

The “Duchesse de Velours” and Her Daughter: A Masterpiece by Nattier and Its Historical Context

DONALD POSNER

Ailsa Mellon Bruce Professor of Fine Arts, Institute of Fine Arts, New York University

J EAN-MARC NATTIER’S portrait of Madame Marsollier (also known as the duchesse de Velours) and her daughter (Figure 1) came to the Metropolitan Museum by bequest in 1945.¹ If one can judge from the catalogue of the Museum’s French paintings published a decade later, the gift, while surely appreciated, was not very highly esteemed. The cataloguer, Charles Sterling, had little more to say about it than that the artist “chose a milieu for his subjects that epitomizes the frivolous elegance” of mid-eighteenth-century France. He couldn’t find anything very favorable to say about Nattier’s art in general and, rather grudgingly, granted only that the artist “must . . . be given credit for the pleasing optimism in his portraits and for the unvarying purity and sparkle of his color.”²

This was not a new or perverse view of Nattier.³ In fact, although he had long been the leading portraitist of Parisian high society, his graceful mode of portraiture, dependent on flattering imagery and descriptive likeness modified by beautifying artifice, began to be thought of as “mannered” and went out of fashion about a decade before he died in 1766. It lost its appeal in a market that had developed a taste for acute and often uncompromisingly honest delineation of individual physiognomy and personality, in the manner of the portraits of such artists as Maurice Quentin de La Tour and Louis Tocqué.⁴ Nattier’s reputation declined precipitously. Although recent interest in eighteenth-century French art has led to a more generous assessment of Nattier’s work,⁵ it has never recovered, and may not deserve, the luster it had in his heyday, from about 1735 to 1750, when one critic declared: “The name Nattier itself suffices as an encomium for his portraits.”⁶ But his paintings are not without very genuine and historically important merits; and his Portrait of *Madame Marsollier and Her Daughter* should not be dismissed as just a graceful depiction of the elegant people and manners of his

age. It is, in fact, a remarkable work, splendid in design and execution, and original in conception.

Nattier was one of the first and foremost creators of the Rococo style in portraiture, in which the pictorially bombastic forms and presentations favored in the Baroque portraits of the previous generation (Figures 3, 5) were replaced by restrained action, restful harmonies, and simplicity of dress and drapery. The style was an expression of the easy, exquisitely gracious urbanity that eighteenth-century Parisian society fostered in reaction to the ponderous formality and aggressive self-assertion of the courtly ideals of Louis XIV’s world. Nattier’s portraits not only reflected the new society, they helped to shape it by advertising and refining the fashionable manners and comportment of the new age.

In style, the Marsollier portrait is characteristic of Nattier’s works: its design structured by an elegant interplay of finely delineated forms; its color, high keyed and dominated by silvery blues and pale grays, suppressing shadows and creating a clear, light-filled world for its fair inhabitants; its handling combining extraordinary delicacy and subtlety in picturing the sitters’ flesh with an astonishing liveliness and immediacy in describing drapery and other details. It is an obviously “graceful” and patently “artful” portrait, but, nonetheless, one that contrives to preserve the illusion of natural appearances.

The people and action in the painting seem, in fact, so natural, so true to life, that we are tempted to interpret the picture as a candid portrayal of a moment in the daily lives of the sitters. That is, of course, what the painter intended. Indeed, the verisimilitude of the image has been intensified by the implied inclusion of the spectator in the scene. We, the viewers, are imagined as interacting with the lifesize painted figures. We have entered the dressing room of the women, evidently mother and daughter, as they attend to their *toilette*. It is early in their preparations for the day, and though stylishly robed, they are still in their undergarments. The mother chooses ornaments from the jewelry box the girl holds; at the same time she looks at

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Figure 1. Jean-Marc Nattier (1685–1766). *Madame Marsollier and Her Daughter*, 1749. Oil on canvas, 146.1 × 114.3 cm. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Bequest of Florence S. Schuette, 1945, 45.172

the mirror to see from another angle if a feather in her daughter's hair would be becoming, and wonders if a sprig of small yellow flowers might be strategically placed to complement her complexion. We are welcome visitors, evidently familiars of the household, and the child, looking directly at us with no hint of surprise, seems to await our opinion of her mother's suggestions.

This charming domestic conceit is seemingly innocent and unpretentious. But like most portraits, the picture is not without an agenda, and it proves upon examination to be anything but unpretentious.

The identity of the sitters is known to us because of the chance survival of one of Nattier's drawings (Figure 2).⁷ It reproduces the portrait and is inscribed: "j.m Nattier px. Madame Marsollier et M.lle Sa fille et delineavit 1757."⁸ Madame Marsollier died in 1756, and the drawing was possibly made in preparation for a commemorative engraving. The painted portrait was made in 1749 (it is signed and dated on the pilaster at the right); we don't know what occasioned it.

In fact, we don't even know the first names of the sitters, nor their exact ages when the picture was made. No other certain portraits of the two women have come to light.⁹ We are confronted with a frustrating situation—more the rule than the exception in the study of portraits from the past—in that we have no way of judging how good the likeness is, no way of knowing how true the depiction is to character or circumstances, or in what ways the artist has interpreted or transformed them.

The painting itself contains little information about the sitters. From their possessions and surroundings we guess they were rich; from the action, that they were bound in an affectionate relationship; and from the images of the people themselves, that they were attractive and healthy. Nothing more. And even this, from the picture alone, would have to be treated with caution, because painted appearances can reflect hopes and fantasies as well as reality. From the picture we cannot say whether the sitters are aristocrats or upper-middle-class people, or whether they belong to Parisian or provincial society. Happily, in 1756 the duc de Luynes chanced to write a few lines about Madame Marsollier in his *Mémoires*. His words provide confirmation for some of what we see and answers to a couple of the questions that occur to us:

A few days ago a Madame Marsollier died in Paris. She was the daughter of M. de Leu, procurator for the domains and woods of the King; she was very well known for her beauty. Her husband was a wholesale dealer in silks who afterward bought a position as secretary of the King.

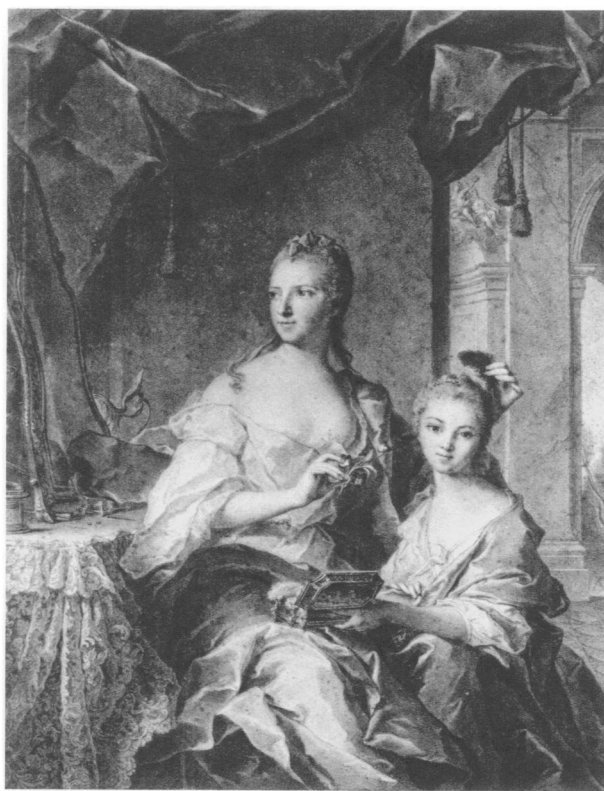


Figure 2. Nattier. *Madame Marsollier and Her Daughter*, 1757. Pen and ink on white paper. Weimar, Kunstsammlungen

Madame Marsollier is survived only by one daughter, who will be very rich. One of the conditions of Madame Marsollier's marriage was that she would never have to enter her husband's shop; she even avoided the rue Saint-Honoré so she wouldn't have to see the shop; that didn't prevent people from calling her the duchess of Velvet.¹⁰

From this very brief biography we can conclude that the portrait does not lie about Madame Marsollier's looks or her wealth. Furthermore, it allows us to infer something about her social position and ambitions. She was born, it appears, into a family of only modest means. Her father's appointment in the king's service was a minor one that cannot have made him rich. But in that old world of subtle class distinctions, it conferred a certain social status. He did not belong to the aristocracy, but because his activities reflected, however faintly, the light of life at the royal court, and because he did not owe his livelihood to anything so vulgar as making or selling something, he could claim a higher place in the social pecking order than craftsmen or merchants. That meant, in fact, that he had something special to negotiate with when it came time to marry off his daughter. M. Marsollier was a bourgeois gentleman. When he went shopping for a wife, it was, one imag-

ines, perhaps with an eye for good looks, but certainly with one for a social position that could enhance his status in society and that of his posterity. Possibly it was with the help of his wife's family's that he was able to procure his own title as royal secretary. Evidently, at least for a time, he continued plying the draper's trade. But that was an occupation that offended Madame Marsollier's sense of personal dignity.

She was embarrassed to be the wife of a mere merchant, but her efforts to conceal the fact from herself did not, of course, hide it from anyone else. Ironically, her pretentious display of supposed high-born sensibility earned her a brief mention in de Luynes's memoirs, without which she would be unknown to posterity; in her lifetime, however, it made her an object of ridicule, under the mocking title *duchesse de Velours*—not the proprietress of a duchy, or any landed estate, but the mistress of bolts of expensive textiles.

In the light of Madame Marsollier's social pretensions, Nattier's portrait of her and her daughter proves to be a thoughtfully wrought iconographic construction—an assemblage of signs—meant to convey a quite specific image of her self-declared standing in society. It is reasonable to assume that the sitter collaborated in its formulation. She was, one imagines, probably responsible for the choice of the artist to portray her.

Nattier was the painter in vogue at the time, the painter of high society, in which Madame Marsollier fervently wished to believe she was included. He was expensive, but she could afford him, and demonstrating that fact was in itself a statement about her position in the world. Her next decision involved the choice of portrait typology for the painting.

Nattier was especially well known for his mythological and allegorical costume pieces, and Madame Marsollier might have opted to have herself and her daughter represented as Flora or Venus with an attendant, or as Diana with a nymph, the latter a disguise that Largillierre had used for a double portrait of 1714 (Figure 3).¹¹ The *portrait déguisé*, however, began to fall from favor about 1750, when it came to be looked upon as silly in its conceits and as a subversion of the documentary purpose of portraiture.¹² It may be that in 1749 Madame Marsollier sensed this shift in fashion. And she may very well have been influenced in her choice of a realistic portrayal in an informal domestic setting by the fact that Nattier's remarkably uncereemonious portrait of Queen Marie Leszczyńska (Château de Versailles) was greatly admired when it was exhibited at the Salon of 1748. Following the queen's own instructions, the artist showed her dressed in everyday clothes (*habit de ville*) while she reads the Bible.



Figure 3. Nicolas de Largillierre (1656–1746). *The Comtesse de Montsoreau and Her Sister as Diana and a Nymph*, 1714. Oil on canvas, 132.5 × 111.3 cm. Dallas, private collection (photo: Sotheby's)

But apart from fashion, there was still another, probably more compelling, reason why Madame Marsollier chose not to have herself portrayed in costume. The *portrait déguisé* provides at most only minimal information about the sitter's actual position and circumstances in life. People more secure about their place in the world than Madame Marsollier did not, of course, need to call attention to what everyone knew quite well. She, however, must have felt a need to insist on what she believed justified her social pretensions, and one way to accomplish that was through her portrait. But she couldn't do so disguised as a lovely creature in the never-never world of mythology; she wanted to display the evidence of her real-life distinction. In 1750, the year after it was painted, the portrait was exhibited at the Salon, where it could call the attention of a wide public to the fact that she was "somebody." On a day-to-day basis it could serve to impress visitors to her house, and satisfy her as a kind of mirror of the person she imagined she was.

Possibly the decision about the choice of portrait type had been made even before Madame Marsollier consulted with Nattier. The compositional scheme and the setting to be used had next to be decided.



Figure 4. Nattier. *Madame Crozat (Marie-Louise-Augustine de Montmorency-Laval) and Her Daughter*, 1733. Oil on canvas, 138 × 105.5 cm. Indianapolis Museum of Art, gift of Mrs. Herman C. Krannert (photo: Indianapolis Museum of Art)

Nattier probably kept drawings and prints after his own and other artists' portraits, which could be shown to clients as suggested models for a proposed work. One imagines that while leafing through such pictures Madame Marsollier came across a reproduction of a double portrait that Nattier had made some fifteen years earlier (Figure 4). The image is charming in its rendition of maternal affection, as the mother dresses her daughter's hair with flowers. No doubt, for the duchesse de Velours, a portrait scheme that had served some socially distinguished person would have had special appeal, and this one had apparently been invented for the wife of Louis Antoine Crozat, baron de Thiers, one of the richest men in Paris.¹³

A basic scheme for the positioning and interrelationship of the sitters had been found, but it needed to be revised and relocated in order to meet Madame Marsollier's needs for self-advertisement. The earlier picture, with its outdoor setting, floral imagery, and diaphanous costumes, is very much like a *portrait déguisé*; it might even have been intended as such, with Madame Crozat as Flora or Astrea with a child companion.¹⁴ Pictorially, it only hints, at best, at the great wealth of the sitters.



Figure 5. Largillierre. *Portrait of a Woman at Her Toilette*, ca. 1695–1700. Oil on canvas, 158.8 × 127.4 cm. St. Louis Art Museum (photo: St. Louis Art Museum)

Madame Marsollier required a setting that could affirm the luxury and splendor of her lifestyle, and that could best be achieved by moving the figures indoors. The architectural background at the right in her portrait is probably not an accurate depiction of her residence, but the loggia with its marble facing¹⁵ and the great curtain hanging in the room are signifiers meant to attest to the fact that she lived in a large, well-appointed, and expensive house.

Once the sitters were moved indoors, the action in the Crozat portrait found its logical place in the dressing room. Here, of course, the gilt-framed mirror, the sumptuous lace covering of the table, and the handsome jewelry box the daughter holds reinforce the theme of luxury, of affluence. But the setting is still richer in connotations that served to establish Madame Marsollier's image of herself and of her status in society.

Portraits of women at their *toilette*, engaged in the rituals of beautification, had already been popularized in France in the sixteenth century, when they allowed for a bold display of the sitter's mostly naked charms and plainly likened her to Venus at her *toilette*.¹⁶ Although less daring, many portraits of the seven-

teenth and eighteenth centuries showing women at their *toilettes*, like one by Largillierre from about the beginning of the eighteenth century (Figure 5), make the same flattering allusion.¹⁷ Largillierre's painting, or one much like it, was possibly known to Nattier, and he may have referred to it in planning the general arrangement and components of his own picture. The lady in the earlier picture, to judge from the image, seems not entirely to have deserved the flattery implied by the scene, but Madame Marsollier was, according to de Luynes, a natural beauty, and the association with Venus that still, if only gently, clings to her portrait presumably would not have seemed inappropriate to her contemporaries. But more important to the sitter than the mythological allusion was the social significance of the *toilette* setting, which served to bolster her conviction that she did, indeed, belong to the elite world of leisure and fashionable refinement.

A mid-century writer, describing the daily life of a woman *de bon ton*, explained that such a person would arise only very late in the morning, and then spend the rest of the day at her *toilette*, while receiving visitors.¹⁸ The fashionable *toilette* was also depicted by artists of the time (Figure 6).¹⁹ This is the life that Madame Marsollier's portrait tells us she enjoyed. Not for her to busy herself on the rue Saint-Honoré like some ordinary shopkeeper's wife. At midday, or early afternoon, to judge from the bright, shadowless light, she and her daughter (like the woman in Figure 6, where the clock indicates 3 P.M.) are still at their *toilette*, and not as yet dressed, a fact that is not without significance.

The writer just quoted also remarked that while receiving visitors and attending to her *toilette*, the lady will be scantily clad, "in a state of undress that is more than ordinarily seductive."²⁰ The worldly Madame d'Épinay remarked that a lady *en négligé* will be "less beautiful" than when finely dressed, "but more dangerous . . . less elegant, but more appealing."²¹

A certain boldness in the display of one's physical charms was a mark of sophistication in high society, and one reason for the vogue of the mythological or allegorical *portrait déguisé* was that it provided a rationale for revealing costumes. In *toilette* scenes the "realistic" portrait satisfied this taste for suggestive undress, since the sitters could be shown wearing only a chemise or nightgown, and wearing it, as in the case of both our "duchess" and her daughter, off the shoulder and low enough to reveal the nipple of a bared breast. But there is more to this than merely fashionable sophistication. Allowing oneself to be seen in one's underclothes had a social, class-conscious dimension.

Under the old régime, people were expected to show a decent respect for those who were their social



Figure 6. After Pierre-Antoine Baudouin. *A Woman at Her Toilette*, 1765. Gouache. Etching and engraving by Nicolas Ponce, 1771 (photo: from E. Fuchs, *Illustrierte Sittengeschichte II* [Munich, 1910], pt. 1, fig. 262)

superiors. As expressed in terms of dress codes, that meant that inferior people were expected to appear fully dressed when in the company of their betters. The "better" people, however, could be casual about their dress, and, in fact, it was a sign of what such people considered their natural superiority to be comfortable in a state of semi-undress at the levee, the public display of arising from bed, or at the later *toilette*.²² Madame Marsollier obviously felt comfortable in sharing the manners of the social class to which she felt she belonged.

The portrait of the duchesse de Velours is coded with messages that require some time and effort for us to decipher. Her contemporaries, however, naturally understood them at first glance, without thinking about them. One suspects that most of her contemporaries viewed her portrait as one more instance of the ridiculous pretense of social distinction on the part of the textile merchant's wife.

There is, however, one aspect of the picture that is not necessarily related to social climbing, although it too has social implications. That is its expression of an affectionate, nurturing relationship between mother

and daughter. It strikes the viewer immediately, winningly, and at the time the portrait was painted it must have done so with more force than we can readily appreciate today, for it explores a theme that was until then still rather uncommon in portraiture.

Before the early eighteenth century (and granting such notable exceptions as Rubens's portrayal of his wife and children in the Louvre), portraits of a parent with her or his child rarely suggest strong emotional ties between the sitters. In a portrait of the late seventeenth century (Figure 7), for example, Madame de Maintenon and her niece, her "adopted" daughter, each hold the other's arm affectionately, but the gesture is restrained and the relationship suggested is more one of the child's dependence on the adult than of loving intimacy between them.²³ In some portraits the child appears as little more than an accessory, or appendage, of the adult person who made it.²⁴ In others, such as



Figure 7. Louis-Ferdinand Elle the Younger. *Madame de Maintenon and Her Niece*, ca. 1686. Oil on canvas, 219 × 142 cm. Versailles, Château (photo: Réunion des Musées Nationaux)



Figure 8. Largillierre. *The Marquise de Castelnau and Her Son*, ca. 1700. Oil on canvas, 134 × 105.1 cm. The Minneapolis Institute of Art (photo: Minneapolis Institute of Art)

one by Largillierre (Figure 8), there is no more than a hint of a loving parent-child relationship. In this picture the mother's right hand rests on her son's shoulder, but, despite the implied affection, the motif is unobtrusive and has far less impact pictorially than her left hand caressing the muzzle of the dog in the foreground.²⁵

Such images are widely presumed to reflect the ideas about children and the reality of family relationships of the time.²⁶ The notion of children as "property" would have made it difficult to appreciate and interact with young people as independent individuals, while a high rate of child mortality is likely to have discouraged—as a kind of self-protective parental instinct—deep emotional attachments to offspring who might not survive into adulthood.

In the course of the eighteenth century, however, European attitudes toward children and ideas about family appear to have changed dramatically. It is not necessary to rehearse the sources and character of the historical transformation here;²⁷ but it is clear that decades before Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Émile* of 1762 widely popularized new notions of childhood and of parent-child relationships, portraitists were beginning



Figure 9. Alexis-Simon Belle (1674–1734). *Madame de la Sablonnière(?) and Her Daughter*, 1724. Oil on canvas, 137 × 105 cm. Pau, Musée des Beaux-Arts (photo: Caisse Nationale des Monuments Historiques et des Sites)

to give expression to these ideas by reducing the apparent emotional distance that separated their sisters. In a portrait of 1724 by Alexis-Simon Belle (Figure 9),²⁸ for example, a maternal embrace binds the pair, and mother and daughter are united in the musical activity that they share and enjoy together. The action in Nattier's portrait of Madame Crozat and her daughter of 1733 (Figure 4) is cosmetic rather than musical, but its expressive intent is the same.

In 1749, when Madame Marsollier had herself and her daughter portrayed, attitudes toward children and child-rearing may have been changing rapidly, but it cannot be said that a societal consensus had been achieved. Some of the best people, however, must certainly have espoused new ideas.²⁹ One likes to think that Madame Marsollier cherished her child as warmly as the portrait suggests. But whatever the truth of that, in her picture the duchesse de Velours was again asserting that she shared with members of society's elite the current fashion—maternal fashion in this case.

Nattier stated her claim in the most convincing terms. The expressive strength of the Marsollier portrait is heightened by its genre-like setting and circumstance, which endow it, when compared to the fanciful



Figure 10. Jean-Baptiste-Siméon Chardin (1699–1779). *The Morning Toilette*, 1741. Oil on canvas, 49 × 39 cm. Stockholm, Nationalmuseum (photo: Nationalmuseum)

Crozat portrait (Figure 4), with a great sense of the reality of the affective relationship between mother and child. As is well known, a fashionable display of tender regard for children also appeared in genre paintings of the time,³⁰ and not only in the modest bourgeois settings so familiar to us from Chardin's work. Boucher's *Breakfast* of 1739, now in the Louvre, takes place in an apparently affluent household, where its occupants enjoy the presence of the children of the family and take pleasure in catering to them.

But Chardin's pictures of domestic life are relevant here too, since their popularity at the time reflects the historical intrusion of bourgeois values into the culture of the upper classes.³¹ The appealing imagery of Chardin's scenes of family life surely contributed to the growing appreciation of the requirements and pleasures of maternal care,³² and the artist's works may also have had some effect on the shape of contemporary high-society portraiture.

It seems possible, in fact, that Chardin's *Morning Toilette* of 1741 (Figure 10) was one of Nattier's sources of inspiration when he designed the Marsollier portrait. Chardin's picture was much admired at the Salon of 1741, and a print after it by Le Bas was made that year.³³



Figure 11. François-Hubert Drouais (1727–1775). *Family Portrait*, 1756. Oil on canvas, 244 × 195 cm. Washington, National Gallery of Art, Samuel H. Kress Collection (photo: National Gallery of Art)

The two pictures are very similar in general arrangement and in the action represented; they also share the motif of the glance into the mirror by one of the subjects. Insofar as they are pictorially related, they may also share a conceit about the nature of women. The verses appended to a print made after Chardin's picture declare that "the fair ones are never children . . . in their will to please and [in their understanding of] the art of pleasing."³⁴ It is a sentiment that Madame Marsollier, occupied with the art of prettifying herself and her daughter, would surely have endorsed.

Of course, Chardin depicted an unostentatious household, and unlike Madame Marsollier and her daughter, the mother and child in his painting, as proper, middling bourgeois people, appear fully dressed; and they don't luxuriate in the leisurely pleasures of the *toilette*. Early risers, they are finishing their preparations to leave the house, just before 7 A.M. according to the clock at the right, presumably to attend early mass.³⁵ But despite the marked social differences in the two images, they share an ideal, a vision of maternal solicitude and of the generational bond of love.

This ideal took on a new, deeply sentimental character in the art of the second half of the century, when

it was interpreted according to the self-indulgent emotional culture of *sensibilité*. The well-known portraits of mothers and children clinging to one another in an excess of demonstrative affection that Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun produced beginning in the 1780s seem its end products. But as early as 1756, in a family portrait by Drouais (Figure 11) that was clearly inspired by Nattier's painting of Madame Marsollier and her daughter,³⁶ a change in the emotional climate is evident. *Papa* has entered the scene, to gaze benignly on the treasured women of his household. *Maman* calls her husband's attention to the charms of their daughter, who snuggles close to her mother and holds on to a basket of flowers in the fertile maternal lap. While not yet as saccharine as many of Vigée-Lebrun's portraits, Drouais's picture is not unlike them in overstating its message by means of posturing and obvious allusions.

Until about 1750, however, the ideal of family closeness was expressed in forms that maintained a fine balance of tender feeling and decorous restraint, what we might call a "classical" *equipoise*, and in portraiture it was given perhaps its most lucid, most winning and exquisite expression in the picture of Madame Marsollier and her daughter. Nattier's portrait is about maternal love; but it is also about beauty, wealth, social status, and fashion. In the painting all those themes are woven into an indissoluble visual union by the artist's genius and skill.

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NOTES

1. See MMA, *A Catalogue of French Paintings, XV–XVIII Centuries* (Cambridge, Mass., 1955) p. 121.

2. Ibid.

3. Harry Wehle had not been much more enthusiastic when, ten years before it became part of the Museum's permanent collection, the Marsollier portrait was exhibited at the Museum. He noted only that it was one among the artist's "handsome and kindly portraits."

He described Nattier's color as "clear and pearly," but, to his eyes, "slightly fatigued" (MMA, *French Painting and Sculpture of the XVIII Century* [New York, 1935] p. 6). Complaints about Nattier's color had already been voiced as early as 1750, when Bachaumont remarked that it was "souvent fort mauvais" (cited by P. de Nolhac, *Nattier: Peintre de la cour de Louis XV* [Paris, 1910] p. 180).

4. As early as 1750, Nattier began to be unfavorably compared to his son-in-law, Tocqué. See *ibid.*, pp. 180 and 198–99, and G. Huard, "Nattier," in L. Dimier, *Les Peintres français du XVIII^e siècle* (Paris, 1930) II, p. 116.

5. Joseph Baillio is currently preparing for publication Georges Wildenstein's catalogue raisonné of the works of Nattier.

6. "Le nom du sieur Nattier suffit à ses Portraits pour leur éloge." La Font de Saint-Yenne, *Réflexions sur quelques causes de l'état présent de la peinture en France* (The Hague, 1747) p. 106.

7. Less than a score of his drawings are known today. See P. Hattis, *Four Centuries of French Drawings in the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco* (San Francisco, 1977) p. 124, no. 85.

8. The date has sometimes been given incorrectly in the literature as 1751 or 1755.

9. A bust-length portrait of a young woman by Nattier (signed and dated 1757) in a private collection in New York is said to depict the comtesse de Neubourg, née Marsolier. (I am grateful to Joseph Baillio for this information.) The painting is illustrated in A. Wintermute, *The French Portrait: 1550–1850* (Colnaghi, New York, 1996) pl. 13 and p. 97. The sitter does, in fact, resemble the daughter in the MMA portrait.

10. "Il mourut il y a quelques jours à Paris une Madame Marsolier, fille de M de Leu, procureur du Roi des domaines et bois; elle étoit fort connue par sa beauté. Son mari étoit un gros marchand de soie qui a acheté depuis une charge de secrétaire du Roi. Madame Marsolier ne laisse qu'une fille qui sera fort riche. Une des conditions de mariage de Madame Marsolier a été de ne jamais entrer dans la boutique de son mari; elle évitoit même de passer dans la rue Saint-Honoré pour ne pas voir la boutique; cela n'empêchoit pas qu'on l'appelât la duchesse de Velours." *Mémoires du duc de Luynes sur la cour de Louis XV* (1735–58) (Paris, 1860–65) XIV, p. 383, entry for Saturday, Jan. 17, 1756.

11. The picture was sold by the New-York Historical Society at Sotheby's, New York, Jan. 12, 1995, sale 6653, lot 89. The identification of the sitters was made by G. de Lastic in "Largillierre et ses modèles," *L'Oeil* 323 (1982) p. 78.

12. It should be noted, however, that the change in taste was slow. Portraits by Nattier of four of the royal daughters in the guise of "Elements" were exhibited at the Salon of 1751, and later in that decade important people were still commissioning *portraits déguisés* from Nattier. See the comments of Nolhac, *Nattier*, pp. 202–204, and Huard, "Nattier," pp. 113–114, both quoting from Cochin's hilarious satire on the *portrait déguisé*.

13. For the identity of the sitters, see M. N. Rosenfeld, *Largillierre and the Eighteenth-Century Portrait* (Montreal, 1982) p. 361.

14. *Ibid.*

15. The sculptured relief pictured over the niche is not positively identifiable. K. Baetjer, in D. Sutton, *Treasures from the Metropolitan Museum* (Yokohama, 1989) p. 96, speculated that it may represent the crowning of Psyche, who lived, of course, with Cupid in a magnificent palace.

16. Cf. S. Béguin, *L'École de Fontainebleau* (Paris, 1960) p. 105, and Rosenfeld, *Largillierre*, pp. 124–126.

17. Rosenfeld, *Largillierre*, pp. 124–126, and E. Goodman-Soellner, "Boucher's Madame de Pompadour at her toilette," *Simiolus* 17 (1987) pp. 41–58, who also discusses the amorous and erotic connotations of the theme, which, however, seem at most only incidental to Nattier's painting. As Joseph Baillio reminded me, the theme makes an appearance in Charles Coypel's satirical picture *Folly Ornamenting Decrepitude with the Attire of Youth*. See T. Lefrançois, *Charles Coypel* (Paris, 1994) pp. 326–327.

18. Goodman-Soellner, "Boucher's Madame de Pompadour," p. 49, quoting from Boudier de Villemont's *L'Ami des femmes* of 1758.

19. A painting by Charles Coypel of 1728 shows children playing adults and acting out the *toilette*. See Lefrançois, *Coypel*, pp. 217–219.

20. "... dans un déshabillé plus que galant"; *ibid.*

21. "... moins belle, mais plus dangereuse, ... moins précieuse, mais plus touchante." Quoted in L. Dumont-Wilden, *Le Portrait en France* (Brussels, 1909) pp. 44–45.

22. Cf. D. de Marly, "Undress in the Oeuvre of Lely," *Burlington Magazine* 120 (1978) pp. 745–750.

23. Madame de Maintenon raised the child, Françoise d'Aubigné, as if she were her own daughter. A. R. Gordon (*Masterpieces from Versailles. Three Centuries of French Portraiture* [Washington, 1983] pp. 22, 48) described the picture as a "somber kind of portrait" and saw in it the expression of the child's "obedience and devotion." Van Dyck's portrait of Susanna Fourment and her daughter, in the National Gallery, Washington, or a very similar picture, was possibly the model for Elle's painting.

24. For example, Van Dyck's full-length pendant portraits in the Louvre (inv. 1242–3) of a father and son and mother and daughter.

25. The iconography of this picture remains unexplained. Because the child holds a bunch of grapes, Rosenfeld (*Largillierre*, p. 128) suggested that the sitters might be represented in the guise of Bacchus and the nymph Erigone, who was seduced by the god in the form of a bunch of grapes. Such a conceit would seem extremely inappropriate for a portrait of mother and son.

26. Philippe Ariès's seminal study, *L'Enfant et la vie familiale sous l'ancien régime* (Paris, 1960), has had widespread influence, but many of its conclusions have been challenged on evidentiary and other grounds. For a brief summary of the debate surrounding it, see D. Archard, *Children. Rights and Childhood* (London/New York, 1993) pp. 15–28.

27. They are briefly surveyed in J. Gélis, "The Child from Anonymity to Individuality," in R. Chartier, P. Ariès, and G. Duby, *A History of Private Life* (Cambridge, Mass./London, 1989) III, pp. 309–325. C. Duncan discussed them in their specifically French context in "Happy Mothers and Other New Ideas in French Art," *Art Bulletin* 55 (1973) pp. 570–583. Both Gélis and Duncan accept Ariès's conclusions (see note 26 above). Although the nature, and even the reality, of the transformation is currently a subject of debate, the apparent transformation seen in works of art cannot be questioned. L. Pollock, for instance (*Forgotten Children: Parent-Child Relationships from 1500–1900* [Cambridge, Mass., 1983]), has argued that in practice emotional attitudes toward children have been consistent for centuries, but she grants that "there are varied ways in which they were perceived and expressed in particular societies." *Idem*, *A Lasting Relationship: Parents and Children over Three Centuries* (Hanover, N.H./London, 1987) p. 13.

28. See P. Rosenberg, *The Age of Louis XV; French Painting 1710–1774* (Toledo, Ohio, 1975) p. 22. Charles Coypel painted a comparable portrait of a mother and daughter in 1733. See Lefrançois, *Coypel*, p. 274.

29. Madame de Pompadour was a famously affectionate mother. She had several portraits made of her daughter, Alexandrine (1744–1754), including one in which she and the child appear together in a domestic setting. See M. N. Benisovich, “A Bust of Alexandrine d’Etiolles by Saly,” *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* 28 (1945) pp. 30–42 and fig. 7.

30. A related development in art was the production of images of children seen alone in decorative, allegorical, or “realistic” contexts. See the illuminating study by E. A. Standen, “Country Children: Some *Enfants de Boucher* in Gobelin Tapestry,” *MMJ* 29 (1994) pp. 111–133; also G. Brunel, *Boucher* (New York, 1986) pp. 256ff.

31. S. Schama in *The Embarrassment of Riches* (New York, 1987) pp. 517ff., 523, 540–544, argues that Dutch culture of the 17th century fostered close emotional and social ties between parents and children. Chardin’s art was, of course, one of the vehicles for the transmission of Dutch bourgeois values into France. I note that Madame de Pompadour owned, and apparently displayed, some prints after Chardin’s genre paintings. See J. Cordey, *Inventaire des biens de Madame de Pompadour rédigé après son décès* (Paris, 1939) p. 87.

32. Affectionate fathers are rarely seen in art until the second half of the 18th century (and even then infrequently), which reflects a cultural reality. Fathers were expected to take an authoritative, disciplinary role in family life. Women were charged with the care of very young children and girls. Male tutors supervised boys when they reached the age to begin formal education. In *La Nouvelle Héloïse*, Julie declares: “I nurse children, but I am not presumptuous enough to wish to train men.” See Duncan, “Happy Mothers,” pp. 577 n. 23, 582 (quoting Rousseau); also idem., “Fallen Fathers: images of authority,” *Art History* 4 (1981) pp. 186–202, and P. Conisbee, *Chardin* (Oxford, 1986) pp. 182–183.

33. See P. Rosenberg, *Chardin*, exh. cat., Grand Palais (Paris, 1979) p. 274, no. 88.

34. “Avant que la Raison l’éclaire,/ Elle prend du Miroir les avis séduisants/ Dans le désir et l’Art de plaire,/ les Belles, je le vois, ne sont jamais Enfants.” This trifling conceit has been taken as an indication that the picture is a warning against vanity or even an allegory of vanity. I share the doubts expressed by Rosenberg, *ibid.*, p. 276. But see the comments of Conisbee, *Chardin*, pp. 166–168.

35. The book on the stool at the left is, one assumes, a prayer book.

36. C. Eisler (*Paintings from the Samuel H. Kress Collection. European Schools Excluding Italian* [Oxford, 1977] p. 323) recognized the relationship between the two paintings.