. (See John Jay to Alexander Hamilton, 11 April 1793, Papers of John Jay, Columbia Digital Library Collections, Columbia University Libraries.) To the French, who believed the United States owed them allegiance on the basis of the two countries' alliance of 1778, the proclamation was a bitter disappointment. Genêt promoted pro-French propaganda and mobilized public sentiment against the neutral course being pursued by the Washington administration. Upon learning that Genêt had threatened to appeal over Washington's head to Congress, Jay published the details of the affair in a New York newspaper under his own name. Genêt attempted to bring a suit for libel against Jay, a design that fizzled out ignominiously (see John Jay and Rufus King to Alexander Hamilton and Henry Knox, 26 November 1793, Papers of John Jay, Columbia Digital Library Collections, Columbia University Libraries).

seeking funds to build American war ships and assisting in the negotiation of treaties with France.⁹² Manigault might have been projecting her disapproval of John Jay's staunch neutrality policies during Franco-American affairs in 1793 onto, literally, Sarah Jay's face.

Even though searing with spite, Manigault regularly socialized with Sarah Jay as the demands of her genteel society required. Most often, she endured the company of "little sharp faced" Jay in the drawing rooms and parlors of their shared relations and friends in New York in the two decades following the Revolutionary War.⁹³ Despite her pregnancy, despite her contempt for some of the company and most of the parties, despite her desire sometimes to stay at home and read to her children, and despite her routine reluctance to socialize, Manigault nevertheless remained engaged in polite society almost every day. In an era of uncertain fortunes and volatile hierarchies following the

⁹² Margaret Izard Manigault was the eldest daughter of Ralph Izard (1741/42-1804), a princely Charleston rice planter-merchant Senator from South Carolina, and his niece Alice De Lancey (1745-1832). Izard descended from a family of rice planters and owned Weymouth plantation near Georgetown, South Carolina. Some of First Lady Michelle Obama's ancestors were enslaved by Ralph Izard. As an absentee landlord, Izard was rarely, if ever, in South Carolina. The young Margaret Izard spent most of her childhood in France and England, in addition to a few months in Brussels. She returned to the United States in 1783 and married Gabriel Manigault in 1785. Gabriel Manigault (1758-1809) was born in Charleston to Elizabeth Wragg Manigault (1736-1773) and Peter Manigault (1731-1773). Peter Manigault studied law in London at the Inner Temple, but never actively practiced law in South Carolina. Instead, he used his legal training to collect American debts owed to London merchants and eventually became one of the wealthiest individuals in British North America in 1774. Gabriel was orphaned at age 14 and became the master of a great fortune.

⁹³ The social and familial networks of Margaret Izard Manigault and Sarah Livingston Jay overlapped repeatedly. The most outstanding connection between the two women was via the Livingston-De Lancey family. Susannah De Lancey Barclay's daughter Eliza Barclay (Margaret Izard Manigault's first cousin) married Peter Schuyler Livingston (a cousin to Sarah Livingston Jay). Margaret Izard Manigault's maternal aunt, Susannah De Lancey, married Thomas Henry Barclay in 1775. Thomas Barclay studied law under John Jay and later became an outspoken Loyalist who served in the Loyal American Regiment during the Revolutionary War. After his property in New York was confiscated, he took refuge in Nova Scotia and assumed several political positions there. Barclay returned to New York in 1799 as the British Consul General. Despite the political conflicts between Thomas Barclay, the De Lancey family, and John Jay, the women in their families—especially Susannah De Lancey, Margaret Izard Manigault, and Sarah Livingston Jay—socialized regularly.

Revolutionary War, elite women such as Manigault used their participation in and successful performance of French gentility to fix their places and the places of their families at the top of America's ruling class. It was a system of interconnected families maintained by marriage plots, sociability, and deep-rooted personal interests, not unlike the French aristocratic dynasties.

The week before she gave birth, Margaret Manigault did not miss a beat in the salon circuit. Joined by her mother and her husband, she attended a larger than usual dinner party at the home of Hannah Cornell Le Roy on a Friday night.⁹⁴ Manigault's diary entry gives one of the most vivid descriptions of an American salon in New York as the federal capitol. She first remarked on the distracting appearance of Janet Livingston Montgomery "whose eyes made me very uneasy lest my little Infant should take a fancy to imitate them."⁹⁵ Although she found John Jay's sister Eve Jay Munro a "rather pleasant looking woman," Manigault was offended by the manners of her husband Reverend Harry Munro: "With him I had been perfectly well acquainted at Paris. I thought he looked a little embarrassed, as if he had wished to speak to me, but did not know how."⁹⁶ After a game of *vingt-et-un*, guests were called to eat: "It was a handsome

⁹⁴ Hannah Cornell Le Roy was married to Herman Le Roy (1758-1841), the first Dutch Consul to the United States. He later worked as a New York merchant and a partner in the mercantile and banking firm of Le Roy & Bayard. Hannah Cornell Le Roy's father was Samuel Cornell, a Loyalist and the last Royal Attorney General of North Carolina. Her sister Elizabeth Cornell married William Bayard (a close friend of Alexander Hamilton's in whose Greenwich Village home he died after his duel with Aaron Burr). Her daughter Caroline Le Roy married nineteenth-century statesman Daniel Webster in 1829.

⁹⁵ Janet Livingston Montgomery (1743-1827), was the eldest child of Judge Robert R. Livingston and his second cousin Margaret Beekman. She married Irishman Richard Montgomery (1736-1775), who became a brigadier general in the Continental Army, in 1773. He died in battle in 1775. Cynthia A. Kierner, "Patrician Womanhood in the Early Republic: The 'Reminiscences' of Janet Livingston Montgomery," *New York History* 73, no. 4 (1992): 389-407.

⁹⁶ Eve Jay Munro was the older sister of John Jay. Her husband, the Reverend Harry Munro, joined the British forces during the Revolutionary War, escaped from an American prison, and fled to Britain. Their

supper, but did not strike me as being very sumptuous or magnificent as I had been led to expect that it would.” About thirty people sat at a large table in the middle of the room and another six or eight ate at a side table. The improper behavior of some guests irritated Manigault: “Becky Edwards made really a dreadful noise. Talking loud, laughing loud, & romping with the men in what I thought an indecent manner—A poor young man who fell with some violence on the floor had reason to think her jokes rather too tough too.” The overwhelming heat of the room and the noise “of this obstreperous mirth” gave Manigault a headache by the end of the evening and made her cold worse the next day. “These very large parties are seldom pleasant,” Manigault concluded.⁹⁷ She gave birth to her daughter Harriet Manigault five days later on Christmas morning.

Though no list of rules or etiquette manual for federal-era salons existed, they were carefully choreographed productions. Manigault’s review of the inauspicious 1793 evening party at the Le Roy’s reveals implicitly the unabashed expectations of the patrician elite. Salonnières should provide an impressive meal or tea service in a luxurious home, facilitate polite conversation among guests, and perform white female gentility impeccably. Bold flirting, boisterous talking and laughing, falling on the floor, ignoring an acquaintance, and even frenzied eye movements disrupted the show. Perhaps these expectations were never fully realized in an American salon, but they signify a standardized social aesthetic that women orchestrated to reign—and reign in—the early republic. The American salon was a showplace for private wealth, a theater for etiquette,

son (John Jay’s nephew) Peter Jay Munro traveled with John and Sarah Livingston Jay on diplomatic missions to Spain and England from 1779-1784.

⁹⁷ Margaret Manigault diary, 19 December 1793. *Vingt-et-un* is a card game similar to blackjack. A *surtout de table* and a *plateau* are ornamental centerpieces.

and an arena for social power organized, regulated, and maintained by elite women.

Manigault's diary serves as a window into salon culture and her observations magnify the arabesques stretched by the governing elite against the rise of popular government and the new political order in the early republic.

Philadelphia

When the federal capital moved to Philadelphia in 1790, French culture and salons already flourished there.⁹⁸ Martha Washington continued to host her Friday evening salons in the presidential residence on Market Street. Mary White Morris (whose husband was the leading financier of the Revolutionary War), Lucy Flucker Knox (the wife of the Secretary of War), and Elizabeth Willing Powel (wife of a state senator and former mayor), all worked as salonnières to define the new federal capital city.⁹⁹ In 1790 after attending one of Martha Washington's Friday evening salons in Philadelphia, Abigail Adams declared that the "dazzling" Mrs. Bingham "has certainly given the laws to the ladies here, in fashion and elegance; their manners and appearance are superior to what I have seen."¹⁰⁰ More so than the first lady, Anne Willing Bingham hosted the most lavish and prominent salon in the federal capital.¹⁰¹

⁹⁸ François Furstenberg argues that in the early 1790s Philadelphia was "as French as any American city could be." François Furstenberg, *When the United States Spoke French* (New York: Penguin Press, 2014), 109.

⁹⁹ Susan Branson, *These Fiery Frenchified Dames: Women and Political Culture in Early National Philadelphia* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001), 133.

¹⁰⁰ Abigail Adams to Abigail Adams Smith, 26 December 1790. *Adams Family Correspondence*, vol. 9, eds. Margaret A. Hogan et al. (Cambridge: The Belknap Press, 2009), 167-168.

¹⁰¹ In a footnote, David S. Shields suggests that "it could be argued that a salon wholly on the French model did not exist in America until Anne Willing Bingham's in Philadelphia" in the late 1780s and 1790s. He

Anne Willing Bingham had not spent much time with strangers before her marriage. Born into great privilege in Philadelphia after the finale of the Seven Year's War in 1764, Bingham knew every comfort and enjoyed every luxury: hers was one of the few Philadelphia families to have a carriage in the 1760s.¹⁰² Her father William Bingham at the time served as the mayor of Philadelphia, a post his own father had held twice before him in the 1740s and 1750s.¹⁰³ She grew up in the house her grandparents had built, one of the finest and largest homes in Philadelphia with manicured grounds stretching from Third Street to Fourth Street and from Spruce to Willing's Alley. In addition to a robust girl's education, a large extended family surrounded Anne Willing including five doting aunts, one of whom Elizabeth Willing Powel lived two houses down. In October 1780 at age sixteen she married William Bingham who had returned to Philadelphia six months prior from French Martinique where he had amassed a fortune through privateering and acquiring war munitions on behalf of Thomas Willing, Robert Morris, and the Continental Congress.¹⁰⁴

cites Wendy Nicholson's MA thesis from the University of Delaware, 1988. Shields, *Civil Tongues and Polite Letters*, 119.

¹⁰² Robert C. Alberts, *The Golden Voyage: The Life and Times of William Bingham, 1752-1804* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1969), 12

¹⁰³ Anne (Nancy) Willing Bingham was born on August 1, 1764 in Philadelphia. Thomas Willing was the Mayor of Philadelphia from October 4, 1763 to October 2, 1764. Thomas Willing had refused to support or vote in favor of the Declaration of Independence, a decision that rendered him more or less ineligible for elected office after the war. His fortune, however, survived the trade dislocations of the Revolutionary War and he later became president of both the Bank of North America and the Bank of the United States. His father Charles Willing was the Mayor of Philadelphia from 1748-1749 and again in 1754.

¹⁰⁴ Alberts, *The Golden Voyage*, 16-22, 94-96. Anne Willing married William Bingham on October 26, 1780 at Christ Church, Philadelphia. Bingham traveled to Martinique on behalf of the Committee of Secret Correspondence under auspices of the Continental Congress. The Committee of Secret Correspondence became the Committee of Foreign Affairs in April 1777 and was the forerunner of what is now the Department of State. It is not to be confused with the Committees of Correspondence or the Secret Committee (later the Committee of Commerce in 1777).

The beauty of the young bride and the wealth of her husband (twelve years her senior) were undoubtable. The match of the two personalities, however, was less convincing. Anna Rawle wrote from Philadelphia about the Willing-Bingham wedding to her Loyalist mother who had been exiled to New York: “She might set for the Queen of Beauty, and is lately married to Bingham, who returned from the West Indies with an immense fortune. They have set out in the highest style; nobody here will be able to make the figure they do; equipage, house, cloathes, are all the newest taste,—and yet some people wonder at the match. She but sixteen and such a perfect form. His appearance is less amiable.”¹⁰⁵ Anne Willing Bingham would later have to make up for more than just her husband’s appearance.

As the daughter of the president of the First Bank of the United States Thomas Willing and the wife of wealthy Philadelphia merchant and Federalist Senator William Bingham, Anne Willing Bingham reigned over the highest social circles in Philadelphia in the 1790s. She was, according to nineteenth-century historian Rufus Griswold, “the centre of a court which was all her own.”¹⁰⁶ Her paternal aunt Elizabeth Willing Powel’s salons had been a center of Philadelphia social life in the early 1770s through which she became a longtime friend and confidante of George and Martha Washington.¹⁰⁷ And like

¹⁰⁵ Anna Rawle to Mrs. Samuel Shoemaker, November 4, 1780, quoted in William Brooke Rawle, “Laurel Hill and Some Colonial Dames Who Once Lived There,” *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 35, no. 4 (1911): 398. Mrs. Shoemaker was an ardent Loyalist, exiled from Philadelphia by the Supreme Executive Council in March 1780 and spent the following year in New York.

¹⁰⁶ Griswold, *The Republican Court*, 253. As a delegate to the Constitutional Convention, Thomas Willing voted against independence in 1776, a decision that rendered him more or less ineligible for elected office after the war. His fortune survived the trade dislocations of the Revolution and he later became president of both the Bank of North America and the Bank of the United States. Anne Willing (informally known as Nancy) married William Bingham, one of her father’s associates, on 26 October 1780 in Philadelphia.

¹⁰⁷ Branson, *These Fiery Frenchified Dames*, 134-35.

Sarah Jay, more than Anne Bingham's genealogy and marriage distinguished her among the female leaders of the burgeoning federal elite class. Bingham learned the mechanics of the French salon which armed her to govern her Philadelphia parlor as a shrewd salonnière.

Carrying her infant daughter and pregnant with her second child, Anne Bingham crossed the Atlantic Ocean for the first time in 1783, overcoming seasickness, homesickness, and morning sickness during the five-week voyage. William Bingham attested to his father-in-law from Paris in 1784: "Should you discover any change in your daughter, I can assure you, it will be for the better. Her constant intercourse with the fashionable world may have polished her manners, and a continual variety of new scenes may have furnished reflections, which would other wise have lain dormant." According to her husband, Bingham's "judgement is consequently riper, and her knowledge of mankind, more correct and extensive. She has seen the best of company, which it was my pride and pleasure to have her introduced to."¹⁰⁸ Bingham did not just want to show Europe to his wife; he wanted to show his wife to Europe.

Her husband's wealth had gained them entrée into the society of European nobility but Bingham herself kept them there. During her European tour in the early 1780s, Anne Bingham dazzled the courts of George III and Louis XVI with her grace and sophistication. In Europe at the same time, members of the Adams family astutely observed Bingham's progress in mastering aristocratic gentility. After a dinner given by the Adamses in Paris in 1784, Nabby Adams described Bingham as "pretty, a good

¹⁰⁸ William Bingham to Thomas Willing, December 14, 1784. Quoted in Alberts, *Golden Voyage*, 138-139. The Bingham's traveled in Europe from May 1783 to March 1786.

figure, but rather still. She has not been long enough in this country to have gained that ease of air and manner which is peculiar to the women here.”¹⁰⁹ But just a month later, Nabby’s opinion of her improved: “Mrs. B. gains my love and admiration, more and more every time I see her; she is possessed of more ease and politeness in her behavior, than any person I have seen.”¹¹⁰ John Adams described a supper in 1784 given in honor of Anne Bingham at the court of the Prince and Princess of Orange: “There was a great Enquiry after her, and much admiration expressed by all who had seen her, of her Beauty.”¹¹¹ Even Nabby Adams’s London hairdresser inquired after “the lady so much talked about from America.”¹¹²

Bingham established and maintained advantageous relationships with Americans and Europeans abroad, no thanks to what her peers described as her husband’s often aggravating and irksome behavior. William Bingham aspired to a diplomatic post in Europe, but his ambitions disturbed the sensibilities of some doyens of the European elite. Shortly after being introduced to Bingham in 1785, Nabby Adams wrote about him: “I am mistaken if he does not lack some essential qualifications to make him either

¹⁰⁹ Nabby Adams journal, 25 September 1784, as quoted in Abigail Adams Smith, *Journal and Correspondence of Miss Adams, Daughter of John Adams*....., ed. Caroline Amelia Smith De Windt (New York: Wiley and Putnam, 1841), 19. Caroline Amelia Smith De Windt was the daughter of Abigail Adams Smith. A fire in her home a decade after her death probably destroyed much of the manuscript material that she published in this volume and is no longer extant.

¹¹⁰ Abigail Adams Smith journal, 26 October 1784, as quoted in *Journal and Correspondence of Miss Adams*, 29.

¹¹¹ John Adams, 22 June 1784, in *Diary and Autobiography of John Adams*, ed. L. H. Butterfield, vol. 3 (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1961), 167.

¹¹² Abigail Adams Smith Adams to John Quincy Adams, 13 February 1786, as quoted in Alberts, *Golden Voyage*, 153-54.

respected or admired.”¹¹³ Thomas Jefferson thoroughly disliked and distrusted William Bingham and warned James Madison in 1787 (again italicized words were encoded by Madison):

*He will make you believe he was on the most intimate footing with the first characters in Europe & versed in the secrets of every cabinet. Not a word of this is true. He had a rage for being presented to great men & had no modesty in the methods by which he could effect it. If he obtained access afterwards, it was with such as who were susceptible of impression from the beauty of his wife.*¹¹⁴

British merchant Alexander Baring, who later would marry Bingham’s daughter in 1798, offered an explanation for William Bingham’s unfavorable character: “There is a littleness about the man in trifles that will make him for instance dispute all the tavern bills on the road, but when he thinks the world looks at him, his pride makes him make up that artificial character which he thinks a man of his fortune should have. He knows how to treat his equals but not his inferiors and is consequently unpopular or he would otherwise have been raised to the Vice President’s chair.”¹¹⁵ Anne Bingham actively assuaged her husband’s aggressive maneuvers with her sociability and genteel performances to gain a place among Europe’s haut monde for her and her family.

After her sojourn in Paris, Bingham carried on a correspondence with Thomas Jefferson and in a 1787 letter—her only surviving letter of substance—she extolled the political power wielded by French salonnières and revealed, by association, her own political convictions. In her view, Parisian women “are more accomplished, and

¹¹³ Abigail Adams Smith, 8 April 1785, in *Journal and Correspondence of Miss Adams*, 70-71.

¹¹⁴ To James Madison from Thomas Jefferson, 30 January 1787,” *Founders Online*, National Archives.

¹¹⁵ Alexander Baring to Hope and Co., 26 February 1796, as quoted in Alberts, *Golden Voyage*, 428. Alexander Baring, 1st Baron Ashburton was a British politician and financier and a business partner with his father, whose earliest American associates were Robert Morris and Thomas Willing. He married Ann Louisa Bingham in August 1798.

understand the Intercourse of society better than in any other Country.” Bingham especially admired the intellectual prowess of the marquise de Coigny who “takes a lead in all the fashionable Dissipation of Life, and at more serious moments collects at her House an assembly of the Literati, whom she charms with her Knowledge and her bel Esprit.” What most impressed Bingham, however, were the political opportunities French salons afforded elite women:

The Women of France interfere in the politics of the Country, and often give a decided Turn to the Fate of Empires. Either by the gentle Arts of persuasion, or by the commanding force of superior Attractions and Address, they have obtained that Rank and Consideration in society, which the Sex are intitled to, and which they in vain contend for in other Countries.¹¹⁶

She added a final quip at Jefferson: “We are therefore bound in Gratitude to admire and revere them, for asserting our Privileges as much as the Friends of the Liberties of Mankind reverence the successfull Struggles of the American Patriots.”¹¹⁷ And it was a well-deserved dig at Jefferson, who while in Paris complained to George Washington about “the influence of women in the government” there.¹¹⁸ Bingham was more than beguiled by court life. She set out not just to imitate salonnières, but to surpass them.

Despite Jefferson’s aversion to women’s participation in governmental politics, Bingham knew her reader well and wrote to Jefferson not only as a friend but also as the United States Minister to France and one of the nation’s leading politicians. Surely,

¹¹⁶ Anne Willing Bingham to Thomas Jefferson, [1 June 1787], Jefferson Papers, *Founders Online*, National Archives. Unfortunately, Jefferson’s response to Bingham is no longer extant.

¹¹⁷ Anne Willing Bingham to Thomas Jefferson, [1 June 1787], Jefferson Papers, *Founders Online*, National Archives.

¹¹⁸ Thomas Jefferson to George Washington, 4 December 1788. *Founders Online*, National Archives. For more on Jefferson’s view of women in politics, see Clare A. Lyons, *Sex Among the Rabble: An Intimate History of Gender and Power in the Age of Revolution, Philadelphia, 1730-1830* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 289.

Bingham must have hoped, her political sentiments would not fall on deaf ears. She might have even watched Jefferson open his mail, commented on the new information that it brought, or discussed matters of state with him. Bingham's letter to Jefferson in 1787 opens with a bold redress of Jefferson's views on Parisian women: "I agree with you that many of the fashionable pursuits of the Parisian Ladies are rather frivolous, and become uninteresting to a reflective Mind; but the Picture you have exhibited, is rather overcharged." demonstrates her vision for and practice of politics and statecraft outside those held by husband, who could not have hoped to succeed without her. She analyzed how long-held gender norms attributed to elite women such as "the gentle Arts of persuasion" and "superior Attractions and Address" had been channeled by leading French women to "give a decided Turn to the Fate of Empires." She wished to see more American women pursue their own education so that they may "procure a happy variety of Genius, which forms their Conversation."¹¹⁹ Political engagement and education meant no loss of femininity in Bingham's mind. To be sure, she requested at the end of the same letter for Jefferson to continue sending her Parisian fashion magazines. With a "higher Cast" of education, American women too should "interfere in the politics of the Country" by applying their already-honed skills of persuasive rhetoric and genteel conversation. Bingham learned much more than frivolous etiquette in Paris: she witnessed firsthand how French women used salons to shape a nation's politics. But Bingham did not just talk and write about politics. She took action.

¹¹⁹ Anne Willing Bingham to Thomas Jefferson, [1 June 1787], Jefferson Papers, *Founders Online*, National Archives.

Bingham returned to Philadelphia in March 1786 determined to mobilize the power of the Parisian salon in her American parlor. She hosted her weekly salons at their newly constructed three-story 18,000-square-foot Mansion House that stretched between Third and Fourth Streets with three acres of gardens; it was their theatre of taste, their parade of wealth, their passport to nobility.¹²⁰ The Bingham's dining room showcased the finest accoutrements for spectacular entertaining. An 1805 estate inventory for that one room lists in part: two seven-foot looking glasses; four chandeliers; seven mahogany knife cases; a mahogany side board and wine cooler; twenty-four mahogany chairs; a "large range of dining tables;" more than 550 pieces of French china; a 47-piece Sèvres tea set; a 43-piece tea set; a 30-piece tea set of French china; a large plateau with seventeen marble figures; fourteen lamps; twenty-eight glass dishes, cups, and baskets; 206 drinking glasses; and more than 200 pieces of silver.¹²¹ Bingham meticulously crafted the dining room and the parlor of Mansion House as the stages on which she performed the role of French salonnière.

Bingham entertained her husband's political allies as well as his political foes, providing precious opportunities for the making of alliances and reconciliations that allowed the Bingham's to maintain the political power that they had gained through their wealth. Her guests included George and Martha Washington, fellow Federalists such as

¹²⁰ The Bingham's modeled their Mansion House on the Duke of Manchester's London mansion (which now houses the Wallace Collection in London). The Bingham's house burned in 1784 and was torn down. For more on Mansion House, see Furstenberg, *When the United States Spoke French*, 170-175. Julian Niemcewicz visited Mansion House in 1797 and testified that the "pompous appearance" of it "wounds a little the spirit of equality and excites envy."

¹²¹ A public auction of the late William Bingham's personal property was held at Mansion House on November 18, 1805. This inventory of Bingham's property comes from the *United States Gazette*, (Philadelphia, PA) Nov. 16, 1805.

Alexander Hamilton, and such ardent democrats as Jefferson and Albert Gallatin. She also hosted foreign aristocrats such as Henrietta and Sir Robert Liston (the British minister to the United States), Thomas Twining (the great-grandson of the tea company's founder), and French political refugees such as the Viscount Noailles (who lived for a time in a room at the end of the Bingham estate), the vastly wealthy revolutionary duc de la Rochefoucault-Liancourt, the philosopher comte de Volney, and the three ducs d'Orléans including Louis Philippe, the oldest son of Louis XVI.¹²²

Anne Bingham was not the only salonnière in Philadelphia using French sociability to wield political power in the Republican Court. Hot on her heels was Abigail Adams. Though she had been critical of the formalities of court life in Paris and London and often bemoaned ostentation, Adams confessed that presidential salons and levées seemed necessary for the Washingtons because "I do not know how they could be visited in any other way than they are, consistent with the Rank they hold."¹²³ Adams complained to her sister about the immense time she spent hosting, preparing to host, cleaning up from hosting, and finding the money to host. "I have so little Time," she wrote from Philadelphia in 1791, "that I can call my own whilst here." She looked forward to her return to Braintree when she could enjoy simply the company of her family as compared to her almost daily public rituals as the wife of the vice president:

on Monday Evenings our House is open to all who please to visit me. on tuesdays my domestick affairs call for me to arrange them & to labour pretty well too, for the wednesdays dinners which we give every week to the amount of sixteen & 18 persons which are as many as we can accommodate at once in our Thousand

¹²² Furstenberg, *When the United States Spoke French*, 196-197; Branson, *These Fiery Frenchified Dames*, 138. The rise of Jeffersonian Republicanism brought increased public hostility. In 1795, a mob attacked the Bingham mansion in an outburst of resentment against the Jay Treaty.

¹²³ Abigail Adams to Cotton Tufts, 6 February 179[1], *Founders Online*, National Archives. Cotton Tufts was a Massachusetts physician and a cousin of John Adams.

dollors House on thursday the replacing & restoring to order occupies my attention the occasional intercourse of dinning abroad returning visits &c leaves me very few hours to myself.¹²⁴

Soon before her husband was sworn into office as president in March 1797, Abigail Adams wrote to Martha Washington asking her about the “Rules” of receiving and returning visits, both “to strangers and citizens.” Adams confessed that she hoped to emulate Washington “not from motives of an Idle curiosity but from a desire to do right, and to give occasion of offence to no one.”¹²⁵ Washington responded generously with an outline of the calling etiquette concerning “the ladies of the diplomatic corps,” but mentioned nothing of her Friday evening salons.¹²⁶ Abigail Adams, a fervent Federalist, continued the French tradition in the federal capital.

Though they continued to take place on Friday evenings in the presidential residence, Adams’s salons prevailed in a political context vastly different from that of Martha Washington’s. 1797 was not an easy year in Philadelphia: an economic downturn, yellow fever epidemic, and increasingly factional politics racked the federal capital. The famously wealthy Robert Morris now fended off creditors trying to have him sent to debtor’s prison, impoverishing countless others in turn.¹²⁷ Nevertheless, salons, levées, and lavish entertainments prevailed in Philadelphia during the administration of John Adams. Relieved to find a Philadelphia home to rent within their meager budget in 1796, Henrietta Liston (wife of the British minister to the United States) sighed about the need

¹²⁴ Abigail Adams to Mary Smith Cranch, 18 December 1791, *Founders Online*, National Archives.

¹²⁵ Abigail Adams to Martha Washington, [9 February 1797], *Founders Online*, National Archives.

¹²⁶ Martha Washington to Abigail Adams, 20 February 1797, *Founders Online*, National Archives.

¹²⁷ Ryan K. Smith, *Robert Morris’s Folly: The Architectural and Financial Failures of American Founder* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 2014). See especially Chapter Seven: His Entreaties.

to entertain company regularly because “*that* seems to be a necessary part of our Trade.”¹²⁸

Considerably less wealthy than the Washingtons, the Adamses worried about matching the lavishness of the first presidential entertainments.¹²⁹ The day before his inauguration in March 1797, John Adams wrote to Abigail Adams that in Philadelphia they would live “in not one third the Style of Washington” and he worried for months how he would afford the expenses of furnishing and renting a home in Philadelphia.¹³⁰ In Washington’s wake, John Adams found the barren presidential residence “in the most deplorable Condition” with “not a Chair fit to sit in.” Too dirty to welcome visitors, the house was a “scene of the most scandalous Drunkenness and Disorder.”¹³¹ Abigail Adams, expert at household management, took two days to put the house in order after she arrived in Philadelphia in May 1797.¹³² In her first letter to her sister from Philadelphia that spring, she expressed relief that the social season had passed but even so she did not escape a steady stream of visitors: “from 12 to half past two I received visits, 32 Ladies and near as many Gentlemen I shall have the same ceremony to pass through to Day, and the rest part of the week.”¹³³

¹²⁸ Bradford Perkins, “A Diplomat’s Wife in Philadelphia: Letters of Henrietta Liston, 1796-1800,” *The William and Mary Quarterly* 11, no. 4 (1954): 601.

¹²⁹ John Adams to Abigail Adams, 31 January 1797; John Adams to Abigail Adams, 4 February 1797, *Founders Online*, National Archives. Despite writing to Abigail that “They shall have a Republican President in earnest,” John Adams continued the tradition of holding levées for men on Monday afternoons.

¹³⁰ John Adams to Abigail Adams, 3 March 1797, *Founders Online*, National Archives.

¹³¹ John Adams to Abigail Adams, 22 March 1797,” *Founders Online*, National Archives.

¹³² David Shields and Frederika J. Teute, “The Court of Abigail Adams,” *Journal of the Early Republic* 35 no. 2 (2015): 227.

¹³³ Abigail Adams to Mary Smith Cranch, May 16, 1797, *Founders Online*, National Archives.

Despite financial panics and the turmoil of the French Revolution, Abigail Adams began hosting biweekly Friday evening salons during the first winter social season of her husband's presidency from November 1797 to June 1798.¹³⁴ Unlike Washington, Adams had experienced first-hand court life in Europe: she befriended the marquise de Lafayette in Paris and was presented at court to George III and Queen Charlotte, where she and her family waited in line for four hours to see the king and another two hours to see the queen.¹³⁵ The formality of the royal ceremonies inspired in Adams a deep aversion for the hauteur of the levées and rigid behavior of women at the salons. One aspect of the court, however, appealed to her and convinced her that glamour in civic life had its benefits: fashion. In the words of historians David Shields and Frederika J. Teute, Adams, more so than Washington, embraced fashion "as an expression of both the sumptuary adequacy of the United States and a register of a kind of modest elegance suited to republican gentility."¹³⁶

During the tumultuous four years of her husband's presidency, roused by increasingly political factionalism surrounding events such as the XYZ Affair, the Quasi War with France, and the Alien and Sedition Acts, Adams's salon allowed her an important venue in which to advocate her political views among the governing class. In the words of historians David Shields and Fredrika Teute, Adams as first lady "became a broker of patronage, and conduit of information to newspapers, a counselor to the

¹³⁴ *American Daily Advertiser* (Philadelphia, PA), Nov. 22, 1797; *Gazette of the United States* (Philadelphia, PA), June 15, 1798.

¹³⁵ Woody Holton, *Abigail Adams* (New York: Free Press, 2009), 217-219.

¹³⁶ David Shields and Frederika J. Teute, "The Court of Abigail Adams," *Journal of the Early Republic* 35 no. 2 (2015): 228.

president, and a figure whose known influence on the president caused her to be the target of petition and persuasion.”¹³⁷ Adams avidly read, excerpted, circulated, and refuted both Republican and Federalist newspapers from Philadelphia, to New York, to Boston. She actively tried to influence public opinion by sending excerpted reports she deemed to be accurate to friends and family to be reprinted in local papers. She also strategically forwarded letters (such as letters from her son John Quincy Adams) or articles printed in other newspapers, sometimes with her corrections, to editors with pertinent passages underlined for publication in their newspapers.¹³⁸ More so than Washington, Adams used her salons to control information. Even though she complained about the expenses and rituals of hosting, Adams capitalized on her role as salonnière to gather information from her guests and track public opinion from the states. She mitigated political opportunities not only to develop broader support for the presidency and the Federalists but also to coalesce support around the federal government. By doing so, she actively melded states representatives, government officials, foreign dignitaries, and their families into a federal governing class.

Washington, D.C.: The End of the Salonnière

After the federal capital moved to the muddy banks of the Potomac and Thomas Jefferson became president in 1801, salons and salonnières like those of Enlightenment-

¹³⁷ Shields and Teute, “The Court of Abigail Adams,” 228. They cite: Letter of Apr. 26, 1798; Letter of May 13, 1798; Letter of Nov. 15, 1799; Letter of Mar. 15, 1800, in Abigail Adams, *New Letters of Abigail Adams, 1788–1801*, ed. Stewart Mitchell (Boston, 1947), 166, 173, 215, 241–242; Edith B. Gelles, *Abigail Adams: A Writing Life* (New York, 2002), 150–56, 157–59.

¹³⁸ Shields and Teute, “The Court of Abigail Adams,” 233–34.

era France ceased to reign over federal politics. The dense social networks and rigorous political culture that had allowed salons to flourish in New York and Philadelphia in the 1780s and 1790s disappeared. Jefferson abolished levées and salons in the new capital, determined to purge the federal government of what he deemed Federalist monarchical tendencies and to constitute a government more outwardly dedicated to egalitarian republicanism. By never mixing Federalists and Republicans at his table, Jefferson evidently hoped to maintain the social harmony he so prized.

At the highest executive level, he banished the more austere etiquette that had been exercised by his two predecessors.¹³⁹ Jefferson reported to his close friend Polish military leader Tadeusz Kościuszko in 1802: “we have suppressed all those public forms & ceremonies which tended to familiarize the public eye to the harbingers of another form of government.”¹⁴⁰ Defying custom, he replaced the weekly levées with a series of smaller, more relaxed dinners, preferred to shake hands rather than bow, dressed informally for official receptions, ended the rite of drinking toasts at the end of a meal in order to allow for the easier flow of conversation, and ended the tradition of a processional hierarchy of dinner guests to their places at the table (the policy of pell-mell seating). Taking serious offense to Jefferson’s seating arrangements (or lack thereof), British minister Anthony Perry believed that it was a design to degrade his character and

¹³⁹ Jefferson did not end all etiquette or French methods of sociability. He hired a French *mâitre d’hôtel*, Étienne Lemaire (d. 1817) in the President’s House. Lemaire had worked previously in Philadelphia in the household of William Bingham. Transferring to Jefferson’s employ, he assumed management of the domestic staff at the President’s House, supervised the dinner service and dessert, handled household accounts, and conducted most of the marketing for groceries and other provisions.

¹⁴⁰ From Thomas Jefferson to Tadeusz Kosciuszko, April 2, 1802, *Founders Online*, National Archives.

withdrew from official Washington society altogether.¹⁴¹ What offended Jefferson about salons was not their French precedent, but their monarchical one.

During Dolley Madison's tenure as First Lady from 1809 to 1817, a salon culture did become firmly established in Washington, but the ritual had become almost unrecognizable from its Enlightenment-era French precedents. Madison invited ordinary Americans into the White House in large numbers. Her salon governance was more strongly informed by democratic ideals of accessibility than by the pageantry and control that ruling elites sought in French sociability. Margaret Bayard Smith estimated that in the winter of 1812 rarely did fewer than two or three hundred people attend Madison's Wednesday night salons. Madison even placed announcements in local newspapers, at a time when no respectable woman hoped to see her name in a newspaper, as general invitations to anyone in Washington to frequent her salons. Indeed, historian Catherine Allgor declares that "Dolley's drawing rooms created a new kind of political space."¹⁴² Allgor claims that Madison was an "innovator as a politician" who first "offered Americans an alternative to older, coercive models of governing" and that this model "helped to create the first modern democracy." Allgor's analysis here buttresses the idea that earlier salons were, indeed, creating royals out of republicans.

¹⁴¹ From James Madison to Rufus King, Dec. 18, 1803, *Founders Online*, National Archives. James Madison later conformed to the same pell-mell policy as Jefferson, but reinstituted more formality into official dinner parties. John Quincy Adams was the first president to propose a toast at an official dinner—he raised a glass to the marquis de Lafayette in 1825. For more on dinner etiquette during Jefferson's administration, see Lucia Stanton, "Observing the Health Law," in *Spring Dinner at Monticello, in Memory of Thomas Jefferson* (Charlottesville, VA: Thomas Jefferson Memorial Foundation, 1986), 1-9.

¹⁴² Catherine Allgor, *Parlor Politics: In Which the Ladies of Washington Help Build a City and a Government* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2000), 73.

Madison's new style of salon was decidedly and intentionally different from, even oppositional to, the salons in federal-era New York and Philadelphia based on a French model of institutionalized access to and contact with authority. Dolley Madison hosted legendary parties with political capital, charismatic charm, and an impressive wardrobe, but these gatherings, I argue, did not constitute a salon culture meant to instill sophistication and order in the early republic.¹⁴³ She was not the first woman to build the social aesthetics of the salon and the informal structures of government that it offered the new United States. Dolley Madison did initiate a new style of entertaining at the presidential house: one that lacked exclusivity, intimacy, and privacy.

There is much to celebrate about the world salonnières made. But although salons developed into a particular space that allowed certain forms of performance for women, they also foreclosed others.¹⁴⁴ I argue that early American salons acted like a relief valve for women's political activity: they were a type of safety valve used to control or limit the pressure in a political system that excluded women, pressure that might otherwise build up and upset the system or cause system failure. Salons guaranteed both women's inclusion in informal political discussions and their simultaneous exclusion from the electorate. There is little evidence of explicit salon coordination among women, yet the individual actions of salonnières had national, even international, consequences. Analysis

¹⁴³ Catherine Allgor, *A Perfect Union: Dolley Madison and the Creation of the American Nation* (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 2007), 6.

¹⁴⁴ By 1828, women's politicization was seen more as a liability than as a strength, contributing to a divisive political climate that repeatedly brought the country to the brink of civil war. Rosemarie Zagarri, *Revolutionary Backlash: Women and Politics in the Early American Republic* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008).

of the world of early American salons reveals anew how both individual and collective practices inaugurated a federal political culture behind the public's eye.

Interlude

Presidential Plateau: Putting French Gentility Center Stage



Figure 3: Plateau, France, ca. 1789. Object number: W-105/A-E. Mount Vernon Collections, Mount Vernon, Virginia.

About six months after his inauguration and a month after news of the storming of the Bastille reached the United States, President George Washington wrote to Gouverneur Morris in Paris, asking him to send “mirrors for a table, with neat and fashionable but not expensive ornaments for them.”¹ Morris had been in France since early 1789 on personal business and Washington often asked him to go shopping on his behalf in Paris.² The “mirrors for a table” that he requested from Morris were called a

¹ From George Washington to Gouverneur Morris, 13 October 1789, *Founders Online*, National Archives. Gouverneur Morris served as an unofficial envoy to Great Britain under instructions from George Washington (communicated to him in this letter of October 13, 1789) and later served as Minister Plenipotentiary to France from 1792 until his recall in 1794.

² From George Washington to Gouverneur Morris, 13 October 1789, *Founders Online*, National Archives. Morris initially traveled to France to manage a number of business affairs, namely settling Robert Morris’s tobacco contract with the Farmers General and negotiating a highly speculative enterprise to purchase American debt from France. In a second letter to Morris on October 13, 1789, Washington also referenced a watch and twelve wine coolers that Morris was helping him to purchase in Paris.

plateau or *surtout de table* and embellished the most distinguished tables in France and some other parts of Europe. Placed down the center of the dining table, a plateau provided a reflective stage for ceramic figurines, flowers, or candelabra during an elegant meal. The plateau that Morris sent to Washington (Figure 3) from France originally included seven sections and extended more than twelve feet when assembled. For the accompanying ornaments (Figure 3), Morris selected three unglazed biscuit porcelain figural groupings, twelve single figures representing the arts and sciences, and two vases from Dihl and Guérhard's factory to place on the plateau.³



Figure 4: Venus and Two Cupids, France, 1790. Object number: W-2133. Mount Vernon Collections, Mount Vernon, Virginia.

³ To George Washington from Gouverneur Morris, 24 January 1790, *Founders Online*, National Archives. This figural group featuring Venus and two cupids is the only one of the three still extant. Morris's letter to Washington that accompanied the plateau and ornaments included instructions for their cleaning as well as display: "When the whole Surtout is to be used for large Companies the large Group will be in the Middle the two smaller ones at the two Ends the Vases in the Spaces between the three and the Figures distributed along the Edges or rather along the Side."

In selecting his plateau, Washington requested that Morris “avoid extravagance,” since it “would not comport with my own inclination, nor with the example which ought to be set.”⁴ But Morris far exceeded the President’s budget. He defended his spending for a reason beyond deflecting the President’s disapproval, explaining to Washington: “I would have sent you a Number of pretty Trifles for very little prime Cost, but [...] your Table would have been in the Style of a petite Maitresse of this City, which most assuredly is not the Style you wish.” Morris warned Washington that if he dressed his table with cheap ceramics, he risked being likened to a Parisian *petite-maitresse*, a young woman known for her pretentiousness, artificiality, and affected manners. Certainly, that was not the display that the President or Morris hoped to exhibit on behalf of the new United States.

In the same letter to Washington accompanying the costly French plateau, Morris justified his more expensive purchases as necessary to legitimize the early republic: “I think it of very great Importance to fix the Taste of our Country properly, and I think your Example will go very far in that Respect.” His comments to Washington about French table ornaments also serve as a metaphor for his wishes for the new nation. Morris warned of ongoing expenditures for inexpensive goods that “want continual Renovation” and “where a Taste of this kind prevails, each Generation has to provide for itself.” But investment in things “substantially good and majestically plain; made to endure” lead to “a vast Accumulation of real Wealth in the Space of half a Century.”⁵ By avoiding kitsch and fads in presidential entertaining, Washington could convey permanence and

⁴ From George Washington to Gouverneur Morris, 13 October 1789, *Founders Online*, National Archives.

⁵ To George Washington from Gouverneur Morris, 24 January 1790, *Founders Online*, National Archives.

timelessness across generations to his guests and his country. Morris hoped to convince Washington that a clear and firm aesthetic vision—and by extension I argue a political vision—for the United States would help to avoid not only “continual Renovation” but also continual revolution.

The correspondence between Washington and Morris—and their disagreement about the style and cost of presidential entertaining—underscores the symbolic weight of the plateau. The plateau and formal entertaining in general signified to foreign and domestic guests the values of the young nation and how those who led it hoped to present themselves to the world. Washington sought to communicate through his table centerpieces a style grand enough to impress his guests, yet solemn enough to avoid accusations of ostentation. He made one facet of his dining room clear: it would be French. To acquire additional pieces for his dining room in New York, Washington purchased from the departing French minister, the comte de Moustier, twelve armchairs, six side chairs, a silk damask upholstered sofa, and three matching silk damask curtains in addition to a 309-piece French porcelain table service. Historian Amy Henderson writes: “Buying the Moustier suite was never simply about investing in good-quality furniture; it was an investment in a way of life organized around fashionable modes of distinction and the public demonstration of taste.”⁶

Even during the Franco-American political turmoil of the 1790s, Washington and elite Americans deliberately fashioned their tables, their polite sociability, and their political culture after those of the French *ancien régime*. They socialized at salons, bowed

⁶ Amy Henderson, “Material Matters: Reading the Chairs of the Republican Court,” *Journal of the Early Republic* 35, no. 2 (2015): 291.

at levées, dined around plateaux, and sat on French chairs. A plateau in the center of a dining table surrounded by French chairs heralded the intentions of its owners and guests to conduct themselves, their households, and by extension the new nation, according to Enlightenment-era French gentility and politesse. The use of French plateaux by elite Americans such as Washington (Figure 4) embodied associations with an admired, cosmopolitan European metropolis and established the dining room as a place of refined sociability. To be sure, the leaders of the early republic intended to perform the aristocratic French gentility of the *ancien régime*—that of hereditary monarchs and feudal nobles—on American stages while tapering ties to the increasingly volatile Jacobins.⁷ Adopted by Federalists and Democratic-Republicans alike, *ancien régime* French sociability and its accoutrements in the early republic challenge, I argue, long-held assumptions about republican simplicity and show how material culture and its attendant behaviors can contradict political rhetoric and upend standard political categories.

⁷ As the French Revolution degenerated into violent factionalism and civil war during the 1790s, American conservative northeasterners reacted in profound terror. Rachel Hope Cleves, *The Reign of Terror in America: Visions of Violence from Anti-Jacobinism to Antislavery* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012).



Figure 5: An interpretation of presidential dining in the A. Alfred Taubman Gallery, The Donald W. Reynolds Museum and Education Center, Mount Vernon, Virginia.

Washington's plateau from Morris and others like it in the homes of American elites during the early republic served as more than sumptuous dining room centerpieces.⁸ The dining table in the early republic was a showplace for private wealth, a theater for etiquette, and an arena for social power. It defined the ways in which political

⁸ Certainly, the most fashionable tables in federal-era Philadelphia were decorated with a plateau. An 1805 estate inventory of the late William Bingham's personal property lists one large plateau with seventeen marble figures. "Catalogue of the principal articles of Furniture and Plate," *United States Gazette* (Philadelphia, PA), Nov. 16, 1805.

leaders and their families interacted with each other. American gentry adhered to French sociability as the hallmark of a civilized society and they were critical of a host's decorum. After a dinner party in New York in 1793, South Carolinian Margaret Izard Manigault (daughter of United States Senator Ralph Izard) recorded in her diary: "the elegant surtout, or Plateau, was paraded—It was a handsome supper, but did not strike me as being very sumptuous or magnificent as I had been led to expect that it would."⁹ Perhaps the ideal of French sociability was never fully realized in every American dining room, but a plateau on the table—especially on the president's table—proclaimed a formal French social and cultural aesthetic that Americans wielded to distinguish and define the early republic.

⁹ Margaret Izard Manigault papers (Accession 0502), diary, 19 December 1793. Hagley Museum and Library, Wilmington, DE. Joined by her mother and her husband, Manigault had attended a dinner party at the home of Hannah Cornell Le Roy in New York.

Chapter Three: Sexual Liaisons

A Libertine in the Republican Court: The Scandalous Marriage of Maria Matilda Bingham and the comte de Tilly

At the twilight of the eighteenth century, teenaged Maria Matilda Bingham may have been the most educated and privileged young woman in Philadelphia, if not in the United States. Born in 1783 in London's fashionable Bloomsbury Square, surrounded by lords and ladies, dukes and duchesses, and earls and countesses, Maria Matilda spent her first years traversing Europe with her parents William and Anne Willing Bingham.¹⁰ Soon after their return to Philadelphia in 1786, the Binghams—one of the wealthiest American families—moved into their newly constructed Mansion House. It was the largest house in Philadelphia measuring 18,000 square feet, surrounded by three acres of manicured gardens, and decorated with the richest furniture imported from France (Figure 5).¹¹ A Bingham relative recalled years later the “brilliant Balls, sumptuous dinners, and constant receptions” at Mansion House: “I have never seen any private house more admirably adapted for the reception of company, & certainly there never was

¹⁰ Robert C. Alberts, *The Golden Voyage: The Life and Times of William Bingham, 1752-1804* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1969), 149-150. Maria Matilda Bingham was born on December 9, 1783.

¹¹ Mansion House was a monument to the ill-gotten gains of William Bingham's war profiteering. He had served as Robert Morris's agent in Martinique during the American Revolution, from which both men profited handsomely. After signing the Declaration of Independence, Morris used his position in the Continental Congress to secure lucrative government contracts for his mercantile firm. For fuller descriptions of Mansion House, see François Furstenberg, *When the United States Spoke French: Five Refugees Who Shaped A Nation* (New York: Penguin Press, 2014), 169-176 and Alberts, *Golden Voyage*, Chapter 13: “Rest for the Sole of My Foot,” especially pages 162-164.

in our country a series of such distinguished reunions.”¹² For the next dozen years, the Bingham family reigned over the highest social circle in the early republic and Maria Matilda and her older sister Ann Louisa enjoyed every advantage of their parents’ station.



Figure 6: William Birch, *View in Third Street, from Spruce Street, Philadelphia, 1800*, Print Department, The Library Company of Philadelphia, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. The Bingham’s Mansion House was the center of social life in Philadelphia. The house was set amid extensive formal gardens and was probably further back from the street than appears in the engraving. The house was razed about 1850.

¹² Joshua Francis Fisher, *The Recollections of Joshua Francis Fisher, Written in 1864*, Compiled by Sophia Cadwalader (Philadelphia: Privately printed, 1929), 200. Fisher describes the Bingham residences: “The Bingham had brought from Europe everything for the house & table which the taste & luxury of the times had invented...Mr Bingham has imported also his household servants; his French cook and confectioner, his butler and housekeeper,” 201-202. Fisher (1807-1873) was related to the Bingham family by his mother Elizabeth Powel Francis Fisher (1777-1855) and his grandmother Ann Willing Francis (1733-1812) who was Anne Willing Bingham’s aunt.

As Maria Matilda grew up in Philadelphia during the 1790s, her mother Anne Willing Bingham sat at the center of a dense web of Franco-American networks connected across the Atlantic by friendship, business, letters of introduction, and a sometimes-shared revolutionary zeal. At Mansion House, Bingham hosted extravagant soirées and salons like those she had attended in France. In the Binghams' parlor, French aristocrats fleeing revolutionary upheavals in Saint Domingue and France found French conversation, camaraderie, and an elite sociability reminiscent of the French court. Now a United States Senator and prominent Federalist, William Bingham hosted political meetings and entertained aristocrats from Europe at his home.¹³ Enlightenment philosopher, politician, and traveler Constantin-François de Chasseboeuf, comte de Volney, a close friend of the Binghams, taught French to the two Bingham girls, who were also fluent in Italian. One visitor to the Bingham country estate at Lansdowne (Figure 6) in the summer of 1797 remarked that for both teenaged Bingham girls "French is almost as natural a language to them as their mother tongue."¹⁴ Louis-Marie, vicomte de Noailles (who was a brother-in-law to the marquis de Lafayette, a veteran of the Revolutionary War, and an early leader of the French Revolution who fled to

¹³ Alberts, *The Golden Voyage*, 337. In the spring of 1798, Bingham hosted seventeen Federalist members of the Senate at his home and they decided to follow a new legislative procedure called a caucus. Federalists would vote in private on important measures at Bingham's house and then support the majority decision in the Senate.

¹⁴ Robert Gilmore Jr., *Memorandums Made in a Tour to the Eastern States in the Year 1797* (Boston: Boston Public Library, 1892), 5. Quoted in Margaret L. Brown, "Mr. and Mrs. William Bingham of the Philadelphia: Rulers of the Republican Court," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 61, no. 3 (1937): 314. Robert Gilmore, Jr. (1774-1848) was a Baltimore merchant, East India importer, art collector, and son of William Bingham's longtime business partner Robert Gilmore.

Philadelphia in 1793) lived in a set of apartments on the Bingham's Mansion House property and entertained a stream of francophone guests there.¹⁵



Figure 7: William Birch, *Lansdowne, the seat of the late Wm. Bingham Esq. Pennsylvania*, 1809, Print Department, The Library Company of Philadelphia, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. William Bingham purchased Lansdowne in 1797. It was formerly the home of John Penn, the last governor of colonial Pennsylvania and grandson of the state's founder.

¹⁵ Furstenberg, *When the United States Spoke French*, 132. Noailles became a banking partner with William Bingham in Philadelphia. Tilly wrote in his *Mémoires* that Noailles “was a friend of the house” and “passed for the lover of Mme Bingham.” That is the only account that I have read of an affair between Noailles and Anne Bingham. Alexandre de Tilly, *Mémoires du comte Alexandre de Tilly, pour servir à l’histoire des mœurs de la fin du 18^e siècle* (Paris : Chez les Marchands de Nouveautés, 1828), 245.

The Binghams led a life lavish with rich entertainments, beguiling conversations, and pleasurable French friends, creating liaisons both advantageous and dangerous. In 1796, William, Anne, Ann Louisa, and Maria Matilda Bingham, along with wealthy British merchant banker Alexander Baring, Anne's sister Abigail Willing, the vicomte de Noailles, an English traveler named John Richards, and a number of servants traveled to General Henry Knox's mansion named Montpelier in Maine. The backcountry trip was embellished with dinner soirées and fine sociability. One dinner guest remarked, "We had a merry dinner, the little Misses talking French in a gay mood. Mrs. Bingham was sensible, had been in France, could talk of European politicks, and gave the history of the late King of France, etc."¹⁶ This Maine travel party was part and parcel of a larger land speculation scheme and in time the Barings, Binghams, and their Amsterdam partners the Hopes invested in Maine hinterlands.¹⁷

The Binghams had become the gravitational center of all society in Philadelphia, accruing a coterie of men and women eager to court them. Not long after the trip to Maine in 1796, Thomas Twining (heir of the famous tea merchant) arrived in Philadelphia from India and promptly made a call to Mansion House where he "dined and drank tea with Mr. Bingham, met the Count de Noailles, Count Tilley, the celebrated Monsr. Volney, the two Messrs. Barings, and several members of the Senate and House of Representatives - in all a very large party."¹⁸ One of the men at this party later would

¹⁶ Reverend Coffin, "Missionary Tour in Maine," 326-27. Maine Historical Society. Quoted in Alberts, *Golden Voyage*, 288.

¹⁷ Furstenberg, *When the United States Spoke French*, 268-71. For more on land speculation in Maine, see Alan Taylor, *Liberty Men and Great Proprietors: The Revolutionary Settlement on the Maine Frontier, 1760-1820* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990).

¹⁸ Thomas Twining, quoted in Alberts, *Golden Voyage*, 314.

prove a more parlous menace to the future of the Bingham family than perhaps anyone that night could have anticipated.

By the end of 1796, however, at least Anne Bingham began to harbor doubts about her French friends. Recently elected President, John Adams reported in a letter to Abigail Adams a “confidential” conversation that he had while sitting next to Anne Bingham at dinner at her home the previous evening. Adams said he “had Something like a political Conversation with her” in which she disclosed “the Characters of Several of the notable Foreigners, and I find has the Same Jealousies of them, which I have entertained. Talleyrand Liancourt, Volney, Caznove &c.” According to Adams, Anne Bingham believed that Noailles alone had “much Friendship for America” and as for the rest of her French *amis*, she “considers them all as Spies upon Us, and wishes them all away.”¹⁹ Surrounding this conversation between president-elect Adams and Anne Bingham, political disputes concerning France bitterly divided Americans by 1796 including the Citizen Genêt Affair, the Jay Treaty, the violence of the French Revolution, the French seizure of American ships carrying British goods, and the growing menace of a French invasion of the American West by way of Louisiana. These acrimonious debates began to poison Philadelphia’s francophone networks and perhaps Anne Bingham was right to be wary of the French aristocrats suffusing her home and her family.

During this political tumult, the Bingham women labored through marriage and childbirth to maintain their position at the top of the ruling elite. In a short two-year span

¹⁹ John Adams to Abigail Adams, 20 December 1796. *Founders Online*, National Archives. Anne Bingham had reason to suspect her French friends of being spies. A Revolutionary War veteran and the former French governor of Guadeloupe, Victor Collot traveled as a spy through the Ohio, Mississippi, and Missouri River Valleys in 1796, noting the weaknesses in the western border and the country’s military preparedness on behalf of the French Republic.

between 1798 and 1800, both Bingham daughters married and their mother gave birth to a male heir. First, in 1798, Ann Louisa Bingham married one of her father's business partners Alexander Baring, son of Sir Francis Baring and scion of the British banking family, creating what historian François Furstenberg called the "newest and most powerful Anglo-American merchant network."²⁰ Ann Louisa gave birth to her first child William Bingham Baring the next year.²¹ Around the same time, her mother Anne Bingham, now a grandmother at age thirty-six, became pregnant with her first son, also named William. Through propitious marriages to monied merchants, both Anne Willing Bingham and her daughter Ann Louisa Bingham Baring secured the political dynasty of their family and created a genealogy of wealth for generations to come. Fifteen-year-old Maria Matilda Bingham's marriage, however, followed a different American narrative, but perhaps one just as irresistible as capturing the wealth of a British financier.

The Bingham's ten-year-long houseguest the vicomte de Noailles introduced his friend Jacques-Pierre-Alexandre, comte de Tilly to the family sometime in 1796 or 1797. After his arrival in New York, Tilly wrote to Noailles, who in his reply doubted that Tilly should have come to the United States because "there is nothing *romantic* here" and "there could not be a more unfavorable moment for undertaking any affairs here" in light

²⁰ Furstenberg, *When the United States Spoke French*, 271. Ann Louisa Bingham married Alexander Baring on August 23, 1798 at the Bingham home at Black Point, New Jersey. In addition to his career with his family's merchant bank in London, Alexander Baring later sat in Parliament for various constituencies between 1806 and 1835, served as Master of the Mint and President of the Board of Trade between 1834 and 1835, and negotiated the Webster-Ashburton Treaty settling the northeastern boundary of Maine in 1842. He was raised to the peerage as Baron Ashburton in 1835.

²¹ William Bingham Baring was born on June 9, 1799. Together, Alexander Baring and Ann Louisa Bingham Baring had nine children.

of rising anti-French sentiment.²² A former member of the titled aristocracy, Noailles often invited French guests to the Bingham's Mansion House, entertaining them in his rooms inside the compound and borrowing servants to prepare food for his visitors. But this penniless French aristocrat saw the Bingham's as much more than temporary hosts.²³

Tilly not only proceeded to Philadelphia; he utterly charmed the wealthiest family in the city. Thirty-six years old, handsome, and charismatic, Tilly titillated the Bingham's and their guests with tales of life at the French court, his stint as a page to Queen Marie Antoinette, and his escape from revolutionary France disguised as a coachman after which he lived in exile in England for four years. Some of his European exploits, however, were less than chaste. According to one mid-twentieth-century biographer of William Bingham, Tilly was known throughout Europe as "an accomplished seducer, in an age known for its accomplished seducers."²⁴ In London as in France, he sustained himself by "gambling and with women."²⁵ Published years after his death, his memoirs describe liaisons with at least two noblewomen during his time in London, one of which included sexual violence. A jealous lover, Tilly treated Elizabeth Berkeley, Lady Craven with a "singular brutality," whipping her in the presence of witnesses.²⁶

²² Alberts, *Golden Voyage*, 369. The timeline is unclear around when Tilly arrived in the United States and how soon afterward he met the Bingham family. Quote in French in Tilly, *Mémoires*, 243.

²³ Furstenberg, *When the United States Spoke French*, 197.

²⁴ Alberts, *Golden Voyage*, 369.

²⁵ Tilly, *Mémoires*, 216. « Il paraît encore plus évident que Tilly, de même qu'à Paris, fit fortune au jeu et auprès des femmes ».

²⁶ Tilly, *Mémoires*, 232.

Elizabeth Berkeley and her first husband, William Craven, 6th Baron Craven permanently separated in 1783 after thirteen years of marriage, seven children, and infidelities on both sides. After a years-long affair, Elizabeth Craven married Charles Alexander, Margrave of Brandenburg-Ansbach, in 1791.

French Libertinage: From Crébillon fils to Sade

Tilly was a libertine, an eighteenth-century French figure who embraced Enlightenment free thought in a way that evoked sexual freedom, seduction, and frivolity.²⁷ According to French novelist and literary scholar Catherine Cusset, libertinage as a French literary and aesthetic movement placed emphasis on “not only the body and sensual pleasure, but also on vanity, on the social image of man, and on the contradiction between fleeting desire and deep or long-lasting sentiment.” In Cusset’s analysis, there were two strands of libertinage. The first, a “passive” form, arouses a surprise of the senses, manifesting at “a point in time when circumstances suddenly make you oblivious to any other reality but physical pleasure.” The second form, a more “active” form, “involves control over one’s own instincts and feelings along with the manipulation of others.” In both cases, love is the opposite of libertinage.²⁸ Libertines practiced no morality, held no optimism for humanity, and followed only the laws of self-interest and success. They were engineers of seduction, men and women obsessed with the thrill of sensual manipulation and moral corruption. Indeed, libertines were elite whites for whom a life of pleasures was possible and desire and sexuality were fundamental practices of domination. It was a philosophy of life fueled by the transgression of official civil and religious power structures.²⁹

²⁷ The word “libertine” comes from the Latin adjective “libertinus,” meaning of a freedman. During the sixteenth century, “libertine” and “atheist” became synonymous. By the eighteenth century, the concept had evolved from heresy and secular freethinking to debauchery. “Libertine” appeared in a 1769 Boston spelling book as “a loose liver.”

²⁸ Catherine Cusset, “Editor’s Preface: The Lesson of Libertinage,” *Yale French Studies* 94, *Libertinage and Modernity* (1998): 2, 8, 9.

²⁹ Doris L. Garraway, *The Libertine Colony: Creolization in the Early French Caribbean* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005). In her cultural study of the French colonial Caribbean, Doris Garraway developed a theory of “the libertine colony,” highlighting how French colonial writers characterized the

In libertine literature, gender mattered at least as much as sex. While it would be wrong to say that there were no female libertines, eighteenth-century women who engaged in modes of free thought, publicly sexual behavior, or extravagant self-display were routinely castigated as whores.³⁰ Feminist theorist and literary scholar Nancy Miller defines libertine literature as from a specifically “male-authored and male-narrated perspective.”³¹ Libertine fiction depended on a fantasy of male power that ignored all consequences for women such as pregnancy. There was no danger for men in these works. The practice of libertinage, in other words, was the capacity to have sexual affairs with no tomorrow.³²

Popularly, the French literary movement of libertinage began with the subtle, playful articulation of desire by Claude Prosper Jolyot de Cr  billon in *Les   garements du coeur et de l’esprit* (*The Wanderings of the Heart and Mind*, 1736-38) and ended with the obscene violent writings of the marquis de Sade in *Les 120 journ  es de Sodome* (*The 120 Days of Sodom*, 1785) and *Juliette* (1799).³³ Libertine novels—*les romans libertins*—

Caribbean as a space of spiritual, social, and moral depravity. She argues that libertinage contributed to laws of exclusion (including the *Code noir*) and constructions of race in the brutal slave societies of the colonial French Caribbean.

³⁰ Lisa O’Connell, “The Libertine, the Rake, and the Dandy: Personae, Styles, and Affects,” in *The Cambridge History of Gay and Lesbian Literature*, ed. E. L. McCallum and Mikko Tuhkanen (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 218-220. O’Connell argues for libertine works as a significant part of lesbian and gay literary history. This chapter however focuses on metropolitan England and passes over the French tradition, from which the English instantiations of the libertine, rake, and dandy drew.

³¹ Nancy Miller, *French Dressing: Women, Men, and Ancien R  gime Fiction* (New York: Routledge, 1995).

³² Catherine Cusset, *No Tomorrow: The Ethics of Pleasure in the French Enlightenment* (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 1999). Cusset contends libertine works are not, as is commonly thought, characterized by the preaching of sexual pleasure but are instead linked by an “ethics of pleasure” that teaches readers that vanity and sensual enjoyment are part of their moral being.

³³ Other notable eighteenth-century libertine novels include Abb   Pr  vost, *Histoire d’une Grecque moderne* (1740); Cr  billon fils, *Le Sopha, conte moral* (1742); Denis Diderot, *Les bijoux indiscrets* (1748); anonymous, *Th  r  se Philosophe* (1748); Vivant Denon, *Point de lendemain* (1777); and Honor   Gabriel

repeated a veritable parade of characters such as the cruel libertine, the flirtatious coquette, the nonchalant rake, the sartorial-obsessed fop, and the austere prude. Often, the texts adopted military metaphors for sex with characters plotting, attacking, and triumphing over each other in elaborate games of tactical power. But it was what literary scholar Pierre Saint-Amand has called the “terror of seduction” that distinguished libertine novels from others in the eighteenth-century: the texts lay bare the “underside” of the Enlightenment, men and women “foundering on the blind reefs of desire.”³⁴

The complexities of seduction and revenge make Choderlos de Laclos’s *Les liaisons dangereuses* (*Dangerous Liaisons*, 1782) the greatest French libertine novel and the one that best shows the arabesques and pirouettes of libertine machinations. It tells the story of a war between the marquise de Merteuil and the vicomte de Valmont, two narcissistic ex-lovers who use seduction as a weapon to manipulate their victims. An epistolary novel, *Les liaisons dangereuses* carries the added sense of the perverse, of peeking at something forbidden, as readers unravel private letters, some of which present grossly disparate views of the same writer to different recipients. Duplicitous characters, especially Merteuil and Valmont, control intelligence through a complex network of lures

Riqueti, comte de Mirabeau, *Ma conversion* (1783). French cultural historian Robert Darnton has studied this genre and eighteenth-century French book history and publishing extensively. See, for example: *The Forbidden Best-Sellers of Pre-Revolutionary France* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1996), *The Corpus of Clandestine Literature in France, 1769–1789* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1995), and most recently *A Literary Tour de France: The World of Books on the Eve of the French Revolution* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018).

³⁴ Pierre Saint-Amand, *Libertine’s Progress: Seduction in the Eighteenth-Century French Novel*, trans. Jennifer Curtis Gage (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1994), 3–4. Saint-Amand argues for the religious aspects of libertinage as a mythical practice that celebrates evil-doing. He describes literary mechanisms of desire and seduction using the superstitious core of the eighteenth century. The seducer, he writes, is a “Devil with a modern face and worldly tastes” (5).

and letters: they “diabolify social communication.”³⁵ One description of Valmont grasps the effectiveness of his mimetics of seduction: “Monsieur de Valmont has an honoured name, great wealth, and many likable qualities and he recognized early on that to acquire social prestige two things only were required: to be equally adept at flattery and ridicule. No one possesses this double gift better than Valmont: he uses the first to charm, the second to intimidate. People don’t think highly of him but they indulge him.”³⁶ With the exception of great wealth, the same could be said of the lecherous Tilly. Libertine literature such as *Les liaisons dangereuses* gave the early American reading public a framework for consuming salacious affairs and scandals among the aristocratic classes. They were an audience primed for dangerous liaisons in real life.

³⁵ Pierre Saint-Amand and Jennifer Curtiss Gage, “The Immortals,” *Yale French Studies* 94 (1998): 119.

³⁶ Letter XXXII, Madame de Volanges to Madame de Tourvel. Choderlos de Laclos, *Les liaisons dangereuses*, trans. Douglas Parmée (New York: Oxford World Classics, 1995), 62.



Figure 8: Jean-Antoine Watteau, *L'Embarquement pour Cythère*, 1717, Musée du Louvre, Paris.

In addition to authors, libertinage inspired artists to create sumptuous and luxurious scenes of extravagant self-display. Emblematic of libertine aesthetics, Jean-Antoine Watteau's sensuous *fêtes galantes* (courtship parties) portray groups of elegantly attired idle aristocrats, most often in a pastoral setting and engaged in decorously amorous play. A mix of reality and fantasy, his bucolic paintings celebrate pleasure and frivolity in a dreamlike world complete with flying cupids and a hazy air of theatricality (Figure 8). François Boucher and Jean-Honoré Fragonard also cultivated rococo whimsicality and licentiousness by forgoing scenes of typical rural innocence to portray scenes with a definitive eroticism. Fragonard's most renowned painting *L'escarpolette*

(*The Swing*, 1767) (Figure 9) portrays a young gentleman concealed in the bushes glimpsing under the dress of a lady being pushed on a swing by her husband, unaware of their affair. One can almost imagine a similar scenario in the three acres of lush gardens behind the Bingham mansion in Philadelphia.



Figure 9: Jean-Honoré Fragonard, *L'Escarpolette*, ca. 1767, The Wallace Collection, London.

French was the language of libertinage, the vehicle of its discourse, and the code of its practitioners. But stories of seduction were not unique to French literature during this period. Many sentimental novels published in England valorized family relations and some titillated readers with violations of domestic values. In Samuel Richardson's epistolary novels *Pamela; or, Virtue Rewarded* (1740) and *Clarissa, or, the History of a Young Lady* (1748), perhaps the most famous English sentimental novels, the young eponymous heroines challenge the libertine's powers of sexual enticement. In the United States, readers often appreciated depictions of families in sentimental literature as allegorical accounts of the nation: a cohesive family equaled a prosperous nation.³⁷ Epistolary novels published in the early republic such as William Hill Brown's *The Power of Sympathy: or, The Triumph of Nature* (1789) and Hannah Webster Foster's *The Coquette or, the History of Eliza Wharton* (1797) as well as Susanna Rowson's *Charlotte Temple, A Tale of Truth* (1791) narrate the downfall of well-educated and socially adept young women at the hands of lustful libertines. At stake in these novels was the basis of civil society: who could marry whom and the rules of kinship governed by blood and rank. Libertine practices destroyed fictional families and family lines and they threatened to destroy actual American patrilineage.³⁸

³⁷ For the linkage between the early American sentimental novel and the nation, see Elizabeth Barnes, *States of Sympathy: Seduction and Democracy in the American Novel* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997); Cathy N. Davidson, *Revolution and the Word: The Rise of the Novel in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004); and Elizabeth Maddock Dillon, *The Gender of Freedom: Fictions of Liberalism and the Literary Public Sphere* (Redwood, CA: Stanford University Press, 2004).

³⁸ Leonard Tennenhouse, *The Importance of Feeling English: American Literature and the British Diaspora, 1750-1850* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), 48-50. For a thorough discussion of the publication and reception of Richardson's novels in the United States, see Chapter 3: The Sentimental Libertine. Brown's *The Power of Sympathy* and Foster's *The Coquette* were fictionalized accounts of highly-publicized scandals in which both young women died.

Literary scholars generally describe libertinage as a strategy of seduction found in French novels and paintings, but not in real life. Catherine Cusset insists: “libertinage is text, not sex.” To discuss libertinage, she argues, “we speak of a novelistic corpus, not of bodies: libertine eroticism implies an esthetic relation among words, the imagination, and the reader. Libertinage is not an erotic practice but something that happens in language.”³⁹ But did libertinage function in reality? Did libertinage propound alternative models of society for the eighteenth century? Armed with a fantasy of Watteau’s *fêtes galantes* and *Les liaisons dangereuses* in his mind—if not in his valise—the comte de Tilly enacted every bit the master French libertine on the American stage. His target: the younger daughter of the wealthiest man in Philadelphia.

Performing Libertinage: A “very extraordinary event”

If the Bingham family knew about Tilly’s risqué character, they did not exclude him from their guest list. There were several ways that the Bingham family might have learned of Tilly’s libertine reputation and insolvency before they met him: through his friend Noailles who lived on their property, by word of mouth among the francophone networks in Philadelphia, or during the time the Bingham family spent in Paris in the early 1780s. Why then did they welcome a viper into their circle? Perhaps his ignoble past made him an exciting guest in the eyes of the Bingham family. Perhaps his wit and attractiveness masked his bedroom debaucheries. Perhaps his title outweighed his sordid renown. In any case, he

³⁹ Cusset, “Editor’s Preface: The Lesson of Libertinage,” 12.

was a welcome guest at Mansion House and the Bingham hoped to enjoy his cosmopolitan and French company.

Tilly quickly inveigled teenaged Maria Matilda Bingham. He was almost two and a half times her age and she became enraptured by the Frenchman. She personally extended invitations in proper French on gilt-edge satin paper to Tilly to dine “chez eux en famille” (at their home with family), sent him chocolates “having remarked yesterday that he approved of it,” and offered him prime fruit from the Bingham garden.⁴⁰

Apparently, Maria Matilda did more than simply arouse his taste buds with dinner, chocolate, and fresh fruit. Tilly’s libertine seduction succeeded: Maria Matilda eloped with the penniless French aristocrat just eight months after her older sister had married a rich and powerful British banker. Under the cover of darkness one night in April 1799, Maria Matilda absconded from her parents’ house and married Tilly at the home of a French woman in a service performed by a minister of the Universal Church.⁴¹ The newlyweds continued to Tilly’s lodgings where a search party led by Alexander Baring discovered the couple in bed together near five o’clock in the morning. Baring struck Tilly, then gathered Maria Matilda and brought her back to her parents’ home.⁴²

⁴⁰ Alberts, *Golden Voyage*, 370; Tilly, *Mémoires*, 246.

⁴¹ Marriage Certificate, Maria Matilda Bingham to James Alexander, Comte de Tilly, 11 April 1799, married "By me Thomas Jones of the Universal Church in Philadelphia Pennsylvania." Maria Matilda Bingham de Tilly Letters, Collection 661, Folder 1, Historical Society of Pennsylvania. Tilly’s first name on the marriage certificate was false – this the only document in which he used his father’s first name Jacques in addition to his own, Alexandre. Tilly, *Mémoires*, 247.

⁴² Alberts, *Golden Voyage*, 371.

Scandal erupted among elites in Philadelphia. Three newspapers printed matrimony notices within hours of the clandestine wedding.⁴³ Eight more newspapers from New Hampshire to South Carolina reprinted the news in the following two weeks.⁴⁴ Churned by news articles and gossip, the affair created, according to Bingham relative Joshua Francis Fisher, “a prodigious sensation in the highest circles.”⁴⁵ The day after the covert wedding, director of the United States Mint Elias Boudinot reported to Judge Samuel Bayard in New York that Tilly, who was “said to be of very bad character, in point of morals and rather low in Purse about 40 years old,” had “got acquainted” into the Bingham family and “before they suspected any acquaintance with their youngest daughter about 15 years of age he carried her off and married her.” The Bingham, he wrote, “are sunk in the deepest affliction and seem to admit no consolation.” He seems to have held Tilly less accountable for his actions than the Bingham who had been spellbound by his charms: “Thus you see that extravagant riches do not necessarily constitute the ingredient for exclusive happiness.”⁴⁶ “Now you see my dear,” bankrupt Robert Morris wrote from Walnut Street prison to his teenaged daughter, “large fortunes do not always bring happiness, on the contrary misery to the possessor is frequently the

⁴³ *Porcupine's Gazette* (Philadelphia, PA), April 11, 1799 (stated that they were “married last night”); *Aurora General Advertiser* (Philadelphia, PA), April 12, 1799; *Gazette of the United States* (Philadelphia, PA), April 12, 1799.

⁴⁴ *Federal Gazette* (Baltimore, MD), April 15, 1799; *Newburyport Herald* (Newburyport, MA), April 23, 1799; *Salem Gazette* (Salem, MA) April 23, 1799; *Providence Gazette* (Providence, RI), April 27, 1799; *City Gazette* (Charleston, SC), April 29, 1799; *South-Carolina State Gazette* (Charleston, SC), April 30, 1799; *Providence Journal and Town and Country Advertiser* (Providence, RI), May 1, 1799; *Oracle of the Day* (Portsmouth, NH), May 4, 1799.

⁴⁵ Fisher, *Recollections*, 194.

⁴⁶ Elias Boudinot to Samuel Bayard, April 12, 1799, in *The Life, Public Services, Addresses and Letters of Elias Boudinot*, vol. II, ed. J. J. Boudinot (Cambridge, MA: The Riverside Press, 1896), 151.

result, and this unfortunate lady is one instance of it.”⁴⁷ The Bingham’s enormous wealth was likely what had attracted Tilly to their home and daughter and it was their wealth that, according to Boudinot and Morris, destabilized the patriarchy and social organization of America.

The affair gave rise to both genuine sympathy for Maria Matilda’s distraught parents and some heavy-handed moralizing at the disgrace befallen the rich and mighty. A week after the clandestine marriage, Supreme Court Justice James Iredell wrote an entire letter to his wife Hannah just of the “*very extraordinary event*” on April 11. He described Tilly as “an eminent French nobleman, about forty or forty-five, a very dissipated man, and immensely in debt, but distinguished for being remarkably handsome.” He married Maria Matilda Bingham “at half after one in the morning, at a Universalist Minister’s of the name of Jones; and at five in the morning they were found in bed at a milliner’s of the name of Jones, the corner of Market and South streets.” After Maria Matilda returned to her family’s Mansion House, some Philadelphians guessed that the marriage was illegitimate, but Iredell assured his wife that “it is generally believed the marriage is a valid one.” Anne Bingham, he reported, was “in a state of distraction, and could only be composed by laudanum.” Iredell felt no pity for teenaged Maria: “Only two days before, it is said, her father had cautioned her about him. Now that the mischief is irreparable, she feels great contrition (though she did not at first), and would submit to any thing if it was possible to undo what she has done. What a deplorable event; but the too natural consequence of unbounded prosperity, and dissipation.” A man of the law,

⁴⁷ Robert Morris to Maria Morris, 26 June 1799. Society Miscellaneous Collection, folder 14, Historical Society of Pennsylvania. Quoted in Furstenberg, 203. Robert Morris landed in debtor’s prison in 1798.

Iredell perhaps hoped the lavish and improvident Maria Matilda Bingham would face the consequences of her divertissement: Tilly “is taking legal steps to claim her.”⁴⁸

The careful curation of information and the construction of social networks empowered Tilly to infiltrate and disrupt the Bingham family. The last line of Iredell’s letter implicates another resident of Mansion House in the affair and reveals an important key to Maria Matilda’s midnight elopement: “A woman, servant in the house, was the agent; and was ordered to wake Mrs. Bingham at daylight, and inform her of the event, &c., &c.”⁴⁹ Joshua Francis Fisher later recalled that Maria Matilda’s parents left their daughter “to the instruction of a French governess” who “was probably bought by de Tilly.”⁵⁰ Perhaps by bribery or seduction by Tilly or her own desire, the female servant in the Bingham house made possible the affair between Maria Matilda and Tilly.⁵¹ Her investment in their liaison conceivably could have extended beyond that one night in April and she may have passed letters or messages between the couple or arranged meetings for them prior to their elopement. Given that William and Anne Bingham seemed (at least outwardly) shocked by the elopement, the female servant perhaps had

⁴⁸ Griffith John McRee, *Life and Correspondence of James Iredell*, vol. II (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1858), 571-572. Letter dated April 18, 1799. James Iredell married Hannah Johnston of Edenton, North Carolina in 1773. Her brother was Samuel Johnston, a prominent lawyer in North Carolina to whom the ambitious and penniless James Iredell had apprenticed himself shortly after his arrival from England at the age of 17. Laudanum is a tincture that contains almost all of the opium alkaloids, including morphine and codeine. For more on the history of universalism since the French Revolution, see Naomi Schor, “The Crisis of French Universalism,” *Yale French Studies* no. 100 (2001): 43-64.

⁴⁹ McRee, *Life and Correspondence of James Iredell*, 571-572. Letter dated April 18, 1799.

⁵⁰ Fisher, *Recollections*, 196.

⁵¹ For more on how servants witnessed the sexual indiscretions of their elite white employers, see Clare A. Lyons, *Sex Among the Rabble: An Intimate History of Gender and Power in the Age of Revolution, Philadelphia, 1730-1830* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 232-236.

been helping to conceal the intensity of Tilly's seductive masquerade, Maria Matilda's flirtatious behavior, or both.⁵²

In a letter to her niece in Georgetown four days after the affair, Rebecca Lowndes Stoddert recounted the clandestine marriage in detail, perhaps echoing the feelings of many other elite Philadelphia women. After calling the French "horrid and vile a people," Stoddert wrote that "Neither Mr. nor Mrs. Bingham suspected any such thing" and were frantic: "Mrs. Bingham is very ill" and "Mr. Bingham has lost his senses." Her judgement of the scandal was decidedly anti-French: "This count is a man of horrid character in every sense of the word, besides not being worth a farthing; but that is nothing, for the lady's father is so rich that if a deficiency of money had been the only objection it could, and I dare-say would, have been removed."⁵³ As Stoddert understood the relationship, the libertine Tilly had undoubtedly seduced the teenaged daughter of the wealthiest senator in the United States for more than her family's money: William Bingham could have easily paid Tilly to leave his daughter alone. But it was also a sexual conquest for Tilly. His expert performance of the French gentleman trounced the sensibilities of one of the most elegant and Francophile families in the country. Tilly had dazzled the Binghams with his charm but all the while churning underneath his winsome

⁵² At least one other French-speaker worked in the Bingham household: François Etienne Lemaire (d. 1817). Originally from the outskirts of Paris, he was in Philadelphia by July 1792 and worked as the primary cook for the French minister to the United States Jean Baptiste Ternant. Lemaire was working for William Bingham in 1801 when French envoy at Philadelphia Philippe de Létombe recruited him as maître d'hôtel for President Jefferson. To Thomas Jefferson from Étienne Lemaire, 10 May 1802, *Founders Online*, National Archives.

⁵³ Rebecca Lowndes Stoddert to Elizabeth Gantt, 15 April 1799. Printed in Kate Mason Rowland, "Philadelphia A Century Ago," *Lippincott's Monthly Magazine*, vol. LXII (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Company, 1898), 810. Rebecca Lowndes Stoddert was married to Benjamin Stoddert, a loyal Federalist. As the first Secretary of the Navy appointed by President Adams in May 1798, Stoddert quickly faced the undeclared naval Quasi-War war with France. This might explain some, but certainly not all, of his wife's hostile anti-French sentiment.

visage were the machinations of a cruel libertine intent on conquering a virtuous coquette. He brought to life the monstrous Valmont, the *120 Days of Sodom*, the specter of untethered eroticism that threatened post-revolutionary American narratives of courtship, marriage, and kinship.

The midnight elopement between Maria Matilda and Tilly would have been more comprehensible to the Bingham's middle-class neighbors in Philadelphia than to her family and other leaders of elite white society. Casual and extramarital sexual encounters among ordinary folks became more common in the last quarter of the eighteenth century as men and women of the new nation debated about women's place in society. In the words of historian Clare Lyons, "during the early national era Philadelphians tolerated an increase in male sexual privilege, which in turn increased female vulnerability." At the same time, this period also witnessed women establishing sexual lives of their own choosing. Lyons explains during this era: "some women, from all classes, exercised new levels of sexual independence, acting to achieve self-fulfillment and undermining patriarchal authority."⁵⁴ Although it is tempting to think about Maria Matilda Bingham boldly seeking and attaining sexual pleasure and sexual independence by marrying a French libertine such as Tilly, we are left with few clues to her motivations or her attraction to the French aristocrat. We can only imagine that she was captivated by the chattering of Philadelphians about women's expansive sexual lives and a new understanding of female sexuality.

William Bingham immediately summoned his attorney William Lewis to contest his daughter's marriage. Tilly fought back. He claimed that his wife's family was holding

⁵⁴ Lyons, *Sex Among the Rabble*, 256, 288.

her against her will, forbidding her from returning to him, and retained well-known lawyer Samson Levy to defend his case. Levy wrote a letter William Bingham on April 17 and enclosed a copy of the marriage certificate between Tilly and Bingham arguing that “there is strong reason now to believe” that Maria Matilda was being “restrained and Deprived of her Liberty” by her parents, “contrary to the Union the nature of the Contract contemplated.” Tilly’s lawyer requested that “the Lady be Liberated and permitted to return, or act as she may think proper.” Tilly issued a writ of habeas corpus to William Bingham to try to secure legal control over Maria Matilda. Levy assured Bingham that “The Law upon this Occasion is well defined and settled.”⁵⁵ Coverture remained intact in the new republic and women lost their individual identity when they married. As the legal dependents of husbands, wives could not act independently in economic or political matters.⁵⁶

Each side mustered more manpower – merchants and bankers gathered behind the lawyers in a legal tour de force. The Willing, Francis, and Baring families teamed up for the defense of the Bingham as the viscount de Noailles, Guillaume Guérout de Boisclaireau (a relative of Tilly’s), and Pierre Aupois (a man from New York), flanked Tilly and his lawyer Levy.⁵⁷ United States Supreme Court Justice James Iredell wrote to his wife Hannah on April 23, 1799 that in a court hearing the day prior William Bingham

⁵⁵ Samson Levy to William Bingham, 17 April 1799. Maria Matilda Bingham de Tilly Letters, Collection 661, Folder 2, Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

⁵⁶ On coverture, see Hendrik Hartog, *Man and Wife in America: A History* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000), Chapter 4: Being a Wife, especially pages 115-122.

⁵⁷ Tilly, *Mémoires*, 257-248 and Alberts, *Golden Voyage*, 375. Guillaume-Jean-René Guérout de Boisclaireau was a prominent French resident of Philadelphia and relative of Tilly’s grandmother Françoise-Renée de Guérout de Boisclaireau.

“returned that she [Maria Matilda] was not in his custody, &c., and Lewis, on behalf of Mr. Bingham, satisfied the Judge that the writ had not been issued in a proper manner. He has never been with his wife since the first night, and where she is now I don’t know.”⁵⁸ But even the law could not stop Tilly from pursuing Maria Matilda.

Tilly placed an advertisement in a Philadelphia newspaper on April 27, two weeks after his marriage, issuing an appeal to find and secure his wife. It read: "1000 dollars Reward. As I have been deprived of my lawful beloved Wife, Maria Matilda Countess De Tilly (late Maria Matilda Bingham, daughter of Wm. Bingham, Esq.), of Philadelphia, ever since the 12th inst. any person giving information where she is, so that I may be restored to her presence and society, shall receive the above reward."⁵⁹ At least ten more newspapers from Portland, Maine, to Savannah, Georgia, reprinted over the next month Tilly’s demand for his wife.⁶⁰ How the penniless Tilly presumed to pay anyone a thousand dollars is unknown. The language in the advertisement resonated with that in adjacent ads for runaway indentured servants, runaway slaves, and missing personal goods. While many husbands placed ads in newspapers to sever their financial responsibilities for their runaway wives, Tilly sought to ensure his financial future by securing his runaway wife.⁶¹

⁵⁸ McRee, *Life and Correspondence of James Iredell*, vol. II, 573.

⁵⁹ *Porcupine's Gazette* (Philadelphia, PA), April 27, 1799.

⁶⁰ *Aurora General Advertiser* (Philadelphia, PA), April 30, 1799; *Federal Gazette* (Baltimore, MD), April 30, 1799; *Centinel of Liberty* (Georgetown, MD), May 3, 1799; *Times, and District of Columbia Advertiser* (Alexandria, VA), May 3, 1799; *Maryland Herald* (Hagers-Town, MD), May 9, 1799; *Albany Gazette* (Albany, NY), May 10, 1799; *Eastern Herald* (Portland, ME), May 13, 1799; *Georgia Gazette* (Savannah, GA), May 16, 1799; *Oracle of the Day* (Portsmouth, NH), May 25, 1799; *City Gazette* (Charleston, SC), May 31, 1799.

⁶¹ Lyons, *Sex Among the Rabble*, 17. See especially “Chapter 1: A Springboard to Revolution: Runaway Wives and Self-Divorce.” In eighteenth-century Philadelphia, runaway wife advertisements were an

A Philadelphia newspaper article from early May 1799 testified to the growing scandal created by Tilly's seduction of the young Bingham heiress and the social dangers of being associated with such a libertine plot. A woman named S. F. Jones wanted "to silence the tongue of slander" against her so she publicly declared her ignorance and innocence of the affair by swearing an oath to a city alderman and printing a report of her oath in the *Philadelphia Gazette*. In the wake of the elopement, rumors presumably circulated that Jones knowingly had harbored the couple on their wedding night. Tilly, she assured Philadelphians, "had rooms in my husband's house, yet he kept his own table and his own servants." She declared in the newspaper that she "was an entire stranger and no way privy to any intimacy between the Count De Tilly and the daughter of W. Bingham, Esq. previous to their marriage, and that the first knowledge or information I had of it, was after it was known to her family and friends." Jones made certain to declare that she never "heard the Count De Tilly speak of any individual of the Bingham family until *after* the marriage, nor did I know that he was intimate with or visited that family." She believed that the "Countess De Tilly could not have come to my husband's house, the night of her marriage, until myself and my family were in bed, all of whom, I am confident, as ignorant of the transaction as myself." No person, she declared, could truthfully claim to "have ever known or seen any indecency or impropriety" connected with her family affairs.⁶² While S. F. Jones insisted on her innocence to Philadelphians, readers could only speculate on her husband's involvement in the clandestine marriage.

effective means of marital dissolution. Absolute divorce with a right to remarry was first available to Pennsylvania citizens in 1786.

⁶² *Philadelphia Gazette* (Philadelphia, PA), May 9, 1799. Reprinted in *Aurora General Advertiser* (Philadelphia, PA), May 10, 1799.

Had Tilly spoken to his landlord Jones about his plans for marrying Maria Matilda? Was Tilly perhaps in debt to Jones for rent and Tilly assured him that he would have plenty of money to settle his accounts soon after his marriage into the Bingham family? S. F. Jones certainly felt her reputation was at stake by association with the clandestine marriage night and hoped to safeguard herself against the libertine's blight.

Negotiations continued for several weeks between Tilly and the Binghams and by the end of May, it seemed as if a settlement was in sight. On May 24, Tilly's attorney Samson Levy appealed to Bingham's attorney William Lewis with an arrangement. If Maria Matilda appeared before a judge and declared "a preference to her Family," Levy promised that "there will be such an End and Conclusion put to the business as will ease the Minds and anxiety of Maria D. Tilly's Friends."⁶³ Lewis replied to Levy the next day. Maria Matilda had in fact considered "going before a magistrate and making a solemn renunciation under oath of the Count de Tilly forever" but the plan changed because she had "been apprized of his intention and preparation for taking forcible possession of her person." Not wanting to see Tilly or be kidnapped by him, Maria Matilda, he wrote, had "accordingly withdrawn herself beyond the reach of either Mr. Bingham or Mr. De Tilly." Lewis assured Levy that "Maria knows her Fathers determinations to be irrevocably fixed, and he has the pleasure to know that hers are not only so, but that they are perfectly correspondent with his own." He insisted that all correspondence from Tilly must end and no further proposals from Tilly would be considered by the Binghams.⁶⁴

⁶³ Samson Levy to William Lewis, 24 May 1799. Maria Matilda Bingham de Tilly Letters, Collection 661, Folder 7, Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

⁶⁴ William Lewis to Samson Levy, 25 May 1799. Maria Matilda Bingham de Tilly Letters, Collection 661, Folder 4, Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

In early June, Tilly named his price. In exchange for a divorce and a promise to leave Philadelphia immediately and then the United States altogether, Tilly demanded £5,000 sterling to pay his debts, an annual pension of £500 sterling, an apology (written or made through Noailles) from Alexander Baring for striking Tilly, and a “Security that I Shall not be molested by any Process whatsoever, for any Act of mine, relative to my Marriage.” Finally, he promised to return Maria Matilda’s letters to her mother.⁶⁵ Bingham met these demands swiftly: Tilly received his money and his apology the next day. On June 11, Alexander Baring authorized Bingham’s lawyer William Lewis “to cause an end to be put to all prosecutions commanded at my Instance against James Alexander Count de Tilly.”⁶⁶ Tilly fled Philadelphia and sailed from New York to London one month later. Ten American newspapers announced, perhaps in celebration, his departure.⁶⁷ But before his ship sailed from New York and true to his libertine subterfuge, Tilly suggested that Noailles should arrange for the marriage of one of his sons or a nephew to Maria Matilda after the divorce. Noailles answered with a cold rebuke: “I would never consent, under any pretext whatever, that one of my children become the son-in-law of Mr. Bingham. I would not wish to reduce him to the necessity

⁶⁵ Terms of separation of comte de Tilly, Maria Matilda Bingham de Tilly Letters, Collection 661, Folder 6, Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

⁶⁶ Alexander Baring to William Lewis, 11 June 1799. Maria Matilda Bingham de Tilly Letters, Collection 661, Folder 9, Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

⁶⁷ “Count de Tilly went out passenger in the ship Factor, capt. Kemp, who sailed yesterday morning for London.” *Philadelphia Gazette* (Philadelphia, PA), July 13, 1799; *Claypoole’s American Daily Advertiser* (Philadelphia, PA), July 15, 1799; *Federal Gazette* (Baltimore, MD), July 15, 1799; *Porcupine’s Gazette* (Philadelphia, PA), July 15, 1799; *Albany Centinel* (Albany, NY), July 16, 1799; *Centinel of Liberty* (Georgetown, MD), July 19, 1799; *Providence Gazette* (Providence, RI), July 20, 1799; *Times, and District of Columbia Advertiser* (Alexandria, VA), July 20, 1799; *City Gazette* (Charleston, SC), July 25, 1799; *Georgia Gazette* (Savannah, GA), August 1, 1799.

of receiving his charity.”⁶⁸ The unscrupulous Tilly had won his game and returned to London a far richer man than he had left.

In the winter of 1799, William Bingham petitioned the state legislature in Lancaster to annul his daughter’s marriage. The Pennsylvania House of Representatives concluded that Tilly “did, by bribing and corrupting the servants of William Bingham of the city of Philadelphia, commence and prosecute a secret correspondence” with Maria Matilda and through this secret correspondence he “by arts the most seducing, fraudulent and iniquitous, as well as by menaces and intimidation, ensnared” her into a midnight elopement from her parents’ house. Moreover, the legislature agreed that Tilly was “actuated by no motive religious, moral or civil” and intended “merely to obtain and extort a sum of money from the said William Bingham.” They concluded that he should be “defeated in his nefarious scheme” to “deter others from offending in a manner so fatal to the order of society and the happiness of individuals.” The legislators hoped that by passing the bill of divorce, “The solemn contract of marriage may be vindicated from practices so immoral, irreligious, fraudulent and corrupt.”⁶⁹ The state in this instance understood divorce as a public process and one with a decidedly political character. This divorce ruling assumes, in the words of historian Henrick Hartog, “a public remedy for a

⁶⁸ Noailles to Tilly, 28 June 1799, quoted in English in Alberts, *Golden Voyage*, 376-77. In French in Tilly, *Mémoires*, 251-252.

⁶⁹ “Thursday, January 9, 1800,” *Journal of the First Session of the Tenth House of Representatives of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania* (Lancaster: Francis and Robert Bailey, 1799), 96-97. William Bingham first presented the divorce petition on January 4, 1800 and Governor Thomas McKean signed the bill on January 17, 1800, after it passed both the House and the Senate. One nineteenth-century account of the affair written by Joshua Francis Fisher, a Philadelphia relative of the Bingham family, claimed that Tilly had been “bribed to furnish evidence against himself and the divorce was obtained by influence with the Legislature of Pennsylvania, whether by corruption, I am not able to say, but in those days Legislatures were presumed to be unassailable in that way.” Fisher, *Recollections*, 194-195.

public wrong.”⁷⁰ It became important for the moral identity of Maria Matilda, the powerful Bingham family, and by extension the new nation, to be freed from legal unity with Tilly. The 1785 Pennsylvania divorce law articulated quite limited grounds for a full divorce: adultery, bigamy, desertion for four or more years, impotence, and remarriage due to the mistaken death of a spouse.⁷¹

Rather than admit the susceptibility and guilt of his educated and virtuous daughter at the hands of a scheming Frenchman, Bingham publicly incriminated the servants in his home in the scandal. For the state legislators and the reading public, Bingham built a defense of his daughter and his family based on the vulnerability of his servants who probably would not refute his claims made in the divorce petition and who, in the eyes of Pennsylvania lawmakers, could have more easily fallen into Tilly’s trap than Maria Matilda alone. Her innocence was won at the expense of the same servants who made her life of leisure possible. At stake in the divorce of Maria Matilda and Tilly was not only the takedown of a villainous libertine who had seduced a young woman but also the sanctity of marriage and the protection of the American family, and perhaps the nation, from French schemes.⁷²

⁷⁰ Hartog, *Man and Wife in America*, 70.

⁷¹ Lyons, *Sex Among the Rabble*, 200 n24.

⁷² Maria Matilda Bingham was not the only young elite woman to assert a right to make her own choices in marriage and divorce to a French noble. As a teenager, Elizabeth Patterson Bonaparte forced her parents to accede to a marriage they knew would prove a disaster, a marriage to Napoléon’s libertine brother Jérôme Bonaparte. See Carol Berkin, *Wondrous Beauty: The Life and Adventures of Elizabeth Patterson Bonaparte* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2014) and Charlene M. Boyer Lewis, *Elizabeth Patterson Bonaparte: An American Aristocrat in the Early Republic* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012).

Madame de Tilly: “a Real French woman”

In the wake of Maria Matilda’s elopement and the legal melee to banish and divorce her husband, the Bingham made a show of keeping up appearances. Abigail Adams returned to Philadelphia in November 1799 and described to her sister a visit from the Bingham:

amongst the Ladies presented to me the Countess de Tilly has been of the Number, by the Appellation of Madam de Tilly. She has all the appearence and dress of a Real French woman, Rouged up to the Ears: Mrs Bingham did not appear to feel any embarresment at introducing her, tho I cannot say she did not creat one in me; for I really felt a reluctance at addressing her, so I talked to her mother and sister, and as there was much other company present I easily passt her over.⁷³

Adams, in her embarrassment for Anne Bingham and her daughter, placed the blame for the affair on them. A more virtuous and modest young woman, in her eyes perhaps, would not have fallen prey to the lustful schemes of a libertine such as Tilly.

The winter that George Washington died, elite women paraded showy French fashions on the streets of Philadelphia and the Bingham found no reason not to participate. Federalist politician Harrison Gray Otis wrote to his wife Sally Foster Otis that, despite the divorce proceedings and the winter weather, Maria Matilda went on daily promenades with her mother “in a dress which you will hardly believe it possible for a lady to wear at least this season.” Referring to her scant attire, he exclaimed, “I have been regaled with the sight of her whole legs for five minutes together, and do not know ‘to what height’ the fashion will be carried.” Otis concluded: “she and the whole family are

⁷³ From Abigail Smith Adams to Mary Smith Cranch, 15 November 1799, *Founders Online*, National Archives.

evidently dejected.”⁷⁴ Abigail Adams wrote to her sister a searing critique of the women’s style in Philadelphia that winter season of 1800: “The Stile of Dress ... is really an outrage upon all decency.” Even in drawing rooms, women wore nothing more than a thin satin petticoat covered only by a chemise, sometimes a “crape made so strait before as perfectly to show the whole form,” bare arms to the shoulder, and a tight girdle around the waist. “The face,” Adams described, was “a la mode de Paris, Red as a Brick hearth.” Most women, she felt, “wear their Cloaths too scant upon the body, & too full upon the Bosom for my fancy. not content with the Show which nature bestows. they borrow from art, and litterally look like Nursing Mothers.”⁷⁵

Undeterred by Maria Matilda’s elopement, Tilly’s skillful manipulation of her family, and the recently finalized divorce, Anne Bingham worked to maintain her family’s place as the leaders of society in the federal capital. In a letter to her sister in Georgetown, Rebecca Lowndes Stoddert, wife to the first secretary of the Navy, gave a detailed account of a ball hosted by the Bingham at Mansion House in February 1800. No expense was spared and no detail was overlooked. Stoddert first spotted Anne Bingham “seated at the head of the drawing-room” surrounded by just three women (rather than seated in a smaller room until all her company had arrived) before the dancing began around nine o’clock. Then servants brought in punch, lemonade, “the best ice-cream, as well as the prettiest, that ever I saw was carried around in beautiful china

⁷⁴ Harrison Gray Otis to Sally Foster Otis, 18 January 1800. Quoted in Samuel Eliot Morison, *Life and Letters of Harrison Gray Otis*, vol 1, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1913), 137. Harrison Gray Otis was a nephew of Mercy Otis Warren and elected a US Representative for Massachusetts in 1797. He was one of the wealthiest men in Boston in the early nineteenth century.

⁷⁵ From Abigail Smith Adams to Mary Smith Cranch, 15 March 1800, *Founders Online*, National Archives.

cups and gilt spoons,” and Stoddert described “the most superb” supper with an orange tree ripe with fruit in the middle of the table and for dessert “everything that one could conceive of.”⁷⁶

Outwardly, Maria Matilda wasted no tears or heartache on Tilly. Noailles had written to Tilly in the fall that she “has been very much sought after all summer; her flight has been considered as nothing more than a rash escapade. She has made much progress in acquiring spirit and instruction, and she has perfected herself in agreeable arts.” Noailles assured the profligate Tilly that Maria Matilda “has a singular talent for captivating hearts, but if she forms a new tie, it will be only as the result of a violent passion that she has long struggled against, and one approved by her parents, whose idol she is.”⁷⁷ With her divorce scarcely procured, Maria Matilda had another suitor named Erving, whom Otis considered “conceited, democratical and niggardly.” In the eyes of the older stateman, Erving’s attentions to Maria Matilda were “perfectly ridiculous” as he “followed her up and down when she danced with other persons like a shadow, and in short was so absolutely inattentive to the ladies of the family that I was mortified.”⁷⁸ Erving received a prompt dismissal from the Binghamms, perhaps eager to avoid another dangerous liaison for Maria Matilda.⁷⁹

⁷⁶ Rebecca Lowndes Stoddert to her sister (probably Harriet Lowndes Gantt) in Georgetown, 10 February 1800. Printed in Kate Mason Rowland, “Philadelphia A Century Ago,” *Lippincott’s Monthly Magazine*, vol. LXII (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Company, 1898), 815-816.

⁷⁷ Noailles to Tilly, 16 November 1799, quoted in English in Alberts, *Golden Voyage*, 377. In French in Tilly, *Mémoires*, 253.

⁷⁸ Harrison Gray Otis to Sally Foster Otis. Quoted in Morison, *Life and Letters of Harrison Gray Otis*, 137-138.

⁷⁹ Morison, *Life and Letters of Harrison Gray Otis*, 380.

Tilly apparently left the Bingham family alone for several months, while he roamed from London to Hamburg to Berlin, until sometime in 1801 when he decided to ask William Bingham for more money: another lump sum payment of £5000 in addition to his £500 annuity. He put his former negotiators Noailles and Guérout de Boiscleraux to the task. Bingham firmly refused Tilly's request and insisted on their first agreement, fearing that an independently wealthy Tilly could become again dangerous to his family and because Tilly had violated the terms of the first agreement. Tilly had written a letter to Maria Matilda claiming that at the death of her parents, he would hold the rights to her inheritance.⁸⁰

Tilly could not have tried to negotiate at a worse time: by 1801 the Bingham family were clinging to every last ounce of familial strength they had. Philadelphia was no longer the city it had been for the last decade and the players in Tilly's game of seduction had dispersed. Congress had moved to Washington, D.C. in the fall of 1800, Anne Bingham gave birth to her first son in December 1800, and Senator William Bingham moved to the new capital on the first day of 1801. Following a sleighing party that winter, Anne Bingham became ill and her health rapidly declined.⁸¹ William Bingham returned to Philadelphia in March 1801 after Jefferson's inauguration and based on the recommendation of his wife's physicians he decided to move her to the warm climate in Madeira where he hoped "she will be restored to health, after experiencing the good

⁸⁰ Tilly, *Mémoires*, 254. Also in Alberts, *Golden Voyage*, 416.

⁸¹ Alberts, *Golden Voyage*, 411. The sleighing party was "possibly an all-night party with a fiddler beside the coachman, warm bricks for the feet, frequent stops at taverns for hot punch and oyster stew, and travel over the snow with incredible speed and smoothness."

Effects of a Sea Voyage.”⁸² Accompanied by William, Maria Matilda, her younger sister Abigail Willing, and some family servants, Anne Bingham left Philadelphia on April 13, carried on a palanquin from Mansion House to the ship, “an event which attracted the gaze of hundreds.”⁸³ Benjamin Henry Latrobe wrote to a friend in Washington that Anne Bingham “is scarcely expected to live a week her leaden coffin is part of the Cargo. What a melancholy set!”⁸⁴ Not long at sea and with Anne’s health declining quickly, William Bingham knew that his wife would not live to Madeira. Aged thirty-seven, Anne Bingham died one month later and her family buried her at St. Peter’s Church in Bermuda.⁸⁵

William Bingham quickly settled his financial affairs in Philadelphia and four months after the death of his wife he and Maria Matilda had settled in London, joining his eldest daughter and her Baring family there but leaving his infant son with his Willing relations in Philadelphia.⁸⁶ He wrote to his dear friend Noailles in the fall of 1801: “The irreparable loss I have sustained casts a gloom over all my pursuits and blunts the edge of every enjoyment of life.” A year after his wife’s death, grief-stricken Bingham confessed to his brother-in-law Thomas Mayne Willing: “My Plan of Life must essentially vary as

⁸² William Bingham to General David Cobb, 9 April 1801. William Bingham Correspondence, Collection 53, Historical Society of Pennsylvania. General David Cobb, a Revolutionary War veteran and Massachusetts politician, acted as William Bingham’s land agent in Maine. Doctors diagnosed Anne Bingham with galloping consumption, a rapid form of tuberculosis. Alberts, *Golden Voyage*, 411.

⁸³ Rufus Wilmot Griswold, *The Republican Court; or, American Society in the Days of Washington* (New York: D. Appleton, 1855), 362.

⁸⁴ Quoted in “Notes and Queries,” *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* XLII, (1918), 183.

⁸⁵ Anne Bingham died on May 11, 1801.

⁸⁶ Margaret L. Brown, “Mr. and Mrs. William Bingham of the Philadelphia: Rulers of the Republican Court,” *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 61, no. 3 (1937): 322.

the Scenes which constituted my domestic Happiness have vanished.”⁸⁷ Bingham did not long outlive his wife; he died in Bath in early 1804.

By 1806, Tilly had persuaded the executors of William Bingham’s estate to pay off his annuity with a single lump sum. Then he left Germany, spent some time in Paris, and lastly settled in Brussels. From there, in poor health and worse financial straits, his exorbitant gambling debts reached amounts he could not pay. In 1816, Tilly committed suicide.⁸⁸

Before he died, Tilly wrote the manuscript of his memoirs and the work was published posthumously in three volumes in Berlin in 1825-27, in Paris in 1828, and a century later under the editorship of American sexologist Havelock Ellis in New York in 1932. Tilly touched only briefly on his American experiences, but the German editor recreated the Bingham-Tilly affair from Tilly’s papers and told it in his preface. Joshua Francis Fisher, a Bingham relative, declared Tilly’s memoir “not fit for any library.”⁸⁹

In his *Mémoires*, Tilly dedicated pages and pages to praise of *Les liaisons dangereuses* and observations of Laclos. The novel, which had “made a prodigious sensation” in his mind deserved “in its genre, to occupy a classic place in the best libraries.” He was a “passionate admirer” of the book when it was first published in 1782. Tilly claimed, “all the women confessed to having read when all the men ought to have condemned it.” Tilly “wished inordinately” to meet Laclos to discover the “mystery” of his novel, which he finally did in Paris in 1789. Convinced that “such a work does not

⁸⁷ William Bingham to Thomas M. Willing, 22 May 1802, Gratz Collection, Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

⁸⁸ Alberts, *Golden Voyage*, 521-522.

⁸⁹ Fisher, *Recollections*, 195.

come into anyone's mind without preliminary facts," Tilly was disappointed by the polite defense of Laclos who "did not teach me anything satisfactory." However, he expresses some reproach at his past enthusiasm for Laclos' book, "especially for having lent it in its novelty to two or three women, who then hid themselves to read it more than they hid from fulfilling all that it teaches." After pages of reflection on characterization, plot, and style, Tilly thinks of *Les liaisons dangereuses* "as one of those disastrous meteors that appeared under a fiery sky at the end of the eighteenth century." He concludes: "In a word, it is the work of a mind of the first order, of a rotten heart, and of the genius of evil."⁹⁰ Perhaps later in his life Tilly had come to harbor some remorse, too, about his own libertine proclivities at the end of the eighteenth century as much as he did his early admiration for Laclos's libertine novel.

Two years after her divorce from Tilly and almost nineteen years old, Maria Matilda quietly married her sister's brother-in-law Henry Baring in England in April 1802 (Figure 6). Her father declared the marriage as "a connection in every respect highly gratifying."⁹¹ From Philadelphia two months later, Alexander Baring wrote to Robert Gilmore: "My letters bring me the information of the Marriage of my brother Henry with Miss Bingham an event which though it did not surprise me was unexpected."⁹² Not long after the second Bingham-Baring marriage, William Bingham, the Barings Bank, and their Amsterdam partners the Hopes helped the United States

⁹⁰ Tilly, *Mémoires*, vol. I, Chapitre XIV, 318-319, 321, 326-327.

⁹¹ William Bingham to General David Cobb, 1802. Quoted in Alberts, *Golden Voyage*, 419.

⁹² Alexander Baring to Robert Gilmore, 16 June 1802. Dreer Collection, Historical Society of Pennsylvania. Henry Baring (1776-1848) married Maria Matilda Bingham on April 10, 1802. He later married Cecilia Anne Windham on July 9, 1825.

government negotiate and finance the Louisiana Purchase. Secretary of the Treasury Albert Gallatin estimated that the financiers profited about \$3 million from the transaction.⁹³



Figure 10: Thomas Lawrence, *Maria Mathilda Bingham with Two of her Children*, ca. 1810-1818. Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam. Maria Matilda Bingham Baring is shown with the two oldest of her five children. In this family portrait, her husband Henry Baring is missing. Judging by the direction of the gaze of Maria Mathilda Bingham and her son, he must have stood on the left. Maria divorced her husband and then had the painting reduced on that side.

⁹³ Furstenberg, *When the United States Spoke French*, 401-403. The sale was financed by a consortium made up of the Barings, the Hopes, and William Bingham. The Barings used a cipher to protect the privacy of their correspondence during negotiations.

After more than twenty years and five children together, Maria Matilda and Henry Baring's marriage ended miserably. Henry Baring had a reputation for licentiousness and gambling, and perhaps for those reasons withdrew as a partner in the Baring firm in 1823. In a scandalous public trial, Henry charged Maria Matilda with having an affair with a man named Captain Webster.⁹⁴ "Henry Baring, who could have had no sense of honour or delicacy in marrying her, which he no doubt did for her fortune," Maria Matilda's Philadelphia relative Joshua Francis Fisher alleged, "threw her into the most dissipated company, was glaringly unfaithful himself, and it is said, laid a plan for her divorce, when he had fallen in love with a young lady who became his second wife. Whether Captain Webster knowingly lent himself to his friend's scheme, I know not."⁹⁵

Soon after her second divorce, Maria Matilda moved to France and married a French soldier of noble birth, Auguste, marquis du Blaisel, in 1826.⁹⁶ Another gambler, Blaisel, according to William Bingham's biographer, "used up money as fast as Maria could supply it." A Bingham family relation, Joshua Francis Fisher knew Maria Matilda in Paris during this time and recalled in his 1860s memoir that she was after her second divorce "an old woman but quite an amusing one. She had seen the world in many phases, and had plenty of anecdotes which she told pleasantly. She was a very amiable, kind-hearted woman, and her faults and frailties were attributable in some measure to

⁹⁴ Alberts, *Golden Voyage*, 437-438 and Fisher, *Recollections*, 195. Captain Webster was the son of Sir Godfrey Webster and Lady Holland.

⁹⁵ Fisher, *Recollections*, 196.

⁹⁶ Alberts, *Golden Voyage*, 438. Auguste, marquis du Blaisel (1790-1870) married Maria Matilda Bingham on June 9, 1826.

neglect, and the bad company into which she was thrown.”⁹⁷ After years on the fringes of court life in Paris and London, Maria Matilda died in 1849 in England.

Conclusion: Contesting Patriarchy

The 1799 elopement of Maria Matilda Bingham and the comte de Tilly happened at the Philadelphia intersection of French libertinage, sentimental and seduction novels, early American contestations of patriarchy, and the vestiges of Enlightenment ideas of pleasure and performance. By interpreting their marriage as a seduction plot—with Maria Matilda Bingham as the virtuous young woman and Tilly as the salacious libertine—I argue that their affair constituted a topos that linked the material conditions of privacy, literacy, and gender with the discursive practices of libertinage. In the wake of revolutionary upheavals and increasing social anxiety about patriarchy and national identity, libertinage in the United States was a sword that sliced women like Maria Matilda Bingham doubly. It gave men such as Tilly the rhetoric and seduction tools to assail their victims and it gave men such as William Bingham the moral authority to control and “protect” otherwise honorable and innocent young women from themselves. It is what in his famous preface to *Les liaisons dangereuses* André Malraux called the “eroticization of the will”—the pursuit of desire, the exercise of power, the quest of pleasure, the supremacy of performance—for in the end libertinage was the ultimate expression of resistance to control.⁹⁸

⁹⁷ Fisher, *Recollections*, 196.

⁹⁸ André Malraux, “Preface,” *Les Liaisons dangereuses* (Paris : Gallimard, 1970), 20. In French: “une érotisation de la volonté.”

Maria Matilda's marriage to Tilly was a reaction to forces and developments that were much larger than her personal affairs. Her elopement was a challenge to the patriarchal order in the early republic, an expression of her views about American culture and politics. Patriarchy remained intact after the Revolutionary War though it was contested: some women imagined that free choice in marriage and control over their sexual intimacy would be rights they enjoyed in the new republic.⁹⁹ She was of the generation that had inherited the Revolution and needed to make sense of its goals and ideology and put them into practice. Maria Matilda's actions demonstrate her beliefs and the distinct ways in which women of this era could participate in public culture and instigate national discussions about the place of women in the republic. She did not unthinkingly choose two French and one British husband, French clothing, French manners, and eventually Paris and London as her homes. She contested the social limits that American society placed on women and through her marriages and divorces presented an alternative model of womanhood for the new nation. She showed clear dissatisfaction with the role of republican wife and mother and she was never content to be the kind of daughter, wife, or even divorcée that American society generally expected of elite white women. At the turn of the nineteenth century, as the ideal of "republican motherhood" waned yet before the middle class's "cult of true domesticity" solidified, Maria Matilda Bingham presented another model of womanhood based on French libertine gender norms.

⁹⁹ Lyons, *Sex Among the Rabble*, 12-13, 225, 240.

Chapter Four: Private Liaisons

The Boudoir in the Early Republic

Near the end of March 1793, Annis Boudinot Stockton sat alone in front of the fire late at night in her mansion called Morven in Princeton, New Jersey, with pen in hand and ink and paper at her side. She remarked that there was “not a creature upon in the house but my self—.”¹ What she had to say could not wait until morning. What she had to say was best written in solitude. An elite poet, patriot, and widow of a signer of the Declaration of Independence, Stockton had finally got her hands on a copy of Mary Wollstonecraft’s *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*.² Wollstonecraft’s book of feminist philosophy had been published in January 1792 and in it she passionately defended the rights of women to equal education, equal employment, and parliamentary

¹ Annis Boudinot Stockton, “Letter to Julia Stockton Rush on Mary Wollstonecraft’s *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (ca. 1793),” in *Transatlantic Feminisms in the Age of Revolutions*, ed. Lisa L. Moore, Joanna Brooks, and Caroline Wigginton (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 290. Also reprinted in *Only for the Eye of a Friend: The Poems of Annis Boudinot Stockton*, ed. Carla Mulford (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1995), 304-307. Mulford estimates that Stockton most likely wrote the letter on March 22, 1793. Original is found under Rush I:05:08 ALsS Annis Boudinot Stockton to Julia Stockton Rush ca. 1793, Rosenbach Museum and Library, Philadelphia, PA.

Annis Boudinot Stockton was probably not alone in her house that evening. Enslaved men, women, and children at Morven made her life of leisure possible. Morven was a working plantation farmed extensively by slave labor. After the death of her husband, Annis Boudinot Stockton continued to enslave people on the estate. Historians and curators at Morven today can only speculate where enslaved men, women, and children might have slept.

² Annis Boudinot Stockton (1736-1801) married Richard Stockton (1730-1781) in late 1757 or early 1758. Richard Stockton served as a delegate to the First Continental Congress, signed the Declaration of Independence, was imprisoned for a time by Loyalists during the war, and later died of cancer in 1781. Annis Boudinot Stockton’s brother Elias Boudinot (1740-1821) was a lawyer, Congressman, and, later, Director of the Mint. He married Richard Stockton’s sister Hannah. Elias Boudinot became the president of the Continental Congress in 1782 and when Congress moved to Princeton he resided with his sister at Morven.

representation. She called for “a REVOLUTION in female manners” to dismantle prevailing notions of women as innately emotional, illogical, and capable of moral sentiment but not rational understanding.³ Past one o’clock in the morning, Stockton finished a lengthy letter to her daughter Julia Stockton Rush reflecting on the philosophical and literary merits of *Rights of Woman*. There was a reason George Washington called her the “Muse of Morven.”⁴

Stockton’s letter analyzing Wollstonecraft’s book is a rare glimpse of a female reader at work in the eighteenth-century. She had consumed privately Wollstonecraft’s arguments over the course of several days, digested and reflected upon them by herself, then penned a critique to her daughter in the flickering light of her “solitary fire.” The finished text created an epistolary sorority: a letter by a woman to a woman about a woman. For the most part, Stockton agreed with the major tenets of Wollstonecraft’s book, but argued that some of the conditions plaguing British women did not exist in the United States. From her elevated position among the Federalist elite and her own experiences of family life, Stockton believed none of “that Slavish obedience” existed between American wives and husbands and American women’s opportunities for education only increased alongside men’s appreciation for intelligent female companions. Stockton’s contention that sex and gender held no sway over intellect—in her words, “there is no sex in Soul”—belied, however, what she saw as the destined interconnectedness of married men and women that would prohibit “equal powers of the

³ Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman and The Wrongs of Woman, or Maria*, ed. Anne K. Mellor and Noelle Chao (New York: Pearson, 2007), 230.

⁴ From George Washington to Annis Boudinot Stockton, Aug. 31, 1788, *Founders Online*, National Archives. Stockton was one of Washington’s most ardent admirers and sent him several patriotic poems. Washington stayed several times at Morven, most notably on his way to Yorktown in August 1781.

mind.” “We are all beings dependent on one another,” she wrote, “and we must make the best of it.” Stockton also attacked Wollstonecraft’s embrace of Rousseau whom, she charged, “had some defect in his brain, or that he was a refined Idiot.”⁵ Driven by sweeping remarks in the first person, the intimate tone of Stockton’s letter functioned as a rhetorical device meant to persuade readers of her views and provoke literary and philosophical debate among the people in her circles.

Stockton’s letter confirms a widespread familiarity with Wollstonecraft’s text as a cultural presence at least in New Jersey and Philadelphia by March 1793. She began her letter to her daughter: “I have been engaged these days with reading the rights of women, which I never could procure before, tho it has been much longer in the neighbourhood.”⁶ With just an abbreviated title and no author, Stockton assumed that her daughter would know what book she had been reading. Literary scholar Caroline Wigginton takes Stockton’s phrase “the neighbourhood” to describe the communities within which elite white women authors read and wrote fiction. “Blurring the line between public and private,” Wigginton argues, “an epistolary neighborhood allows a woman author to gain an audience beyond her home and family while also avoiding the cultural ridicule often directed at vocal women.”⁷ Even though Wollstonecraft’s book had only been available in the United States for a few months, Stockton presumed that her daughter had at least already heard of it and perhaps read it. She even expected her daughter to send her judgements on the work: “I suppose it is an old thing with you-- I wonder you never Sent

⁵ Stockton, “Letter to Julia Stockton Rush,” in *Transatlantic Feminisms in the Age of Revolutions*, 288-290.

⁶ Stockton, “Letter to Julia Stockton Rush,” in *Transatlantic Feminisms in the Age of Revolutions*, 288.

⁷ Caroline Wigginton, “A Late Night Vindication: Annis Boudinot Stockton’s Reading of Mary Wollstonecraft’s *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*,” *Legacy* 25, no. 2 (2008): 226.

me your Critique.”⁸ That wealthy, elite, and highly educated Stockton had had difficulty getting a copy of *Rights of Woman* also suggests that many Americans had quickly snatched up an imported copy from London or one of the two pirated American editions in circulation by the end of 1792. Additionally, at least three American periodicals included reviews and excerpts from the book before March 1793.⁹

Stockton’s letter was not entirely private nor public. Though the tone of her letter suggested an intimacy with the recipient, Stockton most likely expected her daughter in Philadelphia to share it. Perhaps Rush would read it aloud at a literary salon hosted by Elizabeth Graeme Fergusson.¹⁰ Maybe she would pass the letter to her husband Benjamin Rush. It might fall into the hands of Benjamin Franklin, whose post office Stockton had lived next to as a girl in Philadelphia.¹¹ Stockton often circulated her letters and poetry among New Jersey and Philadelphia elites, hosted literary discussions at Morven, and published a small number of poems.¹² In this case though, Stockton wrote the letter in

⁸ Stockton, “Letter to Julia Stockton Rush,” in *Transatlantic Feminisms in the Age of Revolutions*, 288.

⁹ Wigginton, “A Late Night Vindication,” 230. The first pirated edition was from William Gibbons of Philadelphia and the second from Isaiah Thomas and Ebenezer Andrews of Boston. Mathew Carey published his own reprint in 1794. Wigginton refers to these American editions as piracies because English copyright law did not apply in the United States. Two of the periodicals were published by Thomas and Andrews: *The Lady’s Magazine, and Repository of Entertaining Knowledge*, September 1792; *Massachusetts Magazine*, October 1792. *New York Magazine, or Literary Repository*, February 1793 includes Wollstonecraft’s entire introduction. Wigginton concluded that “*Rights of Woman* had a substantial public sphere presence in America by March 1793” (230).

¹⁰ Elizabeth Graeme Fergusson was a good friend and confidante of Annis Boudinot Stockton, published writer, and hostess of a distinguished literary salon in Philadelphia. Shields, *Civil Tongues and Polite Letters*, 120-40.

¹¹ Wigginton, “A Late Night Vindication,” 226. Stockton was born in Darby, Pennsylvania. She spent most of her youth in Philadelphia where her family’s home and her father’s blacksmith shop were next door to Benjamin Franklin’s post office. The Stockton family later settled in Princeton in 1752 or 1753.

¹² *Only for the Eye of a Friend*, ed. Carla Mulford, xvii. Stockton wrote at least 125 poems and published at least 21 of them.

private and sent it only to her daughter. In it, she offered her comments on a published and therefore public text and it most likely circulated semipublicly via friends, family, and acquaintances. She did not try to publish her letter or spread her thoughts about Wollstonecraft in public venues such as taverns, coffeehouses, or the legislature. But the political context in which she produced the letter is important, too. In 1793, taxpaying women (single or widowed) in New Jersey could vote. Although there is so far no documentation that Stockton ever cast a ballot, dozens of other New Jersey women did: between 1797 and 1807, an estimated 7.7 percent of voters were female.¹³ One 1797 article reported: “In Elizabethtown, the *federal* ladies, maids as well as matrons, believers in the democratic Wollstonecraft’s *Rights of Woman*, turned out in support of their favourite candidates, and gave in their votes to the number of 75 heads.”¹⁴ Stockton’s intimate letter to her daughter was much more than that: it was a private act of political engagement, an inner work of self-reflection, and a realization of personal pleasure.

Why did a published female author with voting rights, a woman who feared no “Slavish obedience” to men, choose to meditate and contemplate privately on Wollstonecraft’s text when she could have done so in a much more public manner? Stockton’s late-night fireside solitary reading and writing, I argue, was her boudoir. It was time and space for her physical and cerebral privacy.¹⁵

¹³ Marcela Micucci, “The First Generation: America’s Women Voters, 1776-1807,” *History Now* 56 (Summer 2020), Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History.

¹⁴ “Electioneering,” *The Bee* (New London, CT), Oct. 25, 1797. Though published in Connecticut, the *Bee* reported this story on women voters in a 1797 New Jersey election.

¹⁵ Here I emphasize a distinction between privacy and secrecy. In my analysis, privacy refers to not being disturbed or observed by other people. Privacy entails solitude, isolation, and peace. Secrecy is the action of keeping something a secret or hiding information from some people while sharing it with others. In some cases, there may exist a moral component to secrecy and a legal aspect to privacy. See, for example, Samuel D. Warren and Louis D. Brandeis, “The Right to Privacy,” *Harvard Law Review* 4, no. 5 (1890):

The boudoir had multiple meanings over the course of the eighteenth century and not all Americans would have all thought about it in the same way by 1793. What began in France as a private female space for prayer and meditation soon signified the extension of that privilege to women for secular (and later sexual) pleasures.¹⁶ Popularized in print culture in France during the eighteenth century, the boudoir allowed elite, often highly-educated women a time and a place in the home when and where they would not be disturbed or observed by other people. By the end of the century, it became synonymous with illicit sex and aristocratic dalliance thanks, in part, to novels by the marquis de Sade. Few instances of boudoirs built into American homes, even of the wealthiest women, existed in the late eighteenth century. Of course, even Stockton's quiet seat by the fire with pen, paper, and literature was one of immense privilege. I argue, however, that the idea of the French boudoir provided for well-educated, affluent white American women a cerebral space for fostering an interior life based on intimacy, privacy, literacy, and female pleasure.

Much feminist scholarship on the role of post-revolutionary women such as that by Linda K. Kerber, Cathy N. Davidson, and Mary Kelley framed the question of women and reading in terms of citizenship, a political tension in the emerging liberal nation-state. These scholars focused on educated women who asserted their rights and credentials as valuable members of the body politic, forcing their way into civil society.¹⁷ Other

193-220. For a recent reflection on women's struggles to carve out private time for writing, see Brigid Schulte, "A woman's greatest enemy? A lack of time to herself," *The Guardian* (London), July 21, 2019.

¹⁶ For this tension in England and France, see Nicole Reynolds, "Boudoir Stories: A Novel History of a Room and Its Occupants," *Literature Interpretation Theory* 15 no. 2 (2004): 103.

¹⁷ Linda K. Kerber, *Women of the Republic: Intellect and Ideology in Revolutionary America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980); Cathy N. Davidson, *Revolution and the Word: The Rise of the Novel in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986); and Mary Kelley, *Learning to Stand and*

scholars emphasized the degree to which the vast majority of women—those who were not wealthy, educated, or white—remained subject to the power of patriarchal men.¹⁸ Regardless of rank or class, white property-holding men claimed privacy as their exclusive privilege well into the nineteenth century.¹⁹ I propose that reading, in addition to propelling elite women toward citizenship, also propelled them in another direction: toward privacy and the cultivation of an inner self. Solitary reading made possible for elite women the prospect of female individualism and the potential to act based on her own desires. Affluent American women, I argue, saw inspiration for the cultivation of their minds and the creation of private female spaces in the French boudoir.

The Eighteenth-Century Boudoir in France

The French boudoir was a fictional site before it was an architectural one. For at least half a century, the boudoir became manifest in erotic literature before it was

Speak: Women, Education, and Public Life in America's Republic (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006). For more on women's role in civil society, see: Jan Lewis, "The Republican Wife: Virtue and Seduction in the Early Republic," *William and Mary Quarterly* 44 (1987): 689–721; Nancy Isenberg, *Sex and Citizenship in Antebellum America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998); Catherine Allgor, *Parlor Politics: of Washington Help Build a City and a Government* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2000); Susan Branson, *These Fiery Frenchified Dames: Women and Political Culture in Early National Philadelphia* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001); and Rosemarie Zagarri, *Revolutionary Backlash: Women and Politics in the Early American Republic* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007).

¹⁸ Claire A. Lyons, *Sex Among the Rabble: An Intimate History of Gender and Power in the Age of Revolution, 1730–1830* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006) and Sharon Block, *Rape and Sexual Power in Early America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006). For an examination of patriarchy in the early republic, see Kenneth A. Lockridge, *On the Sources of Patriarchal Rage: The Commonplace Books of William Byrd and Thomas Jefferson and the Gendering of Power in the Eighteenth Century* (New York: New York University Press, 1992).

¹⁹ Sarah Igo, *The Known Citizen: A History of Privacy in Modern America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2018).

explicitly codified within architectural terms.²⁰ Born in the pages of novels such as Crébillon fils's *Le Sopha, conte moral* (*The Sofa: A Moral Tale*, 1742) and Jean-François Bastide's *La Petite Maison* (*The Little House*, 1752), the boudoir developed into a cultural icon by the late eighteenth century with the publication of Vivant Denon's *Point de Lendemain* (*No Tomorrow*, 1777), Choderlos de Laclos' *Les Liaisons Dangereuses* (*Dangerous Liaisons*, 1782) and the marquis de Sade's *La philosophie dans le boudoir* (*Philosophy in the Bedroom*, 1795).²¹ From its first usages, the boudoir was a private, domestic place where women could shed a façade of formality and thus it came to be defined as a site of indecency, both of the mind and the body.²² A literary and architectural genealogy of the boudoir in eighteenth-century France reveals its multiple and mobile meanings, the uneasy convergence of femininity and interior space, and the regulation and production of sexuality and pleasure.²³

²⁰ One of the earliest recorded appearances of the word boudoir is in 1727, when Mercier de Compiègne published *Manuel des boudoirs, ou Essais érotiques sur les demoiselles d'Athènes* in four volumes. Mark Girouard, *Life in the French Country House* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2000), 153.

²¹ Beatriz Preciado, "Gender, Sexuality, and the Biopolitics of Architecture: From the Secret Museum to Playboy," (PhD diss., Princeton University, 2013), 115. Preciado's dissertation explores the use of architecture as a biopolitical technique for governing sexual reproduction and the production of gender in modernity.

²² The English lady's dressing room had an almost reverse transformation in the eighteenth century according to literary scholar Tita Chico. She argues: "From the late seventeenth century to the late eighteenth, the lady's dressing room changed from being a site of lasciviousness and secrecy for aristocratic women to an emblem for good and virtuous mothers" (9). Tita Chico, *Designing Women: The Dressing Room in Eighteenth-Century English Literature and Culture* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2005).

²³ Michel Foucault argued that starting in the seventeenth century, the bourgeois order necessitated repression of sex. This censorship resulted in "a discursive explosion" in the last three centuries. "The principle of secrecy" required sexuality to be confined in the home. In the words of Foucault, "The conjugal family took custody of it and absorbed it into the serious function of reproduction." Thus, any performance of sex other than reproductive proposes was viewed as frivolous. Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1: An Introduction* (New York, Vintage Books, 1990), 3-17.

The etymology of the word reminds us that the boudoir was not always a room for illicit sex. Boudoir is derived from the French verb *bouder*, meaning “to sulk.” Scholars guess that the predecessor of the boudoir may have been the Renaissance Italian *studiolo* (a small study room), the harem, the cabinet, or the lady’s oratory.²⁴ The word boudoir appeared for the first time without a religious connotation in the 1740 *Dictionnaire de l’Académie française* as a “petit cabinet où l’on se retire quand on veut être seul” (small cabinet where one withdraws when one wants to be alone).²⁵ Almost a century later, in 1835, the *Dictionnaire de l’Académie Française* introduced the gendered condition of the boudoir, defining this space as a “sorte de cabinet orné avec élégance, à l’usage particulier de des dames et dans lequel elles se retirent, lorsqu’elles veulent être seules ou s’entretenir avec des personnes intimes” (kind of elegantly decorated cabinet, for the particular use by ladies and in which they retire when they want to be alone or talk with intimate friends).²⁶

²⁴ Michel Delon, *L’invention du boudoir* (Paris: Zulma, 1999), 21-23. Gülen Çevik argues that “the reinvention of the harem space as ‘boudoir’ in France enabled Europeans to inhabit a forbidden Oriental domain, all the while keeping a safe distance from it.” Gülen Çevik, “Boudoirs and Harems: The Seductive Power of *Sophas*” (PhD diss., University of Cincinnati, 2019), 12. Mark Girouard discusses the *cabinet*, the *cabinet de toilette*, and the entresol system (clusters of small rooms along a corridor) of French châteaux as the precursors of the boudoir. Mark Girouard, *Life in the French Country House* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2000), 149-151. Ed Lilley writes: “I have not been able to ascertain why, specifically, the term boudoir emerged rather than another neologism, although the tone smacks of male condescension. Leaving aside questions of education, the designation, even on an emotional level, is low-key. The lady has not retired to contain unbridled rage or passionate despair, but simply because she is a little moody.” He suspects that the “emotional resonance might suggest that it was connected with what some would now call premenstrual tension.” Ed Lilley, “The Name of the Boudoir,” *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 53, no. 2 (1994): 197.

²⁵ *Dictionnaire de l’Académie française* (Paris : J.-B. Coignard, 1740), 181. “Boudoir. f. m. Petit cabinet où l’on se retire quand on veut être seul. *Elle est dans son boudoir*. Il est du style familier.”

²⁶ *Dictionnaire de l’Académie française* (Paris : Firmin-Didot frères, 1835), 212. “Boudoir. s. m. Sorte de cabinet orné avec élégance, à l’usage particulier des dames, et dans lequel elles se retirent, lorsqu’elles veulent être seules ou s’entretenir avec des personnes intimes. *Madame est dans son boudoir*. *Un joli boudoir*. *Un boudoir élégant*.”

Perhaps the most direct architectural ancestor of the woman's boudoir was the oratory. In the early years of the eighteenth century, French women often retreated to an *oratoire*, an aristocratic, married woman's small private room for religious reading and prayer. Husbands later labeled this space reserved for women as the boudoir—a room to sulk—because they were often denied what they believed were their conjugal dues when women retired there in the name of a higher authority.²⁷ It served as a wife's refuge from her husband, her children, her household duties, her visitors, her social obligations: in short, from the world. In this way, French men vilified women's solitary activity, especially their desire to educate themselves through reading.²⁸ As architectural historian Diana Cheng describes, "There was no sulking *inside* the boudoir."²⁹

The architectural precedent of the boudoir in France also existed in the *cabinet*, later designated as the *cabinet de toilette* (dressing room), a small room—and often an unpretentious one at that—attached to a *chambre* (bedroom) containing the *toilette* (dressing table). When the dressing table moved from the bedroom to the cabinet, the nature of the woman's cabinet changed, in the words of historian Mark Girouard, "from a room concerned with study, for intense and secret imaginings, to a room in which to make oneself desirable."³⁰ French architect Jacques François Blondel described the cabinet in 1735 as a place for letting fantasies run free and prescribed that its decoration

²⁷ Diana Cheng, "A History of the Boudoir in the Eighteenth Century" (PhD diss., McGill University, 2011), 20. Cheng hypothesizes that the naming of the boudoir had a sexual vector. Her work surmises that the boudoir was invented in order to tastefully describe a new attitude concerning conjugal relations between aristocratic men and women.

²⁸ Lilley, "The Name of the Boudoir," 198.

²⁹ Cheng, "A History of the Boudoir," 359.

³⁰ Girouard, *Life in the French Country House*, 150.

should reflect its purpose: “It is here that imagination can take flight and abandon itself to the liveliest fancies.”³¹

The boudoir developed in French rococo art as a site female privacy but one still subject to the male gaze. In François Boucher’s *La Toilette* (1742), a woman in a state of *déshabillé* (undress) in an untidy dressing room ties her garter while choosing a cap, shown to her by her maid (Figure 11). It provides an invaluable document of the interior of a *cabinet de toilette*. The walls and chairs are covered in a gold colored damask, a Chinese screen with birds and trees partially obstructs a portrait hung on the wall, and heavy wrinkled fur-lined fabrics stretch over a chair and the dressing table. The mantle as well as the floor in front of the fireplace are crowded with various objects and a playful cat has dragged a ball of string from a sewing bag. Boucher’s vision is a voyeuristic one: the woman reveals her bare thigh while getting dressed. An overall sense of frivolity, yet with a delicate intimacy pervades the composition, redolent of the gentle sensuality associated with boudoirs of this period.

³¹ Jean-François Blondel, *De la distribution des maisons de plaisance et de la décoration des édifices en général*, vol. I, (Paris, 1737), 29. Quoted in Girouard, *Life in the French Country House*, 153.



Figure 11: François Boucher, *La Toilette*, 1742. Museo Nacional Thyssen-Bornemisza, Madrid.

When French aristocrats incorporated boudoirs into the architectural plans of their homes, they did so in a way that maximized privacy for the woman of the house. Eighteenth-century French floor plans show the multiplication of cabinets and *salons particuliers* (private rooms) along corridors creating new spaces of circulation and insulation (Figure 12). A single entry afforded many boudoirs a higher level of privacy than most other rooms in a French *hôtel* (grand urban mansion), a structural confirmation of the meticulously organized social world of the French elite. Frequently on the second floor, some boudoirs, however, also were accessible through a secret back staircase (fittingly called in French *l'escalier dérobé*)—one of the best kept secrets of a home's

floor plan echoing the mid-eighteenth-century taste for the clever and simultaneously subtle accent.³²

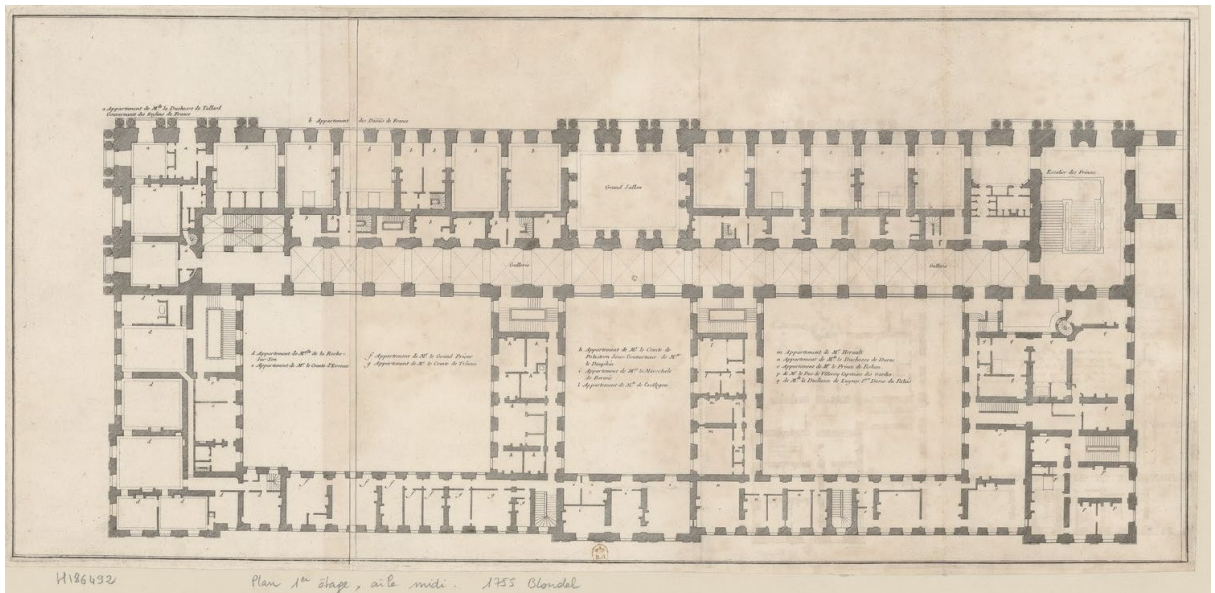


Figure 12: Jacques-François Blondel, *Plan du premier étage de l'aile du Midi du château de Versailles, Paris*, ca. 1735. Département Estampes et photographie, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris. This plan for the south wing of the palace of Versailles illustrates horizontal distribution—the division of space into ever more intimate and private rooms along lengthy corridors.

The boudoir served as a place for pleasure of the body and the mind—for unleashing one's imagination—and its decoration was meant to reflect its purpose. The interior design of a boudoir varied by the degree of exclusiveness and luxuriousness desired by its owner. The defining features of a boudoir included an abundance of curves, luxurious fabrics, and comfortable upholstered furniture pieces such as a bed, fauteuil, chaise-longue, or sofa, ideally in a niche.³³ Delicate rococo plasterwork, sumptuous silks,

³² For an analysis of the entresol system in eighteenth-century French private homes, see Girouard, *Life in the French Country House*, 149-150.

³³ Çevik, "Boudoirs and Harems," 51, 54.

paintings of nudes, and mirrors adorned the most luxurious boudoirs. Mark Girouard describes the decoration of the boudoir in the home of the marquis de Lastic: “crimson silk embroideries framed in grey on the wall, sofa, chairs and stools all in matching crimson and grey, marble-topped tables of mahogany and ormolu, and porcelain-and-ormolu cases and candlesticks reflected in the mirror over the chimney-piece.”³⁴ Above all, the boudoir relied on the fabrication of obscurity, the inner ambiguity of space with furniture and textiles to lay a veil over reality.

By the middle of the eighteenth century, the meaning of the boudoir had changed in France: it was no longer a space for a woman’s religious devotion, but a space devoted to herself.³⁵ The nature of what she imagined there shifted: it was less devout, more frivolous, and at times outright erotic. How did the French boudoir evolve from a place of religious devotion to a place of sexual pleasure? The answer, argues one twenty-first century architect, “is not sex, but reading.”³⁶ The boudoir as a chamber for women’s reading, especially for reading pornographic books, signaled the secularization of the religious practices of reading and meditation, turning spiritual discipline into physical pleasure. Diana Cheng describes the boudoir in eighteenth-century France as a “psychological architecture which promoted an interior life” for women.³⁷ Art historian

³⁴ Girouard, *Life in the French Country House*, 156.

³⁵ Delon, *L’invention du boudoir*; Girouard, *Life in the French Country House* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2000). Although some scholars discuss the boudoir as a space for the expression of women’s power and sexual identity, other scholars attribute to it a negative valuation. Jill Casid argues that the boudoir denied women legitimate participation in the emerging public sphere. See Jill H. Casid, “Commerce in the Boudoir,” in Melissa Hyde and Jennifer Milam, eds., *Women, Art and the Politics of Identity in Eighteenth-Century Europe* (Burlington, Vermont: Ashgate, 2003), 91-114.

³⁶ Preciado, “Gender, Sexuality, and the Biopolitics of Architecture,” 123, 128. Preciado continues on page 129: “It was through reading that the *oratoire* started to be represented as a female masturbating room.”

³⁷ Cheng, “A History of the Boudoir,” 1.

Ed Lilley captures the essence of the sexualized boudoir as the “signifier of an eighteenth century in which handsome gentlemen dally with gorgeous ladies in sumptuous interiors, all the while hoping that their spouses do not come in and ruin everything.”³⁸

Especially in the last quarter of the eighteenth century, titillating boudoir genre paintings eroticized voyeuristic encounters. Popularized by Pierre-Antoine Baudouin (Figure 13), boudoir scenes depicted risqué and often explicit images, usually of charming young aristocrats engaged in a variety of sexual intrigues, played out in the gardens, parlors, and boudoirs of fashionable homes.



Figure 13: Pierre Antoine Baudouin, *La Nuit* (Night), n.d. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, New York.

³⁸ Lilley, “The Name of the Boudoir,” 198.

Le Boudoir (1776) (Figure 14) illustrates an elegantly dressed woman daydreaming on a sofa with her book in her hand, resting between her legs spread apart, almost ready to lie down. The thick curtains have blown open revealing a couple embracing on the terrace, suggesting an illicit sexual encounter. The man grasps the woman around the waist while peering through the window at the other woman on the sofa. In her analysis of reading women in nineteenth-century French paintings, art historian Kathryn Brown explains the *liseuse* motif in visual art: “Far from representing a private space for solitary reading, the boudoir becomes a stage for the display of female sexual and textual vulnerability.”³⁹ Because she has fallen asleep reading, the woman on the sofa allows a double transgression in her boudoir: the illicit sexual meeting on the terrace and the erotic entertainment of the male spectator watching her lay with her legs spread apart.

³⁹ Kathryn Brown, *Women Readers in French Painting, 1870-1890: A Space for the Imagination* (Surrey, UK: Ashgate Publishing, 2012), 2, 164.



Figure 14: Pierre Maleuvre after Sigmund Freudenberger, *Le boudoir*, History of Manners and Customs of the French (series), 1774. National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC.

French literary works attached boudoirs to sexual intrigue in daring stories and the fictional boudoir remained fashionable throughout the eighteenth century. French author Abbé Prévost crowded his controversial novel *L'histoire du chevalier des Grieux et de Manon Lescaut* (*Manon Lescaut*, 1731) with dramatic scenes featuring a boudoir as the locale for secret encounters between two young lovers. Set in France and Louisiana in the early eighteenth century, the work tells the tragic love tale of a young seminary student of noble birth the chevalier des Grieux and his amoral courtesan Manon Lescaut. Suspicious that his mistress has accepted another lover, the chevalier des Grieux prepares to confront Manon when she “gave me a kiss, and, escaping from my arms, quickly entered the boudoir, turning the key after her.” Later, a melancholy chevalier des Grieux meets Manon at the home of another one of her lovers and after “she went alone into her boudoir. I very soon followed her, and then I found her in a flood of tears.”⁴⁰ Relying on the sensationalization of the invasion of female privacy, the boudoir represented both a woman’s private sanctuary, a place where she could turn the key behind her and cry, as well as the curb of the male dominion. Penetrating Manon’s boudoir meant access to her most intimate self: it was the extreme end of female privacy.

In his libertine novel *Le Sopha* (*The Sofa*, 1742), Crébillon fils tells the story of the soul of an Oriental prince condemned to inhabit a series of seven sofas until two virgin lovers consummated virtuous love upon the sofa he “inhabited,” after which time he would be reincarnated in a human body. In one scenario, a woman declared that the sofa in her boudoir was for religious reading and pious meditation, but this sofa’s

⁴⁰ *Manon Lescaut*, from the French of the Abbé Prévost (London: George Routledge and Sons, 1886), 55, 117. *Manon Lescaut* was banned in France upon its publication in 1731.

sumptuous pink upholstery with silver trimmings suggests to the man who inhabited it that it did not serve such solemn purposes. After reading only a few lines from a religious book, the woman switched to reading an erotic book pulled from a secret cupboard. The episode ends after her husband discovers her making love to a priest on the sofa.⁴¹ The sofa served as a central feature of the boudoir, often placed in a niche or alcove, and its lack of prescribed function and posture (unlike an armchair or a stool which left no confusion about personal space and posture) implied its use for pleasure and comfort.⁴²

Among the many other eighteenth-century French stories that privileged the licentiousness of the boudoir was Jean-François de Bastide's *La petite maison* (*The Little House*, 1753). In his short story, Bastide described in great detail a boudoir in the home of a marquis who bet a young woman that she would not be able to resist him once she visited his home. The young woman almost entered a trance because she was so seduced by the sumptuousness of the boudoir:

All the walls were hung with mirrors, and the joints of the latter were covered with artificial trees carved with great skill into leafy patterns... They were strewn with flowers and hung with chandeliers, the candles of which provided a graduated light because of the cunning disposition, at the end of the room, of gauze hangings, either tightly stretched or hanging loose over the mirrors. This artifice was so successful that one could imagine oneself in a natural wood, illuminated by the forces of art.⁴³

⁴¹ Crébillon fils, "Le Sopha, conte moral" in *Collection Complète des Œuvres de M. de Crébillon le Fils* (London, 1772), vol. III, 25-35.

⁴² For more on the colonialist narrative of the sofa, see Gülen Çevik, "Boudoirs and Harems: The Seductive Power of *Sophas*" (PhD diss., University of Cincinnati, 2019), 72-78. See also Rori Bloom, "Un Sopha rose brodé d'argent": Crébillon 'fils' and the Rococo," *The Eighteenth Century* 51, no. 1 (2010): 87-102.

⁴³ Jean-François de Bastide, *La petite maison* (Paris, 1879), 14-15. According to the preface of this nineteenth-century edition, Bastide's story was first published in the *Journal oeconomique* in 1753 or 1754 and was reprinted in the *Nouveau spectateur*, vol. 2 (1758-59) before appearing in Bastide's collected *Contes* (Paris, 1763). Quoted in Lilley, "Name of the Boudoir," 197.

After a decadent meal, the marquis ushered his female guest into yet another boudoir and this one proved irresistible. The young woman “trembled, became confused, sighed, and lost the wager.” The association of the boudoir with seduction in Bastide’s narrative was so powerful that the young woman did not even stop to consider whose boudoir had seduced her.⁴⁴ The imagery created by authors such as Bastide promoted the boudoir as a dream-like Rococo space outfitted with mirrors, candles, artificial trees, the scents of various flowers, and fabric hangings in such a way that occupants entered into a daze. The authentic architectural walls visually dissolved behind decoration and ornament. It was seduction by design.

In the second half of the eighteenth century, the boudoir peppered not only French novels, journals, newspapers, but also homes as a woman’s luxurious refuge, a place for illicit sex, and a site of seduction.⁴⁵ In 1755, the word boudoir appeared for the first time in the *Mercure de France*, which carried all the news that would interest the French court.⁴⁶ French writer Louis-Sébastien Mercier put it in his *Tableaux de Paris* (1781-9):

Two hundred years ago no one could have visualized the hidden secret stairs, the little unsuspected cabinets, the false doors which conceal the true exits, the floors which can be made to rise and fall, and the labyrinths in which one can hide and put off inquisitive servants while indulging one’s tastes—a way out (opening into the garderobe of the next-door house) hidden from everyone, except those in the know, but designed to foster the mysteries of love, and sometimes those of politics.⁴⁷

⁴⁴ Bastide, *La petite maison*, 46. “Mélite frémit, se troubla, soupira, et perdit la gageure.” Quoted in Lilley, “Name of the Boudoir,” 198.

⁴⁵ Lilley, “The Name of the Boudoir,” 194. Lilley claims that the boudoir can be identified as a distinct room in architectural plans and inventories in France beginning in the 1760s.

⁴⁶ Fiske Kimball, *The Creation of the Rococo* (Philadelphia: Philadelphia Museum of Art, 1943), 188n.

⁴⁷ Louis-Sébastien Mercier, *Les Tableaux de Paris* (Amsterdam, 1783), II, 108. Quoted in Girouard, *Life in the French Country House*, 148-149.

By the end of the 1780s, Jean-François Féraud noted in his dictionary, “[c]e mot est aujourd'hui fort à la mode” (“This word is very fashionable today”).⁴⁸ In his 1780 treatise, French architect Le Camus de Mézières declared the dramatic atmosphere of the boudoir: “the boudoir is regarded as the abode of sensual delight, where plans may be meditated and natural inclinations followed.”⁴⁹

The extraordinarily popular *Les liaisons dangereuses* (*Dangerous Liaisons*, 1782) by Choderlos de Laclos lifted the veil on the sexual intrigue of the boudoir for a wide transatlantic readership in the eighteenth century.⁵⁰ An epistolary novel, it tells the story of an unscrupulous war between two former lovers: the masterful seducer the vicomte de Valmont and the marquise de Merteuil, who secretly seeks vengeance for Valmont's earlier rejection of her. In a conspiratorial game of lures and letters, sexual conquests serve as wins in their competition of score setting and military strategizing. The boudoir is their luxurious indoor battlefield. Through her two boudoirs, the marquise de Merteuil delights in the erotics of her private space and reading. She writes letters and reads letters as well as novels such as Crébillon's *Le Sopha* in her boudoir. The marquise consummates her trysts by writing letters to Valmont from her boudoir. *Les liaisons dangereuses* revealed the vanity inherent in the boudoir, but also underscored its double narrative of seduction. Inspired by reading libertine novels, fictional women such as the

⁴⁸ Jean-François Féraud, *Dictionnaire critique de la langue française* (1787-1788)

⁴⁹ Nicolas Le Camus de Mézières, *Le Génie de l'architecture* (Paris, 1780). Quoted in Jean Starobinski, *The Invention of Liberty*, trans. Bernard C. Swift (Geneva, 1964), 56.

⁵⁰ First published in Paris 1782, *Les liaisons dangereuses* was an immediate success. The first English translation was published anonymously in London in 1784 under the title *Dangerous Connections*.

marquise were able to seduce others in the boudoir, which in turn inspired real women to imitate their fictional machinations.⁵¹

The marquis de Sade created the long-lasting, licentious reputation of the boudoir with his book *La philosophie dans le boudoir* (1795) (Figure 15). Written as a dialogue, the novel narrates the story of a fifteen-year-old modest and obedient virgin Eugénie who is given a sexual “education” by two libertines obsessed with eighteenth-century sexual taboos such as incest, sodomy, adultery, homosexuality, rape, and, of course, sadism. Sade gives readers a brief description of the boudoir around which his novel revolves: it is a “tiny room, very narrow cabinet, near the room one inhabits.” His descriptions of the sexual acts that took place there were anything but brief. From this moment on, the novel takes place exclusively in the “boudoir délicieux” (“delightful boudoir”) belonging to Madame de Saint-Ange, who leads a two-day course in libertinage for the young Eugénie with another libertine Dolmancé.⁵² In Sade’s hands, the boudoir functions as a liminal space connecting discussion and action and the narrative oscillates between a philosophical dissertation of libertinage, atheism, and morality and the physical exploration of those sexual precepts between the three main characters. Sade inserts an aside to readers in italics: “*it should be noted that ejaculations always go on during the*

⁵¹ Marine Ganofsky, “Illustrating Narrative Seduction: The Example of Choderlos de Laclos’s *Les Liaisons Dangereuses* in the Illustrated Edition of 1796,” *Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies* 38, no. 1 (2015): 1-27. Ganofsky studies the engravings of the 1796 edition of *Les Liaisons Dangereuses* as insights into contemporaneous conceptualizations of novel-reading, the dialogue between reader and author, and how narrative seduction was believed to operate during the French Enlightenment.

⁵² Marquis de Sade, *La Philosophie dans le boudoir* (Paris: Gallimard, 1998), 27. “Petit réduit, cabinet fort étroit, auprès de la chambre qu’on habite.” “Troisième dialogue. *La scène est dans un boudoir délicieux.*” All translations are by the author, unless otherwise stated.

dialogue.”⁵³ In these short extracts, Sade firmly yoked the boudoir with libertinism, luxury, violent sex, aristocratic intrigue, feminine control, and pleasure at all costs.

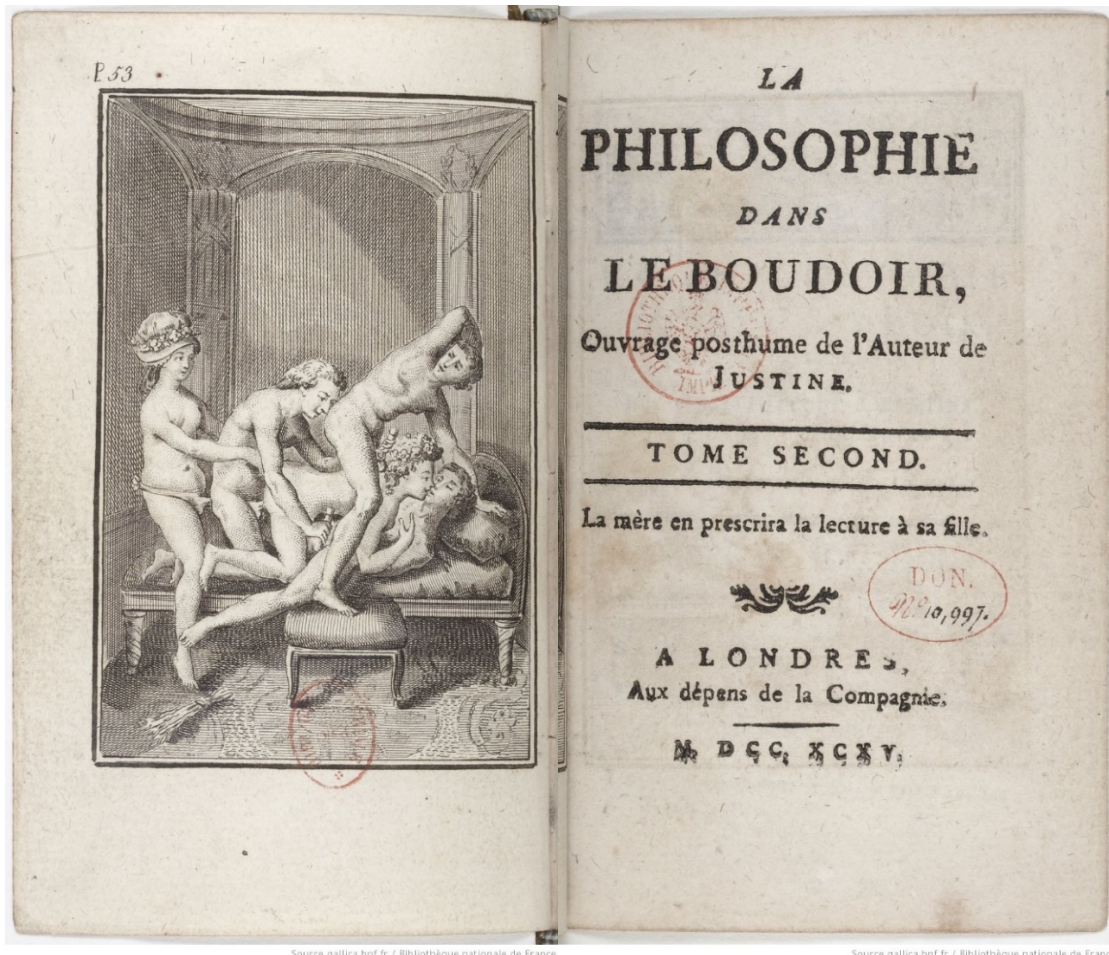


Figure 15: Marquis de Sade, *La Philosophie dans le boudoir*, title page and verso, 1795. Département Réserve des livres rares, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris.

⁵³ Sade, *La Philosophie dans le boudoir*, 119. “il faut observer que les pollutions vont toujours pendant le dialogue.”

Translating Privacy and Pleasure: The American Boudoir

Instances of architectural boudoirs built in American homes in the eighteenth century are few and far between. At least one mid-nineteenth century observer interpreted a room in Mansion House built in the 1780s in Philadelphia as Anne Willing Bingham's boudoir. A nephew of Anne Bingham, he reminisced in the 1860s: "The Drawing-rooms & Parlour with Mrs Bingham's Boudoir & State Bed-chamber, occupied the second floor, to which you ascended by a broad stone staircase."⁵⁴ Other wealthy Americans perhaps converted a small bedroom, closet, or dressing room adjacent to a bedroom into a boudoir for the lady of the house. Still, more women, I propose, who might not have had private rooms in their homes dedicated to their pleasure and privacy, crafted boudoirs through literacy. Not every boudoir required chandeliers and a sofa. Like Annis Boudinot Stockton, some elite American women carved out private space and time for themselves defined not by gilded mirrors and illicit sex, but by reading and writing, perhaps in front of a "solitary fire."⁵⁵ The boudoir was a designated retreat for women from the continuous demands of aristocratic sociability, a space where she could craft an interiority based on personal pleasure, and a privileged opportunity for privacy and literacy.

How could affluent and educated American women such as Annis Boudinot Stockton have come to envisage the precepts of the French boudoir at the end of the eighteenth century? Print culture provides at least part of the answer. Some elite

⁵⁴ Fisher, *Recollections*, 200. The architect of Mansion House was John Plaw (1745-1820) and the house was modeled on an expanded version of Hertford House, the 4th Duke of Manchester's London townhouse (built 1776-1788). Mansion House was razed circa 1850.

⁵⁵ Stockton, "Letter to Julia Stockton Rush," in *Transatlantic Feminisms in the Age of Revolutions*, 288.

American women probably read about the boudoir in imported French libertine texts made available to them by way of direct shipments from overseas acquaintances. Other women might have purchased imported French books or their English translations in bookstores or borrowed them from a library or friend. Some commercially successful English translations of French books were reprinted by American publishers who sold those editions in bookstores and printing shops.⁵⁶

Margaret Izard Manigault was just one of many elite American women who received imported books in English and French as gifts from European friends, sometimes delivered personally by those visiting the United States, other times shipped directly to her upon request.⁵⁷ For several years in the 1790s and early 1800s, Manigault recorded in her diary not only which books she read, but also what she thought of them and often how she had acquired them. In January 1794, Manigault remarked that one afternoon at home her mother picked up the book that she had been reading, *The Dean of Coleraine* (1735-1740) by the Abbé Prévost, author of the better-known *Manon Lescaut* (1731).⁵⁸ A few months later, Manigault recorded a visit to the New York Society Library where she borrowed *Caliste, ou lettres écrites de Lausanne* by Isabelle de Charrière, probably using her father's library account.⁵⁹

⁵⁶ On domestic reprints, see Lyons, *Sex Among the Rabble*, 145.

⁵⁷ Margaret Izard Manigault (1768-1824) was the eldest daughter of Ralph Izard (1741/42-1804), a U.S. Senator from South Carolina and President pro tempore of the Senate in 1794, and his niece Alice De Lancey (1745-1832). The young Margaret Izard spent most of her childhood in France and England, in addition to a few months in Brussels. She returned to the United States in 1783 and married Gabriel Manigault (1758-1809) in 1785.

⁵⁸ Margaret Izard Manigault papers (Accession 0502), diary, January 8, 1794. Hagley Museum and Library, Wilmington, DE. Hereafter cited as Manigault diary. According to the NYSL circulation records, Sarah Livingston borrowed *The Dean of Coleraine* by the Abbé Prévost in April 1792.

⁵⁹ Manigault diary, April 19, 1794. Born in the Netherlands, Isabelle de Charrière (1740-1805) was an Enlightenment novelist, poet, and writer who lived the second half of her life in Switzerland. NYSL records

During the summer of 1805, Manigault read a number of French books and paid particular attention in her diary to recording their titles and sometimes added a few sentences reflecting her opinions. In May, Marshal of the French Empire Jean-de-Dieu Soult, a famous military leader, and his wife sent a box of French books, millinery, and sheet music to Manigault.⁶⁰ Another French friend who was “very well informed, & quite au courant of the new publications in Paris” lent Manigault a book by Stéphanie Félicité, comtesse de Genlis that had been published in France just the year prior.⁶¹ In June, she had received another shipment of recently-published books from France and proclaimed, “They are a perfect treasure.”⁶² From this shipment she read *Elmonde, ou la fille de l’hospice* (1805), *Manuel du voyageur en Suisse* (1805), and the memoirs of Jean-François Marmontel (1800).⁶³

Manigault often distinguished what she read with her children or family aloud (“we” in her diary) and what she read by herself, alone, for pleasure, and often in French. In early August 1805, the Manigaults purchased David Hume’s *History of England* (1754-61) in twenty-one volumes for \$24 in New York and began it with their children

for 1794 have been lost so it is impossible to trace all the books that Manigault might have borrowed from the library. Her father Ralph Izard had a NYSL account but surviving records only show that he checked out one magazine in 1789.

⁶⁰ Manigault diary, May 27, 1805. Marshal Soult later served as the Prime Minister of France three times in the 1830s and 1840s.

⁶¹ Manigault diary, May 27, 1805. Stéphanie Félicité, comtesse de Genlis (1746-1830) was a French writer and tutor to the children of the duc d’Orléans. Her husband and the duc d’Orléans were both guillotined in 1793.

⁶² Manigault diary, June 12, 1805.

⁶³ Manigault diary, June 22, 1805; July 4, 1805; and July 21, 1805. Jean-François Marmontel (1723-1799) was a French historian, writer, and a member of the Encyclopédiste movement.

the next day “with a determination to read with great vigor & perseverance.”⁶⁴ For Manigault, this reading was work. Privately, in time that she carved out for herself that summer, she read Madame de Staël’s account of her father Jacques Necker’s life shortly after his death in 1804. Necker had been finance manager for King Louis XVI and his daughter was one of Napoleon’s principal opponents. At first opposed to Madame de Staël’s political opinions, Manigault discovered a tender humanity in her relationships with her father and her children to which she could relate: “I am exceedingly pleased with her sentiments, & expressions of love & admiration” for her family.⁶⁵ This, I argue, was a boudoir for Manigault—and a specifically French one, too. Even with a detailed multi-volume diary spanning a decade, Manigault never recorded where she read her French books, beyond “at home.” But the time that she prioritized for reading Madame de Staël’s and so many other books in French, reading that she did for herself in addition to the reading that she did for her family, constituted a quest for intellectual pleasure and female individualism inspired by the privileges of the French boudoir. It also provided space and time for her to change from a reader initially hostile to an author’s political reputation to a reader sympathetic to an author’s role as a daughter and mother. Manigault’s boudoir nurtured female intellectual empowerment. Once a place where French women could change their clothes, the American boudoir was a place where women could change their minds.

⁶⁴ Manigault diary, August 7, 1805.

⁶⁵ Manigault diary, August 25, 1805. Germaine de Staël was a French-Swiss writer, literary and political theorist, and salonnière. She supported the abolition of the French monarchy and lived in exile in Switzerland for a time in the 1790s. Many regarded her to be the personal enemy of Napoleon, who banished her from Paris in 1803.

Manigault was just one of many female readers of French books in the early United States who perhaps maintained similar reading habits (reading separate books for her family and for herself) but not a diary that recorded them. The circulation records of the New York Society Library (NYSL) from 1789 to 1805, when the library shared Federal Hall with the first Congress, offer invaluable data for the reading habits of elite white readers in New York.⁶⁶ In both French and English, *Les liaisons dangereuses* and its representations of the libertine boudoir made it across the Atlantic and onto American bookshelves less than a decade after its original publication in Paris in 1782. In early 1791, the library acquired the 1782 Paris edition of *Les liaisons dangereuses* and the 1784 London edition in translation. During the next decade, at least nine library account holders checked out the French edition of *Les liaisons dangereuses* (8 checkouts for volume 1; 9 checkouts for volume 2) (Figure 16). Thirty-four account holders checked out the English translation, titled *Dangerous Connections* (35 checkouts for volume 1; 24 checkouts for volume 2) (Figure 17). The number of checkouts for the London edition far outstripped the average number of checkouts per book in the library for the years 1791 (the year the NYSL purchased the book) and 1801. The vast majority of account holders borrowed these books for less than seven days.⁶⁷

⁶⁶ For more on the lending records of the New York Society Library in the eighteenth century, see Nina Root, "The Eighteenth-Century Society Library," Our Collection, The New York Society Library, <https://www.nysoclib.org/collection/eighteenth-century-society-library>. The New York Society founded a library in 1754 and it received a charter from King George III in 1772. British soldiers looted the library during the occupation of New York City and the few books that remained in their collection after the war had been secretly stored in St. Paul's Chapel in lower Manhattan. The NYSL reopened in its previous location in City Hall in 1789, one floor above the new American Congress. The library moved to its own building at 33 Nassau Street in 1795. The City Readers project has fully digitized and transcribed circulation records from two charging ledgers, 1789-1792 and 1799-1805. Records from 1793-1799 have been lost.

⁶⁷ "*Les liaisons dangereuses*" and "*Dangerous Connections*," City Readers: Digital Historic Collections at the New York Society Library.

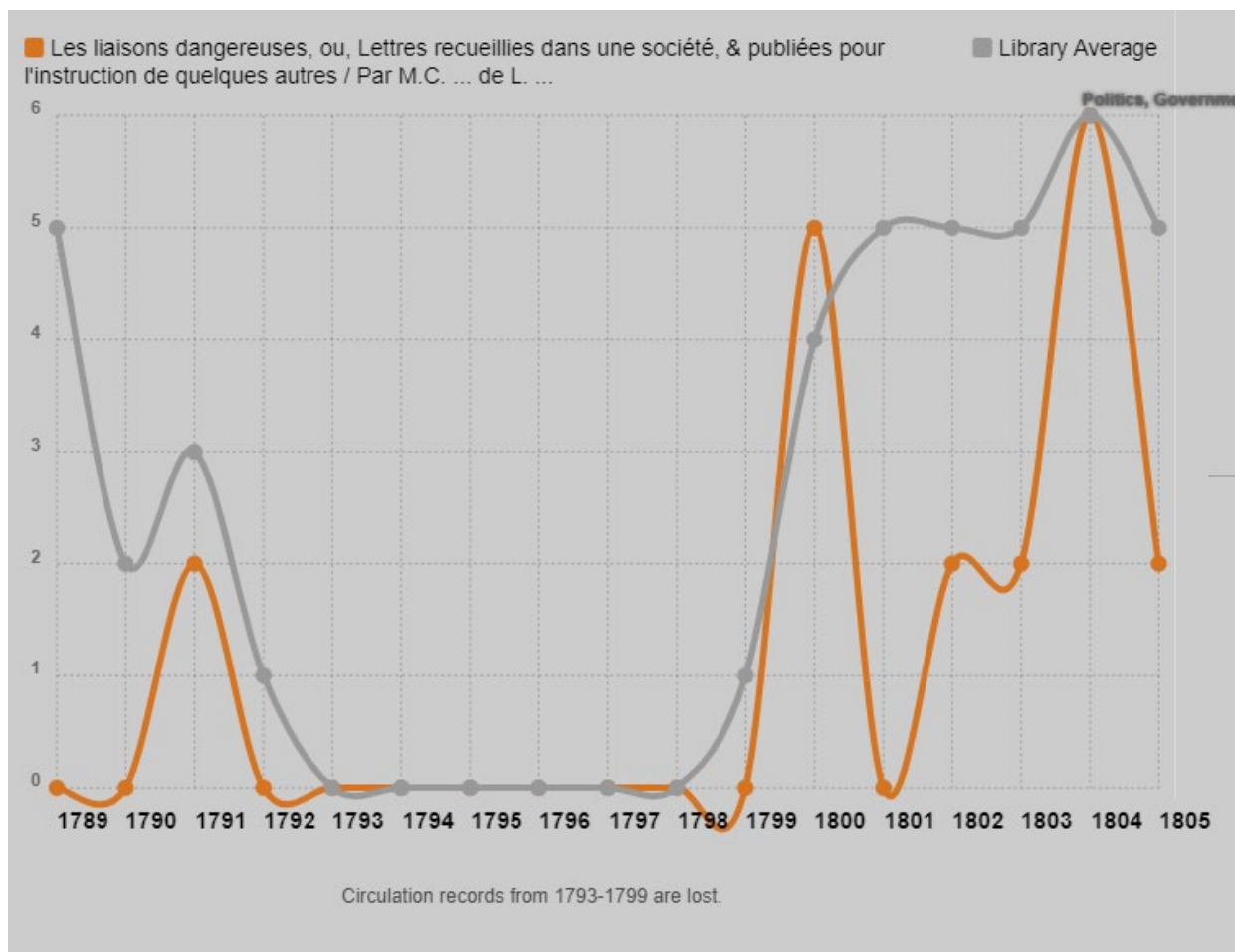


Figure 16: Number of checkouts annually for *Les liaisons dangereuses, ou, Lettres recueillies dans une société, & publiées pour l'instruction de quelques autres* / Par M.C. ... de L. ... (Paris: Chez Durand neveu, 1782). City Readers: Digital Historic Collections at the New York Society Library, New York, NY.

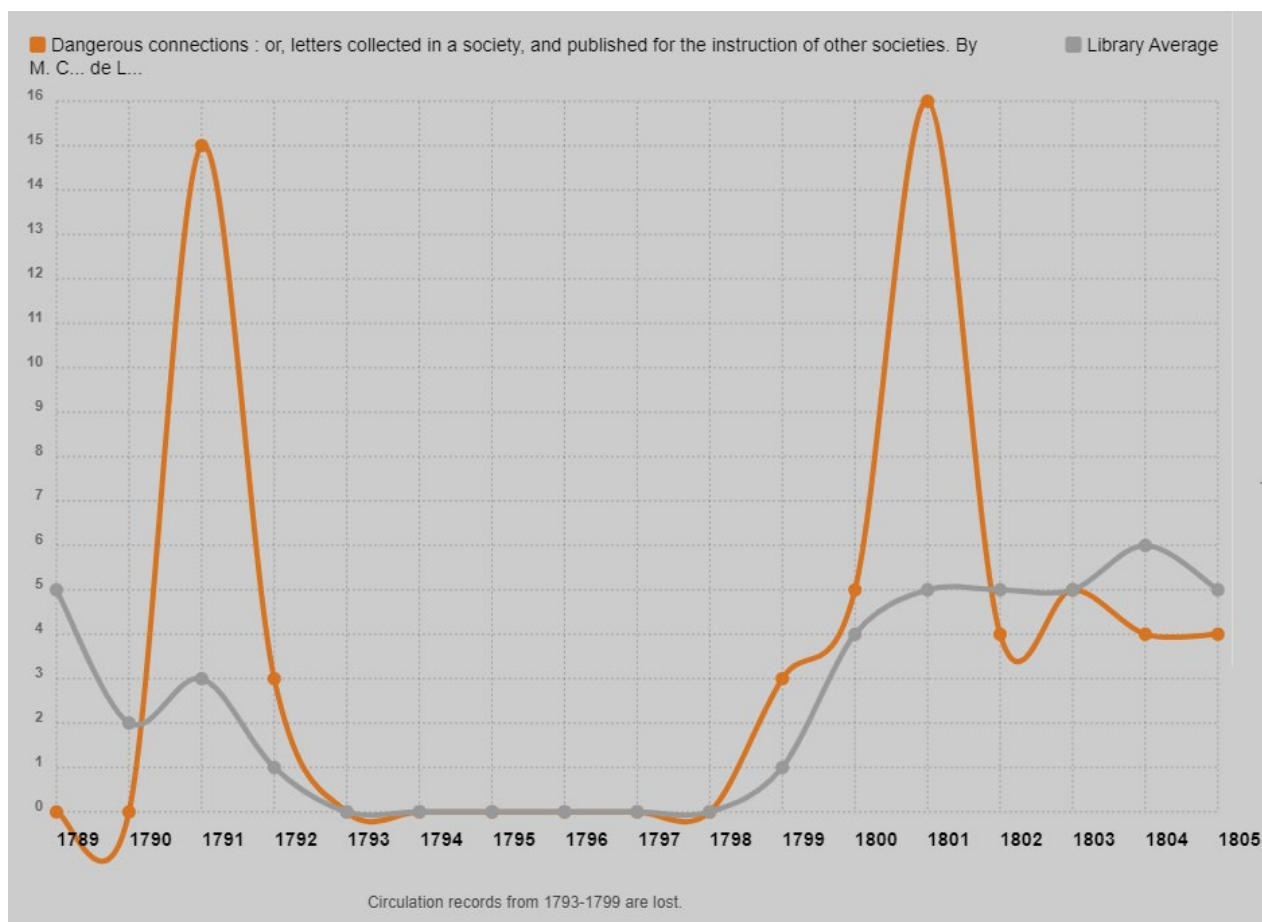


Figure 17: Number of checkouts annually for *Dangerous connections: or, letters collected in a society, and published for the instruction of other societies* by M. C... de L... (London: Printed for T. Hookham, 1784). City Readers: Digital Historic Collections at the New York Society Library, New York, NY.

This is only a partial picture of readership for many reasons. First, NYSL circulation records from 1793-1799 have been lost. It is reasonable to presume that many more New Yorkers checked out *Les liaisons dangereuses* during those six years in the mid-1790s. Second, checking out a book from a library is not the same as reading it and multiple scenarios were possible after a book left a library. Because a library account was in one person's name did not mean that the account holder was the exclusive reader of the books borrowed. Maybe a book checked out in a man's name, for example, was actually

read by his wife or another member of the household. Maybe one person read the book aloud to someone else or a room of listeners, a common eighteenth-century practice.

Maybe no one read the book while it was checked out. In her study of the French-language reading practices at the NYSL, Jennifer Furlong explained that multi-volume works were often taken out of the library for one or two days and then returned. Even a fervent reader could only read a portion of a multi-volume book in two days, if at all.⁶⁸

Only 57 of the 2,751 members of the NYSL, about two percent, were women. They represent a small but extremely active slice of the library's reading demographic.⁶⁹ Educators, philanthropists, and merchants, these women read widely and voraciously, with circulation numbers that often far exceeded library averages. Several women borrowed *Les liaisons dangereuses* in English or in French. Catharine Bradford, who served as the proprietor of the Old Coffee-House after her husband's death in the mid-1780s, checked out seventy-two titles from the NYSL, among them *Dangerous Connections* (the English translation of *Les liaisons dangereuses*) for six days in August 1791. In 1803, Catharine Ladley Valentine was the only other NYSL account holder to borrow Laclos' libertine novel and she returned both volume one and volume two the next day. New York salonnière Henrietta Marie Colden was the only woman who borrowed the French edition of *Les liaisons dangereuses* in 1802. Though few women

⁶⁸ Jennifer Furlong, "Reading French in Early Nineteenth-Century New York," *Mémoires du livre/ Studies in Book Culture* 11, no. 1 (2019): 6-7.

⁶⁹ Thomas Bradford's circulating library in pre-Revolutionary Philadelphia tells a different story. The patron lending list for 1771-1772 reveals that more than 40 percent of patrons were women and many of them were young. Novels, both refined and less refined, telling stories of the sexual pursuit of young women were popular choices of eighteenth-century readers. Bradford stocked several sexually suggestive titles such as *Nunery for Coquets*, *Fair Adulteress*, and *Masquerade*. Lyons, *Sex Among the Rabble*, 146-151.

borrowed *Les liaisons dangereuses* from NYSL library accounts in their own names, that did not exclude many more women from reading it. American readers shared books among household members, friends, family, and neighbors. The wealthiest readers purchased European editions directly through booksellers or requested books from friends and family in Europe. The ledgers of the NYSL offer a tiny but precious glimpse at the readership of Laclos and his eroticized rendition of the boudoir in the early American republic.

Beyond novels, American readers encountered the boudoir in articles in American newspapers that inextricably tied the boudoir to politically active women of the French Revolution. On November 23, 1795, a newspaper in Philadelphia reprinted an article from the *Journal de l'Opposition* in Paris about the making of decrees in the National Convention. The one-paragraph article professed a change in women's political participation after 9 Thermidor (or July 27, 1794), the ousting of Robespierre and the end of the Reign of Terror. The influence of the "pious dames" who served as "indefatigable gossips" under the leadership of Robespierre was over but, the article proclaimed, "nevertheless we are under the government of women." No longer shouting from the galleries of government halls, women now beseeched men for political projects, solicited favors, and denounced decrees "in a tone so sweet" and "a tone so overwhelming that it is impossible not to yield." "How many decrees were dictated by the galleries under Robespierre!" the journal's editor exclaimed. "How many projects are enforced by the sighs in the boudoir, under Tallien, Chenier, Louvet, &c."⁷⁰ Women influenced the

⁷⁰ "Foreign Intelligence," *Gazette of the United States* (Philadelphia, PA), Nov. 23, 1795.

The Thermadorian Reaction is the common term in the historiography of the French Revolution for the period between the ousting of Robespierre on 9 Thermidor II (or 27 July 1794), his execution the following

leaders of the French Revolution after Robespierre, the journal's editor implied, not by shouting at them in the halls of the assemblies but by whispering in their ears from their boudoirs. The boudoir was the realm of women's power, the place from where she generated her action, the extreme end of the private driving the public. Two other newspapers in Boston and one in Charleston reprinted this article, spreading the idea of the boudoir to empower women in the American imagination along the east coast.⁷¹

By the twilight of the eighteenth century in the United States, the boudoir represented a place where secrets were exchanged, clandestine information was shared, and women exerted political sway. In 1797, the *Philadelphia Gazette* printed a letter extracted from a Parisian newspaper attacking Madame de Staël as a “celebrity of crimes and ridicule,” an antipatriotic hedonist who had amassed “in the stead of her husband, a retinue of would be Philosophers.” The author proclaimed that “Her “*Boudoir*” (Cabinet

day, and the inauguration of the French Directory on 1 November 1795. It marked the end of the Reign of Terror.

Pierre-François R  al (1757-1834) was the editor of the *Journal de l'Opposition*. The Biblioth  que nationale de France holds seven issues published between 1795 and 1796. R  al was a revolutionary member of the Jacobin Club, arrested in March 1794, and saved by the 9 Thermidor.

Jean-Lambert Tallien (1767-1820) was a member of the National Convention, notorious for his participation in the September Massacres in 1792 and establishing the Terror in the French provinces, especially his bloody affinity for “feeding the guillotine” in Bordeaux. Tallien became more lenient after his marriage to Th  r  sa Cabarr  s and became a leading Thermidorian (rather than Jacobin), suppressing the Revolutionary Tribunal and the Jacobin Club. He had embodied the Terror, then made a complete transformation to right-wing leader and campaigner for free speech by 1795.

Andr   Marie Ch  nier (1762-1794) was a French poet and orator who was guillotined in July 1794 at age 31.

Jean-Baptiste Louvet de Couvrai (1760-1797) was a French novelist, playwright, and politician. He was a radical revolutionary attached to the Girondists and a member of the Jacobin Club.

⁷¹ “Foreign Intelligence,” *Columbian Centinel* (Boston, MA), Dec. 5, 1795. “London, Sept. 15,” *The Courier* (Boston, MA), Dec. 5, 1795. “London, September 15,” *City Gazette & Daily Advertiser* (Charleston, SC), Dec. 11, 1795.

of Love) ... is a source of political intrigues, and a workshop of conspiracy.”⁷² This was where Staël, according to the author, seduced men privately and then deceived them into her political machinations. The boudoir was unquestionably the place in which a political woman could scheme by way of her sex and gender. This reference to the boudoir as a “Cabinet of Love” harkens back to its predecessor—the cabinet as a devout woman’s private space—but infused now with sex, eroticism, and seduction. Astute American newspaper readers elicited the meaning of the boudoir as a woman’s hidden enclave but also as a space from which she enacted her politics.

At the same time that the boudoir earned a political reputation among American newspaper readers, it was also solidified as a site of aristocratic privilege for women. In *A Residence in France* printed in New Jersey in 1798, an English woman spied an elderly French woman across the hall in a state of undress and continued to describe the “great indelicacy” of French women as an “in attractive [*sic*] part of the female national character.” She judged, “an English woman is as likely to be put to the blush in the *boudoir* of a Marquise, and in the shop of the *grisette*, which serves also for her dressing room.”⁷³ The same room had a different name for different women: a woman of lower class, the *grisette* (a young, often flirtatious working woman, from the French word *gris* for the cheap gray fabric of the dresses they usually wore) had a shop while a wealthy marquise kept a boudoir.

⁷² “Madame de Stael, Paris, July 26,” *Philadelphia Gazette and Universal Daily Advertiser* (Philadelphia, PA), Nov. 1, 1797.

⁷³ *A Residence in France, during the Years 1792, 1793, 1794 and 1795* (Elizabeth-town, NJ: Shepard Kollock, 1798), 45.

At the hand of one proud American writer, the boudoir morphed into a French den of iniquity.⁷⁴ In November 1798, a newspaper in New York and a newspaper in Philadelphia printed the same letter from “An American Solider” that featured the boudoir in a postscript: “On the originality of my Project, I may safely declare that it was neither gleaned from the rubbish of any Gallic minister’s *Bureau*, nor from the *Boudoir* of any royal concubine of France: I shall never be found to insult the chaste ear of an American public, with any *voluntary* allusion to those impure sources of wit or ribaldry.”⁷⁵ By invoking the boudoir of a French courtesan, the male author revealed two important aspects that contributed to American understandings of the boudoir. First, it was a specifically French place where a person could secret away or extract important information, as French ministers had clandestinely tried to manipulate American commissioners in France that year. Second, the boudoir was an “impure” place, it was indecent, coarse, and vulgar, and associated with sex and feminine seduction. The “American Soldier” equated the French boudoir with the “rubbish” from a French minister’s office, presumably the insulting demands made on the American commissioners by the French intermediaries W, X, Y, and Z. No honorable American man, the author implied, would stoop to such a level. The boudoir was popularly understood as place where wealthy men could be distracted, where privileged aristocrats

⁷⁴ Thomas M. Ray, “‘Not One Cent for Tribute’: The Public Addresses and American Popular Reaction to the XYZ Affair, 1798-1799,” *Journal of the Early Republic* 3, no. 4 (1983): 389-390. The XYZ Affair incited widespread anti-French sentiment after President John Adams released the coded dispatches from John Marshall (who was part of the delegation to France) to Congress and then to newspapers in April 1798.

⁷⁵ “For this Gazette, Project and Counter-Project,” *The New-York Gazette and General Advertiser* (New York, NY), Nov. 8, 1798. “The ‘Young Projector versus General Eustace, the American Soldier,’ from the New-York Gazette, Project and Counter-Project,” *The Philadelphia Gazette and Universal Daily Advertiser* (Philadelphia, PA), Nov. 10, 1798.

indulged in secret pleasures and luxuries, where the will floundered, and libidinal desires triumphed.

By the dawn of the nineteenth century, American reprints of European novels also made the boudoir available for a wider American readership. In Angès Maria Bennett's *The Beggar Girl and Her Benefactors*, reprinted in Philadelphia in 1801, the young beggar girl Rosa, while being led around an elegant mansion, "could not help stopping to indulge a sensation that had something more affecting in it than mere curiosity." She stood in the hallway and spied a woman reading in her boudoir. Later, a distressed woman savors her boudoir, "which was the only place where she would take nourishment; and indeed was so fond of it, that it was often with difficulty she could be prevailed on to sleep out of it."⁷⁶ The secrets of a woman's boudoir were so enticing that the young Rosa, who otherwise tiptoed around the opulent house hoping not to cause offense by her mere presence, her curtsies ignored by the men and women whishing around her, could not refuse their pull. The boudoir was the only place where a woman in anguish could receive nourishment for her mind and body.

After 1802, instances of the word boudoir occurring in American print culture surged. An 1803 article called "Madame Recamier's Bed," which appeared in

⁷⁶ (Angès Maria) Bennett, *The Beggar Girl and Her Benefactors* (Philadelphia: John Conrad & Co., 1801), 133, 228. The first edition was published in London in 1797. Predictably, by the end of the novel, Rosa turns out to be the long-lost daughter of a kind and sophisticated countess and the only real heiress to the titles and riches of two prominent aristocratic families.

Two other American printings of European novels mentioned the boudoir in similar contexts. First published in London, the epistolary novel *Helen of Glenross* by Anglo-Irish writer Harriet Martin, reprinted by francophone publisher Joseph Nancrède in Boston in 1802, cited the boudoir three times. Harriet Martin, *Helen of Glenross* (Boston: Joseph Nancrède, 1802). An 1802 New York printing of a memoir by German dramatist Augustus von Kotzebue described a boudoir in a Russian palace. Augustus von Kotzebue, *The Most Remarkable Year in the Life of Augustus Von Kotzebue* (New York: H. Caritat, 1802), 244. First published in London.

newspapers in New York, Georgetown, and Baltimore, described that the only place more intimate than a woman's bed was her boudoir.⁷⁷ In 1804, a satirical article mocking the complex codes and intricate designs of Parisian fashion listed in painstaking detail the standards required of the Parisian "beaux" to gain entrée into polite society. Once the criteria had been met, "you will be welcome in the parlour and *Cydalise* will admit you into her Boudoir." If not, according to the article, you would not be welcome in even the drawing room and ignored in society.⁷⁸ This article was reprinted at least six times in the following month across the northeast United States.⁷⁹ Access to a woman's boudoir, then, also signified access to the most fashionable and innermost circles of high society. One Boston newspaper column declared in 1805: "*A Lady's Boudoir* is now become a fashionable appendage to every mansion of first-rate distinction" and they "admit of being furnished in the most costly manner possible, as far as elegance combined with neatness will allow."⁸⁰ This description of the elegant interior design of a boudoir in a mansion underscored its most essential ingredient: affluence. It was a rich woman's space. The boudoir was the sum of architecture plus aristocracy.

⁷⁷ "From late London papers. Madame Recamier's Bed," *The Daily Advertiser* (New York, NY), April 21, 1803; "From a late London Paper. Madame Recamier's Bed," *The Olio* (Georgetown, District of Columbia), April 29, 1803; "From a late London Paper. Madame Recamier's Bed," *Republican; or, Anti-Democrat* (Baltimore, MD), May 6, 1803.

⁷⁸ *The Repertory* (Boston, MA), April 27, 1804.

⁷⁹ "The Paris Tippee," *Morning Chronicle* (New York, NY), May 2, 1804; *United States Gazette* (Philadelphia, PA), May 3, 1804; *Jenks' Portland Gazette* (Portland, ME), May 5, 1804; *The Connecticut Courant* (Hartford, CT), May 9, 1804; *Portsmouth Oracle* (Portsmouth, NH), May 19, 1804; *Oracle Post* (Portsmouth, NH), May 22, 1804.

⁸⁰ "Modern Furniture," *The Repertory* (Boston, MA), Mar. 19, 1805.

Behind the Mask: Authenticity in the American Boudoir

The American boudoir was as a space where women could transform. It was an educated, wealthy woman's private site for the pleasure of and devotion to herself. It was also a venue for performance, a stage upon which gender and femininity could be displayed or hid behind a curtain.⁸¹ I suggest a reading of the American boudoir as a space of female unmasking—a venue for masquerade—that could reveal a woman's identity with the potential to destabilize gender norms and patriarchal domestic regimes. Just as the masks worn by aristocrats to elite pageants and balls displayed the dynamic versatility of masking, women could realize their potential for the cultivation of an inner self through the boudoir. Creating a boudoir harnessed the energy of a masquerade for women to consider the mutability of their own character, challenging the expectations of eighteenth-century women held by their contemporaries and perhaps by ours.

While many eighteenth-century American women explored the possibilities of self-fashioning through clothing, cosmetics, and portraits, others staked their claims to identity, I argue, though interior space, both architecturally and mentally.⁸² Often as in the case of French boudoirs, the frivolity of a space could mask the serious pursuits of the

⁸¹ Denise Amy Baxter, introduction to *Architectural Space in Eighteenth-Century Europe: Constructing Identities and Interiors*, ed. Denise Amy Baxter and Meredith Martin (Burlington, Vermont: Ashgate, 2010), 1-3.

⁸² Kate Haulman, *The Politics of Fashion in Eighteenth-Century America* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2011). For the theatrical staging of a purportedly natural femininity, see Meredith Martin, *Dairy Queens: The Politics of Pastoral Architecture from Catherine de' Medici to Marie-Antoinette* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011). For more on masquerade portraits in colonial America, see Jennifer Van Horn, "The Mask of Civility: Portraits of Colonial Women and the Transatlantic Masquerade," *American Art* 23, no. 3 (2009): 8-35. For an account of a wartime masquerade in occupied Philadelphia, see David S. Shields and Fredrika J. Teute, "The Meschianza: Sum of All Fêtes," *Journal of the Early Republic* 35, no. 2 (2015): 185-214.

woman to whom it belonged.⁸³ The same can be said of American boudoirs, crafted not exclusively by chandeliers and sofas but by and of literacy. Women's elaborate masks—in other words, the artificial facades they wore in front of other people to hide their true selves—could be transformed by way of the boudoir and their cerebral guards could be let down. At least two instances of the boudoir as a site of unmasking of a woman's authentic identity and power existed in American print culture around 1800, both imported from across the Atlantic. I read the boudoir in these two texts as site that made possible female privacy and transformation in pursuit of female pleasure. It was always a site of desire, a desire for authenticity forged from a French place designed to be artificial.

An English Gothic novel by Eliza Parsons, *The Girl of the Mountains* (London, 1797; Philadelphia, 1801) rendered the boudoir as the seed of a transforming masquerade for women. First published in London in 1797, the Philadelphia reprint four years later of Parson's book suggests that a strong market existed among American readers who eagerly engaged with and purchased the London edition.⁸⁴ The story begins with a nobleman wrongly accused of murdering his wife, stripped of his fortune and family, and sentenced to life in prison. In the first pages of the second volume, the nobleman's daughter, under the false name of Miss Dupont, languishes in a Paris convent anxiously

⁸³ For the regulations of space through the rituals of etiquette and social performance in France, see: Katie Scott, *The Rococo Interior: Decoration and Social Spaces in Early Eighteenth-Century Paris* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996) and Mimi Hellman, "Furniture, Sociability, and the Work of Leisure in Eighteenth-Century France," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 32, no. 4 (1999): 415-445.

⁸⁴ *The Girl of the Mountains* first appeared in London in 1797 and was reprinted in Philadelphia in 1801. Writing for money to support her family in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, Parsons created fiction that was didactic and popular with the public, though she earned faint praise from literary critics. Best known for *The Castle of Wolfenbach* (1793) and *The Mysterious Warning* (1796), she wrote approximately sixty volumes in a seventeen-year career.

awaiting news of her father. After a week of confinement, a wealthy countess (and mistress of the king) whisks her out of the convent to a physician's house on the outskirts of Paris, in a plan to reunite the girl with her father. The girl enthusiastically greets the physician when the countess warns her, "in this place be silent; even walls have ears."⁸⁵ The countess, the physician, and the girl enter the safety of a small boudoir where an elderly woman brings coffee and food. Only after she had left the room, the countess and the physician hasten to action. He says to the girl, "My love, you must put on boy's clothes: as near as we could possibly judge we have provided for you: if they do not exactly fit, we have no time to be fastidious:—let us retire to dress." Miss Dupont describes the masking of her identity in the boudoir: "in a short time I was quite metamorphosed into a little boy; my eyes were blacked, and apparently enlarged, a coarse kind of paint put on my cheeks, and, upon the whole, I was so totally unlike myself, that, on looking in a glass, I started at my own figure."⁸⁶

In the middle of the novel and at the height of its suspense, the dangerous mission of helping Miss Dupont to be reunited with her father was made possible by the complete disguise of her identity in the boudoir. The process of hiding her identity so far as to hide even her gender was achievable by crossing the threshold of the boudoir, where the countess could carry out secret plans made between her and a man to whom she was not married. In the boudoir the countess realized her power to challenge the sentence passed down by the king and the hazard of crossing the king's mother. After the countess and the

⁸⁵ Eliza Parsons, *The Girl of the Mountains*, vol. II (Philadelphia: John Bioren and David Hogan, 1801), 4-5.

⁸⁶ Parsons, *The Girl of the Mountains*, vol. II, 5.

physician changed Miss Dupont to look like a boy, the young girl gazed upon herself in the mirror and experienced an almost out-of-body sentiment—“I was so totally unlike myself”—that she almost fails to recognize her own reflection. The reflective nature and liminality of the boudoir allowed for the creation of an alternate world. Like a masquerade, the boudoir could inscribe gendered and class-based identities but also question and destabilize such identities.

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Jemima Wilkinson was an unremarkable Quaker maiden from a small town in Rhode Island, born in the middle of the eighteenth century. After a grave illness in 1776, Wilkinson had, they later claimed, died and been reincarnated as a divine spirit sent to preach a message of apocalyptic destruction, a transformation so complete that they shunned both birth name and gendered pronouns.⁸⁷ By 1791, after about a decade of preaching, the Public Universal Friend Friend—as they styled themselves—and several hundred followers had settled in the Finger Lakes region of New York, calling it New Jerusalem. Like many religious pioneers across the American frontier, they faced disapproving outsiders.⁸⁸ One of those critics was, perhaps unsurprisingly, an exiled French aristocrat.

⁸⁷ The Friend was “not to be supposed of either sex” and acted in ways that reinforced the image of “being neither man nor woman.” *Freeman’s Journal* (Philadelphia, PA), Feb. 14, 1787. The Friend’s disciples used male pronouns in references to their holy prophet. I use singular “they” gender-neutral pronouns when referring to the Public Universal Friend.

⁸⁸ Susan Juster, “‘Neither male nor female’: Jemima Wilkinson and the Politics of Gender in Post-Revolutionary America,” in *Possible Pasts: Becoming Colonial in Early America*, ed. Robert Blair St. George (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000), 357. On the Public Universal Friend’s theology and struggles as a preacher, see Catherine A. Brekus, *Strangers and Pilgrims: Female Preaching in America, 1740-1845* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 80-97.

On his journey from Philadelphia to Niagara Falls in the summer of 1795, the duc de la Rochefoucauld-Liancourt and a travelling party of about ten men passed through the Friend's Jerusalem and recounted in detail his impressions of the settlement and the holy prophet who led it. The *National Aegis* of Worcester, Massachusetts published excerpts of his travel journal in 1801, sharing the opinions of the French aristocrat with American readers.⁸⁹ The duc and his companions "attended her meeting, which is held in her own house." The Friend wore "a white morning gown, and waistcoat, such as men wear, and a petticoat of the same colour." Reflecting on the sermon, Liancourt clearly disliked their theology: "She aims at simplicity, but there is somewhat of pedantic in her manner."⁹⁰

Liancourt disapproved of more than the Public Universal Friend's ministry; he denounced their entire project. The Friend lived closely with Rachel Malin, the prophet's lieutenant, a Philadelphia Quaker who was "entirely devoted to her." In addition, Liancourt noticed "Six or seven girls of different ages, but all young and handsome, wait upon her." These followers planted fields and tended gardens for the Friend while neglecting their own business. The young devotees of the Friend were, in Liancourt's words, the "dupes of her self-interested policy."⁹¹ Liancourt suspected that Jerusalem had become a vanity project of the Friend, rather than one intended to impede the apocalypse.

Liancourt found great discrepancies between the Friend's preaching of meagerness and voluntary impoverishment and the manner in which they lived. The

⁸⁹ "Anecdotes of Jemima Wilkinson, from the Duke De La Rochefoucault's *Travels in North America*," *National Aegis* (Worcester, MA), Dec. 30, 1801.

⁹⁰ Duke de la Rochefoucauld-Liancourt, *Travels through the United States of North America, the Country of the Iroquois, and Upper Canada, in the Years 1795, 1796, and 1797*, vol. 1 (London: T. Gillet, 1800), 201-206. Entry for June 6, 1795. An earlier edition was printed by R. Phillips in 1799.

⁹¹ Rochefoucauld-Liancourt, *Travels*, 207-208.

Friend, according to Liancourt, “inculcates, as her leading tenet, poverty, and resignation of all earthly possessions.” The house, “though built only of the trunks of trees, is extremely pretty and commodious. Her room is exquisitely neat; and resembles more the *boudoir* of a fine lady, than the cell of a nun. It contains a looking-glass, a clock, an arm-chair, a good bed, a warming-pan, and a silver saucer.”⁹² The boudoir was the key to discovering the Friend’s true identity for Liancourt. Once he had seen the luxuries they kept hidden in the boudoir, Liancourt felt confident that he had uncovered their true nature. Keeping a boudoir revealed the great hypocrisy behind their preaching and mission. It was the linchpin that once pulled unraveled Friend’s religious project and identity: because they secretly sought personal pleasure and domestic luxuries such as mirrors, silver, and a clock, the Friend’s public ministry based on poverty and fear of impending doom was a hoax. For sure, their authentic desires rested in the boudoir and everything else was simply an act, a mask for outsiders.

Overwhelmingly adverse to the Society of Universal Friends, Liancourt found the Friend’s “hypocrisy may be traced in all her discourses, action, and conduct, and even in the very many in which she manages her countenance.” For Liancourt, the boudoir betrayed the Friend’s secrets. Rather than living in voluntary poverty, the Friend harbored luxuries in their boudoir. Rather than maintaining a meager subsistence, the Friend and their followers indulged in delicious and rich meals, one of the best Liancourt claimed he had eaten since he had left Philadelphia weeks earlier. The Friend was, according to Liancourt, a “bad actress, whose pretended sanctity only inspired us with contempt and disgust.” He summed up his impressions of the Friend: “Her speeches are so strongly

⁹² Rochefoucauld-Liancourt, *Travels*, 205.

contradicted by the tenor of her actions” that “we were actually struck with abhorrence of her duplicity and hypocrisy.”⁹³

It was the social implications of the Friend’s ministry that most likely irked Liancourt. The Friend was outwardly a genderless patriarch in men’s clerical garb and a prophet with no formal theological training who advanced a general disregard for markers of rank and class. Yet the hidden gentility the Friend kept in their boudoir (a mirror, clock, silver) revealed, in Liancourt’s mind, the Friend’s corrupt nature. Their goal, in the French aristocrat’s words, was “to live independent, in a decent, plentiful, and even elegant manner.”⁹⁴ The perhaps imported luxuries kept in the Friend’s private boudoir resonated with contemporary fears concerning insatiable female desires for foreign fashions and expensive goods and the artificial means by which women enhanced their figures.⁹⁵ Stays, bishop sleeves, powders, perfumes, wigs, face paint, and other innovations in fashion hid—or worse deformed—women’s natural figures. Deception of appearance in many cases equaled moral turpitude.

The Public Universal Friend openly challenged constructs of manhood and womanhood in the early republic: they wielded spiritual authority, dressed much like a man, spoke in public, and gained use of a sizable estate in northwestern New York. By

⁹³ Rochefoucauld-Liancourt, *Travels*, 206, 210-211.

⁹⁴ Rochefoucauld-Liancourt, *Travels*, 211.

⁹⁵ Carroll Smith-Rosenberg has argued that the image of the extravagant white middle-class female consumer was central to the construction of citizenship in the early republic. Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, “Dis-Covering the Subject of the ‘Great Constitutional Discussion,’ 1786-1789,” *Journal of American History* 79, no. 3 (1992): 841-873.

advocating for a celibate society, the Friend also eschewed traditional roles of wife and mother.⁹⁶

Liancourt was not the only person to question the Friend's authenticity as a prophet. The Friend invited scorn and ridicule constantly from many American audiences. Crowds of American listeners struggled to understand the performative aspects of the Friend's gender identity alongside their theatrical preaching. Public hostility generally stemmed from reactions to the artifice of the Friend's external appearance (long black clerical robes and a plain black hat) rather than their internal transformation (claims to divine incarnation).⁹⁷ Whatever their intentions, the Friend's ministry and ambiguously gendered persona represented, in Susan Juster's words, "a daring, if ultimately, futile attempt to reframe the democratic promises of the revolutionary moment in the language of patriarchal authority." The Friend represented "everything the new republic most detested and feared."⁹⁸ Skeptical from the beginning of their messianic project, Liancourt felt that he had discovered the Friend's true identity under their robes, after their sermon, behind their religious theater, in their boudoir. The Friend's boudoir, in Liancourt's journal, revealed not only their true feminine gender identity but also their imposture and seductive schemes. The boudoir then was a

⁹⁶ By the early nineteenth century, the Society of Universal Friends had fallen into decline, accelerated by the Friend's death in 1819 and the Society's enforced celibacy.

⁹⁷ The resurrection of masculine power in the form of a prophet would become a hallmark of antebellum religious culture. Paul Johnson and Sean Wilentz, *The Kingdom of Matthias: A Story of Sex and Salvation in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).

⁹⁸ Susan Juster, "Neither male nor female," 371-373. Juster believes that we have no reason to suspect that the Friend was anything but sincere about their transformation and messianic ambitions.

convenient cultural shorthand by 1795 for private aristocratic femininity and women's power ventures.

Conclusion: The Libertine Moment

In France and in the United States, the boudoir helped women dream of an alternate world. Always a site of sensual desire, the boudoir functioned as the backstage of gender performance to elite aristocratic women. From their boudoirs, women could imagine and sometimes enact lives predicated on female individualism and female pleasure. To be sure, the boudoir was a domestic site born of aristocratic privilege, an indulgent space for the private female mind. But even for affluent women, leisure does not just happen, it is made. Historian Linda Kerber reminds us that nothing is more easily manipulated than a person's use of time. Time was not given to eighteenth-century women: they rearranged priorities to make time to read.⁹⁹ Even the cruel and brutish Sade recognized that the boudoir was inherently associated with women's introspection: he titled his book *La philosophie dans le boudoir*, not sex in the boudoir and not libertinage in the boudoir. The post-Enlightenment society in which the gendered boudoir emerged was one in which radically revised concepts of desirable behavior redefined the individual.¹⁰⁰ The boudoir then was a specific technology of the self. The boudoir lay

⁹⁹ Kerber, *Women of the Republic*, 249.

¹⁰⁰ Peter Gay, *The Party of Humanity: Essays in the French Enlightenment* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1964), 137. Gay insists on retaining Sade's triad of boudoir/sexuality/philosophy in his analysis of the eighteenth-century: "The *philosophes* sought to break with the conventional—that is to say, Christian and bourgeois—morality because in their opinion it constrained and even degraded man's nature."

buried in the heart of the architecture of the French mansion and in the heart of the architecture of American women's psychology.

Conclusion

At the dawn of the nineteenth century, the cultural contests waged by elite white Americans were not over but the playing fields had changed drastically. By 1804, the United States had expanded from thirteen states clinging to the Atlantic seaboard to a vast nation stretching west across the continent toward the Rocky Mountains. France had fought its way from a monarchy to a republic and then an empire under Napoleon. Once a French colony made profitable by hundreds of thousands of enslaved laborers, Saint Domingue had become a nation of free Haitian citizens. No one was left untouched by the momentous events rocking the Atlantic basin: from the highest echelons of the European aristocracy to backcountry American settlers to slaves chained in Caribbean slavery.

Affluent and influential American families such as the Binghams and their circle who had modeled and displayed ideologies, both personal and political, based on the pageantry of French gentility faced increased anti-French sentiment around the turn of the century. In the wake of the XYZ Affair (1798-99), many Americans became painfully conscious of the French attempt to manipulate the United States and their former “blind infatuation with their first and oldest ally” began to wane. After Congress voted to publish the incriminating dispatches from the French diplomats in April 1798, public opinion against France rose, as did the popularity of President John Adams. Every American city of six thousand or more inhabitants sent at least one anti-French address to

President Adams in Philadelphia.¹ His Quasi-War (1798-1800) with France proved vastly less popular and ignited fiery feuds between Federalist and Democratic-Republicans in the months prior to the election of 1800. But Adams ended hostilities almost as abruptly as they had begun, signing the Treaty of Mortefontaine with France in September 1800, a move that paved the way for the Louisiana Purchase three years later.

Upon the relocation of the nation's capital to the muddy banks of the Potomac in November 1800, social life in Philadelphia subsided. Salons did not disappear entirely, but their number and glamor abated as the Federalist era drew to a close.² Less than a year later, the Binghams' once glittering Mansion House stood empty and silent, an apt symbol of the dimming celebration of French gentility. Anne Willing Bingham, the most revered salonnière of the early republic, had died in Bermuda and her devastated husband fled his luminous Mansion House to London in the summer of 1801. He sold Mansion House along with his two country seats at Lansdown, Pennsylvania, and Black Point, New Jersey, and almost all of his belongings.³ In October 1804, Julian Ursyn Niemcewicz, a Polish statesman and poet from a noble family, reminisced about the Bingham mansion:

The house of Mr. Bingham filled me with sadness. Five years ago it was the most resplendent and attractive house in Philadelphia: the host, rich and hospitable, his wife beautiful and flirtatious and the daughters full of charm... Today the parents

¹ Thomas M. Ray, "'Not One Cent for Tribute': The Public Addresses and American Popular Reaction to the XYZ Affair, 1798-1799," *Journal of the Early Republic* 3, no. 4 (1983): 389-390, 402, quote on 412.

² Daniel Kilbride, "Cultivation, Conservatism, and the Early National Gentry: The Manigault Family and Their Circle," *Journal of the Early Republic* 19, no. 2 (1999): 221-256. Alice Delancey Izard and her daughter Margaret Manigault Izard hosted a salon in Philadelphia in 1807 in what Kilbride calls "a response to the declining fortunes of the Federalist establishment that, these women believed, emerged from the failure of American aristocrats to propagate effectively the virtues of elitism" (222).

³ Advertisement for Bingham Mansion House and goods, *Philadelphia Gazette* (Philadelphia, PA), Aug. 7, 1801, quoted in Furstenberg, *When the United States Spoke French*, 385.

have found a grave in a foreign land; the children are scattered; the house stands empty, offered for occupancy to whomsoever would wish to pay the taxes due. And so even in this new country there are awful examples of change in fortune.⁴

The melancholy sentiments expressed by Niemcewicz about Mansion House and its owners reflected a nostalgia for the elegant salons and salonnières of the early republic but also serious doubts, perhaps, about revolutions that wrought such instability and “change in fortune.” Theirs was a way of life on the path to obsolescence.

From the outset of his presidency, Thomas Jefferson worked vigorously to dismantle many policies and precedents set in place by his two Federalist predecessors. Jefferson had been propelled into office by a rising tide of republicanism and rushed to prove he had no use for the trappings of monarchies. After a disastrous dinner with the British minister Sir Anthony Merry, Jefferson composed his *Canons of Etiquette* in 1804 to institutionalize presidential dining protocol. He explained his policy of seating guests *pêle-mêle*—first come, first seated—as more egalitarian than assigned seating arrangements because it would “give force to the principle of equality” and rule out any preference by rank, title, or social status at his table. It was a direct blow to the European custom. He wrote: “At dinners in public or private, and on all other occasions of social intercourse, a perfect equality exists between the persons composing the company, whether foreign or domestic, titled or untitled, in or out of office.”⁵ In a letter to his protégé William Short, Jefferson explained how pell-mell seating could be a privilege for

⁴ Quoted in Furstenberg, *When the United States Spoke French*, 410.

Julian Ursyn Niemcewicz (1757/58–1841) fled to the United States with Tadeusz Kościuszko in 1796 after fighting unsuccessfully for Polish independence from Russia. Niemcewicz married wealthy widow Susan Livingston Kean (1759-1853) in 1800 and in 1803 he published in Polish a biography of George Washington. He returned to Poland in 1807.

⁵ Thomas Jefferson, “II. Canons of Etiquette, 12 January 1804,” *Founders Online*, National Archives.

the women who dined at the presidential house, giving some women the opportunity to sit nearer to men and women of higher status: “it was intended to give a rank to those ladies over their fellow citizens.”⁶ What he often failed to do, however, was give women seats at his table at all.

In the process of remaking political sociability and etiquette void of any trace of ostentation or monarchical tendency, the question of elite women’s participation in political culture became a vehicle for articulating Jefferson’s radically different constitutional visions of republicanism. Despite his support for the French Revolution and desire to cement Franco-American alliances, Jefferson divested the federal capital of many of the markers of French gentility that had helped define political culture and women’s participation in it over the prior twenty-five years.⁷ Jefferson thwarted women from hosting salons and neglected to provide other formal or informal schemes of permitting access to authority for genteel women of the capital. Rather than large dinner parties a number of times a year for various members of the political and social elite, such as those hosted by Washington and Adams, Jefferson hosted male-dominated dinners at the presidential home most weeknights for small groups of fewer than a dozen members of Congress or local gentry. Women rarely dined with the president. Instead of French-inspired salons and levees, Jefferson believed these small and frequent

⁶ From Thomas Jefferson to William Short, 23 January 1804, *Founders Online*, National Archives.

⁷ Jefferson did not delete all signs of French gentility from the capital. He hired a French maître d’hôtel, Étienne Lemaire (d. 1817) in the President’s House. Lemaire had worked previously in Philadelphia in the household of William Bingham. Transferring to Jefferson’s employ, he assumed management of the domestic staff at the President’s House, supervised the dinner service and dessert, handled household accounts, and conducted most of the marketing for groceries and other provisions.

congressional dinners would promote political harmony and allow him to exert influence and power more effectively over his guests.⁸

Jefferson's presidency then marked a regression rather than progression of elite women's prerogatives to cultivate ideologies by way of the customs of French gentility. A self-proclaimed Francophile, Jefferson in fact put an end to many of the ways that affluent Americans, especially women, had embraced salons, French texts, libertine philosophies, and sociability in order to assert their cosmopolitanism, gentry power, and erudition in the early decades of the American republic.

⁸ Merry Ellen Scofield, "The Fatigues of His Table: The Politics of Presidential Dining during the Jefferson Administration," *Journal of the Early Republic* 26, no. 3 (2006): 456-461.

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