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Ulla Kölving, ed., *Entente culturelle. L'Europe des correspondances littéraires*. Ferney-Voltaire: Centre international d'étude du XVIII^e siècle, 2021. xii + 278 pp. €60.00 (pb). ISBN 9782845591417.

Review by Kelsey Rubin-Detlev, University of Southern California.

This volume of essays offers an overview of the state of the field for research on the eighteenth-century phenomenon of the *correspondance littéraire*. Originating in an international conference held in Liège in 2014, the collection showcases the impressive recovery and publication efforts of the past fifty years that have begun making this treasure trove of source material available to scholars. As the volume illustrates, the *Correspondance littéraire* edited by Friedrich Melchior Grimm from 1753 to 1773, and then by Jakob Heinrich Meister until 1813, remains the paragon of the genre: a manuscript periodical purveying the latest cultural and sometimes political news from Paris at regular intervals to an exclusive set of usually paying recipients. The ongoing edition of Grimm's work, edited by Ulla Kölving,[1] forms the basis for many of the essays, while others explore similar correspondences that have thus far remained in manuscript or are likewise in the process of publication, often in the Champion-Slatkine series *Correspondances littéraires, érudites, philosophiques, privées ou secrètes*. This is a highly erudite volume displaying the authors' meticulous historical detective work. It convincingly demonstrates that anyone studying the European Enlightenment, in any domain of culture or thought, needs to engage with these crucial primary sources.

The volume is bookended by considerations of the *correspondance littéraire's* formal features as a genre. After the editor's brief preface outlining the aims and contents of the book, the collection opens with Henri Durantón's helpful reflections on the meaning of the term *correspondance littéraire*. He reviews previous attempts at delimiting the genre relative to similar forms such as the published periodical, the private letter, and the manuscript newsletter (*nouvelles à la main*), before proposing a definition that leaves room for the indistinctness of such categories and the inevitable blurring of boundaries between literature and politics, private and public, and manuscript and print circulation. Durantón's contribution is usefully complemented by Régine Jomand-Baudry's essay, the second to last chapter in the volume. Although she modestly claims to be considering the rather marginal example of the so-called "correspondance littéraire de Nîmes," addressed by the minor playwright Pierre de Morand to an unknown provincial correspondent, she in fact offers an analysis of the *correspondance littéraire* as a discursive form. She addresses the peculiar temporalities of a form of writing that emphasizes above all the immediacy of the information and impressions it conveys, and she contemplates the curious interplay in this type of journalism between the pursuit of veracity and the thirst for

entertainment, which in Pierre de Morand's case leads to a denial of the very possibility of accessing and expressing historical truth.

A second group of essays explores the creation and distribution of Grimm's paradigmatic *Correspondance littéraire*, emphasizing its embeddedness in several different networks. Ulla Kölving's essay traces how Grimm successfully built up an extraordinary list of subscribers to his correspondence, counting among his crowned and paying readers Gustav III of Sweden, Catherine II of Russia, Stanislas II August of Poland, and the future Leopold II of Austria. To accomplish this feat, he combined in his networking efforts the roles of savvy journalist, art agent, diplomat, courtier, secretary, and educator. Kölving's second contribution to the volume is an edition of the copies of Grimm's letters to the Genevan Isaac de Budé, seigneur de Boisy, that were preserved in the correspondence of Jacques Pictet, another Genevan working unofficially for the kingdom of Piedmont-Sardinia. Taking up a substantial fraction of the volume and concluding its contents, these letters about the Seven Years War might seem tangential to the main aim of the collection, but they crystallize the key theme of the *correspondance littéraire's* interactions with diplomacy. Grimm's somewhat unwise political correspondence with de Budé took place simultaneously with his activity as a literary correspondent in 1759-1761 and reflected his ambition to begin a new career as a diplomat, but the discovery of the correspondence by French postal surveillance temporarily quashed Grimm's hopes. Only many more years of writing and networking as the editor of the *Correspondance littéraire* would allow Grimm to obtain official posts as a cultural and, increasingly, a political factotum, most notably in the service of Catherine the Great from 1777.

The essays by Mélinna Caron and Stéphanie Géhanne Gavoty fall into the same category as that of Kölving and flesh out our understanding of the most famous *Correspondance littéraire*. Caron's chapter stands out for its fascinating analysis of Louise d'Épinay's multifaceted and pivotal role in creating the manuscript periodical. She was at once an author, a co-editor, and an addressee of and character in texts by other writers inserted in the *Correspondance*. Although we will never know the full extent of d'Épinay's input, Caron determines that a complex game of anonymity and pseudonymity pointed the alert reader to her ubiquitous presence. Caron shows that d'Épinay's most essential function was to generate the atmosphere of elite sociability that many readers (most prominently Catherine the Great) appreciated above all in Grimm's *feuilles*. Géhanne Gavoty offers a thoroughly documented example of the vagaries of the *Correspondance littéraire's* circulation, tracing how four entries from a supposedly top-secret manuscript were plagiarized in print, probably as a result of political upheavals in the tiny German principality of Zweibrücken. Once more, politics and culture, manuscript and print prove inseparable in the production and reception of the eighteenth-century *correspondance littéraire*.

A third category of articles expands this interest in the place of *correspondances littéraires* in eighteenth-century cultural, social, and political networks by exploring the Russian connections of three different *correspondances*. Sergueï Karp traces the Russian reception of Grimm's periodical from its initial attentive reading by Catherine the Great through its censorship by the imperial government in the first half of the nineteenth century and a resurgence of interest from the late 1860s. Along the way, Grimm became a symbolic figure for many Russians, appearing most famously in Alexander Pushkin's *Evgenii Onegin* as an ironic example of how frivolity and intellect need not be antithetical. Piotr Zaborov considers how Jean-François de La Harpe attempted to cater to his select Russian readership—the future emperor Paul, his wife Maria Fedorovna, the Francophile statesman Count Andrei Petrovich Shuvalov, and his wife

Ekaterina—by sharing all possible news about the reception of Russians and Russian culture in France. Meanwhile, Karina Goltsova and Elena Lebedeva turn again to the question of how *correspondances littéraires* circulated beyond their immediate addressees. They uncover how the *correspondance* of Adrien-Michel-Hyacinthe Blin de Sainmore, previously thought to have reached only Grand Duchess Maria Fedorovna, in fact was read in part or in whole by numerous other figures ranging from the aristocrat and diplomat Pavel Martynovich Skavronskii to the lady's companion Marie-Antoinette Daudet and her friends. Together, these three essays draw attention not only to the large role played by Russia in the circulation of these *correspondances*, and therefore to the Russian elite's close ties to French cultural life, but also to the ways in which these apparently exclusive texts achieved a broader resonance than one might expect.

A fourth and final category of essays examines the different thematic fields discussed in these manuscript periodicals and how these texts contributed to the emergence and diffusion of ideas. Highlighting the prominent place of art criticism in these writings, Katalin Bartha-Kovács proposes that a single turn of phrase, the “magic” of Jean-Baptiste-Siméon Chardin's use of color in his still lifes, helped Diderot to re-evaluate the significance of minor genres of painting in his *Salons*, which first circulated in Grimm's *Correspondance littéraire*. Françoise Tilkin adds to the volume's overall reflections on the interconnections between culture and politics by analyzing how Grimm's *Correspondance littéraire* reacted to the peace celebrations of 1763, when France sought to transform the humiliating end of the Seven Years War into an occasion for fostering patriotic spirit. Interestingly, these reactions depended more on the artistic medium than on the patriotic content *per se*: celebratory poetry elicited nothing but sarcasm, theatrical productions provoked elitist disdain for spectacles aimed at the populace, but Grimm and Diderot championed Edme Bouchardon's statue of Louis XV, which was unveiled for the occasion. According to Tilkin, these varied reactions reflect Grimm's and Diderot's effort to portray themselves and their readers as people of taste, while also negotiating the difficulties of writing about France's troubles for a readership of foreign heads of state. Béatrice Ferrier compares and contrasts the theatre criticism of two literary correspondents, Grimm and Antoine Maillet-Duclairon. She concludes that, whereas Maillet-Duclairon assumes from the outset that he shares the same cultural values as his single addressee, Caroline Louise of Baden-Durlach, Grimm tries more actively to instruct his readers in new aesthetic and cultural values. Thérance Carvalho turns from the arts to political and economic theory, discussing the *Correspondance littéraire et politique* of Pierre-Samuel Du Pont de Nemours as a means by which the physiocrats sought to convince interested leaders like Gustav III of Sweden and Charles-Louis of Baden to implement their ideas in practice.

Most authors of these essays are involved in projects to edit and publish *correspondances littéraires* or related manuscript materials. This editorial focus sometimes leads to a regrettable lack of conceptualization, but the wealth of intriguing details invites the scholarly community to undertake that further analytical work. The volume's continuous questioning of the relationship between literature and politics begs for interrogation within a larger framework, such as Tim Blanning's approach to the culture of power and the power of culture.^[2] The questions of secrecy, circulation, and the public/private divide cry out for more research: *correspondances littéraires* deserve more explicit comparison with related forms of writing like the personal letter, as well as more thorough exploration in terms of how these texts reflect the practices of *mondanité* and elude our normal assumptions about the print basis of celebrity culture.^[3] Moreover, several essays hint at the fragility of the literary culture from which these *correspondances* sprang, one in which Europe's most elite and powerful people felt it imperative to be at the forefront of

intellectual and cultural developments purportedly centered on Paris. Further exploration of the effects of the French Revolution on this type of textual production and its cultural perception, perhaps through further consideration of the later reception of these texts and of possible parallel phenomena in post-Revolutionary Europe, would be very welcome. Enlightenment scholars have their work cut out for them in assimilating these exciting sources as they gradually find their way into print.

LIST OF ESSAYS

Ulla Kölving, “Avant-propos”

Henri Duranton, “Correspondance littéraire: qu’est-ce à dire?”

Ulla Kölving, “Grimm et la *Correspondance littéraire*: la création d’un réseau européen”

Mélinda Caron, “Louise d’Épinay, correspondante littéraire (1755-1783)”

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Karina Goltsova, Elena Lebedeva, “La correspondance littéraire de Blin de Sainmore et ses lecteurs en Russie”

Thérance Carvalho, “La correspondance littéraire et politique de Du Pont de Nemours: vecteur de diffusion du modèle physiocratique en Europe”

Régine Jomand-Baudry, “La circulation de l’information culturelle entre Paris et la province: l’exemple de la correspondance littéraire de Nîmes par Pierre de Morand”

Ulla Kölving, “Friedrich Melchior Grimm et Isaac de Budé de Boisly, les avatars d’une correspondance politique: trente lettres inédites de Grimm”

NOTES

[1] Friedrich Melchior Grimm, *Correspondance littéraire, 1753-1773*, ed. Ulla Kölving (Ferney-Voltaire: Centre international d'étude du XVIII^e siècle, 2006-).

[2] T. C. W. Blanning, *The Culture of Power and the Power of Culture: Old Regime Europe 1660-1789* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

[3] Antoine Lilti, *Le Monde des salons. Sociabilité et mondanité à Paris au XVIII^e siècle* (Paris: Fayard, 2005); Antoine Lilti, *Figures publiques. L'invention de la célébrité, 1750-1850* (Paris: Fayard, 2014).

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