Breaking with Convention: Mme de Pompadour’s Refashioning of the ‘Self’ Through the Bellevue Turqueries

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ABSTRACT

MANDY PAIGE-LOVINGOOD: Breaking with Convention: Mme de Pompadour’s Refashioning of the ‘Self’ Through the Bellevue Turqueries
(Under the direction of Dr. Melissa Hyde)

In 1750 the sexual relationship between Mme Pompadour and Louis XV ended, resulting in the maîtresse-en-titre’s move out of Versailles and into the Château de Bellevue. Designed by Pompadour and with the financial support of the king, the château offered her a place away from court etiquette and criticism, a private home for her and Louis XV to relax. Within Bellevue, her bedroom (la chambre a la turq) was decorated with Turkish furnishings, textiles and Carle Van Loo’s three-portrait harem series. Specifically, my thesis will explore Pompadour’s chambre a la turque and Van Loo’s A Sultana Taking Coffee, the only self-portrait of Mme de Pompadour in the series, to exhibit her adoption and depiction of the French fashion trend of turquerie. Here, I suggest Pompadour’s adoption of harem masquerade was a political campaign aimed at reclaiming and magnifying her social and political dislocation from Louis XV’s court, as well as an alternative approach to the French definition of ‘woman,’ whereby she represented herself as an elite and desired ‘other’: the Ottoman woman. What happens to Pompadour’s position as mistress and her status as woman when she no longer maintains her sexual responsibilities and her role dictates that she pleasure the king? Expanding on Perrin Stein’s notion of political advancement through self-representation, my analysis presents a new interpretation of A Sultana Taking Coffee by suggesting that the image depicts the mistress re-feminizing her body through an exotic metaphor. Through an examination of the cross-cultural relationship between her feminine identity and turquerie, I demonstrate how Pompadour performed, constructed, and
presented her status as an empowered ‘other’ type of French woman through her exotic costume and setting.
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INTRODUCTION

Nebahat Avcioglu has usefully defined the eighteenth-century phenomenon turquerie as an empowering notion of dislocation employed through the political and social performance of self-representation.¹ Though a modern term, dislocation was established in the eighteenth century when an individual was alienated, disturbed, or moved from an original or usual place, position, or state whether forced or by one’s own choosing.² Turquerie, the cross-cultural exchange between Ottoman Istanbul and Europe, allowed for these “dislocated” elite European men and women to display their disempowerment and exercise agency by owning their dislocation through corporeal representations fashioned as the ‘other.’ Not wanting to become Turks, Avcioglu stated that patrons looked to Ottoman culture as a “symbolic language with which to fashion and negotiate their ‘otherness’ to reshape it into a new self” in the realm of representation.³ To be viewed as an Ottoman ‘other’ in the eighteenth century was to be regarded as exotic, but nevertheless, equal. Because of this sense of equality, the practice of turquerie, “a set of artistic and architectural productions betraying Turkish influences,” was an acceptable and fashionable European trend found in architecture, furniture, painting, and fashion.⁴ Yet, to be


depicted as an Ottoman ‘other’ did not necessarily mean authentic. Particularly, the French were not interested in truthful depictions of the Levant; rather, turquerie was a conflation of Eastern Turkish imagery through the lens of French cultural practices, which resulted in a hybridized Ottoman-French aesthetic. The French’s idea of Istanbul leaned more towards fantasy, and one that was based on some first person travel accounts but, oftentimes, it was recreated from primary images, making the French’s Turkish aesthetic an invention of intrigue. A metropolis rivaling many major cities of Europe, Istanbul was a military might and a monumental trading hub that connected the east and the west, acting as a gateway to world exchange. Hence, to be represented à la turque was not solely a random fashionable choice. On the contrary, turquerie allowed patrons to endow their identity with a layered socio-political meaning of one’s personal identity that represented both the powerful ‘other’ and French. To fashion oneself as a Turk was to acknowledge the relationship between subject and their own dislocation, one who broke away from cultural, political, or social conventional norms. Representing the body à la turque was to harness Turquerie as a means to embody the power and authority of the evenly matched Ottoman ‘other’, whereby their turqueried body became a portal between two very powerful and respected worlds.

In his groundbreaking work on the subject, early twentieth century historian Auguste Boppe originally viewed turqueries as fashionable and multi-cultural images, categorizing them as either ethnographic or fantasy. However, scholars such as Perrin Stein and Nebahat Avcioglu have suggested that visual representations of turquerie must be analyzed on a case-by-case basis, thereby abandoning Boppe’s initial notion that turqueries were merely reflections of the


extravagance and frivolity of the Rococo. Rather, their research has indicated both artists and patrons alike should regard turquerie as artistic productions of complex works of individuality and identity. In accordance, I, too, step away from Boppe’s approach of an overly simplified reading of turqueries and align my argument with contemporary art historians by drawing from Avcioglu’s premise of dislocation to interpret turquerie images. To view these images as representations of empowerment through the embodiment of the ‘other’ takes issue with the patron’s biography and its relation to the construction of the visual self. Hence, my argument focuses on Pompadour’s biography and why Pompadour herself employed turquerie as a means of self-representation and how the artistic style assisted in projecting her desired socio-political identity.

Dislocation was characteristic of the position and condition of Pompadour upon her ascension to maîtresse-en-titre. Born to a bourgeois family, Pompadour, then Jeanne-Antoinette Poisson, was likely the illegitimate daughter of a state financier, Le Normant de Tournehem and granddaughter to the Secretary to the King’s Household. Married to the nephew of Tournehem, Charles-Guillaume Le Normant d’Etoiles, in 1741 at the age of twenty-four, as Mme d’Etoiles she gained wealth and status from her marriage and enjoyed the company of Parisian intellectuals, such as Voltaire. Through careful planning, she and her family arranged a ‘chance’ meeting with the king while he was on a hunting excursion. He was smitten with her. While her family’s ties to the court and king proved rewarding, her middle-class upbringing certainly was an issue amongst courtiers. For the then Mme d’Etoiles to be presented formally at

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7 Both Perrin Stein and Nebahat Avcioglu offer a comprehensive historiography of turquerie and its plight through modern history and art history. They also both reference Auguste Boppe’s Les peintres du Bosphore au XVIIIe siècle, (Paris: 1911), as a primary source for understanding its emergence in academic studies.


9 Elise Goodman, 7.
court, Louis XV had to purchase the marquisate de Pompadour for her in 1745, which provided her with the title, estate, and aristocratic coat of arms necessary to become maitresse-en-titre. Yet, despite her new title as the Marquise de Pompadour, courtiers would always view Pompadour as an outsider or ‘other,’ a dislocated middle-class woman strolling around aristocratic territory, who slept her way into the court and rested on the laurels of a bought title. In response to their criticism, many of Pompadour’s self-representations and her tendency to self-fashioning can be viewed as ruminations crafted to refute these judgments. Her visual image was her weapon and its compositional makeup and metaphorical message was retaliation to the attacks directed at her character.

Perrin Stein’s article, “Madame de Pompadour and the Harem Imagery” (1994), discusses Pompadour’s château de Bellevue (figure 1) turqueries, the chambre à la turque and Carle Van Loo’s three-canvas harem series which adorned the room, as efforts to “clarify and solidify her political position” in 1750. Adopting Steins’s argument that political intention fueled Pompadour’s patronage, my thesis also focuses on the turqueries at the château de Bellevue, which was constructed on the outskirts Paris, between the years 1749-1751. However, Stein does not address Pompadour’s reasoning for employing turquerie within the château’s interior, which is a central concern in my thesis. A hallmark of Pompadour’s patronage, Bellevue reflected a period of personal and political transition for the king’s favorite. This was disseminated throughout its interior and decor through references of her court position, which had evolved from maitresse-en-titre to the queen’s lady-in-waiting by 1756. Likewise, Pompadour designed the interior of the château to engage with the transitioning status of her social and sexual relationship with Louis XV, which had begun to change around 1750, through

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10 Elise Goodman, 8.

a consistent iconographic commissioning of self-referential visual representations of friendship, love, and the arts.\textsuperscript{12} Therefore, to situate Pompadour’s employment of \textit{turquerie} with this moment of transition and dislocation in her life is to redefine a moment historically deemed as tragedy into triumph. Pompadour’s \textit{turqueries} become images and objects of propaganda and empowerment.

Specifcally, my argument centers on Pompadour’s private quarters, the \textit{chambre à la turque}, within the château de Bellevue, a Turkish-style bedroom located in the main pavilion, which was designed by Pompadour and functioned as a private domestic space away from Versailles.\textsuperscript{13} Here, I focus on why Pompadour employed \textit{turquerie} as a means of self-representation and how the artistic style assisted in projecting her desired identity. Stein’s thesis designated Pompadour’s patronage of the \textit{chambre à la turque} and Carle Van Loo’s three-canvas harem series, which consisted of \textit{A Sultana Taking Coffee} (figure 2), \textit{Two Odalisques Embroidering} (figure 3), and \textit{An Odalisque Playing a Stringed Instrument} (figure 4), as a political act meant to praise her “virtues, talents, and status,” through the figure of an Ottoman sultana.\textsuperscript{14} Correspondingly, I argue in accordance with Stein’s views that the Bellevue \textit{turqueries} were a programed political statement. However, I expand upon her argument, which focuses largely on the iconography of the painting, by suggesting that both the \textit{chambre à la turque} and the Van Loo harem series functioned as a whole, whereby they ‘performed’ a private, panoramic spectacle for the benefit of privileged guests and Louis XV. The iconographic message of the spectacle aimed to reclaim, resituate, and strengthen Pompadour’s current social and political


\textsuperscript{13} Katie Scott, “Framing Ambition: The Interior Politics of Mme de Pompadour,” \textit{Art History}, Vol. 28. Issue 2. (April, 2005), 263.

dislocation by representing her ‘self’ visually as a feminine, powerful, top-tier ‘other’ and aristocratic woman through the guises of both the aseki, the sultan’s head concubine, and the valide sultan, the mother-queen to the Ottoman sultan. In this manner, Pompadour’s bedroom became a carefully planned social signifier and political vehicle, ensuring her future within the royal court, and next to the king. My argument, furthermore, continues to move beyond Stein’s sole focus of the private and expands into the public realm. Because Carle Van Loo’s *A Sultana Taking Coffee* was the only portrait exhibited publically in the Salon of 1755, I assert that Pompadour used the portrait as propaganda to project her message beyond the viewing of Louis XV and the walls of her bedroom to the public at large. Through this image, she imparted her continued power and influence to the court and the public despite the changes taking place, thereby reaffirming her place at the court and her future next to the king.

Through an examination of the cross-cultural relationship between Pompadour’s French feminine identity and the turquerie found in Carle Van Loo’s *A Sultana Taking Coffee*, I go beyond Stein’s interpretation of the series to demonstrate how she performed, constructed, and presented her status as a woman through an exotic metaphor. What happened to Pompadour’s status as woman when she no longer maintained her sexual role within the court as the official mistress, which dictated that she pleasure the king? However contentious her class status, her femininity and womanhood were never doubted by courtiers while she was the king’s sexual partner. Once that relationship ceased, did eighteenth century French courtiers and critics still view Pompadour as a “true” woman? It is my argument that turquerie was a vehicle of self-expression, which Madame de Pompadour utilized as both a political and personal tool to actualize herself in accordance to the historical concept of the French aristocratic woman, which will be discussed in relation to Carle Van Loo’s *A Sultana Taking Coffee* in chapters two and three. My thesis details how Pompadour’s adoption of and depiction of performing turquerie as
the aseki and the valide sultan was a political campaign aimed at reclaiming and magnifying herself as the eighteenth century definition of ‘true woman’ thereby representing herself as conforming to the gender norms and established order of her culture.

The following chapters work in conjunction with each other to present the comprehensive nature of the chambre à la turque and the harem series as a kind of Gesamtkunstwerk.\textsuperscript{15} Chapter one, which begins with the construction and layout of Bellevue, focuses on Pompadour’s chambre à la turque, demonstrating Pompadour’s use of turquerie in her bedroom as a means of negotiating and projecting a carefully crafted narrative of her court position and relationship with the king, which was meant solely for privileged viewers, mainly Louis XV. Using eighteenth century architectural ideals articulated by Germaine Boffrand, I situate Bellevue as an architectural structure (and its decor) as a building, which communicated its patron’s purpose to the spectator. Viewed in this manner, Bellevue’s chambre à la turque functions as a stage upon which she was able to perform her personal narrative for the king through Carle Van Loo’s A Sultana Taking Coffee. Using a comparison between the patronage of Pompadour’s château de Bellevue and her hermitage at Versailles, I demonstrate that it was common practice for Pompadour to manipulate architecture and decor through metaphorical imagery to convey meaning about her current affairs and personhood.

Through an analysis of the layered meanings presented in Van Loo harem portrait A Sultana Taking Coffee, Chapter 2 provides a detailed visual and analytical analysis of the subject matter within the painting. A discussion of the portrait’s composition and its associations with both French and Ottoman societies help to piece together Pompadour’s intended socio-political narrative, illuminating the reflective character of her pictorial narrative. Here, the portrait relays...

a story much like her life: a moment of transition and dislocation. Using the Ottoman harem, a forbidden and unlawful place for most individuals, but a sanctuary or sacred place for the sultan, his female family members, and his concubines, I propose that *A Sultana Taking Coffee* is indicative of Pompadour’s declining sexual relationship with Louis, as well as the slow progression from king’s favorite to queen’s lady-in-waiting. Following this notion, chapter three discusses Pompadour’s employment of the roles of the *aseki* and the *validé sultan*, which allowed for her to position herself both privately and publically as ultra-feminine at a moment when courtiers, and possibly even herself, may have viewed her as less of a woman, as she was not fulfilling her courtly duties, nor was she abiding by eighteenth century constructions of female identity and thoughts on women.

Chapter four unites the *chambre à la turque* and *A Sultana Taking Coffee* with its companion paintings, *Two Odalisques Embroidering* and *An Odalisque Playing a Stringed Instrument*, looking at the room and the Van Loo series as a whole, suggesting that the room was structured as a spectacle. Here, I propose that because Pompadour needed to solidify her position with the king in an effort to remain within the court, she used their shared taste, *turquerie*, to construct a planned and powerful spectacle in a language the king would understand. By creating a narrative in Turkish style, Pompadour was able to remain official mistress to the king, unlike any prior mistress, and maintain her prominence within the court circle and her influential power over the king.

Particularly, this thesis approaches Madame de Pompadour’s patronage of Bellevue’s *chambre à la turque* and the Van Loo harem series as a unified act of self-representation whereby she used *turquerie* as a tool for acknowledging her dislocation from Versailles and her position to the king. With the *chambre à la turque* as stage and the Van Loo harem series’ narrative of power and femininity through both maternal and sexual elite Ottoman women,
Pompadour created an elaborate spectacle aimed at the king and a portrait at the public that embodied socio-political meaning through the aesthetic pleasure of the Ottoman ‘other.’
CHAPTER ONE: LA CHAMBRE Á LA TURQUE: SETTING THE STAGE

By 1750, just five years after her rise to role of maîtresse-en-titre, Madame de Pompadour was now dislocated from her role and responsibilities as mistress when the sexual relationship between her and Louis XV had begun to dwindle. On account of this breakdown another form of dislocation resulted, which in turn brought about the mistress’ move out of the epicenter of the royal court and into Château de Bellevue, which had become her main residence though her presence at Versailles was still necessary.16 While the change in their sexual relationship has been attributed to several issues, including Pompadour’s continuous poor health, her diagnosed ‘frigidity,’ and the king’s wandering eye, none have been pinpointed as the exact cause of the cessation of their sexual relationship.17 Certainly, courtiers viewed their relationship as deteriorating and coming to an end. However, Pompadour, using patronage and art as her weapon, fought back against the possibility of being pushed out of her position on account of this change and the widely circulated rumors. In protest, she strategically constructed a non-traditional relationship between king and mistress, one that was not built on sex and lust. Rather, and perhaps more controversial than her presence as official mistress, Pompadour constructed a new, unconventional relationship not structured around the traditional means of attaining power-

16 Pompadour still retained an apartment at Versailles and spent time on palace grounds, though her room was relocated from the ground floor and no longer connected via private staircase with the king’s bedroom.

through sex. Instead, it was centered on mutual love and friendship, which she introduced into the artwork and interior decor of Bellevue and elsewhere.\textsuperscript{18} Bellevue, it’s interior, and Pompadour’s commissioned artworks became the quintessence of her social and political aspirations.

Intentionality was bound to Pompadour’s iconographic program, in which she used the visual arts as a vehicle for self-representation and took aim at solidifying and reinforcing both her social and political identity.\textsuperscript{19} Using painting, and portraiture more generally, architecture, and theater as a conveyance, Pompadour delivered political messages to the courtiers and public through commissioned artworks, advertising her authority and prominence, and maybe even boasting about her position as the king’s official mistress in the royal court. Likewise, Pompadour harnessed this manner of visual communication for artistic endeavors aimed at the king, constructing both mythological and metaphorical images of love, friendship, and the arts, which thereby reflected both Pompadour’s newly acquired upper class and their relationship status.\textsuperscript{20} Through the visual arts, she conveyed her love for the king, her title as \textit{maîtresse-en-titre}, as well as presented an image of herself as \textit{femme savant}, an intelligent, “cultivated woman of the Enlightenment with a wide range of good tastes and knowledge.”\textsuperscript{21} Yet above all else, Pompadour’s portraits revolved around formulating a visual representation that reflected her


\textsuperscript{20} \textit{Ibid}.

court position, class and gender identity, which is exactly what she did within Bellevue and specifically the chambre à la turque.

Designed under Pompadour’s supervision and with the financial and emotional support of the king,22 the small château de Belleville offered her a royal home outside of court etiquette and away from criticism, a maison de plaisance where she and Louis XV could relax. Although Pompadour’s relocation to Bellevue provided for a peaceful atmosphere and a private space of her own, this period marked a moment of transition not just between dwellings, but also within her social and political identities. In this chapter, I explain how Bellevue’s chambre à la turque functioned as a stage, which ultimately allowed for Carle Van Loo’s A Sultana Taking Coffee to perform her personal narrative meant for Louis XV. It is my argument that Bellevue’s chambre à la turque shows that she utilized turquerie as a means of negotiating and projecting a carefully crafted socio-political narrative on both her changing court position and relationship with the king and directed at privileged members of her inner circle, and the king. Translated through the exotic imagery of the Ottoman Empire, a shared taste between the king and his mistress since their initial meeting at a masquerade ball in 1745, turquerie allowed for Pompadour to negotiate the evolving nature of her personal relationship. She was the ‘other’ in every sense during this moment in her life-the “other woman”-as well as her first five years at court. The turqueries in the chambre à la turque permitted Pompadour to accentuate her difference-her dislocation- and use it as leverage through a language for which she could display herself as the highly valued ‘other’-something other than mistress and friend- in a visual language for which the king was well versed.

22 Alden R. Gordon, “The Art of Patronage of the Marquise de Pompadour and of the Marquis de Marigny,” in La Volupté Du Goût: French Painting in the Age of Madame De Pompadour, ed. by Olivier Baumont, (Paris: Musée des beaux-arts, 2008), 46. See also: Edmond de Goncourt, “Madame de Pompadour” in The Confidants of the King: The Mistresses of Louis XV, (London & Edinburgh; T.N. Foulis, 1907), 177: “She drew out her plan, marked the site of buildings, and traced the arrangement of the gardens. The first blow of the pick was struck on June 30, 1748 and the works carried on so energetically that the inauguration was able to take place on December 2, 1750, in the presence of the King.”
Originally located on the banks of the Seine, the château de Bellevue was conveniently situated between Paris and Versailles and commissioned by Pompadour during the years 1748-1751. Consisting of a large, two-story pavilion nine bays wide and six bays deep the château was constructed with a large front terrace and fully encapsulated by an elaborate garden, and flanked by two buildings designated for bathing and service quarters. Bellevue, in typical eighteenth century art and architectural fashion, was every bit a reflection of Pompadour’s selfhood and the status of her current relationship with Louis XV. Throughout the eighteenth century, architecture had been an outlet of self-expression for the elite, but by mid-century interior spaces were becoming as important as the exterior, allowing for architects to personalize their client’s commissions with their patron’s personalities. This notion that the expression of caractère within architecture allowed for structures to transcend their “inanimate, material nature” and thereby effect their spectator’s sensibilities gave way to architectural agency. Eighteenth century architect Boffrand suggested that facades and interior decor became a mask that expressed the emotions associated with the patron’s purpose of building. Yet, the ability to express personal identity within building design was not limited to only elite men. Pompadour,

23 Perrin Stein, “Madame de Pompadour and the Harem Imagery at Bellevue,” in Exotism as Metaphor: Turquerie in Eighteenth-Century French Art, (ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, 1997), 170. The chateau was demolished in the early twentieth century and there are no surviving images of the interior.


27 Germain Boffrand, Book of Architecture: Containing the General Principles of the Art and the Plans, Elevations, and Sections of Some of the Edifices Built in France and in Foreign Countries (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2002), XX.
as the king’s favorite, was able to fully embrace the opportunity to negotiate and construct her identity within her architectural endeavors, such as Bellevue and its interior.

Boffrand’s theory that caractère, and by extension architecture, was expressed by different genres, “giving,” as Boffrand puts it, “life into parts of a building by means of characters it makes the spectator imagine”\(^{28}\) can be used to explain how Pompadour’s architectural agency was a means for communicating her message to Louis. In the chambre à la turque, the furnishings and decor were supporting actors of sorts, following the narrative of the main theme and the lead of the patroness: Pompadour. Within her bedroom a stage was created for which her commissioned artwork *A Sultana Taking Coffee* could perform, as I will discuss in chapter two and three. But how does Pompadour use the chambre à la turque to ‘speak’ to Louis?

Although Bellevue preceded Jean-François de Bastide’s *La Petite Maison* by almost thirteen years, the interior of Pompadour’s château would certainly have summoned Mélite’s cries of delight upon entering the Marquis de Trémicour’s little house and viewing its interior, prompting her to proclaim, “This is so much more than just a little house; this is a temple of genius and taste...”\(^{29}\) To which Trémicour responded, “This is how the asylum of love should be. Without knowing this god, I feel that in order to inspire him, it should seem as though he inspired me.”\(^{30}\) Certainly, Pompadour’s love is different from Trémicour’s, as it was inspired by both adoring and amiable love and friendship and not lust, nor was her design sexually charged. But just as Stein had indicated that the marquise’s home was a site for which she was able to

\(^{28}\) Germain Boffrand, XXI.


\(^{30}\) *Ibid.*
communicate her personal “virtues, talents, and status”\textsuperscript{31}, so too was Trémicour’s. What was reminiscent of the \textit{petite maison} in Bellevue was the idea and practice of using architecture and décor infused with its patron’s \textit{caractère} to convince or convey a message for a specific purpose. Like Trémicour, Pompadour intended to entice Louis through the aesthetic. Nevertheless, because the château de Bellevue was the only residence out of fifteen that was built from the ground up for Pompadour, it offered her a \textit{tabula rasa} from which to work.

Designating a specific theme for each room, except for the guard’s quarters, Pompadour’s assigned thematic narratives were presented through ornate decor. Consisting of luxurious furnishings and textiles, Bellevue was adorned with allegorical paintings, tapestries, overdoors, and sculptures by revered artists, including François Boucher, Carle Van Loo, Lambert-Sigisbert Adam, Pigalle, and Étienne-Maurice Falconet.\textsuperscript{32} With Pompadour at the helm, the decor was infused with messages of love, friendship, the arts, music, power and court position, all elements associated with her \textit{caractère}. Katie Scott suggested that Pompadour invested a great deal of money building her refuge, making it an ideal space for “idyllic refuge, as Cythera, or pastoral redoubt”\textsuperscript{33} emblazoned with elements of elegance, comfort, and privacy. Bellevue was a space where Pompadour was, in her own words, “I am alone...or with the king and few others, and therefore happy.”\textsuperscript{34} This quote is quite straightforward, detailing her adoration of the king and her contentment with solitude. Yet, her words also point to her desire to be separated from the

\begin{enumerate}
  \item This is a list compiled from the writings of Bellevue and its interior by: Alden R. Gordon, “The Art of Patronage of the Marquise de Pompadour and of the Marquis de Marigny,”; Katherine K. Gordon, “Madame de Pompadour, Pigalle and the Iconography of Friendship,”; Perrin Stein, “Madame de Pompadour and the Harem Imagery at Bellevue,”; and Katie Scott, “Framing Ambition: The Interior Politics of Mme de Pompadour.”
  \item Katie Scott, “Framing Ambition: The Interior Politics of Mme de Pompadour,” \textit{Art History}, Vol. 28. Issue (April, 2005), 264.
  \item Katie Scott, “Framing Ambition: The Interior Politics of Mme de Pompadour,” 264.
\end{enumerate}
viciousness of the courtiers, court gossip and the growing intrigue with her personal relationship with the king that were infecting Versailles.

Whether or not Pompadour’s sexual relationship with the king ceased completely in 1750 is up for debate, as research has shown that there was a decline in their physical relationship starting in 1749, but it likely continued on sporadically until around 1753.35 Despite the lack of concrete evidence on the cessation of their sexual relationship, it is clear that their relationship had changed and, on account of that change, the subject matter of Pompadour’s commissions and her own artwork began to emphasize the theme of friendship, which Katherine K. Gordon indicated was a nod to their increasingly platonic relationship.36 Yet, the iconographic message of friendship between Pompadour and Louis XV seems to be in contrast with her Ottoman harem inspired bedroom, the chambre à la turque, a room embellished distinctively different from the rest of the château. However, before I discuss why the bedroom’s program was different from the rest of the château, I will first examine why Pompadour likely designed the layout and decor of Bellevue.

When thinking about the layout and decoration of Bellevue, a reference to de Bastide’s La Petite Maison and how Trémicour used the interiority of his little house as a method of seduction is useful for understanding why Pompadour would construct her bedroom in the fashion of à la turque. As Mélite progressed throughout Trémicour’s petite maison, where each room was more beautiful than the previous one, she became so overcome with emotion that she started to feel attracted to a man she originally had no interest in. Bastide’s fictional story


36 On the iconography of friendship at Bellevue, see: Katherine K. Gordon, “Madame de Pompadour, Pigalle, and the Iconography of Friendship,” and Katie Scott, “Framing Ambition: The Interior Politics of Mme de Pompadour.”
describes the notion of architectural agency and its ability to induce sexual desire and invoke an overwhelming sense of emotion from the spectator. On the face of it, the petite maison exercised a sense of power over women; the house’s interior had the ability to persuade Mélite to act against her wishes and change her mind. While de Bastide’s book was not about physical seduction, the fictional story was about getting Mélite to do something she didn’t originally anticipate, a way to woo her into thinking a certain way. While the goal of Trémicour’s architecture was ultimately physical seduction, Pompadour’s goal was a psychological seduction of sorts, a way to attract and impact the thinking of the viewer. In this manner, Pompadour’s use of architecture, it seems, anticipated de Bastide’s story and appeared to utilize a similar tactic in the interior of the chambre à la turque. The turqueried decor was perhaps meant as a strategic manner for which the marquise could tempt Louis into thinking as she did, recognizing their changing relationship and her presence as positive.

Pompadour’s private five-room suite (figure 5) was entered from the left side of the central vestibule and her bedroom and boudoir could be entered through Salle à Manger. The placement of Pompadour’s chambre à la turque in relation to Louis XV’s bedroom, the chambre du Roi, indicated Pompadour’s position within the royal court. Her room was on the ground floor, directly under the king’s bedroom, and situated between her boudoir and library there was a private back staircase connecting the two rooms. Upon descending the stairs, Louis XV passed through his mistress’s boudoir and entered into a 360° recreation of an Ottoman harem, which fostered a mediated French version, or illusion, of an Ottoman harem. Although the layout of the bedchambers was standard, Perrin Stein notes that Pompadour’s bedroom was particularly unique by way of decor as it predated the later French trend of decorating appartements and

boudoirs in the Turkish exotic and, in true French fashion, took the image of the Levant and reimagined it through the lens of French culture.

The French were not, however, interested in authenticity; rather, they recreated Turkish goods through both imports and those manufactured in France. For the goods crafted in France, their practice consisted of appropriating the imagery of the East and resetting them into “a rococo framework consistent with French standards of interior decor.” And the chambre à la turque in every way, shape, and form was a true example of the merged French and Turkish decorative imagery. While there are no surviving images of Pompadour’s Bellevue bedroom, Alden Gordon offers a detailed description of the room based on inventories, describing it as follows:

Madame de Pompadour’s two most privileged and private rooms were located off the Salle á Manger, her bedroom and boudoir. The chambre à la turque had a gilded bed with four columns draped with a great canopy of Imported Asian textile, while there was a low Turkish couch or ottomane with two large cushions. The theme of the room was articulated by Carle Van Loo’s three painting harem series.

Likewise, Perrin Stein offers additional details about the room, noting that it was featured with lacquered furnishings and imagined through a Rococo framework, describing:

Oriental carpets and Chinese porcelains were mixed with porcelains, wallcoverings, upholstery fabrics made in France and decorated with exotic motifs, including, on the fireplace, two large vases of Sévres manufacture with lilac backgrounds depicting Turkish scenes.

Although both Stein and Gordon offer somewhat different accounts of Pompadour’s bedroom, both scholars pulled their descriptions from Paul Biver’s early twentieth century book *Histoire*.

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du chateau de Bellevue, which offers a sketch of his recreation of the chambre à la turque. His account of the room was based on the original architectural design of the room and inventory records from Pompadour’s brother, the Marquis de Marigny.

By all accounts, Pompadour’s room imagined the layout of the harem; however, as Stein has thoroughly detailed, much of the inspiration of the design and arrangement of the chambre à la turque came from Franco-Flemish painter Jean-Baptiste Van Mour’s engravings (figure 6).\footnote{Ibid., 193-194.} Hired by French ambassador to the Ottoman Empire Charles de Ferriol, Van Mour spent just over a decade in Istanbul focusing on individual figures, customs, objects, and the sultan’s court, which upon his return to France, he painted over one hundred small canvases of his studies.\footnote{Ibid.} Highly influential, the incorporation of Van Mour’s genre paintings of Constantinople into French renderings of Ottoman imagery, as Stein has noted, allowed for “a greater level of ethnographic verisimilitude to the Pompadour commissions.”\footnote{Ibid.} Yet, as discussed in the description of Pompadour’s bedroom, accuracy was not a priority. Rather, the use of Turkish style decor in the chambre à la turque was to reference the ‘other’ in a manner of which the king could comprehend. Therefore, it is necessary to understand why Pompadour would employ turquerie as a means for communicating her private message.

The love of Turkish culture was a shared taste between Pompadour and Louis since the beginning of their relationship. In 1745, at the wedding of Louis XV's son, the Yew Tree masked ball was held at the royal palace of Versailles. While Pompadour came dressed as a Shepherdess and the king and his fellow courtiers came as yew trees, many of the attendees wore elaborate Turkish and Chinese costumes. The Yew Tree Ball marked the moment turquerie had become a symbol of love between Louis XV and Pompadour, as fellow courtiers claimed that it was the...
moment the two fell in love. Attesting to this declaration, inventory records indicated that Pompadour owned a copy of Charles Nicolas Cochin’s etching of the ball, *Decoration for a Masked Ball at Versailles, on the Occasion of the Marriage of Louis, Dauphin of France, and Maria Theresa, Infanta of Spain* (Bal masqué donné par le roi, dans la grande galerie de Versailles, pour le mariage de Dauphin, 1745) (figure 7) throughout her lifetime, which has been suggested as sign of a sentimental possession of Pompadour’s. Likewise, Louis’ and Pompadour’s respective library collections each contained copies of the *Recueil de cent estampes représentent différentes nations du Levant* and *Costumes Turcs de la Cour et de la Ville de Constantinople en 1720*, two popular books detailing the Ottoman empire and its hierarchical roles. Ultimately, the tie that binds their shared taste of *turquerie* lies in an opera performed in December of 1748. Pompadour, no stranger to the stage, was a known and celebrated patron, admirer, and performer of the theatrical arts. Her notable performances included, but were not limited to: *Venus et Adonis*, *Issé*, *Les Amours de Ragonde*, *Le Petite maison* (d’Hénault), *Le Devin du village* and *Tancrède*. Cast as the role of Herminie, Pompadour performed *Tancrède* twice at the Théâtre des Petits Cabinets in 1748 and again in 1752. This repeated characterization of Herminie, for which she also kept the costume and wore it several times, suggests Pompadour likely identified with or was quite attracted to the role. Pompadour’s identification with Herminie casts Louis as her Tancrède.

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46 Pompadour has performed a number of plays; however, the above are the most commonly studied. For an in-depth study of Pompadour’s travesti roles, see: Melissa Lee Hyde, “Troubling Identities and the Agreeable Game of Art: From Madame de Pompadour’s Theatrical ‘Breeches’ of Decorum to Drouais’s Portrait of Madame du Barry En Homme,” in *Women and Portraits in Early Modern Europe: Gender, Agency, Identity*, ed. by Andrea G. Pearson, (Aldershot, Hampshire, England; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2008).

André Campra’s *tragédie en musique, Tancrède*, concentrated on a tragic event retold in Italian poet Torquato Tasso’s epic romantic poem, *Gerusalemme liberata*. The opera recounted the dramatic love story between Tancrède, Clorinda, and Herminie through a scene of vicious hand-to-hand combat between Tancrède and his rival, Argante, where Tancrède unknowingly killed his love Clorinda, who had disguised herself in a man’s suit of armor. Herminie, played by Pompadour, was in love with Tancrède, her father’s enemy, and was recruited to kill him in an enchanted forest. Yet, because of her passion and love for Tancrède, she blocked his execution, which allowed for his release. Here, Herminie, like Pompadour, was the other woman in love with a man betrothed to another. Surely, Pompadour resonated on some level with the relationship between Herminie and Tancrède, as Louis was married to Marie Leszczyńska, Queen of France, and Pompadour was the official mistress, or more simply put, the ‘other woman.’ In the same vein, she, like Herminie, was also trying to hold on to the man she loved. As Melissa Hyde has suggested, Pompadour’s plays often refuted critic’s misgivings about the king’s behavior and status, countering speculations that he had “fallen from grace.” However, in the case of *Tancrède* it is impossible to determine whether or not the *tragédie* informed her

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49 James R. Anthony. "Tancrède." *The New Grove Dictionary of Opera. Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online.* Oxford University Press, accessed February 25, 2017, [http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/subscriber/article/grove/music/O009632](http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/subscriber/article/grove/music/O009632). The plot is a tangle of amorous rivalries spun against the background of the first crusade. Argante, the Saracen leader, loves Clorinde, a Saracen princess and renowned warrior, who has been captured by the crusader Tancrède and secretly loves him. Herminie, daughter of the king of Antioch, also loves Tancrède, her father’s enemy, and Ismenor, a Saracen magician, loves Herminie. Tancrède, declaring his love for Clorinde, frees all the Saracen prisoners. Argante calls on Ismenor to create an enchanted forest where Tancrède can be captured. Ismenor and Herminie, who now knows that Clorinde is her rival, arrive in the forest to kill the captured Tancrède, but Herminie, admitting her love, blocks Ismenor’s sword. Furious, he tries again, but this time it is Clorinde who stays his hand. She confesses her passion for Tancrède, whom she releases, but duty and pride prevent her from surrendering to love. Tancrède emerges victorious from an ensuing battle in which he believes he has killed Argante. Argante enters, however, mortally wounded by Tancrède’s knights, and announces that it is Clorinde, dressed in his armour, whom Tancrède has slain. Tancrède is led off the stage in suicidal despair.

choice of *turquerie* when commissioning her *chambre à la turque*. Still, due to Pompadour’s adoration for *Tancrède*, it is plausible to think she used elements of the storyline and production design from her performance as guidelines for fashioning her bedroom after a familiar event.

Alden Gordon indicated that the recollection of Pompadour’s theatrical roles had been noted as one of the most important organizing themes of the Bellevue iconography.\(^{51}\) While *Tancrède* does not reference the harem, it does relate a story of love and sacrifice, which parallels and echoes Pompadour’s and Louis’ relationship status during 1750. Katherine Gordon states that during this time frame Pompadour had made several pleas to the French clergy, asking for forgiveness for her past sins and claimed her relationship with the king was pure, even going as far as walling up the private staircase connecting her and Louis’ bedrooms as additional proof of her repentance.\(^{52}\) However, most scholars attribute the decline in their sexual relationship, as I detailed earlier, to Pompadour’s poor health. Nevertheless, despite the reason for their declining relationship, Pompadour, in the same manner as Herminie, went against her courtly duties, jeopardizing her place next to the king, and sacrificed her required duties so as to save her love. Viewed in these terms, the *chambre à la turque* can be imagined as a set, or stage, for which Pompadour could cast herself as Herminie in visual representations by Van Loo and thereby remind the king of her relinquishment of sin in his honor. Therefore, I ask: Is it possible Pompadour employed her plays in the same manner as she did when refuting gossip against the king for herself and her reputation?

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\(^{51}\) Alden R. Gordon, “The Art of Patronage of the Marquise de Pompadour and of the Marquis de Marigny,” in *La Volupté Du Goût: French Painting in the Age of Madame De Pompadour*. Ed. by Olivier Baumont, (Paris: Musée des beaux-arts, 2008), 48. Gordon lists Helge Siefert as the person behind the idea; however, I have been unable to track down any publications with this information.

Bellevue was not Pompadour’s sole architectural project during the 1750s. She had commissioned a number of hermitages, gardens, and dairies between 1748-1754, using their architectural designs, as Meredith Martin has indicated, as a means for expressing and shaping her identity, “consolidating her position at court, as well as to entertain the king and strengthen their relationship.”53 According to Martin, Pompadour’s Versailles hermitage was constructed as a symbol for her self-improvement in accordance with new Hippocratic ideas about the intertwined relationship between the body, nature, and the mind. In an effort to discredit the rampant rumors circulating throughout the court of her supposed “degeneracy” or “unnatural dominance” over Louis XV, Pompadour used her hermitage to represent herself as a healthful, nurturing, and feminine.54 When comparing the patronage of Pompadour’s château de Bellevue and her hermitage at Versailles, it becomes evident that it was common practice for Pompadour to manipulate architecture and decor through metaphorical imagery to convey meaning about her self, current affairs, and relationship with the king.

Pompadour’s motivation for Bellevue’s chambre à la turque can be viewed in the same manner as her Versailles hermitage: to convey and defend her identity in a private setting. Yet, in this instance, she was not attempting to promote her health; rather she was promoting her newly defined relationship with Louis XV. What the chambre à la turque allowed Pompadour to visually represent was a physical representation of dislocation in Turkish fashion. Her personal harem-styled quarters did not appear to reference the transitioning from love to friendship; rather, the Turkish iconography bespeaks of the place in-between love and friendship, a space of dislocation, one centered around neither/nor. For at this moment, Pompadour was in transition and she was positioned between these two roles; she was neither completely Louis’ sexual

partner nor merely a close friend. Turquerie allowed for her to represent this otherness as a new social and political role to the king, a position that was a doorway to two worlds, or in this case, two roles. By decorating her bedroom as a Turkish harem, moreover, the room broke with the continuity of the décor, which allowed Pompadour to display her private area as dislocated from the rest of Bellevue’s interior, quite similar to where she found herself at that particular moment.

The chambre à la turque acted as the vehicle for which Pompadour could convey her newly created courtly role, but it was Carle Van Loo’s A Sultana Taking Coffee that delivered the brunt of her intended narrative. In the following chapter, I will discuss how Pompadour communicated her socio-political position and refuted any misgivings against her character through the exotic portrait, A Sultana Taking Coffee.
CHAPTER TWO:  
A SULTANA TAKING COFFEE: REFASHIONING THE SELF THROUGH THE OTHER

Beginning in 1749, Pompadour seemed to have anticipated major changes in her personal relationship with Louis XV, which would undoubtedly affect both her personal and social life within the court.\(^{55}\) Entries from the memoirs of Pompadour’s confidant Cardinal de Bernis indicated that between the years 1752-1755, “clear-sighted persons thought they saw a diminution in the favor of Mme de Pompadour; they suspected that the king had a fancy for Mme de Choiseul, a little serpent whom the marquise had warmed in her bosom.\(^{56}\) Certainly, this lessening was not something that developed over night, surprising Pompadour. With the king’s known wandering eye and Pompadour’s recorded fragile health, her position at court had always been at the mercy of the king’s whim. But to remain maîtresse-en-titre throughout their constant evolving relationship, Pompadour needed to strategize and construct a battle plan in order to maintain and eventually elevate her position, influence and closeness to the king.

Melissa Hyde suggested in her chapter, *The Make-up of the Marquise*, that Pompadour was very aware of and used her image in the visual arts to convey specific meanings about her identity and her relationship with the King in many commissioned works.\(^{57}\) Looking to *A Sultana*


\(^{56}\) François-Joachim de Bernis, *Memoirs and Letters of Cardinal De Bernis* (New York: Privately printed for members of the Versailles Historical Society, 1899), 173. Bernis’ accounts on events in Pompadour’s life should be used with caution as they were personal thoughts in a private journal, which may have been misconstrued or manipulated to favor his person.

Taking Coffee, the only painting in the Van Loo harem series to display a figural representation of Pompadour, the composition certainly reflects her tendency to employ the visual arts to convey meaning and identity. Likewise, the portrait renders Pompadour’s anticipation of change, casting herself and personifications of herself in non-sexual exotic genre scenes as a strategy to mitigate the changes taking place at Versailles and with Louis. Stein had deemed both this image and its fellow paintings in the series as reflections of Ottoman women engaged in Turkish activities, suggesting that when Pompadour commissioned the series, she did so self-consciously and with political intentions. Furthermore, she continues on to suggest that the marquise’s aim was to express her position and solidify her power through harem imagery on account of the “harem-like” situation that took place off the grounds of Versailles, at Parc-Aux-Cerfs.58

While my argument aligns with Stein on a fundamental level, I take issue with the reason why Pompadour chose turquerie and the specific roles of the Ottoman women of the harem as a means to represent her social, political, and gender identity in the visual arts in both a public and private setting. I argue that her use of turquerie is much more complicated than what Stein had stated. Pompadour had chosen to represent herself as a respectful and high-ranking Ottoman woman in a non-sexual manner, which was quite unconventional in eighteenth century depictions of Ottoman women, as sexuality was commonly associated with Ottoman harem imagery.59 Therefore, an analysis of how and why she wielded turquerie through the female Ottoman figures in A Sultana Taking Coffee to convey a publicized narrative is essential to

58 Perrin Stein, “Madame de Pompadour and the Harem Imagery at Bellevue” in Extrait De La Gazette Des Beaux-Arts. vol. 123. (January, 1994), 188-189. Stein based her argument on the activities, which took place at the Parc-Aux-Cerfs as well as the marquis d’Argenson’s journal.

understanding Pompadour’s use of the visual arts as a political tool for maintaining her position and reinforcing her feminine identity.

In Hyde’s examination of Madame de Pompadour at Her Toilette she noted that by 1758, Pompadour reached the zenith of her power and influence over the king “through her flawless social performance.” Therefore, on account of the unprecedented nature of Pompadour’s improving relations with the king, the years leading up to her crowing point, mainly the Bellevue years 1750-1755, should be viewed as a moment of great significance. In this chapter, I analyze the metaphorical meaning presented in Van Loo’s A Sultana Taking Coffee through the lens of French and Ottoman societies to create a narrative of Pompadour’s intended socio-political message. Dislocated from her role and Versailles, Pompadour used this period to reformulate her personal identity after the roles of the Ottoman aseki and validé sultan to counter criticism on her behavior and bridge the gap between love and friendship, whereby she crossed onto a new socio-political realm. Furthermore, by creating a completely unique configuration of a hybridized Ottoman-French woman, Pompadour’s act of self-representation simultaneously allowed for her to refute any claims that her relationship, and by extension, femininity were in jeopardy. Courtier intrigue had viewed her behavior as official mistress unacceptable and, therefore, Pompadour’s response was fueled with elements pertaining to the acceptable constructions of femininity and enlightened thoughts on women was necessary. Through innovation and intention, the marquise devised a new role for herself by claiming her dislocation through visual representation as an advantage and necessary position to remain next to the king.

**Pompadour: Patroness of the Arts**

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Much is unknown of the origins of the Van Loo harem series commission, including their original titles and their dates, as scholars place them as completed between 1750-1755.\textsuperscript{61} Inventory records from Pompadour’s brother, the Marquis de Marigny, labeled \textit{A Sultana Taking Coffee} in 1781 as “Une Sultanne prenant le café que lui présente une négresse” and it’s overdoor companion, \textit{Two Odalisques Embroidering}, listed as “Une Sultanne travaillant à la tapisserie,” noting the two paintings as pendant portraits.\textsuperscript{62} Likewise, questions of patronage are left unanswered as to who directed Van Loo to the compositional design of \textit{A Sultana Taking Coffee} and its companion portraits. But, as Marcia Pointon has noted, many elite eighteenth century women were actively involved in the commissioning of portraits and the patrons often assisted in the development of the composition.\textsuperscript{63} This was also true for the marquise, as Hyde has suggested that Pompadour had a hand in the visual makeup of her identity in François Boucher’s \textit{Madame de Pompadour at Her Toilette} (figure 8).\textsuperscript{64} Conflating Boucher and Pompadour as artist, the portrait presents an illusion of Pompadour ‘painting’ her face in both a cosmetic and artistic manner, suggesting to the viewer that Pompadour is a maker of images and, particularly, her own image. On account of Pointon’s assertion and knowing that Pompadour was


\textsuperscript{62} Jean Cordey, \textit{Inventaire Des Biens de Madame de Pompadour Rédigé Après Son Décès}, (La Bibliothèque Nationale: Paris, 1939), 91. Pompadour’s postmortem inventory records listed \textit{A Sultana Taking Coffee} and \textit{Two Odalisques Embroidering} as pendant portraits and were commissioned for 1500 livres.


\textsuperscript{64} Melissa Lee Hyde, “The Makeup of the Marquise,” \textit{Making up the Rococo: François Boucher and His Critics}, (Los Angeles, CA: Getty Research Institute, 2006), 114.
both mindful and involved in the construction of her visual identity in many of her portraits, we can presume that Van Loo’s portrait was no different.

What is different in the portrait, however, is Pompadour’s visual identity, which is rendered in turquerie. The Turkish inspired theme embraces Avcioglu’s theory of self-representation, which she defined as “the practice of manufacturing one’s public identity for socio-political purposes” with an aim of “imposing, keeping or gaining power.” As I have indicated throughout the introduction and first chapter of my thesis, Pompadour faced a great predicament and, therefore, needed to counter the changes taking place in her relationship, as well as the court intrigue circulating throughout Versailles. For that reason, turqueried portraiture allowed for her an avenue for which she could address her alienation by emphasizing her character and role to underscore her rank and gender. Scholars have indicated that portraiture and elite women went hand in hand in eighteenth century Europe. Indeed, patrons (of both genders) used the artistic outlet of the portrait to project a desired version of their self or counter unwanted or harmful slanders and rumors; however, it was women who harnessed its maximum potential by communicating their social and political stances through the visual world as they lacked the same agency as men. As a result, portraiture allowed for women to subliminally assert their views and make statements in the public sphere through metaphorical dimensions, as it was typically off limits for women to express themselves freely.

Pompadour, too, was a women who used the arts, most often portraiture, as a vehicle to drive and project her social and political positions. Even so, this practice was not always as

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68 Ibid., 65.
apparent in early images as it was in her later commissions. For example, Jean-Marc Nattier’s 1746 mythological painting *Madame de Pompadour as Diana the Huntress* (figure 9) placed the marquise as the young and beautiful Diana the Huntress. Colin Jones had suggested in his chapter, “Discretion and Fidelity” that the painter, known for his “prettified” and idealized images of aristocratic women, was likely in the driver’s seat for the creation of the composition as the make-up mirrored several other women’s portraits of the time. Still, the mythological subject matter certainly paid tribute to the initial meeting between Pompadour and the king during one of his hunting excursions, which could be an indication of Pompadour’s involvement on some level. Early portraits such as Nattier’s show the newly placed mistress honing her patroness craft. Yet, it is the later portraits of the 1750s, which display the prominence in Pompadour’s presence in her commissions. Specifically, Pompadour was known for her *femme savant* portraits, such as Quentin de La Tour’s pastel painting, *Portrait of Madame de Pompadour* (1755) (figure 10), which situated her in a room surrounded by elements denoting her intelligence, her amateur artistic practices, and her support for the musical and visual arts. Multiple books, such as the *Encyclopédie*, a globe, guitar, musical sheets, and her portfolio of drawings frame Pompadour seated at an ornate desk. She is, by all indications, a *femme savant*, as only a woman of the highest caliber would surround herself with symbols of a learned and culturally enlightened society. *A Sultana Taking Coffee*, in contrast, steps away from Pompadour’s philosophical and learned self-representational approach to portraiture and instead leapt into the realm of an exotic genre scene.

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70 Ibid.

**Pompadour’s Sultana**

Upon first glance, Van Loo’s portrait of Pompadour in *A Sultana Taking Coffee* exhibits her appearance as an Ottoman elite woman. She dressed in Turkish style regal attire, invoking a purely aesthetic exoticism. One can, however, notice the combination of Van Loo’s vision of the Levant, which was a conflation of the imaginary and reality, with Pompadour’s past portraits whereby it implied a change of location and intrigue to the viewer through her clothing, activities, architecture, and furnishings.72 Situated on the right quadrant of the portrait, Pompadour is depicted in full profile, and dressed in a sumptuous white Turkish-inspired silk tunic, a blue kaftan, and red silk harem pants. Gold embellishments decorate her waist and are embroidered into the neckline and bodice of her tunic. She is seated on an Ottoman-esque divan, accompanied by a black servant pouring her coffee. Her right arm extends behind her, propped up by the couch as support, while her hand grasps a long, narrow pipe, which rests against the tambour. Stretching across the central axis, her left arm extends parallel to her leg as she reaches for her hot coffee. Eighteenth century French author Louis-Sebastien Mercier stated in *Le Tableau de Paris* that fashions should be characteristic of gender, insisting “a women’s clothing should distinguish her from us; she should be all woman from head to heels.”73 *A Sultana Taking Coffee* calls to mind this quote as Pomdour is dressed sumptuously as an Ottoman woman of her status should be, subliminally expressing her rank and role within her self-representation. Her Turkish dress has been adorned with jewels and pearls, which have also been intertwined


into her braids, signifying her higher rank. Pompadour’s head is wrapped with a makeshift white toque and topped with her signature pink rose. Her costume engages with what Marcia Pointon argued was the ‘body as a work of art,’ describing it as,

How one wore one’s patches, how one held one’s fan, the cut of one’s clothes, the shape of one’s wig- all these made of the body a mobile cluster of signifiers indicating political affiliation, class, gender, and sexuality.  

What we can deduce instantly from Pointon’s argument is how Pompadour’s body was adorned as a marker of her association with the king as well as a nod to her upper-class status. This notion of power through association was conveyed through the image of Pompadour as an Ottoman woman, and specifically a woman who would have been endowed with a great amount of power in the harem hierarchy. Knowing that Turkish customs distinguished ranks by fashion, colors, and the wearing of turbans and sashes in both public and private use, Pompadour’s outfit certainly noted her rank through the costly, sumptuous fabrics of her costume. However, as Salon critics noted, the sheen and luster from the luxurious fabrics and surfaces garnered more attention for Van Loo’s artistic skill than Pompadour’s intentions or her embodiment of a sultana.

A review from eighteenth century art critic Baillet de Saint Julien wrote of the 1755 salon that Van Loo’s painting, A Sultana Taking Coffee, was a clear representation of Pompadour, stating:

Vous devez vous rappeler que Van Loo a represente dans un dessus de potte que tres belle Sultane prenant le caffè que lui presente une Negresse. Cette Sultane est un profil;


Though Baillet de Saint Julien did not specifically call the painting a portrait of the marquise, he noted in his criticism that Van Loo’s depiction of Pompadour as a sultana was quite beautiful, even comparing it to de la Tour’s pastel portrait, *Portrait of the Marquise de Pompadour*, which was also exhibited at the 1755 Salon. While Baillet de Saint Julien’s criticism focuses on *A Sultana Taking Coffee*’s likeness in relation to Pompadour and the skill of Van Loo, my focus is based on her physical representation within the portrait as well as the fact that the portrait was the only painting to be exhibited publically from the Van Loo harem series. Due to this, it seems likely that Pompadour placed emphasis on the painting and its contents, which would fall in line with her typical approach to conveyed meaning through the visual arts in a public/social setting.

As Gordon has indicated, it was around 1750 when d’Argenson had foretold of the change, or in his words collapse, of the sexual relationship between the king and Pompadour and by 1754 it was public knowledge. Therefore, the exhibition of *A Sultana Taking Coffee* corresponds directly to the moment in which criticism would have been rampant and a rebuttal or tailoring of her response would have been imperative to her reputation. Pompadour, exerting her power, used her *turqueried* body to take control of how she was to be viewed in public and what narrative was to be conveyed.

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77 Baillet de Saint-Julien, Guillaume (1726-1795), Seconde lettre a un partisan du bon gout. Sur l'Exposition des peintures, gravures & sculptures, faite par Messieurs de l'Académie Royale, dans le grand Salon du Louvre le 28 Août 1755, Salon (1755; Paris), 6. Translation: “You have to remember that Van Loo has represented in a top that very beautiful Sultana taking the coffee presented from a Negress. This Sultana is a profile; It is said that it resembles the person whom M. de la Tour has purposely depicted in his pastel (Pompadour). For my part, I can not persuade myself that these two figures have been worked upon according to the same tone. If the Sultana is similar the pastel is not.”

78 Ibid.

An initial reading of *A Sultana Taking Coffee* implies that Pompadour is an elite Frenchwoman partaking in fashionable Eastern costume and practices of leisure in a private Turkish domestic space. The Eastern illusory setting by the hand of Carle Van Loo, well known for his Turkish subjects and sought after by many aristocrats and private collectors, further instilled elements of Turkish realism to portrait.\(^{80}\) Unquestionably, Van Loo and Pompadour were not concerned with factual Turkish gender and cultural orders as Pompadour is unveiled and she retained her pale European complexion and somewhat aquiline nose. Rather, the portrait functioned as a picturesque exotic genre painting, which Roland-Michel described as figures dressing-or acting-in fashions characteristic of foreign countries, while their features remained European.\(^ {81}\) But I argue that *A Sultana Taking Coffee* is much more than an image of fashionable masquerading as Pompadour was reclaiming her status as official mistress through ‘otherness.’

Nebahat Avcioglu’s reclamation of *turquerie* images, which were traditionally categorized as frivolity and purely decorative in function, argued that the appropriation of Turkish forms was a means of self-fashioning an image of empowerment\(^ {82}\) and certainly Pompadour can be included in her argument. For example, in Jean-Baptiste Lemercier’s portrait, *Stanislas Leszcynski* (figure 11), Avcioglu proposed that the king mirrored the image of Ottoman Sultan Ahmed III through both pose and symbols, wearing conflated Ottoman/French articles, such as an ermine kaftan and the hybridized crown/turban topped with feathers.\(^ {83}\) Yet, it is the hybridized headgear: a crescent topped Kallavi (turban/crown), which directly aligned

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Leszcynski with Ahmed III, as it is the very same turban Ahmed III wore in his royal portrait. In the case of Lemercier’s portrait one can view the act of self-representation a la turque as a “conscious art,” meaning Leszcynski wanted to identify with the Ottoman sultan, but also intended to commemorate his position as (deposed) king of Poland along with promoting his new position within the Ottoman Empire. Working in the same manner as Avcioglu, I place *A Sultana Taking Coffee* as a “conscious art” meant to identify Pompadour with the roles of the Ottoman aseki and the validé sultan in an effort to solidify her position but to also display her ‘otherness’ in visual form.

**Constructing a Sultana**

Beginning in 1751, Denis Diderot and Jean le Rond d’Alembert published the *Encyclopédie*, a large-scale multi-volume reference project meant to “change the way men think” and usher in a new way to acquire knowledge in an effort to improve the world. Pompadour, an advocate and supporter of the *Encyclopédie*, was well versed on the entries and had full access to the book. Biographer Nancy Mitford noted that Pompadour was known to have persuaded the king to call off his original ban of the *Encyclopédie* after, upon her suggestion, he search for the answer to his question in the reference book. Given the marquise’s advocacy and

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84 *Ibid*, 52.


86 Ewa Lajer-Burcharth, “Pompadour’s Touch: Difference in Representation,” in *Representations* Vol. 73, No. 1 (Winter, 2001), 65. Lajer-Burcharth notes that Pompadour championed and supported the *Encyclopédie* against the Jesuits and the religious, conservative faction at court. She also persuaded Louis XV to call off his ban on the public access to the *Encyclopédie*.

insistence on its importance and the benefits of the text, it seems likely that she would have herself read the *sultane* passages, which stated,

Maitresse ou concubine du grand - seigneur. Nous ne disons pas *son épouse*, parce que la politique des empereurs turcs ne leur permet pas d'en prendre. *Sultane* favorite est une des femmes du serrail que le sultan a honoré de ses faveurs, & qu'on nomme *aseki* sultana. *Sultane validé* est la mere de l'empereur regnant, comme nous disons la *reine mere*. 88

The *Encyclopédie* then refers the reader to the entry for *aseki* for supplementary information on Ottoman woman roles, defining the role as,

Nom que les Turcs donnent aux sultanes favorites, qui ont mis au monde un fils. Lorsqu'une des sultantes du grand Seigneur est parvenue par - là au rang d'*aseki*, elle jouit de plusieurs distinctions, comme d'avoir un appartement séparé de l'appartement des autres sultanes, orné de vergers, de jardins, de fontaines, d'offices, de bains & même d'une mosquée: elle y est servie par des eunuques & d'autres domestiques. 89

When thinking about Pompadour’s lust for knowledge and her instances of intellectual braggadocio in her portraits, it also seems plausible that she chose a specific *sultane* role for her *chambre à la turque* images, so as to create a specific narrative akin to her wants and needs.

Perhaps Pompadour looked to the role of the *validé* sultan in the *Encyclopédie*, which described the sultan’s mother as,

Nom que l'on donne chez les Turcs à la sultane mere de l'empereur qui est sur le trône. La *sultane validé* est toujours très - respectée par son fils, & prend part aux affaires de l'état, suivant le plus ou le moins d'ascendant qu'elle sait prendre sur son esprit. Elle jouit d'une liberté beaucoup plus grande que les autres sultanes qui sont dans le serrail, & peuvent y changer & y introduire ce que la fantaisie leur suggere. La loi veut que le sultan obtienne le consentement de sa mere pour coucher avec quelqu'une des femmes qui y sont renfermées; ainsi la *validé* lui amene une fille choisie pour attirer ses regards; elle

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88 Denis Diderot and Jean Le Rond d’Alembert, “Sultane” in *Encyclopédie; ou, Dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers*. 17 vols. Paris: Braisson, 1751-1765. (Reprint, Elmsford, NY: Pergamon, 1969), 15: 656. English translation: “Mistress or concubine of the Grand - Seigneur. We do not say his wife, because the policy of the Turkish emperors does not allow them to take. The favorite Sultana is one of the women of the seraglio whom the Sultan has honored with his favors, and who is called aseki sultana. See aseki.”

89 Denis Diderot and Jean Le Rond d’Alembert, “Aseki” in *Encyclopédie; ou, Dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers*. 17 vols. Paris: Braisson, 1751-1765. (Reprint, Elmsford, NY: Pergamon, 1969), 1:752. English translation: “a name which the Turks give to the favorite Sultanas, who have given birth to a son. When one of the saints of the great Lord had attained the rank of aseki, she had several distinctions, such as having an apartment separated from the other sultan’s apartments, adorned with orchards, gardens, fountains, Offices, baths, and even a mosque; it is served by eunuchs and other servants.”
Because the descriptions of the roles of Ottoman women within the harem were quite
descriptive, when looking at Van Loo’s *A Sultana Taking Coffee*, it appears Pompadour chose to
conflate the roles into one image, representing herself as neither wholly an *aseki* nor a *validé*, but
instead picking aspects of each role that coincided with her current situation, creating an
hybridized sultana. The conflation of the Ottoman *aseki* and the *validé* in the painting should be
viewed as an attempt to fashion an identity as an ‘other’ appropriate to her subordinate position
to the king. To step outside of the designated gender roles for theatrical entertainment was one
thing, as Pompadour was performing for the king and close friends in a private setting, but to do
so in a portrait destined for the king’s viewing and public exhibition would have been a major
*faux pas*, and one that would likely result in her expulsion from the court. And van Loo’s image
of Pompadour avoids that outcome at all costs by appropriating gendered positions of the Levant
that were equivalent to the marquise’s role and relationship to the king.

As I indicated at the beginning of this chapter, Stein argued that the Turkish themed
compositions of Van Loo’s harem series was attributed to Pompadour’s rumored involvement in
the organization of sexual partners for Louis at the *Parc-Aux-Cerfs*. Likewise, she also deemed
the narrative of the harem series as representative of social class distinction and the power

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90 Denis Diderot and Jean Le Rond d’Alembert, “Validé” in *Encyclopédie; ou, Dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers*. 17 vols. Paris: Braison, 1751-1765. (Reprint, Elmsford, NY: Pergamon, 1969), 16: 821. English translation: “A name given in the Turks to the sultana-mother of the emperor who is on the throne. The sultana is always respected by her son, and takes part in the affairs of the state, according to the more or less ascendancy which she knows how to take over her mind. She enjoys a much greater liberty than the other sultans who are in the seraglio, and can change and introduce into it what fantasy suggests to them. The law requires the sultan to obtain the consent of his mother to sleep with some of the women who are confined there; Thus the validate brings her a girl chosen to attract her looks; She would find herself very bad, and would think herself dishonored if her son did not rely on her choice. Her physician, named hekisis effendi, when she falls ill, is introduced into her apartment, but speaks to her only through a veil whose bed is surrounded, and does not feel her pulse but through A fine linen, which is put on the arm of the validated sultana.”
associated. Within each of the paintings, Stein suggested that there was a distinction between the leisure activity found in Pompadour’s figure in *A Sultana Taking Coffee* versus the odalisques embroidering and playing music in *Two Odalisques Embroidering* and *An Odalisque Playing a Stringed Instrument.*\(^9\) While this observation certainly is credible, to suggest that Pompadour would solely focus on class distinction and its benefits in her private bedroom would be completely out of character for the marquise. Knowing that Pompadour was accustomed to taking up iconographic programs that spoke of class, gender, and her relationship, an all encompassing analysis of the harem series should be based on these three categories, so as to understand the narrative of *A Sultana Taking Coffee.*\(^9\)

As Pompadour’s case suggests, eighteenth century women were aware of how their choices and treatments of subjects could negatively affect and be used against them if they undertook improper subjects; at the same time, their choices could also be used positively to form an identity that could project an accepted and desired representation of their own womanhood.\(^9\) Portraiture as an outlet was a means for self-fashioning the visual self with political, social, and economically charged messages in an otherwise absent space in women’s lives. Here it is instructive to consider how other powerful European women engaged with *turquerie* in portraiture. Take for example a follower of Jean-Étienne Liotard’s portrait, *Portrait of Maria-Theresa in Turkish Dress* (figure 12), which portrays Empress Maria Theresa of Austria as a fashionable European woman dressed *à la turque.* To the casual eye, the painting’s simple composition appears as a European empress masquerading in Turkish clothing. Yet

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\(^9\) Referring to the scholarly work of Melissa Hyde, Katherine Gordon, and Alden Gordon, all of which approach their analysis of Pompadour’s portraits on class, gender, and her relationship status.

Michael Yonan has suggested that Maria-Theresa’s blue and red ermine-lined kaftan, feather headpiece, bronze belt, and masquerade mask were not solely for fashionable imagery; rather, they are metaphorically charged with underlying political meanings.\(^{94}\) Relayed through her clothing was the notion that Maria-Theresa was familiar with Turkish culture due to her background, specifically her “geographical proximity and historical circumstances.”\(^{95}\) Here, Yonan implies that the empress can put on and take off the masquerade, which simultaneously harnesses and diffuses the Islamic East’s powers, thereby allowing her to “conquer and dismantle the Islamic identity into something simple, superficial, and unthreatening” all in an effort to visually reinforce her power as Austrian empress.\(^{96}\)

On some basic level this portrait does display Pompadour as a fashionable European woman dressed as a Turkish sultane engaging in ordinary Ottoman life, but it does not reference any type of power struggle with the Levant, as does Maria-Theresa’s image. But just as Portrait of Maria-Theresa in Turkish Dress carried an underlying meaning, so too does Pompadour’s portrait. The major difference between the two paintings, however, is that Pompadour is not purely masquerading, but embodying Ottoman sultanes. Here, Pompadour is not only interested in looking like a sultane, but she also personifies the role, invoking the privileged power of the Ottoman aseki and validé all while staying inside the parameters of French courtly portraiture.

In the Ottoman Empire, female subjects of the sultan lived in the harem, a separate, protected and private quarter within the royal palace and were rarely seen in public spaces.\(^{97}\)

While the harem was typically cast in a sexual light in French travel accounts, the harem


\(^{95}\) *Ibid.*

\(^{96}\) *Ibid.*

household was not dominated by sexuality hierarchy but, rather, by seniority and familial relationships. The sultan’s mother, the *validé*, was head of the household and she exercised the greatest amount of authority over both the sultan’s consorts as well as the sultan himself. While women of the harem were allotted rights and some authority within their private, domestic space it was the *validé* sultan who assumed the legitimate role of authority both inside the harem as well as outside the royal household. But the sultan had deep ties to two women: his mother and his favorite, the aseki. As head concubine, the aseki was elevated into a position of privilege and wealth, but was subordinate to the *validé* sultan.

Certainly, Pompadour would have identified with the position and role of the aseki as she was the king’s official mistress and she was subordinate to the queen. And, just as the Ottoman sultan awarded his head concubine with “favors,” Louis XV, too, provided financial, architectural, and luxury gifts to Pompadour. Refering back to the *Encyclopédie* entry, as aseki, Ottoman woman had several distinctions, such as having an apartment separated from the sultan's apartments, which was adorned with orchards, gardens, fountains..., and it was served by eunuchs and other servants. Bellevue, by all accounts, was the quintessence of an aseki’s living quarters, as it was separated from Versailles and decorated with luxuries and lush gardens. Likewise, Bellevue was not a space for men and women to move throughout freely. Rather, one must hold a rank of distinction and enter the private household only upon invitation by Pompadour or Louis.


On one level, the roles of aseki and mistress have the most apparent connection. Referring back to the aseki entry, it was the head concubine who had an apartment separated from the other sultan’s apartments and adorned with orchards, gardens, and fountains. Such a description seems to mirror the placement and exterior decoration of the château de Bellevue. Still, Stein indicated that after the breakdown of the couple’s sexual relationship in 1750, Pompadour’s political position as confidant and advisor to Louis XV was secured and she carried out a “harem-like” setting off the grounds of Versailles in an effort to keep the king sexually happy. That the Ottoman aseki provided the sultan with a son becomes a problematic area when discussing Pompadour as fully representing herself as the aseki sultane. While Pompadour did have a daughter, Alexandrine-Jeanne (Fanfan), her daughter was born the year before she met the king by then husband Charles-Guillaume Le Normant d’Étiolles. Hence, given Pompadour’s close familiarity with the Encyclopédie, she likely read the account on the aseki and recognized that she did not, in fact, align with that particular position in the Ottoman harem hierarchy. One cannot, however, disregard the fact that the French were not particularly interested in Ottoman verisimilitude and, therefore, to rule out the likelihood that Pompadour created a hybridized image of the aseki with attributes and powers from other Ottoman woman would be a gross disregard to the patronage of the marquise and to the exotic genre painting field. Although there are clearly similarities between Pompadour as mistress and the role of the Ottoman aseki, the act of arranging for the king to have a rendezvous point for sexcapades at the


103 Mme Du Hausset, Mémoires De Madame Du Hausset, Femme De Chambre De Madame De Pompadour : Avec Des Notes Et Des Éclaircissements Historiques, (Paris: Baudouin frères, 1824), 44-45. Hausset was Pompadour’s lady maid and kept a diary throughout her time with the marquise. However, Haussett’s diary was not printed until 1824.
*Parc au Cerfs* suggested another role in the harem: the *validé sultane*. What my argument brings to the table is an expansion on Stein’s placement of Pompadour as purely an undesignated sultana in the harem to one that presents a conflated sultana crafted from the likes of the *aseki* and the * valide* sultan to express the ‘otherness’ of her current position.

To suggest that the marquise fit perfectly into the box of ‘sultan’s favorite’ is to simplify the visual representation she presented in the portrait when, in fact, it is much more complicated. More often than not eighteenth century images of exoticism did not illustrate a particular physical embodiment of the “other,” but, rather, they were motivated by or an idea of a European cultural context.\(^\text{104}\) In that manner, Pompadour’s sultana did not represent a specific sultana because she herself was not operating in a specific category within French courtly society. In this portrait, the marquise is shown as an elite Ottoman women, which we know due to the Ottoman costume and the servants’ presence within the confines of the composition. And the idea of Pompadour as *aseki* in the image is only indicated through her actual relationship with the king. Since the room within the painting mimics the harem and Pompadour was his official mistress, it seems logical that scholars, such as Stein, would situate Pompadour solely as a high-ranking sultana. And socially, Pompadour was viewed as merely a concubine for the king’s pleasure but her role expanded beyond the sexual domain to the platonic area of confidant and advisor.\(^\text{105}\) Pompadour’s lack of sexual innuendo within the portrait, however, suggests that the representation of her identity was leaning towards their chaste, intimate relationship, taking on a deeper meaning and one that anticipated the direction their relationship was heading toward-the maternal.


Alluding back to the *Encyclopédie* entry on *sultane*, the *validé* was defined as, “la mere de l'empereur regnant, comme nous disons la reine mere.” ¹⁰⁶ The Ottoman mother-queen was the head of the household and, as Leslie Pierce noted in her book *The Imperial Harem*, the mother-queen exercised authority over all of the women within the harem.¹⁰⁷ Likewise, many Ottoman sultans welcomed the political advice and influence from their mothers, as the *validé sultane* had legitimate authority in the Ottoman government. This mother-queen authority stretched into the sultan’s private life as well, as the *validé* was known to provide advice, approve, and often arrange meetings with potential concubines.¹⁰⁸ The task of arranging meetings between the sultan and potential partners calls to Pompadour’s supposed role in arranging for the king’s pleasure at the *Parc au Cerf*. In light of this, viewing Madame de Pompadour’s self-representation of identity in *A Sultana Taking Coffee* as operating in the manner of the *validé* begins to take shape.

Van Loo’s portrait *A Sultana Taking Coffee* does not depict a simple or clearly defined image of an Ottoman *sultane*. Instead, Van Loo’s image of the *sultane* was a result of blending the roles of *aseki* and *validé sultane* together and, therefore, creating an image that reflected the roles Pompadour was taking on in the 1750s, both of the *validé* and *aseki*. But why would Pompadour combine the meanings of these two roles? Because Pompadour was at a crossroads of sorts, a period of transition and, therefore, it would make sense to not depict oneself as one or the other. This is particularly true, as we know that scholarship and later eighteenth century sources contradict one another on whether or not Pompadour and Louis XV’s sexual relationship

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¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 6.

did, in fact, cease in 1750. There is no one answer. What we do know, however, is that upon 1750, Pompadour’s iconographic images changed from love to friendship, which in which scholars agree that a change was taking place in their relationship. But it is here, in that transition between two roles, that we can understand why Pompadour perhaps conflated the aseki and validé. To be between two characters, neither completely Louis’ sexual partner, nor a maternal figure, but also acting as a mistress and a nurturing figure, allowed Pompadour to remain maîtresse-en-titre when tradition called for her dismissal and also assisted her to the elevated position of lady-in-waiting. Her choice to represent herself through turquerie as the ‘other’ allowed for her to project a self-crafted image of herself as another option from traditional French courtly woman. As a representation of a woman of the East, Pompadour did not have to conform to French norms. Instead she redefined the role of king’s favorite and created a new personal mythology for herself that was projected through a foreign depiction of a woman.
CHAPTER THREE:
FASHIONING A WOMAN: POMPADOUR’S FEMININE SELF

...women could be effectively excluded from mankind, posited as ‘an additional part of the Species,’ another (and an ‘Other’) territory to be explored, investigated, penetrated, ‘revealed,’ mastered, an object of knowledge, rather than its producer.109

Louis de Jaucourt’s Encyclopédie excerpt “Femme” promoted the idea of submissive woman, stating, “ensorte que la femme doit nécessairement être subordonnée à son mari & obéir à ses ordres dans toutes les affaires domestiques.”110 Yet, subordination permeated all aspects of women’s lives in the eighteenth century, including the scientific hypothesis on the make-up of their biological being. Resting on sexual difference, scientists and philosophers alike proposed that biology predetermined the human body, making women susceptible to distractions and unable to “develop strong powers of reflection or reason.”111 To be a woman was to be deemed inadequate in every sense. Women’s purported soft organs and the rapid movements of their nerves and muscle fibers were thought to have created a susceptibility to emotional disturbances and extreme passions, which were often believed to be uncontrollable.112 French medical texts labeled la femme as lacking the ability to be rational beings on account of tetchy organs, which


112 Mary Sheriff, “The Woman-Artist Question,” 43.
created an inability to control the body’s sensibilité. Meaning, women were perceived as unable to respond to their environment in a reasonable and rational manner because biologically they were vulnerable to the extreme passions of life.

While men enjoyed the luxuries of their naturally gifted control and reason, their sensibilité only benefitted their person, allowing for greatness and genius. Men were judged on their intelligence and their good sense, placing their mind as the distinction of their character. Women, on the other hand, were prized more so on their physical beauty, and this was particularly true for visual representations of women. Eighteenth century French Representations of beauty often cast women in erotic or biological positions in portraiture.113 Particularly, in the arts and literature women were to embody feminine ideals of virtue and modest, being depicted as if they were beautiful “exquisite cadavers.”114 What this translated to in the visual world of the eighteenth century was: all body, no brains. Women were represented in terms of their reproductive functions and sexuality, placing them as objects of desire and, most important, visually appealing to the male gaze. French philosopher Montesquieu’s notions of femme, which he stated as, “Nature...She has given women attractions; their limit is the end of their attractions,”115 fell in line with visual representations of women, insinuating that beauty and sexuality were priority to the female body and by extension the visual rendering of women.

As the king’s mistress, Pompadour, too, was expected to embody the expectations of la femme. She was to be submissive, to obey and honor Louis XV, as well as offer complete fidelity

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114 Nancy K. Miller, French Dressing: Women, Men, and Ancien Régime Fiction, (New York; Routledge, 1995), 156.

115 Charles de Montesquieu, My Thoughts, (Indianapolis, Ind.: Liberty Fund, 2012), 225.
knowing that he would not return the favor.\textsuperscript{116} Likewise, much of her presence at court also rested on her charms and her celebrated beauty. Women were typically judged on their physical beauty and both their identity and worth were more often than not conflated with their outward appearance.\textsuperscript{117} Madame du Hausset, the marquise’s lady maid, wrote in her private memoirs,

\begin{quote}

Pompadour seemed a little displeased; at last, she burst into tears...”My dear friend” she said to Mme de Brancas, “I am agitated by the fear of losing the King’s heart by ceasing to be attractive to him. Men, you know, set great value on certain things, and I have the misfortune to be of very cold temperament. I, therefore, am determined to adopt a health diet, in order to remedy this defect...
\end{quote}

Women’s main societal roles were mother, wife, and sexual object and all rested on the idea of external beauty and grace. This was particularly true of the king’s official mistress and Pompadour was no exception to the eighteenth century ideas of femininity. Given her role as official mistress, these notions likely impacted both her social and political life a great deal more.

While Mme du Hausset’s memoirs should be taken with a grain of salt, it is certainly likely that Pompadour did fret over her changing relationship with the king, as it controlled the future of her place at court. With failing health and the inevitable effects of aging, her safety within Versailles was no doubt under threat. How was she to hold on to the king’s attention if she was no longer sexually pleasing him? In this chapter, I focus on how Mme de Pompadour reimagined her femininity through the roles of the Ottoman aseki and valide sultane in an effort to forge a visual representation of a highly sought after ‘other’ of the eighteenth century. By reimagining herself as a woman of the Levant, Pompadour persuaded Louis XV to break with a


\textsuperscript{117} Wendy Frith, “Sex, smallpox and seraglios: A monument to Lady Mary Wortley Montagu,” 103. 

\textsuperscript{118} Mme du Hausset, \textit{The private memoirs of Madame Du Hausset, lady's maid to Madame de Pompadour}, (E. Wilson; London, 1825), 44.
long-standing historical convention bound by an active sexual relationship in turn for a
relationship that was dislocated from tradition, and dependent on friendship and mutual love.

Nineteenth century French writer and critic Edmond Goncourt wrote of Pompadour’s
social standing in the 1750’s, stating:

For four or five years, the habitual frequenters of the Cabinets, the King’s intimates, were
spreading abroad a report that there no longer existed between Louis XV and Pompadour
anything more than a platonic relation. They said that the two lovers were only held
together by immaterial bonds, sympathies of temper, a community of tastes, the
convention of habit, a spiritual union having succeeded to mutual passion and the
commerce of the senses. ¹¹⁹

While Goncourt whittles the marquise’s position down to a simplistic relationship, her
occupation was not only to occupy the king through arousal but to also keep him from ennui. ¹²⁰
And it was Pompadour who distracted him from his ennui at first through love and sex, but later
through art, literature, and friendship. Her confidant, Abbé de Bernis recalled of Pompadour,
“she had all the graces, all the freshness, and all the gaiety of youth: she danced, sang, and
played comedy marvelously well; no agreeable talent was lacking in her. She loved letters and
the arts.”¹²¹ Bernis’ statement paints a picture of a young Pompadour full of knowledge and
excitement, but it also assists in verifying the continuation of her love for arts and literature
throughout her time at Versailles. And, as I have indicated throughout this thesis, given
Pompadour’s fervor for both, it is no surprise that she employed the arts to entertain and
communicate to and about Louis XV. Particularly, it was there within the confines of the visual
world that she was able to reimagine her identity and project her intentions all while amusing and
enticing the king.

¹¹⁹ Edmond de Goncourt, “Madame de Pompadour” in The Confidants of the King: The Mistresses of Louis XV,
(London & Edinburgh; T.N. Foulis, 1907), 194.
¹²⁰ Ibid., 155. Ennui is translated as boredom.
¹²¹ François-Joachim de Bernis, Memoirs and Letters of Cardinal De Bernis, (New York: Privately printed for
members of the Versailles Historical Society, 1899), 87.
Returning to *A Sultana Taking Coffee*, Pompadour’s ‘self’ as a hybridized and highly feminized Ottoman *aseki/validé* sultan attempts to remedy or counter any personal or public suspicions of her position next to the king as a woman. She is the epitome of beauty, gracefulness, and modesty in Van Loo’s image—everything required of a woman of the eighteenth century. While beauty is certainly highlighted in the portrait it is done in a rather low-key manner. The viewer does not see the same emphasis on the act of beautification as we can see in *Madame de Pompadour at Her Toilette*. There is no reference to the marquise actively making-up her ‘self’ during her toilette, nor is she surrounded by the *son fard séduisant* of Boucher’s portrait. Instead we are presented with an aged representation of Pompadour, with its effects found in her rounded body and her slight double chin. Pompadour’s beauty within Van Loo’s portrait is not advanced through her appearance, but through her perfect poise, her porcelain skin and her subtle smile.

Much like the many portraits of Madame de Pompadour, *A Sultana Taking Coffee* had a public function of communicating her position next to the king as well as alluding to her femininity. Just as her comportment and smile signified her beauty, they are also iconographic elements used to convey her role as woman. Seventeenth century feminist writer Poulain de la Barre considered comportment as “constitutive of identity—the self was performative.” And, in Pompadour’s case, to make one’s self up as a sultana was to behave as one by performing roles and engaging in activities deemed feminine. Because identity is not fixed, Pompadour was able to construct new identities as she saw fit to her current situation. Despite the difficult transition taking place during this moment, Pompadour is still composed and smiling. Ronit Milano’s article “Decent Exposure” posits the smile in the mid-eighteenth century as alluding to the joys

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of womanhood, maternity and nursing as well as the pursuit of female happiness. The depiction of happiness had recently sprouted up into women’s portraits and, therefore, my study connects Pompadour’s smile with her womanhood and her search for happiness during this period of transition.

Art critic Denis Diderot listed the categories of women in Sur les Femmes, a response to Antoine-Léonard Thomas’ essay on women, as: the hysterical, the prostitute, “la dévote” (devout woman), the virgin, the mother, the savage, the prude, and the libertine. With these designated roles in mind, perhaps Pompadour appropriated the hybridized image of the aseki and validé sultana so as to present an acceptable self-representation of herself as a happy femme, one who enjoys the company and luxuries of associating with the king sultan. Melissa Hyde demonstrated in Boucher’s Madame de Pompadour at Her Toilette how the marquise “used the art of appearance as an implicit recognition of identity,” which she noted was not “a permanent condition fixed at birth but rather a state, understood as the product of social performance.” Appearance was a way of defining and expressing whom one was through fashion and the “make-up of appearance.” By masquerading as a non-sexual corporeal representation of a conflated figures of Ottoman sultanas, Pompadour’s Turkish inspired appearance was connected to and representational of her dislocation to her roles as both a woman and a mistress. But she also used Turkish imagery to display her ‘otherness’ in relation to the standard notion of woman. Hence, A Sultana Taking Coffee proclaims that Pompadour did not need to provide or exude


127 Ibid. See also: deJean, Ancients against Moderns, 1690.
sexual pleasure to maintain her happiness, her court position or her personal relationship as they were now dependent on her ‘otherness’ as neither completely lover nor mother, but rather as an official mistress, close confidant, and trusted advisor.
CHAPTER FOUR:
The Politics of Pompadour’s Spectacle

Madame de Pompadour’s love of masquerade and theatrical performances has been traditionally attributed to her desire to entertain the king. Yet, these activities were not merely playful events or for the king’s enjoyment. Rather, as Melissa Hyde has indicated, Pompadour’s desire for masquerade and theater was tied up with self-identification and allegorical representations of her relationship with Louis. In the same way, the chambre à la turque and the Van Loo harem series were intertwined with the politics of Pompadour’s identity and the status of her relationship. However, unlike the public visibility associated with her theater performances, in 1750 she took a step back from the theater’s public eye and instead performed a private spectacle for Louis through the architecture and art of Bellevue’s chambre a la turque. Through an examination of the contents of the chambre à la turque and Carle Van Loo’s A Sultana Taking Coffee, I consider the bedroom and its décor in unison in order to make the case that the room functioned as a private spectacle. Using architecture, decor and artwork to perform her narrative, Pompadour was able to challenge the boundaries of her court position and the issues arising from her changed relationship. Because Pompadour needed to solidify her position as maîtresse-en-titre, she used her shared taste with the king, turquerie, to construct a planned and powerful spectacle in a language Louis XV admired and understood. By creating a room entirely dedicated to her identity, Pompadour was able to remain as king’s mistress, unlike any

prior mistress, and maintain her independence, prominence and authority within the court circle and increase her influential power over the king.

Placed strategically on the walls of Pompadour’s bedroom at Bellevue, the Van Loo harem series was comprised of pendant portraits *A Sultana Taking Coffee* and *Two Odalisques Embroidering*, the larger two paintings, which were hung parallel to each other as overdoors. The smaller of the series, *An Odalisque Playing a Stringed Instrument*, was placed between two windows overlooking the garden, just above Pompadour’s vanity mirror.129 As I detailed in the first chapter, the marquise’s bedroom was adorned with Oriental carpets and Chinese porcelains that were paired with decorative porcelains, wallcoverings, and upholstery fabrics ornamented with Turkish motifs. As a whole the *chambre à la turque* functioned in the same manner as a theatrical set, transporting the viewer out of French reality and into an Ottoman-inspired exotic illusion. And once the stage was set, Pompadour used Carle Van Loo’s *A Sultana Taking Coffee* to project her socio-political narrative through exoticized imagery to silence any attacks on her reputation and court position. But before I delve into the theatricality of Pompadour’s *chambre à la turque*, a contextualization of theater and its place within Pompadour’s society is necessary.

French drama and tragedy were the preeminent leaders of the dramatic arts throughout the world during the eighteenth century.130 Works from Voltaire, Joseph de LaGrange-Chancel, and Crébillon flooded the stages of Paris. Lauren Clay’s book *Stagestruck: The Business of Theater in Eighteenth-Century France and its Colonies* recalls French theologian and Cardinal Bertrand de la Tour’s comments on the presence of theater in French society, quoting him as saying, “public theaters, although innumerable, do no suffice, we construct them in villages, in the armies...in private homes. We run to them; we go in them; we perform there; we spend our

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130 Oscar G. Brockett, “Italy and France in the 18th Century” in *History of the Theater*, (Boston, Mass.: Allyn and Bacon, 1999), 302.
lives there.” While Paris was the central location for theater in the eighteenth century, it spread far beyond the city, throughout Europe and across the world. The globalization of theater in turn generated an interest in two worlds meeting on stage. Much like André Campra’s tragédie en musique Tancrède from chapter 1, the subject matter of love and romantic trysts with ‘others’ became quite popular and trendy, and was found in plays such as de LaGrange-Chancel’s Ino and Mélicerte and in Voltaire’s Zaïre. Theater became a copy of life; it was a reflection of the cross-cultural connections taking place between France and exotic places such as Istanbul, Asia, and Egypt. This visual duplication/replication of the historical moment was certainly present in the scenic practices of the theater and by extension in Pompadour’s commissions.

Eighteenth century stages were expected to present the audience with a consistent and unified visual projection of the ‘world’ of the play. Much like the stage, the chambre à la turque and its contents unquestionably replicate the “world” or interior of the French’s vision of the Ottoman harem through illusion. Marion Hobson has suggested that illusion is an appearance, which simultaneously hides and reveals the meaning of the orator, who is “both implicit and disclosed by either the delivery, the character of the speaker, or the nature of the subject.” Through the lens of Hobson, Pompadour, as maker, was both implying aspects of her identity and creating meaning through her exotic illusion. Referring back to chapter two, I have


132 Ibid., 303.

133 Oscar G. Brockett, “Italy and France in the 18th Century” in History of the Theater, (Boston, Mass.: Allyn and Bacon, 1999), 327.


suggested that Pompadour employed the roles of the *aseki* and the *validé sultan* within *A Sultana Taking Coffee*, whereby she alternated between corporeal representations of maternal and feminine configurations of Turkish women to mirror her own evolution and construct a visual representation of her maturing identity. This illusory trend carried on into the additional two Van Loo images, *Two Odalisques Embroidering* and *An Odalisque Playing a Stringed Instrument*. Depicting various women in an Ottoman interior paired with the theatrical manner of the *chambre à la turque* and its contents allowed for Pompadour to “fix and occupy the heart and eyes of the king.”

Pompadour’s creation of an all-encompassing world, a whole “spatial *mise-en-scène* of intimacy” for the king at Bellevue was crafted around an exotic visual theme and infused into the *chambre à la turque*’s furnishings, paintings, textiles. Yet, the bedroom was much more than a private thematized domestic space meant for rest and socializing. Rather, it mirrored the thematic program of the rest of the *château*, focusing on comfort- in this case, the comfort of court position. Everything within the *chambre a la turque* seemed to be set up before one as though it were a picture of the East. All of the room’s contents were arranged before the viewer as a signifier, proclaiming itself to be part of a larger whole. Pompadour’s bedchamber was planned and constructed into an intimate theatrical spectacle by moving the theater’s stage into her private space and rendering the room’s contents as the backdrop. Meredith Martin has indicated that many eighteenth-century elites, particularly women, commonly carried over their public roles of the theater into their private fantasy worlds. Certainly Pompadour, with her

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136 Edmond de Goncourt, “Madame de Pompadour” in *The Confidants of the King: The Mistresses of Louis XV*, (London & Edinburgh; T.N. Foulis, 1907), 163


known adoration for theatrics, would have followed in a similar fashion. However, in the case of the chambre à la turque, Pompadour was not the actress; rather, she fabricated the room as actress, allowing the room’s decor and furnishings to carry out the performance.

Eighteenth century author Claude-Proper Jolyot de Crébillion’s 1742 novel Le Sopha (The Sofa) tells the tale of a lazy sultan through the narration of Amanzéi, a lower-level courtier. The fictitious story takes a peculiar twist when Amanzéi revealed that he witnessed the forthcoming events because his spirit had inhibited various sofas. Using Le Sopha as her framework, Mimi Hellman expands upon the novel, suggesting that furniture and decorative objects were:

social actors that both facilitated and monitored the leisure acts of privileged society. Through strategically designed aspects of form and function, furniture appeared to accommodate and flatter its users as they pursued such activities as reading, writing, conversing, eating, dressing, and game playing. Through the same design qualities, however, furniture also structured and delimited the behavior and appearance of individuals according to culturally specific codes of social conduct.

What Hellman’s excerpt suggests is that there is a mutual interaction taking place between furniture and bodies and, in the case of Pompadour, the furnishings in the chambre à la turque project the same narrative as the marquise. The decorated interior was a work of art and one that created a visual spectacle and constant harem-esque atmosphere through the display of realistic renderings of Eastern-inspired artwork and ornamentation. But why would Pompadour choose to create a spectacle to translate her message?

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141 Ibid., 418.
The use of Spectacle was a staple of court culture and a central aspect of monarchical and courtly representations of power. These planned acts allowed for the elite to both entertain and display their status by putting on a ‘show’ for their courtier-audience, performing rank so as to exert their political authority. As Jennifer Jones has shown in her work on the ancien régime, “French absolutism was a theater-state in which Versailles was the stage and Louis [XIV] the playwright and principle player.” This practice carried on throughout the eighteenth century, which allowed Pompadour, as the king’s official mistress, to perform through spectacle as a means of exhibiting her identity in relation to the king and for the king. However, when looking at the room as a whole, the overall meaning created by the chambre à la turque and the Van Loo harem series pointed to the Ottoman harem and, when thinking about the placement of the king’s bedroom above Pompadour’s, the chambre à la turque also becomes a room indicative of the power and visual privilege of the Ottoman sultan. The sultan was the only man given elite masculine privilege to the interior of the harem, having full access to the private domestic quarters and to all of the women inside. Through the architectural arrangement of the king’s bedroom in relation to Pompadour’s, as well as the private staircase connecting the two rooms, Louis XV was awarded entitled access to Pompadour’s “private harem.”

The all-encompassing nature of the chambre à la turque converted a private, domestic space into a unique environment that conveyed Pompadour’s intended identity as “other to Louis XV. The room became an object of representation, a space that allowed the viewer to lose


143 Ibid.


oneself within the signified world within. A space that was constructed with meaning and purpose and that was set up as a portal into the East. Through its Ottoman-inspired content, the chambre à la turque and Carle Van Loo’s A Sultana Taking Coffée, Two Odalisques Embroidering, and An Odalisque Playing a Stringed Instrument served as political tool for Pompadour to lay out her newly constructed identity as a king’s mistress that was not fully a sexual tool, but not quite a maternal figure; rather, she was something of an other, a woman operating between two realms, completely dislocated from tradition. Nonetheless, Pompadour was unique and, therefore, a typical portrait would not do for such a change in identity. It was only through the Ottoman woman that Pompadour could truly embody her new self; a woman respected and protected and always near and dear to the ruling monarch. In this manner, the chambre à la turque and its contents became a carefully-planned social signifier and political vehicle, ensuring her future within the royal court, and next to the king.
CONCLUSION

Madame de Pompadour’s turqueried iconographic program in the chambre a la turque at Bellevue was an attempt to reclaim and maintain her position as official mistress to the King of France. The attempt was likely quite successful as Pompadour exhibited van Loo’s *A Sultana Taking Coffee* at the 1756 Salon perhaps to spread the same message to the public. Shortly after the exhibition of *A Sultana Taking Coffee*, moreover, Pompadour was elevated to the most prestigious rank possible for a woman at court, lady-in-waiting to the Queen of France. As the queen’s lady-in-waiting, Pompadour wielded much power and influence, mediating advancements, favors, and dismissals and played an active role in domestic and foreign politics.\(^\text{146}\) Likewise, she was a trusted confidant to the queen and enjoyed the power and luxury that allocated by the role. Soon after, the marquis was once again granted a promotion and became the King’s unofficial Minister of Culture, where she oversaw “the arts and the sciences, patronizing the arts and the artists who fashioned them,” and continued to lend support to the enlightened thinkers and their projects\(^\text{147}\) until her death in 1764.


\(^{147}\) *Ibid.*
Figure 1: Simon Brouard, *View of the Château de Bellevue from the side of the gardens* (With the coat-of-arms of Madame de Pompadour). c. 1750, pen, watercolor. Musée national des châteaux de Versailles et de Trianon.

Figure 2: Carle Van Loo, *A Sultana Taking Coffee*, c. 1752-1755. Oil on canvas. Dimensions unknown. The Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg, Russia.
Figure 3: Carle Van Loo, *Two Odalisques Embroidering*, c. 1752-1755. Oil on canvas. Dimensions unknown. The Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg, Russia.

Figure 4: Carle Van Loo, *An Odalisque Playing a Stringed Instrument*, c. 1752-1755. Oil on canvas. Dimensions unknown. Location unknown.
Figure 5: Detail from Paul Biver’s *Histoire du château de Bellevue*. Pompadour’s five-room suite was on the ground floor: A, B, C, D, G.

Figure 6: Jean-Baptiste van Mour, *La Sultane*, print after van Mour, 18th century.
Figure 7: Charles Nicolas Cochin I, *Decoration for the Masked Ball at Versailles*, Etching with engraving, c. 1860 reprint of a 1764 plate, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, NY.

Figure 8: François Boucher, *Madame de Pompadour at her Toilette*, oil on canvas, 1750, Fogg Art Museum, Harvard.
Figure 9: Jean-Marc Nattier, *Madame de Pompadour as Diana the Huntress*, oil on canvas, 1746, Château de Versailles, France.

Figure 10: Quentin de La Tour, *Portrait of Madame de Pompadour*, Pastel with gouache highlights on at least eight sheets of blue paper, including one for the face, glued to canvas on a stretcher, 1755, Louvre, Paris, France.
Figure 11: Jean-Baptiste Lemercier, *Portrait of Stanislas Leszczyński*, oil on canvas, 1728, Château de Chambord, France.

Figure 12: Follower of Jean-Étienne Liotard, *Portrait of Maria Theresa in Turkish Dress*, 18th century. Private Collection
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