

**THE ENTOMOLOGY OF ORNAMENT:  
*ESSAI DE PAPILLONNERIES HUMAINES* AND THE METAMORPHOSES OF  
EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY DECORATIVE ART**

by

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## ABSTRACT

A unique collection of French ornament prints entitled *Essai de papillonneries humaines* was executed by the royal embroiderer of King Louis XV, Charles-Germain de Saint-Aubin in the mid-eighteenth century (c. 1748-1756). Intended as design models for transfer onto a wide range of decorative art objects, the etchings depict witty vignettes of anthropomorphized butterflies performing activities exclusive to the elite classes. Through a consideration of the designs' material translations and subsequent social and spatial contexts, my thesis explores the interrelated issues of class relations, intellectual history, salon practices, the culture of appearances, and various forms of ornamentation, especially of domestic interiors. Indeed, an unprecedented fervor for butterflies in the decoration of new private spaces emerged in the eighteenth century, coinciding with a fashion for entomology (the study of insects) in the cultural and intellectual projects of the period known as the Enlightenment. Drawing from changing concepts on the relationship between humans and insects expressed in entomological, philosophical, and literary natural history publications of the mid-century, I examine the ways in which insects were increasingly referenced as a source of metaphor for the social, political, and individual self as the century progressed. I suggest that there was a cultural language of entomology, one that would have been particularly familiar to the educated nobility and newly wealthy bourgeoisie and drawn upon in the practices of salon sociability. Butterflies were the host of an array of specific associations that would have been activated by the intellectual conversation and games of wit practiced in salon spaces. As such, through the example of the *papillonneries* designs, my project endeavors to intervene in the discourse of ornament, positing that ornamentation was a dynamic social actor, rather than mere decoration in eighteenth-century France.

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*For my sister Michelle*

## INTRODUCTION

The French verb, *papillonner*, from the noun for butterfly, *le papillon*, was invented in the eighteenth century to describe the performance of activities considered lighthearted, frivolous, or even trivial.<sup>1</sup> Concurrent to this etymological development was an entomological one. There was a widespread fascination in entomology, or, the study of insects, in “Enlightenment” Europe, for natural scientists and amateur collectors alike. France was no exception to this trend; members of the elite classes collected both insects and the newest natural history and entomological publications, especially those concerning Lepidoptera, or, species of butterflies and moths.<sup>2</sup> While insects were long a part of the culture of curiosity in European courts – and as objects of display, had already an ornamental function of sorts– with the proliferation of new domestic spaces in eighteenth-century France, butterfly specimens emerged from collectors’ cabinets and took new material form in the decorative programs of elite sociability.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Victor Carlson suggests that the butterfly subject of the *papillonneries* may have been prompted by the invention of the word *papillonner* to describe actions that are “lighthearted and performed at a moment’s notice.” See Victor Carlson, *Regency to Empire: French Printmaking, 1715-1814* (Maryland: Baltimore Museum of Art, 1984), 123. The 4<sup>th</sup> edition (1762) of the *Dictionnaire de l’Académie Française* defines *papillon* proverbially and figuratively as “un esprit léger, & qui ne s’amuse qu’à des choses frivoles, que *C’est un homme qui vole le papillon.*”

<sup>2</sup> Charles Linnaeus named this order of butterflies and moths in 1735.

<sup>3</sup> On new domestic spaces in Paris, see Joan DeJean, “A New Interiority: The Architecture of Privacy in Eighteenth-Century Paris,” in *Paris: Life & Luxury in the Eighteenth-Century*, ed. Charissa Bremer-David (Los Angeles: Getty Publications, 2011), 33-51. See also Sherry McKay, “The ‘Salon de la Princesse’: ‘Rococo’ Design, Ornamented Bodies and the Public Sphere,” *Canadian Art Review*, XXI, 1-2 (1994): 70-84.

<sup>4</sup> Translated by scholars as “ideas for butterflies masquerading as humans” (Carlson, 1984), or “essay on the human antics of butterflies” (Colin Jones, 2007). Copies of the etchings of one or both suites belong to the collections of the Metropolitan Museum of Art (New York), The National Gallery (Washington D.C.), and The British Museum.

<sup>5</sup> There also exist preparatory drawings of some of the prints, as well as others that were never engraved. In addition, three etchings with oval compositions are known that do not belong to either series, but were executed by Charles Linnaeus named this order of butterflies and moths in 1735.

<sup>3</sup> On new domestic spaces in Paris, see Joan DeJean, “A New Interiority: The Architecture of Privacy in Eighteenth-Century Paris,” in *Paris: Life & Luxury in the Eighteenth-Century*, ed. Charissa Bremer-David (Los Angeles: Getty Publications, 2011), 33-51. See also Sherry McKay, “The ‘Salon de la Princesse’: ‘Rococo’ Design, Ornamented Bodies and the Public Sphere,” *Canadian Art Review*, XXI, 1-2 (1994): 70-84.

This thesis examines a collection of engravings for ornament executed in the middle of the eighteenth century by the royal embroiderer of Louis XV, Charles-Germain de Saint-Aubin, entitled, *Essai de papillonneries humaines* (c. 1748-1756) (Fig.1).<sup>4</sup> Intended as design models for transfer onto a wide range of decorative art objects, the *papillonneries* are composed of two suites of six etchings, one horizontal and the other vertical in format.<sup>5</sup> Both suites contain an extravagant title page. The first consists of a rococo-style cartouche articulated by framing butterfly wings, cobwebs, acanthus leaves, and festoons, whereas the latter vertical title page depicts a weathered obelisk suspended in air by flanking butterflies and embellished with floral garlands and erupting fireworks by insects and rats (Fig. 2a & 2b). The title pages introduce the imaginative and playful spirit that characterizes the series' designs. Each of the suites include five etchings of different vignettes that illustrate anthropomorphized butterflies parading as social elites engaging in a range of leisurely activities. Butterflies dance and play musical instruments at a country ballet, partake in a competition of checkers and drinking, and even act as characters of the *Théâtre Français* and *Théâtre Italien*. No two butterflies are quite alike and have been rendered with meticulous detail befitting Enlightenment classification. However at the same time obvious liberties have been taken in the papillons' designs: their bodies are exaggerated and anthropomorphized through the substitution of six appendages with a set of arms and legs, their probosci have been truncated, and their wings are sometimes tailored to serve as costumes that correspond to the individual tableau.

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<sup>4</sup> Translated by scholars as “ideas for butterflies masquerading as humans” (Carlson, 1984), or “essay on the human antics of butterflies” (Colin Jones, 2007). Copies of the etchings of one or both suites belong to the collections of the Metropolitan Museum of Art (New York), The National Gallery (Washington D.C.), and The British Museum.

<sup>5</sup> There also exist preparatory drawings of some of the prints, as well as others that were never engraved. In addition, three etchings with oval compositions are known that do not belong to either series, but were executed by the artist. These are different in style, but maintain the theme of butterflies in the place of humans.

I argue in this study that the anthropomorphic butterfly etchings visually express a changing relationship between humans and insects during the mid-eighteenth century in which the boundaries between humanity and “insectivity” were blurred.<sup>6</sup> Drawing from contemporary entomological, philosophical, literary natural history, and fashion publications, I examine the ways in which insects were increasingly referenced as a source of metaphor for the social, political, and individual self as the century progressed. And as will be discussed at a later point, butterflies were the host of an array of unique associations, ones that can be linked to issues of class and identity. As such, I posit that a cultural language of entomology developed, one that would have been particularly familiar to the educated nobility and newly wealthy bourgeoisie.

As templates for the ornamentation of luxury *objets d’art* manufactured for new elite domestic spaces, crucial to this study is a consideration of the ways in which the butterfly images would have played a part in the practices of salon sociability. The *papillonneries*, I argue, would have been activated by exchanges between users, objects, and the spaces they inhabited. Salons were the central venue for cultivating elite status, and the amusing images would have participated in the intellectual conversation and games of wit characteristic of the *divertissements* of polite society. Drawing from art historian Mimi Hellman’s foundational discussion of the “work of leisure,” described as the “mutually defining interaction of objects and bodies, and the ways in which elite social personae were produced through the formal dynamics and cultural meanings of furniture usage,” my thesis seeks to reanimate Charles-Germain’s<sup>7</sup> butterflies through a consideration of the social practices that both informed their production and acted as a

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<sup>6</sup> For recent contributions on the cultural and textual meanings of insects and the diverse ways in which insects have come to signify humanity’s “Other,” through language, literature, and other cultural practices, see Eric Brown, ed., *Insect Poetics* (Minneapolis & London: University of Minnesota Press), 2006.

<sup>7</sup> I will refer to the artist by his first name so as to avoid confusion with other artists from his family.

theater for their consumption.<sup>8</sup> Specifically, my study is shaped by what Hellman calls, “the interpersonal dynamics of the decorated interior,” or the ways in which luxury objects acted as accomplices in performances of codified rituals in order to reinforce the appearance of grace, knowledge and elite status of their users.<sup>9</sup> My analysis pushes further with this method of interpreting the decorative arts by integrating a consideration of the specific images depicted on the instruments of leisure to assess the ways in which such imagery may also have participated and shaped social and spatial practices. I am less interested in providing an explanation of the manner in which the *papillonneries* work to fashion noble station, for I believe that that kind of analysis would close down the multiplicity of meanings they engender. Rather, by considering the prints in light of their unique inclusion of butterflies and framing them in terms of their material status, I wish to demonstrate that they interweave the typically separate discourses of fashion, leisure and sociability of the noble class, the politics of humor, Enlightenment science, and the “Republic of Letters,” here defined as the community of scholars in seventeenth and eighteenth century Europe.<sup>10</sup>

Central to this study is the concept of metamorphosis. The transmutability of butterflies is akin to that of ornament prints and their material translations, providing a thematic thread that links different issues and subjects of eighteenth-century French social history. Through the

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<sup>8</sup> Mimi Hellman, “Furniture, Sociability, and the Work of Leisure in Eighteenth-Century France,” *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 32, (1999): 415-45. Since its publication, and increasingly in recent years, this text has shaped studies of eighteenth-century material culture, especially those concerning furnishings and fashion.

<sup>9</sup> See Mimi Hellman, “Interior Motives: Seduction by Decoration in Eighteenth-Century France” in *Dangerous Liaisons: Fashion and Furniture in the Eighteenth Century* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2006), 15-23.

<sup>10</sup> There is diversity of approaches on the meaning of the Republic of Letters within the context of the eighteenth-century Parisian salons. For two viewpoints, see Dena Goodman, *The Republic of Letters: A Cultural History of the French Enlightenment* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994) and Antoine Lilti, “The Kingdom of Politesse: Salons and the Republic of Letters in Eighteenth-Century Paris,” *Republic of Letters: A Journal for the Study of Knowledge, Politics, and the Arts* 1, no. 1 (May 1, 2009). Accessed August 26, 2011. <http://rofl.stanford.edu/node/38>.

example of the *papillonneries*, I wish to reconsider the idea of ornamentation: rather than simply decorative, I suggest that ornament was an active participant in eighteenth-century French social life.

To develop this argument, my thesis is organized into three parts. Although I will consider all twelve prints of the two suites in my discussion, I will primarily focus on two images, *Le Duel* and *La Toilette*, which provide points of entry into the series and its themes. In part one, “Enlightenment Entomology and Enlightenment Salons,” I look to the intellectual atmosphere of Enlightenment France in order to address the butterfly subject of the prints, extending my exploration into the popular entomological projects of the eighteenth century. I not only consider volumes of natural philosophy, but also look to forms of literary natural history and popular associations with butterflies in order to link the cultivated language of entomology to the fashionable spaces of polite society. In part two, “*Le Duel*: Play, Humor, and Social Order,” I concentrate my examination on a single image of butterflies engaging in swordplay as a means of accessing the practices of wit and humor that would have informed and implicated the *papillonneries* ornament. I suggest that the playful images were not merely frivolous, but engaged their beholder in creative exchanges that expressed more serious concerns with class prerogatives. In part three, “Transforming *La Toilette*: Fashion and the Culture of Appearances,” I broaden my discussion to issues of fashion in order to link the images of butterflies and the career of the artist as designer of the King’s wardrobe to a larger exploration of gender, the culture of appearances and the notion of transformation, here in relation to matters of entomology, fashion and class. Before developing this tri-part analysis, however, I introduce the *papillonneries* in the following paragraphs with a literature review and an overview of the artist, the prints and their application onto decorative arts.

## Literature Review

Overall, very little has been written on Charles-Germain, his *papillonneries* etchings, or even the genre of ornament prints. There are, however, some significant early records of the artist and the butterfly suites. Of these, the most foundational is Victor Advielle's *Renseignements intimes sur les Saint-Aubins, d'après les papiers de leur famille*, the primary source of all subsequent biographical treatments of the artist.<sup>11</sup> One may also look to Charles-Germain's self-authored family genealogy<sup>12</sup> and retrospective volumes on eighteenth-century French engravers and decorators (*ornemanistes*) published in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.<sup>13</sup> Of the latter, the most significant is Prosper de Baudicour's *Le peintre graveur français continué* (1859), which provides some biographical information on the artist, but more importantly, is the most commonly cited resource for the *papillonneries*.<sup>14</sup> To date, Baudicour's

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<sup>11</sup> Cited from Colin Jones and Juliet Carey, "Introduction" in *The Saint-Aubin 'Livre de caricatures': Drawing satire in eighteenth-century Paris* (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 2012), 1. Advielle's text provides biographical information of Charles-Germain as well as his brothers, Gabriel and Augustin, and was first published in *Mémoires lus à la reunion des societees des beaux-arts des départemens* (Paris, 1896).

<sup>12</sup> Charles-Germain was responsible for documenting his family's genealogy from the seventeenth century to the last quarter of the eighteenth century. He included it in his manuscript, the *Recueil de Plantes, copiées d'après nature par Saint Aubin, dessinateur du roy Louis XV, 1736-1785* (Collection of Rachel Lambert Mellon, Oak Spring Garden Library, Upperville, VA). His grandson-in-law, Pierre-Antoine Tardieu, provided additional notes on the family at the end of the book. A more minor source on the artist is a facsimile and translation of the artist's 1770 treatise on the art of embroidery (*L'Art du brodeur*), which provides some introductory comments on Charles-Germain. See Nikki Scheuer, trans. *Art of the Embroiderer: by Charles-Germain de Saint-Aubin, Designer to the King, 1770*, Los Angeles County Museum of Art (Boston & London: David R. Godine, 1983), 10.

<sup>13</sup> These include: Prosper de Baudicour, *Le peintre graveur français continue, ou Catalogue raisonné des estampes gravées par les peintres et les dessinateurs de l'école Française nés dans le XVIIe siècle* (Paris: Bouchard-Huzard, 1859); Désiré Guilard, *Les maîtres ornemanistes, dessinateurs, peintres, architectes, sculpteurs et graveurs: écoles française,--italienne,--allemande,--et des Pays-Bas (flamande & hollandaise)* (Paris: E. Plon, 1881), 211; François Couboin, *Le graveur française: essai de bibliographie* (Paris: M. Le Garrec, 1927-28), II., 872; Peter Jessen, *Rococo Engravings: Two Hundred Plates of the Eighteenth Century Selected by Dr. Peter Jessen and Reproduced in Collotype* (London: Benn Brothers, Ltd, 1922), 287 and Peter Jessen, *Katalog der Ornamentstichsammlung der Staatlichen Kunstbibliothek Berlin* (Berlin, 1939).

<sup>14</sup> Baudicour is included among the bibliographic references within the collection websites for the National Gallery of Art, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, and The British Museum. See [http://www.nga.gov/fcgi-bin/tinfo\\_f?object=45774&detail=lit](http://www.nga.gov/fcgi-bin/tinfo_f?object=45774&detail=lit); <http://www.metmuseum.org/collections/search-the-collections/90066046>; [http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/search\\_the\\_collection\\_database/term\\_details.aspx](http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/search_the_collection_database/term_details.aspx), respectively.

text is the only publication that provides a systematic visual description of the etchings.<sup>15</sup> Likewise, Edmund and Jules de Goncourt's *Art of the Eighteenth Century*<sup>16</sup> (1859-1875) includes biographical information on the artist and his family, as well as a lengthy description of the second butterfly suite's title page.<sup>17</sup> In the twentieth century, a significant source of information on the artist is to be found in Emile Dacier's 1931 text on Charles-Germain's brother, *Gabriel de Saint-Aubin, dessinateur et graveur (1724-80)*.<sup>18</sup>

In terms of the butterfly etchings, little has been written since Baudicour in the nineteenth century. The most notable exception is Patrick Mauriès' 1996 publication, the first and only complete compilation of the prints.<sup>19</sup> This book includes all twelve etchings, their original designs, as well as three oval prints that do not belong to either suite. Mauriès' collection, while useful, lacks any sustained visual or critical analysis of the images.<sup>20</sup> More recently, five of the studies from Mauriès' book were included in the 2002 publication from the Louvre, *le Livre des Saint-Aubin*.<sup>21</sup> This text includes 80 image selections drawn from an original anthology of 280

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<sup>15</sup> Baudicour notes that the *Premier Essai*, (horizontal suite of etchings executed in 1748) is rarer than the vertical suite, making it impossible for him to find copies of all the etchings and thereby resulting in the omission of descriptions of *La Brouette* and *Le Blessé*. In addition to the *Papillonneries humaines*, Baudicour describes some of Charles-Germain's etchings of flowers. For Baudicour's entry of Charles-Germain and the *papillonneries*, see pages 84-93. On etchings of flowers, see pages 93-97.

<sup>16</sup> Edmond et Jules de Goncourt, *L'art du dix-huitième siècle* (Paris: E. Flammarion, 1927). The text was published in installments from 1859 to 1875 and Charles-Germain de Saint-Aubin's entry belongs to the second volume.

<sup>17</sup> Charles-Germain, Gabriel and Augustin, as well as other members of their artistic family, are included together in the Goncourt's *L'Art du VIIIe siècle*, under the section heading, *Les Saint-Aubins*. The Goncourt brothers also commented on the *Livre de caricatures* in this text.

<sup>18</sup> Emile Dacier, *Gabriel de Saint-Aubin, peintre, dessinateur et graveur (1724-80)*, 2 vols (Paris and Brussels, 1929-1931).

<sup>19</sup> Patrick Mauriès, *Sur les papillonneries humaines* [sic] (Paris: Le Promeneur, 1996). One may also look to Jesson 1920, plates 24, 59, and 79 for illustrations of some of the prints.

<sup>20</sup> Mauriès' introductory text is mostly composed of biographical information drawn from earlier sources.

<sup>21</sup> Pierre Rosenberg, *Le Livre des Saint-Aubin* (Paris: Musée du Louvre with Réunion des Musées Nationaux, 2002). This album is also described in Dacier 1929, 1, 5-14 and McCullagh 1981, 60-64.

drawings produced by Charles-Germain and his family, seven of which were sketches of the *papillonneries*.<sup>22</sup> The Louvre publication provides the usual biographical information on the family, with particular attention to Charles-Germain's brother Gabriel, as well as descriptions of the selected works.<sup>23</sup> However, only a single column of text offering limited interpretation accompanies the butterfly images.<sup>24</sup>

A more thoughtful analysis comes from the earlier 1984 exhibition catalog, *From Regency to Empire: French Printmaking, 1715-1814*, organized by the Baltimore Museum of Art and the Minneapolis Institute of Art and edited by Victor Carlson.<sup>25</sup> This catalog is one of the few semi-recent publications that acknowledges the vast array of material culture produced during the printmaking revolution in the eighteenth century, and is perhaps the only source other than the Louvre's *le Livre de Saint-Aubin* to provide an interpretation of the prints, albeit a brief one.<sup>26</sup> Focusing his discussion on two of the etchings from the second suite, the title page (*Titre*) and *La Toilette*, Carlson praises the artist's inventive handling of ornament prints, suggesting that they are “*jeux d'esprit* to be enjoyed for their witty commentaries on mankind's vanities and pretensions.”<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Only some of these butterfly sketches were converted into etchings.

<sup>23</sup> Recently, Gabriel de Saint-Aubin was the subject of a Frick collection exhibition and catalog. See, *Gabriel de Saint-Aubin: 1724-1780* (New York: The Frick Collection, 2007).

<sup>24</sup> There is also a page featuring the preparatory drawings, but the accompanying text contains mostly artist information (112).

<sup>25</sup> Carlson, 123-7.

<sup>26</sup> Specifically, Carlson dedicates one page of text for the two suites (123), and a half a page of text to describe three rarer oval *papillonneries* etchings that do not belong to either suite (126). For another recent text on printmaking of the eighteenth century, see Margaret Morgan Grasselli, *Colorful Impressions: The Printmaking Revolution in Eighteenth-Century France* (London: Lund Humphries Publishers, 2003).

<sup>27</sup> Carlson, 123. This conclusion was also reached by Juliet Carey in reference to the butterfly etchings in “The king and his embroiderer” in *The Saint-Aubin 'Livre de caricatures,'* 268n.

Lately there has been a surge of academic interest in the *Livre de Caricatures tant Bonnes que Mauvaises*, a clandestine album containing nearly 400 comical drawings, principally executed by Charles-Germain, including sketches of the *papillonneries* and other butterfly images.<sup>28</sup> The Voltaire Foundation, for example, recently published a sixteen chapter volume dedicated entirely to contents of the album.<sup>29</sup> The introduction of the Voltaire Foundation's volume provides a detailed biography of the artist, as well as interpretations by leading eighteenth-century scholars of the various drawings and their themes. Although no analysis of the *papillonneries* is provided, several authors draw connections between the caricatures and the butterfly suites, suggesting a renewed awareness of their production and import.<sup>30</sup>

### **Charles-Germain de Saint-Aubin and Ornament Prints**

Although now remembered as a “generally obscure luxury artisan,” during his life, Charles-Germain de Saint-Aubin enjoyed considerable success as a designer of fabric and embroidery.<sup>31</sup> He was the eldest of seven children that belonged to the last generation of a

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<sup>28</sup> Katie Scott's chapter, “Saint-Aubin's jokes and their relation to...” discusses one drawing of a composite flower-butterfly, and Valerie Mainz notes the presence of butterflies in the volume's frontispiece.

<sup>29</sup> The comic drawings range in date from the 1740s to the mid 1770s. While Charles-Germain was the principal contributor, drawings were also produced by his family and close friends. See Colin Jones, Juliet Carey, and Emily Richardson, eds., “*The Saint Aubin 'Livre de caricatures.'*” The album of drawings contains 387 pages of drawings. It is currently housed by the Waddesdon Manor Collection.

<sup>30</sup> These include Colin Jones' and Emily Richardson's introduction (8; 35), Kim de Beaumont's “The Saint-Aubin's sketching for fun and profit” (75), Mark Ledbury's “Theatrical Life” (193), Juliet Carey's “The king and his embroiderer” (68n), and Richard Taws' “The preciousness of things” (332). Likewise, in an Interdisciplinary seminar in the Humanities with the University Of Chicago, historian Colin Jones described the artist and briefly addressed the *papillonneries* in relation to the *Livre de caricatures*. A written form of this presentation is available online. See Colin Jones “How Not to Laugh in the French Enlightenment: The Saint-Aubin *Livre de Caricatures*” (University of Chicago: Interdisciplinary Seminar in the Humanities, 2007).

<sup>31</sup> Jones and Carey, “Introduction” in *The Saint Aubin 'Livre de caricatures,'* 1. As noted, this source is the most recent and comprehensive compilation of biographical information on the artist, and one of the few sources in English.

seventeenth and eighteenth-century artistic dynasty, or as Pierre Rosenberg put it, “[t]out le monde dessinait chez les Saint-Aubin.”<sup>32</sup> Everyone indeed, for not only were four of his brothers professional artists/artisans, but his grandfather, Germain de Saint-Aubin, worked as concierge and embroiderer to the Duchesse de Lesdigières, and his father, Gabriel-Germain, followed suit, becoming the *brodeur du roi*, or embroider of the king.<sup>33</sup> Likewise, our Charles-Germain was his father’s pupil and too gained the position of the royal embroiderer, where, in addition to Louis XV and the queen consort, Marie Leszyzyska, he received the fortunate patronage of Madame de Pompadour.<sup>34</sup> Outside of his royal post, Charles-Germain held clientele from both the court of Versailles and city of Paris and was recognized for a manuscript of watercolors of real and imagined flowers (*Recueil de Plantes*) and his treatise on the art of embroidery (*L’Art du Brodeur*). *Art of the Embroiderer* was an attempt by Charles-Germain to elevate the craft of embroidery to the realm of fine art, as he, like his family, was a luxury artisan whose production was neither strictly art nor craft.<sup>35</sup> Charles-Germain was also a man of the Enlightenment. An amateur scientist of sorts, he enjoyed reading and visiting collections and even labeled many of the flowers in his designs with Linnaean classification.<sup>36</sup> Upon viewing the intricate designs of butterflies in the prints, one can imagine Lepidoptera numbered among Charles-Germain’s interests in natural sciences. And, in fact, butterflies were a common subject

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<sup>32</sup> Rosenberg, 6.

<sup>33</sup> Alternatively, Charles-Germain was titled the *dessinateur du Roi pour le costume*, or designer of the King’s wardrobe.

<sup>34</sup> Scheuer, 10. Other notable clients were Louis XV’s subsequent mistress, Madame du Barry, Marie Antoinette, and the kings of Portugal and Prussia.

<sup>35</sup> His brother Augustin, an acclaimed etcher, was in a similar position between artist and artisan as Charles-Germain, and their artist-trained brother, Gabriel, worked primarily as an illustrator.

<sup>36</sup> Colin Jones and Juliet Carey, “*The Saint Aubin ‘Livre de caricatures’*”, 9. Charles-Germain also provided marginal dissections and descriptions of the proprieties of many of the flowers he depicted. See, Colin Jones, “How Not to Laugh in the French Enlightenment,” 7-8.

for the artist, appearing in various permutations beyond the *Essai de papillonneries humaines*, including the *Livre des Saint-Aubin* and the *Livre de Caricatures tant Bonnes que Mauvaises*.<sup>37</sup>

*Essai de papillonneries humaines* is a collection of ornament prints, or, engravings typically distributed within *cahiers* (gathered single leaflets) or pattern books, and supplied to manufactories and workshops to be used as a decorative design source for other media, including porcelains, silver, fabrics, tapestries, wall paper, panels, and furnishings.<sup>38</sup> Considering Charles-Germain's profession as an embroiderer, one might assume that these etchings were originally conceived as textile designs.<sup>39</sup> This, however, would not mean that the images would be limited to this purpose, but instead could be used for other decorative objects. Prints such as the *papillonneries* would have been purchased by different French and European manufacturers for the use of modelers and painters. While, in reality the *papillonneries* were not a big commercial success, evidence of their application does exist. Copies of the engravings were found in the archives of the Meissen Porcelain Factory and they also reached the Sèvres Factory, as testified by a surviving material translation of the etchings, a late-eighteenth century porcelain cup and saucer.<sup>40</sup> The Sèvres cup and saucer incorporate three of the *papillonneries* designs, but isolate

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<sup>37</sup> Other butterfly designs by Charles-Germain may be found outside of the *papillonneries* studies, including an image of a female herm with a butterfly resting atop of her head and an image of a flower-butterfly hybrid in the *Livre de Caricatures tant Bonnes que Mauvaises*.

<sup>38</sup>On the copies of the prints found in the archives of the Meissen porcelain factory, see Maureen Cassidy-Geiger, "Graphic Sources for Meissen Porcelain: Origins of the Print collection in the Meissen Archives," *Metropolitan Museum Journal*, Vol. 31 (1996): 111. For a recent handling of prints for ornament see Gail Davidson "Ornament of Bizarre Imagination: Rococo Prints and Drawings from Cooper-Hewitt's Leon Decloux Collection" in *Rococo: The Continuing Curve, 1730-2008* (New York: Cooper-Hewitt, National Design Museum, 2008), 40-71.

<sup>39</sup> The absence of any embroidered objects today may be explained by the perishableness of silks, and the changing, and subsequent disposal, of fashions in Paris during this time. See Daniel Roche, *The Culture of Clothing: Dress and Fashion in the Ancien Regime*, trans. Jean Birrell (Cambridge University Press, 1994) for a detailed analysis of the rapidly shifting Revolutionary fashion market during the eighteenth century.

<sup>40</sup> For Meissen archives, see Cassidy-Geiger, 111. For a discussion of the butterfly decoration of the cup and saucer, see Clare Le Corbeiller, "Whimsy and Sobriety: Rococo Butterflies and Neo-classical Porcelain," *Apollo* 139, no. 383 (Jan. 1993): 25-7.

the butterfly episodes from their original arabesque environments and add landscape backgrounds.<sup>41</sup> Significantly, the porcelains are colored, as the majority of applications for the *papillonneries* would have been. The teacup is in the style of *tasse à l'Étrusque* and features Charles-Germain's design, *Le Duel*, an image of fencing butterflies.<sup>42</sup> Pictured on the saucer are selections from two other etchings, *Théâtre Italien* and *Théâtre Française*, in which butterflies don the costumes of characters of the Italian and French comedies. In the sections to follow I will return to each of the images featured on the porcelains, with particular attention given to *Le Duel*. Bearing the variegated cup and saucer in mind, one might imagine similar adaptations of these designs on diverse mid-eighteenth century *objets d'art* and the different ways they would have performed as social actors in the intellectual and recreational activities of the salon.

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<sup>41</sup> These design adjustments were likely due to changes in decorative tastes at the end of the century, as well as the spatial limits of the objects.

<sup>42</sup> On the other side of the saucer an image of three standing butterflies not recognizable from Charles-Germain's designs is depicted.

## Enlightenment Entomology and Enlightenment Salons

Before examining the *papilloneries* images more closely to explore the ways in which they may have been activated through salon sociability, I would like to briefly discuss the Enlightenment context. The humor of the butterflies is underscored by a specific set of social and scientific concerns, and salons were the principle forum for these exchanges. In her groundbreaking study, *The Republic of Letters: A Cultural History of the French Enlightenment*, historian Dena Goodman demonstrates the ways in which the salon came to be the primary institution for the intellectual and philosophic practices of the Enlightenment.<sup>43</sup> Goodman argues that the salons were central to the “community of discourse” of the Republic of Letters, one in which an expanding group of *philosophes*, including nobles and non-nobles, came together “on a footing of equality” to share new ideas.<sup>44</sup> Although scholars have since debated the validity of Goodman’s claims, it is generally accepted that salons were increasingly a space where members of the nobility and the intellectual bourgeoisie could participate in both the amusements and the academic endeavors of the Republic of Letters, including discussing the newest publications in literature, philosophy, and science.<sup>45</sup> As such, salons were an important site for negotiating not only shifting relations between classes, but also their redefinition.<sup>46</sup>

While nobility was long determined by military achievement and noble birth, increasingly during

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<sup>43</sup> Central to Goodman’s argument is that female salon hosts (*salonnières*) played a crucial role in the development of the Republic of Letters and the spread of Enlightenment ideas.

<sup>44</sup> Dena Goodman, “Enlightenment Salons: The Convergence of Female and Philosophic Ambitions,” *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, Vol. 22, No. 3, Special Issue: The French Revolution in Culture (Spring, 1989): 329-50.

<sup>45</sup> On challenges to Goodman’s arguments, see Steven Kale, *French Salons: High Society and Political Sociability from the Old Regime to the Revolution of 1848* (Baltimore & London: John Hopkins University Press, 2004) and Lilti, 2009.

<sup>46</sup> For a foundational text on the role of salons in changing class relations and ideologies of nobility during the seventeenth century, see *Le Paradis des Femmes: Women, Salons and the Social Stratification in Seventeenth-Century France* (Princeton, 1976). For a continuation of these issues in the eighteenth and nineteenth century see Kale, 2004. For the impact of salon culture on early and mid-eighteenth century architecture, see McKay, “The Salon de la Princesse,” 1994 and Dejean, 2011.

the eighteenth century, the aspiring wealthy bourgeoisie sought alternative means for distinguishing themselves from the undifferentiated third estate.<sup>47</sup> Merit, education, and cultural practices of polite society, including participation in the intellectual projects of the Enlightenment, were common strategies of self-cultivation.

Most significantly, the *papillonneries* engage with the social and scholastic climate of the Enlightenment through their relationship to natural history. Although it was long a field of inquiry, an unprecedented fervor for discovering, classifying, and understanding the natural world emerged alongside new philosophic conceptions of nature during the eighteenth century.<sup>48</sup> The Enlightenment saw the rise of the amateur scientist; not only did members of the upper classes belong to scientific societies and academies, including the newly-founded *Académie des Sciences* in France, but they also assembled private collections of natural specimens as well as dictionaries of natural history.<sup>49</sup> Entomology was one of the favorite Enlightenment subjects of the European well-to-do; members of the elite amassed impressive collections of local and foreign insects, particularly butterflies and moths. In fact, the eighteenth century saw the formal

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<sup>47</sup> One may look to Pierre Bourdieu's notion of "social capital" and "cultural capital" to describe these strategies of cultural advancement. See Pierre Bourdieu, "The Forms of Capital" in *Cultural Theory: An Anthology* (West Sussex: Wiley-Blackhall, 2011) and *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984).

<sup>48</sup> Enlightenment science was not exclusively the realm of the private, but also took many public forms, such as popular lecture-demonstrations, periodicals, pamphlets and books. For recent contributions on the public spectacle of eighteenth-century science, see Bernadette Bensaude-Vincent and Christine Blondel, eds. *Science and Spectacle in the European Enlightenment from Science, Technology and Culture, 1700-1945* (Hampshire & Burlington: Ashgate, 2008) and Michael Lynn, *Popular Science and Public Opinion* (Manchester & New York: Manchester University Press, 2006).

<sup>49</sup> Indeed, there was a proliferation of scientific dictionaries during the eighteenth century that claimed to contain collective human knowledge, including Buffon's masterwork, *Histoire Naturelle*, and its principal commercial rival, Diderot's multi-volume *Encyclopédie*. For a recent cultural history and critical evaluation of scientific texts in the Republic of Letters, particularly in the British context, see Richard Yeo, *Encyclopaedic Visions: Scientific Dictionaries and Enlightenment Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

emergence of the “Aurelian,” (another word for lepidopterist), its most institutional form being the Society of Aurelians in London.<sup>50</sup>

Enthusiasm for Lepidoptera, however, had been building in the years preceding the eighteenth century. For example, in the last quarter of the seventeenth century, Maria Sibylla Merian published in Germany a series of watercolors of caterpillars and butterflies, novel for their depiction of various stages of the metamorphosis process.<sup>51</sup> The science of transmutation was new to the European intellectual community, whose previous understanding of butterfly transformation was based upon an Aristotelian idea that caterpillars emerged as winged insects from a process of spontaneous generation occurring in mud.<sup>52</sup> Merian’s drawings took careful documentation of the entire life cycle, making her publications a tremendously influential contribution to the popular understanding of butterfly metamorphosis and an integral part of the collection of scientific libraries in the early eighteenth century.<sup>53</sup> In France, much of the buzz for entomology surrounded famed scientist, René Antoine Ferchault de Réaumur, particularly his publication, *Mémoires pour servir à l’histoire des insects* (6 volumes, 1734-42). Réaumur

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<sup>50</sup> See Moses Harris, *The Aurelian: or Natural History of English Insects; Namely Months and Butterflies* (London: 1766).

<sup>51</sup> Maria Sibylla Merian’s insect publications include *The Caterpillars’ Marvelous Transformation and Strange Floral Food* (1679) and *Metamorphosis insectorum Surinamensium* (1705). Much has been published on Merian’s contributions to entomology, and particularly the understanding of insect metamorphosis. For recent sources, see Ella Reitsma, *Maria Sibylla Merian & Daughters: Women of Art and Science*, Lynne Richards, trans. (Amsterdam: Rembrandt House Museum; Los Angeles: J. Paul Getty Museum; Zwolle: Waanders Publishers, 2008); Kim Todd, *Chrysalis: Maria Sibylla Merian and the Secrets of Metamorphosis* (Orlando: Harcourt, 2007). For reproductions of her engravings, see William T. Stern, *Wondrous Transformation of Caterpillars: Fifty Engravings Selected from Erucarum Ortus* (London: Scolar Press, 1978).

<sup>52</sup> See Chapter 2: “Insect Metamorphosis and Spontaneous Generation” in Daniel Marlos, *The Curious World of Bugs* (Penguin, 2010).

<sup>53</sup> Although Dutch biologist Jan Swammerdam (1637-80) is typically understood as the father of the theory of insect metamorphosis, Merian’s drawings were notable for depicting all stages of the transformation, including egg, larva, pupa, and adult, as well as the plants the insects fed on. Copies of the book and its illustrations were in the collections of several notables, and her drawings were influential to many natural history publications in the eighteenth century.

represented a faction of the scientific community who, aided by recent developments with the microscope, marveled at the sophistication within the smallest of insects, attributing their abilities (including metamorphosis) to the power of God.<sup>54</sup> He describes insects as “more complex, more admirable, and possibly made with greater art than those with which we are most closely involved, and have the greatest idea.”<sup>55</sup> Réaumur’s comments demonstrate a new sensibility towards insects, one that elevated them above, and thereby separated them from, the rest of natural beings, including man.<sup>56</sup>

The primacy of the insect—as a manifestation of God’s wisdom—however, was combated by another popular French naturalist from the mid-century, Georges-Louis Leclerc, Comte de Buffon. A suave savant, member of the *Académie des sciences* (appointed *adjoint-mécanicien* in 1733), and superintendent of the Jardin du Roi (appointed in 1739), Buffon is remembered today as the author of the scientific volumes, *Histoire naturelle générale et particulière* (1749-1788, 36 volumes).<sup>57</sup> Competing with the widely influential classifying systems developed by Charles Linnaeus,<sup>58</sup> Buffon’s volumes were extraordinarily popular among the educated public (albeit vehemently criticized by contemporary scientists) and were

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<sup>54</sup> The presence of God’s hand in insects’ design was a point agreed upon by much of the scientific community, including Swammerdam, Malpighi, Leeuwenhoek, and Vallisneri. See Jacques Roger, *The Life Sciences in Eighteenth-Century Thought*, Keith R. Benson, ed., Robert Ellrich, trans. (Stanford University Press, 1997), 188-92.

<sup>55</sup> Quoted in Roger, *The Life Sciences in Eighteenth-Century Thought*, 190.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 188-92.

<sup>57</sup> The 35 volumes of the *Histoire Naturelle* that Buffon saw through the press included three general introductory volumes, twelve volumes on mammals, nine volumes on birds, five volumes on minerals, and six volumes entitled *Suppléments*. See Otis E. Fellows and Stephen F. Milliken, *Buffon* (New York: Twayne Publishers, Inc, 1972).

<sup>58</sup> Buffon was a vocal opponent to Linnaeus’ system of classifying the natural world based on anatomical details, even censuring his system in *Histoire Naturelle*. See Phillip Sloan “The Buffon-Linnaeus” Controversy, *Isis*, Vol. 67, N.3 (Sep. 1976): 356-375. On Buffon, see Roger, *Buffon: A Life in Natural History*, trans. Sarah Lucille (Ithaca: Cornell University, 1997) and “Buffon” in *The Life Sciences in Eighteenth-Century Thought*. On Linnaeus, see *Linnaeus: The Man and His Work*, Sten Lindroth, Gunnar Eriksson and Gunnar Broberg, eds. (Berkeley, Los Angeles & London: University of California Press, 1983) and *Contemporary Perspectives on Linnaeus*, John Weinstock, ed., Lanham (New York & London: University Press of America, 1985).

widely adopted as standard reading for both the mid-century elite and the socially ambitious bourgeoisie.<sup>59</sup> As one scholar recently noted, Buffon formulated a dual appeal to potential readers by framing natural history as a route to “social superiority,” promoting its study as an elevating activity that provides, “knowledge of an infinity of things which the ordinary man is ignorant of, and which can often be found useful in life.”<sup>60</sup>

Social politics aside, Buffon’s system introduced a completely novel system and conception of the relationship between man and nature.<sup>61</sup> The prevailing view of the natural world, including the work of Réaumur’s, was based on Cartesian mechanistic philosophy in which living things were understood in terms of rational laws of motion and animals were considered automata, or animated machines made of an arrangement of individual parts.<sup>62</sup> The work of Buffon, as well as other philosophic projects of the period, helped initiate a natural history where, contrary to dualistic biological mechanistic philosophy, animals were ordered according to their relation to human purposes.<sup>63</sup> Buffon clashed with his peers of the scientific

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<sup>59</sup> Mary Sheriff has pointed out that ornamented books of “knowledge” also were collected and displayed, serving both an edifying and self-elevating function. See Mary Sheriff, “Decorating Knowledge: The Ornamental Book, the Philosophic Image and the Naked Truth” from *Between Luxury and the Everyday: Decorative Arts in the Eighteenth Century* (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), 15-21.

<sup>60</sup> Emma C. Spary, *Utopia’s Garden: French Natural History from Old Regime to Revolution* (Chicago & London: The University of Chicago Press, 2000), 26.

<sup>61</sup> Roger, *The Life Sciences in Eighteenth-Century Thought*, 426,

<sup>62</sup> On the shift from seventeenth-century theories of mechanism, see Roger, *The Life Sciences in Eighteenth-Century Thought*, 167-180. For Descartes’ thesis on animal-machines see part five of “*Discours de la method*” from *Oeuvres Descartes*, ed. Charles Adam and Paul Tannery (Paris: Vrin, 1996), 6: 40-60.

<sup>63</sup> Much of the discourse on human-animal affinities was concerned with the topic of animal souls. The issue of animal souls long preceded the eighteenth century, however; Aristotle looked to animal souls (vital functions) rather than their bodies for defining character. This method is in stark contrast to the physical classifying taxonomic systems of Linnaeus. See Hugh Raffles, *Insectopedia* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2010), 129-131. On eighteenth-century French philosophies on animal souls, intelligence, and communication see John C. O’Neal, “The Evolution of the Notion of Experience in the Writings of Boullier and Condillac on the Question of Animal Souls” in *Changing Minds: The Shifting Perception of Culture in Eighteenth-Century France* (Cranbury: Associated University Presses, 2002), 47-69 and Sarah R. Cohen, “Animal Performance in Oudry’s Illustrations to the Tables of

community, centering man, rather than God, in his conception of the universe, and, crucially, relating animals to humans.<sup>64</sup> This is evident in both the content and style of *Histoire naturelle*, which contained lengthy anthropomorphic descriptions of animals.<sup>65</sup> For example, his entry on butterflies in *Natural history of birds, fish, insects and reptiles* slips into anthropomorphizing prose, in one instance explaining that butterflies “employ the short life assigned them in a variety of enjoyments,” including “the pursuit of the female.”<sup>66</sup>

The new theories that related animals to humans find a parallel in the decorative arts. Although animals had long appeared in the history of ornamentation, there was an unprecedented demand for the subject in the furnishings of eighteenth-century France.<sup>67</sup> Specifically, a fashion for literally replacing people with animals emerged, by far the dominant form being *singeries*, or, images in which monkeys ape the activities of the noble class.<sup>68</sup> Although scholars tend to agree that the *papillonneries* belong to this trend, the etchings are unusual in their use of insects.<sup>69</sup>

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La Fontaine,” *Studies in Eighteenth Century Culture*, Vol. 3 (2010):35-76. On perceptions of animals in eighteenth-century England see Heather Keenleyside, *Animals and Other People in Eighteenth Century Literature* (PhD diss., University of Chicago, 2008), Frank Palmeri, *Humans and other Animals in Eighteenth-Century British Culture* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2006), and Harriet Ritvo “Leaning from Animals: Natural History for Children in the Eighteenth Century,” *Children’s Literature*, Vol. 13 (1985): 72-3.

<sup>64</sup> However, animals, of course, were ranked lower than man in Buffon’s hierarchy of beings.

<sup>65</sup> Indeed, one of the most notable qualities of Buffon’s works was his mastery of the written word, transforming a scientific text into prose.

<sup>66</sup> Georges-Louis Leclerc, Comte de Buffon, *Natural History of Birds, Fish, Insects and Reptiles* (translated and published by H.D. Symonds, London, 1808), 5: 278.

<sup>67</sup> This trend was significantly encouraged by the proliferation of furnishings depicting Jean-Baptiste Oudry’s illustrations of la Fontaine’s fables. See Cohen, 35-6.

<sup>68</sup> The *singeries* of mid-eighteenth century French decorative arts were exemplified by the works of Christophe Huet, whose wall paintings were preceded by the earlier arabesques of Claude Gillot and Jean-Antoine Watteau and the designs of Jean Bérain and Claude Audran III. Monkeys performing as humans also appear in Dutch seventeenth century paintings. See Nicole Garnier-Pelle et.al, *The Monkeys of Christophe Huet: Singeries in French Decorative Arts*, trans. Sharon Grevet (Los Angeles: Getty Publications, 2011).

<sup>69</sup> Victor Carlson, for example.

They do not merely substitute human actors, but emphatically express a blurring between humans and insects by depicting butterflies that are anthropomorphized.

Crucially, the imagery of the *papillonneries* is not only informed by the discourse on animals during the period, but their specific use of insects documents changing ideas in the field of entomology. In tandem with the Enlightenment philosophical projects of Buffon emerged a fashion for literary entomology, or texts that transformed catalogue-style scientific volumes into novel form for wider readership.<sup>70</sup> For example, just prior to the mid-century, Gilles Auguste Bazin converted the rigid classifying academic entries from Réaumur's texts on the history of insects into a best-selling dialogue form of entomological salon literature for women. Bazin's *Memoires pour servir à l'histoire des insectes* (1744) and its four-volume sequel, *Abregé de l'histoire des insectes pour servir de suite à l'histoire naturelle des abeilles*, encouraged readers to look to insects as a means of understanding the individual in society, a transgression of boundaries emphasized by the texts' abundant use of metaphor.<sup>71</sup> Indeed, bees, a eusocial (or, socially organized) insect, much like ants and wasps, provided a potent metaphor for referencing issues of class, labor, and government.<sup>72</sup> One can imagine that organized colonies operating under the authority of a queen insect had particular currency during a period of absolutism.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> See Marc Olivier, "Gilles Auguste Bazin's 'True Novel' of Natural History" (Eighteenth-Century Fiction, Vol. 18, Iss. 2, Article 3, 2006): 187-202 and Sam George, "Animated Beings: Enlightenment Entomology for Girls" (Special Issue: Animals in the Eighteenth Century, *Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies*, Vol. 33, No.4, 2010).

<sup>71</sup> The first of Bazin's texts encourages mirroring family life after the economy of domestic bees, while the second expands its scope to the merits of wild bees and other insects, including butterflies. In a similar vein, Bernard Mandeville's poem (1705) and subsequent political economic commentary (1714) were titled, *Fable of the Bees: or, Private Vices, Public Benefits*. For a comprehensive chronological and thematically organized text on insect metaphors in literature, particularly concerning bees, see Christopher Hollingsworth, *Poetics of the Hive: The Insect Metaphor in Literature* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2001), Chapter 2 and 3.

<sup>72</sup> Erika Mae Olbricht, "Made Without Hands" in *Insect Poetics*, ed. Eric C. Brown (Minneapolis & London: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), 223-41.

<sup>73</sup> Deirdre Coleman, "Entertaining Entomology: Insects and Insect Performers in the Eighteenth Century," *Eighteenth-Century Life*, Vol. 30, No. 3 (2006): 107-34.

Social insects could also be thought of in terms of community, as a group of individuals working for a common good. In contrast, butterflies are asocial insects that fly from one flower to the next, drawing for their own nourishment, rather than as a contribution for a larger social body. It is easy to paint analogies to the elite classes and nobility of the mid-eighteenth century who were viewed by many as parasitic and characterized as idly flitting about in search of amorous encounters.<sup>74</sup> Not surprisingly, the fourth edition of the *Dictionnaire de l'Académie française* from 1762 figuratively defined *un papillon* as a man drawn to run recklessly after trifles. In short, there was a social side of entomology that would have operated as a codified language of its own, within which butterflies were rife with meaning. In the following section, I wish to explore how the *papillonneries* could act as an extension of the social discourse of entomology and the ways in which their images would have served as “accomplices” in practices of salon humor.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> For recent studies and reassessments on the aristocracy and nobility of eighteenth-century France See William Doyle, *Aristocracy and Its Enemies in the Age of Revolution* (Oxford University Press, 2009) and Jay Smith, ed. *The French Nobility in the Eighteenth Century: Reassessments and New Approaches* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2006).

<sup>75</sup> Hellman, “Interior Motives.”

## ***Le Duel: Play, Humor, and Social Order***

As noted in the introduction, the etymology of the verb *papillonner* is rooted with a sense of play, a lightness in spirit and a joy in the frivolous. These associations would have been familiar to the salon participant, and may have been drawn upon in the practices of humor in elite interiors. To support this point, I wish to turn to one of the etchings pictured on the Sèvres porcelain teacup, *Le Duel*, as it provides a reference for the theme of play activated through salon sociability. Within an arabesque frame, two sword-wielding butterflies engage in a duel (Fig. 3). The combat takes place on a platform and base comprised of turf, bark and curving supports that are overgrown with moss, vines, lichens and other foliage. An elaborate canopy inexplicably balances on tenuous vertical supports, providing a trembling arbor-like architectural backdrop to the scene. Flowers and leaves spring from the arches of the interlaced trellis frame, and garlands and vines drape the various surfaces. Combining elements of nature and design, the setting is simultaneously constructed by flora and fauna as well as elements of decorated interiors, including ornament folding screens to the left and right of the middle ground, bowed structural elements carved to resemble modified seedpods, a length of floral patterned tapestry wound through them, and a ceiling medallion. Despite the asymmetry of the ornamental details, the overall form of composition is symmetrical, and figures and objects are mirrored along a central vertical axis.<sup>76</sup> This axis is intersected by the horizontal platform, which serves as the field of honor for the duel. The butterfly to the left carries out the attack. He lunges at his larger opponent to the right who deflects with a stylish parry. The fencing butterflies are flanked on both sides by their “seconds,” who witness the unfolding drama from an elevated view on ladder-like vertical elements. Arms and legs crossed, the second on the left intently watches and the

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<sup>76</sup> For a discussion of the use of symmetry as a means of controlling visual play in rococo decorative panels, see Jennifer Milam “Miming Play” in *Performing the “Everyday”*: *The Culture of Genre in the Eighteenth Century* (Cranbury: Associated University Presses, 2007), 49.

one on the right gestures towards the action below. Further to the right an additional butterfly spectator, possibly a mutual love interest, peers over the top edge of the folding screen.

At first glance *Le Duel* is entertaining. In the spirit of the ludic, the playful imagery amuses the viewer. Not only does the formal language of the composition provide a kind of visual play, but butterflies masquerade as humans and compete in a game of swordplay. This theme of play persists throughout the *papillonneries* suites. Several of the etchings draw upon familiar motifs of eighteenth-century elite leisure, such as *Le Damier*, in which two butterflies engage in a game of checkers (Fig. 4).<sup>77</sup> Likewise, one of the preparatory designs, *Le Bascule*, depicts two butterflies riding a seesaw while another stands at its center flying a kite, and two more build a house of cards in the foreground. And, as depicted on the Sèvres cup and saucer, butterflies play as characters of the *Théâtre Italien* and *Théâtre Français*.<sup>78</sup> While “playfulness” is familiar idiomatic territory of rococo studies, particularly in terms of its apparent “frivolity” within the context of elite leisure, art historian Jennifer Milam has addressed the various ways in which rococo visual representation engaged their beholder’s imagination in a “state of play.” Milam has demonstrated that these seemingly “frivolous” viewing experiences have surprising affinities with the doctrinal aesthetic theories of the Enlightenment.<sup>79</sup> Within this context, the butterflies of the *papillonneries* can exemplify the rococo creative viewing experience; as metamorphic insects that transmutate from egg to caterpillar to pupa to butterfly, their very

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<sup>77</sup> Worthy of note, this particular etching is sometimes also referred to as *Les jouers des dames* (Mauriès, 68).

<sup>78</sup> Fittingly, the *Encyclopedie* describes a card game from the period called *le jeu de papillon* (the game of the butterfly). See *le jeu de papillon* from the *Encyclopédie ou Dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers, par une Société de Gens de lettres* (1751-1772), 11: 876.

<sup>79</sup> See Jennifer Milam, *Fragonard’s Playful Paintings: Visual Games in Rococo Art* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2006) and “Play Between Disciplines: The Problem of the Ludic in Rococo Art and Enlightenment Culture” in *The Interdisciplinary Century: Tensions and Convergences in 18th-Century Art, History and Literature* (Oxford: The Voltaire Foundation, 2003), 102-13. For “Imagination,” see Mary Sheriff, “Decorating Knowledge,” 15-36.

transformative nature lends imagination and invention.<sup>80</sup> These images would have been further animated by the games of wit and instances of satire in salon spaces that also shared a language of the Enlightenment.

The salons were the primary venue for the *jeux d'esprit and bon mots* of the eighteenth century, or the exercise of conversation in which participants employed a codified language of wit to demonstrate a command of diverse realms of cultural knowledge, including philosophy, literature, and the sciences.<sup>81</sup> As such, the pursuit of noble leisure was what might be called a virtual vocation. As demonstrated in the 1996 film *Ridicule*, proficiency in the manners of wit could work to elevate one's status and visibility in society, while a *gaucherie* could be ruinous. The rigors of leisure are evident in many of the *papillonneries*; a butterfly primps at her toilette, fashioning her elite appearance and feminine charm, butterflies perform on stage, and another balances atop a rope strung between nature and artifice, exemplified by the Louis XV style chair. Returning to *Le Duel*, the clash of swords may be interpreted as a sort of clash of wits. These are not aimless jabs, but each parry is a carefully choreographed repartee in a struggle to obtain "satisfaction."

Animals have long been used as a comical and metaphorical strategy for communicating social and political commentary. Aesop's fables and la Fontaine's seventeenth century reinterpretations, as well as the story of Psyche, the myth of the beautiful love of cupid sometimes pictured as or with butterflies, were well-known amongst early modern courts, often

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<sup>80</sup> For one take on metamorphosis in rococo ornament see Mary Sheriff, "Seeing Metamorphosis in Sculpture and the Decorative Arts" in *Taking Shape: Finding Sculpture in the Decorative Arts* (Los Angeles: Getty Publications, 2009), 156-65.

<sup>81</sup> According to the first edition of the *Dictionnaire de l'Académie française* (1694), "On appelle jeux d'esprit, des productions d'esprit qui ont plus de gentillesse que de solidité, comme les anagrammes, les énigmes, les bouts-rimés," and the fourth edition (1762) adds: "On appelle jeux d'esprit, certains petits jeux où l'on joue quelquefois, & qui demandent quelque facilité, quelque agrément d'esprit."

appearing in decorative programs, and are an obvious precedent to the butterfly images.<sup>82</sup> In a similar vein, there was a general knowledge of entomology among the educated elite of the eighteenth century, who would have been able to identify both the literal and figurative associations with the *papillonneries*. For example, in *Théâtre Italien*, Charles-Germain depicts three recognizable characters from the *Comédie Italienne*, Pierrot, Harlequin, and Scapin, respectively (Fig. 5). Pictured in the center and identifiable by his signature checkered costume, Harlequin references an actual butterfly type, albeit one less stylized in reality. Coincidence, maybe, but it is tempting to posit that, considering the popularity in amateur entomology, Charles-Germain drew from a then recognizable language of Lepidoptera, transforming actual specimens into amusing reinterpretations, and thereby inviting viewers to play a game using visual or verbal clues. Likewise, belonging to the same vertical suite, *Théâtre Français* provides, perhaps, the counterpart to *Théâtre Italien*, a subtle reference to the recent *Querelle des Buffons*, or war between the two rival musical and literary traditions (1752-1754) (Fig. 6).<sup>83</sup> This battle of pamphlets was fought between persons of letters, including Rousseau, D'Alembert and Diderot, and its ostensibly cultural, and more subtly social-political implications, were surely debated and discussed in salon spaces. Indeed, rivalry abounds throughout the images. In *Le Damier*, or *Les Joueurs de dames*, two butterflies compete in a game of checkers. Likewise, *Théâtre-Français*, alternatively titled, *Le papillon jaloux*, depicts a scene in which one butterfly dramatically holds

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<sup>82</sup> See Katie Scott, *The Rococo Interior: Decoration of Social Spaces in Early Eighteenth-Century Paris* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1995), 206-22.

<sup>83</sup> On the Querelles des Buffons, see Jolanta T. Pekacz, "Gender as a Political Orientation: Parisian Salonnières and the *Querelles des Buffons*" in *Symbols, Myths & Images of the French Revolution*, Ian Germain & Robin Swales, eds. (Regina: Canadian Plains Research Center, 1998); Maurice Barthélemy, "L'opéra-comique des origins a la Querelle des Bouffons" in *L'opéra-comique en France au XVIIIe siècle*, ed. Philippe Vendrix (Liege, 1992), 8-78; Servando Sacaluga, "Diderot, Rousseau et la querelle musicale de 1752; Nouvelle mise au pint," *Diderot Studies* 10 (1968): 133-73; John N. Pappas, "D'Alembert et la Querelle des Bouffons," *Revue d'histoire littéraire de la France* 65 (1965): 479-84; James H. Johnson, "The Encyclopedists and the *Querelles des Bouffons*: Reason and the Enlightenment of Sentiment," *Eighteenth-Century Life*, 10, no. 2 (1986): 12-27; *La Querelle des Bouffons*, ed. Denise Launay, 2 vols. (Geneva, 1973).

a dagger above another weeping butterfly kneeling to his right. And, indeed, male butterflies were characterized by their tendency to engage in territorial battles, particularly over matters of the opposite sex—as we have seen in *Le Duel*.<sup>84</sup>

Rivalry would have had particular relevancy in the salons during a moment of class reidentification, as wit was a mode by which non-nobles cultivated elite appearance. At the same time, the means could also lead to a humorous end; in this sense, *Le Duel* articulates the “gentle mockery” of salon humor directed towards practices of self-aggrandizement.<sup>85</sup> Dueling, a distinguishing practice of the noble class, epitomized by the distinction *de l'épée* (of the sword), was increasingly emulated by non-nobles throughout the century.<sup>86</sup> And indeed, as an insect whose metamorphosis does not merely alter its exterior appearance, but profoundly changes its type, butterflies would have had a particularly weighty connotation in terms of maintaining the social status quo. Thus, while these duelers seem to announce the subject as a noble one, I would argue that they speak as much to mimicry of the noble class, making a humorous allusion to the social imitation of the elite, and thereby lending an intertextual relationship between image, subject and practice. In this sense, the *papillonneries* express a form of self-referential humor on the vanities of *noblesse*, pointing to the futility of grandeur and the underlying anxieties of changing class relations.

Humorous interpretations are not exhaustive, but rather, the improvisational nature of wit and the diversity of subjects and contexts make possible a variety of permutations. Thus, I offer

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<sup>84</sup> On male spiral flights see Sharman Apt Russell, *An Obsession with Butterflies: our Long Love Affair with a Singular Insect*, (Basic Books, 2004), 81-2.

<sup>85</sup> See description of *raillerie*, in Bendetta Craveri, *The Art of Conversation*, trans. Teresa Waugh (New York: New York Review of Books, 2005), 346-7.

<sup>86</sup> Cited in Michael Kwass, “Big Hair: A Wig History of Eighteenth-Century France” (*The American Historical Review*, 111, June 2006), 631-59.

these observations not as definitive explanation of the *papillonneries*, but instead as potential avenues for rethinking the complex way in which decorative arts, humor, natural history and social discourse are interrelated.<sup>87</sup> The “light spirit” associated with *papillons* does not anchor the images to staid interpretations of elite frivolity, but rather, like the natural history and humor of the period, the decorative series serves as a means of negotiating serious concerns, including the debates on social order.

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<sup>87</sup> For a recent study on the interchanges between ornament and knowledge, specifically, the *Encyclopédie*, see Sheriff, “Decorating Knowledge,” 15-36.

## Transforming *La Toilette*: Fashion and the Culture of Appearances

A different etching from the series, *La Toilette*, reveals another social thread woven into the prints, that is, fashion and the culture of appearances (Fig. 7).<sup>88</sup> As the *dessinateur du Roi pour le costume*, or designer of King Louis XV's wardrobe, -Germain de Saint-Aubin's professional and artistic endeavors are inextricably tangled with practices of elite fashion.<sup>89</sup> Indeed, the production and distribution of the etchings coincided with the Paris fashion boom of the mid-century, a period of dramatically increased luxury consumption across socio-economic classes.<sup>90</sup> As the author of *l'Art du brodeur*, Charles-Germain quite literally wrote the book on French fabric design, and indeed, considering the vogue for embroidered designs on mid-eighteenth century clothing, one may imagine how the *papillonneries* could have been sourced for the embellishment of modish silks, such as brocade, damask, satin, velvet and twill.<sup>91</sup> Although no extant examples of garments decorated with images from the suites are known, their non-specific ornament print format, available to any manufacturer or private consumer, would

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<sup>88</sup> The seminal text for eighteenth century French fashion is Daniel Roche, *The Culture of Clothing: Dress and Fashion in the 'Ancien Regime'*, Jean Birrell, trans. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), in which he asserts that close study of fashion consumption during what he terms the "sartorial Ancien Regime" makes visible the changing social experience in eighteenth-century France. Other available sources on fashion of the period include, Madeleine Delpierre, *Dress in France in the Eighteenth Century*, trans. Caroline Beamish (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1997) and Aileen Ribeiro *Dress in Eighteenth Century Europe: 1715-1789* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2002).

<sup>89</sup> In reality this title was less an official appointment than a self-entitlement by the artist. Nevertheless, Charles-Germain was hired as a designer for the royal court, initially by contract with Dufourney. Jones and Carey, "Introduction" in *The Saint Aubin 'Livre de caricatures'*, 9.

<sup>90</sup> The fashion boom was related to the consumer revolution of the eighteenth century. See Kwass, 631-59 and "Ordering the World of Goods: Consumer Revolution and the Classification of Objects in Eighteenth-Century France," *Representations*, 82, Spring, (2003), 87-111. See also, Maxine Berg and Elizabeth Eger, eds., *Luxury in the Eighteenth Century: Debates, Desires, and Delectable Goods* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003).

<sup>91</sup> *L'Art du brodeur* begins with an international history of the art of embroidery, positioning eighteenth-century French production at its cultural apogee (and thereby Charles-Germain as the nation's leading artist). As previously noted, this short treatise was part of an effort to elevate embroidery to the level of fine art. See Nikki Scheuer, trans. *Art of the Embroiderer*. On eighteenth-century embroidery, see Delpierre, *Dress in France in the Eighteenth Century*, 48-57.

have enabled them to be incorporated in diverse media and configurations.<sup>92</sup> While the only known application of the designs is the Sèvres porcelain, it may be assumed that the *papillonneries* were also intended to be used at the other major luxury manufactories in France, including tapestry and silk factories, where clients would visit and select designs from pattern books.<sup>93</sup> At the very least, they quite plainly exhibit visible connections to Charles-Germain's career in fashion design, especially as the patterns and textures of the wings of the butterflies lend comparison to his extensive embroidery work.<sup>94</sup>

Before developing my analysis on fashion, it is important to reiterate that the monochromaticity of the prints makes it easy to underestimate the colors that would have enlivened their designs. Butterflies, an insect celebrated for their splendid shimmering and variegated hues, were omnipresent in the eighteenth century—whether in gardens, collectors' cabinets, or as decorative patterns on fabrics and *objet d'art*.<sup>95</sup> In keeping with the colorful aesthetics characteristic of eighteenth-century décor, the media Charles-Germain's designs may

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<sup>92</sup> Delpierre, *Dress in France in the Eighteenth Century*, 53. Much has been documented on the rapid turnover of fashions in mid-eighteenth-century Paris, and the subsequent rejection of elite fashion in the years surrounding the Revolution, so it is reasonable to assume that examples of this kind would not have been preserved. Specifically, Lyon was the center of silk manufacture during the eighteenth century, but their designs and fabric samples were destroyed with the events of the Revolution.

<sup>93</sup> In a slightly later treatise on silk, Joubert de l'Hiberderie, designer and merchant manufacturer, advised designers of silk to look to various sources of inspiration in Paris and surrounding regions, including butterflies at the Jardin des Plantes. See William H. Sewell Jr., "The Empire of Fashion and the Rise of Capitalism in Eighteenth-Century France," *Past & Present* (2010): 81-120 and L.E. Miller, "Representing silk design: Nicholas Joubert de L'Hiberderie and Le dessinateur pour les étoffes d'or, d'argent et de soie," *Journal of Design History*, 17, 1, (2004): 29-53.

<sup>94</sup> Indeed, three chapters of the recent SVEC volume of the *Livre de caricatures* are dedicated to the connection between Charles-Germain's drawings and fashion. See Aileen Ribeiro, "Fashioning the feminine" (233-48), Kimberly Chrisman-Campbell, "Costume books and fashion plates" (249-60) and Juliet Carey, "The king and his embroiderer" (261-82).

<sup>95</sup> Insects had an even more literal connection to color in Europe during this time, as many dyes for fabrics came from specimens collected from colonial holdings. See Michael Taussing, *What Color is the Sacred?* (The University of Chicago Press, 2009).

have appeared on would have exhibited brilliant colors, similar to the later Sèvres porcelain tea cup and saucer. Color was indeed a significant part of eighteenth-century fashion; garments, including the court costumes designed by Charles-Germain, were vibrantly dyed with pigments and embroidered with gold, silver, or multi-colored threads. Further, and as penned in more recent years by author Vladimir Nabokov, butterfly wings make easy comparison to colorful fabrics, such as silk, satin, and velvet.<sup>96</sup>

The connection between the etchings and fashion is most evident in *La Toilette*, in which the individual butterfly wings resemble delicately embroidered silk and lace. The subject of this print, a toilette scene—the quintessential image of cultivating appearances in eighteenth-century France—also prompts a consideration of fashion. The image of the toilette, by the eighteenth century a social event of staged self-adornment, was very much à la mode in the visual culture of the period. Most famously executed by artist François Boucher,<sup>97</sup> but found in many other examples, toilette scenes typically depict a lady or goddess being ‘fixed up’ in her boudoir, all while being called on by guests, usually including an abbé, maid, merchant, or tailor (*tailleur de corps*).<sup>98</sup> Charles-Germain’s *La Toilette* employs the standard format of this genre, yet frames

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<sup>96</sup> Nabokov, himself a serious lepidopterist, described butterflies as “shimmering satin,” “silky little creature[s]” (103), and “velvety black” (110). He also describes chrysalids as “jewels of nature” (98). See Vladimir Nabokov, “The Aurelian” in *Nabokov’s Dozen: a collection of thirteen stories* (New York: Avon Books, 1973 [c.1958]). Considering that silk was a major luxury industry in eighteenth-century France, one can make the connection between silk worms, a species of Lepidoptera, and fashion. Tours was the oldest silk center, but was eclipsed by industry in Lyon, and Paris had some silk workshops. See Delpierre, *Dress in France in the Eighteenth Century*, 49-52.

<sup>97</sup> Worth noting, François Boucher was not just a painter, but the head of the Beauvais tapestry factory in the mid-century, dedicating much of his career to fabric design.

<sup>98</sup> For recent studies on representations of women at their toilette see Melissa Hyde, *Making up the Rococo: François Boucher and His Critics* (Los Angeles: Getty Publications, 2006) and Kimberly Chrisman-Campbell, “Dressing to Impress: The Morning Toilette and the Fabrication of Femininity” in *Paris: Life & Luxury in the Eighteenth-Century*, ed. by Charissa Bremer-David (Los Angeles: Getty Publications, 2011), 53-74.

the very artificial subject with sinuous organic arabesque elements typical of the rococo decorative lexicon. Similar to *Le Duel*, this particular design consists of an individual vignette staged upon a floating platform framed by fantastic swirling architecture with swags of flowers. The composition of *La Toilette* is more asymmetrical than that of *Le Duel*: the overhanging canopy springs from curvilinear supports on the right side, and the main scene takes place in the right middle ground. The episode depicts three butterflies surrounding an ornate *service de toilette*, consisting of a covered table, a mounted or silver mirror, two candle sticks, pins, ribbons, combs and a hair parter (*gravoir*), and various boxes and containers for cosmetics. They are framed on the left by an ornamental folding screen, then very much in vogue, and underfoot by a ruffled fringed tapestry. Characteristic of Boucher's contemporary images, such as *Woman Fastening Her Garter*, the setting is in *beau désordre*: the floor in front of the toilette is strewn with accessories and beauty tools, including a parasol, a basket of ribbons, flowers and hats, boxes, including one holding four sealed bottles, likely containing perfumes, and a stylized bidet pictured to the left (an eighteenth-century invention). At the table, one butterfly sits in front of the looking glass having its hair styled by a *friseur* standing to its left, while an *abbé* sits at the table's rightmost corner, ostensibly reading a book. A smaller winged insect dangles from a garland hanging from the top right, heating a curling iron with a magnifying glass—a playfully ironic twist of fate imagined by the author.

As previously noted, throughout much of the eighteenth century, images of the toilette appeared in figurative and decorative arts, and much has been written on the cultural practice and its accompanying contemporary criticism.<sup>99</sup> Although the composition of Charles-Germain's

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<sup>99</sup> Kimberly Chrisman-Campbell, "Dressing to Impress: The Morning Toilette and the Fabrication of Femininity," 53-74; Melissa Hyde, *Making up the Rococo*; Prologue: "The Morning Toilette" in Jennifer M. Jones, *Sexing La Mode: Gender, Fashion and Commercial Culture in Old Regime France* (Oxford & New York: Berg, 2004), xv-xvii. In reference to the album of caricatures, see Aileen Ribeiro, "Fashioning the feminine" in *The Saint-Aubin Livre de caricatures*, 233-48.

rendition resembles other images of the same theme, it is singular in its use of entomological subjects. This is not, however, the only example in which animals have taken the place of humans in toilette scenes. As previously noted, Christophe Huet's wall painting in the Petite Singerie at Chantilly replaces a human cast with monkeys. While many comparisons may be drawn between Huet and Charles-Germain's non-human actors, particularly in light to the ways in which animal imitators frame social practice in a playfully mocking manner, I suggest that, as metamorphic beings, the butterflies bring an alternative dimension to the image of the toilette, and thereby contribute to my greater exploration of the mutually constitutive social and material practices of elite interiors.<sup>100</sup> The toilette, itself a place of physical transformation, and a new favorite domestic space for luxury consumption and social meetings, epitomizes the site for exchanges with ornamented *objets d'art*.<sup>101</sup> Significantly, as design models intended to be transferred and reinterpreted into new object forms, the etchings for ornament themselves were fundamentally metamorphic. Fittingly, then, butterflies and fashion were also caught up in a world of changing appearances. In the following paragraphs I endeavor to demonstrate that engaging with *La Toilette* in terms of the transmutative nature of butterflies lends a crucial lens for accessing multiple levels of interpretation, including those tied to gender, consumer culture, and class relations.

Several art historians have commented on the ways in which the morning toilette evolved into a semi-public "ritual performance" in the eighteenth century.<sup>102</sup> Originating from the ceremony of the *levée*, or, *lever* (rising), popularized during the reign of King Louis XIV, in

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<sup>100</sup> Monkeys, too, had a host of individual associations in early modern Europe, and often signified lasciviousness. For a recent overview of the subject, see Nicole Garnier-Pelle, 2011.

<sup>101</sup> DeJean, "A New Interiority," 42-3.

<sup>102</sup> See Chrisman-Campbell, "Dressing to Impress," 53; Hyde, *Making up the Rococo*, and Hellman, "Interior Motives," 15-23.

which members of the court would attend the king or queen's dressing, by the mid-eighteenth century, the toilette became a privilege practiced across classes in Paris, albeit in varying degrees. The majority of secondary literature on the toilette links it to issues of gender, particularly in relation to the critique of female luxury consumption and the feminization of fashion in the second half of the eighteenth-century.<sup>103</sup> One need not look far for eighteenth-century satire on the subject of women at the toilette: a drawing by a member of the Saint-Aubin family depicts Madame du Pompadour as a monkey applying ointment to her "lips" (Fig. 8).<sup>104</sup> Men do, however, also enter the discourse--and certainly the satire--of the toilette and fashion, most commonly in literature on British caricatures of foppish French men (derisively referred to as macaronis in England).<sup>105</sup> Indeed, similar to a slightly later image of a man at his toilette by Jean-Michel Moreau le Jeune,<sup>106</sup> the decidedly ungendered butterfly of Charles-Germain's etching speaks to the metaphoric practice: men too wore lace, colored silks, cosmetics, perfume, jewelry, wigs and had their hair curled.<sup>107</sup> Appropriately, the toilette was a place of alteration,

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<sup>103</sup> On the female gendering of consumption, see Jennifer Jones, Part II: "La Ville: Clothing and Consumption in a Society of Taste" in *Sexing La Mode*, 71-210; Elizabeth Kowaleski-Wallace, *Consuming Subjects: Women, Shopping and Business in the Eighteenth Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), and Hyde, *Making up the Rococo*.

<sup>104</sup> This drawing was unpublished and would have only been seen by the close circle of the Saint-Aubin family, permitting a more explicitly critical stance on the fashionable practice.

<sup>105</sup> There are some publications on the subject, but these are dominated by studies of British caricature of the French. On eighteenth century fashion caricature, particularly by British artists, see Diana Donald, *Followers of Fashion: Graphic Satires from the Georgian Period* (London: National Touring Exhibitions, 2001) and *The Age of Caricature: Satirical prints in the Reign of George III* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1996), Chapter 3. On cross-channel fashion relations see, Ribeiro, *The Art of Dress: Fashion in England and France, 1750 to 1820* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1995), 35-9. For a more recent reassessment of issues of French masculinity in the eighteenth century, see *French Masculinities: History Culture and Politics*, Christopher E. Forth & Hertrand Taithe, eds. (Hampshire: Palgrave MacMillan, 2007). For a broader reevaluation of French caricature, see *The Efflorescence of Caricature*, Todd Porterfield, ed., (Farnham, Surrey; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2010).

<sup>106</sup> The particular engraving referenced was executed by P.S. Martini from original drawing by Jean-Michel Moreau le Jeune as part of a series published in two groups of twelve plates in 1777 and 1783 entitled, 'pour servir à l'histoire des Modes et du Costume en France, dans le dix-huitième Siècle.'

<sup>107</sup> See Anne C. Vila, "Elite Masculinities in Eighteenth-century France," *French Masculinities: History Culture and Politics*, Christopher E. Forth & Hertrand Taithe, eds. (Hampshire: Palgrave MacMillan, 2007) and Jennifer Jones,

and indeed, through the application of makeup and costume, gender boundaries became less stable. While there are undeniable differences in male and female eighteenth-century fashion rituals, rather than contributing to the discourse of the toilette on one end of the gender spectrum, for the purposes of my study, I consider it here in terms of transmutability for either gender--as a more lateral practice.<sup>108</sup> By replacing the gendered human subject with an insect without any clear sexual marker, *La Toilette* destabilizes any gender fixity, illuminating the instability of the practice and its representation.

Beyond gender, *La Toilette* signals an overall unfixity to the entire institution of eighteenth-century fashion, including notions of class distinction. In her recent publication, “Dressing to Impress: the Morning Toilette and the Fabrication of Femininity,” art historian Kimberly Chrisman-Campbell addresses the codified rituals of the toilette, arguing that the practice of self-fashioning was a means of exhibiting outward signs of rank for elite ladies.<sup>109</sup> Indeed, the image of a butterfly in Charles-Germain’s *La Toilette* immediately brings to mind the much-documented frippery of the aristocracy. Butterflies, an insect particularly noteworthy for their strikingly variegated wings, make for an apt metaphor for the cultural elite, who most commonly wore rich colors, patterns and materials. In a more recent article, Chrisman-Campbell describes an embroidered Revolutionary waistcoat (*gilet*) from the end of the century likely owned by a converted nobleman that depicts butterfly images on its lapels. On the right

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*Sexing la Mode*, 3. Jones points out that the mid-century was a specific moment where the relationship to fashion, as well as notions of biological difference, between men and women was less diametrically opposed in the mid century but shifted over the course of the eighteenth century. She links the ungendering of fashion of the first-half of the eighteenth century to the model of the preceding century, where it was a means to distinguish aristocratic station, rather than sexual difference.

<sup>108</sup> Indeed, Jennifer Jones demonstrates that there was a conceptual “transformation” after the mid-century in which the notion of the effeminate was increasingly linked to fashion. See Part I: “*La Cour*: Absolutism and Appearance,” in *Sexing la Mode*, 7-47.

<sup>109</sup> Chrisman-Campbell, “Dressing to Impress,” 53-71. This particular aspect of Chrisman-Campbell’s chapter is influenced by the work of Mimi Hellman.

lapel, a butterfly is shown having its wings clipped off by a large pair of scissors, returning it to its previous undecorated caterpillar state (pictured on the left lapel). A reverse metamorphosis of sorts, this design was intended to represent a throwing off of aristocratic decadence in favor of Revolutionary values.<sup>110</sup> Crucially, this example provides material evidence that for an eighteenth-century audience, butterfly wings were likened to luxury fashion. Bearing this in mind, I argue that butterfly wings are a marker of eighteenth-century adornment, and in turn, fashion was a living form of ornament.

Much like Charles-Germain's prints, every pair of butterfly wings are unique, exhibiting different shapes, patterns, complexity and scale—class and wealth differences did take different fashionable forms. And indeed, a cursory scan through Moses Harris' *The Aurelian* (1766) provides a total social spectrum of Lepidoptera, ranging from lackey moths to monarch and emperor butterflies.<sup>111</sup> For the cultural elite, fashion was a means of affirming grandeur and status. For the aspiring middle classes, however, fashion, like the butterfly wings themselves, had a mobilizing function, allowing social and economic maneuvering.<sup>112</sup> And, worth noting, butterflies are a species that employ mimicry, or the imitation of characteristics of another species, at both their larvae and adult stages. In his seminal text on eighteenth-century fashion, Daniel Roche explains, "Fashion acted as the symbolic stake in the battle of appearances in a

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<sup>110</sup> Chrisman-Campbell points out, however, that although fashion was an important medium for expressing political identity, the nobleman may have been giving a false pretense.

<sup>111</sup> See Harris, 1766.

<sup>112</sup> Recently, historian Michael Kwass has warned of over-subscribing to Nobert Elias' "emulation theory" for studies of eighteenth-century consumer culture.<sup>112</sup> He writes, "It is not so much that the emulation thesis is wrong per se, critics argue, but that in light of the plurality of meanings that consumers attribute to possessions, the thesis is insufficient. In addition to social identity, goods communicate messages about sexuality, nationalism, ethnicity, and individual identity; they trigger memory, mark stages in the life cycle, and bestow special meaning on particular rituals and ceremonies" (28). Heeding this advice, I wish to expand, rather than limit ways of thinking about class and fashion in the eighteenth century: rather than simple emulation, I suggest that fashion was a forum that all classes could simultaneously participate.

society in which the distribution and diffusion of wealth was changing, permitting a greater or lesser social mobility. It was an issue for the nobility as well as the bourgeoisie, for the elites as well as those who had not yet arrived.<sup>113</sup> Although differences in luxury consumption existed, and a certain observance of established social order was followed, eighteenth-century fashion was a phenomenon that in many ways transcended class lines, particularly at a moment of waning sumptuary law.<sup>114</sup> While the goal of both moralists' critiques of bourgeois luxury and the ridicule by the elite was to maintain dress according to rank, exceptions did occur, and members of the lower class were sometimes able to infiltrate polite society through fashion, deportment, and conversation.<sup>115</sup> As such, I suggest that fashion, as a form ornamenting the self, did not have a passive decorative function, but rather was an active and dynamic social agent.

In French, as in English, the noun *le costume* not only refers to dress characteristic of a particular style, but also to a general assemblage of garments. Simply put, *le costume* was the term for an outfit in the eighteenth century. I highlight this linguistic doubling as it points to the inherent connection between fashion and theatricality in French dress. Likewise, metamorphosis may be thought of in terms of costuming, as a caterpillar may become or, in the case of a moth, don similar habiliments of a butterfly.<sup>116</sup> In a recent chapter, Eric C. Brown makes this connection between Lepidoptera, costuming, and performativity in the seventeenth century,

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<sup>113</sup> Roche, 57.

<sup>114</sup> By the early eighteenth century the wealthy bourgeoisie were no longer subject to the sumptuary laws of formed in the previous decade under the auspices of Colbert, largely as a means of combating foreign competition. Even while they were active, sumptuary laws were rarely strictly observed, including the final decree of 1704. See Chapter XIX: "Dress and Fashions" in Paul Lacroix, *The Eighteenth Century: Its Institutions, Customs, and Costumes* (New York: Scribner, Welford and Armstrong, 1876).

<sup>115</sup>The most common means of which was profitable marriage. See Aileen Ribeiro, *Dress in Eighteenth-Century Europe*, 165.

<sup>116</sup> Eric C. Brown, "Performing Insects in Shakespeare's *Coriolanus*" in *Insect Poetics*, ed. Eric C. Brown (Minneapolis & London: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), 30.

positing that the transmutation of butterflies came to signify performance itself to the early modern audience, particularly in a cultural context where actual insect shows, such as the flea circus, were common.<sup>117</sup> Drawing from literary examples, Brown illustrates that in the century preceding the publication of the *papillonneries* butterflies were a common metaphor for the ostentatious display of upstart courtiers, citing even King Lear's likening of the court to "gilded butterflies."<sup>118</sup> Jennifer M. Jones makes a similar connection between fashion, performance and costume in the eighteenth century. She writes, "'Backdrop,' and 'foreground,' 'actor' and 'audience,' 'scenery,' 'props,' 'performance' and 'costumes' – these theatrical metaphors permit us to...think about the relationship between the real and the imaginary, the individual and the role, the private person and the public stage, clothing and costume."<sup>119</sup> Fittingly, then, the theme of dissimulation is literally illustrated in *La Toilette*, but also permeates the other images of the two suites.<sup>120</sup> Quite emphatically, *Théâtre Italien* and *Théâtre Français* depict costumed butterflies acting out different roles on stage. A detail of the former includes a mask, an object for obscuring and replacing identity. Likewise, several of the images, including, *Le Bateleur* and *Ballet Champêtre*, take performance as their subject.<sup>121</sup> Furthermore, several of these images include objects of spectacle and deception, including fireworks, instruments, folding screens, cards, and checkers.<sup>122</sup> More subtly, however, all the images employ the visual language of

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<sup>117</sup> Brown, 31.

<sup>118</sup> Cited in Brown, "Performing Insects in Shakespeare's Coriolanus." Brown also draws from *A Quippe for an Upstart Courtier* (1592) in which the player's boys wear butterfly cloaks.

<sup>119</sup> Jennifer Jones, *Sexing la Mode*, xvii.

<sup>120</sup> A point also made by Mark Ledbury in relation to the album of comic drawings. See Mark Ledbury, "Theatrical Life" from "Section III: Sites of Culture" in *The Saint Aubin 'Livre de caricatures,'* 193-214.

<sup>121</sup> See Brown, "Performing Insects in Shakespeare's Coriolanus," 29-57.

<sup>122</sup> Valerie Mainz considers some of these objects, also pictured on the frontispiece of the album of caricatures, to be symbols of follies. See "*Gloire*, subversively" in *The Saint-Aubin 'Livre de caricatures,'* 151-178.

rococo ornament, blending organic and inorganic elements together, suggesting of the refashioning of the natural with the artificial.

Within a “society on display,” fashion was as much about conformity as it was establishing difference.<sup>123</sup> I am less concerned here with matters of class emulation, although the battle of appearances was certainly at the heart of social tensions, but rather wish to consider fashion as a liberating form of ornamentation that encompassed participation across classes and contexts.<sup>124</sup> Roche notes, “Fashion was thus first a point of equilibrium between the collective and the individual, a way of marking the social hierarchy, both fixed and mobile.”<sup>125</sup> Like the wings of Charles-Germain’s butterflies that are never the same, everyone had a different way of *papillonning* in mid-eighteenth-century France.<sup>126</sup> The days at Versailles with King Louis XIV were over—with the reemergence of the aristocracy and nobility in Paris in the in the years following *la Régence*, and the subsequent development of the rococo, came new freedom in expression in all matters of ornament, including dress.<sup>127</sup> The mid-eighteenth century saw a freeing up of clothing styles from the symmetrical and sculptural restraints of the preceding years, to lighter and tighter fitting garments with more experimental use of color, materials, and textures.<sup>128</sup> Likewise, the return of the aristocracy to Paris engendered a new kind of mixing of social classes in the cultural context of the Enlightenment, transforming the consumption of

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<sup>123</sup> Roche, 54.

<sup>124</sup> Roche explains, “Either the aristocratic model speeded up the circulation of signs, causing the ancient clothing code to collapse and the arbitrary reign of fashion to prevail; or a different bourgeois model challenged the imitation of noble habits and imposed a different style of consumption as a way of distinguishing itself from the upper classes; in the name of an egalitarian ideology, which could easily accommodate a variety of appearances” (57).

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*, 48.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*, 55.

<sup>127</sup> See Jennifer Jones, “*La Ville: Clothing and Consumption in a Society of Taste*” in *Sexing la Mode* for an examination of how the new commercial culture in eighteenth-century Paris stimulated a new fashion culture.

<sup>128</sup> Ribeiro, *Dress in eighteenth-century Europe*, 124.

fashionable dress into something men and women in various stations could partake.<sup>129</sup>

Increasingly towards the later part of century, fashion was no longer a privilege reserved to the elite classes, but rather was shared by various sectors of society. For the first time, the eighteenth-century consumer revolution suspended differences of privilege (to some degree). Clothing, fashion publications, cosmetics, and other luxury items reached members of all classes, simultaneously uniting and permitting diverse consumers to self-fashion according to their individual tastes and needs. In this sense, the *papillonneries* highlight the emergence of a new kind of subjectivity through self-ornamentation.

Here it is useful to return to the waistcoat from the French Revolution discussed above. The image on the lapel depicting the severing of butterfly wings highlights the moment where the fluttering of individualizing fashion was arrested. The new Republican principle of *égalité* was perhaps made most visible by the standardization of clothing in the early years of the Revolution, speaking to the power of fashion as a unifying force, even in the absence of ornament.<sup>130</sup> Indeed, the primacy of appearances in *La Toilette*, as well as the other etchings in the *papillonneries* demonstrates the unfixity of fashion, gender, and class in years preceding the conclusion of the *Ancien Régime*. The transmutability of these various threads of discourse

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<sup>129</sup> Jennifer Jones, 73-4. This point is also central in Roche's text.

<sup>130</sup> Dress was a central signifier of politics during the Revolution. The term for militant revolutionaries, *sans culottes*, takes its origins with working class dress, and indeed sartorial extravagance contradicted Republican notions of French patriotism. Artist Jacques-Louis David, for example, helped visualize the new Republican dress, one that would rid of differences to express equality among citizens. Significantly, there was a return to formulating subjectivity through dress following the Terror, in what is referred to as the Directory (1794-1800). In a seminal text on the subject and the later work of David, Ewa Lajer-Burkhardt describes this moment as a cultural crisis of embodiment in which forms of self display, including fashion, worked to produce a new bourgeoisie identity. Specifically, the 1790s saw a surge in male fashion, as well as the emergence of a new brand of femininity. See Chapter 3, Section 6: "Necklines: Directoire Self-Fashioning" in Ewa Lajer-Burkhardt, *Necklines, The Art of Jacques-Louis David after the Terror* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1999), 181-204. For the return of court fashion at the turn of the century, see Madeleine Delpierre, "le retour aux costume de cour sous le Consultat et l'Empire" in *Modes & Revolutions: 1780-1804*, Musée de la mode et du costume (Paris: Editions Paris-Musée, 1989), 33-8. For a survey of the entire scope of the French Revolution, see Aileen Ribeiro, *Fashion in the French Revolution* (New York: Holmes & Meier Publishers, Inc, 1988).

woven through Charles-Germain's designs demonstrates that, contrary to its standard definition, ornament, whether as fashion or *objet d'art*, is not just about surfaces. Rather, ornament functions as an interweaving of histories of interiors, aesthetics, fashion, gender, class, and sociability, providing a more complex and multidimensional engagement with French eighteenth-century culture.

## CONCLUSION:

The goal of this thesis has been to explore the ways in which the engravings in Charles-Germain's *Essai de papillonneries humaines* not only unravel simplistic narratives about eighteenth-century France, but also open up alternative approaches for thinking about ornament and the decorative arts. The *papillonneries* cannot be read solely in terms of their imagery or printed form, but instead require a more nuanced consideration of their material, spatial and intellectual contexts. The *papillonneries* drew from a language of Lepidoptera to communicate both *l'esprit* and the social politics of the upper classes and their designs converge with the cultural history of the Enlightenment, salon sociability, and the consumer revolution.

By reconsidering these templates for ornament in terms of bodily and cerebral engagement, the etchings can be thought of as material actors in cultural activities in salon spaces, contributing to staging of the intellectual and social self. The transformative *papillonneries* encourage a reexamination of the ways issues of class relations, gender, the culture of appearances, salon leisure, and Enlightenment intellectual projects effectively decorated the interior and the body, testifying to the dynamism of eighteenth-century ornament.

The *papillonneries'* meanings cannot be fixed, nor can the etchings simply be inserted in a single historic narrative. Rather, in all their diversity, they testify to a complex intersection between disciplines, raising more questions than answers, and thereby opening up opportunities for further study in the field. As a metamorphic species, butterflies inherently shift in form; the very subject of Charles-Germain's images speaks to the morphology of meanings they solicit.

## FIGURES

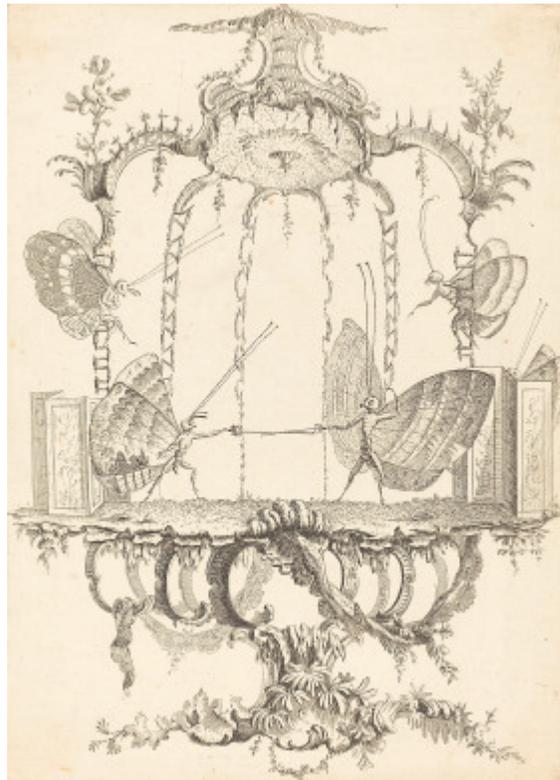
**Fig. 1:** Charles-Germain de Saint-Aubin, *Essai de Papillonneries Humaines*, c. 1756. Etchings in two suites. © National Gallery of Art, The Rosenwald Collection, 1958.8.123-34.



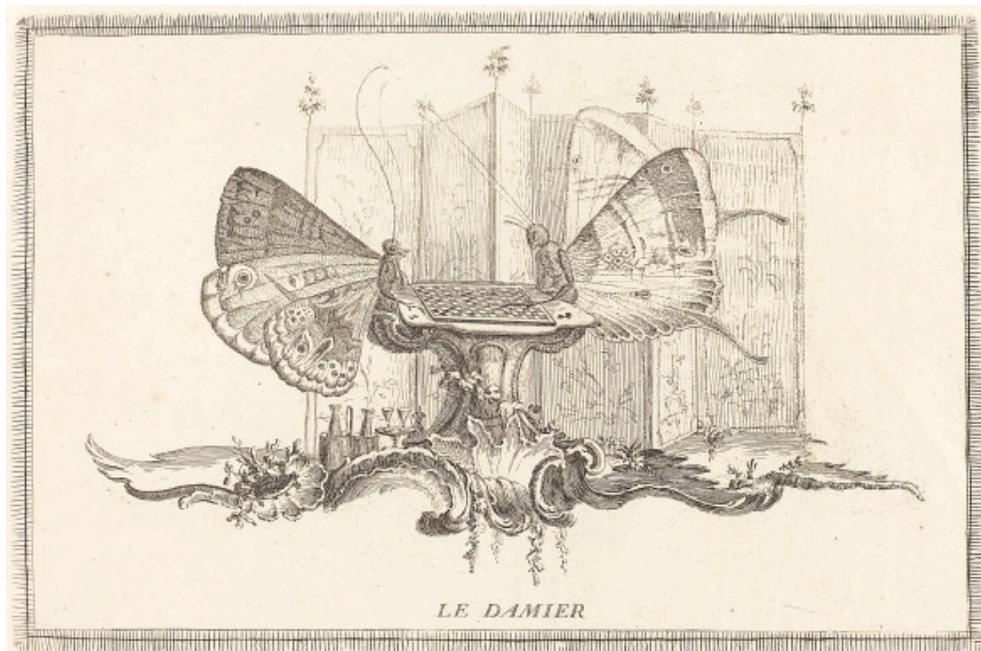
**Fig. 2a & 2b:** Charles-Germain de Saint-Aubin, *Essai de Papillonneries Humaines*: title pages of both suites, c. 1756. Etchings. © National Gallery of Art, The Rosenwald Collection, 1958.8.123 and 1958.8.129.



**Fig. 3:** Charles-Germain de Saint-Aubin, *Essai de Papillonneries Humaines: Le Duel*, c. 1756. Etching, 33.1 x 23.7 cm. © National Gallery of Art, The Rosenwald Collection, 1958.8.132.



**Fig. 4:** Charles-Germain de Saint-Aubin, *Essai de Papillonneries Humaines: Le Damier*, c. 1756. Etching. © National Gallery of Art, The Rosenwald Collection, 1958.8.126.



**Fig. 5:** Charles-Germain de Saint-Aubin, *Essai de Papillonneries Humaines: Théâtre Italien*, c. 1756. Etching, 33 x 24.1 cm. © National Gallery of Art, The Rosenwald Collection, 1958.8.130



**Fig. 6:** Charles-Germain de Saint-Aubin, *Essai de Papillonneries Humaines: Théâtre Français*, c. 1756. Etching, 32.7 x 23.8 cm. © National Gallery of Art, The Rosenwald Collection, 1958.8.133.



**Fig. 7:** Charles-Germain de Saint-Aubin, *Essai de Papillonneries Humaines: La Toilette*, c. 1756. Etching, 33.2 x 23.8 cm. © National Gallery of Art, The Rosenwald Collection, 1958.8.134.



**Fig. 8:** Charles-Germain de Saint-Aubin, *Livre de Caricatures tant Bonnes que mauvaises: Pomade pour les levres*, c 1740-c 1775 {nd}. Watercolour, ink and graphite on paper, 187 x 132mm. Waddesdon Manor, The Rothschild Collection (The National Trust), acc. no. 675.288. Photo: Imaging Services Bodleian Library © The National Trust, Waddesdon Manor.



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