

THE UNCROWNED QUEENS

The Power of Erotic Capital in the Courts of Charles II and Louis XIV

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Introduction

The lasting history of courtesans and mistresses to kings has been wrought with scandal, lascivious behavior, and sensationalism. This is not without warrant; however, there was more to the lives of these women than sex, luxury, and unconventional conceptions of morality. When analysed, the courtesans and mistresses of early modern Europe, and specifically in the cases of seventeenth century France and England, encapsulate wit, politics, determination, and skill. Indeed, these women embody Catherine Hakim's theory of erotic capital. Through an interdisciplinary combination of women's and gender studies and history perspectives, I intend to establish that an effective mistress could attribute her success to her skilled ability to use the seven elements of Hakim's erotic capital in her own way. She did this in a manner that was appropriate to her location in time and space, to appeal to her respective king in order to create sexual, erotic, and/or romantic transactions for economic, social, and/or cultural capital. In that sense, being a mistress involved skilled work, intelligence, charm, dedication, and incredible social grace.

The mistresses of Louis XIV and the mistresses of Charles II make for an excellent historical case study for Hakim's theory of erotic capital. Charles II was involved with, among others: Barbara Palmer, Louise de K erouaille, and Nell Gwyn. Louis XIV was involved with, among others: Louise de la Valli re, Fran oise-Ath na is, and Fran oise d'Aubign .¹ Through the analysis of the beginning, middle, and end to the affairs of these women with their kings, what made a mistress "successful" in her endeavours to use her erotic capital to benefit her life and the life of her family can be defined and determined. The first chapter will examine the beginnings of mistresses' relationships with men in power. In many cases, the start of the relationship

¹ For the official titles, other known names, years of birth and death, and brief biographical details of these women, see the Appendix.

defined the future of the affair. Some women were raised and trained to be courtesans and mistresses. They received training in acting, singing, dancing, playing musical instruments, art appreciation, and other bourgeois refinements, giving them a competitive edge over other women.² These women were being trained in how to use their erotic capital. How a woman piqued the interest of her king often spoke to her personal brand of erotic capital. Many women did not inherit the political power that came with being a mistress, but created it. The second chapter will analyse how they held the interest of their respective king despite controversy and competition. It will look at whether there were other women to act as competition for the king's attention and how the mistresses dealt with them. It will explore the relationship mistresses had with the queen. It will discuss whether the kings strayed from their mistresses and had other affairs, including singular acts of passion, such as the ones Elisabeth Charlotte, Duchesse d'Orléans gossiped about in her notorious letters.³ The third chapter will explore the conclusions of the relationships. It will analyse why and how some mistresses became ennobled with financial and familial support, while others were left destitute and ostracized. It will consider how it was a balance of the six (and occasionally seven) facets of Hakim's erotic capital that contributed to a life of luxury, contentment, and legacy for the children of a mistress. It was a failure to reach this balance in a way that was appropriate to the time and place of her situation (as well as to the personal tastes of her king) that would lead to the termination of a relationship, ostracization, and economic destitution. Indeed, by the same principle, I contend that it was erotic capital being used skillfully that made it possible for a woman, who may not have had any

² Nancy Mitford, *Madame De Pompadour* (New York, NY: New York Review of Books, 2001), 22-23.

³ Elisabeth Charlotte Orléans, *A Woman's Life in the Court of the Sun King*, ed. Elborg Forster (Baltimore: London: John Hopkins University Press, 1997), 100.

royal or finished background, to become what can be appropriately called an “uncrowned queen.”

Hakim's Erotic Capital

In 2010, Hakim attributed the first use of the term “erotic capital” to Martin and George⁴ in her article bearing the same name.⁵ She has since developed her concept and published a book on the subject, *Honey Money: The Power of Erotic Capital*⁶ in 2011. Hakim builds off of Bourdieu’s theory of personal assets, arguing that his list– economic, social, and cultural capital– is incomplete.⁷ She contends that erotic capital is the missing element. In Hakim’s interpretation of erotic capital (also called erotic power) there are six, and occasionally seven, distinct aspects of erotic capital that people of all genders can embody and perform. The six main categories are: 1) attractiveness and beauty; 2) sexual attractiveness; 3) social grace, charm, and social skills; 4) liveliness, energy, and humour; 5) social presentation and dress; and 6) sexual competence, imagination, and playfulness. The seventh element, reproduction and fertility, is only counted some of the time, based on the time and space of the interaction. For instance, in the context of my research, the ability to produce a child would be much more important when attributed to the wife of the king, rather than his mistress, who may benefit from remaining childless.

Using Catherine Hakim’s work from a women’s studies perspective may be seen as an intriguing and controversial decision. Hakim continually bashes what she perceives to be the faults of women’s studies departments and feminists. She states that women’s and gender studies departments do not fully appreciate the concept of erotic capital and that they “erect a false

⁴ Martin, J. L. and George, M., “Theories of Sexual Stratification: Toward an Analytics of the Sexual Field and a Theory of Sexual Capital,” *Sociological Theory*, 24 (2006): 126.

⁵ Catherine Hakim, “Erotic Capital,” *European Sociological Review* 26, 5 (2010): 499-518.

⁶ Catherine Hakim, *Honey Money: The Power of Erotic Capital* (London: Allen Lane, 2011).

⁷ Hakim, *Honey Money*, 18-19.

dichotomy: either a woman is valued for her human capital (her brains, education, work experience and dedication to her career) *or* she is valued for her erotic capital.”⁸ While she recognizes that modern feminism is divided by several political orientations and geographical locations,⁹ she maintains that her conception of mainstream feminism is a kind of “victim feminism.”¹⁰ She is comfortable with blanket statements such as “Feminism in all its colours and variations rejects sex and sexuality rather than seeking to impose female control over sexual activity and sexual expression.”¹¹ Indeed, she argues that feminists and women’s studies departments have been “brainwashed by patriarchal ideology.”¹² She simplifies the difficult conversations within feminist discourse on beauty routines and expectations as impossible and untrue, claiming that “[i]f even half of this were true, women would be insane by now, or else there would have been a revolution.”¹³

This text, in addition to its problematic framing of women’s studies and feminism, also contains elements of homophobia. Hakim argues that women’s studies propagates lesbianism,¹⁴ includes several stereotypical depictions of gay men, and proclaims the high prevalence of homosexuality amongst humans as a myth.¹⁵ Hakim’s historical analysis and examples are often weak, overly exaggerated, unsupported, broad, and decontextualized from culture. An example of this is her brief history of reproductive beliefs, which takes her only two pages to account for.¹⁶ Hakim also exaggerates the experiences of sex workers as overly positive.¹⁷ Regardless of

⁸ Hakim, *Honey Money*, 87.

⁹ Hakim, *Honey Money*, 89.

¹⁰ Hakim, *Honey Money*, 89.

¹¹ Hakim, *Honey Money*, 90.

¹² Hakim, *Honey Money*, 90.

¹³ Hakim, *Honey Money*, 92.

¹⁴ Hakim, *Honey Money*, 93.

¹⁵ Hakim, *Honey Money*, 43-44.

¹⁶ Hakim, *Honey Money*, 78-79.

¹⁷ Hakim, *Honey Money*, 190-191.

the shortcomings of Hakim's book as a whole entity, her theory of erotic capital remains convincing and useful. While her book is in some ways meant as a prescriptive guide to improving women's lives at work, at home, and in the bedroom, this thesis instead frames the conceptual theory of erotic capital away from modern politics and onto erotic capital as a tool of analysis that can be applied in a historiographical context. The point of this thesis is not to rewrite the biographies of famous mistresses or to prescribe the art of erotic capital to modern women. Instead, seventeenth century England and France act as a case study to try the theory of erotic capital in a historical context.

Significance

This work is of important academic note, as it fills in a large gap in the understanding of the lives of early modern European sex workers, courtesans, and mistresses. Reasons for this gap include the moralizing of history,¹⁸ due to the extra-marital sexual nature of a courtesan's role, and the perception that being a courtesan was frivolous or devoid of politics¹⁹ and purely sexual in nature. I wish to add my work to the growing body of women's history. Being a courtesan or mistress has been historically unrecognized as a profession or career, despite the fact that the women who filled these roles acted with deliberation, intent, and effort. Courtesan or mistress work has been separated from sex work. This is in spite of the fact that they share the same core definition: the exchange of some sort of sexualized service—or, erotic capital—for another form

¹⁸ Some texts that I read as part of my research included some elements of moral commentary, such as in Bonnie S. Anderson and Judith P. Zinsler, *A History of Their Own: Women in Europe from Prehistory to the Present, Vol. II* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), where the authors characterize Françoise-Athénaïs as greedy and vain and Françoise d'Aubigné as matronly and pure (p. 73-74). While these descriptions may be accurate in some ways, the tone in the writing suggests some value judgements of the mistresses.

¹⁹ This notion is discussed by Hakim, who argues that feminist theorists view women without incomes as "powerless, even if they are married to millionaires" (p.87). I argue that this idea can be overlaid onto historical thought, as women without official political titles were seen to be uninfluential, even if they spent much of their time with a king.

of capital, be it money, protection, or social standing. Work that analyses these women creates a valuable history for something that women have been doing for millennia: having intercourse with men in an exchange that runs deeper than sexual pleasure. The conceptualization of these women's lives in the frame of erotic capital allows for a greater understanding of sexuality and its connection to economics, politics, and social mores- a significant contribution to both the study of seventeenth century European history and to women's, gender, and sexuality studies.

Literature Review

Literature on this subject is lacking. Due to my personal English language restriction, the European countries in which I could explore were limited. Therefore, this thesis will focus on the mistresses and courtesans of England and France. Most historical literature on this subject tends to define the mistress or courtesan in relation to her male partner. It was necessary to find material from biographies of the king or noble in question, or a general history of a nation's court, hoping that illegitimate sexual affairs would be considered noteworthy by the author. Many sources do not define or differentiate between courtesan, mistress, and sex worker, using the terms interchangeably. Joanna Richardson attempted to define the three in her research on nineteenth-century French women. She maintained that "A courtesan is less than a mistress, and more than a prostitute. She is less than a mistress because she sells herself for material benefits; she is more than a prostitute because she chooses her lovers. The courtesan is, in fact, a woman whose profession is love, and whose clients may be more or less distinguished."²⁰ I plan to use *mistress* when discussing women in long-term relationships with married men, *official mistress* or *maîtresse-en-titre* when a woman was given the title by a king, *courtesan* to refer to a woman

²⁰ Joanna Richardson, *The Courtesans: The Demi-Monde in 19th Century France* (London, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1967) as quoted in Julie Peakman, "Memoirs of Women of Pleasure: The Whore Biography," *Women's Writing* 11, 2 (2004): 164.

courtier without the euphemism for sex, and *sex worker* when referring to a woman who has sex for direct monetary exchange.

Materials that did focus solely on the mistresses themselves were often sensationalized or quasi-academic sources,²¹ with some exceptions, such as Madame de Pompadour²² and Barbara Palmer²³, who have captivated historical minds for decades. Later memoirs and biographies may have been purposefully exaggerated, as they became scandalous reading materials for the public in the Victorian era.²⁴ The narratives of the lives of these women were often fractured and integrated intermittently into the narratives of the kings. Therefore, attentive reading was necessary to discern information pertinent to mistresses' relations to their erotic capital. In addition to Hakim's *Honey Money* and "Erotic Capital", two other texts pertinent to this work are Antonia Fraser's *Love and Louis XIV*²⁵ and Susan Griffin's *The Book of the Courtesans: A Catalogue of Their Virtues*.²⁶

Love and Louis XIV: The Women in the Life of the Sun King chronologically follows the life of King Louis XIV of France and how he interacted with women. While Fraser is not an academic historian, she is an acclaimed author and biographer and the historical elements of her writing are cited appropriately with a wide selection of primary and secondary texts. The benefit of this book is that in her titular description of 'women', Fraser does not just mean lovers and wives, of which Louis XIV had many, but also his mother and women of the court. The inclusion

²¹ An example of this is Eleanor Herman's *Sex with Kings*.

²² Madame de Pompadour has countless biographies, such as Colin Jones, *Madame de Pompadour: Images of a Mistress* (London: Yale University Press, 2002); Nancy Mitford, *Madame De Pompadour* (New York, NY: New York Review of Books, 2001); and Evelyne Lever, *Madame De Pompadour: A Life* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2002).

²³ Hamilton, Elizabeth. *The Illustrious Lady: A Biography of Barbara Villiers, Countess of Castlemaine and Duchess of Cleveland* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1980).

²⁴ Peakman, "Memoirs of Women of Pleasure", 163.

²⁵ Antonia Fraser, *Love and Louis XIV: The Women in the Life of the Sun King* (Toronto: Doubleday Canada, 2006).

²⁶ Susan Griffin, *The Book of the Courtesans: A Catalogue of Their Virtues* (New York: Broadway Books, 2001).

of these other important figures means that the reader can examine the King's personal romantic relationships, familial relations, and court politics. Fraser includes accounts of interactions between the women themselves, as well as conversations between the King and other members of his family and the court about his affairs, which is a huge advantage for my research. While Fraser does define the women in this book by the relations they had with the Sun King, she does give them due attention by examining their lives before and after their affairs with the King and recognizing their autonomy (or lack thereof) as human beings.

The Book of the Courtesans: A Catalogue of Their Virtues, like *Love and Louis XIV*, was not written by an academic historian either. Susan Griffin is a feminist author, whose work contributes to the women's and gender studies aspect of my research. She does not record the stories of mistresses in chronological order or by individual, but instead divides their stories into categories of "virtues" and "erotic stations." Her virtues are: timing, beauty, cheek, brilliance, gaiety, grace, and charm. Her erotic stations are: flirtation, suggestion, arousal, seduction, rapture, satiety, and afterglow.²⁷ These groupings follow similar definitions to Hakim's elements of erotic capital. Indeed, this text is very useful, as it provides detailed evidence about the purposeful and autonomous behavior of mistresses in their pursuit of gaining and maintaining relationships with men in positions of power. One attribute of this book is that it focuses not only on the famous mistresses, such as Madame de Pompadour, as many texts do, but on lesser known women as well. This book was not a very useful historical source, but it does provide valuable context and insight into the behaviours and qualities of mistresses. It expanded upon and

²⁷ Griffin, *The Book of the Courtesans*, ix-xii.

reimagined Hakim's theory of erotic capital, which was useful when studying the biographies of the mistresses of Charles II of England and Louis XIV of France.

Chapter One: The Foundations of Erotic Capital

Education and Upbringing

Barbara Palmer, born Barbara Villiers, was the most legendary English “uncrowned queen.”²⁸ She was from a noble, but impoverished family. Her family, upon the execution of King Charles I of England during the English Civil War, secretly swore their fealty to his son and Barbara's eventual partner, Charles II, while he was in exile. It is assumed that she was well trained and educated in noble customs and dress.²⁹ In 1659, she married Roger Palmer, a Catholic Royalist.³⁰ The marriage did not stop her from engaging in a relationship with Phillip Stanhope, Lord of Chesterfield, to whom she may have been a mistress,³¹ nor did it stop her relationship with Charles II.

Louise de la Vallière, one of Louis XIV's first mistresses, was of minor noble birth, to again an impoverished family. However, to her benefit, she was raised with the daughters of Gaston, Duke of Orléans, in Blois, France. Louise was therefore well educated in courtly behaviours and social norms, most notably dancing³² and horse riding.³³ Louise, while not raised to be any more religious than any other court member, was extremely pious, even from a young age.³⁴ Louise's upbringing gave her a distinct advantage in terms of erotic capital. Louise was

²⁸ This term is used by several historians and authors, including Antonia Fraser, Princess Michael of Kent, and Eleanor Herman, in reference to several powerful mistresses.

²⁹ Sources on Barbara Palmer's life before becoming intertwined with Charles II are very limited.

³⁰ Fraser, *King Charles II*, 175.

³¹ Fraser, *King Charles II*, 209.

³² Fraser, *Love and Louis XIV*, 73.

³³ Joan Sanders, *La Petite: The Life of Louise De La Vallière* (Houghton Mifflin, 1959), 4.

³⁴ Fraser, *Love and Louis XIV*, 72.

already familiarized with the social expectations, skills, and dress of the French court, denoting the third and fifth aspects of erotic capital. This is especially true of her horse riding, as this was a skill well appreciated by Louis XIV for its opportunities of privacy.³⁵

Little is known about Nell Gwyn's upbringing. What is known, however, is that Nell, who later became one of Charles II's mistresses, was born in an urban working class, garnering her notoriety as a folk heroine and as an example of a Cinderella story. It appears that Nell, unlike many of her counterparts, had a background in sex work. Her mother was the madam of a brothel, and it is possible that Nell herself engaged in child sex work.³⁶ Her first job was as an "orange-girl", selling oranges to men who attended the theatre.³⁷ It is here where many women, including Nell, would meet men and engage in mutually beneficial relationships. Nell, unlike many other mistresses, had a career outside of being a royal mistress. She continued working in the theatre, eventually becoming a lead actress in several plays. She was known for her wit and her humour, indeed, being nicknamed "pretty, witty Nell"³⁸, which allegedly saved the fates of many poorly written plays. She encapsulated the concept of the fourth element of erotic capital. Nell was a kept woman for several men of the aristocracy before becoming a royal mistress.³⁹ Nell had a competent hold of the sixth facet of erotic capital– sexual competence.

Françoise-Athénaïs, also known as Madame de Montespan, Louis XIV's most infamous maîtresse-en-titre, came from one of the oldest and most prestigious families in France, the House of Rochechouart. Her finishing and education were the finest available to a woman of her

³⁵ Fraser, *Love and Louis XIV*, 73.

³⁶ John Harold Wilson, *Nell Gwyn, Royal Mistress* (New York: New York, Pellegrini & Cudahy, 1952), 8-9.

³⁷ Arthur Irwin Dasent, *Nell Gwynne, 1650-1687; Her Life Story from St. Giles's to St. James's with Some Account of Whitehall and Windsor in the Reign of Charles the Second* (New York: B. Blom, 1969), 41.

³⁸ HRH Princess Michael of Kent, *Cupid and the King: Five Royal Paramours* (New York: New York, Touchstone, 2005), 10.

³⁹ Kent, *Cupid and the King*, 8-9.

station. She received formal education at a convent, and was quite religious in her youth. Her familial background casts an interesting light on her future; her mother was extremely devout while her father was a hedonist.⁴⁰ She spent much of her young life entertaining and participating in salons, cultivating her *joie de vie*, the fourth aspect of erotic capital.⁴¹ It is in the salons where she was nicknamed Athénaïs, after the goddess Athena.⁴² She had early trouble with love; one of her suitors was involved in an illegal duel and fled from France. She later got married to Louis-Henri de Gondrin de Pardaillan, Marquis de Montespan. He was quite poor, and unable to provide properly for a woman of her noble background.⁴³ Early into the relationship, he sold a pair of her diamond earrings to finance a trip to the south of France to pursue a military career.⁴⁴ He abandoned her with two children. Françoise-Athénaïs' life as a young woman established several aspects of erotic capital. She was well refined and educated, encapsulating the third and fifth assets. As well, by the time she met Louis XIV, she was already sexually experienced, and maintained a hold on the sixth aspect of erotic capital.

Louise de Kérouaille, Nell Gwyn's main competitor for the affections of Charles II of England, was a noble woman in the French court of Louis XIV. She was well educated in the social norms and courtly arts, much like her other noble-born contemporaries. This solidified her hold on the third and fifth aspects of erotic capital, social graces and social presentation. She was known for her mastery of the art of finesse.⁴⁵ It is possible that Louise's family intended for her

⁴⁰ Fraser, *Love and Louis XIV*, 106-107.

⁴¹ Christine Adams, "'Belle Comme Le Jour': Beauty, Power and the King's Mistress." *French History* 29, no. 2 (2015), 168.

⁴² Fraser, *Love and Louis XIV*, 104.

⁴³ Th.-Louis Latour, *Princesses, Ladies & Adventuresses of the Reign of Louis XIV* (London: K. Paul, Trench, Trubner, 1924), 234-235.

⁴⁴ Fraser, *Love and Louis XIV*, 108.

⁴⁵ H. Forneron, *Louise De Keroualle, Duchess of Portsmouth, 1649-1734, Or, How the Duke of Richmond Gained His Pension*, 2d ed. (London: S. Sonnenschein, Lowry, 1887), 64.

to be a mistress for Louis XIV, but at the time of her coming of age, Louise de la Vallière had already captured his attentions. Indeed, Louise de K rouaille’s upbringing, like many noble ladies’, was designed around erotic capital. Her education was intended to attract a man in power through lessons on topics such as appropriate dress to charm and liveliness.

Fran oise d’Aubign , also known as Madame Scarron and Madame de Maintenon, was Louis XIV’s last mistress and unofficial second wife. She was not from a well-off background. Her grandfather was a Protestant. While she was not as low-born as her contemporary Nell Gwyn, Fran oise’s family was impoverished and criminal; her father was in prison at the time of her birth in 1635.⁴⁶ She too, had a convent education.⁴⁷ She married Paul Scarron, an older and wealthier noble who suffered from disabilities. She acted as his nurse as well as his wife. Through him, she was able to access higher Parisian society. While engaging in this community, Fran oise met Fran oise-Ath na is, where they became friends.⁴⁸ Fran oise’s early life did little to solidify her hold on aspects of erotic capital, although she did learn proper social skills and dress, the third and fifth facets, because of her husband and his social circles.

First Encounters

Barbara Palmer (and her husband) supported Charles II during his exile, which was advantageous for her once he returned to court and the throne. Purportedly, they either began their sexual relationship while Charles II was still in exile,⁴⁹ or on the night of his coronation in 1660.⁵⁰ She was still married at this time. Almost exactly nine months after the coronation,

⁴⁶ Fraser, *Love and Louis XIV*, 149.

⁴⁷ Fraser, *Love and Louis XIV*, 152.

⁴⁸ Fraser, *Love and Louis XIV*, 121.

⁴⁹ Fraser, *King Charles II*, 175.

⁵⁰ Herman, *Sex with Kings*, 11.

Barbara gave birth to her first child, Anne. Her husband, Roger, acknowledged her as his own.⁵¹ However, the true paternity was clear. In 1661, the King made Roger Earl of Castlemaine (therefore ennobling Barbara) and declared that his inheritance was only to pass to “heirs of his body gotten on Barbara Palmer his now wife.”⁵² This was an obvious move by the King to attempt to account for his cuckolding. Barbara gave birth to a second son (also the King’s) in 1662 and Roger left her.⁵³ Barbara was given by the King her own apartments in Whitehall. Roger and Barbara remained separated but technically married for the rest of their lives.

Louise de la Vallière was introduced to Louis XIV to serve as a distraction. The young king, who had been flirting and perhaps engaging in an affair with his sister-in-law, Henrietta Anne Stuart, Duchess of Orléans was guided by Queen Anne of Austria, his mother, to Louise to displace his affections.⁵⁴ When they met in 1661, Louise was sixteen years old and positioned as a maid of honour for Henrietta. She had long had a crush on the king and had strong royalist affections.⁵⁵ The King fell for Louise, finding her shyness, innocence, and coy, virginal demeanor to be intriguing and different from the other women around him.⁵⁶ It took him six weeks to seduce her, eventually convincing her with jewelry and a romantic note.⁵⁷ Louise’s act of adultery went against the teachings of her sincere piety; she allegedly told the King, “Have pity on my weakness!”⁵⁸ Indeed, Louise imagined her actions with the King, whom she truly loved, as a “kind of holy duty.”⁵⁹ Where Louise lacked in the sixth facet of erotic capital, sexual

⁵¹ Fraser, *King Charles II*, 182.

⁵² Fraser, *King Charles II*, 210.

⁵³ Fraser, *King Charles II*, 210.

⁵⁴ Fraser, *Love and Louis XIV*, 70.

⁵⁵ Fraser, *Love and Louis XIV*, 71.

⁵⁶ Sanders, *La Petite*, 44

⁵⁷ Sanders, *La Petite*, 48-49.

⁵⁸ Fraser, *Love and Louis XIV*, 74.

⁵⁹ Fraser, *Love and Louis XIV*, 74.

competence and playfulness, she made up for in true affection for Louis XIV, as she once stated to other ladies of the court, “The crown adds nothing to the charm of the person.”⁶⁰

Louise de K rouaille was positioned in the house of Henrietta Anne Stuart, Duchess of Orl ans, to, like Louise de la Valli re, quite possibly to serve as a distraction from the flirtation between Louis XIV and his sister-in-law. Despite the fact that at this time the French king was in love with Louise de la Valli re, a royal relationship was not out of the picture for Louise de K rouaille. She accompanied Henrietta on a trip to visit her brother, Charles II of England. There, Henrietta unexpectedly died, and Charles II positioned Louise as a lady-in-waiting for his wife, Catherine of Braganza.⁶¹ Allegedly, Louise was chosen by the French court to attract Charles II’s attention as an attempt to bring the two courts closer. Louis XIV of France once wrote, “How long will the resistance of this childish-looking girl be carried on?” referring to Louise’s coy approach to sleeping with Charles II.⁶² Whether or not this was true, the French ambassador in England and the Secretary of State for England pushed for the development of the relationship once flirtations were evident.⁶³ Clearly, both the French and English courts were aware of the political power ingrained in the position of royal mistress, or else they would not have been as concerned as to whom that woman may be.

In 1667, Nell Gwyn was approached by George Villiers, 2nd Duke of Buckingham, who was intent on managing her love affairs and purposefully attaching her to the King, as a way to secure a closer status for himself with Charles II.⁶⁴ Allegedly, Nell, aware of the power of her

⁶⁰ Fraser, *Love and Louis XIV*, 74.

⁶¹ Fraser, *King Charles II*, 212.

⁶² Louis XIV, as quoted in Forneron, *Louise De Kerouaille*, 64.

⁶³ Forneron, *Louise De Kerouaille*, 69.

⁶⁴ Wilson, *Nell Gwyn*, 84-85.

erotic capital, asked £500 a year to be kept and was rejected as too expensive.⁶⁵ She then met Charles II anyway, in 1668. The two sat near each other in the theatre. Apparently, Charles II was more interested in flirting with Nell, attracted to her beauty, her wit, and her humour, than watching the play.⁶⁶ They continued their affair with conflict only arising in the form of a sense of distaste from the court for her lowborn background. Nell, quite impressively, surpassed and transcended the different stages of sex work, as she escalated from brothel work to being the favourite mistress of the King of England.

After being abandoned by her husband, Françoise-Athénaïs took life into her own hands. She was positioned as a lady-in-waiting to the Queen thanks to her family connections.⁶⁷ It was from this position that she decided, by her own volition and despite still technically being married, to pursue a relationship with the King. By 1666, it was clear that she was attempting to actively seduce Louis XIV. At first, the King and Louise de la Vallière were still in the passionate phase of their relationship and Françoise was considered amusing, but not a threat. She actually became friends with Louise, as well as the Queen.⁶⁸ The King once said to his brother, “She tries hard, but I want nothing of it.”⁶⁹ She was greatly underestimated. Françoise watched for moments when Louise was falling out of favour. The exact moment of the beginning of Louis’ and Françoise’s sexual relationship is unknown, but she was undoubtedly successful. She manipulated her erotic capital to enchant the King away from Louise. One rumoured story recounted an elaborate tale where Louis XIV was disguised as a servant, watching Françoise-Athénaïs take a bath. He accidentally revealed his presence, prompting Françoise, upon

⁶⁵ Kent, *Cupid and the King*, 47; Wilson, *Nell Gwyn*, 85.

⁶⁶ Kent, *Cupid and the King*, 15-16.

⁶⁷ Adams, “Belle Comme Le Jour,” 168.

⁶⁸ Adams, “Belle Comme Le Jour,” 168-169.

⁶⁹ Gillette G. Ziegler, *At the Court of Versailles; Eye-witness Reports from the Reign of Louis XIV*, 1st ed. (New York: Dutton, 1966), 56.

recognizing the King, to simply drop her towel.⁷⁰ Françoise-Athénaïs was an intelligent, charming, and witty woman. Her family was known for their wit. She coined several catchwords and was skilled in mockery.⁷¹ These traits, which exemplify the third and fourth aspects of erotic capital, were central in her seduction of the King of France.

Françoise d'Aubigné met Louis XIV through very different channels than any of her contemporaries. Once Françoise-Athénaïs had entered into a relationship with Louis XIV, she immediately began having his children. Athénaïs, not a very maternal woman, asked Françoise d'Aubigné to be the governess for her children.⁷² It is from this position that Françoise met and began a friendship with the King, which remained platonic until 1675.

Beauty and Attractiveness

Barbara Palmer was an extremely beautiful woman. She had “dark auburn hair, a shapely figure, porcelain skin, an oval face”⁷³ and “heavy-lidded, slanting eyes and sensuous sulky mouth.”⁷⁴ She was a stylish woman. She was known for turning heads and elicited both erotic and aesthetic responses from onlookers.⁷⁵ She was gifted with a strong hold on both the first and second features of erotic capital – beauty and sexual attractiveness.

Louise de la Vallière, while not considered beautiful, was appealing none the less. The Abbé de Choisy quoted Jean de La Fontaine as describing her as “the grace more beautiful than beauty,”⁷⁶ meaning her charms and nature outstood her physical appearance. She was pale, had

⁷⁰ Fraser, *Love and Louis XIV*, 105.

⁷¹ Fraser, *Love and Louis XIV*, 105.

⁷² Fraser, *Love and Louis XIV*, 121.

⁷³ Herman, *Sex with Kings*, 48.

⁷⁴ Fraser, *King Charles II*, 209.

⁷⁵ Fraser, *King Charles II*, 209.

⁷⁶ Fraser, *Love and Louis XIV*, 73.

extremely fair blond hair, blue eyes, and a thin throat.⁷⁷ She had a limp and a wide mouth.⁷⁸ Most notably, she had a very flat chest, for which she compensated with necklaces and neckties with large bows, now dubbed *lavallières*.⁷⁹ While Louise's looks may not be classified as meeting the standards of sexual attractiveness in a seventeenth century context, the second facet of erotic capital, she did meet the basic qualifications of general attractiveness and beauty, the first facet.

Nell Gwyn was both classically and sexually beautiful, with thick, auburn hair, clear skin, perfect teeth, blue eyes, and thick lashes,⁸⁰ assuring her hold on the first and second aspects of erotic capital. Her upbringing may have influenced both her style of dress, as she was not trained in courtly expectations, and the interpretations of others, as her sexual history was known.

Françoise-Athénaïs was stunning. Her beauty was known to have outshone her age, as she was twenty-six years old by the time she entered Louis XIV's court, considerably older in this historical context and in comparison to the King's other affairs and available women. She was much more appealing than her competitor, Louise de la Vallière. She was voluptuous, beautiful, and sexually appealing. She had large blue eyes, thick blond curls, and a curvy body type. Madame de la Fayette called her appearance "faultless."⁸¹ She had a much stronger hold on both the first and second aspects of erotic capital in comparison to Louise.

Louise de Kérouaille was very classically beautiful. She was known for her "childish simple baby face,"⁸² as she was aptly described by John Evelyn. She was quite chubby, and was affectionately nicknamed "Fubbs" by Charles II.⁸³ At first, her appearance and dress were not

⁷⁷ Sanders, *La Petite*, 4.

⁷⁸ Sanders, *La Petite*, 4.

⁷⁹ Fraser, *Love and Louis XIV*, 73-74.

⁸⁰ Kent, *Cupid and the King*, 10.

⁸¹ Latour, *Princesses, Ladies & Adventuresses*, 237.

⁸² John Evelyn as quoted in Forneron, *Louise De Keroualle*, 64.

⁸³ Charles II actually named one of his ships after this nickname. Fraser, *Love and Louis XIV*, 176.

inherently sexual in nature, due to her coy relation with the King. Over the course of her relationship with Charles II, she had established both the first and second features of erotic capital.

Françoise d'Aubigné's looks are rarely discussed in her biographies and in biographies of Louis XIV. Indeed, it was not her beauty that had attracted the love the King. None the less, she was a beautiful woman. She enjoyed modest and feminine dress. Her complexion was "pleasing if a little dark,"⁸⁴ and she had dark, thick hair, leading to her nickname "la belle Indienne."⁸⁵ She had a heart-shaped face, a long nose, a small mouth, and a plump chin.⁸⁶ She was not considered sexually attractive, even in her youth, perhaps because of her modesty and her position at court as a governess. She was older than both of Louis' other mistresses and her sexual relationship with the King began once she was forty years old. She did have a minor hold on the first aspect of erotic capital, but not the second.

Chapter Two: The Manipulation of Erotic Capital

Playing the Game

Louise de la Vallière was not interested in exchanging her erotic capital for a better position in the French court. Believing that she and Louis XIV had a "holy love,"⁸⁷ she did not recognize the importance of court politics and keeping the attention of the King. Her religious beliefs conflicted with her actions with the King, and in 1662, after mounting religious pressure from theologian Jacques-Bénigne Bossuet, Louise fled to a convent.⁸⁸ Louis XIV personally

⁸⁴ Fraser, *Love and Louis XIV*, 153.

⁸⁵ Fraser, *Love and Louis XIV*, 153.

⁸⁶ Fraser, *Love and Louis XIV*, 153.

⁸⁷ Fraser, *Love and Louis XIV*, 104.

⁸⁸ Fraser, *Love and Louis XIV*, 81.

went to fetch her and convince her to come back to court. Persuaded, but still filled with religious guilt, Louise returned, and by 1663, was pregnant with her first child by Louis XIV.⁸⁹ Their relationship went smoothly enough, however burdened by its “secret” nature and Louise’s intense and emotional affections. Louise’s third pregnancy did not advance her courtly position in terms of the seventh facet of erotic capital, reproduction and fertility. In fact, it had the opposite effect, as it severely hampered her sexual attractiveness, social presentation, and sexual competence for nine months while Françoise-Athénaïs introduced herself to court and to the King.⁹⁰

The court of Charles II was complicated and rife with rivalries, especially in the decades of the 1660s and 1670s, when Charles II had several dedicated, long-term mistresses (along with endless flirtations and various sexual exploits) all at the same time. Unlike Louis XIV, whose mistresses largely followed in succession but did not overlap or compete fiercely for long periods of time, Charles’ mistresses were forced to compete for attention, recognition, resources, and status. This often required specific and skilled manipulation of erotic capital.

For the first ten years of Barbara Palmer’s presence at court, she was the only favourite mistress. She and Charles II were both promiscuous and engaged in other affairs,⁹¹ but Barbara had control and power. She was experienced sexually before she entered court and was an imaginative and insatiable lover, which solidified her hold on the sixth facet of erotic capital – sexual competence.⁹² The seventh facet of erotic capital, fertility, may have benefited Barbara in this context, as Queen Catherine was unable to bear children successfully.⁹³ She was very skilled

⁸⁹ Fraser, *Love and Louis XIV*, 85.

⁹⁰ Fraser, *Love and Louis XIV*, 104.

⁹¹ Herman, *Sex with Kings*, 32.

⁹² Herman, *Sex with Kings*, 32; Fraser, *King Charles II*, 209.

⁹³ Kent, *Cupid and the King*, 7.

in manipulating her social skills and her *joie de vivre*, the third and fourth components of erotic capital. Barbara was famous for her temper and recognized that it was an effective tool in manipulating the King for things such attention, money, land, and titles.⁹⁴ She was also fun, throwing parties, elaborate dinners, and hosting gambling games.⁹⁵ She created a double identity, both called “lovely Lady Castlemaine” by diarist Pepys and “the curse of the nation” by John Evelyn.⁹⁶

Nell Gwyn was very skilled at maintaining and exploiting her erotic capital. By the time Nell entered Charles II’s interests, his previous favourite mistress, Barbara Palmer, had already lost much of her influence with the King. Nell quickly bore Charles II a son, in 1670. Like Charles II’s other mistresses’, Nell’s fertility was an asset due to the barren nature of his wife. She boldly returned to the stage the same year,⁹⁷ which was controversial with the court, but maintained her character as lively and witty, which was her primary feature of erotic capital. Nell kept company with playwrights, courtesans, and other nobles to keep up her wit.⁹⁸ She bore a second son to the King in 1671. Nell constantly made fun of Louise de K rouaille, calling her “Squintabella” and “Weeping Willow” for her affinity for tears.⁹⁹ Charles II often found this highly amusing. She mastered the fourth asset of erotic capital- liveliness, energy, and humour. Her practical jokes and performances were central to the continuance of her sexual relationship with the King.

⁹⁴ Herman, *Sex with Kings*, 48.

⁹⁵ Herman, *Sex with Kings*, 130; Fraser, *King Charles II*, 209.

⁹⁶ Fraser, *King Charles II*, 208-209.

⁹⁷ Kent, *Cupid and the King*, 22.

⁹⁸ Kent, *Cupid and the King*, 37.

⁹⁹ Fraser, *King Charles II*, 311-312.

In 1670, Louise de K rouaille entered the English court, immediately after Nell Gwyn. Louise and Nell entered into fierce competition for Charles II’s attention. Louise therefore had to manipulate and exploit her erotic capital as fiercely as Nell did. The polar opposite of Nell, Louise lost her virginity to Charles II.¹⁰⁰ Her coy, well-trained manner was central in keeping the attention of the King when he was not up to Nell’s “buffooneries,” a term used by the French ambassador in England.¹⁰¹ She, like Nell, immediately bore him a son. Her fertility, again, like Nell’s, may have been an asset in her erotic capital. Louise’s relationship with the King was not as heavily sexual as his with Nell. In fact, she contracted a venereal disease from Charles II that prevented her from having sex at all for several months, and greatly impacted her future sexual relationships.¹⁰² Without sex, assumedly one of the most crucial aspects of erotic capital, Louise was able to maintain the interests of the King through the exploitation of her other qualities of erotic capital. While tears, hysterics, swooning, and threats of suicide (which could be considered manipulations of the third facet of erotic capital – social skills) were frequently how Louise negotiated her way with the King,¹⁰³ it was her refinement that set her apart from her rivals; it was her finesse and domesticity that made her pleasant company during the daylight hours. Jean-Baptiste Colbert, Minister of Finances for France, recorded in a letter how Louise’s demeanor and upbringing were central to her sexual and political relationship with the King of England:

It is certain that the King of England shows a warm passion for Mademoiselle Keroualle [sic]; and perhaps you may have heard from other sources, what a finely furnished set of lodgings have been given to her at Whitehall. His Majesty goes to her rooms every day at nine o’clock every morning, never stays for less than an hour, and often remains until eleven o’clock. He returns after dinner and shares at her card-table in all her stakes and

¹⁰⁰ Herman, *Sex with Kings*, 116.

¹⁰¹ Charles Colbert de Croissy, as quoted in Wilson, *Nell Gwyn*, 99.

¹⁰² Herman, *Sex with Kings*, 119.

¹⁰³ Fraser, *King Charles II*, 312.

losses, never letting her want for anything. All the ministers, therefore, seek her friendship. Milord Arlington [Secretary of State in England] said to me quite recently, that he was much pleased at this new attachment to the king and that although His Majesty never communicated state affairs to ladies, still, as they could whenever they pleased, render ill-service to statesmen, and defeat their plans, it was well for the king's good servants that his majesty should have a fancy for mademoiselle Keroualle [sic], who was not of an evil disposition, and was a lady. It was better to have dealings with her than with lewd and bouncing orange-girls and actresses, of whom no man of quality could take the measure. She was no termagant or scold; and when the king was with her, persons of breeding could, without loss of dignity, go to her rooms, and pay him and her their court... both I and Milord appreciated her influence, and in what esteem he held her. I believe I can assure you that she has so got round King Charles as to be of the greatest service to our sovereign [Louis XIV] and master, if she only does her duty.¹⁰⁴

Françoise-Athénaïs expertly exploited her erotic capital to gain a foothold with the King. Françoise built upon her initial seduction with her cleverness, charm, and finesse, maneuvering these assets with skill and precision to maintain the King's attention and affection.¹⁰⁵ She had a larger than life personality. She was incredibly fertile and handled her pregnancies well, as she continued to entertain while pregnant and immediately after. Two weeks after giving birth to her first child, she went right back to dancing the ballet at court.¹⁰⁶ She kept the King close; she even went to the battlefield with him, using her title as lady-in-waiting to the Queen.¹⁰⁷ She loved sex, and was known to be insatiable and creative.¹⁰⁸ Indeed, one of the major ways that Françoise kept the attention of Louis XIV was through her sexual appetite, the sixth aspect of erotic capital.

Françoise d'Aubigné did not need to play into the game of manipulating erotic capital. Based on the historical evidence, it appears that Louis XIV and Françoise fell in love quite naturally. Louis, growing older and tired with the antics and temper of Françoise-Athénaïs, was

¹⁰⁴ Jean-Baptiste Colbert as quoted in Forneron, *Louise De Keroualle*, 66-68.

¹⁰⁵ Adams, "Belle Comme Le Jour," 171.

¹⁰⁶ Fraser, *Love and Louis XIV*, 108.

¹⁰⁷ Fraser, *Love and Louis XIV*, 126.

¹⁰⁸ Fraser, *Love and Louis XIV*, 119.

attracted to Françoise d'Aubigné as a maternal figure.¹⁰⁹ She was much more caring and motherly to Athénaïs' children than Athénaïs herself. Indeed, it was her ability to use the seventh aspect of erotic capital, fertility, without even having her own children, which solidified her relationship with the King. As royal governess, she was free to speak openly with the King. He took advantage of this opportunity, and they often discussed politics, economics, and religion. He considered this charming. Françoise also benefitted from good timing – by the time Athénaïs was beginning to lose her footing in the court and in the King's favour, the King was getting older. His sexual exploits were winding down, partially through the religious influence of Françoise d'Aubigné herself.¹¹⁰ He was looking for a more conventional relationship and Françoise could give him that.

Relationship with the Queen

Both Louis XIV's mother and wife most likely knew of his "secret" relationship with Louise de la Vallière. However, there was little they could do about this.¹¹¹ Perhaps because of unthreatening involvement and little influence in court life, neither aggressively tried to end the relationship. Queen Marie-Thérèse did extend some cruelties to Louise de la Vallière, such as ignoring her and preventing food from being served to her at court.¹¹² Louise and her children by the King were only officially acknowledged after the death of Queen Anne, the king's mother in 1666.¹¹³ Françoise-Athénaïs was kind towards the Queen before she became maîtresse-en-titre. Once, while Queen Marie-Thérèse was particularly upset by Louise de la Vallière, she said to her as comfort, "God save me from being the mistress of the King! But if I was, I should feel

¹⁰⁹ Fraser, *Love and Louis XIV*, 163.

¹¹⁰ Ziegler, *At the Court*, 205.

¹¹¹ Fraser, *Love and Louis XIV*, 83-84.

¹¹² Fraser, *Love and Louis XIV*, 113.

¹¹³ Fraser, *Love and Louis XIV*, 103-104.

thoroughly ashamed in front of the Queen.”¹¹⁴ Once she had gained her footing with the King, however, the Queen suffered from Françoise-Athénaïs’ temper and control of the court.¹¹⁵ Françoise d’Aubigné was kind to the Queen both during her position as governess and as mistress.

Charles II had many mistresses and affairs, both long and short term. His wife, Catherine of Braganza, had little say in this matter. Barbara Palmer tortured the Queen. Catherine was wildly unprepared for the life ahead of her in England – Barbara was already a central personality in court. Upon her arrival to court, Barbara refused to light a fire outside her door to welcome her. She purposefully gave birth to her second child by the King at the same palace as the two were honeymooning. She made the King assign her to be Lady of the Bedchamber for the Queen.¹¹⁶ There is no evidence that either Catherine or Nell Gwyn were particularly cruel to the other. Louise de Kérouaille was purposefully very respectful to the Queen, in staunch opposition to the behaviour of Barbara, and the two could have been described as allies. In fact, Catherine protected Louise when she was criticized by the public for her Catholicism.¹¹⁷

Political Influence

Louise de la Vallière was “no court politician.”¹¹⁸ Despite a six year relationship with Louis XIV, she either did not desire to or did not know how to enact political power and influence from her position as mistress. Her only notable political consequence was the arrest and imprisonment of Nicolas Fouquet, the Superintendent of Finance. Fouquet had once tried to bribe Louise as a way to get close to the King, including with flirtatious advances. This incensed

¹¹⁴ Françoise-Athénaïs as quoted in Fraser, *Love and Louis XIV*, 113.

¹¹⁵ Herman, *Sex with Kings*, 65.

¹¹⁶ Fraser, *King Charles II*, 208, 210-211.

¹¹⁷ Fraser, *Love and Louis XIV*, 176.

¹¹⁸ Fraser, *Love and Louis XIV*, 81.

the loyal and pious Louise, and while the King had other concerns about him, this did contribute to his eventual downfall in court life.

Barbara Palmer did not have any personal political goals attached to her relationship with Charles II. However, this did not mean that her person was not political. Barbara's tumultuous relationship with Queen Catherine led to what was called the "Bedchamber Crisis."¹¹⁹ Her conversion to Catholicism contributed to the general feeling of unease in Protestant England. She openly supported and lobbied for the Dutch War, in collaboration with the East India Company and the Duke of York.¹²⁰ The reputation of her temper and her hold on the king affected court politics. Even if Barbara did not institute many political opinions, it was well established that she *could*. As Antonia Fraser puts it, her "importance lay not so much in the influence she exerted over Charles, as in the influence she was presumed to exert by outsiders."¹²¹

Françoise-Athénaïs, like Barbara Palmer, was more politically influential through perception rather than direct action. Her political power stemmed from her position as *maîtresse-en-titre*, which she achieved through manipulation of her erotic capital. Her political sway manifested itself in the form of patronages and marriages. She had the authority to alter the political milieu through "material rewards...—pensions, gifts, emoluments for offices or military ranks and commissions—as well as honorary rewards, speculative opportunities or simply the advantages of her friendship,"¹²² and she took advantage of these powers. She especially did so for her family and friends — she improved the station of her brother and

¹¹⁹ Fraser, *King Charles II*, 210.

¹²⁰ Fraser, *King Charles II*, 231.

¹²¹ Fraser, *King Charles II*, 231.

¹²² Adams, "Belle Comme Le Jour," 167.

ensured that her children were not only legitimized and ennobled, but married well.¹²³ She brokered marriages that connected her already well-to-do family house to even more powerful families in France. Françoise also had an interest in military campaigns. Occasionally, war councils were held in her rooms and she accompanied the King to battlefields.¹²⁴

Louise de K erouaille was much more politically charged than her rival Nell Gwyn, both by her own volition and as a characteristic ascribed to her. Louise entered the English court during a period of religious conflict between Protestants and Catholics in England. Charles II's wife, mother, and brother were all Catholics, leading to religious tensions within the population, the majority of whom were dedicated to the Church of England and mobilized by the recent Restoration of the English monarchy. While Charles II was personally very tolerant towards Catholics, the idea of a Catholic woman being in a position of close relation with the King was publically unpopular.¹²⁵ Louise was extremely loyal to the French, and purportedly supported French policies regardless of the impact on England. Rumors that she was an agent of the French courts ran rampant.¹²⁶ Louise faced harassment for her religion and for her position at court, including a poem stating, "Within this place a bed's appointed/ For a French bitch and God's annointed [sic]"¹²⁷ being tacked to her door. Luckily, she escaped the Popish Plot of 1678-1681 unscathed. Louise's own personal political contributions included the development of the Royal Observatory in Greenwich in 1675. Louise used her position as mistress to point Charles II in the

¹²³ Adams, "Belle Comme Le Jour," 177.

¹²⁴ Adams, "Belle Comme Le Jour," 172.

¹²⁵ Fraser, *King Charles II*, 310.

¹²⁶ Fraser, *King Charles II*, 311. The anxiety surrounding Louise's presence in the English court spread into popular fiction. Eve Tavor Bannet gives an excellent commentary on the genre of "secret histories" and how the tale of Louise's and Charles' romance fits into the genre. Louise inspired the character Francelia, who has beginnings as a "charming, witty, and successful courtesan in France" who eventually had "her Voice in all the Affairs that were negotiated at home and abroad" in the English court. Eve Tavor Bannet, "'Secret History': Or, Talebearing Inside and Outside the Secretorie," *Huntington Library Quarterly* 68, no. 1-2 (2005), 381.

¹²⁷ Herman, *Sex with Kings*, 159.

direction of astronomers attempting to solve the longitude problem, a central issue to navigation, astronomy, and therefore colonialism.¹²⁸

Nell Gwyn was not particularly interested in exploiting her erotic capital for political gains (she much preferred to benefit personally); however, she was aware of her position in a political context. Her status as a royal mistress was politically very complicated. On one hand, she was from a lowborn background, and on the other, she was a Protestant and English born. While riding in a carriage in Oxford, an angry crowd mistook her for her current rival, Louise de K rouaille. She said to them, “Pray, good people, be civil; I am the Protestant whore.”¹²⁹ She recognized that Louise was being called the “Catholic whore” and responded in such a way that suggests that she was aware of her position both as a mistress and as a member of a political court as well as the religious anxieties at the time. She was quick to criticize the King’s other mistresses for behaving as if they were above her station¹³⁰ – they were engaging in an exchange of erotic capital, just like her. Nell was reportedly aware of her fortune, as she frequently engaged in charitable acts and often donated the money that her relationship with Charles II gave her access to; one newspaper reported: “Madam *Gwyn* was very liberal to the Ringers and the Poor all the road, and especially at *Beconsfiedl* [sic] and *Wickam*, where she distributed much money”; “Madam *Gwyn* has been very liberal here [in Oxford] upon all occasions, and out of her charitable inclinations, she released three Prisoners for Debt out of the Castle, and Two out of

¹²⁸ Dava Sobel, *Longitude: The True Story of a Lone Genius Who Solved the Greatest Scientific Problem of His Time* (USA, Bloomsbury Publishing, 2010), 30.

¹²⁹ Alison Margaret Conway, *The Protestant Whore Courtesan Narrative and Religious Controversy in England, 1680-1750* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010), 3-4.

¹³⁰ Fraser, *King Charles II*, 289.

Bocardo.¹³¹ These acts may have had a political edge, as Louise was currently being condemned publically for being incredibly expensive.

Françoise d'Aubigné was, allegedly, the most powerful person in the French courts aside from Louis XIV himself. Her role as governess had given her access to frank conversations on politics with the King; eventually, she was considered a prime minister of sorts. Françoise was viewed by those seeking patronage as more approachable than other members of the court, both because of her kind and open character and because of the unofficial nature of her marriage to the King.¹³² He consulted her on most issues of politics, governance, economics, and religion.¹³³ As written in a letter published by Madame Dunoyer, "It is astonishing that a woman possessing neither beauty nor youth can inspire such passion and confidence."¹³⁴ Françoise was a huge religious influence on the King and was central in the revoking of the Edict of Nantes.¹³⁵ Her influence on the King and his personal life spread throughout the court; Louis XIV behaved in a more religious, level-headed manner, easing the constant drama at Versailles.¹³⁶ Françoise, forever maternal, influenced the children of the King and the youth of the court to live virtuous lives with acceptable partners, shaping the political future of the court.

¹³¹ *Smith's Protestant Intelligence, Domestick and Foreign* 17-21 March, 28-31 March, 4-7 April, 1681 as quoted in Conway, *The Protestant Whore*, 36-37.

¹³² Ziegler, *At the Court*, 213.

¹³³ Latour, *Princesses, Ladies & Adventuresses*, 310-311.

¹³⁴ Ziegler, *At the Court*, 213.

¹³⁵ Latour, *Princesses, Ladies & Adventuresses*, 313.

¹³⁶ Latour, *Princesses, Ladies & Adventuresses*, 314.

Chapter Three and Conclusion: The Power of Erotic Capital

Lasting Successes

Nell Gwyn was incredibly successful in exchanging her erotic capital for a better life. While Nell may have been able to provide a decent life for herself through her acting career or through relationships with other rich men, she would never have been able to reach the standards of life that came with being a mistress of Charles II. Nell was an advocate for her own well-being. She refused to lease a house from the courts, and demanded that it be placed in her own name.¹³⁷ She received a generous pension, even after having fallen out of sexual favour of the King.¹³⁸ She also advocated for the acknowledgement and ennobling of her two sons, in a way that was characteristically Nell. She allegedly said to her son while in front of the King during a visit, “Come hither, you little bastard!” When he appeared upset by this, she said, “I have no better name to call him by” to which the King replied, “Then I must give him one.”¹³⁹ He was made an Earl and later a Duke. In 1685, the King supposedly said on his death bed, “Let not poor Nelly starve.”¹⁴⁰ This request was honoured until her early death at 37 years old.

Louise de K rouaille’s relationship with Charles II was very successful. She continued to be his partner until his death in 1685, when, like Nell Gwyn, he wished for her to be cared for as he stated, “be well to Portsmouth.”¹⁴¹ In addition, Charles II allegedly converted to Catholicism on his death bed, which would have been significant to the devout Louise.¹⁴² While Louise was already a noble woman and most likely would have led a relatively comfortable life without the

¹³⁷ Kent, *Cupid and the King*, p. 23.

¹³⁸ Kent, *Cupid and the King*, 29.

¹³⁹ Herman, *Sex with Kings*, 170.

¹⁴⁰ Kent, *Cupid and the King*, 46.

¹⁴¹ Fraser, *King Charles II*, 456.

¹⁴² Fraser, *King Charles II*, 452.

involvement of a king, albeit without a dowry,¹⁴³ there is no comparison to the luxury attached to being the mistress of a king. This is especially true in the case of Louise and Charles II. Charles II gave Louise three titles, Duchess of Portsmouth, Countess of Fareham, and Lady Petersfield.¹⁴⁴ Over the course of their relationship, Charles II spent more extravagantly on her than on any other mistress. She had a very generous pension and apartments “ten times the richness and glory’ of the Queen’s.”¹⁴⁵ Even after the King’s death and her retirement to France, the French courts supported her with a pension of “12,000 livres annually... It was just and polite to bear in mind the important services she had rendered to France while living in England, as the very influential mistress to Charles II.”¹⁴⁶ Louise advocated for the ennobling of her son, who was made Duke of Richmond, ahead of the son of Barbara Palmer, due to her own scheming.¹⁴⁷ Louise’s most noteworthy successful use of her erotic capital may be her lineage. She is the ancestor of both Diana, Princess of Wales and Camilla, Duchess of Cornwall. Considering the court and cultural contexts of the seventeenth century, the continued political success of her family would have been very important to her.

Françoise d’Aubigné was undeniably the most successful mistress during the seventeenth century in both the English and French courts. Françoise began her life as an impoverished Protestant woman in a Catholic country and ended it as the unofficial Queen of France. In 1683, the Queen Marie-Thérèse died of illness related to an abscessed tumour.¹⁴⁸ That same year, King Louis XIV and Françoise were married in a private ceremony. Due to the fact that this marriage

¹⁴³ Fraser, *King Charles II*, 311.

¹⁴⁴ Fraser, *King Charles II*, 313.

¹⁴⁵ Fraser, *King Charles II*, 313.

¹⁴⁶ Saint-Simon, Louis De Rouvroy, and Francis Arkwright, *Memoirs of the Duke De Saint-Simon*. (Bretano's, 1915), 56.

¹⁴⁷ Herman, *Sex with Kings*, 169.

¹⁴⁸ Fraser, *Love and Louis XIV*, 197.

was morganatic, meaning between two people of unequal social rank, preventing the passage of the husband's titles and privileges to the wife, it had to be unannounced and unacknowledged.¹⁴⁹ Through the use of the third aspect of erotic capital, social grace, in combination with the unusual usage of the seventh aspect of erotic capital, fertility, Françoise had climbed the most immense social ladder in her historical context. Indeed, Françoise was the truest “uncrowned queen.” Françoise continued to rule in an unofficial capacity until the King’s death in 1715, when she decided to retire. She lived for four more years, where she continued to foster a school for poor noble girls that she had founded. She received a generous pension and was continually visited by members of the intellectual circles and by nobles, including Tsar Peter the Great of Russia, in Saint-Cyr, where she retired.¹⁵⁰ Upon her death, an island off of the coast of what is now Nova Scotia, Canada was renamed Isle Madame in her honour.

Replacement & Displacement

Determinating whether or not Barbara Palmer was successful or failed in her manipulation of erotic capital is difficult. On one hand, the riches, titles, and lands that she gained for herself and her children were immense. By the time of the Charles II’s death, she had been made Duchess of Cleveland and Countess of Castlemaine,¹⁵¹ however, this appeasement may have been a snub and a hint that their relationship was deteriorating. Five of her six children were acknowledged, ennobled, and included in court activities, the last clearly being the child of a lover, John Churchill.¹⁵² Her furious temper was less becoming come the late 1660s, when Moll Davis, Nell Gwyn, and Louise de Kérouaille, all ten years younger than Barbara, arrived at

¹⁴⁹ Fraser, *Love and Louis XIV*, 204.

¹⁵⁰ Fraser, *Love and Louis XIV*, 318.

¹⁵¹ Fraser, *King Charles II*, 286.

¹⁵² Fraser, *King Charles II*, 286.

the English court. Her attention was spread thin between several of her own lovers. Upon the arrival of Nell Gwyn, Barbara was asked to leave her apartments. Charles II said to her, “Madame, all that I ask of you for your own sake is, live so for the future as to make the least noise you can, and I care not who you love.”¹⁵³ She was unable to compete both socially and sexually with Nell and Louise, who both possessed more erotic capital than her at this time. Her conversion to Catholicism proved a career killer, as the 1676 Test Act, which prevented Catholics from holding positions in court, removed her from her position of Lady of the Bedchamber.¹⁵⁴ Her pensions continued after Charles II’s death, receiving about £40,000 a year, with the exception of 1681, when she received £136,000.¹⁵⁵ The question of her employment of erotic capital as a failure is resolved by the fact that she could have had a profitable life with her husband (without the King) and that she was fiercely unhappy with her final situation. Fighting between Charles II’s mistresses was extremely common and intense, especially when Barbara’s temper was included.¹⁵⁶ Her later marriage saw her unhappy and poorly treated.¹⁵⁷

Louise de la Vallière was made a duchess by Louis XIV and given land. Her children, starting with her daughter Marie-Anne, were legitimized, given semi-noble titles, and granted the right to inherit Louise’s lands.¹⁵⁸ This could arguably be considered a successful exchange of erotic capital (i.e. a sexual relationship with Louis XIV) for economic and social capital, considering Louise’s limited other opportunities for her future. However, I instead argue that this was indeed a failure. The ennobling of her children was considered a hint that the relationship

¹⁵³ Charles II as quoted in Fraser, *King Charles II*, 286.

¹⁵⁴ Fraser, *King Charles II*, 287.

¹⁵⁵ Herman, *Sex with Kings*, 132.

¹⁵⁶ Herman, *Sex with Kings*, 11.

¹⁵⁷ Fraser, *King Charles II*, 462.

¹⁵⁸ Fraser, *Love and Louis XIV*, 112.

between Louise and Louis had in fact come to an end by the court.¹⁵⁹ Louise, unable to maintain her social grace and charm that had established her relationship with the King, disobeyed orders, fled Versailles for Avesnes, and “flung herself trembling on the ground before him.”¹⁶⁰ Her emotional instability, in combination with the new affections for Françoise-Athénaïs, led to the end of their relationship. Louis XIV gave his son with Louise a basic and unenthusiastic noble title and kept Louise around in court to fulfill the role that had led her to him in the first place: as decoy from a more salacious affair.¹⁶¹ The end of her life was tortuous and filled with internal religious conflict. Louise, always pious and still desperately in love with the King, fled to a convent for the second time in her life and, humiliatingly, was forced to return to continue to act as cover for Françoise-Athénaïs.¹⁶² Eventually, she was allowed to take the veil. She considered her children with Louis XIV sinful and did not revel in the fact that they had achieved titles; upon hearing of the death of her son, she responded “I ought to weep for his birth far more than I weep for his death.”¹⁶³ She was never visited by Louis at the convent, and she died in 1710, emaciated from penances and lacking in all of her previous characteristics of erotic capital.

Like Barbara Palmer, defining the success or failure of Françoise-Athénaïs is quite difficult. It is clear that Françoise’s manipulation of erotic capital was incredibly skilled and purposeful. All of her children were legitimized by Louis XIV.¹⁶⁴ She was granted an official separation from her husband thanks to his help and was given the title of Duchess.¹⁶⁵ With determination and skill, Françoise shaped her own life path by exploiting the assets of erotic

¹⁵⁹ Fraser, *Love and Louis XIV*, 112.

¹⁶⁰ Fraser, *Love and Louis XIV*, 113.

¹⁶¹ Fraser, *Love and Louis XIV*, 116.

¹⁶² Fraser, *Love and Louis XIV*, 145-146.

¹⁶³ Fraser, *Love and Louis XIV*, 188.

¹⁶⁴ Fraser, *Love and Louis XIV*, 142.

¹⁶⁵ Fraser, *Love and Louis XIV*, 174.

capital available to her. However, her fall from the King's favour was quite disastrous. Françoise was implicated in the Affair of the Poisons, a murder scandal which took place from 1677-1682. During this period, Françoise was suspected of murdering a sexual rival by poisoning. She also stood accused of witchcraft – during the Affair, she was accused of having held a black mass while she was nude, killing babies, slipping potions and poisons to the King, and gaining the King's love and attention through magical means.¹⁶⁶ Her erotic capital, which was so integral to her creation as *maîtresse-en-titre*, was also the cause of her downfall. Her ability to steer the King in her favour in combination with her sexualized body was looked upon as unnatural and of dark origins. The monarchy attempted to keep this scandal quiet, but the damage was done. Françoise and the King were forced apart. The King still visited for sexual liaisons and conversation for several years, but their relationship could no longer be official. Eventually, upon religious scrutiny in combination with her deteriorating looks, Louis XIV terminated the relationship.¹⁶⁷ She retired with an extremely large pension, which she used to patronize hospitals, charities, and the arts.¹⁶⁸

Conclusion

As is evident through the analysis of the personal timelines of Françoise d'Aubigné, Barbara Palmer, Françoise-Athénaïs, Louise de la Vallière, Louise de Kérouaille, and Nell Gwyn, the manipulation and strategic use of erotic capital is one of the best theories that explains the successes and failures of mistresses. Despite the fact that these women were living in similar court contexts in the same historical period and pursuing the same men, they each exploited the seven elements of Hakim's erotic capital in vastly different ways and with varying levels of skill.

¹⁶⁶ Herman, *Sex with Kings*, 104-105.

¹⁶⁷ Fraser, *Love and Louis XIV*, 162.

¹⁶⁸ Adams, "Belle Comme Le Jour," 180.

These women were diverse as individuals, yet represent the same phenomenon. Through relationships with Charles II and Louis XIV, every one of these women altered their political milieus, their own status, the status of their families, and arguably, the future of their court. Every level of success or failure in these relationships, from destitution and rejection to an unofficial seat on the throne, can be traced to the skilled (or unskilled) application of the seven separate facets of erotic capital, both consciously and unconsciously. While the research needs to be expanded, Hakim's theory of erotic capital has a clear place in historiography as a tool of analysis. The question of whether or not the theory of erotic capital is irreconcilable with feminism and women's studies does not find an answer in this case study. While *these* specific women were in competition with each other, that does not mean that female solidarity and sisterhood were not at play in these court contexts. Mistresses to different kings corresponded, such as Barbara Palmer and Catherine Charlotte de Gramont, Princess of Monaco, a mistress to Louis XIV unstudied in this text, who compared penis sizes of the two monarchs.¹⁶⁹ Courtiers and courtesans alike gossiped about and were friends with the mistresses. It should be considered that men in this context were in competition as well; for attention, funds, titles, and influence. Albeit they had different forms of capital to manipulate. Undeniably, it is erotic capital being wisely invested that made it possible for women, who may not have had a finished background or any prosperous life opportunities, to become what can be appropriately called an "uncrowned queen."

¹⁶⁹ Herman, *Sex with Kings*, 22.

Appendix

Françoise d'Aubigné (Marquise de Maintenon, Madame Scarron, Madame de Maintenon, 1635-1719) was a member of the French court and mistress to and subsequently the second wife of King Louis XIV of France. She was mistress after Françoise-Athénaïs.

Barbara Palmer (Barbara Villiers, 1st Duchess of Cleveland, Countess of Castlemaine, Lady Castlemaine, 1640-1709) was a member of the English court and a mistress of King Charles II of England. She was mistress before Nell Gwyn and Louise de Kérouaille.

Françoise-Athénaïs (Françoise Athénaïs de Rochechouart de Mortemart, Marquise of Montespan, Madame de Montespan, 1640-1707) was a member of the French court and maîtresse-en-titre of King Louis XIV of France. She was mistress before Françoise d'Aubigné.

Louise de la Vallière (Françoise Louise de La Baume Le Blanc, Duchesse de la Vallière, Sister Louise de la Miséricorde, 1644-1710) was a member of the French court and one of the first mistresses of Louis XIV of France.

Louise de Kérouaille (Louise Renée de Penancoët de Kérouaille, Duchess of Portsmouth (1649-1734) was a French woman, member of the English court, and mistress of Charles II of England. Nell Gwyn was her rival.

Nell Gwyn (Eleanor Gwyn, 1650-1687) was an actress and mistress to King Charles II of England. Louise de Kérouaille was her rival.

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