

Trudy Gold | Louis XIV and his Women, Part 2

– Well, good evening everyone from a very cold London. And let me apologise. I have a cold, so my voice is a little hoarse, so I hope you can bear with me. Anyway, we come to part two of Louis XIV and his women. And I think the first thing I want to say about it, remember what Louis said, "The state is me." He'd had a very insecure background. In fact, during La Fronde, which was, of course, his attempt... His Mazarin's attempt, to deal with the nobility, he had to take him, his mother, Anne of Austria and his brother out of the country. And he was determined to master the nobility. He is the absolute ruler, par excellence. He uses civil servants to rule the country. And in one way you can say that, what he does at Fontainebleau and later in Versailles, because of course he is the creator of Versailles. He is really going to create bread and circuses that all Roman adage for the nobility into his great drama, because you can see the quarter Versailles, really is a huge stage play, and into his drama comes many, many women. But the reality, is it's against the backdrop of terrible religious problems between the Huguenots and of course the ruling Catholics against the European War and something else, the beginnings of humanistic thought, and of course the European enlightenment. On one level, he needs to ensure a better education for his people, but at the same time, he's an absolute monarch. So, you have to keep the people down.

Now, the oasis of humanism at the time, of course, was Holland, Protestant Holland and Sweden under Queen Christina. Now, what he manages to achieve in Versailles, is the most extraordinary panel play of beauty, art, architecture, costume. But as I said to you last week, and I'm sure both William and Patrick have reemphasized this point, you've got to see underneath the surface, there was a kind of rottenness. Under the surface, there was disease, there was... Just think how unhygienic Versailles was. And it's more and more remote from Paris. It's 50k's from Paris, the estates general are never called in his reign. And he is living, particularly towards the end of his life, a completely remote life. And you can make the case that the seeds of the revolution, are actually sown in the reign of Louis XIV. But as part of the panel play, of being the absolute ruler, of course, and the beauty with it come an extraordinary number of women. And we've already talked about the role of women, have we not? How on earth could women achieve anything in this period of history? Well, obviously, his mother had quite a lot of power, and his wife, of course, is really a political pawn. His wife is his double first cousin. And it's not until we come to probably, his most important mistress, who later became his wife, Madame de Maintenon, that you actually do see a woman, who discreetly and very much through her lover and later her husband, does manage to influence events. But as I've said many times to you, how on earth did women take any sort of path? So, shall we have a look at the picture of our absolute monarch?

Yes, here you see Louis XIV, later on in life, and just have a look at the kind of robes he's wearing, the theatricality and the masters of the robes, servants, beg your pardon, nobles, who will be part of dressing him, the whole circus of the court, a different sort of group of nobles, would be able to watch him eat. His life was totally on show. And his first mistress of notes, you will remember that last time, I talked about Marie de Mancini, one of the five beautiful nieces of Mazarin. He was evidently in love with her, but it was a very chaste relationship. In fact, her husband remarked that he didn't expect to find a virgin on his wedding night. But the second mistress, who's going to make more of an impact, shall we see her face please? It's Louise de La Vallière. There you see her dressed up in, sort of, the costume of a shepherdess. This was something else that was very much a feature of Versailles. Not only are we going to see operas, we're going to see theatre, we're going to see ballet. We're also going to see a lot of dressing up. And here you see his mistress, his main mistress of the period of his early life, as king, Louise de La Vallière in the... You can see the crook in her hand. In the outfit of a shepherdess. Now who was she? She came from a military family. Her father was the governor of the city of Ambleny. They all come through the nobility, remember. She was educated by her aunts. She could read, she was educated in grammar, and also in musical composition. You see, this was the other point, women are going to have to please their husbands, or in many cases, their lovers because we're going to see that many noble families actually encourage their prettier daughters and nieces to go to the court to try and ensnare the king because that is how one progressed in society. Her father died young and her mother married a Marquis, who worked for Gaston, Duke of Orléans, who was the uncle of Louis XIV. He was known as Monsieur. And Louise was companion to the Duke's three young daughters. And as a result, she's moving up the social ladder. She's educated with them in how to paint, music, again, and etiquette. That is going to be so important, at the court of Louis XIV, etiquette was everything. You should never ever step out of line. She was also educated in literature and in philosophy because when asked, a young woman had to be able to converse in an interesting way with the man. And she was actually instructed by the Duke's almoner, who was a church official. Again, never forget the power of the Catholic church. And he went on... in fact, the man who was her best educator went on to found a Trappist monastery, a Trappist Monastery in France. And after the death of the Duke de Orleans, his widow moved with her daughters to the Luxembourg palace and they took Louis with them. She was obviously a favourite of theirs. And through family influence, she became a maid of honour to Henriette.

Now, Henriette was the new Duchess of Orléans, and the wife of Louis XIV's brother Philippe. Now, Henriette was the sister of Charles II. It's very important that you see how interconnected the royal families are. Remember it's all about women being pawns in marriage games. And it appears that Philippe was probably a homosexual. So, consequently, Henriette did not have a happy life. So, Louise is her maid and she

joins her in the Tuileries. She's now known as Madam Henriette. She joins the court at Fontainebleau, and this is where Louise de La Vallière would've first met the king. So, ironically, one of the maids working alongside her was the future Madame de Montespan, probably the most famous or infamous mistress of Louis XIV. There was a very close relationship between Louis and Henriette, the wife of his brother. And that really, really worried Anne of Austria. And they decided it was very important that Louis should actually court other women. And she, Anne of Austria, selected suitable candidates for her son. Now, so the king becomes interested in the pretty Louise, evidently it was her first relationship. She was reportedly quite an innocent girl. She was very religious and she became a secret lover. She is not the mistress entitle. So this is the early days of the reign. And she doesn't want confrontation with the formidable Anne of Austria. And now is the king at this stage. So he moves his new mistress to a hunting lodge near Versailles. And already there are sermons in the various churches in Paris against the immorality of the king. You see, on one level, the king is God's anointed on earth. But he's beginning to live this incredibly lavish lifestyle, and also a lifestyle which is seen more and more as in pierce now. And also there were factions against Louise. One of them was led by Olympia Mancini who's now a Countess, and of course she is the sister of Marie, his first love. So basically, I want you also to see it's really like a harem to see the court as an absolute hotbed where all women really have to offer their favours. It's a terrible... if you think about it, through the eyes of the 21st century, certainly those of us living in the privileged west, it's a very, very strange situation. But how could women succeed except through catching the eye of the man.

Now can we move on please? Can we see the next slide? Yes, that is "The Pleasures of the Enchanted Island." Now in 1683, she gave birth to her son. The boy was spirited away, but the story still spread through Paris and the public school. This woman an illegitimate child, and she is forced to go to midnight mass with the king. And she has had to escape from the church. It was a real scandal. Now in 1664, officially in honour of his mother and his wife, Louis hosted "The Pleasure of the Enchanted Island." And you can see this kind of incredible ballet in the hunting lodge where Louis is living. And in fact, Moliere, can we see his face please? Can we go onto the... Moliere who of course there are more of his plays performed by the Comedy France than any other playwright. He was an incredibly prolific, wonderful writer. And he is of course working for the court. He produces two new plays, including the imposter in it's a great success. And the musical arrangements are by another genius, a man called Lulie. So even though the Enchanted Island is dedicated to the mother and his wife, the real queen of the celebrations are Louise, but she was obviously very, very embarrassed by it. She doesn't want that. And obviously, she is not the kind of mistress that as he grows into really being the man who says, "The state is me." That he really wants. However, she did receive an incredible castle from him, which

she started working on. And she had the gardens were designed by the raw landscape gardener. So he is, if you like, creating her, but it's at this stage by 1665, he's having other affairs. And after his mother's death, his mother was a restraint on him in many ways. He started to publicly display Louise as his mistress on tetra. And she was very, very embarrassed by this. She had to appear at mass along with the queen. So you can imagine the role of Marie Therese because yes, she's his double first cousin, but how did she really feel about the king flaunting his mistresses? She was very ashamed. Remember Louise is a religious girl, and she does treat Marie Therese with great respect.

Now, it's at this stage that Madame de Montespan turns up at the court, and there's going to be a lot more about her in a minute. And what then happens is that she, as lady in waiting to the Duchess of Orleans, she is a different sort of woman. She is very quick-witted, she's very, very smart. She's ruthless, she's far better equipped to become the mistress on teat than Louise de La Vallière. So let's have a look at the exquisite Marquis de Montespan. Reputedly at the time to be the most beautiful woman of the court. But not only that, she was incredibly smart, and as I said before, very, very ruthless. And you're going to have to be ruthless to be able to cope with the kind of life. So she soon ensnares Louise. Remember Louise de La Vallièrer might have been good for his younger years, but now he's moving into the role of really being the theatre master, the conductor of Versailles, he's building Versailles, and he needs a woman by his side who can live up to him. But what's going to happen to Louise, in May, 1667 before going on a military campaign, Louis did legitimise his only living child by Louise. He's already having children by Marie Therese remember. He had seven children by her, but only one of them survived to adulthood. His three eldest children by Louise de La Vallière had died and he legitimises his only living child Marie Anne. She actually survives till 1739. And she therefore was allowed to use the surname de Bourbon, which meant of course, as the illegitimate daughter of the king, it's going to be a glittering marriage. It's going to be... she's really set up for life. And when Louis goes off to war, he gives instruction. By this time Louise is again pregnant, although he has his mistress on tetra, he's still having a relationship with Louise, and she's pregnant and ordered to stay at court. But what she does is this was her death nail. She travelled to the battle field without permission, and she throws herself at the foot of the king. And instead of being touched by it, he was absolutely furious, and forced her to return home to the court. And of course that made Madame de Montespan, who, as I said was ruthless. She was a real witch. She really made a lot out of this scandal because what she wants more than anything else is to become the mistress on tetra.

Now what Louise is not yet dismissed, as gradually Louis elevates Madam de Montespan, Louise is forced to share an apartment with her

rival. And because Montespan's husband was uncomfortable with her affair with the king, five months later, poor old Louise gives birth to her fifth child, her last child who was later legitimised, he survives until 1683. She's still evidently passionately in love with Louis. We have a lot of evidence of this because they kept, they wrote memoirs. There are many people at court who told the stories, the great scandal of the king. And so she is now enduring terrible humiliation. She has to dress her rival for really, for going along with the king and for the king's bed chamber. And also because of the scandal around Marquis de Montespan, she cannot afford to scandal because of her own husband, Louis. She has to drive in a carriage with her. And Louise is also sometimes forced to drive in a carriage with the queen. And of course the queen knows very well what her husband is up to. In the end of March, Madam Marquise de Montespan gave birth to her first child by Louis, and Louise was forced to be the godmother. So once Louis XIV had tired of the woman, there's no compassion there. Remember, he is the states, he is the Sun King. All of power emanates from him. So she becomes quite ill. She's very humiliated. And now she needs to save her soul. So she turns to religion. Nobody wants her to leave court. Certainly, Louis doesn't. The Marquise de Montespan doesn't want because they want her there almost as a buffer. And she's forced to stay at court. And she admitted she was still in love with the king. And to quote a letter she wrote, she's not yet dead to the passion. But she took advice from religious leaders, and also the head of the royal household who was fond of her took pity on her. And she finally decides to leave court, and she enters a Carmelite convent. Montespan fought hard to have her back in court so that she could hide her own affair. She asked her confidant and the governess to her own children, Madame Scarron, to intervene. And I'll be talking about her later on. And Madame Scarron explained to Louise how difficult it would be for her to be a Carmelite nun. Having had all the luxury of the court, she's going to find it very austere and very difficult. But she has become very religious and all attempts at dissuading her fail. So the day she left court, she makes her mind up she's going to leave the court, she throws herself at the feet of the queen, begging the queen's forgiveness for all the wrong, she's done the queen. And this is what she says, "My crimes were public. My repentance must be public too." And a year later, she took perpetual vows under the name of Louise of Mercy and accepted the veil ironically from Marie Therese.

So, the intrigues behind all these women is absolutely extraordinary. We know that the queen often visited her, she was quite fond of her because Louise gave her far more respect than the Marquise de Montespan is going to give her, or many of the other women who hang around her husband. And in fact, she begs for forgiveness and obviously the queen does forgive her. And she's going to spend 36 more years in the religious life and she dies age 65. Now let's concentrate a little bit now on the Marquise de Montespan. How did she rise so high? By the time, she comes from one of the wealthiest families in France. Her mother was lady in waiting to Anne of Austria. At age 12,

also she had a formal convent education. Evidently she was madly in love with someone else, but forced to marry the Marquise de Montespan. Women did not have choices. And who was also from a prominent family, and the couple had two children together. Age 20, she becomes the maid to the king's sister-in-law, Henrietta of England. That's of course is where she really gets to know Louise de La Vallière. And later on, because of the relationship between her own mother, Anne of Austria, she was appointed lady in waiting to Queen Marie Therese. And by 1666 important years, 1666, think of the burning of London, the great fire of London. She was usurping the love of Louis. Not only was she a woman of outstanding beauty, according to the court, she had an incredibly ferocious cutting wit. I suppose the woman in England most like her was Barbara Villiers, one of the other mistresses of Charles II. Because whereas you have Louis XIV and all his mistresses, don't forget that over the channel, you have the mistresses of Charles II. And last week, on Tuesday, I mentioned that in fact one of the Mancini girls becomes one of Charles II's mistresses. That's of course how women progressed. She was a great lover of the arts. Now this is important, along with all the beauty or the regalia, and this is what is fascinating, in many ways, these women are very much children of the later Renaissances. She adored art, she adored architecture. And because she had the king's protection, and she was given a grand apartment, near to his own. And she's going to have seven children by the king. And she's given a house, seven children they had together. And their education is going to be entrusted to a fascinating woman, the widow of a man called Paul Scarron, Madame de Scarron. And I'm going to talk much more about her. Now, six of these children were legitimised.

This is from the memoirs of San Samoa, one of the great gossips of the court. She was a great lover of luxury in the arts. She covered her walls with paintings, and transformed her apartments into the courts witty heart. Everybody wanted to be there. What did they do? You've got to remember, they're all trapped at courts. They're all trapped in this incredibly beautiful, but feted atmosphere where they would eat banquets that were 16 courses. They would gamble, they would play cards in the most incredibly luxurious surroundings. It's extraordinary. And she offered all her protection to artists like Molière. We've already mentioned him. He is the most important of the writers of the period. And also La Fontaine. So if you are an artist or an actor or a writer, and you want to do well in France, you do it through royal patronage. Now the point about her, she's incredibly witty and she thought she was unassailable. She began to quarrel with Louis. Louis would stray quite often, and she couldn't take it. She forgot who she was in many ways. She was very rude to Maria Theresa. And then she gets involved in a scandal. There's absolutely going to rock France, and it's called "The Affair of the Poisons." It's a major murder scandal in France. It's going to last. Can we go onto the next slide please? "The Affair of the Poisons." It's a really important scandal. It is the Watergate of French history of this period of the

17th century. It's a huge murder scandal, a poisoning scandal. It lasts for between 1677 and 1682 when a number of prominent aristocrats are implicated and sentenced on charges of poison and witchcraft.

Can we go on to the next slide please? This is Madame de Brinvilliers. The case began in 1675 with Madame de Brinvilliers, who was accused of murdering her father and two brothers to inherit their estate. After her death, there's going to be speculation that she poisoned up to 30 people in hospitals in order to test her poison. It was never confirmed because what's going to happen, it's going to become, look, obviously something awful does happen, but it's going to be whipped up. It's a little bit like Salem. Once you get the story of witches and poison, it gets out of control. Her crimes were discovered after the death of her lover who saved letters detailing the poisoning of... because she and her lover actually talked about this, and wrote about it. So he kept the letters, and he'd actually been imprisoned by her father. Let the cache, one of the abuses of this period of history is that a noble could have someone imprisoned without trial and letter de cache, in fact, I suppose the most infamous character, imprisoned by letter de cache was in fact the Marquis de Sade who was of course released from the Bastille by the revolution. So, he was imprisoned by her father. She's accused that the letters are read, she is accused of poisoning her father and her two brothers. She's arrested. She is terribly tortured. Can we have a look at the next? Yeah, now of course it's illustrated. It's the water torture, the trial of Madame Brinvilliers because this is of course the barbarism, the other side of France. This is Barbarism. This is torture to investigate and create the truth. Now, whatever truth you want. So she's horribly tortured, and she is finally executed. Now, the trial absolutely captures the attention of Paris. This is the great scandal. Louis XIV employs someone called La Reyne.

Now can we please go on? Because the next, now this is Mademoiselle de Fontanges, now who was she? She was born into an old aristocratic, but impoverished family. Very, very beautiful. Meant to be the most beautiful woman who ever appeared at the court. And she came from, as I said, a very aristocratic, but an impoverished family. How are they going to regain their fortune where they're going to send their daughter to court to hope that she can ensnare the king. And when she arrived in court, the king is already involved, of course with Madame de Montespan, but he's getting tired of her. And also with Madame Scarron, who is the governess to his mistress' seven children. And it's at this stage, this beautiful creature arrives in court. By this time, Louis he's middle-aged. And this is a quote, she became lady in waiting again to his sister-in-law, Henrietta, who once loved him. It must have been terrible for her. Many of his mistresses, their trade working for her. And this is actually a comment by one of the women of court. "She's as beautiful as an angel with a good heart, but as stupid as a basket." This is Baron Spamanheim, very much above all that have been seen at Versailles for a long time. She was regarded as

the most beautiful creature who'd ever arrived at Versailles. And her beauty did captivate Louis. He began to send her extraordinary presence. This is a middle-aged man now, and along comes this extraordinary creature that everybody says is the most beautiful woman at court. And the king has to have her. He starts to drown her in diamonds and pearls. He himself began again to wear diamonds and whatever she was wearing, he would attach to his costume ribbons. And there's a lovely story if you want the trivia of it all. When she was on a hunt with him, her very elaborate hairstyle got caught in a branch. So she had to sweep it down and just put a ribbon in it. And Louis was so enchanted by it that it kind of became the costume and fashion at the court, which totally it made Madame de Montespan absolutely furious because of course Madame de Montespan with her wit, Fontanges was absolutely no match for Montespan. And he makes Madame de Fontanges mistress in title, which really puts Montespan's nose out of joint. And what she does, and it gives you a notion, this is the harem. Montespan actually sent two tame bears to destroy her apartment. And then having done that, she'd befriends her. So this rather simple, but beautiful creature just didn't know where she was. She became pregnant, the child died. And according to a chronicler, she was wounded in the service of the king. But Louis had no time for ill health. If you were ill, you were out of sight. If you could imagine the banquets where he insisted that people just sit there for hours and hours and hours, the ritual and all you had to do was please the king. So she has another pregnancy and then she dies. And the whole story, remember there is the poison fever. Was she actually poisoned? And was she poisoned by Madame de Montespan? There's absolutely no real evidence, but it didn't matter because people believed that in fact she was. So can we go on and have a look at the next slide? Now you see Nicolas de la Reynie. This is important because he's appointed by Louis XIV.

Now remember, Louis tends to appoint people who are not aristocrats as his advisors. And he is really the founder of the French police force. He needs to clean up Paris. It was initiated by Colbert, who was the first minister of state. And he's aim was to really filter out crime in Paris, and also stop something, the growth of something called the Court of the Miracles, which was a slum area of Paris, which was really dominated by crime. And where the robbers, the poor villains of Paris had their own justice and their own court. And the king is now appointing la Reynie to clean out crime. Now, the problem was that the death of his mistress drew attention to other mysterious deaths. And this is going to really exacerbate the situation. So another woman, Magdelaine de La Grange was arrested on charges of forgery and murder. And she claims that she has a lot of evidence. She comes before la Reynie, she is also tortured. She claims she's got a lot of information on important crimes. Louis tells La Reynie root the whole thing out. And you've got to remember this is the era of soothsayers, fortune tellers, alchemists. I mentioned this last time, think about the atmosphere at court. Yes, on one level it's the beginning of

humanism, but it's the other side of the coin as well. Alchemy, the wanting to create gold out of base metal, astrology, so lots of the wealthy went to fortune tellers. They wanted to know the future against the backdrop of the piety of the church. You've got an incredible paradoxical situation in France. Anyway, what happens is they're all rounded up, alchemists, fortune tellers, anyone who is suspected of selling aphrodisiacs, something else were aphrodisiacs given to nobles and to the king by mistresses, to try and to increase their own power. And of course, these people were tortured. They're the ordinary folk, they're tortured. And they give lists of clients, of people who'd already bought poison to destroy rivals. And the most famous, can we see the next picture? This is La Voisin. She was the most famous of... she was a midwife, but she was also a faith healer. And she also is incriminated with another poison, a woman who's already confessed to poison under torture. Marie Boss, also a famous fortune teller. And La Voisin implicates several famous courtiers including Olympia Mancini, the Countess of Soissons and her sister, the Duchess of Bunol. So these are two of Marie Mancini's sisters. And also another one who is implicated is Madame de Montespan. And when they got La Voisin drunk, and she claimed that Antoinette de Montespan had bought aphrodisiacs, and actually had performed a black mass to keep the king's favour, a child was sacrificed. There is no evidence beyond her confession, but it leads to a terrible atmosphere and a witch hunt. And La Voisin is sentenced to death on the 22nd of February, 1680. And La Reynie himself, the new head of police, the head of the new police force establishes a court to judge cases of poisoning and witchcraft. Over the years, 24 people were actually sentenced to death. The court was abolished in 1682. Is it because the king could not risk the scandal? And in fact, as one of the chronicler said, the novelty of their crimes proved their safeguard. Was it possible that the king's main mistress, the mother of seven of his children, was actually involved in black magic? So a very interesting side effect of this is the expulsion of Olympia Mancini, the Countess of Soissons from court. Her son remains in France, but his ambitions were thwarted by his mother's disgrace. And so he wanted a military career. He was not allowed one in France. So he eventually leaves France. He nurtured a really bad grudge against Louis, and entered the service of his sworn enemy, the Habsburgs. And as Prince Eugene of Savoy would become one of the greatest generals of his age, and one of the reasons for Louis's failure in the end to gain complete power in Europe. Now, some of those accused were imprisoned by letter de cache, including many aristocrats.

So, although it was never really proven, that was really the end of Madame de Montespan. The king has had enough of her, the tinge of the scandal was just too much. And she finally retires from court in 1691. She moved to a convent, by which time maybe those 16 course meals had their toll on her. She became so large, it was difficult for her to get in and out of carriages. And she died in 1707, aged 67. But as the king's mistress, nothing really happened to her. Was she implicated?

Who knows, who knows. How much was it a witch hunt? She certainly was ruthless. Whether she was involved in black magic, who knows. But certainly it did leave it all clear for her rival, and one of the most fascinating women to appear at the French court Madame Scarron later, Madame de Maintenon. So can we see her picture please? Now first of all, we're going to see the picture of the man she married. That's Paul Scarron.

Now, let me talk first about her. She was born in the Midwest of France. Her birthplace was Hotel de Soumo. And she was born in or just outside the local prison where her Huguenots father was imprisoned for a conspiracy against Cardinal Richelieu. Her mother Jeanne was the daughter of the prison director, and was probably seduced by the incarcerated man. So basically, her mother is a fervent Catholic. She has the child baptised into her religion. In 1637, Constant was released from prison, and went with Jean and Françoise d'Aubigné to the French island colony of Martinique in the West Indies. So she's going to have a very kind of fractured background. In 1647, she returns to France, both parents die and she goes to live in the care of their paternal aunt. She's very wealthy, and she gives her an education. They're ardent Protestants. And she raises her in Protestant belief. And when it was discovered by Françoise's godmother, she's immediately sent to a convent. So it shows you just how serious these war of religion were. She received the first only a relatively limited education. We know that she studied maths, she studied the French language, she studied Latin and also domesticity, how do you run a household. Her main education was actually religion and liturgy. And she received her first communion. She was brought to Paris by her godmother's mother, and introduced into sophisticated salons. Now this is important because what else is happening in Paris is the humanist salons where you have writers and thinkers. This is really the predating of the enlightenment salons that are going to appear all over the German lands, all over France. And they're very, very important. And at one of these salons, and evidently she's a very clever woman. She meets a very accomplished poet, Paul Scarron. He obviously had had the smallpox, he had a very ravaged appearance, but he's an important dramatist and an important novelist. He's 25 years, her senior. She begins the correspondence with him, and he actually had counted Louis XIII as one amongst one of his patrons. He offered her marriage or to pay her dowry so that she might, or that she could go into a convent. He likes her. And although he suffered from chronic and appalling pain, Françoise accepted him. And they were married in 1652. And of course the match gave her access to the highest levels of French society. For nine years, she's mainly his nurse. But he gave her an incredible education, and really a vocation as a teacher because this is the salons where playwrights would come, artists would come, politics are dangerous, we don't talk politics, but if you think of the arts, she becomes a brilliant conversationalist and a very good scholar. After Scarron's death, Anne of Austria, the widow of Louis XIII remember, continues his pension to his widow and even increased

it, which enabled her to still be part of literary circles.

Now Louis XIV suspends the pension. She's in terrible straightened circumstances having... and she's had enough living off the charity of her friends. So she's prepared to leave for Lisbon as a lady awaiting to the new queen of Portugal, a French aristocrat, a pawn in a marriage game. But she meets Madame de Montespan who likes her. Already she's the king's mistress at this stage. She really takes a fancy to her and decides to reinstate her pension. And not only that, she thinks she'll make a brilliant governess for her children. So Louis XIV buys a house for Montespan's children. And as the brood continues to grow, Madame Scarron becomes their governess. She's provided now, she is now the governess to the illegitimate children of the king. And he's going to legitimise them. He's going to give them the name, Bourbon. So to befit status, the governess is given a large income and a large scarf. So she had to ensure that the house was very well guarded and she was very discreet. She becomes a secretary and a housekeeper. She cares for the Duke of Orleans who's first. And it's this that first brings her to the attention of Louis XIV. At first, can we have a look at her face now?

This is Madame de Maintenon. She is not the beauty of Montespan or many of the others, but she is the one who as the king gets older, he's going to become interested in her. Remember she spent a lot of time in literary salons. She's an incredibly bright woman. So what's he going to do about it? And at first, he finds her much too strident. But he has conversations with her over the education of her children. She has become very religious, a religious Catholic with a very strange Huguenots Catholic background. She is now a very religious Catholic, which at that stage was rather repellent to Louis. But after he legitimised the children, she moved to an important shadow, and is officially the royal governess on one of the few people permitted to speak candidly to the king as an equal about the children. And Madame de Sévigné who was one of the great letter writers, was observed that Louis XIV was actually by this stage, he's in middle age now, was charmed by having someone who could speak honestly with him. And due to her hard work with the children, the king gave her a large sum of money, which she used to produce a property at Maintenon. And she becomes the Marquis de Maintenon. And this is her title given in 1675. Madame de Montespan becomes terribly jealous of her because Louis is interested in talking to this woman. And they have terrible rouse over the children. But by this time, the star of Madame de Montespan is falling. It's the affair of the poisons. And in 1680, Louis makes her the second mistress of the robes to his daughter-in-law, the Dophine. So basically, she's now at court. So the affair of the poisons forced her rival out of court, and she was very respectful of the queen. And she has a very, very good influence of the king. This is what he said of her, "Madame de Maintenon knows how to love. There will be great pleasure in being loved by her." But she wrote, "Nothing is so clever as to conduct oneself approachably. She held out against him because

she realised she's not going to be a mistress like all the others. So she holds up against the king. And by the late 1670s, Louis is spending much of his time actually discussing politics, economics, and religion with a woman. And after the death of the queen, Louis marries her. It's a morganatic marriage. And all historians agreed that this marriage actually happened. Can we have a look at it?

Can we have a look at... There you see the marriage of Louis XIV and Madame de Maintenon. And we know the king's confessor was there, and she wasn't acknowledged as his wife, but there's no official documentation. But all historians except that she becomes his wife. And this is what the gossiping Dr. San Samoa said, the satiety of the honeymoon, she doesn't give in to him until marriage. The satiety of the honeymoon, usually so faithful in especially the honeymoon of such marriages, only consolidated the favour of Madame de Maintenon. Evidently he was completely bewitched by her. In fact, the older he got, the more he wanted her. And in the end she actually wrote to the pope saying that the pope had to curtail his demands. And the Pope basically sent her a note saying, "Put up with it." And she had an apartment opposite the king on the same floor as the king. And from then on, Louis always passed some hours with her every day. She was always lodged near him. And this is basically a memoir of another member of the courtier. Before the marriage, she didn't consent to the king's will, which she had opposed in order to excite it. And in the presence of dot, dot, dot, was married to the king of France and Navar in the Chapel of the Chateau. Now what's interesting about her is that she has political influence over the king. She becomes the second most powerful person after the king and was considered almost a prime minister after 1700. Obviously, politically she made some mistakes, but she was a strongly religious woman, and had a very interesting influence over Louis. He no longer had any other mistresses, and he banned operas in Lent. And in 1690 to 1672, the Pope granted her the rights of visitation over all the convents in France, which is a great honour. And she used her power for personal patronage to her brothers and to also for the children of Madame de Montespan who had been her charges. Now she founded a school, she believed passionately in education.

Can we go on please? And of course when Louis... this is where you see Louis on his deathbed, and of course Louis deathbed. Louis finally dies aged 77 of gangrene. He had a long and horrible death. And the throne of course passed his great, his nine-year-old great grandson. Luis X who of course was the king who said. He also lived a very debauched life in Versailles, cutoff from Paris as the enlightenment progressed. And remember when he dies, leaving the throne to his very ineffectual, Louis XVI, married to Marie Antoinette. Of course, it escalates into the revolution more about that next week. So going back to Madam de Maintenop, she founds a school for girls from impoverished noble families, and gives women a very wide education. She housed over 200, remember she thinks of her own past. She understands the

importance of education for women. It houses over 250 pupils, women. There you see her school in Sancia. They're cared for by 36 professional educators, children between the ages of seven until their 20s. She herself drew up the rules. Ironically, it's going to influence the society of revolutionary, but public women, which in 1793 becomes the first female political interest group in the revolution. Very important. Her work had an incredible impact on the Paris salons. During the age of the Enlightenment, she promoted quality education. Now after Louis's death, she actually retired to Sonocia with a very large pension. She continued to receive visitors, including Tsar Peter the Great. Peter the Great of Russia, remember, wanted to visit Europe in order to bring back to Russia some of the improvements of Europe. And when she's an old woman, he visits her and she says to him, "Why did you come?" And he said, "I came to see everything worthy of note that France contains and that madam is you."

So, as I said, she was a brilliant educator. She was an incredibly bright woman. She'd ensnared the King. She was almost his equal in terms of the power it gave her. And she finished her life running a school for women. And she died aged 83. She bequeathed her shuttle to her niece, the daughter of her brother Charles. So, she wrote an instruction for the ladies, it's called "Instructions for the Fair Sex." So, it's far more than her endowing. She was actually in charge of the curriculum. Not only had she managed to conquer literary society as the wife of Paul Scarron, she studied the philosophical ideas of the period. She debated the works of Descartes, a huge contribution to moral philosophy. And her price though, in order to do it, was in fact to be the mistress and the wife of Louis XIV. Now whether that was a hardship or not, I leave that to you to judge. The syllabus, of course it was religious, reading, writing, mathematics, music, art, dancing, middle work, home economics. She founded her own lay educators, the Dames of Louis. And she said people should enter dialogue rather than being strict sheet lectured to, she really was a woman outside her time. I find her absolutely fascinating. Rather dower, but definitely fascinating. And as I said, queen of France. So next week, I am going to go back really to the revolution. I'm going to go back to Jewish history because don't forget, Jews are now part of the French Kingdom. 1648 El Saas where there's a German community becomes part of France. And there's already a community in Bordeaux. And as France grapples with modern ideas and the ideas of the enlightenment, how are the Jews going to fit in? So what I'm going to do is to look at the image of the Jews in France up until the revolution, but I'm also going to look at how the enlightenment viewed the Jews, and then what happens to them in the revolution. At the time in the revolution, there were only 40,000 Jews in France. They were absolutely irrelevant to the French Revolution, but the French Revolution is seminal in Jewish history because it's the first time in European history that the Jews are emancipated. And as the enlightenment thinkers said, and as the revolution said, and as Napoleon later said, "To the Jews as individuals, everything to call

poor Israel nothing. Give up your nationhood, become citizens of France."

But the whole view in the end, what was it about? Was it to convert? And to me, one of the most fascinating aspects of this period of history, Jewish historians call this the crisis of modernity. And in Chinese, the figure for crisis is represented by two figures. One is danger, one is opportunity. The role of the Jews as they enter modernity. So the last couple of lectures, in a way, for me it's been quite a lot of fun because although it's quite on the edge, nevertheless it's very much away from the drama of Jewish history, but we're back to it next week. So let's see if there are any questions.

Q & A and Comments

Right, David said, we learned so little about French history in the English Canadian school.

This is Louis de Valliere. I think she's holding a bow with a load of arrows. Yeah, nice pun. Seeing the court as an absolute hotbed. Yes, like that.

Marion Pitch is recommending a book, the story of La Montespan's cook old husband. Couldn't have been easy when your mistress, when your wife attracts the power of the king.

Q: I wonder what sort of love of the king was. Poor Louise falling in love with him. Maybe cause she was young and he was the first, but maybe also because he was a good lover. Are there any letters describing this?

A: Do you really think any letters would ever say he wasn't? But you know, how many times did he bathe? It couldn't have been much fun. It couldn't have been much fun sleeping with the king. Believe me.

Q: How many children did Louis have?

A: Are we talking about legitimate? He had seven legitimate children by the queen, and only one survived. He had loads and loads of illegitimate children. But in those days, very few of them survived to adulthood. This is before good medicine. This is before antibiotics. What is interesting though, he is on the tip of the age of scientific revolution. And that's going to change everything. And it's also going to lead to a far more cynical non-religious world. The king ruled because he believed he was appointed by God to rule. That is going to change through the enlightenment. More and more of the enlightenment thinkers are going to turn away from Catholicism 'cause the Catholic church had such power in Europe, it's absolutely extraordinary.

Ed mistress of Louis XIV is showing us something to look at the spicy sex life and Louis XIV, they're all having fun. Jennifer's wishing me better. Bless you. Another book, "Love and Louis XIV" by Antonio Fraser.

Yes, her own love life was quite interesting with Para Pinta. So interesting in destruction. Interesting name in French, it means now, but not spelt exactly the same. Feel better.

Margaret loves all the intrigues. Yeah, but can you imagine what it was really like out there in Paris? Look, we know what it was like in Versailles, the poverty outside though, where people are starving. What happens when the potato crop fails? So on one level, the way that Louis created the bread and circuses to keep the nobles in check, no one's going to go back to their estates because everybody wants to be at court. And later on it is really going to hit his successes in the face. Can you educate a people and at the same time keep a nation down? It's a complicated story this.

Thank you Rita. I think that's it actually. Everyone, I wish you all a good weekend. We've just had an interesting budget here. What strange times we live in. And of course over the weekend, more lectures by Patrick and David. Again around the same kind of subject.

And actually tonight at seven, we've got a brilliant lecture, which so many of you have asked for about genealogy because I know a lot of you are involved in tracing your own roots. So please listen at seven o'clock, and I will see you next Tuesday when I'm going to look at the image of the Jew in France. And it's going to be twofold. I'm going to look at the image of the Jew in mediaeval times, which is dark. We are the pariahs of society, remember. And how it does it change under the enlightenment on what does it do to the Jews? And I suppose my... when I talked about the crisis of modernity in Chinese, two figures representing crisis, one danger, one opportunity, what was the role of the Jew? And of course, as France modernises in the 19th and 20th century, who is going to take France by the horns and modernise it, it's going to be those people from another planet who fall in love with France. Nothing much changes, does it? So have a lovely weekend, and I wish you all well. Bye.