The Consort's Court

Yoko Ono and Madame de Maintenon

Intimate Dependence and Derivative Sovereignty

A critical comparative study based on Frederic Seaman's Lennon memoirs and the Duc de Saint-Simon's Memoirs

Primary-source interpretation • Allegation distinguished from fact
October 2026

Governing thesis

The comparison between Yoko Ono and Madame de Maintenon is not merely a comparison of two "strong women" attached to famous men. That formulation is too vague and too generous to be useful. The precise equivalence is **derivative sovereignty**: the conversion of a central man's intimate dependence into practical jurisdiction over access, expenditure, routine, patronage, and the moral explanation of his conduct.

Within Frederic Seaman's account, Ono does not simply assist John Lennon. She administers him. Within Saint-Simon's account, Maintenon does not simply comfort Louis XIV. She helps govern the conditions under which he governs others. Each woman occupies the space between the great man's self-image and his actual decisions. Each turns intimacy into an institutional position without needing that position to be publicly named. Each is portrayed as making herself indispensable and then using that indispensability as power.

The criticism should be stated without evasion. Seaman's Ono is possessive, fiscally acquisitive, controlling of another adult's social world, and skilled at presenting control as protection. Saint-Simon's Maintenon is a patient intriguer whose piety functions as both personal discipline and political instrument, and whose private access becomes an invisible system of appointments and rewards. But conceptual consistency requires equal severity toward the men. Lennon does not merely suffer maternal authority; in Seaman's narrative he repeatedly purchases safety by surrendering adult initiative. Louis XIV does not merely fall victim to an enchantress; in Saint-Simon's narrative he enjoys being flattered, resists recognizing manipulation, and preserves the exhilarating fiction that he alone decides. The consort's power is real in these accounts, but it is not created out of nothing. It is cultivated inside a vacancy left by the great man's own fear, vanity, exhaustion, or appetite for dependence.

That is the comparison this essay declares and develops. It is an interpretation of two literary-historical portraits, not a clinical judgment about either marriage and not a claim that every allegation made by two interested memoirists is an established fact.

1. Two hostile witnesses and the status of the evidence

The evidential situation is unusually symmetrical. Both portraits come from men who were close enough to observe daily life and interested enough to distort it.

Seaman writes as a former employee who had worked intimately with Lennon and Ono, kept a diary, and later became involved in a bitter conflict over Lennon's journals. His two books, *The Last Days of John Lennon* and *John Lennon: Living on Borrowed Time*, are substantially parallel versions of one author's account. They cannot be cited as two independent confirmations. His proximity gives him access to domestic detail; his subsequent grievances give him a reason to organize that detail into a prosecution. His own framing makes the book part testimony and part brief for the narrator.[1]

Saint-Simon likewise writes as participant, observer, gossip collector, and aristocratic polemicist. The Introduction to his *Memoirs* quotes his refusal to claim impartiality. His great subject is precedence: who ranks above whom, who receives favors, who has been improperly elevated, and who governs without legitimate title. Maintenon—socially obscure, secretly married, and immensely influential—is almost perfectly designed to offend him. His portrait is evidence of her position at court, but it is also

evidence of the court's class resentment and of Saint-Simon's appetite for exposing hidden mechanisms behind public reverence.[2]

These limitations do not require critical paralysis. They require attribution and consistency. When Seaman says Ono took Lennon "out of public circulation," that is Seaman's interpretation. When he reports that she instructed him to screen calls and to consult her about Lennon's dealings with the outside world, that is a reported household instruction. When Saint-Simon calls Maintenon an "incredible enchantress," that is polemical characterization. When he describes ministers working with the King in her rooms and coordinating candidates with her in advance, that is his account of an administrative routine. The analytical value lies in comparing patterns across such scenes, not in swallowing either narrator's adjectives.

The distinction matters because both writers convert ambiguity into essence with suspicious ease. Seaman moves from episodes of control to the sweeping claim that without Lennon, Ono would be merely "an eccentric lady with no money and no power." Saint-Simon moves from Maintenon's social skills and difficult early life to a theory that necessity made her false and intrigue habitual. These are not neutral conclusions. They are character sentences imposed by narrators who believe they have discovered the whole person. This essay rejects that pretension while taking their reported mechanisms seriously.

A final evidentiary limit concerns scale. Saint-Simon's Maintenon appears in connection with royal appointments, ministers, councils, religious persecution, and dynastic decisions. Seaman's Ono appears principally in a household-business system involving staff, investments, real estate, publicity, and Lennon's personal access. The comparison concerns **form of relational power**, not equivalent responsibility for equivalent historical consequences.

2. Social ascent: insecurity converted into expertise

The biographical parallel begins before either relationship reaches its mature form. Both women are portrayed as learning elite society from positions of dependence. Neither begins as the secure center of the world she later helps administer.

Saint-Simon's Maintenon arrives in France poor and dependent, is made to keep the keys to a granary and measure feed for horses, and enters Paris without money or powerful friends. Marriage to Scarron gives her access to a distinguished intellectual and social circle, but widowhood returns her to precarity. In the houses where she subsequently finds welcome, Saint-Simon says she is often more servant than guest, running errands and remaining at the beck and call of her hosts. Her eventual route to Louis XIV runs through service: she becomes governess to the secret children of the King and Madame de Montespan.[3]

Ono's early history is not documented with comparable biographical depth in Seaman's memoirs, so a point-for-point account of her formation would exceed the source base. What Seaman does provide is a narrative of artistic ambition seeking patronage. He describes her presenting herself to Lennon as an important avant-garde artist in need of support and aggressively pursuing his attention. His version of the reconciliation after the "Lost Weekend" is still more openly accusatory: after her own career disappointments, she works to recover Lennon and then appoints herself his business representative. This is not a dispassionate biography; it is a story of strategic ascent told by a hostile former subordinate.[4]

The equivalence lies not in identical origins but in a learned understanding of **proximity as infrastructure**. Maintenon discovers that a household is not merely a place where one serves; it is a network through which introductions, secrets, obligations, and favors circulate. Seaman's Ono appears to understand the same thing. Studio One is not simply an office. It is the junction of Lennon's money, correspondence, public relations, domestic staffing, property acquisitions, and contact with the outside world. Ono is president of Lennono, and Seaman—though hired as Lennon's assistant—finds that he also becomes her executive secretary by default.[5]

Both women thus move from dependency to administration. The important transformation is not from weakness to celebrity, but from needing access to controlling access. Their knowledge of subordination becomes an executive skill. They know how requests are made, how patrons are soothed, how gatekeepers behave, and how easily a supposedly informal household role can become indispensable.

This interpretation is more critical than a simple social-climbing story. Social climbing names the desire to rise; administrative capture names the ability to reorganize other people around one's position. Saint-Simon credits Maintenon with exactly this ability when he describes her turning a governess's proximity into the King's confidence. Seaman attributes an analogous achievement to Ono when the assistant appointed to "keep John happy" discovers that his reporting obligations run back to her. In both narratives, the woman initially admitted to help manage the great man's intimate life becomes a manager of the people who surround him.

The narrators' class and cultural contempt should not be reproduced. Saint-Simon's emphasis on Maintenon's former service is saturated with aristocratic disdain; Seaman's treatment of Ono's artistic ambitions is often sneering rather than analytical. Yet removing the snobbery does not dissolve the structure. On the contrary, it clarifies the achievement: each woman learns to operate a system whose insiders imagined that birth, genius, rank, or fame—not administrative competence—was the only legitimate source of authority.

3. Fame and monarchy: the asset at the center

The analogy between Lennon's fame and Louis XIV's power must be declared precisely. Lennon cannot command armies, confer legal rank, or determine the succession of states. Louis XIV's authority is not a larger version of celebrity. Nevertheless, both men possess an asset that other people seek to approach, borrow, spend, interpret, or manage. In that restricted sense, their positions are structurally comparable.

Louis's asset is sovereign authority embodied in his person. Access to him can mean access to offices, pensions, favors, marriages, and decisions. Maintenon's rooms become politically important because the King works there. Saint-Simon reports that councils concerning the Spanish succession met in her apartments and that the King required her opinion after others had spoken. The location is domestic and intimate; the business is dynastic.[6]

Lennon's asset is symbolic and economic capital accumulated through the Beatles and his solo career. His name attracts fans, journalists, merchants, musicians, supplicants, and staff. Even in seclusion, press clippings and fan mail continue to arrive. His withdrawal does not abolish demand for access; it can intensify its scarcity. Seaman has Lennon articulate the principle himself in a chess metaphor: "I'm the king," Seaman's knight must protect him from pawns, and "the less I'm seen, the more power

I have." The sentence is almost too perfect for the present comparison, and as reconstructed dialogue it should be treated cautiously. But the economic logic is clear: visibility is spent, while controlled scarcity preserves mystique.[7]

Ono's reported authority operates on this asset. She manages the business attached to Lennon's name, supervises his contact with others, and participates in the presentation of their marriage to the media. Maintenon's authority operates on Louis's asset in a more consequential register. She is near the point where private inclination can become public appointment. Both women understand that the man's power does not cease to exist because he is tired, withdrawn, or indecisive. Someone will administer its daily expression.

Here the analogy becomes sharply critical of the men. Louis wishes to be absolute and to be spared the burden of recognizing how others prepare his choices. Lennon wishes to remain an elusive sovereign of his own life while delegating the consequences of withdrawal. Each retains the language and ceremony of command. Each also creates opportunities for others to decide in his shadow.

Derivative sovereignty therefore does not mean that the consort secretly possesses all the man's power. It means that she acquires influence over **how that power is encountered**. She may decide which request reaches him, which option appears reasonable, which minister or employee is trusted, which warning feels persuasive, and which decision can be postponed. This is not the power to command everything. It is the power to shape the agenda on which command occurs.

Saint-Simon supplies an excellent limiting formulation when he says Maintenon did nearly all she wished, "but not when or how she wished." Her influence is enormous but neither effortless nor absolute. Seaman's Ono likewise meets resistance: Lennon complains about property decisions made through psychics, sometimes insists on his own plans, and eventually resumes travel and songwriting. The mature comparison is not omnipotent puppet mistress and helpless puppet. It is a struggle over administration between a nominally central figure and the intimate executive who makes centrality workable.

4. "Mother" and the maternal organization of dependence

The most pointed feature of Seaman's portrait is Lennon's reported habit of calling Ono "Mother." The word appears not in a single sentimental scene but in practical contexts. On Seaman's first evening, Lennon says he will ask "Mother" about acquiring a new car. He later says that a possible charitable contribution must be checked "with Mother." He asks whether "Mother" is busy and refers Seaman to "Mother" when household records cannot be found. Seaman also attributes to him the statement that he and Sean are "riding on Mother's good luck" and the still more dependent declaration that, if Mother died first, he would be unable to face life alone.[8]

The cumulative force is greater than the nickname. "Mother" names the person who authorizes purchases, knows where things are, receives reports, controls access, and remains emotionally necessary. Within Seaman's text, it expresses a division of adulthood: Lennon retains genius, fame, wit, and occasional eruptions of will, while Ono occupies the position of the competent, sanctioning parent. The criticism is not that a wife is maternal. It is that the marital relationship, as Seaman constructs it, turns maternal authority into a technique of household government.

Seaman's chapter title "Mother Superior" sharpens the accusation. It fuses maternity with religious hierarchy. Ono is not merely nurturing; she is the superior of a domestic order. Her instructions to

"keep John happy," report unusual behavior, and screen calls suggest surveillance wrapped in care. Her alleged insistence that she must approve Lennon's dealings with the outside world turns protection into prior restraint. When she says, "I'm here to protect him," the statement can be sincere and still function as a justification for control. Protective intent and dominating effect are not mutually exclusive.[9]

Maintenon's maternal dimension is differently constituted. She enters the royal orbit as governess to the King's concealed children. Saint-Simon describes her attachment to the Duc du Maine as that of a nurse and says she pressed the King over his marriage. She also becomes associated with moral education, religious discipline, and the formation of young women at Saint-Cyr. Her authority is maternal in an institutional rather than merely nickname-based sense: she forms, corrects, supervises, and intercedes.[10]

The comparison is therefore not that Louis XIV called Maintenon "Mother." The sources supplied do not establish such a usage, and inventing a verbal parallel would weaken the argument. The equivalence is functional. Both women are portrayed as converting care into jurisdiction. The person who comforts also corrects; the person who protects also supervises; the person who understands the dependent man's needs acquires authority over the circumstances in which those needs are answered.

Yet the dependent man is not simply infantilized by the woman. He participates in the arrangement. Seaman's Lennon seeks Ono out, worries about her availability, and returns to isolation hoping for attention. His maternal language is evidence—if Seaman reported it accurately—of his own relational vocabulary, not merely of her propaganda. Saint-Simon's Louis makes Maintenon necessary through daily habit. After their secret marriage, he spends hours with her every day, lodges near her, works in her rooms, and asks her opinion. The King installs the influence that he later struggles to limit.[11]

This is where conceptual consistency matters most. If Ono's "Mother" role is criticized because it compromises Lennon's autonomy, Lennon's voluntary delegation must also be criticized. If Maintenon's maternal-moral authority is criticized because it enables covert government, Louis's appetite for a partner who reconciles intimacy, conscience, and routine must also be criticized. The woman's power does not cancel the man's agency. It reveals the form in which he has chosen to exercise, or avoid exercising, that agency.

There is also a cruel asymmetry in the two narrators. Male dependence is treated as tragic or ridiculous; female indispensability is treated as sinister. Seaman's Lennon is a prisoner who has committed himself voluntarily, but Ono remains the possessor who holds the key. Saint-Simon's Louis is duped, but Maintenon remains the enchantress. A consistent reading rejects the implied absolution. Dependence may explain vulnerability to control; it does not make the dependent great man morally weightless.

5. Gatekeeping: the control of access and reality

Gatekeeping is the strongest concrete parallel because it joins domestic routine to power. It determines who may speak, what information arrives, which requests become decisions, and which relationships require mediation.

Seaman reports that Ono instructed him never to put callers through to Lennon without her permission and specifically warned him about Julian, Cynthia, Paul McCartney, and the other former Beatles. She also told him to report unusual requests or strange behavior. The instruction creates two

channels: Lennon's incoming social world is filtered, while information about Lennon flows back to Ono. The assistant is therefore not simply a companion. He is part of a reporting system.[12]

The WBAI episode makes the principle explicit. After Lennon impulsively pledges $1,000, Ono allegedly rebukes Seaman for following the order without first consulting her. The issue is not merely whether the donation was wise. It is who holds procedural authority when Lennon acts spontaneously. Seaman presents her rule as extending to "human relations" and dealings with the outside world. On that account, Lennon's direct intention is insufficient; it must be cleared through the household executive.[9]

Saint-Simon's Maintenon exercises gatekeeping through a more elaborate administrative choreography. Ministers work with the King in her rooms. She hears what passes, often while appearing to read or do tapestry. She rarely presses a point openly. Instead, she confers with the minister beforehand. Candidates are arranged, lists are shaped, alternatives are balanced, and the King is guided toward the desired name while being allowed to feel that he has chosen. When necessary, a decision can be delayed, confused, or returned to later.[13]

The shared technique is **decision preformation**. The consort need not announce a command if she can influence the menu from which the great man chooses. Ono's alleged screening of calls and outside dealings is a domestic version of the same principle: control the approach before the decision. Maintenon's alleged coordination with ministers is its courtly version: control the options before the audience.

This is more than secretarial work. It changes the informational environment. A person who sees only filtered requests and selected alternatives may remain formally free while becoming practically predictable. That is the critical force of the analogy. Power lies not only in saying "no," but in deciding what may become a question.

Saint-Simon's description is so total that it invites skepticism. His claim that Maintenon disposed of three-quarters of favors, and three-quarters of the remaining fourth, has the flavor of a polemicist's arithmetic. Seaman likewise turns recurring household instructions into a theory of near-total possession. Both narratives risk making the invisible consort omnipotent precisely because her influence is difficult to measure. The responsible conclusion is narrower but still severe: each memoirist depicts a functioning system of prior mediation, and each believes that system allows the consort to shape outcomes without publicly owning them.

Gatekeeping also affects the gatekeeper's dependents. Staff and courtiers learn where to direct requests. Seaman's accountant says, "Yoko's the boss," when explaining why he executes peculiar orders without asking questions. At Versailles, ministers who need Maintenon's cooperation become her partners. The result is a court in the sociological sense: a network organized by access to a center, with intermediaries accumulating power because everyone else needs passage.[14]

But the Dakota is not Versailles. Ono's reported control of calls does not equal Maintenon's alleged influence over state offices. The comparison identifies a mechanism, not a magnitude. It is strongest when confined to the management of approach and weakest when expanded into a claim that both women ruled equivalent worlds.

6. Money, acquisition, and patronage

Seaman's Ono is not simply a wife with opinions about her husband's spending. She is an executive presiding over a substantial flow of money. Studio One houses Lennono's business operations; the accountant writes checks; staff carry cash; dealers, decorators, property agents, and advisers circulate through the household. Ono tells Seaman that she took charge of Lennon's assets after their reunion and multiplied them. That boast remains her claim as transmitted by Seaman, not an audited finding. But the memoir's daily scenes consistently place her at the administrative center of expenditure.[15]

Her acquisition of cars, art, antiques, and real estate serves more than consumption within Seaman's interpretation. It demonstrates that the resources attached to Lennon's name can be converted into her decisions, her relationships, and her projects. Seaman makes the accusation in its harshest form by calling Lennon her most valuable acquisition. The phrase is rhetorically effective and morally loaded. It reduces a marriage to ownership and should be recognized as Seaman's judgment, not an observable transaction.[14]

Maintenon's relationship to money is expressed through patronage rather than shopping. The King's resources enable the purchase of the Maintenon estate, her establishment at court, favors to allies, appointments, and the foundation of Saint-Cyr. Saint-Simon presents these as stages in a conversion from royal bounty to independent institutional presence. Saint-Cyr is especially important because it outlasts the relationship's private daily routine and gives Maintenon a role as founder, protector, and governor.[16]

The equivalence is **resource conversion**. Each woman takes value associated with the central man and turns it into a sphere of action that others must recognize. Ono's reported sphere includes investments, properties, staff, advisers, and business decisions. Maintenon's includes favors, offices, religious and educational institutions, and networks of obligation. Acquisition becomes administration; administration becomes durable status.

A critical reading should not pretend that managing wealth is inherently exploitation. Ono's claim to have improved Lennon's financial position cuts against the idea that she merely extracted value. Maintenon's charitable and educational work likewise cannot be reduced to self-enrichment. The sharper criticism concerns accountability. When private access determines how resources move, the boundary between the great man's interests, the consort's judgment, and the consort's network becomes obscure. Even beneficial management can consolidate unaccountable power.

Saint-Simon's Maintenon understands that favors create dependence. Seaman's Ono understands that employment, expense accounts, and access to the Lennons create loyalty and obligation. In both settings, money helps make the court. It pays the intermediaries who make the intimate executive's system function.

The contrast in the narrators is also revealing. Seaman emphasizes objects: unused clothes, antiques, cars, properties, cash. His Ono is acquisitive in an almost compulsive material sense. Saint-Simon emphasizes appointments and precedence. His Maintenon is acquisitive in a relational and institutional sense. The difference reflects both the historical settings and the authors' obsessions. Seaman writes as an employee astonished by consumption; Saint-Simon writes as a peer obsessed with rank. Their portraits are therefore complementary but not interchangeable.

7. Piety and psychic authority: morality as a technique of rule

Both women are portrayed as possessing a language that can reorganize the great man's fears and desires. For Maintenon, that language is Catholic devotion as Saint-Simon understands it. For Ono, it is a repertoire of astrology, numerology, directionalism, health discipline, and psychic warning. The critical comparison does not require treating these belief systems as intellectually or historically equivalent. It concerns their reported function within the relationship.

Saint-Simon states the mechanism with brutal economy: "Devoutness was her strong point; by that she governed and held her place." He depicts a King who wants to think of himself as religiously significant and a consort able to address that aspiration. His most consequential accusation is that Maintenon helped encourage the policy culminating in the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes. This is Saint-Simon's attribution within a fiercely hostile portrait, not a conclusion this essay independently establishes. Its scale also places Maintenon in a category of historical responsibility that cannot be transferred to Ono.[17]

Seaman's Ono uses different warnings for smaller but structurally recognizable ends. He says that references to Mercury going retrograde could discourage Lennon from action and that ominous psychic predictions were used when he became restless or difficult. He also describes psychic involvement in property decisions and hiring. His allegation is not simply that Ono held unusual beliefs. It is that she could instrumentalize a shared cosmology to make compliance appear prudent.[14]

The parallel is **moralized obedience**. A command need not sound like a command when it can be presented as the teaching of religion, the warning of the stars, or the requirement of health and safety. The dependent man is not merely told what the consort wants; he is given a framework in which resisting her appears spiritually dangerous, irrational, or self-destructive.

This is one of the strongest criticisms available against both portraits. Maintenon's alleged exploitation of Louis's devotional self-image turns conscience into a channel of influence. Ono's alleged use of psychic warning turns anxiety into a channel of influence. Each consort is accused of governing by interpreting reality for a man who prides himself on judgment but fears making the wrong kind of error.

Once again, however, the man is not absent from the transaction. Louis's desire for apostolic grandeur makes him receptive to religious flattery. Lennon's fears, superstitions, and wish for safety make him receptive to occult explanation. Seaman explicitly says Lennon believed isolation was the sane alternative to his former self-destructive life. The consort's narrative succeeds because it answers something in him.[14]

The comparison also requires restraint about sincerity. Neither memoirist can reliably settle whether the woman believes the framework she invokes. Saint-Simon treats Maintenon's devoutness as a role she wears admirably, but even he does not demonstrate that every religious commitment was feigned. Seaman treats psychic language as a "ploy," yet his own account shows Lennon sharing many of the beliefs. A practice can be sincerely held and still be used strategically. Instrumental use does not prove disbelief; disbelief is not necessary for manipulation.

The essential equivalence is therefore not "religion equals superstition." It is that each memoirist depicts the consort as possessing privileged authority over the man's interpretation of risk, duty, and

well-being. That authority supplements administrative control with moral control. It makes her preferences appear not merely preferable but necessary.

8. Marriage, secrecy, and public narrative

Maintenon's marriage to Louis XIV is secret but, in Saint-Simon's account, certain and proved. The secrecy is part of her peculiar authority. She cannot simply occupy the public position of queen, and Saint-Simon says the declaration of the marriage remains her ardent but frustrated ambition. Her power is therefore enormous yet incomplete. She must operate through proximity, ministers, and routine because the public title that would stabilize her position is withheld.[18]

Ono's marriage is public and culturally mythologized. Seaman argues that the public image of a devoted househusband and an idealized partnership concealed a much colder domestic arrangement. Where Maintenon's problem is a marriage kept from public recognition, Ono's is a marriage intensively offered to public interpretation. Both situations make narrative management important.[19]

The parallel is not secrecy itself but the gap between **visible status and operative relationship**. Maintenon lacks the public title but possesses private access. Ono possesses the public title and shared celebrity narrative, while Seaman claims the private relationship is distant, supervised, and mediated by staff. In each case, outsiders can misread the power structure by looking only at the official image.

Saint-Simon's scene at the military camp at Compiègne dramatizes the moment when private significance becomes visible. Maintenon reviews the spectacle from her sedan chair while the King stoops to explain the maneuvers to her, taps at the window, and appears absorbed in her responses. Saint-Simon watches the court watching them. The scandal is not merely that she is present; it is that the King's attention publicly reveals her centrality. The army becomes a backdrop to the real spectacle: the sovereign attending to the consort.[20]

Seaman's Lennon sometimes attempts a comparable revelation in reverse. His dependence appears in small domestic gestures—checking whether Ono is available, waiting for her attention, consulting "Mother." These scenes are humiliating to Seaman because they contradict the public sovereign image of John Lennon. The former employee experiences the gap as disillusionment; the courtier experiences Maintenon's prominence as a breach of proper rank. Both narrators measure the woman's power by the great man's visible deviation from the dignity expected of him.

This exposes a bias worth criticizing. The male observer repeatedly treats female centrality as an affront to natural order. A king explaining military movements to his wife becomes a spectacle of shame; a famous musician consulting his wife becomes evidence of captivity. Consultation itself is not subjugation. The stronger evidence lies in the wider pattern of prior permissions, reporting rules, resource control, and dependence—not in the mere fact that a man listens to a woman.

Nevertheless, the public-private distinction remains analytically powerful. Maintenon's unacknowledged marriage encourages indirect methods. Ono's public partnership supplies a narrative against which Seaman defines his exposé. Each memoirist gains rhetorical force by claiming to reveal what the official arrangement hides. Their books are not neutral descriptions of power; they are revelations staged against an appearance they wish to discredit.

9. Independent projects and the limits of reduction

A serious comparison must resist the memoirists' shared temptation to make the woman exist only in relation to the man. Both women have projects and competencies that cannot be exhaustively explained as traps laid for a partner.

Ono appears in Seaman's account as an avant-garde artist before Lennon, a performer with her own career ambitions, a recording collaborator, and a business president. Seaman often treats these activities dismissively, but their presence complicates his own conclusion that she is nothing without Lennon. If she manages investments, negotiates staff and dealers, participates in recording, and handles publicity, then "no money and no power" is a polemical counterfactual, not an adequate assessment of her capacities.[4]

Maintenon's Saint-Cyr likewise exceeds the role of consort. Saint-Simon describes her ruling the establishment's arrangements, corresponding, intervening in convent affairs, and returning there after Louis's death. He interprets its foundation partly as emulation, self-protection, and a means of seeking noble support. Those motives may coexist with educational and charitable purposes. An institution can serve its founder's status and still perform real work.[16]

The concept of derivative sovereignty must therefore include the possibility of **conversion into independent durability**. Power initially derived from intimacy need not remain wholly dependent on intimacy. The consort can build an institution, a business identity, a network, or a reputation that survives the central relationship. Maintenon's post-Louis residence at Saint-Cyr is the clearest example. Ono's continuation of artistic and business activity within Seaman's later narrative points in the same direction, though the present comparison deliberately centers on the earlier household period.

This does not soften the criticism of their methods. It makes the criticism more exact. The problem is not that either woman had ambition or built something of her own. The problem, within the hostile accounts, is that independent projects could be interwoven with unacknowledged control over the partner's resources and choices. Competence does not excuse domination; domination does not erase competence.

There is a further distinction in scale and kind. Saint-Cyr is an educational institution embedded in religious and noble networks. Ono's art and business activities belong to modern cultural and commercial fields. Treating them as equivalent achievements would be empty. The useful comparison is strategic: each woman's position cannot be reduced to passive extraction because each converts opportunity into organized activity beyond the immediate dyad.

The memoirists resist this conclusion because it threatens their character portraits. If Maintenon is merely an enchantress, Saint-Cyr must be interpreted primarily as vanity and self-insurance. If Ono is merely an acquisitive controller, her business and artistic work must be treated as dependence on Lennon's fame. A consistent critique rejects that circularity. Their alleged manipulation should be assessed from reported actions, not from an assumption that every achievement secretly proves lack of merit.

10. The consort's court: a comparative schema

The following table states the analogy at its proper level: mechanisms of relational power, not literal historical identity.

Dimension	Seaman's Ono	Saint-Simon's Maintenon	Critical equivalence
Central asset	Lennon's fame, wealth, cultural mystique	Louis XIV's sovereign authority and patronage	Others seek value through access to the man
Consort's base	Studio One, Lennono, household staff	Private apartments, ministers, Saint-Cyr	Intimate space becomes administrative space
Maternal role	"Mother," permission, protection, reporting	Governess, nurse-like attachment, moral formation	Care becomes jurisdiction
Gatekeeping	Screening calls and outside dealings	Prearranging appointments and favors with ministers	Options are shaped before decision
Material power	Investments, property, acquisitions, expenditure	Offices, favors, estates, institutional patronage	Resources become networks of obligation
Moral vocabulary	Psychics, astrology, health, protection	Piety, conscience, religious duty	Preference is framed as necessity
Public position	Openly celebrated wife and collaborator	Secret wife denied public declaration	Official status diverges from operative influence
Dependent man's role	Seeks safety through withdrawal and delegation	Seeks flattery, routine, and reassurance of mastery	Abdication helps create consort power
Independent sphere	Art, recording, business administration	Saint-Cyr and charitable/educational networks	Derived position can support durable projects
Principal limit	No sovereign coercive or dynastic authority	Power operates within an actual monarchy	Similar mechanism, radically different scale

The schema also clarifies why "the power behind the throne" is an inadequate cliché. Ono is not behind Lennon's throne in the same sense that Maintenon stands behind Louis's. Lennon himself uses the language of kingship metaphorically, but his withdrawal is partly a refusal of public performance. Ono's power often appears in managing the consequences of that refusal. Maintenon operates where the King continues to conduct the business of monarchy. One consort administers seclusion; the other participates in the administration of ongoing sovereignty.

The phrase "consort's court" is nevertheless justified as a deliberate metaphor. In both narratives, a group forms around the intimate executive: employees, accountants, publicists, psychics, and dealers in one case; ministers, confessors, nobles, clients, and institutional dependents in the other. The court exists because access has value and because the consort can affect its terms.

Its moral danger is the same at every scale: accountability becomes difficult when influence is exercised informally. A person harmed by a decision may not know who made it. The central man can believe he decided; the minister or assistant can say he was following orders; the consort can remain officially uninvolved. Informality does not mean weakness. It can mean power without a clearly assignable signature.

11. Where the analogy breaks—and why the breaks matter

The comparison fails if it becomes historical inflation. Four differences are decisive.

First, **coercion and consequence**. Louis XIV's decisions can affect law, war, religion, office, and the lives of populations. Lennon's decisions principally affect a household, business, artistic career, and cultural public. Even if every one of Seaman's allegations were accepted, Ono's reported household control would not approach the public consequences Saint-Simon attributes to Maintenon's religious and political influence. Equating them would trivialize the suffering associated with royal policy.

Second, **formal status and legitimacy**. Maintenon's secret marriage leaves her in an anomalous position: indispensable in practice, denied open recognition as queen. Ono's marriage is public and her role in Lennon's business is comparatively explicit. Maintenon's concealment encourages indirect rule; Ono's recognized presidency gives her at least some overt administrative ground. The same behavior can therefore carry different meanings. Ono's instruction to an employee may be an exercise of stated managerial authority; Maintenon's alleged private coordination with ministers is more clearly an attempt to influence outcomes while preserving the King's illusion of independent choice.

Third, **the possibility of exit**. Seaman insists that Lennon's Dakota doors were not locked and that he had committed himself voluntarily. His seclusion is reinforced by fear, fame, habit, and dependence, but it is not legal imprisonment. Courtiers and ministers at Versailles also make choices, yet the costs of royal disfavor belong to a different coercive order. "He could leave" cannot be used in the same uncomplicated way across both settings.[7]

Fourth, **source purpose**. Seaman writes a celebrity exposé built around disillusionment and later personal conflict. Saint-Simon writes a vast aristocratic history of rank, favor, and legitimacy. Seaman's Ono is designed to explain the contradiction between the public househusband myth and the private household he experienced. Saint-Simon's Maintenon is designed to explain how an improperly elevated woman could preside over a corrupt system of favor. Both portraits are prosecutorial, but they prosecute different offenses.

These disanalogies do not destroy the comparison. They prevent it from becoming lazy. The analogy is strongest at the level of relational technology: filtering access, preforming choices, moralizing preferences, converting care into supervision, and making oneself administratively necessary. It is weakest when used to equate personal temperament, total historical responsibility, or the degree of actual freedom enjoyed by the partner.

Nor does the comparison prove a universal female type. It does not show that women naturally rule through intimacy or that influential consorts are inherently manipulative. It shows that two hostile male narrators, observing radically different settings, found it useful to describe female power through strikingly similar mechanisms. That may reflect real recurring structures of informal power. It may also reflect a durable male narrative habit: when a woman's influence lacks a formal title, explain it as enchantment, maternal capture, or intrigue. Both possibilities must remain in view.

12. Judgment: what the comparison reveals

The comparison is illuminating because it identifies a coherent form of power and because it distributes criticism more honestly than either memoirist does.

Seaman's Ono and Saint-Simon's Maintenon are both portrayed as **intimate executives**. Their authority rests on more than emotional influence. They organize the practical world around the central man. They control or shape access, direct staff or ministers, influence resources, and supply the moral language through which decisions are justified. Their power is derivative in origin but not therefore trivial. Once embedded in routine, it becomes real power over real people.

The critical judgment against Seaman's Ono is that she allegedly treats Lennon's spontaneity as something requiring her prior supervision and justifies restriction as protection. The "Mother" vocabulary crystallizes the problem: care and command become difficult to distinguish, and the husband's dependence becomes the wife's administrative mandate. Her reported business ability does not refute this criticism; it explains how the system became effective.

The critical judgment against Saint-Simon's Maintenon is more politically severe. She allegedly turns private access into an opaque machinery of favor and uses devotional authority to reinforce the King's worst certainties. Her lack of public title does not make that influence innocent. On the contrary, Saint-Simon's central accusation is that concealment allows her to exercise power while leaving the appearance of royal decision intact.

But neither great man should be allowed the luxury of the dupe's defense. Seaman's Lennon wants insulation, delegates its maintenance, and then experiences the resulting order as confinement. Saint-Simon's Louis wants unquestioned supremacy and intimate reassurance, yet resists seeing how ministers and his wife prepare his choices. Each man's self-image depends on not acknowledging the full extent of his own delegation. The consort exploits that blindness, but she does not alone author it.

There is finally a criticism of the witnesses themselves. Seaman and Saint-Simon are too ready to transform a relational system into a female essence. "Possessor," "enchantress," and "witch" explain by condemning. They risk making the woman's alleged power the proof of her bad character and her alleged bad character the proof of her power. That is not analysis; it is narrative closure.

A conceptually consistent comparison must do better. It must say, without softening: **the conduct attributed to these women is controlling, strategically opaque, and at times morally reckless; the conduct attributed to these men is avoidant, vain, and complicit in the surrender of judgment; and the conduct of the narrators is itself an exercise in partisan character construction.** All three propositions can be true together.

Ono is therefore not "a modern Maintenon" in any literal biographical sense. The value of the analogy is sharper than identity. Maintenon supplies a historical lens through which Seaman's Ono appears as the executive of a private court organized around fame; Ono supplies a modern domestic lens through which Saint-Simon's Maintenon appears not as an inexplicable enchantress but as a practitioner of access, preformation, and moralized dependence. The comparison reveals a recurring political form inside intimate life: the person who makes the great man's world manageable may acquire the power to decide what that world will contain.

References and source notes

[1] Seaman, F. (1991). *The Last Days of John Lennon*. Birch Lane Press/Carol Publishing Group; Seaman, F. (1991). *John Lennon: Living on Borrowed Time*. Xanadu Publications. For the diary-and-recollection method and subsequent journal dispute, see *Living on Borrowed Time*, Afterword, {BT-AFT-¶027}–{BT-AFT-¶029}, pp. 239–246. The two books' relevant chapters are substantially parallel and are not treated as independent witnesses.

[2] Saint-Simon, L. de R. (2014 e-text). *Memoirs of Louis XIV and His Court and of the Regency* (B. St. John, Trans.). Introduction, {SS-INT-¶004}–{SS-INT-¶006}. Quotations are from Bayle St. John's English translation. The edition has no printed page markers; references therefore use chapter and extraction paragraph anchors.

[3] Saint-Simon, *Memoirs*, Chapter LXXV, {SS-C75-¶007}–{SS-C75-¶018}; Chapter XVI, {SS-C16-¶004}. These passages recount Maintenon's poverty, service, marriage to Scarron, social connections, and appointment as governess. Saint-Simon's statements about her lovers and motives remain part of his hostile retrospective portrait.

[4] Seaman, *Living on Borrowed Time*, Chapter 1, {BT-C01-¶012}–{BT-C01-¶018}, pp. 9–11; Chapter 3, {BT-C03-¶034}, p. 50. Seaman's account of Ono's pursuit, reconciliation with Lennon, and business takeover is secondhand for the pre-1979 period and openly accusatory.

[5] Seaman, *Living on Borrowed Time*, Chapter 1, {BT-C01-¶031}–{BT-C01-¶033}, pp. 15–16.

[6] Saint-Simon, *Memoirs*, Chapter XVIII, {SS-C18-¶015}–{SS-C18-¶017}; Chapter LXXVII, {SS-C77-¶005}–{SS-C77-¶009}.

[7] Seaman, *Living on Borrowed Time*, Chapter 2, {BT-C02-¶030}, p. 26, and {BT-C02-¶101}–{BT-C02-¶107}, pp. 40–42. The chess remark is reconstructed dialogue reported by Seaman. His prisoner metaphor explicitly includes Lennon's fears, staff, and voluntary seclusion.

[8] Seaman, *The Last Days of John Lennon*, Chapter 1, {LD-C01-¶039}, p. 17; Chapter 2, {LD-C02-¶006}, p. 20, and {LD-C02-¶077}–{LD-C02-¶078}, pp. 34–35; Seaman, *Living on Borrowed Time*, Chapter 3, {BT-C03-¶033}, p. 50.

[9] Seaman, *Living on Borrowed Time*, Chapter 2, {BT-C02-¶002}, pp. 19–20; Chapter 3, {BT-C03-¶029}–{BT-C03-¶033}, pp. 49–50.

[10] Saint-Simon, *Memoirs*, Chapter II, {SS-C02-¶019}; Chapter LXXV, {SS-C75-¶013}; Chapter LXXVII, {SS-C77-¶003}.

[11] Saint-Simon, *Memoirs*, Chapter LXXV, {SS-C75-¶021}–{SS-C75-¶024}; Chapter LXXVII, {SS-C77-¶006}–{SS-C77-¶021}. The latter passage also records Louis's suspicion of Maintenon, his anger toward her, and his considerable cruelty and indifference—important counterevidence to any fantasy of simple matriarchal omnipotence.

[12] Seaman, *The Last Days of John Lennon*, Chapter 2, {LD-C02-¶002}, pp. 19–20.

[13] Saint-Simon, *Memoirs*, Chapter LXXVII, {SS-C77-¶006}–{SS-C77-¶012}.

[14] Seaman, *Living on Borrowed Time*, Chapter 3, {BT-C03-¶002}–{BT-C03-¶034}, pp. 43–50.

[15] Seaman, *The Last Days of John Lennon*, Chapter 3, {LD-C03-¶015}–{LD-C03-¶019}, pp. 46–48; Seaman, *Living on Borrowed Time*, Chapter 6, {BT-C06-¶004}–{BT-C06-¶006}, pp. 74–75.

[16] Saint-Simon, *Memoirs*, Chapter LXXV, {SS-C75-¶014}–{SS-C75-¶015}; Chapter LXXVI, {SS-C76-¶009}–{SS-C76-¶010}; Chapter LXXVII, {SS-C77-¶003}.

[17] Saint-Simon, *Memoirs*, Chapter LXXVI, {SS-C76-¶001}–{SS-C76-¶008}. The account of Maintenon's responsibility for the Revocation is explicitly Saint-Simon's hostile attribution and should not be mistaken for a consensus judgment established by this essay.

[18] Saint-Simon, *Memoirs*, Chapter LXXV, {SS-C75-¶021}–{SS-C75-¶024}; Chapter LXXVI, {SS-C76-¶010}–{SS-C76-¶020}. Saint-Simon himself distinguishes the certain secret marriage from matters merely "pretended" or rumored.

[19] Seaman, *Living on Borrowed Time*, front flap, {BT-FM-¶007}–{BT-FM-¶010}; Chapter 2, {BT-C02-¶101}–{BT-C02-¶103}, pp. 40–41.

[20] Saint-Simon, *Memoirs*, Chapter XIII, {SS-C13-¶014}–{SS-C13-¶017}.