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Gabrielle-Émilie Le Tonnelier de Breteuil, marquise Du Châtelet, *La Correspondance d'Émilie Du Châtelet*. 2 vols. Under the direction of Ulla Kölving and Andrew Brown. Ferney-Voltaire: Centre International d'étude du XVIIIe siècle, 2018. Xii + 633, 592 pp. ISBN 978-2-84559-136-3.

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It is perhaps time to cease referring to Émilie Du Châtelet as “an exceptional woman intellectual” of the eighteenth century, and to recognize that she was one of the Enlightenment’s most original thinkers of any gender. Although literary and intellectual historians never truly forgot Du Châtelet, for far too long she was remembered primarily as Voltaire’s longtime lover and Newtonian muse, while her own writings were either disparaged as derivative or attributed to others.

The situation began to change with a series of significant publications in the mid-twentieth century, beginning with Ira O. Wade’s edition of her translation of Mandeville’s *Fable of the Bees*, with its significant translator’s preface, as well as portions of her *Essai sur l’optique* and *Grammaire raisonnée*. A decade later, W. H. Barber’s *Leibniz in France* firmly situated her as a central figure in the diffusion of Leibnizian thought. In his 1958 edition of her letters, Theodore Besterman argued that no one could now doubt that she was a fully competent mathematician with a thorough understanding of the scientific problems that she studied. Robert Mauzi’s critical edition of her *Discours du bonheur* revealed her unconventional approach to a key Enlightenment preoccupation.[1] In more recent decades, an explosion of studies on women in the history of science, including a sizeable body of work on Du Châtelet’s *Institutions de physique* (1740), has increased our understanding of her contributions. The twenty-first century has seen further momentum, with Bertram Schwarzbach’s critical edition of her *Examens de la Bible*, an important biography by Judith Zinsser, a number of essay collections and conference proceedings, and the discovery of new archival material.[2]

Given the reevaluation of Du Châtelet’s intellectual achievements and the availability of new documents, the time is ripe for this new edition of Du Châtelet’s correspondence by an international team of scholars led by Ulla Kölving and Andrew Brown. The 1958 Besterman edition included 486 letters from Du Châtelet to thirty-eight different correspondents; the Kölving-Brown edition, 549 letters to ninety-four correspondents, plus 136 letters written to her. The notes and remarks that accompany each letter reflect a wealth of scholarship, research tools, and manuscripts that were unavailable and to a certain extent unimaginable sixty years ago.

A correspondence is both a linear sequence of events unfolding in time and a network of relationships, some interlocking and others entirely autonomous. Du Châtelet's correspondents included members of the scientific community in France and abroad; her social circle in Paris and at the court of King Stanislas in Lorraine; members of the household at Cirey; her legal team and others involved in various lawsuits, in particular the long-running "Affaire Hoensbroeck" that required extended stays in Brussels. The first two broad categories—scientific and social circles—intersect in mentors and friends like Maupertuis, Clairaut, and Algarotti. Voltaire's circle of friends, particularly those who had been his fellow students at Louis-le-Grand, form a special group, two of whom, Cideville and d'Argental, became close friends of Du Châtelet's. The set of people to whom Du Châtelet sent copies of her publications form another cluster, as do her women friends. The letters provide a well-rounded view of Du Châtelet in her multiple roles as aristocrat, member of the Republic of Letters, guardian of her family's political and financial interests, fierce defender of her companion Voltaire, and woman of feeling.

As rich and revelatory as the corpus is, the editors remind us of its lacunae, both in their introduction and in the brief biographies of correspondents and other significant figures. Most conspicuous by its absence is her correspondence with Voltaire. The collection contains three letters from him to her and one from her to him, but they provide few new insights.[3] The fate of their letters to one another is unknown; several eye-witnesses reported having seen a number of bound volumes of their letters in her possession, but it is presumed that Voltaire destroyed them after her death. Premonitions of death in childbirth led her to set her affairs in order in the summer of 1749; in addition to drawing up a careful assessment of her family's financial position, she bound up packets of letters from numerous correspondents in order to have them returned to their senders after her death.[4] We possess none of her correspondence with her children, with her husband, or with close friends like Mlle de Thil. In other cases, such as that of Clairaut, we have only a few letters when a more extensive correspondence is known to have taken place. In the highly significant relationships with Maupertuis and Saint-Lambert, we have Du Châtelet's letters only. The Du Châtelet correspondence leads one to ponder why some letters are preserved and others not. Did these men receive their own letters after her death and decide to destroy them, but preserve hers? Biographers have often assumed an early affair between Maupertuis and the woman who sought him out for tutoring in advanced mathematics, but aside from her familiar tone and eager insistence on frequent meetings, her letters do not provide conclusive proof. Du Châtelet's passionate letters to Saint-Lambert in the last year of her life leave no doubt as to the intensity of her attachment to him, but without his letters to her, the dynamic of their relationship cannot truly be known. Was he as indifferent as her frequent accusations of neglect suggest? Or are her complaints a reflection of her own insecurity and fear of losing her younger lover? Was he equally in love, but unable to be as fully present as she wished, as his reported devastation and deep mourning would indicate?[5] The missing letters are a poignant reminder of the limits of our knowledge.

The extant letters paint a vivid portrait. Many of the recently uncovered letters from the Du Châtelet family archive document her meticulous attention to the management of Cirey, the lawsuit in Brussels, and her family's financial and political interests. Other letters offer breezy accounts of social life, court gossip, current events, and theatrical performances. Two overarching plotlines emerge: her quest for knowledge and recognition, and her relationship with Voltaire. The correspondence takes us from the early stages of her efforts to deepen and expand her understanding of mathematics, to the excitement of her experiments with fire and first publications, her evolving views on physics and metaphysics, and the pride that she took in her

public dispute with Dortous de Mairan, the Secretary of the Academy of Science. We see her holding her own in her exchanges with interlocutors throughout the Republic of Letters; we witness her grim determination to complete her Newton translation and commentary in the summer of 1749. In the late spring of 1735, she discusses her pivotal decision to leave Paris and join Voltaire at Cirey in a moving series of letters to her old friend, the duc de Richelieu. She will go on to chronicle the highs and lows of that relationship in letters to d'Argental and Cideville, old friends of his who had become her confidants as well. We see her efforts to save Voltaire from himself, as she saw it, by endeavoring to prevent him from attracting the kind of official attention that would lead to the renewal of the *lettre de cachet* issued against him. She ultimately comes to recognize that Voltaire was incorrigible, whether in his defiance of the censors, his high-profile disputes with his enemies, or his susceptibility to the siren call of Frederick the Great. Her own forceful personality and possessiveness are on display as well; but despite the tensions, his infidelities, and the waning of their sexual relationship, the two remain profoundly attached to one another, even when she unexpectedly finds herself falling in love with Saint-Lambert. "Je suis extrême, vous le savez," she writes to the younger man (Letter E636)—and one can only agree.

The letters highlight the materiality of all correspondences, the delays occasioned by the post, the persistent concern with police surveillance. [6] Du Châtelet helps Voltaire cover his tracks by fabricating stories to others about his whereabouts (and getting caught in the fabrications, E100); Voltaire uses false names and addresses while traveling. Fearing that her letters may be lost or fall into the wrong hands, the marquise begins numbering letters to Saint-Lambert and enjoins him to do the same. Some letters are intended to be shared while others are not, but they are nevertheless passed on to others despite the writer's intentions. The terms of a posthumous epistolary truce with Voltaire's nemesis J. B. Rousseau require careful negotiations with his literary executor. The editors provide a further dimension to the reality of the letters, by providing information about their physical state, unusual stationery, the use of seals, illegible or crossed-out text, ink blots.

This edition of Du Châtelet's correspondence bespeaks the best of contemporary scholarship and points to the way we read now. Spelling is judiciously modernized. The meticulous notes and remarks accompanying virtually every letter elucidate references and provide context, including excerpts from other relevant correspondences, as in the telling juxtaposition between Frederick the Great's fulsome praise to her (E288) and his snide comments to his confidant Jordan (E288, note 7). In addition to the detailed prefatory materials and biographies, the elaborate apparatus includes various related documents, concordances to both the 1958 edition and to Besterman's "definitive" edition in the *Œuvres complètes de Voltaire* (1968-1977), the localization of all manuscript sources, a chronological list of letters, an alphabetic list by correspondent, an index of people and places, and a list of the seventy-four illustrations. The two lists of letters are equally valuable: the chronological list recapitulates the order of the letters in a format that allows the reader to see sequences at a glance; the grouping of letters by correspondent helps us to appreciate the weight and significance of certain exchanges, even as we recognize that the corpus is incomplete. We have seventy-six letters from the marquise to Maupertuis, ninety-two letters to Argental, and 102 to Saint-Lambert—but none from them to her. I have one quibble with the list by correspondent: the entry under Voltaire lists seventeen letters, but only four of these, as I have mentioned, are exchanged between him and Du Châtelet; the others are letters either signed by or addressed to both of them, to and from other people. The co-signed and co-addressed letters, to which one might add the large volume of letters to or from Du Châtelet that include

greetings to or from Voltaire, are an interesting structural feature of the correspondence, but their presence with the individually signed and addressed letters is misleading. In a work of this size and scope, however, this is a minor issue.

The *Correspondance d'Émilie Du Châtelet* is an indispensable tool for our understanding of this vital figure of the early Enlightenment.

NOTES

[1] Ira O. Wade, *Studies on Voltaire, with some Unpublished Papers by Madame Du Châtelet* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1947). As his title suggests, Wade's emphasis nevertheless remained firmly on Voltaire: "The importance of her work lies less in its own intrinsic value than in its contribution to the formation and evolution of Voltaire's thought" (v); W. H. Barber, *Leibniz in France from Arnauld to Voltaire: A Study in French Reactions to Leibnizianism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1955); *Les Lettres de la marquise Du Châtelet*, ed. Theodore Besterman, 2 vols. (Genève: Institut et musée Voltaire, 1958), 1:16; Émilie Du Châtelet, *Discours sur le bonheur*, ed. Robert Mauzi (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1961).

[2] To highlight only works since 2000: François de Gandt, ed. *Cirey dans la vie intellectuelle: La Réception de Newton en France* (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 2001); Judith Zinsser, *La Dame d'esprit: A Biography of the Marquise Du Châtelet* (New York: Viking, 2006); Judith Zinsser and Julie Candler Hayes, eds. *Émilie Du Châtelet: Rewriting Enlightenment Philosophy and Science* (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 2006); Ulla Kölving and Olivier Courcelle, eds., *Émilie Du Châtelet: Éclairages et documents nouveaux* (Ferney-Voltaire: Centre internationale d'étude du XVIIIe siècle, 2008); Du Châtelet, *Examens de la Bible*, ed. Bertram Eugene Schwarzbach (Paris: Champion, 2011); Véronique Le Ru, *Émilie Du Châtelet philosophe* (Paris: Classiques Garnier, 2019).

[3] Of these letters, Voltaire's letter-poem of September 11, 1740 (1:597-98, letter E303), a relatively recent discovery, is the most intimate, in which Voltaire expresses tender reassurance to her on the eve of his first meeting with Frederick.

[4] Kölving and Brown, 1:59-60.

[5] Zinsser, *La Dame d'esprit*, 287-89.

[6] See Jay Caplan, *Postal Culture in Europe, 1500-1800* (Oxford: Oxford University Studies in the Enlightenment, 2016), especially chapter 4, "Voltaire's post: 1760-1770," 125-40.

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