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JEFFREY MERRICK

THE NOTORIOUS MADAME DE LANGEAC

We have come a long way from nineteenth-century *petite histoire* in which noble women played a decorative role and twentieth-century Marxist history in which working women played a negligible role. Women of all classes – in markets, convents, and salons, as consumers, litigants, and protesters – and gender as a construct now figure conspicuously in research on the political culture of pre-Revolutionary France¹. According to apologists of the Ancien Régime, inferiors (wives, children, servants, workers, subjects) obeyed superiors (husbands, fathers, masters, rulers and their agents), and superiors, in turn, ensured the welfare of inferiors. This patriarchal model organized »natural« differences in sex, age, and rank into a harmonious network of reciprocal obligations that allegedly preserved order in the household and the kingdom. Unruly females from all walks of life threatened private as well as public order when they mismanaged their limited agency inside and outside the home². Eighteenth-century *nouvelles* and libellistes criticized lower-class wives who defied their husbands and upper-class wives who betrayed their spouses. They vilified Louis XV's mistress Madame du Barry and Louis XVI's consort Marie-Antoinette, who reportedly governed the men they were supposed to obey. We know much more about the queen, her favorites, the duchesse de Polignac and the princesse de Lamballe, and other members of her circle, most notably her »minister of fashion« Rose Bertin and her portraitist Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, than we do about many other transgressive women, such as the subject of this article³.

- 1 Women have played a larger role in work on political culture since the publication of Arlette FARGE, *La Vie fragile: Violence, pouvoir, et solidarités à Paris au XVIII^e siècle*, Paris 1986, and Joan LANDES, *Women and the Public Sphere in the Age of the French Revolution*, Ithaca 1988. See for example Cynthia BOUTON, *The Flour War: Gender, Class, and Community in Late Ancien Régime France*, University Park 1993; Lynn HUNT, *The Family Romance of the French Revolution*, Berkeley 1993; Dena GOODMAN, *Republic of Letters: A Cultural History of the French Enlightenment*, Ithaca 1994; Sarah MAZA, *Private Lives and Public Affairs: The Causes Célèbres of Prerevolutionary France*, Berkeley 1995; Mita CHOUDHURY, *Convents and Nuns in Eighteenth-Century French Politics and Culture*, Ithaca 2004, and *The Wanton Jesuit and the Wayward Saint: A Tale of Sex, Politics, and Religion in Eighteenth-Century France*, University Park 2015. The most useful synthesis of research on women under the Ancien Régime is Dominique GODINEAU, *Les Femmes dans la France moderne, XVI^e–XVIII^e siècle*, Paris 2015.
- 2 Jeffrey MERRICK, *Gender in Pre-Revolutionary Political Culture*, in: Thomas KAISER, Dale VAN KLEY (ed.), *Deficit to Deluge: Essays on the Origins of the French Revolution*, Stanford 2011, p. 198–219.
- 3 The vast literature includes MAZA, *The Diamond Necklace Affair Revisited (1785–1786): The Case of the Missing Queen*, and HUNT, *The Many Bodies of Marie-Antoinette: Political Pornography and the Problem of the Feminine in the French Revolution*, in: HUNT (ed.), *Eroticism and the Body Politic*, Baltimore 1990, p. 63–89, 10–30, both reprinted in Dena GOODMAN (ed.), *Writings on the Body of a Queen*, New York 2003; Caroline WEBER, *Queen of Fashion: What Marie-Antoinette Wore to the Revolution*, New York 2006. On Bertin and Vigée-Lebrun see Michelle SAPORI, *Rose Bertin: Ministre des modes de Marie Antoinette*, Paris 2003; Mary SHERIFF, *The Exceptional Woman: Elisabeth Vigée-Lebrun and the Cultural Politics of Art*, Chicago

Someone cleverly but unkindly described Louis Phélypeaux, comte de Saint-Florentin, duc de La Vrillière, as a man who had borne three names but left none behind, or at least none worthy of notice and respect⁴. Contemporaries might have said the same of his longtime mistress, born Cusack, known to Parisians first as Madame Sabbatin and then as Madame de Langeac⁵. They mocked her parents, husbands, and children and scorned her turpitude, influence, and avarice. News, jokes, and lies about Langeac are scattered in many sources, from police reports to caustic pamphlets, so it was and is difficult to reconstruct her history. As the prolific news-monger and journalist Pidansat de Mairobert noted, the life of this woman, »who made so much noise and did so much harm« is »shrouded in too many tales and contradictions«⁶. For example, one text identified her father as a clerk named Boupillon in Charleville, and another identified her mother as a laundress for the galleys in Marseille⁷. This article is intended to collect and digest the evidence about Langeac and her children and to analyze her notoriety in the context of political and polemical culture under Louis XV and Louis XVI. Her tangled story includes connections and privilege, patronage and servility, protection and corruption, venality and adultery, scandal and slander. It involves questions about hierarchy and mobility, authority and publicity, masculinity and femininity that loom large in current research. It illustrates the ways in which an attractive and ambitious woman could make her way inside the Ancien Régime and the ways in which critics vilified unruly females to expose and denounce its decay.

Inspectors Jean-Baptiste Meunier and Louis Marais, who compiled reports about hundreds of Parisian prostitutes, produced the most detailed accounts of Langeac's progress from obscurity to notoriety⁸. The two accounts, composed in 1753 and 1760, include outright mistakes as well as significant discrepancies, but they complement each other and may be combined into the unified narrative that follows. Our subject was the illegitimate daughter, born in 1732 or 1733, of an Irish officer »whose name is forgotten«, governor of Pont-à-Mousson in Lorraine. In 1743 or 1744 her mother, a sutler married to a sergeant in a Swiss regiment in the service of the duke of Modena, accompanied him to Savoy⁹. His colonel, named Bavois, placed the pretty young girl in a convent in Chambéry for her own protection and removed her two years later to make her his mistress. At the age of fourteen or fifteen she gave birth to his son, who was raised in Dauphiné and subsequently legitimized by his father. According to Marais the colonel ended up in prison in Nice in 1748, and his mistress secured his release by »yielding to the de-

1996; Gita MAY, *Elisabeth Vigée-Lebrun: The Odyssey of an Artist in an Age of Revolution*, New Haven 2005.

- 4 *Mémoires secrets pour servir à l'histoire de la république des lettres en France depuis 1762 jusqu'à nos jours*, 36 vols., London 1780–1789) (hereafter MS), vol. 5, p. 235 (10 December 1770).
- 5 »Langeac« means Madame de Langeac throughout this article. No biographer has tackled her or, for that matter, Saint-Florentin. For useful sketches see Georges Paul, »Les Derniers seigneurs de Langeac et Aglaé, marquise de Lespinasse-Langeac«, *Almanach de Brioude et de son arrondissement* 13 (1932), p. 135–147; Marcel BAUDOT, *Un Ministre champenois méconnu*, Actes du 95^e congrès national des sociétés savantes, Reims, 1970, Paris 1974, p. 45–65.
- 6 Mathieu-François PIDANSAT DE MAIROBERT, *L'Observateur anglois*, 4 vols., London 1777–1778), vol. 2, p. 7 (20 July 1775).
- 7 Nicolas BAUDEAU, *Chronique secrète sur le règne de Louis XVI*, in: *Revue retrospective* 3 (1834), p. 40 (15 May 1774); Charles THÉVENEAU DE MORANDE, *La Gazette noire par un homme qui n'est pas blanc* (s.l. 1784), p. 5.
- 8 Memo addressed to lieutenant general of police Nicolas-René Berryer, 16 July 1753, in: François-Nicolas-Napoléon RAVAISSON-MOLLIEN (ed.) *Archives de la Bastille*, 19 vols., Paris 1866–1904), vol. 12, p. 405–406; report dated 25 July 1760, Bibliothèque nationale de France (hereafter BN), Fonds français 11358, ff. 163–165, published in Camille PÉRON, *Paris sous Louis XV*, 2 vols., Paris 1905–1914), vol. 1, p. 182–184.
- 9 Francesco III d'Este, duke of Modena and Reggio as of 1737.

sires« of count Sabbatini, the duke's minister, who attended a conference there about the implementation of the treaty that ended the War of the Austrian Succession¹⁰. After the self-styled countess Sabbatini from Naples accompanied Bavois to Paris in 1749, he left for Switzerland and left her in a boarding house in the faubourg Saint-Germain run by Madame Poupard. According to Meunier, who did not mention Sabbatini, Bavois brought her to Paris, disguised as a man, in 1745 and lodged her in the hôtel d'Entragues, managed by Madame Poupard, on rue de Condé. He left Paris but returned to the city and his mistress in 1748, by which time she had given birth to Saint-Florentin's son, the comte de Vitry, whom he legitimized five or six years later.

Marais reported that Bavois left his mistress some money in the care of a Swiss banker, who introduced her to a German banker, who offered to maintain her. She accepted his money but rejected his attentions because of his bad breath. She was attracted to a police operative named Mondion but realized that she could not make much money off him. In dire straits, she accepted the terms proposed by an officer in the rural constabulary named Berthelin, who procured women for Saint-Florentin. Meunier linked her with a German baron, rather than banker, and with the tax farmer Lallement de Betz's steward Girard¹¹, who ended up in prison because of the schemes he hatched in order to support her. Berthelin met Mademoiselle Bavois chez Madame Poupard, his former mistress, and installed her more comfortably in the convent de la Miséricorde, where she spent four years and received »whom she pleased« in her apartment¹². In 1752 Saint-Florentin provided her with a city house with a porte-cochère on rue du Faubourg Saint-Honoré and a country house with dependencies near Villeneuve-Saint-Georges¹³. When one of her urban neighbors, son of the tax farmer Dumetz, slighted her, he avenged her by having the rude man exposed as a parvenu¹⁴. When he asked her not to see the chevalier d'Audigny any more, she »obeyed«, but they continued to meet secretly¹⁵. Marais reported that she shared her favors with the chevalier d'Arcq¹⁶, who enriched himself by charging plaintiffs to have Saint-Florentin bring their cases before the royal council for adjudication. According to both inspectors she was driven by lust and greed and satisfied both passions as long as she could get away with it. She was exploited by men, and she exploited them in turn.

Other documents clarify Langeac's Irish ancestry or at least the official version of her noble parentage. Richard Edmond Cusack (1687–1768), governor not of Pont-à-Mousson in Lorraine but of Croisic, Guérande, and Saint-Nazaire in Brittany, reached the rank of marshal by the time of his retirement from military service in 1759¹⁷. In 1762 he claimed that he had married

10 Count Alessandro Sabbatini, minister of war as of 1742.

11 Michel Joseph Hiacinthe Lallement de Betz, tax farmer, 1716–1760.

12 The convent was located at 6-8 rue du Vieux-Colombier.

13 Meunier to Berryer, 17 April and 2 July 1752, in: Archives de la Bastille (as in n. 8), vol. 12, p. 380–381. The city house was located just before the barrière du Roule at 154 rue du Faubourg-Saint-Honoré. Villeneuve-Saint-Georges is located in the southeastern suburbs of Paris.

14 Meunier to Berryer, 2 July 1752, in: Archives de la Bastille (as in n. 8), vol. 12, p. 382. The Almanach royal lists no tax farmer named Dumetz in 1730, 1735, 1740, 1745, or 1750.

15 More than a few members of the Andigny family could fill the bill, for example the chevalier d'Andigny captured during the siege of Cassel. Gazette de France, 9 July 1762, second supplement.

16 Philippe de Saint-Foy, chevalier d'Arcq as of 1736, illegitimate son of Louis Alexandre de Bourbon, legitimized son of Louis XIV.

17 For more on his service and honors see Jean-Baptiste-Pierre-Julien DE COURCELLES, *Histoire généalogique et héraldique des pairs de France*, 12 vols., Paris 1822–1823, vol. 5/De Cusack, p. 14–15; P. Louis LAINÉ, *Archives généalogiques et historiques de la noblesse de France*, 11 vols., Paris 1828–1850, vol. 1/De Cusack, p. 15–18; Nicolas VITON DE SAINT-ALLAIS, *Nobiliaire universel de France*, 21 vols., Paris 1872–1877, vol. 12, p. 135–136.

Marie Anne Isabelle Brigitte Fitzgerald (?–1735) in Langemarck, Belgium on 7 January 1727¹⁸. The priest did not record the details in the parish register, but he gave the groom a certificate of marriage. This document was stolen twenty years later, but Cusack defied anyone to suggest that his wife, given her birth, »lived in concubinage until her death« or that he, given his reputation, »was involved in an illicit relationship for several years«. Their daughter Marie-Madeleine-Josèphe-Agláé Cusack was born in Lille on 25 October 1727. The father was out of town and the mother was indisposed on that day, so a woman who did not know them or trust them delivered their child to the parish church of la Madeleine. The priest mangled the names of the parents and recorded the baptism in the register of illegitimate births. When Cusack discovered the mistake, many years later, he expressed surprise and dismay. He petitioned to have it corrected, if only to protect his daughter's marriage. With the support of Saint-Florentin and numerous character witnesses, including the chevalier d'Arcq, he succeeded. The Châtelet ordered the correction in 1763¹⁹. Ten years later the royal genealogist certified that Cusack's daughter had sixteen quarters of nobility²⁰.

There is no such documentation about her relationships with Bavois, Sabbatini, Girard, and other lovers who supposedly preceded Saint-Florentin. One *nouvelliste* claimed that she married a cobbler named Sabathin in Marseille²¹, and another matched her with Giorgio Sabbatini, envoy of Modena²². This elusive diplomat presumably belonged to the distinguished family that included Giuliano Sabbatini, ambassador to France and then bishop of Modena, and his nephew Alessandro, minister and confidant of the duke. In any case, Saint-Florentin reportedly had the husband imprisoned in Bicêtre or deported to the colonies and subsequently declared dead²³. After the count secured her father's consent, Mademoiselle de Cusack married Étienne-Joseph de Lespinasse, marquis de Langeac, comte d'Arlet, baron de Saint-Ilpize (1727–1809), in the parish church of Sainte-Marie-Madeleine, on 19 October 1756²⁴. He accepted paternity of her four children and also recognized her control of her own property. According to Pidansat de Mairobert, this gentleman »of ancient nobility« gave his name to »a minister's concubine and bastards« in return for military advancement²⁵. According to the comte de Neuilly, the »old« marquis »had been extracted from the mountains of the Auvergne, where he was dying of hunger and saw his wife only at the altar.« After the service, he left for Pont-Saint-Esprit in Languedoc, »of which he was given the governorship as a reward for his cooperation«, along with a pension and orders not to leave his post²⁶. In reality the marquis, born in the same year as his wife, had a successful military career before and after his marriage. He received

- 18 François-Joseph-Marie DU SART, lieutenant général civil et criminel de la gouvernance et du bailiage de Lille, judgment dated 16 October 1762, »Appendice III«, in: J. B. BELMONT, *La Belle journée*, in: *Tablettes historiques du Velay* 2 (1872), p. 419–423.
- 19 Marginal note dated 18 March 1763, in »Appendice II« in BELMONT, *La Belle journée* (as in n. 18), p. 418.
- 20 Bernard CHÉRIN, *Preuve testimoniale du côté maternel*, dated 28 April 1773, in: SAINT-ALLAIS, *Nobiliaire universel* (as in n. 17), vol. 12, p. 310–312.
- 21 Mathieu-François PIDANSAT DE MAIROBERT, *Lettres originales de Madame la comtesse Dubarry*, London 1779, p. 136.
- 22 PIDANSAT DE MAIROBERT, *Observateur anglois* (as in n. 6), vol. 2, p. 7 (20 July 1775); *Correspondance secrète, politique, et littéraire*, 18 vols., London 1787–1790 (hereafter CS), vol. 1, p. 265 (15 March 1775).
- 23 PIDANSAT DE MAIROBERT, *Lettres originales* (as in n. 21), p. 136.
- 24 Marriage record, dated 19 October 1756, Appendice II, in: Belmont, *La Belle journée* (as in n. 18), p. 417–418.
- 25 PIDANSAT DE MAIROBERT, *Observateur anglois* (as in n. 6), vol. 1, p. 227 (15 November 1773).
- 26 Ange-Achille-Charles de Brunet, comte de Neuilly, *Dix années d'émigration: Souvenirs et Correspondance*, ed. by Maurice BAILLY DE BARBERY, Paris 1865, p. 31.

the title of governor of Pont-Saint-Esprit in 1765 and the baton of marshal in 1790²⁷. He was hardly confined to his estates, but he and his wife did lead separate lives. They »never consummated the marriage«²⁸. Thus the phrase »mariage à la Langeac«²⁹.

Meunier, who did not mention her marriage, dated her relationship with Saint-Florentin back to 1746. Given the differences in age and, more importantly, size and mien, they made an odd couple. Langeac, born in 1727, was »one of the most lovely women one might see«, tall, with a »majestic carriage« and »harsh look, which she doubtless softened for the lover she desired to entrap«³⁰. Saint-Florentin, born in 1705, was genial, short and plump, ordinary, at least until Louis XV replaced his left hand, amputated after a hunting accident, with a silver prosthesis³¹. The count married Amalie Ernestine von Platen-Hallermund in 1724 but had no children with her. After her death and his acquisition of the ducal title, he supposedly contemplated marriage with the »handsome« Polignac's daughter in order to have legitimate descendants. This prospect supposedly infuriated »Sabbatin«, who threatened to follow the example of Medea by strangling her children, the »Philippotins«, the »so-called Langeacs«³². Saint-Florentin, nicknamed »little saint« because of his stature, was not handsome and did not give his children his own name, but he did not marry again. He gave his mistress what she wanted, opulence and influence, as well as sinecures for their children. In 1765 the count bought her the seigneurie of Langeac in Auvergne, from which she extracted as much income as she could through exercise of her »feudal« rights³³. In 1768 he built her a house on rue des Champs-Élysées at rue de Berri, designed by the fashionable architect Jean-François-Thérèse Chalgrin and later rented by the American diplomat Thomas Jefferson.³⁴

The »little saint« had not only money but also power at his disposal, in the form of influence over appointments and access to *lettres de cachet*. As a member of a family with a long record of service to the crown, he succeeded his father as secretary of state for Protestant affairs in 1725 and added the royal household (including the royal academies) and the department of Paris to his portfolio in 1749 and 1757. Langeac exploited his extensive patronage for her own gain. In 1769 she extorted 200,000 livres from one man to secure his nomination as a tax farmer but did not repay him when she had the position given to another man³⁵. In 1771 La Vrillière

27 For more on his service and honors see COURCELLES, *Histoire généalogique* (as in n. 17), vol. 2/ De Lespinasse: 23–24; LAINÉ, *Archives généalogiques* (as in n. 17), vol. 1/De Lespinasse, p. 9–10; SAINT-ALLAIS, *Nobiliaire universel* (as in n. 17), vol. 12, p. 115–117.

28 Mathieu François PIDANSAT DE MAIROBERT, *Anecdotes sur M^e la comtesse Du Barri*, London 1775, p. 198.

29 Correspondance d'Eulalie, 2 vols., London 1785, vol. 2, p. 110 (3 June 1783).

30 PIDANSAT DE MAIROBERT, *Observateur anglois* (as in n. 6), vol. 2, p. 7 (20 July 1775). According to unspecified »police reports«, she was »tall, brown-haired, blue-eyed, pretty«, also witty but »scheming, deceiving, calculating, haughty and capricious, greedy or prodigal, depending on circumstances«. Quoted in Emmanuel, duc de Croy, *Journal inédit*, ed. by Emmanuel Henri DE GROUCHY, Paul COTTIN, 4 vols., Paris 1906–1907), vol. 3, p. 122, n. 1.

31 Simeon Prosper HARDY recorded the accident in Pascal BASTIEN, Daniel ROCHE (ed.), *Mes Loisirs*, 6 vols. thusfar Paris 2012), vol. 1, p. 98 (7 September 1765).

32 MS 5, p. 200–201 (7 October 1770). François-Camille, the »handsome« comte de Polignac and Marie-Louise de La Garde had two daughters, Élisabeth-Augustine-Aimée and Henriette-Zéphirine, born in 1746 and 1753.

33 Enumerated during the assembly of residents on 26 October 1766, as certified by the notary Reboul on 29 June 1767, Appendice IV, in: BELMONT, *La Belle journée* (as in n. 18), p. 426–435. Langeac left the seigneurie to her second son, who sold it to the marquis de Lafayette in 1786.

34 Located at 2 rue de Berri, at the grille de Chaillot, acquired by the comte d'Artois and then returned to Langeac's first son, demolished in 1842.

35 Armand-Louis de Gontaut de Biron, duc de Lauzun, *Mémoires 1744–1783*, ed. by Georges HEYLLI, Paris 1880, p. 63.

complained to Madame du Barry, who complained to Louis XV, about his sister Sophie's interference in the staffing of the household of their grandson the comte d'Artois. Madame Sophie repented by reprimanding the duke for the »scandalous traffic« in favors in his ministry, »and Madame de Langeac was not spared«. He was so distressed when he reported the conversation to Du Barry that he vomited and passed out in her presence³⁶. In 1774 Langeac and Du Barry clashed over the selection of the chancellor of the comte de Provence, the dauphin's other brother. Langeac charged the baron de Fontette 60 000 livres for the post but planned to sell it to someone else³⁷. Du Barry supported Fontette, and Langeac backed down. She urged La Vrillière, in tears, not to fall out with the king's powerful mistress and even returned Fontette's money³⁸.

The duke was surrounded by individuals, his mistress, her friends, and his clerks, »who sold everything and could be called brigands«³⁹. Comptroller general Terray eventually repudiated his mistress, the baronne de La Garde⁴⁰, because she followed the example of »Madame de Langeac, who engaged in brigandage with impunity for thirty years under the duc de La Vrillière«⁴¹. The day after the baronne's disgrace, a day when Langeac was not at home, jokesters called on her and signed the names of »the whole court«, as it was customary when circumstances dictated condolences, as if to suggest that her own days were numbered⁴². The insult enraged her, but she and the chevalier d'Arcq, her »back-up lover«⁴³, continued to sell *lettres de cachet* »openly«⁴⁴. Langeac sold one to a pretty flower-seller named Jeanneton who wanted to have her brutal husband locked up but also sold him another one, on the same day, for the same price, with the result that both spouses ended up in prison⁴⁵. When a disappointed office-seeker named Maupassant attempted to recover the bribe he had paid d'Arcq, Langeac planned to have him arrested by *lettre de cachet*, but Maupassant reached Madame du Barry in time for her to consult the king and secure the chevalier's exile. Thanks to the sovereign's weakness of character, the duke and his favorite »were spared the disgrace they deserved«⁴⁶. He repaid Maupassant, and she took a voyage to take the waters »to distract herself from her sadness and avoid

- 36 Mathieu-François PIDANSAT DE MAIROBERT, *Journal historique de la révolution opérée dans la constitution de la monarchie française par M. de Maupeou, chancelier de la France*, 7 vols., London 1774–1776, vol. 2, p. 292 (8 December 1771).
- 37 François-Jean Orceau, baron de Fontette, intendant of Caen from 1752 to 1775.
- 38 Jacob-Nicolas Moreau, *Mes Souvenirs*, ed. by Camille HERMELIN, 2 vols., Paris 1898–1901, vol. 2, p. 374–376. The same volume, p. 309, recounts Moreau's own fight to have his brother Moreau de Vormes, rather than Langeac's lawyer Godescart de Lille, appointed *avocat de la ville de Marseille*.
- 39 Joseph Alphonse de Véri, *Journal*, ed. by Jéhan DE WITTE, Paris 1928–1930, p. 99.
- 40 Anne-Thérèse d'Armeval, widow of baron Joubert de la Garde.
- 41 *Mémoires de l'abbé Terrai, contrôleur-général des finances*, London 1776, p. 83.
- 42 MS, vol. 21, p. 187 (3 October 1771) and vol. 6, p. 8 (11 October 1771).
- 43 Charles THÉVENEAU DE MORANDE, *Le Gazetier cuirassé*, s.l. 1771, p. 48.
- 44 BAUDEAU, *Chronique secrète* (as in n. 7), p. 40 (15 May 1774).
- 45 Louis-Philippe, comte DE SÉGUR, *Mémoires, souvenirs, et anecdotes*, 3 vols., Paris 1824–1826), vol. 1, p. 344–345.
- 46 PIDANSAT DE MAIROBERT, *Journal historique* (as in n. 36), vol. 4, p. 215–216 (11 June 1773). On d'Arcq's exile see also HARDY, *Mes Loisirs* (as in n. 31), vol. 3, p. 164 (10 June 1773), PIDANSAT DE MAIROBERT, *Anecdotes* (as in n. 28), p. 271–272 ; *Observateur anglois* (as in n. 6), vol. 1, p. 104–105, and *Lettres originales* (as in n. 21), p. 150–151, and especially Jean-Claude DAVID, *Intrigues et cabales ministérielles du règne de Louis XV: L'Exil du chevalier d'Arcq*, in: *Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century* 267 (1989), p. 321–351. This article includes the text of d'Arcq's retrospective explanation for his exile and vindication of his conduct. He implicated Langeac and exculpated himself.

the deadly vapors that such a cruel separation« from her intimate companion »might cause her«⁴⁷.

Langeac relied on d'Arcq for entertainment in more than one way. He organized the celebrations for her name day (Mary Magdalen's day, 22 July) in 1767 and the ducal title in 1770. The festivities in 1767 included a prologue of his own composition, performed by her children, an old opéra-ballet and a new opéra-comique, performed by dancers and singers from the opera companies⁴⁸, and an »obscene« and »filthy« show called *The Ogre*, by the playwright Antoine-Alexandre-Henri Poinciset, who also penned an »Epistle to Madame la marquise de Langeac«⁴⁹. The festivities in 1770 included a village of happy vassals who praised their lord in song and dance, all scripted by the versatile Nicolas Bricaire de La Dixmerie⁵⁰. Like Poinciset and then Baculard d'Arnaud, recommended by Langeac's second son, he owed his pension on the *Mercure de France* to Saint-Florentin⁵¹. Another literary protégé, the poet Gabriel Charles de Lattaignant composed a »Portrait of Madame la Comtesse Sabatini« and servile verses, preserved in printed format, for the name days of both his patrons⁵². He praised the count as »the father of his king's subjects« and his »friend« not only as a tender mother but also as »the queen of pleasure and love«. »Everyone adores her«, so those who »wear her chains« and »live under her laws« counted themselves happy. Happy or not, members of the Academy of Sciences paid her court to increase their pensions⁵³. The publisher of the projected supplement to the *Encyclopedie* and entrepreneurs with rival designs for the renovation of the Comédie-Française paid her cash to secure her support⁵⁴.

Langeac's dependents and satellites portrayed her as a patron of the arts, letters, and sciences, but others disclosed and denounced her corruption, as illustrated by two injurious publications pursued by the police in 1765 and 1767. Louis-Antoine de la Porte, who played a role in the financial management of conquered German territory during the Seven Years War, bribed Langeac more than once, to the tune of tens of thousands of livres, and, under pressure, signed an acknowledgment that he owed her more money. Jailed for his debts, he appealed to the royal council and secured a letter of rescission, dated 7 September 1765, that canceled the acknowledgment he had signed two years before. Still in the For-l'Evêque prison, frustrated and resentful, he contacted a barrister named Dubois and a solicitor named Alloneau, who composed a six-page memoir that exposed Langeac's venality and vindictiveness⁵⁵. He also contacted Jacques Rainville, a journeyman printer with a history of clandestine operations, to produce 200 copies

47 PIDANSAT DE MAIROBERT, *Journal historique* (as in n. 36), vol. 4, p. 218 (19 June 1773).

48 The act *Vertumne et Pomone* from *Les Eléments*, libretto by Pierre Charles Roy and music by André Cardinal Destouches, included in the *Fragmens lyriques* performed by the Opéra in November and December 1767, and *Le Bouquet*, by Nicolas Médard Audinot, including music by various composers, premiered on this occasion.

49 MS, vol. 3, p. 110–112 (3 May 1767).

50 MS, vol. 5, p. 139–140 (24 July 1770).

51 MS, vol. 17, p. 349–350 (1 July 1768) and, on François-Thomas-Marie Baculard d'Arnaud, vol. 19, p. 113 (2 September 1769).

52 Portrait de Madame la comtesse Sabatini, Italienne, in: Poésies de M. l'abbé de l'Attaignant, 4 vols., London, 1756, vol. 2, p. 82–83; Bouquet en pot-pourri à Madame la marquise de Langeac pour le jour de Sainte-Magdeleine, sa patronne, and Bouquet en pot-pourri à M. le comte de St.-Florentin, pour le jour de Saint-Louis, son patron, in: Chansons et autres poésies posthumes de M. l'abbé de l'Attaignant, London 1780, p. 210–217 and 218–223.

53 MS, vol. 6, p. 283 (15 December 1775).

54 MS, vol. 6, p. 137 (27 March 1772) and p. 190 (7 July 1772).

55 The 1765 Almanach royal does not include any avocat au parlement named Dubois but does list Alloneau, procureur au parlement since 1745. The mémoire concludes with the words »en l'annulant ce sera rendre toute justice aux parties« and the name de La Porte.

of the letter and the memoir⁵⁶. Rainville recruited Jacques Milet, another journeyman, as well as his own son and wife, to work on the project⁵⁷. When the police searched La Porte's cell on 7 October, they found nothing, but they encountered his business agent Guinet there. When they searched Guinet's room in the hôtel Grammont on rue Saint-Germain-l'Auxerrois, they found 199 copies of the letter, stored, unbeknownst to him, according to him, in a locked trunk⁵⁸. They arrested Rainville and Milet on 29 and 30 December⁵⁹. A week later they arrested La Porte's valet Michel Provost⁶⁰, who promised to help them track down the memoir. Judging from the papers of inspector Joseph d'Hémery, who was responsible for police surveillance of the book trade, and the Archives de la Bastille, they did not locate a trunk full of memoirs. Saint-Florentin heard that some people had read printed copies and asked the lieutenant general of police to prevent »publicity«, circulation, of »this libelle«⁶¹. D'Hémery »took all possible measures« to avoid such »publicity« and did not think many copies were distributed⁶². He was right, or at least there is no discussion of the memoir in contemporary sources.

Milet, who insisted that he just did what he was told to do, was released on 17 January 1766, but Rainville languished in the Bastille until 9 May. In a series of sixteen letters to the authorities he complained about cold and damp, vermin and boredom, not to mention injustice. He suggested that his first »crime« was his indigence. With a wife and five children to support, he took La Porte's job only for the money. He noted that he did not print anything against state or church and wondered why he was punished more severely than those who did. Surprised to learn that Saint-Florentin knew and cared anything about Langeac's affairs, Rainville asked, »Am I supposed to know all the people the ministers take an interest in?« It never occurred to him that a »respectable minister« would protect »this lady«, whom La Porte had described as a crook and thief⁶³.

At the end of January 1767, the printer Hardy recorded the arrest of Pierre Guy, associate of the widow Duchesne, bookseller on rue Saint-Jacques, for attempting to smuggle a wagon-load of »bad books«, covered with a rug decorated with the arms of a »great lord«, into the city during the night⁶⁴. According to Hardy, the contraband included a work critical of Saint-Florentin, entitled *Les Sabathines*, by the comte de Lauraguais. Louis-Léon-Félicité de Brancas, comte (and later duc) de Lauraguais, infantry officer turned amateur dramatist and scientist, had a reputation for rakish and reckless conduct. He had three sons with his mistress, the libertine soprano Sophie Arnould, and a daughter with his wife, the Flemish princess Elisabeth-Pauline de Gand d'Isenghien, who sought and won a separation of property from him in 1765. The count spent time in royal custody, once in Metz in 1763 for printing a memoir in favor of

56 Rainville, 40, worked for the printer Sébastien Jorry on rue de la Comédie-Française. Some of the documents are published in Archives de la Bastille (as in n. 8), vol. 19, p. 7–11.

57 Millot, 45, worked for the printer Nicolas-François Moreau on rue Galande.

58 Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal, Archives de la Bastille (hereafter AB) 12255, ff. 15–16.

59 Commissaire Mîche de Rochebrune conducted the interrogations, in AB 12255, ff. 39–42 and 54–55, as well as BN, Fonds français 22097, #148.

60 Michel Provost, 35, arrested on 8 January 1766 and released just five days later. His interrogation is located in AB 12291, ff. 78–79.

61 Saint-Florentin's head clerk Ménard to Antoine-Raymond-Juan-Gualbert-Gabriel de Sartine, 19 January 1766, AB, 12255, f. 109.

62 D'Hémery to Sartine, 21 January 1766, AB 12255, f. 111.

63 AB 12255, f. 120.

64 HARDY, *Mes Loisirs* (as in n. 31), vol. 1, p. 202 (27 January 1767). After the death of Nicolas-Bonaventure Duchesne, his wife Marie-Antoinette Cailleau and his foreman Pierre Guy continued his business. Guy entered the Bastille on 25 January and was released on 19 July.

inoculation for smallpox⁶⁵ and next in the Bastille and then in Dijon in 1766 for squabbling with the marquis de Villette over a wager at a horse race⁶⁶. He escaped from the château de Dijon on the night of 18–19–November and made his way across the Channel. He would have had to compose *Les Sabathines* before or during his detention or after his arrival in London. It is not clear why Hardy named Lauraguais as its author, but it is clear that the count did not think much of Saint-Florentin, who, he claimed, »did not know that two and two make four«⁶⁷.

Commissaire Chénon, who inspected the books seized in January, listed the mix of philosphic and pornographic titles that Robert Darnton's research has led us to expect: Helvétius, La Mettrie, Rousseau, Toussaint, and Voltaire, along with *L'Art de bien baiser*, *L'Ecole de la volupté*, *La Religieuse en chemise*, *Thérèse philosophe*, and *Vénus dans le cloître*⁶⁸. Chénon followed the trail to several locations and interrogated Guy, as well as the binder Nicolas Yard and shopboy Antoine Renault, but he never mentioned *Les Sabathines*⁶⁹. The *Mémoires secrets* reported in February that many people wondered if *La Sabbatine* actually existed and in July that several copies of *Les Sabbatines et les Florentines* had escaped the police »and persons with an interest in proscribing it and preventing any distribution of it«⁷⁰. Written in the form of a »memoir or novel«, with »as much vigor as nobility«, the 150 pages supposedly included not only »amorous intrigues« but also »political anecdotes«, in which the minister and his mistress played disreputable parts. The same source reported that the police searched the residence of a man of letters named Samarie, a former associate of Saint-Florentin, who presumably had inside knowledge about his household, and found nothing there. Samarie has eluded identification, and the search is not documented in the papers of inspector d'Hémery or commissaire Chénon⁷¹. More than a year later the parlement punished colporteurs for distributing this libelle, which the magistrates »feared to name«, along with books contrary to morality and religion⁷².

Assuming that some Parisian actually wrote the text and other Parisians actually read the text, we can only regret that no copies of the text have survived, in Paris or elsewhere, but we can imagine how it depicted Langeac, as an unscrupulous opportunist who sexed her way into a tyrannical minister's bed and manipulated him to enrich herself and their bastard children. Ferdinand Adrien de la Viefville, marquis d'Orvillé, condemned the couple in the unpublished »Discours au roi sur la réformation de l'état« he submitted to Étienne-François, duc de Choiseul, the king's principal minister, in 1769⁷³. The marquis did not mince words in his comments

65 MS, vol. 1, p. 247–248 (16 July 1763), p. 248–250 (18 July 1763), p. 258 (28 July 1763), p. 260–262 (6 August 1763), p. 302 (24 November 1763). Lauraguais sent a copy of his *Mémoire sur l'inoculation* lu à l'Académie des Sciences, dont il est membre, le 6 juillet 1763, Paris 1763, to Saint-Florentin.

66 MS, vol. 18, p. 254–255 (21 August 1766) and vol 3, p. 68 (22 August 1766), p. 80 (23 September 1766), p. 101 (23 November 1766), p. 154 (9 March 1767).

67 *Lettres de L. B. Lauraguais à Madame ****, Paris 1802, p. 100. Hardy and others named Lauraguais as the author of a satire about the Compagnie des Indes that circulated two years later.

68 BN, Fonds français 22098, #72 (25 January 1767).

69 Yard, 24, and Renaud, 34, were released on 22 February and 23 March. The dossiers of Guy, Renault, and Yard in AB 12309 and 12316, include nothing about »Les Sabbatines«.

70 MS, vol. 3, p. 144 (20 February 1767) and p. 243 (20 July 1767).

71 This Samarie or Samary is not listed in the standard bibliographical sources (Cioranescu, Desesarts, Ersch, La Porte and Hébrail, Quéraud).

72 MS, vol. 4, p. 115 (8 October 1768). According to this source »foreign gazettes« announced publication of the libelle in 1767, but I have not managed to locate any such announcements. On the books, vendors, and punishment see Robert DARNTON, *The Forbidden Best-Sellers of Pre-Revolutionary France*, New York 1996, p. 393.

73 La Viefville, 57, was arrested on rue Saint-Antoine and imprisoned in the Bastille on 18 November 1769, then transferred to Saint-Lazare a week later. His dossier in AB 12372, unfortunately, contains nothing of substance.

about the fanatical archbishop of Paris, predatory lawyers, villainous bureaucrats, parasitical monks and lackeys, and Saint-Florentin himself.

*This abominable man has done more harm to your state, and Madame de Langeac has committed more crimes, than any person I know. Avenge this accumulation of monstrous crimes by sending Monsieur de Saint-Florentin far from you and putting this new Athaliah to death*⁷⁴.

Disgrace and exile for the minister, execration and execution for the mistress, like the sanguinary and idolatrous queen of Judah killed by her own subjects. Orville's suggestions and rhetoric convinced the ministry, as well as the family, that he was deranged, even though he expressed himself more lucidly than other self-appointed political commentators who ended up in custody on such grounds. He spent a week in the Bastille and, apparently, the next and last three years of his life in the prison of Saint-Lazare, in the company of other naughty nobles.

According to their critics, La Vrillière and Langeac, like Louis XV and Du Barry, embodied sexual and political disorder that disgraced the court and oppressed the realm, especially after chancellor Maupeou suppressed the parlements, the royal appeals courts that led the opposition to royal and ministerial despotism. After Louis XV died, on 10 May 1774, *nouvellistes* wondered what would become of the duke and his mistress under the regime of justice and virtue. Before the end of the month one reported that Louis XVI had »la Sabbatin, dite de Langeac« confined in a convent or at least expelled from Paris⁷⁵. Others suggested that La Vrillière had repudiated Langeac »in order to comply with the decency of morals of the new court« and insisted that this move would not make the new king forget his »negative opinion« about their liaison⁷⁶. Over the next few months newsmongers dismissed these rumors and noted that Langeac brazenly strolled the boulevards in order »to be seen as much as she could«, endorsed the reports of her exile and announced »the resurrection of her first husband, who was dead only by lettre de cachet«, and explained that she had absented herself from the capital only because one of her children had smallpox⁷⁷. Her selfish »love for her own person prevailed over maternal tenderness in this case«⁷⁸.

After months of speculation La Vrillière finally resigned in July 1775⁷⁹. He received a royal pension of 60,000 livres, which he needed because he had been »continually squeezed« for many years by his »vile, greedy, and insolent« mistress⁸⁰. »Plaything of his blind passion for a haughty woman devoured by the thirst for gold, he was nothing but the object of the nation's scorn, and all the execration fell upon his abominable mistress«. In retirement this man »without energy, without intelligence, without spirit [...] cries continually« and »vegetates chez la marquise de Langeac. But since he no longer has favors to dispense, no *lettres de cachet* that she

74 Jean Louis CARRA, *Mémoires historiques et authentiques sur la Bastille*, 3 vols., Paris 1789, vol. 3, p. 192.

75 BAUDEAU, *Chronique secrète* (as in n. 7), p. 39 (14 May 1774) and p. 66 (31 May 1774).

76 MS, vol. 27, p. 276 (5 June 1774); PIDANSAT DE MAIROBERT, *Journal historique* (as in n. 36), vol. 6, p. 18 (20 May 1774). Moreau reported that the duke sent his mistress to Picardy, where she would be near d'Arcq. *Mes Souvenirs* (as in n. 38), vol. 1, p. 376 (2 June 1774).

77 MS, vol. 27, p. 276–277 (5 June 1774); CS, vol. 1, p. 7 (10 June 1774); MS, vol. 27, p. 285 (17 June 1774).

78 PIDANSAT DE MAIROBERT, *Journal historique* (as in n. 36), vol. 6, p. 128 (1 August 1774).

79 HARDY, *Mes Loisirs* (as in n. 31), vol. 3, p. 475 (7 June 1774) and vol. 4, p. 193 (6 May 1775), p. 222 (1 June 1775), p. 230 (12 June 1775), p. 257 (11 July 1775), p. 263 (16 July 1775), as well as CROY, *Journal inédit* (as in n. 30), vol. 3, p. 122.

80 MS, 6: 111 (9 July 1775); VÉRI, *Journal* (as in n. 39), p. 310.

can sell, he has become a great burden to her, and she endures him impatiently⁸¹. When the duke fell sick in 1776 his confessor urged him to expel »all the Langeacs in the world« from his house⁸². The duke died on 27 February 1777. One contemporary insisted that he was »born for good« and »incapable of evil,« but another concluded that he »did no great harm but he did not bring about anything good«⁸³. Hardy, on the other hand, recalled »a multitude of abuses of authority of which he made himself guilty and the large number of injustices to which he had the misfortune to lend himself.« He supposedly left 182 blank *lettres de cachet* among his papers and left »la dame Sabathin, later la dame de Langeac« with an income of 130 000 livres on investments⁸⁴. Given his subservience to his nephew the duc d'Aiguillon, protegé of Du Barry, Maupeou, and Terray, and »especially to the fatal Sabathin, currently Langeac«, one nouvelliste insisted that La Vrillière died »with the reputation of a tyrant and monster«⁸⁵.

Langeac followed the duke in May⁸⁶, but it was not until September that any of the nouvelles reported the death of this woman who covered herself with »shame« through »scandal« and »the atrocity of the vexations she committed in abusing her influence over her feeble lover«⁸⁷. After his resignation she sold some of her assets. Marie-Antoinette herself expressed indignation when the comte d'Artois purchased a forest that La Vrillière had »snared« from Louis XV for her with the help of Du Barry⁸⁸. After her protector's death, Langeac sold Artois her extensive property in the Champs-Élysées for 100 000 livres plus 36 000 livres in a perpetual annuity⁸⁹. Unless she collected the first year's income in advance, she did not live long enough to receive or expend it. Her children auctioned many of her possessions, but they could not shed her name or her notoriety⁹⁰. She reportedly fired the tutor who told them the truth about their parentage and her history⁹¹, but of course she, and they as well, wanted to have their cake and eat it too. They wanted the stamp of legitimacy and the spoils of illegitimacy. Four of the sons

81 PIDANSAT DE MAIROBERT, *Observateur anglois* (as in n. 6), vol. 2, p. 4, 6 (20 July 1775).

82 *Journal de nouvelles formé pour le marquis d'Albertas*, BN, Nouvelles Acquisitions Françaises 4390, f. 2391 (3 February 1776)

83 Louis DUPUY, *Eloge* in M. le duc de La Vrillière, in: *Histoire de l'Académie royale des inscriptions et belles-lettres*, 42 (1786), p. 162–169; Pierre-Étienne REGNAUD, *Histoire des événements arrivés en France depuis le mois de novembre 1770 concernant les parlements et les changements dans l'administration de la justice et dans les lois du royaume*, BN, Fonds Français 13734, f. 218.

84 HARDY, *Mes Loisirs* (as in n. 31), vol. 5, p. 81 (27 February 1777).

85 *Correspondance secrète inédite sur Louis XVI, Marie-Antoinette, la cour et la ville, de 1777 à 1792*, ed. Mathurin-François-Alphonse DE LESCURE, 2 vols., Paris 1866 (hereafter CSI), vol. 1, p. 28–29 (4 March 1777). Emmanuel Armand de Richelieu, duc d'Aiguillon, minister of foreign affairs, 1771–1774. According to Moreau, Langeac despised him. *Mes Souvenirs* (as in n. 38), vol. 1, p. 373 (2 May 1774).

86 Commissaire Bernard-Louis-Philippe Fontaine drafted the scellé in the presence of her husband on 25 May 1777. Archives nationales, Y13129A.

87 CSI, vol. 1, p. 99 (19 September 1777).

88 Marie-Antoinette to Maria Theresa, 12 November 1775, in: Marie-Antoinette, *Correspondance secrète avec Marie-Thérèse et le C^{te} de Mercy-Argenteau, avec les lettres de Marie-Thérèse et de Marie-Antoinette*, ed. by Alfred ARNETH and M. A. GEOFFREY, 3 vols., Paris 1874–1875), vol. 2, p. 393.

89 *Gazette de Berne*, 5 March 1777.

90 *Catalogue de tableaux [...] provenans de la succession de feu madame la marquise de Langeac*, Paris 1778.

91 *Nouvelles à la main de la fin du règne de Louis XV*, ed. by Emmanuel Henri, vicomte DE GROUCHY, Paris 1898, p. 13 (16 June 1763). »Madame Sabatin, now Madame de l'Espinasse Langeac,« secured an order from Saint-Florentin to have the tutor, named Lengé, 27 or 28, ex-Jesuit, locked up in Bicêtre.

left few traces⁹². La Vrillière himself delivered Alexandre-Joseph-Onézime-Louis-Gustave, chevalier de Saint-Ilpize, born in 1754, to the Bastille in order to teach him a lesson about debts and had him released two weeks later⁹³. Antoine-Charles-Joseph-Caliste-Pamphile, born in 1758, was known as the comte de Lespinasse, and Auguste-Louis-César-Hyppolite-Théodore, born in 1759, was known as the comte d'Arlet.⁹⁴ Last but not least, Jacques-Victor-Charles-Joseph-Auguste, born in 1765, had distinguished godparents: James Francis Edward Stuart, the Old Pretender to the English throne, who lived in Rome and was therefore represented by Charles de Saint-Albin, illegitimate son of the Regent Philippe d'Orléans and archbishop of Cambrai, and Victoire Marie Anne de Savoie, legitimized daughter of Victor Amadeus II, duke of Savoy. This youngest of the six sons reportedly provoked the »convulsion« that killed La Vrillière by berating him for selling the former royal nursery to Artois for less than he should have. The duke had time to change his will and exclude his »natural children«⁹⁵.

The second son, Égide-Louis-Edme-Joseph de Lespinasse (1752–1842), chevalier de Langeac, also known as abbé de Langeac, made his name in 1768 by winning the annual poetry competition sponsored by the Académie française. The *Mémoires secrets* identified him as »one of the children of madame la marquise de Langeac, formerly madame Sabatin, the famous patron of the arts and sciences,« who showered some of the academicians with favors⁹⁶. The same source reported that the selection of the teenager's »Lettre d'un fils parvenu à son père laboureur« provoked »great unrest among literary people«⁹⁷. Everyone knew that Saint-Florentin took a »lively interest« in Langeac's children, so someone suggested that he dictated the academy's decision, as if by lettre de cachet:

By order of the king, these verses will be found to be fine.
(Signed Louis and, below, Phélypeaux⁹⁸)

Égide published in several genres for several decades, and nouvelles and journals followed his literary trajectory. Pidansat de Mairobert suspected that he would have ended up in the Académie Française if his father had not resigned from the ministry⁹⁹. The chevalier also had military and diplomatic careers. Marie-Antoinette informed her mother that this »bastard son of la Sabatin«, »a most disreputable subject«, had accompanied the French ambassador to Vienna. The dauphine noted that Terray's mistress had been dismissed for selling positions and desired

92 The children are listed in COURCELLES, *Histoire généalogique* (as in n. 17), 2/De Lespinasse, p. 25–26; LAINÉ, *Archives généalogiques* (as in n. 17), 1/De Lespinasse, p. 11–12; SAINT-ALLAIS, *Nobiliaire universel* (as in n. 17), vol. 12, p. 117–118.

93 FRANTZ FUNCK-BRENTANO, *Les Lettres de cachet à Paris*, Paris 1903, p. 395 (4 October 1774).

94 He inherited his mother's good taste, as indicated by the catalogue of *Tableaux [...] composant la collection de feu M.A.L.C.H.T. de l'Espinasse de Langeac, comte d'Arlet*, Paris 1814.

95 CSI, vol. 1, p. 28 (4 March 1777) and CS, vol. 4, p. 191 (4 March 1777), as well as HARDY, *Mes Loisirs* (as in n. 31), vol. 4, p. 81 (27 February 1777).

96 MS, vol. 4, p. 87–88 (21 August 1767).

97 MS, vol. 4, p. 100 (4 September 1768). His poem was published in the *Mercure de France*, Octobre 1768, p. 5–10. This issue includes some congratulatory verses addressed to the abbé de Langeac by M. le M. de V., perhaps Monsieur le marquis de Villette, and an »Épître a Madame la M. de L.,« clearly Langeac, by Jean François Dieudonné Maucombe. Hardy and others attributed the prize poem to Jean François Marmontel, who composed verses for Mademoiselle de Langeac to recite on her mother's name day. Marmontel to Mademoiselle de Corsaille, June 1767, in: *Correspondance*, ed. John REWICK, 2 vols., Clermont-Ferrand 1974, vol. 1, p. 174–176.

98 For another epigram, see MS, vol. 4, p. 111 (27 September 1768).

99 PIDANSAT DE MAIROBERT, *Observateur anglois* (as in n. 6), vol. 2, p. 9 (20 July 1775).

that »all the others« would be dismissed as well¹⁰⁰. The second of the »Sabatins« managed to humiliate himself by brawling in the street with one of Emperor Joseph II's coachmen. Hardy suspected that this adventure might dash the young man's hopes of »invading the finest benefices in the kingdom« through his father's influence. He prudently left Vienna and probably intended to avoid »similar blunders« elsewhere¹⁰¹. Fifteen months later he and the attaché Dominique Vivant, baron Denon were expelled from Russia for rescuing a French actress imprisoned in Saint Petersburg¹⁰².

The oldest son, Auguste-Louis-Joseph-Fidèle-Armand de Lespinasse (1748–1816), comte de Langeac, reached the rank of colonel by 1770, but he was more »famous for several adventures that made some noise«¹⁰³. Not long after he received the cross of Saint-Louis on 13 March 1771, without the requisite twenty years of military service, the *Mémoires secrets* reported that he threatened a man who stared at his mistress »indecently« at the opera¹⁰⁴. The man in question, Georges-Maurice Guérin, surgeon to the prince de Conti, supposedly dragged him before a commissaire, who dismissed the case¹⁰⁵. The prince wrote the indignant count an insulting note that ended with these words: »I have had bastards, but I have always taken care that they are not insolent«¹⁰⁶. Three years later Auguste was involved in another scuffle that entertained »the court and the city«. He wished to marry the widowed sister-in-law of Nicolas-Aloph-Félicité Rouault, marquis de Gamaches, who did not like the match, and insulted him at the dinner table¹⁰⁷. When the two men left the house to fight, they were arrested by guards who seemed to have been posted there, presumably by Langeac. The tribunal of marshals sentenced the aggressor to six months in prison¹⁰⁸. Enraged by this sentence, which might have been averted or overruled under Louis XV, Langeac wrote an »extravagant letter« to the marshals and challenged Rouault to a duel with pistols. Louis XVI expelled »this wicked woman, despised by the nation as much as Du Barry was«, from Paris¹⁰⁹. One nouvelliste lamented that »it is not her

100 Marie-Antoinette to Maria Theresa, 13 October 1771, in Marie-Antoinette, *Correspondance secrète* (as in n. 88), vol. 1, p. 223.

101 HARDY, *Mes Loisirs* (as in n. 31), vol. 3, p. 82–83 (18 February 1773). Pidansat de Mairobert also reported the incident in: *Journal historique* (as in n. 36), vol. 4, p. 69 (16 February 1773).

102 On this escapade see Alexandre STROEV, *Vivant Denon en Russie*, in: Francis CLAUDON, Bernard BAILLY (ed.) *Vivant Denon: Colloque de Chalon-sur-Saône*, le 24 mai 2003, Chalon-sur-Saône 2003, p. 17–46.

103 PIDANSAT DE MAIROBERT, *Observateur anglois* (as in n. 6), vol. 2, p. 366 (20 July 1775). For his service and honors see COURCELLES, *Histoire généalogique* (as in n. 17), vol. 2/De Lespinasse, p. 26–29; LAINÉ, *Archives généalogiques* (as in n. 17), vol. 1/De Lespinasse, p. 12–15; SAINT-ALLAIS, *Nobiliaire universel* (as in n. 17), vol. 12, p. 118–125.

104 According to *Gazette noire* (as in n. 7), p. 143, he received the cross only because he was the »bastard of the minister.«

105 Not documented in the papers of any of the three commissaires for the quartier du Palais Royal: Sirebeau, Thierion, and Trudon.

106 MS, vol. 5, p. 234 (23 March 1771).

107 Anne-Jean-Baptiste-Émile Rouault married Marie-Catherine-Ferdinande de Maugiron in 1766 and died after a duel with a jealous husband. HARDY, *Mes Loisirs* (as in n. 31), vol. 3, p. 281 (15 December 1773).

108 MS, vol. 27, p. 272–273 (30 May 1774). According to Moreau, »the little Langeac« not only provoked Rouault but also pulled his chair out from underneath him. *Mes Souvenirs* (as in n. 38), vol. 1, p. 376 (26 May 1774).

109 *Lettres de M. R** à M. N** concernant ce qui s'est passé d'intéressant à la cour depuis la maladie et la mort de Louis XV jusqu'au rétablissement du parlement de Paris*, in: *Mélanges publiés par la Société des bibliophiles français* 5 (1825), p. 27 (2 June 1774). CS, vol. 1, p. 12–13 (25 June 1774) includes the text of the challenge, in which Langeac calls him effeminate and herself respectable.

prostitutions, or her two living husbands, or her exactions, or the public sale of positions and *lettres de cachet*, or her audacious bankruptcies that got her exiled, « just an »absurdly insolent« message to the man who humiliated her »little fool« of a son¹¹⁰.

The »little fool« had amorous as well as bellicose adventures. We do not know the name of his companion who attracted the unwanted attention at the opera, but we do know that he had relationships with two of Louis XV's former mistresses in the 1770s: Louise Jeanne de Tiercelin de La Colletterie, whom La Vrillière expelled from Paris in 1773, though ostensibly not because of her liaison with his son, and Marie-Josèphe d'Arneval, illegitimate daughter of Terray, who gave birth to the count's child and died a few days later, on 2 June 1777¹¹¹. Some suspected poison, and, »because of the hatred people have for everything related to the duc de La Vrillière,« the magistrates had the body exhumed and examined¹¹². The doctors found no evidence of foul play, but Hardy was not surprised that the count resigned his position as captain in the comte de Provence's guards, since he no longer had »his father and protector« around to help him resolve his problems¹¹³. The next incident, in 1779, involved characters from the world of the stage rather than the court. The jealous Jean-Henri Gourgau, dit Dugazon, reproached his wife, the singer, actress, and dancer Louise-Rosalie Lefebvre for »giving herself to a Langeac«¹¹⁴. The lover slapped the husband, who responded in kind. It was said that »M. de Langeac will count these slaps with the kicks and punches« he had received in 1771 and that this colonel with the cross of Saint-Louis »is no match for a histrion«. The comte de Neuilly, who resented the count's intimacy with his mother from the mid 1780s on, claimed that he lacked a quality that every gentleman possessed, courage. Many years after the fact Neuilly recalled with relish the day the count interrupted him while he was studying Caesar's *Commentaries*. He told the unwelcome visitor to go to the devil and chased him out of the room with a fireplace poker¹¹⁵.

The chevalier de Langeac and the comte de Langeac did not marry, but their »charming«, graceful, witty, clever sister did¹¹⁶. Aglaé-Joséphine-Amélie-Louise-Edme de Lespinasse-Langeac (1756–1788) wed Victor-Scipion-Louis-Joseph de la Garde, marquis de Chambonas, on 5 May 1774, just days before the death of Louis XV. Contemporaries assumed that he gave her his hand, just as the marquis de Langeac gave Mademoiselle du Cusack his hand, for the sake of material advantages¹¹⁷. Eight months later the bride initiated a lawsuit for a marital separation from her husband. She charged him with »cruelty and mistreatment«, and he claimed that »she, too quick to follow in the footsteps of her mother, begins to set a scandalous example herself«.

110 BAUDEAU, *Chronique secrète* (as in n. 7), p. 66 (31 May 1774).

111 La Vrillière to Tiercelin, 30 November 1773, in: *Archives de la Bastille* (as in n. 8), vol. 19, p. 98.

112 CSI, vol. 1, p. 63 (13 June 1777) and CS, vol. 4, p. 425 (13 June 1777). See also HARDY, *Mes Loisirs* (as in n. 31), vol. 5, p. 165–166 (7 June 1777).

113 HARDY, *Mes Loisirs* (as in n. 31), vol. 5, p. 171 (15 June 1777).

114 MS, vol. 14, p. 50 (13 May 1779).

115 The comte de Neuilly admitted that he had »an instinctive hatred for M. de Langeac«. Neuilly, *Dix années* (as in n. 26), p. 31–33. His cousin Adélaïde-Millo de Campestre reported that the count »lived in the greatest intimacy« with her aunt for 34 years. A. de CAMPESTRE, *Mémoires*, 2 vols., Paris 1827, vol. 2, p. 139–142.

116 PIDANSAT DE MAIROBERT, *Observateur anglois* (as in n. 6), vol. 2, p. 9–10 (20 July 1775). For an example of the »very young, very pretty, and very clever« Mademoiselle de Langeac's frivolous behavior see PIDANSAT DE MAIROBERT, *Journal historique* (as in n. 36), vol. 3, p. 326–327 (18 November 1772).

117 Madame du Deffand wondered which was more honorable, or rather dishonorable, »to marry a Du Barry, and transmit his name to posterity, or for a man of rank to marry Mademoiselle Langeac?« Mary Anne de Vichy-Chamrond, marquise Du Deffand to the duchesse de Choiseul, 14 June 1773, *Correspondance complète avec la duchesse de Choiseul, l'abbé Barthélemy, et M. Craufurt*, ed. by François-Joseph de Beaupoil, marquis de SAINTE-AULAIRE, 3 vols., Paris 1866–1877, vol. 1, p. 435–436.

This case, which has been thoroughly analyzed elsewhere, did not produce any published judicial memoirs. Nouvellistes did not have access to the one hundred pages of depositions given by the witnesses listed by both parties, but they reported the accusations of brutality and adultery, not to mention the outcome¹¹⁸. The magistrates ruled against the wife, on 7 September 1775¹¹⁹, and »the public« rejoiced, out of hatred for her parents. The marquis and marquise had a son, Alophe-Aïme-Charles de la Garde, born on 21 July 1778, but some at the time and since wrongly assumed that they were actually separated, since they led largely separate lives¹²⁰.

Objections on the part of some of the groom's relatives led Louis XV to wonder if »the poor duc de La Vrillière cannot succeed in marrying off his daughter?« The nouvelliste who quoted the question acknowledged that his readers might be astonished »to hear a king speak this way about the indecent conduct of a minister in whom he had placed his confidence for fifty years«¹²¹. Pidansat de Mairobert predicted that the duke would »soon fall into the oblivion he deserves« and that his mistress and children would »return to the obscurity they should not have left,« but libellistes remembered and vilified them throughout the 1780s, as examples of the corruption of the Ancien Régime embodied by Louis XV.¹²² One recalled that Saint-Florentin was »subjugated« by »Madame Sabattin« to such an extent that »he saw only through her eyes« and even had the »indecenty« to celebrate their daughter's marriage despite the late king's illness¹²³. Another remembered that he could hardly produce enough *lettres de cachet* to satisfy his mistress, that »hussy« and »trollop« Sabbatin, and her other lover, the chevalier d'Arcq¹²⁴. The author of a collection of dialogues of the dead, who copied passages from texts published during the 1770s, had the prince de Conti denounce La Vrillière as an »odious and infamous« character. »Ah, Sire, you do not know about all the vile deeds he committed or allowed his frivolous chatterbox to commit. What rapine! What secretive and sinister and extortions!« Another character added that this »abominable whore« should have been sent to the Salpêtrière, which housed wayward women¹²⁵.

After the fall of the Bastille Jean Louis Carra published some of the documents about Rainville and Milet, arrested in 1765, with added comments about »the turpitudes of this woman and her schemes with all her proteges to make money« on *lettres de cachet*. »What a government is that in which women without modesty dispose of all posts and positions!«¹²⁶ Pierre Manuel published an abridged and enhanced version of the police report about Langeac com-

118 Jeffrey MERRICK, Marital Conflict in Political Context: Langeac vs. Chambonas, 1775, in: Suzanne DESAN, Jeffrey MERRICK (ed.), Family, Gender, Law, and State in Early Modern France, University Park 2009, p. 137–182. For international dissemination of news see for example: Correspondance politique secrète sur la cour de France, 18 janvier, 21 and 28 mars, Fonds de Melde-man 37, Archives de l'État, Namur, Belgium.

119 Additional references include Horace Walpole to Lady Ossory, 9 September 1775, in: Correspondance, ed. by W. S. LEWIS, 48 vols., New Haven 1937–1983, vol. 32, p. 258; Journal de politique et de littérature, 15 September 1775, vol. 3, p. 75; Journal politique, ou Gazette des gazettes, October 1775, première quinzaine, p. 47.

120 Marc GAUER, Histoire et genealogie de la famille La Garde de Chambonas et de ses alliances, s.l. 2012, p. 19.

121 CS, vol. 1, p. 7–8 (10 June 1774).

122 PIDANSAT DE MAIROBERT, Observateur anglois (as in n. 6), vol. 2, p. 368 (20 July 1775).

123 Barthélemy-François-Joseph Mouffle d'Angerville, Vie privée de Louis XV, 4 vols., London 1781, vol. 2, p. 298–299 and vol. 3, p. 261.

124 BOUFFONIDOR (?), Les Fastes de Louis XV, 2 vols., paginated continuously, Villefranche 1782, vol. 2, p. 641–642.

125 S.n., Les Entretiens de l'autre monde sur ce qui se passe dans celui-ci, London 1784, p. 237.

126 CARRA, Mémoires historiques (as in n. 74), vol. 3, p. 105. For an example of radical recycling of material about the children, see: Le porte-feuille du patriote (s.l. 1792), p. 30–31. The author copied the account of the comte de Langeac's encounter with the surgeon Guérin from MS, vol. 5,

posed by Marais in 1760. He stated not that the colonel of her father's regiment took advantage of the girl but that »she let him pick a fruit that was not ripe«. She later entranced and ensnared Saint-Florentin, and »it was soon by her that France was governed«. Since she »revolted the people«, Manuel thanked »madame la comtesse de Sabatini« for her contribution to the Revolution¹²⁷. Many other writers condemned the minister and his mistress, »the infamous adventuress who ruled him«¹²⁸. La Vrillière, »whose name became an insult«, and Madame Sabbatin, »whose memory will be detestable forever«, had »virtuous husbands« arrested to satisfy their wives and the courtiers who desired them¹²⁹. She sold *lettres de cachet* not only to wives who denounced their husbands as brutes but also to husbands who denounced their wives as flirts, as well as parents, children, and siblings who wished to have troublesome relatives locked up for their own advantage¹³⁰.

The notorious Madame de Langeac lived on in less polemical and more historical, anecdotal, and literary accounts of the Ancien Régime. According to a narrative of the reigns of Louis XV and XVI published under the Directory, Saint-Florentin/La Vrillière lasted as long as he did because of »the analogy between his domestic behavior and that of the king«. His mistress, known for »the shameful traffic she conducted, almost publicly, in favors, rewards, and even arbitrary punishments,« encouraged his »blind servility to the will of the king's mistress«¹³¹. A dictionary of historical anecdotes published under Napoleon devoted several pages to Langeac and her husbands, her oldest son's encounters with Guérin and Dugazon, and her daughter's marriage.¹³² One could track representations and misrepresentations of Langeac throughout the nineteenth century, in memoirs (including apocryphal memoirs, like those of the Madame du Barry), popular histories (such as those by Alexandre Dumas père), and fiction. One journal printed a story about the chevalier de Langeac, who wooed a woman with a parrot named Coco and died in the attack on the Tuileries 10 August 1792¹³³. Another journal printed a series about La Vrillière, who lived with an »old woman« named Langeac, formerly »Subretin«, who »contributed a good deal to the sourness of his character and the wickedness of his decisions«¹³⁴. In our time, Jean-François Parot has included the minister and his mistress in the cast of characters in his popular Nicolas Le Floch mysteries. In *Le Crime de l'hôtel Saint-Florentin* he turned the prosthetic left hand into a murder weapon and mentioned both Langeac and Chambonas¹³⁵.

After tracking Langeac in many milieux, high and low, and sources, published and unpublished, we are left with some facts and more fictions about her life, including her thirty years

- p. 234 (23 March 1771), and noted that the count »conducted himself like a man who had the honor to be known as the bastard of a minister«.
- 127 Pierre MANUEL, *La Police de Paris dévoilée*, 3 vols., Paris 1793, vol. 2, p. 103–104. Guillaume Imbert de Boudeaux reprinted this passage in: *La Chronique scandaleuse* 5 (1791), p. 52–53.
- 128 *Le Parc aux cerfs*, Paris 1790, p. 69.
- 129 *Mémoires du maréchal duc de Richelieu, pour servir à l'histoire des cours de Louis XIV, de la minorité et du Règne de Louis XV, etc.*, 9 vols., Paris 1793, vol. 9, p. 360.
- 130 Théophile-Imarigeon DU VERNET, *Vie de Voltaire, suivie d'anecdotes qui composent sa vie privée*, Paris 1797, p. 457.
- 131 Antoine-Étienne-Nicolas FANTIN-DESODARDS, Louis Quinze et Louis Seize, 5 vols., Paris 1797–1798, vol. 2, p. 145.
- 132 MOUCHET, *Dictionnaire contenant les anecdotes historiques de l'amour depuis le commencement du monde jusqu'à ce jour*, 2nd ed., 5 vols., Troyes 1811, vol. 3, p. 452–455. The first edition in 2 vols. (Paris, 1788) does not include any of the Langeacs.
- 133 LÉLIO, *Histoire d'un crime échappé à la Gazette des tribunaux*, originally published in the *Journal des enfants et de la mode des demoiselles* (reprinted in *Le Compilateur*, 10 February 1843, p. 120–123), and Laure SURVILLE, *Le Compagnon du foyer*, Paris 1854, p. 1–26.
- 134 *Journal du dimanche: Littérature, histoire, voyages, musique*, 28 August 1864, p. 294–295.
- 135 Published in 2004, translated in 2010, and filmed in 2013.

with the count and duke. Like more than a few pretty females from the provinces in eighteenth-century novels, as well as police records, she made her way to the city and up the ladder through her looks and wits. *Nouvellistes* and *libellistes* gave her little credit for her natural endowments or for her protective motherhood and cultural patronage. Troubled by the connections between and prevalence of private and public disorders in their time, they emphasized her sexual and financial corruption as well as her domination of the weak man who enabled her malfeasance on behalf of her children (including two undisciplined sons and an intractable daughter) and clients. They portrayed the villainous, unmanly minister and his rapacious, unwomanly companion as models of despotism and debauchery in the style of Louis XV and as victims of regime change under the fatherly and virtuous Louis XVI. They scorned women who used their charms and wiles to master men, but they also mocked men who allowed themselves to be mastered by women through seduction and deception. In recounting Langeac's story, her critics suggested that masculinity was as malleable and problematic as femininity in their time. Historians have neglected her, but her transgressions of conventional expectations about women's conduct earned her a prominent position in the ranks of the avaricious mistresses, promiscuous actresses, and adulterous countesses who haunted the vulnerable male imagination in the last decades of the Ancien Régime.