

WOMAN TO WOMAN: THE INTIMATE CORRESPONDENCE OF
MADAME DU DEFFAND AND THE DUCHESSE DE CHOISEUL

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | Page |
|--|------|
| Chapter | |
| 1 INTRODUCTION AND HISTORIOGRAPHY..... | 1 |
| 2 THE PERSONAL LETTERS OF DEFFAND AND CHOISEUL..... | 25 |
| 3 THE ENLIGHTENMENT'S INFLUENCE ON DEFFAND AND CHOISEUL'S FRIENDSHIP..... | 79 |
| CONCLUSION..... | 113 |
| BIBLIOGRAPHY..... | 120 |

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION AND HISTORIOGRAPHY

Eighteenth-century France has been referred to as many things, such as the Age of Reason or the Age of Enlightenment; however, it should also be referred to as the Feminine Age. Feminine qualities are reflected in centuries' of delicate and ornate architecture, classical music, and Rococo art. The age also held a great reverence for feminine qualities, such as polite manners and elegant, graceful speech. During this period women played a fundamental role in transforming France from a barbaric to a civilized nation, and as Dena Goodman asserts “‘feminine’ virtues were seen to compensate for ‘masculine’ vices that created an ideal whole.”¹

By the eighteenth-century, French men of letters had come to identify culture with sociability, and sociability with polite society. Members of the high society, or *la bonne compagnie*, adhered to certain unwritten rules of *le bon ton*, or the right tone in conversation and maintained proper social etiquette.² Style, which was especially important in conversation, meant everything to this elite stratum of French society; anything might form the subject of polite conversation if it were in good taste and in the right tone. In her work, *The Reign of Women*, Vera Lee observes that French society

¹ Dena Goodman, *The Republic of Letters A Cultural History of the French Enlightenment* (Ithaca, 1994), 6-9.

² *Ibid.*, 3.

would accept perfidy, infidelity, ingratitude, lying and cheating, so long as it was done in good form or concealed by proper manners. Some men sought to emulate these feminine attributes, and the salons of the eighteenth-century provided them with the venue in which to display them. Although the leading figures of the Enlightenment were mostly men, the social context was the highly civilized salon, usually presided over by a woman of independent wealth. The salons were the centers of intellectual life in the eighteenth-century, and they were attended by the age's most popular writers and philosophers. To some extent, their reliance on women provided these men with power and influence that might not otherwise have been available to them.³

According to Dena Goodman, "the French Enlightenment was grounded in a female-centered, mixed-gender sociability that gendered French culture, the Enlightenment, and civilization itself as feminine." The politics of sociability in the eighteenth-century ensured and established women's involvement in French culture, the Enlightenment and civilization. This new political order offered women some leverage in this male dominated society through their legitimized role as civilizers.⁴ These *philosophes*, who willingly submitted themselves to this female governance, and the *salonnières* themselves comprised the rarefied association known as the Republic of Letters. By the 1760's, Parisian salons had become centers for the propagation of the Enlightenment's new set of values. They provided the *philosophes* a forum that

³ Vera Lee, *The Reign of Women* (Cambridge, 1975), 13-15.

⁴ Goodman, *The Republic of Letters*, 5-6.

encouraged and promoted freedom of expression in an organized fashion.⁵ Goodman contends the salons did so by serving as a network of communication where people could meet, converse, exchange, and conceive ideas. Having originated in an age which held the discipline of polite conversation in the highest regard, discourse was the essential activity of salons. And because politeness was considered to be a feminine attribute, it was the *salonnières* who were seen as responsible for shaping good conversation.⁶

Many philosophers considered gender equality as the sign of a civilized nation. Katherine Clinton examines how these men rose to challenge the traditional views regarding the inferiority of the female sex. Montesquieu, Diderot and Voltaire argued against female inferiority, claiming that essentially all of French society was run by women. Montesquieu went so far as to warn men that if they did not know the women of France who governed them, it would be the equivalent of seeing the action of a machine but not knowing its secret springs.⁷ The salons were social and cultural institutions that transformed enlightened ideas from mere conceptualization into a fully articulate form.⁸ This was only possible through the guidance and leadership of *salonnières* like Mme Geoffrin, Mlle de Lespinasse and Mme Necker, who transformed the seventeenth-century leisure salons into literary institutions which brought nobles and non-nobles together on

⁵ Dena Goodman, "Enlightenment Salons: The Convergence of Female and Philosophic Ambitions," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 22, no. 3 (Spring 1989): 331-332.

⁶ Ibid., 340-341. Also see Goodman's work, *The Republic of Letters*, chapters 2 and 3 for a more extensive look at *salonnières* and their governing of the Republic of Letters, including polite conversation and discourse.

⁷ Katherine Clinton, "Femme et Philosophe: Enlightenment Origins of Feminism," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 8, no.3 (Spring, 1975): 285.

⁸ Goodman, *The Republic of Letters*, 6-7.

equal social footing.⁹ Until the mid-eighteenth-century, the interaction of members of the Republic of Letters had mainly centered on epistolary communication, rather than discourse. However, the eighteenth-century salons of these women allowed for the social mixing of men of letters with the aristocracy.¹⁰ The *salonnières* were responsible for enforcing the rules of polite conversation and were charged with harmonizing the egos of the men that frequented their salons. A woman's perceived lack of ego, her serene, calm demeanor, and her modest nature were believed to complement the male gender perfectly. In effect, there existed a form of reciprocal exchange between men and women in the salon, where the governance of the female *salonnière* was substituted for the authority of a male over discourse.¹¹

Historians have only recently recognized the significant role that women played during the eighteenth-century Enlightenment. Carolyn Lougée, Vera Lee, Joan Landes, Dena Goodman, and Carla Hesse are among those historians who have explored the nature of women's participation in the Enlightenment, specifically as *salonnières*.¹² Their works place these women in the social, cultural, intellectual and political contexts within the grand scheme of the Enlightenment. They recognize *salonnières* as forming both the basis of the intellectual social order while serving as the governors of discourse. Thanks to the research of these historians, *salonnières* have been acknowledged as

⁹ Goodman, *Enlightenment Salons*, 333.

¹⁰ Goodman, *The Republic of Letters*, 96-97.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 5.

¹² Carolyn Lougée, *Le Paradis des Femmes* (Princeton, 1976); Lee, *The Reign of Women*; Joan Landes, *Woman and the Public Sphere* (Ithaca, 1988); Goodman, *The Republic of Letters*; and Carla Hesse, *The Other Enlightenment. How French Women Became Modern* (Princeton, 2001).

essential contributors to the Enlightenment and to the modern feminism of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

The salons particularly interest historians because they attracted many of the Enlightenment's most brilliant *philosophes*, writers, dramatists, artists, composers and musicians. Voltaire, Rousseau, Hume, Diderot, d'Alembert, Houdar de la Motte, Fontenelle, Hénault and Montesquieu regularly took part in the salons. In his work, *Considérations sur les mœurs de ce siècle* (1751), Choderlos de Laclos provides us with this observation of the salons:

Both sides have profited from this liaison. Society people have cultivated their minds, formed their taste and acquired new pleasures. The men of letters have gained no less advantage. They have found considerations; they have perfected their taste, polished their minds, softened their manners and on several matters acquired enlightenment such as they would not have found in books.¹³

Salonnières also viewed the salons as an opportunity to become part of the philosophical movement that they identified as the Enlightenment. By the 1760's, they had converted the salons into serious working spaces that encouraged and organized intellectual activity, and promoted enlightened thought and the literary arts.¹⁴ However, the female-centered, mixed-gendered politics of sociability created a problem for many men because they saw themselves as women's natural rulers, and yet here they were subjecting themselves to feminine rule.¹⁵

Lougee's work, *Le Paradis des Femmes: Women, Salons, and Social Stratification in Seventeenth-century France* (1976), offers readers insight into the

¹³ Choderlos de Laclos, *considerations sur les mœurs de ce siècle*, (1751); quoted in Bernadette Craveri, *Madame du Deffand and Her World*, trans. Teresa Waugh (Boston, 1982), 61.

¹⁴ Goodman, *Enlightenment Salons*, 332.

literary debate, known as the *querelle des femmes*, or woman question that evolved from this gendered conflict in the salons. The dissemination of writings about women in the seventeenth-century is vital to understanding the period of the Enlightenment. Lougée's study seeks to address the woman question not solely as an intellectual question, but also as a social one. Previous biographies and literary studies analyzed these writings as isolated ideas that were independent of any social or political roots. Lougée maintains that in the sixteenth-century the *querelle des femmes* focused on the moral worth of women, unlike the seventeenth-century debate, which concentrated on the extent of women's influence on the French social structure. As such, she argues that this debate needs to be addressed on both an intellectual and social level.

In particular, the activity of women within the salons attracted the most attention and drew the most controversy. Lougée asserts that the seventeenth-century salons were an extension of the French court, and replaced the king and his nobles in the monarchy with the *salonnière* and her *habitués* in her *salon*. It was this kind of status granted to women that was the cause of the controversy. Essentially, the proliferation of the salons and women's involvement within them specifically highlighted and brought to the surface the issue of social stratification.¹⁶ The first two parts of her study seeks to analyze the entire contents of writings on women by examining several seventeenth-century tracts authored by a wide variety of writers who focused on the problem of women directly. She uncovers a clear conflict between two schools of thought -- Feminism and Anti-feminism -- and examines writings from prelates, officers and

¹⁵ Goodman, *Republic of Letters*, 106-107.

¹⁶ Ibid., 5.

teachers. Among the authors she examines are Poulain de Barre, a former priest; Saint-Gabriel, an attorney-general in the *Cour des aides* of Normandy; René Bary, a royal historiographer; Louis de Lesclache, a teacher of philosophy and Marguerite Buffet, author and teacher of the art of speaking.¹⁷ However, what cannot be determined from her research is the situation from the vantage point of the women themselves. And even though her work provides readers with a better understanding of how the salons were involved in the issue of social stratification and the reaction of seventeenth-century society, one cannot help but wonder how women in the seventeenth-century viewed their own roles within society.

Part three of her study attempts to describe the seventeenth-century social situation with greater accuracy than has been previously possible. She examines these feminist and antifeminist writings, and provides a thorough sociological analysis of the women who participated in the salons. Lougée investigates the social composition of the salons in order to obtain the opinions of seventeenth-century writers about women and to further her reader's understanding of the social causes and consequences of ideas about women. She examines the character of the salons by analyzing male authors' language and by researching a larger group of women than previous historians.

Lougée's primary sources are lists of distinguished women present in various seventeenth-century works, such as Marguerite Buffet's language textbook, *Nouvelles observations* (1668); Jean de la Forge's *Cercle des femmes savantes* (1663), which listed fifty-eight contemporary learned ladies and patronesses; Saint-Gabriel's treatise, *Le Mérite des dames*, and Antoine Baudeau's comprehensive, *Le Grande dictionnaire des*

¹⁷ Ibid , 11-12.

précieuses, historique, poétique, géographique... (1661). From these lists she formulated a collection of tables, which identified the family backgrounds of salon women, including the lineage of their husbands. These tables demonstrate the merging within polite society of the diverse groups of families who had acquired prominence in the seventeenth-century. By doing so, Lougée hopes to reach a better understanding about the true character of these salons, rather than relying solely on contemporaries' perceptions of these institutions.¹⁸

Lastly, Lougée analyzes an educational institution, the Maison royale de Saint Louis at Saint-Cyr, founded by Madame de Maintenon in 1686, which, from the theoretical stance of anti-feminists, countered the social processes at work in polite society.¹⁹ By making a comparison between this institution, which taught girls not to participate in polite society and the salons, Lougée attempts to illustrate the social conflict and oppositional views that lay at the very heart of the *querelles des femmes*. However, she again relies on seventeenth-century male-authored treatises for an aristocratic social reaction to the blurring of social lines that occurred in the salons rather than any writings from *salonnières* themselves.

Lee's work, *The Reign of Women* (1975), complements Lougée's work in that she explores the eighteenth-century women in their social, moral and judicial milieu. Lee's work, which draws upon social histories of eighteenth-century France, memoirs and correspondence of women, chronicles, pedagogical works and histories of feminine education, legal texts and a few literary and philosophical works, provides her readers

¹⁸ Ibid., 115.

¹⁹ Ibid., 173.

with an overview of the Frenchwoman in various strata of society beginning with the aristocracy.

She begins by describing the archetypal life of noblewomen from their motherless childhood, to their presentation at court, and finally their arranged marriage. She depicts her not as being at a disadvantage because of her sex but, in concurrence with Goodman and Landes, as a representation of Old Regime France.²⁰ Lee also examines the women of the French bourgeoisie, the upper, middle and lower, or *haute, moyenne and petite*, French bourgeoisie. Although she touches upon some of the more obvious distinctions between these classes, she does not comprehensively examine the significance of social mobility, an increasingly common phenomenon as the eighteenth-century wore on, as Landes and Goodman show in their works.²¹

Lee also attempts to show female involvement in literature and the arts. She presents the arguments of Rousseau, Montesquieu, Voltaire or Diderot on women as well as brief accounts written by female writers who write in defense of their gender. Lee is also accurate in not depicting men or women as thinking in terms of sexual equality. Their works in the early eighteenth-century, whether published or not, did not demand freedom from oppression for their sex. It was not until the late 1770's, just prior to the Revolution, that women became more authoritative in their demand for equality.²²

Although Lee does mention a few specific works by the more well-known female authors and *salonnières*, such as Olympe de Gouges, Madame d'Epinay, Madame Ga_\on

²⁰ Lee, *Reign of Women*, 3-7

²¹ Ibid., 1-46

²² Ibid., 57.

Dufour, Madame Dupin, and Madame de Genlis, she does not offer details of the lives of these women. However, her last chapter does place importance on the salons and *salonnières*, identifying them as the judges and arbiters of taste and more importantly as directors of style and content of contemporary writings.²³ She asserts that they aided many aspiring authors and *philosophes* by providing them with protection, pensions and advice. Such connections with *salonnières* opened many doors for men like Montesquieu, d'Alembert, Marmontel, Voltaire and Rousseau.

Lee's work concludes that the history of the Frenchwoman, before the Enlightenment should be viewed as neither a dramatic rise to power nor as a fall from grace. Throughout the ages their roles have shifted constantly; those roles dependant on women's varying social and economic class, age, and marital status. However, Lee concludes that the gains that Frenchwomen made were perceptible, and what was truly important was not the quantity of freedom or equality, but the quality of lives that they lead and how these women managed to enrich their lives.²⁴

The appearance of Jürgen Habermas', *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (1962, first published in English in 1989), opened a new chapter in the development of the historiography of the salon. Habermas' Marxist analysis provided the concept of the public sphere as it applied to France from 1750-1789. The first type of public sphere emerged in early absolutist states, amongst the convoluted court rituals, where it was the monarch who 'represented' his authority to the public. Habermas refers to this as the representative public sphere, whose only function is to provide an arena for

²³ Ibid., 116.

²⁴ Ibid., 113-130.

the display of authority. He further contends that with the emergence of commercial capitalism, a new social class tailored the structure of the public sphere to suit their needs. As trade increased and transcended social and geographic boundaries, dialogue became very important to merchants. Within this new sphere or space a medium of criticism was created, which allowed and encouraged the bourgeoisie to retain his private status while partaking in a public act. According to Habermas' theory, this overlapping of public and private functions began to develop in bourgeois society, thus creating a 'civil public sphere,' which he dates to the mid-eighteenth-century.²⁵

However, Habermas contends that the absence of an institutionalized forum for public opinion allowed for a literary public to develop in France. This in turn led to the creation of the literary public sphere, where a sphere of intimacy was created and centered in the family. The beginning of the new practice of circulating and publishing private letters and diaries of great figures denotes this transition. The birth of published criticism also indicates the emergence of public opinion challenging the state. Habermas argues that capitalism was responsible for the creation of a new social caste based on estate, and was contingent upon his principle of general accessibility. Whereas before capitalism man needed property in order to voice his concerns, now he only needed literacy to partake in state affairs. In essence, the literary sphere had expanded the boundaries of the public sphere to include the common or *bourgeois* man.²⁶ It is here that he identifies the salons as taking part in shaping this public space through their criticism of literary and artistic works, and eventually of public policy. The salons were the first

²⁵ Benjamin Nathans, "Habermas's "Public Sphere" in the Era of the French Revolution," *French Historical Studies* 16, no. 3 (Spring 1990): 621-22.

²⁶ Ibid , 631

institutions that enabled the bourgeois intelligentsia to mix with the nobility. This general accessibility would eventually widen to include the public and become the medium between the state and the rest of society.²⁷ Habermas' theory with its emphasis on the role of the salon in the public sphere is important for most contemporary historiography of women. By placing such a great importance on the act of criticism by a new 'homogenous upper class,' he validates the very forum in which private persons learned to use their reason in a public manner: the salon.

Landes' work, *Women and the Public Sphere* (1988), like Habermas, focuses on women's relationship to the modern public sphere from a theoretical standpoint, and most importantly from a woman's and feminist's point of view. She contends that Habermas addressed the idea of a civil public sphere as a social category, but that he ignored the issue of gender. Her research attempts to reconstruct Habermas' Marxist interpretation of the public-sphere by contending that through discourse and practice the bourgeois created the civil public sphere by excluding women from public life.²⁸ Her main objection is to Habermas' contention that the public sphere was accessible to everyone, because the public sphere excluded women whom she argues played an important role in public life. She presents her work as a revision of his initial thesis, which she deems as being masculine in nature and representative only of the bourgeoisie class. Whereas, Habermas concentrated on the bourgeois public sphere, she focuses on the public life of women and their place within that stratum. By attempting to reconstruct the public sphere theory from a feminist point of view, Landes places her theory in a cultural context.

²⁷ Ibid., 624.

²⁸ Ibid., 635.

Aside from Habermas' political theory, she also relies heavily on a number of secondary sources from other well-known historians.²⁹ She examines elite women's public influence through the salons. New cultural institutions that were rapidly emerging, such as salons, coffeehouses, clubs, reading and language societies, publishing companies, journals and newspapers, helped create a new public world. However, the salons were distinctive in that they were a place where the aristocracy mingled with writers, artists, scholars, philosophers and lawyers. Landes contends that the salons had many similarities with the emerging oppositional bourgeois public-sphere, but these cultural institutions were neither strictly bourgeois, nor aristocratic, even though they did remain an elite affair.³⁰

Landes asserts that the salons allowed both men and women a measured amount of public space that was independent of the king and the court. Salons also created a place where a network of individuals might discuss and criticize France's political and social institutions. The *salonnières* thus created an atmosphere of liberation that not only attracted the *philosophes*, but also served to benefit women as well. Within the salon's walls men and women were able to freely and openly express their ideas regarding the current and promising works of the *philosophes*. In essence, the *salonnières* played an important role in the process by directing and promoting the refinement of the literary arts of speech and writing within the salons.³¹

²⁹ Such as: Keith Baker, Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, Natalie Zemon Davis, Phillipe Ariès, Francois Furet, Dena Goodman, Elizabeth Eisenstein, Robert Darnton, Jeremy Popkin, and Nina Gelbart.

³⁰ Landes, *Women and the Public Sphere*, 23.

³¹ Elizabeth Goldsmith and Dena Goodman, *Going Public: Woman and Publishing in Early Modern France* (Ithaca, 1995), 2-3.

Landes also examines the *salonnière's* role within the emerging print culture, as well as their influence on epistolary fiction, and their place within the press of Old Regime France. Like Habermas, she argues that a new communication system was encouraged by capitalism, which brought into existence a new public world that Habermas calls the oppositional bourgeois public sphere. However, Landes contends that this sphere was not one universal sphere of discourse as Habermas contends, but many, namely between the written, spoken and printed word. Having addressed earlier in her work how women excelled in the categories of speech and letter writing, she then moves to examine women's participation in the print culture as both *epistolières* and *salonnières*.³² Landes also identifies the efforts of Mme du Deffand, Mlle de Lespinasse and Mme Geoffrin, who were well-known for their influence on the academic careers of brilliant writers and philosophers, as the real power behind an election of an individual to the *Académie Française*.³³

In the second half of her work, Landes carries her work to the year of the Revolution, contending that the fate of women and feminism lay with the bourgeois public sphere. She incorporates excerpts from celebrated eighteenth-century writers such as Montesquieu's *The Spirit of Laws*; Mercier's *Journal des dames*, Rousseau's *Emile* and *Confessions*, Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*, and Gouges' *Declaration of the Rights of Women*. After examining various discourses on women's rights and women in society authored by Condorcet, Gouges, and Wollstonecraft, she concludes that even though women had failed to achieve political emancipation, the

³² Landes, *Women and the Public Sphere*, 39-40, 59.

³³ Ibid., 54.

Revolution had granted them a political constitution. Their gender had now become a socially significant class, and had played a pertinent part in the transformation of the absolutist public sphere.

Goodman's numerous works provide readers with a cultural history of the Enlightenment as well as theoretical analysis of the institutions, which gave birth to this movement. She specifically analyzes the social and discursive practices and institutions of the men of letters and the *salonnières*. Like Landes, she is also heavily influenced by Habermas' analysis of the concept of the public sphere. Goodman begins by conceding that throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth-centuries the growth of the Republic of Letters paralleled the French monarchy, and agrees with Habermas that as the public acquired the freedom of conscience it defined a private autonomy for itself. It was the interaction between the state and the individual that formed the basis for the public sphere and that lay at the heart of the Republic of Letters. She argues the men of letters, who recognized themselves as a status group within French society, became the center of the public sphere in which private persons learned to use their reason publicly.³⁴

This contention leads Goodman to recognize salons as cultural institutions that created social and intellectual spaces, which brought nobles, non-nobles, and *salonnières* together for the purpose of promoting and supporting Enlightenment thought. And while she agrees with Landes' final conclusion that women were excluded from the public sphere which developed out of the Revolution, she disagrees with her method of reaching it. She examines Landes' basic argument that the republic that rose from the Old Regime was a gendered republic, but disagrees that the bourgeois public sphere was essentially

³⁴ Ibid., 12-15.

masculine. Goodman claims that Landes misrepresented Habermas' idea of the public sphere by pitting the public and the private sphere against one another. Goodman further argues that Habermas' framework and focus on sociability disclose a different public sphere from the one Landes presented, where women played an important role. She maintains that Landes needed to distinguish between women of the court and those of the salons in order to better explain why *salonnières* played such an important role in the shaping of the public sphere. Goodman sees the main difference between women of the court, or those associated with the absolutist sphere, as associated with deception and secrecy. Any power that they had was derived solely from their intimacy with the king. While the *salonnières* were often painted in the same light, Goodman contends that the domestic space of the salons protected them from the monarchy. Because Landes' assumes that the court and salon are in the same public sphere, she labels them both as being fully public and in opposition to the domestic sphere. Goodman, however, argues that the public sphere was not fully public, and so not in opposition to the domestic sphere at all. In fact, this is what made the salons and *salonnières* socially acceptable. She reveals that there was no such thing as a public woman in eighteenth-century France because most women, and men for that matter, subsisted within a private realm that merely had a public face. Essentially, Goodman sees a distinction between the public sphere of the state and that of the private realm.³⁵

Goodman's best-known work, *The Republic of Letters* (1994), further explores women's specific roles as *salonnières*. She maintains that they were successful in

³⁵ Goodman, "Public Sphere and Private Life: Toward a Synthesis of Current Historiographical Approaches to the Old Regime," *History and Theory. Studies in the Philosophy of History* 31 (1992): 15-20.

transforming the salon from a leisure institution of the nobility into an institution of Enlightenment, and depicts them as taking their roles as *salonnières* very seriously, filling all of their free time preparing and organizing for their salon gatherings. These salons offered the *philosophes* a social space, not to just pass the time, but to gather and freely discuss the intellectual activity of the Enlightenment. She seeks to discover who these women were and how they coped with the paradox of being women in an age that revered their feminine attributes, while simultaneously seeking to limit their involvement in the various social, political and cultural aspects of the eighteenth-century.

Goodman further maintains that conversation and correspondence were complementary discursive modes of the salon. Correspondence was vital to the salons: “If salons were the heart of the Enlightenment, letters circulated through them like its life blood.”³⁶ Letters helped to distribute manuscripts, news, and gossip as well as transmit the daily occurrences within the salons.³⁷ Having one’s manuscripts read aloud in salons could be an alternative to publication, or possibly lead to it. Goodman affirms Habermas’ contention that the salons often held the monopoly of the first publication. The new services of the *messageries* and *postes*, as well as the increasing literacy rate among women, further encouraged the exchange of letters. Commonly, letters of particular interest from *philosophes*, other *salonnières*, or even nobility, would be read aloud or

³⁶ Ibid., pp. 340-341.

³⁷ Catherine the Great and Frederick the Great maintained correspondence with several *salonnières*, such as Mme Geoffrin. Goodman, *Republic of Letters*, 82-84. Also see Glotz and Maire, *Salons du XVIIIème siècle* (Paris, 1949), 137-144.

distributed within the salons, which served to further the intellectual activity of the Enlightenment.³⁸

Hesse's *The Other Enlightenment* (2001) also contributes to the understanding of how French women were involved in the Enlightenment. Taking the term "other" from feminist author Simone de Beauvoir, Hesse attempts to tell the story of the Enlightenment from another point of view, one that did not place women in that immutable category because of their subordination to men. Her work surveys the intellectual lives of French women of the revolutionary era, specifically exploring how they came into consciousness of themselves as modern individuals. Hesse defines modernity as the consciousness of one's self as self-creating, which requires specific intellectual skills and a highly developed system of communication. She identifies writing as the most critical act because it allows us to separate ourselves from our ideas and exchange them with others.³⁹

Hesse begins by exploring women's relationship to literacy, publishing and authorship by charting the breakdown of women's traditional roles in literary culture, namely the *salonnières* and their polar opposite the *poissarde*, or fishwives.⁴⁰ During the decade of the French Revolution, Parisian women were becoming literate in mounting numbers. The literacy rate between the illiterate and literate population closed quickly, beginning in the 1780's when roughly one in eight women could read, through the second half of the nineteenth-century when the number crept to almost 85 percent total literacy.⁴¹

³⁸ Goodman, *Republic of Letters*, 16-20

³⁹ Hesse, *The Other Enlightenment*, xii.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, xii.

Building upon this information, Hesse proceeds to examine how between 1750 and 1790 women were able to find a public voice in the print. She does so by examining two sources, the *Année littéraire*, a massive directory of published writers and their publications, and the *Bibliographie du genre Romanesque (1751-1800)*, and painstakingly cross checking them with the *Archives biographiques de France* and two other catalogues, in order to determine and establish as complete a bibliographic and biographical record for each author as possible.⁴² From these sources she is able to estimate the number of women who had at least one publication. She concludes two things from her research: one, despite a few great women writers, numerically women held a marginal space in the literary culture of the Old Regime; and two, women's writing flourished once that regime fell.⁴³ Hesse's work confirms Landes' conclusion that the even though women had failed to achieve political emancipation, the Revolution had granted them a political constitution. Hesse thus reaffirms her original contention that the "other Enlightenment," which she saw as the public exercise of female reason, began in full with the commercialization of French culture life after 1789.⁴⁴

Her research focuses on a wide array of women, such as Mme Guizot, Mlle de Lezardière, Mme de Staël, Mme de Genlis, and Louise de Kéralio, and establishes other correlations between their social and marital status, and their publications. However, even though her research proves invaluable in piecing together how it was that women

⁴¹ Ibid., 9.

⁴² Ibid., 35-36.

⁴³ Ibid., 37.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 55.

entered the philosophical circles through print and provides keen insight into the plights and successes of these women by exploring parts of their works, women's private thoughts and concerns still elude us.

Godineau also makes contributions to the history of the eighteenth-century Frenchwoman in her work, *The Women of Paris and their French Revolution* (1998); however, she concentrates her efforts on the common woman and her roles in the French Revolution. She claims that most works present women as being set apart from the Revolution, rather than as active participants in the revolutionary process. Her work attempts to unite the history of women and the history of Revolution, and she focuses her research on the question of citizenship for women. She chooses to examine the everyday obstacles that ordinary women, whom she sees as symbols of the private sphere, and carefully avoids involving the aristocratic women such as the *salonnières*. Her work digs deep into the archives, specifically police accounts and interrogation records, in order to explain how ordinary women were involved in the political events of the Revolution.⁴⁵

There she unearths traces of working class women, laundrywomen, shop owners, unemployed women, and wives of artisans or merchants. Godineau claims that these records, give these women a voice, although indirectly, and reveal their collective *mentalité*. They reveal the extreme poverty, violence, and precariousness with which working women lived daily during the Revolution. Godineau, like Landes, Lee, and Hesse, asserts that even though women never possessed the political rights of a citizen,

⁴⁵ Godineau, *The Women of Paris and Their French Revolution*, xvii.

nonetheless certainly participated in Revolutionary events and demonstrated their citizenship regardless.⁴⁶

Historians Goodman, Lougée, Lee, Landes, Goodman, Hesse, and Godineau all assert that women played an integral part in the political, intellectual or cultural movements of the Enlightenment and Revolution. However, in all these various studies very little attention has been paid to the private thoughts and intimate feelings of women. Their works mainly stress women's roles within the public sphere, the Enlightenment, or the French Revolution. Goodman, Landes and Lougée demonstrate that *salonnières* were largely responsible for the transformation of the salon into an Enlightenment institution.

Undoubtedly, theoretical studies and sociological analyses of the cultural, social and political roles played by women in eighteenth-century France are essential for a complete and thorough understanding of French history; however, still missing is a study of the personal perspectives of these women. To correct this omission, this thesis examines the private correspondence between two women, the Marquise du Deffand, a *salonnière*, and the duchesse de Choiseul, a woman of high aristocratic station who had no connection to the world of the salons in mid-eighteenth-century France. Goodman's work attests to the importance of correspondence and letter writing. By the eighteenth-century, letter writing had become increasingly popular, especially in salons, and was not viewed as a casual activity. For women, the agreement to correspond was a formal engagement that implied mutual responsibilities, and served as a substitute for conversation in the physical absence of a friend.⁴⁷ In the salons, women formed valuable

⁴⁶ Ibid., xv.

⁴⁷ Goodman, *Republic of Letters*, 139-140.

social and political connections, which in turn often lead to their making other acquaintances outside the salon walls. Such was the case with Deffand and Choiseul, who were originally introduced by one of the *habitués* to Deffand's salon, the duc de Choiseul.

As Judith Curtis notes, the fact that women's correspondence was often carried on for many years, in the case of Deffand and Choiseul from 1760 to 1780, is significant and illustrative of the close bonds that often formed between women.⁴⁸ The correspondence of Deffand and Choiseul reveals much about the nature of female friendship among aristocratic women in the eighteenth-century. The topics of their correspondence, the nature of their relationship, and the relationship of their friendship to the wider world of the *philosophes* will be the main focus of this thesis. Of particular interest are Deffand and Choiseul's views on love, friendship, happiness and a woman's place in eighteenth-century French society. Their letters indicate that they, and perhaps others like them, did not always lead full and happy lives simply because they were a part of high society, or because they found themselves in the midst of social and intellectual activity, whether at court or in the salon.

Their body of letters are representative of the tight bonds that were formed through letter writing, and this correspondence reveals aspects of their private worlds that cannot be learned from other sources. The private correspondence between these two women has remained virtually ignored by historians despite the insights it provides regarding various aspects of eighteenth-century life for aristocratic women. Their correspondence accentuates the private versus the public realm of two eighteenth-century

⁴⁸ Ibid , 226.

aristocratic women and offers a window into these women's innermost thoughts, ambitions, and fears.

This study is divided into two parts: chapter two is devoted to uncovering the details of the personal friendship of Deffand and Choiseul, and chapter three explores the nature of their friendship by examining their correspondence with Voltaire. In this context, I hope not only to expound on women's role in the Enlightenment and their relationships with the *philosophes*, but more importantly to further explore how Voltaire's involvement, as a male counterpart and *philosophe* affected their friendship. As the Enlightenment's most famous philosopher, his works and correspondence have always fascinated historians. However, in this context it is Voltaire's longstanding relationship of over fifty-years with Deffand, and her subsequent introduction of Choiseul to him, that proves to be so intriguing. Interestingly enough, Voltaire's presence reveals a dramatic role reversal between Deffand and Choiseul and, even more importantly, the affect of his letters had on their personal relationship.

The ultimate goal is to use Deffand and Choiseul's correspondence to add another dimension to the works of Landes, Lougée, Lee, Hesse and Godnieau regarding the lives of eighteenth-century women, particularly those associated with the salons. This study is limited to two specific women and devoted to their own personal thoughts and fears, which may or may not be shared by elite women in general. However, Deffand and Choiseul's letters do offer a window into the intimate world of their gender. Such letters can reveal information that cannot be obtained by interpreting literary works written by contemporary male authors who did not live the life of a woman. How did women cope with living in such a paradoxical society that expected them to remain subservient, while

claiming to admire their feminine attributes? What sort of role did friendship play in the lives of these women, and why was this friendship so central to their well-being? How did their participation in the Enlightenment influence their intimate relationship? For Deffand and Choiseul the answers to these questions can be found through a close examination of their correspondence.

CHAPTER 2

THE PERSONAL LETTERS OF DEFFAND AND CHOISEUL

“However rare true love may be, it is less so than true friendship,” French writer François La Rochefoucauld observed in the seventeenth-century.⁴⁹ Although a great importance was not generally placed on either love or friendship by many in the following century, Rochfoucauld, who was well-known for his insightful maxims, seemed to express what many women like Madame du Deffand and the duchesse de Choiseul would find to be true. Rochefoucauld understood that true love was uncommon and erratic at best, and placed a higher value on its counterpart, friendship. What might pass for friendship within the Old Regime elite was often little more than traditional social and political connections. And although during this age feminine qualities were admired, and even preferred to male attributes by many, nonetheless, women found themselves existing in a male dominated society. It was only through close friendships with each other that women were able to prevail against the irony of the age. Certainly Deffand and Choiseul both maneuvered their way through life via the connections of their friends and families; however, their private letters reveal that they sought something more than the superficial aristocratic life provided them. They needed someone who could bestow the understanding, reassurance, and emotional sustenance that was missing from their lives.

⁴⁹ Bartlett's Familiar Quotations, 17th ed., s.v. “La Rochefoucauld, François.”

Deffand and Choiseul's correspondence reveals the intimate aspects of one female relationship in eighteenth-century France. Their letters offer us the opportunity to follow the course of their relationship and to explore its very nature. Although these women possessed personalities distinct from one another, they both belonged to the old aristocracy of eighteenth-century France, and despite the liberties that they enjoyed as aristocratic women, they also shared many of the same fears and concerns in their ultimate quest for happiness. Because of their differences in age, outlook and social milieu, these letters provide scholars insight into the lives of two distinct aristocratic women: one was experienced in the life of high society; the other reigned in the world of the salons.

In 1697, Marie de Vichy-Champrond, marquise du Deffand, was born into the very prestigious, aristocratic Vichy family. Despite the family's wealth, the death of her father, Gaspard II comte de Champrond of the house of Bourgogne, left her and her mother near destitution due to overwhelming debt, a situation common within the aristocracy.⁵⁰ They did, however, find comfort and financial support from Marie's aunt, the duchesse de Luynes.⁵¹ Like many aristocratic women, the young Marie received only a rudimentary education at the prestigious convent, Madeleine du Traisel in Paris, but she

⁵⁰ Her mother, also from a very noble family was Anne Bruland, daughter of the first president to the parlement of Bourgogne. Craveri, *Madame du Deffand*, 4-5.

⁵¹ The duchesse de Luynes had many connections at the French court, and even got Président Hénault his position of Superintendent of the House, as well as securing 2000 crowns from the Queen's treasury for Deffand, who would also later secure a life annuity when she became the mistress of the Regent of France, Philippe d'Orléans. Helen Clergue, *The Salon: A Study of French Society and Personalities in the Eighteenth-century* (New York, 1907), 60.

was able to substitute a sharp, critical mind and quick wits for her lack of extensive formal education.⁵²

In 1718, she married her distant cousin, Jean-Baptiste-Jacques du Deffand, marquis de la Lande. This proved to be one of the most consequential events of her life. Women often used marriage as a means to an end, and Deffand was determined to take advantage of her situation. This *mariage de convenance* was characterized by a husband and wife who were incompatible and barely tolerated one another. Carolyn Lougée likened such marriage arrangements to bargains, where love was both conditional and revocable. Men needed women primarily to produce legitimate heirs for them, while women used marriages as a springboard into society.⁵³ Essentially, marriage offered women protection, economic security, and social mobility. Once married, women could be received by society, go to balls, show off their jewels and other finery in public, and more importantly they could be presented at court. Most women did not expect, nor look, for romance from their husbands because it was obviously not the point of the institution.⁵⁴

The marquis de la Lande was not in love his wife and expected nothing more than for her to play the part of a dutiful spouse. However, Madame du Deffand was not willing to passively accept her status as a wife. Determined to establish a position for herself in society, Deffand formed liaisons with some of the great men of Parisian society. By 1721, she had entered into an affair with the Regent of France, Philippe

⁵² Craveri, *Madame du Deffand*, 5.

⁵³ Lougée, *Le Paradis des Femmes*, 62.

⁵⁴ Lee, *The Reign of Women*, 9.

d'Orleans, becoming the official mistress of one of the most questionable and corrupt members of the Palais-Royal circle. This affair was confirmed by the infamous acceptance of a life annuity of 6,000 livres.⁵⁵ The marquis soon wearied of his wife's constant flirtations and infidelities, and this led to the couple's brief separation in the early part of 1728. However, despite their attempt at reconciliation later that year, in the end Deffand decided to formally end the marriage on grounds that her husband's resources were less than adequate to establish and maintain a household.⁵⁶

Unfortunately for Deffand, it was also at this point that the Regent ended their affair, leaving her the laughing stock of Parisian society. Nevertheless, determined to regain social credibility, she climbed back to the top with the help of another well-respected and admired man of Parisian society, Charles Hénault, *président au parlement* and close friend of Marie Leczinska, Queen of Louis XV.⁵⁷ Bernadette Craveri surmises they had probably met during the Regency when he was a young and rich magistrate. By the time their relationship began, however, Hénault was a forty-three year old, recently widowed, cultivated man of influence, who was considered one of the most brilliant men of Paris. Their letters suggest the two initially were lovers, but that after their fascination with each other wore off they remained close friends and correspondents.⁵⁸ In fact, it was Hénault's influence that first introduced Deffand to the salon culture. He presented her at

⁵⁵ The Regent's death in 1723 put her in a precarious financial situation, since her separation from her husband deprived her of any financial support from him. Craveri argues it was at this point that she made up her mind that she must rely on her intelligence, not her beauty to get her through life. Craveri, *Madame du Deffand*, 11-12.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 14.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 16.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 16-18.

Madame la duchesse du Maine's famous salon at Sceaux around 1730. At Sceaux she met many of France's accomplished *philosophes* including Montesquieu, Voltaire, d'Alembert, Fontenelle, Crébillon, Marmontel and Diderot, as well as other influential aristocrats such as the Tencins, the Ferriols and Bolingbroke.⁵⁹

Undoubtedly, Deffand's widening circle of aristocratic friends enabled her in 1747 financially and socially to establish a literary salon in the heart of the most fashionable quarter of Paris on the rue Saint-Dominique, at Saint Joseph's convent. The salon remained in this location until her death in 1780. Deffand's salon soon became a meeting place for all celebrities, French and foreign. It was unlike that governed by women such as Madame du Maine; it was not devoted to leisure but rather to literature and the dissemination of Enlightenment ideas.⁶⁰ Goodman maintains that eighteenth-century salons permitted social mobility in the world of the Republic of letters for philosophers and great aristocrats. *Salonnières*, such as Deffand, had transformed the salons of the sixteenth-century, which served primarily as noble and leisure institutions, into spaces where nobles and philosophers alike were brought together on the same social plane.⁶¹ Goodman characterizes the Republic of Letters as based on friendship, marked

⁵⁹ Madame la duchesse du Maine was famous for holding theatrical events at the château de Sceaux just outside of Paris in the early eighteenth-century, where both she and Madame du Stael wrote and performed many plays. The court at Sceaux was seen by many as a rival to the king's court at Versailles. For many years, their only motive was to entertain and 'outdo' Versailles. It was not until several years later that it became a literary center, drawing a long list of famous writers, such as Voltaire, Piron, Fontenelle, Diderot and Voisenon. Madame du Deffand was actually introduced to the salon by Hénault, and spent much time there mastering the refinements of high society by following Madame du Maine's example. Upon du Maine's death Deffand was able to begin her own salon with many of the same participants that had attended du Maine's court. *Ibid.*, 34-41. Also see Clergue, *The Salon*, 57-59. She contends that Deffand's company was the most desired, and was their acknowledged leader.

⁶⁰ Clergue, *The Salon*, 62-64.

⁶¹ Goodman, "Enlightenment Salons: The Convergence of Female and Philosophic Ambitions," 330-331.

by its epistolary relations and values of reciprocity and exchange.⁶² Deffand and other *salonnières* were responsible for establishing and fostering centers where the philosophers could share their works and ideas with one another, and more importantly formulate the connections and alliances to further their careers. As a *salonnière*, she was now a public woman, existing and functioning outside of the institution of marriage. For her, making and securing privatized bonds and alliances among well placed family members and friends for her own advancement, as well as that of her *habitués*, was her main goal.⁶³

Deffand enjoyed playing a more dominant cultural role, as well as the freedom and privileges that came with her new responsibility. Although Deffand entertained friends in her home daily, her salon, which one attended only upon invitation, met regularly for Monday night suppers – and reportedly provided the best conversation in Paris that could be found.⁶⁴ Her long-standing friendship with Voltaire in particular facilitated her association with the Luxembourg, Beauvau, Mirepoix, and d'Aiguillon families, all among the most aristocratic in France.⁶⁵

In 1760, her circle of friends expanded to include Étienne Francois, duc de Choiseul, and later and more importantly, his young wife, Louise-Honorine Crozat du Châtel, duchesse de Choiseul. Their marriage was also one of convenience. The *mariage de convenance* was mainly a tool for preserving social order, and served the

⁶² Goodman, *Republic of Letters*, 86.

⁶³ Landes, *Women and the Public Sphere*, 30-31.

⁶⁴ Clergue, *The Salon*, 63.

⁶⁵ Information regarding Deffand's salon and its participants was largely taken from Craveri, *Madame du Deffand*, chpt. 4. pp. 60-98.

financial, political and social interest of both families. In this case the institution functioned splendidly. The duchesse's grandfather had been Antoine Crozat, also known as Crozat the Rich, a financier who by 1707 had accumulated an estimated twenty million livres. Undoubtedly, the Choiseul family expected to gain some of this wealth. The Châtel family also had much to gain from this marriage. The duc de Choiseul, who was comte de Stainville when the couple first married, served in the French army with distinction against the British and Austrians in the War of the Austrian Succession (1740-1748), and quickly gained political influence at court. In 1758, through his association with Madame du Pompadour, Louis XV's mistress, Choiseul was appointed Minister of Foreign Affairs in 1758, then Minister of War in 1761 and finally, Minister of the Navy in 1762.⁶⁶

It was Deffand's friendship with the duc de Choiseul that led to her lengthy correspondence and intimate friendship with the duchesse de Choiseul. The relationship that developed between the two women is fascinating, for what could an aging *salonnière* and the wife of the Minister of Foreign Affairs of France have found in common that resulted in a friendship and correspondence lasting fifteen years? At the beginning of the friendship, Deffand was already sixty-four years of age, while Choiseul was only twenty-four; however, the disparity in age did not seem to matter to either one of them, although it would ultimately affect the nature of their relationship as their friendship grew. Like Deffand, the duchesse had married early, at the age of fifteen, to a man twice her age who did not love her. Choiseul's marriage allowed her to enter the highest levels of society; however, she did not pursue lovers, or attend any of the salons, as had Deffand. Even

⁶⁶ By 1762, Choiseul held all three of these positions simultaneously. Rohan Butler, *Choiseul. Father and Son 1719-1754* (Oxford, 1980), 633, 855-860.

though she undoubtedly shared many of the same acquaintances and friendships with *salonnières* such as Deffand, Choiseul chose a different path.⁶⁷

In addition to the great difference in their ages, Deffand and Choiseul possessed strikingly different personalities that are revealed in their correspondence. Their atypical friendship began in the early 1760's when Deffand's salon was flourishing. By this time, Deffand was over sixty years old and had been blind for nearly ten years, a great contrast to the duchesse who was busy leading the life of a young, pretty, and delicate wife of one of the most powerful men in France. Because of her husband's position, Choiseul's presence was also constantly required at the royal court at Versailles or other royal chateaus in the Paris region.⁶⁸

The two women began writing to each other in 1761, with the correspondence lasting until Deffand's death in 1780. However, it was not until 1766 that their correspondence became regular. Before 1766 their letters only numbered half a dozen every year, and lacked the intensity that would eventually develop. The subjects of their initial correspondence were the common, if superficial, interests they shared as aristocratic women. It was Choiseul's connections at court that Deffand found particularly useful in the early years of their friendship. Many of their early letters revolved around court gossip and news. Initially in their friendship, Choiseul served as an informant and intermediary for Deffand, specifically providing her with news of both

⁶⁷ Craveri, *Madame du Deffand*, 344-345.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 344-45.

Mme de Pompadour and the Queen's activities and health.⁶⁹ On 22 March 1764, Choiseul reported to Deffand, who no doubt referred information of this kind to the *habitués* of her salon, that Pompadour, had been ill for some time, and "no longer coughs, her breathing is free...the fever is so light...and she returns to Versailles tomorrow. It is only necessary to finish the coughing up of the tuberculosis which is at its end..."⁷⁰ Even more importantly, Choiseul helped secure a pension for Deffand from the Queen and described the Queen as saying, "I couldn't wish for anything more, Madame du Deffand will have her pension...", which the duchesse estimated would equal 2000 écus.⁷¹ Choiseul's influence was crucial in securing the pension, because only women with the title of duchesse could sit at court in the presence of the King and Queen of France.⁷²

⁶⁹ In 1725, Louis XV married Maria Leszczinska, daughter of Stanislaw I, King of Poland, and though she was Queen, it has been noted by many historians that it was Pompadour who took an active interest in the happenings in France. She had many friends among men of letters and authors and successfully put many of them under the protection of Louis XV. She even managed to obtain a position and pension for Voltaire, who becomes Gentleman of Chamber. Such seeking pensions and positions was very common among the aristocrats.

⁷⁰ Choiseul to Deffand, 22 March 1764, "Elle ne tousse presque plus, la respiration est libre...et la fièvre est si légère...demain ou après-demain et qu'elle retournât Mercredi à Versailles. Il n'y en a plus que ce qu'il faut pour achever de cracher ses tubercules qui sont à leur fin..." Pompadour died from tuberculosis on April 15, 1764 less than a month after Choiseul's letter to Deffand. Marie de Vichy Champrond du Deffand. *Correspondence Complete de Madame Du Deffand avec la Duchesse de Choiseul, l'Abbe Barthelemy et Craufurt*. 3 vols. (Paris, 1866-77), 1:17.

⁷¹ Choiseul to Deffand, 22 March 1764, "Je suis comblée, madame du Deffand aura sa pension..." Mais on peut inférer qu'elle est de deux mille écus, puisqu'elle les a demandés." Deffand, *Correspondence*, 1:17. It is very difficult to ascertain the exact value of this pension. From 1667 the only legal currency in France was the livre, which divided into 20 sous. A sous was divisible into 12 deniers. Its relationship to the franc varied greatly according to circumstances. Between 1700 and 1726 the value of currency changed 85 times. At the end of this time the livre dropped from 1,655 francs to 1,022. My best estimation is that 15 écus was equal to 100 francs. This pension was of course not her sole source of income. Her separation from her husband, in combination with several other investments, pensions and inheritances left her with an income of 38,000 livres in 1769, though this number would vary somewhat over the course of her life. See Craveri's endnotes for an itemized list of Deffand's income.

⁷² Craveri, *Madame du Deffand*, 86. Also see Craveri's endnotes, and Alfred Franklin, *La Civilité, l'étiquette, la mode, le bon ton du XIIIe au XIXe siècle...*, (Paris, 1908), I :222-23.

Madame du Deffand

From the beginning of their correspondence, Deffand expressed the loneliness that accompanied the demands of public life for aristocratic women. Although the salon provided Deffand with a certain measure of intellectual and social activity, her correspondence with Choiseul reveals that her life was far from fulfilling. Interestingly, although Deffand was characterized by many of her friends as frivolous, gay, extremely witty, compassionate, and sincere, yet much of her private correspondence with Choiseul proves her also to be pessimistic, demanding, melancholy and untrusting towards others.⁷³ Such characteristics, in combination with her blindness, lead Deffand down a very lonely path in her later life. Her letters to Choiseul, transcribed and painstakingly written by her devoted secretary Jean-François Wiart, are riddled with complaints of her biggest predicament, *ennuie* or boredom.⁷⁴

And although Deffand's boredom was certainly related to her prevailing depression, her complaint does not stem solely from being blind.⁷⁵ In fact, Deffand continued to hold her salon for years after she initially went blind and continued to entertain friends in her home up until her death. Therefore, it was not a lack of friendly attention or intellectual stimulation that she felt she needed. In a letter to Choiseul, on 2 January 1773, just a few years before her death, Deffand makes it clear that for her,

⁷³ Clergue, *The Salon*, 77.

⁷⁴ Wiart entered Deffand's service before 1752, just preceding the time when she went completely blind. The first letter known to be written by Wiart is one written by Madame du Deffand to her sister, Madame d'Aulan, on 18 March 1752. Craveri, *Madame du Deffand*, 432.

⁷⁵ Letters that illustrate Deffand's problem with boredom are numerous. A few examples are: 13 March 1767; 17 May 1767; 1 April 1771; 22 April 1771; 21 July 1771; 16 September 1771; 23 October 1771; 30 January 1772; 2 January 1773; 19 October 1773; 14 November 1773; 17 March 1774; 29 July 1777; 2 May 1778 and 19 July 1778.

boredom and Choiseul's friendship were intrinsically linked: "It is not the solitude which causes my boredom, I see enough of the world, I am rarely alone, but I am indifferent to everything but you." Deffand explained to her dear friend that her problem stemmed from being "separated from all that I love," meaning Choiseul.⁷⁶

Deffand's *ennuie* festered out of her frustration with not being able to permanently relieve it. In her circumstances, she needed a close friendship with someone as young and gay as Choiseul, in whom she could confide and with whom she could help her temporarily forget the discomforts of old age. Absence from her friend precipitated another bout of boredom. An example of this attitude can be found in the letters she wrote to Choiseul on 3 May 1769:

If it would be possible for you to see me in your absence, you would find me the most foolish and most boring creature...I have the vapors, the blackness, the humors. Oh, I am nothing without you...I am going this evening to Chatillon, to the house of the Trudaine's. One has a good change of place, of company, when one does not have that which one loves, everything is wearisome, everything is boring.⁷⁷

At least part of Deffand's *ennuie* appears to have originated, not from a shortage of ordinary friends or acquaintances -- for she seems to have had quite a few -- but from a deficiency of a deep friendship. Clearly, Deffand still attended social dinners with a few friends, but Choiseul's frequent absences neutralized any happiness she might have

⁷⁶ Deffand to Choiseul, 2 January 1773, "Ce n'est point la solitude qui cause mon ennui, je vois assez le monde, je suis rarement seule; mais tout ce que vous m'indifférent. Je suis séparée de tout ce que j'aime, et je n'ai pas le bonheur de m'accomoder de ce que j'ai, quand je n'ai pas ce qui me manqué." Deffand, *Correspondence*, 2:322. Craveri's work, chapter 11 also addresses Deffand's problem on boredom, however only briefly.

⁷⁷ Deffand to Chosieul, 3 May 1769, "S'il vous était possible de me voir en votre absence, vous me trouveriez la plus sotte et la plus ennuyeuse creature...J'ai des vapeurs, des noirceurs, de l'humeur. Oh! Je ne suis rien sans vous...Je vais ce soir à Châtillon chez les Trudaine. On a beau changer de place, de compagnie, quand on n'a pas ce qu'on aime, tout fatigue, tout ennuie." Deffand, *Correspondence*, 1:197.

obtained from her visit at the Trudaine's. Apparently for Deffand, the quality of friendships ruled over quantity of acquaintances. Deffand needed more than social gatherings to ease her anxieties; she needed reassurances and caring words from someone who was genuinely devoted to her. Her only relief from boredom seemed to be found in her newly formed friendship with Choiseul. On 13 March 1767, Deffand conveyed to Choiseul her need to reestablish some connection between them:

I was so gloomy, that I hesitated to trouble your joy and your happiness by a moment of boredom...In the end, I can wait no longer, I can no longer be without news of you; exercise all your authority on the abbé [Barthelemy], and charge him with telling me how you feel, what are your occupations, your amusements, your conversations, your disputes, etc.⁷⁸

Choiseul responded a few days later with the concern and understanding which Deffand sought: "It is by default of sentiments that one is bored by the drought of ideas...for me, it is the best to receive your letters."⁷⁹

Deffand's letters make clear that her answer to fighting her unhappiness revolved around Choiseul. Choiseul's frequent obligations at court often prevented the two women from visiting, and sometimes even corresponding. Such instances only intensified Deffand's feelings of boredom and fueled her separation anxieties. She explained to Choiseul that the "more reliable means for banning all sadness, is thinking of your return." She pleaded with Choiseul, "I implore you, when can one hope for it, let

⁷⁸ Deffand to Choiseul, 13 March 1767, "J'étais si noire, que je me suis fait scrupule de troubler votre joie et votre bonheur par un moment d'ennui. Enfin, je ne peux plus y tenir, je ne peux être plus longtemps sans avoir de vos nouvelles ..exercez toute votre autorité sur l'abbé, et chargez-le de me mander comment vous vous portez, quelles sont vos occupations, vos amusements, vos conversations, vos disputes?" Deffand, *Correspondence*, 1:89. The abbe to which Deffand is referring to is Abbe Barthelemy, a very close friend to Choiseul, who frequently stayed at Chanteloup with the Choiseuls. He would also become friends with Deffand and often serve as an intermediary for their letters and correspondence.

⁷⁹ Choiseul to Deffand, 23 May 1767, "C'est plus par le défaut de sentiments qu'on s'ennuie que par le disette d'idées...pour moi, il m'est excellent de recevoir vos letters." Deffand, *Correspondence*, 1:99.

me know of your news... I would well want that you might love me a little, it is all that I desire.”⁸⁰

Not only was Deffand an old, blind woman by the early 1770's, but she also was suffering from insomnia and a number of other illnesses.⁸¹ Unfortunately, Deffand's unhappiness did not seem to dissipate with time. In another letter, dated 16 May 1770, she again expressed her need for Choiseul's friendship, “All the days of my waking are very sad, not having the hope of seeing you nor even the pleasure of speaking to you renders the soul paralytic.”⁸²

The fact that Deffand's letters to Choiseul focus on her problems with depression and boredom reveal an interesting aspect of their relationship. They clearly illustrate Deffand's intense need for Choiseul's companionship; she was the one to whom Deffand could freely complain and from whom she could illicit sympathy. Her role as a *salonnière*, where she functioned as a governor of intellectual discourse for France's greatest *philosophes* had granted her renowned social status, but it did not provide her with an opportunity to unburden her true feelings.

Duchesse de Choiseul

The duchesse de Choiseul also sought solace for her problems through her friendship with Deffand. Unlike Deffand, Choiseul can best be described as having a

⁸⁰ Deffand to Choiseul, 18 June 1766, “Faut-il que je pense à vous pour jouir de cette sorte d'existence... Le plus sûr moyen pour bannir toute tristesse, c'est de penser à votre retour; dites-moi, je vous supplie, quand on peut l'espérer; faites-moi savoir de vos nouvelles, ... Je voudrais bien que vous m'aimassiez un peu, c'est tout ce que je desire.” Deffand, *Correspondence*, 1:41.

⁸¹ Craveri, *Madame du Deffand*, 164.

⁸² Deffand to Choiseul, 16 May 1770, “Tous les jours, mon réveil est bien triste; n'avoir point l'espérance de vous voir, ni même le plaisir de vous rendent l'âme paralytique.” Deffand, *Correspondence*, 1:268.

more serene temperament. She was known to be gentle, thoughtful, sensitive, gracious and optimistic -- Deffand's exact opposite. She was especially notorious for her extreme kindness towards those who were suffering emotionally and physically. She enjoyed devoting herself to soothing and counseling her close friends, and Deffand provided the subject for her ministrations.⁸³ Deffand's sullen disposition gave Choiseul a perfect opportunity to express her perpetual optimism. She reassured her dear old friend, "believe me, the bad that one resolves to bear soon passes and nothing rests after it, "and cautioned Deffand to avoid being "taken in by misfortune and unnecessary fear."⁸⁴ Choiseul, almost resigned to her own unhappy situation, hopefully surmised that even if their pleasures were not great, that at least their sorrows were light.⁸⁵

However, Choiseul's optimistic nature did not prevent her from experiencing any unhappiness. She endured many social obligations as the wife of the king's most powerful minister. Her days were routinely filled with visitors and petitioners, only to be relieved by the required attendance at another function where she was once again immersed in an ocean of strangers. She wrote to Deffand on several occasions of the incessant obligations placed upon her. Deffand's friendship offered her solace and escape from obligations at court, and she expressed her dissatisfaction to Deffand: "...I dined Monday and Tuesday at the king's house; I gave suppers all the other days. I dined today and yesterday with a hundred and something people...Oh the unbearable nature of

⁸³ Galamiel Bradford, *Portraits of Women* (Boston, 1916), 157-176.

⁸⁴ Choiseul to Deffand, 1766, n.d., "Croyez-moi, le mal que l'on se résout à supporter est bientôt passé, et il n'en reste rien après lui; surtout évitez le malheur toujours dupe et superflu de la crainte." Deffand, *Correspondence*, 1:49

⁸⁵ Choiseul to Deffand, 1766, n.d., "Si nos plaisirs ne sont pas grands, du moins nos peines sont légères." Deffand, *Correspondence*, 1:49.

life here...”⁸⁶ Choiseul’s frustrations with her social responsibilities lead her to rely on Deffand’s friendship for support, yet she lacked Deffand’s intense need for companionship, since her problems were far from the loneliness and boredom that plagued her friend.

Choiseul was grateful for Deffand’s friendship because it offered her a private, more intimate relationship, as opposed to the busy life at court where she was continuously surrounded by acquaintances. On 9 May 1768, Choiseul relayed to Deffand, that “I have thought of you in arriving, in my relaxing, in my weariness, in my traveling, in my leaving: I always think about it.” Her busy life did indeed take a toll on her emotionally and physically, but her reliance on Deffand was of a different nature than Deffand’s on her. Choiseul’s letters do not depict her as being particularly needy, but rather as a woman who needed someone in whom to confide her troubles and to empathize with her plight.

Despite Choiseul’s busy life she was not prevented from thinking of Deffand or their friendship. Early in their friendship, Choiseul took on the role of the strong nurturer. Deffand’s constant desire for reassurances at times even overshadowed Choiseul’s own troubles, yet she did not seem to notice, or even mind. In the same letter where she vented her own troubles, Choiseul also took the time to reassure her friend: “You have been touched by my friendship, my dear child, and I am much comforted, as

⁸⁶ Choiseul to Deffand, 18 July 1767, “J’ai soupé Lundi et Mardi chez le roi; j’ai donné à souper tous les autres jours. J’ai dîné hier et aujourd’hui avec cent et tant de personnes... Oh! L’insupportable chose que la vie d’ici...” Deffand, *Correspondence*, 1:131.

long as you have not been surprised, because you can not believe my sincerity without believing my fondness for you.”⁸⁷

On occasions where Choiseul accompanied her husband to Versailles, she would attempt to visit Deffand in nearby Paris. However, it was not uncommon for Choiseul’s plans to change at the last minute, much to the dismay of both women. Despite Deffand’s overwhelming neediness, Choiseul cared for her friend dearly and did miss her when they were not able to visit. The main difference between the two is revealed in Choiseul’s letter of 9 February 1768, in which she expressed to Deffand her desire to see her friend, rather than her need to do so. The letter demonstrates that Choiseul cared so much for Deffand that she was willing to endure a trip to court just to be able to visit with her friend:

I thank you for the worries that you have over my health, I have been in despair not being able to go to Paris Sunday, because I would have intended to see you there and it is more than three months since I’ve had this pleasure. I fiercely desire a trip to the king to profit in embracing my dear child that I love with all my heart.⁸⁸

Despite the fact that Choiseul was occasionally able to accompany her husband, she was frequently away from the company of her husband even at court and often found herself surrounded by mere acquaintances. Perhaps for this reason she turned instead to the comfort of Deffand’s unwavering friendship. After escaping the court at Compiègne on 11 August 1767, Choiseul found time finally to write to Deffand and reassured her,

⁸⁷ Choiseul to Deffand, 9 May 1768, “J’ai pensé à vous en arrivant, en me reposant, en me fatiguant, en voyageant, en partant: j’y ai toujours pensé... Vous avez été touchée de mon amitié, ma chère enfant, et j’en suis bien aise, pourvu que vous n’en ayez pas été étonnée, car vous ne pouvez pas croire à ma vérité sans croire à ma tendresse pour vous.” Deffand, *Correspondence*, 1:459.

⁸⁸ Choiseul to Deffand, 9 February 1768, “Je vous remercie de l’inquiétude que vous avez sur ma santé, j’ai été au désespoir de ne pouvoir pas aller à Paris Dimanche, parce que je vous aurais vue et qu’il y a plus de trois mois que je n’ai eu ce plaisir... je desire ardemment un voyage du Roi pour en profiter et aller embrasser ma chère enfant que j’aime de tout mon coeur.” Deffand, *Correspondence*, 1:454.

“my first thought and my first moment are for you.”⁸⁹ Seeking solace away from her social obligations and the loneliness that accompanied them, Choiseul’s first thoughts were not always of her husband. Instead she turned to Deffand, who after five years of correspondence had proven herself reliable, trustworthy and sympathetic to Choiseul’s frustration and isolation.

Deffand understood all too well the world that Choiseul inhabited: “Ah! Dear grand’mama, the country that you live in is full of dreams and illusions. Nothing is appreciated at its value, the glass there is taken for diamonds, the tinsel for gold...”⁹⁰ Deffand recognized from long experience the superficiality of courtly eighteenth-century life, perhaps realizing that it could indeed be a source of unhappiness. Their escape from this superficiality of high society was to be found in genuine friendship, for within its secure boundaries they could reveal themselves without scrutiny.

Choiseul’s complaints of life at royal court are one of the most prominent themes found in her letters to Deffand. She found herself unable to be a happy, dutiful wife because her marriage had been nothing but a contract to fulfill family objectives. The ideal eighteenth-century marriage maintained women’s integrity, as well as satisfied society’s requirements. However, many women found this impossible because their duties as wives lead them to become emotionally involved with their husbands, while most men were not only allowed, but expected, to be emotionally disengaged from their

⁸⁹ Choiseul to Deffand, 11 August 1767, “...je ne suis plus à Compiègne, puisque je trouve le moment de vous écrire. Ce n’est pas que je ne sois encore ici dans la foule; mais dans la foule hors de chez soi, on peut quelquefois être seule; ma première pensée et mon premier moment sont pour vous.” Deffand, *Correspondence*, 1:433.

⁹⁰ Deffand to Choiseul, 27 July 1767, “Ah! Chère grand’maman, le pays que vous habitez est plein de chimères et d’illusions. Rien n’est apprécié à sa valeur, le verre y est pris pour diamant, le clinquant pour l’or...” Deffand, *Correspondence*, 1:432.

wives. Thus, despite the prevalent eighteenth-century notion that love and marriage were incompatible, women like Choiseul found themselves seeking love and fulfillment from friends like Deffand when attempts to obtain it from her husband failed.⁹¹

Nature of Their Relationship

Deffand and Choiseul's letters increasingly began to show deep and intimate attachments in 1766, and even more so in 1767. The terms of endearments expressed to one another in their letters exemplify the close-knit bond that was forming between them. Despite Choiseul being twenty-five years younger, she playfully addressed Deffand as 'granddaughter', or my dear child, and in return was affectionately called 'grand'mama'.⁹² In light of such paradoxically endearing names, a closer look reveals the true nature of their friendship. When their correspondence initially began, Choiseul was twenty-one years of age, while Deffand was sixty-four, and although both were from aristocratic families they belonged to different generations. However, it was not Deffand who played the role of a grandmother, but rather that of a needy child. Choiseul on the other hand, seemed immediately to adopt the role of a caring, even doting, grandmother figure. One of Choiseul's first letters demonstrates why she regarded Deffand as a child. She explained to Deffand that "a child has always the happiness of loving and the inestimable pleasure to always be loved...I love you then...and by that same reason you are a child."⁹³

⁹¹ Lougée, *Le Paradis des Femmes*, 25.

⁹² Madame du Deffand's maternal grandmother had married, as his second wife, the duc de Choiseul's father. She consequently referred to the duc as grand'papa. Craveri, *Madame du Deffand*, 345.

⁹³ Choiseul to Deffand, n.d., Deffand, *Correspondence*, 1:2. "Un enfant a toujours le bonheur d'aimer et le plaisir inestimable d'être toujours aimé. Je vous aime donc aussi...et par cette raison même

Their distinctive personalities enabled both women to fulfill each other's needs perfectly. Deffand's melancholy temperament and insecurity stimulated Choiseul's need to play the role of a loving caregiver, the kind of role that she found herself unable to play with her husband. For example, in 1766 Choiseul wrote to offer advice to her downhearted friend in an attempt to help bring her out of her despair, which she identified as boredom:

Do you know why you are so bored, my dear child? It is precisely by the trouble that you take to avoid, to foresee, to fight boredom; live each day, take time as it comes, take advantage of every moment, and with this you will see that you would not be bored...Believe me, the difficulty that one resolves to bear soon passes and nothing remains after it; above all especially avoid unhappiness, always the dupe and over abundance of fear.⁹⁴

Choiseul returned to this theme again in 1767. She wrote to Deffand from her estate in Chanteloup instructing Deffand to eat a little and to open her windows for fresh air in hopes of bringing her out of her depression. Choiseul enjoyed dispensing advice to Deffand in response to her letters that habitually complained of boredom. Choiseul beseeched Deffand to trust and confide in her in order to help ease her friend's weariness, and constantly wrote to Deffand attempting to convince her that her love was infinite and unconditional: "Write me always in your moments of sadness, this will dissipate

que vous êtes une enfant." It should be noted that this letter was placed with her early letters in the first volume. It was determined by the editor that most likely this is where it belonged.

⁹⁴ Choiseul to Deffand, 1766, n.d., "Savez-vous pourquoi vous vous ennuyez tant, ma chère enfant? C'est justement par la peine que vous prenez d'éviter, de prévoir, de combattre l'ennui; vivez au jour la journée, prenez le temps comme il vient, profitez de tous les moments, et avec cela vous verrez que vous ne vous ennuierez pas...Croyez-moi, le mal que l'on se résout à supporter est bientôt passé, et il n'en reste rien après lui; surtout évitez le malheur toujours dupe et superflu de la crainte." Deffand, *Correspondence*, 1.21.

them. Do not be afraid of imparting to me your boredom; I will only share your feelings, and I would always have infinite affection for you.”⁹⁵

Even more ironically, in much of the advice that Choiseul conveyed to her older friend, she tried to assure her that she was indeed a child, innocent and young at heart. In a letter dated 28 May 1770, Choiseul chided Deffand to “write me less nice letters if you want to persuade me that you are aging, all that I see from you has the graces and gaiety of a youth, you are a genuine young girl, and a charming child...”⁹⁶

Choiseul would also refer to herself in the third person in her letters to Deffand, as perhaps would an adoring grandmother talking to her sullen granddaughter.⁹⁷ Choiseul’s role was clearly the more dominant. The women’s letters reveal that it was Deffand who more frequently wrote to Choiseul in distress, asking for her love, support and advice, thereby placing Choiseul in the more dominant, authoritative position. Choiseul clearly adored her friend, and enjoyed providing Deffand with such support. Not only was Choiseul a friend, a *confidante*, and a nurturer, but she also played the dominant role of a teacher, while Deffand often resigned herself to playing the role of her student.

Deffand’s letters reveal this aspect of their relationship: “I study you; I examine you; you

⁹⁵ Choiseul to Deffand, 17 May 1767, “Je conclus que vous êtes malade et ennuyée...Soupez peu, ouvrez vos fenêtres, promenez-vous en carrosse, et appréciez les choses et les gens. Écrivez-moi toujours dans vos moments de tristesse, ce sera une dissipation. Ne craignez pas de me faire partager votre ennui; je ne partagerai que vos sentiments, et j’en aurai toujours un infiniment tendresse pour vous.” Deffand, *Correspondence*, 1:98.

⁹⁶ Choiseul to Deffand, 28 May 1770, “Écrivez-moi de moins jolies lettres, si vous voulez me persuader que vous vieillissez; tout ce que je vois de vous a les grâces et la gaieté de la jeunesse; vous êtes une véritable petite-fille, et un enfant charmant...” 1:277.

⁹⁷ A few examples of Choiseul referring to herself in the third person are: 31 March 1768; 31 May 1768; 13 June 1768; 6 July 1768; 16 June 1769; 30 June 1769; 5 July 1769 and 11 July 1769.

are for me the best treaty of morality that I can ever read.”⁹⁸ Choiseul not only provided Deffand with love and affection, but also tried to bolster the older woman’s self-esteem: “Let us say all the women and all the *philosophes* who we judge, you have one hundred times more wit in your little digit, than each of them have in all their bodies.”⁹⁹

Deffand’s perpetual demands for reassurance and her complaints of sadness frequently elicited a concerned response from Choiseul, who responded in a manner befitting a grand-mother who offered her friendship as a cure. Choiseul’s letters not only demonstrate that she viewed intimate feminine relationships as the cure for women’s unhappiness, but also that she had a desire to play the role of a Deffand’s caregiver. On 31 May 1768, Choiseul responded to another one of Deffand’s distraught letters:

Why, my dear child, have you said to me that you are sad?...It is necessary that you tell me all that you think, all that you feel, all that which affects you...because all that is interesting, and very interesting for grand’mama; but, my dear child, the sadness is not a fault, it is an illness, and in kind grandmothers, I would be moreover eager to cure your illnesses, and if I could, to correct your faults.¹⁰⁰

Choiseul describes how she saw the soul as having the same illnesses and cures as the human body. Fearing boredom would eat away at Deffand’s soul, and believing friendship to be the cure, Choiseul was prepared to offer her a profusion of friendship.

⁹⁸ Deffand to Choiseul, 22 July 1766, “Je vous étudie, je vous épiluche; vous êtes pour moi meilleur traité de morale que je puisse jamais lire.” Deffand, *Correspondence*, 1:56.

⁹⁹ Choiseul to Deffand, 25 July 1766, “Laissez dire toutes les femmes et les philosophes qui les jugent; vous avez cent fois plus d’esprit dans votre petite doigt, qu’aucune d’elles dans toute sa personne.” Deffand, *Correspondence*, 1:59.

¹⁰⁰ Choiseul to Deffand, 31 May 1768, “Pourquoi, ma chère enfant, m’avez-vous dit que vous étiez triste?...c’est parce qu’il faut tout me dire, tout ce que vous pensez, tout ce que vous sentez, tout ce qui vous affecte...parce que tout cela est intéressant, et très-intéressant pour la grand’maman...puis, ma chère enfant la tristesse n’est point un défaut, c’est une maladie; et, en bonne aïeule, je serais encore plus empressée à guérir vos maladies comme les corps, et elle a aussi ses remèdes: l’amitié est un des plus efficaces, et, pour celui-là, ma chère enfant, je puis vous le dispenser avec profusion.” Deffand, *Correspondence*, 1:469.

Deffand also similarly associated sadness with a physical ailment of the body. On 3 January 1773, she remarked to Choiseul that, like a person whose body harbored a tapeworm that starved her to death, “I have in my soul the same effect that the worm makes on the body.”¹⁰¹ While both women felt that feelings of solitude and sadness were like a disease that needed to be cured, Deffand was the one who needed Choiseul to help her combat it, lest the disease slowly eat away at her life until the point of starvation and ultimately death.

Choiseul’s tendency to mother Deffand possibly stemmed from the fact that apparently the Choiseuls were unable to conceive a child.¹⁰² Given Choiseul’s undying devotion and love for her husband, and the motherly role she played in her friendship with Deffand, the duchesse seemed to find some fulfillment from mothering Deffand. In fact, Choiseul was known for her kindness and role as a caregiver to the more unfortunate and was especially well liked by the workers on her estate.¹⁰³ Her tenderness, seemingly endless patience, and serene demeanor in combination with her humanitarian interests made her an appealing mother like figure. Her relationship with Deffand suited both of their needs perfectly: Deffand who desired to be mothered, and Choiseul, who enjoyed playing the role of child. Deffand and Choiseul found fulfillment in their lives wherever they could. Clearly it was a combination of Choiseul and Deffand’s emotional deficits and needs that caused them to use each other to fill the voids in their lives.

¹⁰¹ Deffand to Choiseul, 3 January 1773, “J’ai dans l’âme le même effet que le solitaire fait sur les corps.” Deffand, *Correspondence*, 2:322.

¹⁰² See Bradford, *Portraits of Women*, 158. for information on the Choiseuls. See Craveri, *Madame du Deffand*, 3-19. for information on Deffand. Also see Clergue, *The Salon*, 45-117.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 160-161.

Their Problem With Romantic Love

As Deffand and Choiseul's friendship progressed, their correspondence demonstrates the clear lack of male or romantic love in their lives. These women were unhappy with their lives, and they struggled to find an acceptable supplement to help fill the empty space that a loveless marriage or loveless life tended to create. They were not alone, however, in their plights. Francoise d'Aubigne de Maintenon (1635-1719), Louis XIV's second wife, shared Deffand and Choiseul's frustrations as aristocratic women living in the eighteenth-century. She was once quoted as saying, "There is an important difference between love and friendship. While the former delights in extremes and opposites, the latter demands equality."¹⁰⁴ As the wife of one of France's greatest kings, she must have found herself in a similar situation, and likewise looked to similar outlets for relief. Like Deffand and Choiseul, in her eyes, love -- at least romantic love -- was clearly conditional and restrictive, where as friendship was contingent upon equality and uniformity.

This issue brings forth the question as to how these women defined love given that they both were subjected to *mariages de convenance*. The theme of love is indirectly addressed in their letters when Choiseul expressed concerns over her marriage and her desire to be loved by her husband. Choiseul remained devoted and true to her husband, but despite her naturally optimistic temperament her loveless marriage was one issue with

¹⁰⁴ www.famouscreativewomen.com

which she struggled. The duc was said to be a very charming, brilliant, cheerful, and most of all an amorous man who enjoyed the pleasure of the ladies.¹⁰⁵ And although he undoubtedly cared for his wife and her well-being, he did not love her, at least not in the romantic sense that she loved him.¹⁰⁶ Because of the nature of arranged marriages, her love for the duc proved to be most unfortunate. It was not returned in kind, and she spent much of her life searching for ways to fulfill her need for intimacy.

Other women, like Deffand, willingly submitted themselves to the prevalent practice of a de facto separation, which generally occurred with some measure of indifference by both partners. Deffand felt that she could better fulfill her needs by having affairs with various well-known aristocrats.¹⁰⁷ However, as was the nature with many of these affairs, none of them provided Deffand with the kind of real love or nurturing that she sought, and so, like Choiseul, she looked to other means to fulfill her needs. In contrast, Deffand was by this point in her friendship with Choiseul an old woman, and had realized that she would never again experience the true love and affection of a man. Deffand's husband had died in 1750, and subsequent lovers were reluctant to shower her with love and devotion, preferring more non-committal and non-corporeal relations.¹⁰⁸ Late in her life she reflected on love, acknowledging it could both

¹⁰⁵ Bradford, *Portraits of Women*, 165-166.

¹⁰⁶ Craveri, *Madame du Deffand*, 345-346. Also see Butler, *Choiseul*, 634, 863-65. He describes how the duc de Choiseul's mistress directly before his engagement and marriage to the duchesse, was none other than Antoinette-Eustachie, Marquise de Gontaut, the future duchesse's older sister. Butler claims that the marquise and the duc, then the Count de Stainville, became deeply attached and it was said to be true love. It was only upon her sister's death that the union between the future duc and the duchesse was prompted. Under these circumstances, and Butler's further claim that the duc was indeed unfaithful once they were married, that substantiates the claim in this paragraph.

¹⁰⁷ Craveri, *Madame du Deffand*, 9.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 11-12.

be bitter and sweet by warning Choiseul that, “the contentment of the heart” was the only thing that rendered life “supportable,” and perceived that “those who do not have any feelings do not know, neither its violent sadness, nor its true pleasures.”¹⁰⁹

For Deffand, her own personal struggle with unrequited or romantic love was a rare subject in her letters, and so it is uncertain how she felt about her romantic relationships with men. She did once concede, however, that not loving one’s husband was a common misfortune.¹¹⁰ Nevertheless, she needed love in her life and expressed her views of love to Choiseul in September 1771, when she wrote that, “the pain accompanying tenderness does not collapse the soul, to the contrary” she felt that it drew her out from “the void of boredom.” She further explained to Choiseul her only relief was thinking “to that which I love and to that which loves me, although I am separated, I taste a pleasure that nothing which surrounds me can procure for me.”¹¹¹ Curiously, Deffand was not referring to romantic love at all, but rather to the platonic love of one woman for another. She had found a way to sustain her need for love by supplementing it with Choiseul’s affection and friendship, and she believed that nothing else in her environment could provide it for her.

Love was a subject that affected and concerned both women, as it did many women in the eighteenth-century, and Choiseul’s letters, which speak on love and

¹⁰⁹ Deffand to Choiseul, 4 October 1777, “Je suis intimement persuadée qu’il est aussi content et heureux que vous. On a beau dire, on a beau chercher, il n’y a que le contentement du coeur qui rend la vie supportable. Ceux qui n’ont nul sentiment ne connaissent ni les violentes peines, ni les vrais plaisirs.” Deffand, *Correspondence*, 3:295.

¹¹⁰ Deffand to Choiseul, 2 April 1773, “Elle n’aime point son mari, c’est un malheur assez general.” Deffand, *Correspondence*, 2:380.

¹¹¹ Deffand to Choiseul, 16 September 1771, “La douleur accompagnée de tendresse n’affaïsse point l’âme, au contraire; j’éprouve qu’elle tire la mienne du néant de l’ennui. Quand je pense à ce qui

marriage, offer us a vantage point on that matter. Lougée's work explores how seventeenth-century society viewed love and marriage. She asserts that for them "love was another name for protection, a concession to an inferior, a reward for obedience and good behavior, both conditional and revocable."¹¹² Love and marriage had the same character in the eighteenth-century. The glorified status of marriage in the eighteenth-century was seen strictly as business proposition between two families, only meant to enhance property and social status. Love was an afterthought at best. Marriage was considered by many of Choiseul and Deffand's contemporaries as a living arrangement ideally suited to human economical and social needs, and as the only path to the realization of happiness on earth.¹¹³ And although marriage was to some extent a form of social liberation for some aristocratic women because it allowed them to be presented at court and enjoy social prestige, there existed a clear double standard that favored the male partner.

Women often found themselves consigned to live the life of a "freed" woman, and yet she was not as free in the sense as her spouse. There were still restrictions and certain expectations placed upon married women. Within marriage, it was socially acceptable for men to have mistresses without suffering any social, political or economic consequences, whereas women were responsible for producing the family heirs, which required fidelity to their husbands. A few women, like Deffand, did take lovers for amusement or to socially advance themselves; however, there were also women, like

m'aime, quoique j'en sois séparée, je goûte un plaisir que rien de ce qui m'environne ne peut me procurer." Deffand, *Correspondence*, 2:41.

¹¹² Lougée, *Les Paradis des Femmes*, 62.

¹¹³ Ibid., 65.

Choiseul, who tried in earnest to make the marriage work. Unfortunately, it was this effort that caused her much pain and humiliation. In a letter to Deffand, Choiseul confessed to her friend, “when you love once, it is necessary that you love all of your life.”¹¹⁴ Her obvious devotion to her marriage and her husband are apparent, and yet to her dismay Deffand often interacted more and more frequently with her husband than she did.

Choiseul’s problem concerning unrequited love is demonstrated in some of her letters, which focus on her love for her husband. Deffand’s long-standing friendship with the duc provided the duchesse and her husband with a mutual interest. Choiseul was desperate to have a personal and intimate connection with her husband, and she turned to Deffand with the hopes that she could help bolster this connection. In those letters Choiseul desperately needs Deffand’s friendship. As a result of Choiseul’s need, the duc served as a topic of discussion in many of their letters.¹¹⁵ Such an arrangement must have pleased the duchesse in the sense that she would often willingly and voluntarily play the role of intermediary between Deffand and the duc. However, more often the duc and Deffand corresponded or visited with each other when he was in Paris, which provided Choiseul with access to any information Deffand might choose to share with her. Though their friendship was not contingent upon Deffand’s relationship with the duc; nor was it the heart of their relationship. Choiseul, however, used Deffand to forge her

¹¹⁴ Choiseul to Deffand. 1766, n.d., “...quand on vous aime une fois, il faut vous aimer toute la vie.” Deffand, *Correspondence*, 1:23.

¹¹⁵ Examples of such letters are numerous and frequent, especially in 1770. A few of these letters are: 24 October 1767; 3 June 1767; 7 January 1768; 13 June 1768; 13 June 1770; 11 February 1771; 28 February 1771; 21 May 1771; 2 June 1771; 18 May 1776 and 24 May 1776.

connection with her husband.¹¹⁶ For example, a letter in May 1770 discloses Choiseul's eagerness to learn from Deffand what her husband had said of her after his recent visit to Deffand's salon:

Tell me, my dear granddaughter, grandpapa is he coming back Wednesday, after having seen me in my carriage? Has he spoken of me? What has he said and in what tone? It seems to me that he is no longer ashamed of me, and it is important to no longer wound the self-respect of people by whom one wants to be loved.¹¹⁷

Choiseul's obvious adoration of her husband is further evident later in the same letter when she insisted to Deffand, "I assure you he is the best the age has produced...one is tamed with his good nature and one does not notice the superior talents and the sublime qualities...that his modesty covers."¹¹⁸

Deffand's response to Choiseul's inquiry did not elicit the insight for which Choiseul had hoped. Given the nature of their relationship, Choiseul typically was the one to dispense advice and comfort, so it should come as no surprise that Deffand's response was limited to simple reassurance: "If grandpapa does not feel his happiness, I would not grant him any esteem; but he knows it, he feels it, and I am sure of not being deceived into believing that you are that which he loves best and perhaps uniquely."¹¹⁹

¹¹⁶ While, the duc never returned the duchesse's passion in kind, it is probable that Choiseul's friendship with Deffand helped bridge a connection between the married couple. Some of these letters are: 7 January 1769; 9 May 1768; 1 June 1769; 16 May 1770 and 12 April 1771.

¹¹⁷ Choiseul to Deffand, 13 May 1770, "Dites-moi, ma chère petite-fille, le grand-papa, est-il remonté Mercredi, après m'avoir mise dans mon carrosse? a-t-il parlé moi? qu'en a-t-il dit et de quelle ton? Il me semble qu'il commence à n'être plus honteux de moi, et c'est déjà un grand point de ne plus blesser l'amour-propre des gens dont on veut être aimé!" Deffand, *Correspondence*, 1:264.

¹¹⁸ Choiseul to Deffand, 13 May 1770, "Je vous assure que c'est le plus grand que le siècle ait produit. On s'apprivoise avec sa bonhomie, et on ne remarque pas les talents supérieurs et les qualités sublimes qui son auprès et que sa modestie couvre." Deffand, *Correspondence*, 1:264.

¹¹⁹ Deffand to Choiseul, 16 May 1770, "Si le grandpapa ne sentait pas son bonheur, je ne lui accorderais aucune estime; mais il le connaît, il le sent, et je suis bien sure de ne pas me tromper en croyant que vous êtes ce qu'il aime le mieux et peut-être uniquement." Letters such as these, where Deffand merely

How Deffand obtained such a conviction that the duc loved the duchesse the best is uncertain. An examination of what few letters there are between Deffand and the duc provides no information, nor even hints, of his affection for his wife. It also seems unlikely that the duc would reveal such personal sentiments to Deffand or feel the need to justify to her how he felt about his wife. Indeed, Lougée contends that love was not synonymous with marriage, and men were expected to find love, both romantic and sexual, outside of marriage.¹²⁰ Nevertheless, Deffand's reassurance continued through the years. In October 1777, she again confirmed the happiness of the duchesse and the duc: "your last letter, dear grand-mama, breathes of happiness and pleasure; it has taught me ...that you are in full enjoyment of grand-papa. I am intimately persuaded that he is also content and happy as you."¹²¹

Knowing of her friend's insecurity and wishing to give her some comfort Deffand did her best to give Choiseul whatever hope she could. In March of 1769, she forwarded Choiseul a letter she had received from Voltaire that relayed the duc's personal thoughts about an unnamed woman in his life. After reading the letter Choiseul ecstatically replied back to Deffand, "that which gives me the most pleasure, is the place in his letter where he says that grandpapa conveyed that he had a woman who contributed to his

offers Choiseul support as opposed to advice are numerous. Among some of them are: 24 May 1776; 8 July 1775; 23 May 1775; 5 January 1771 and 30 December 1770. Deffand, *Correspondence*, 1:268.

¹²⁰ Lougée, *Le Paradis des Femmes*, 37. For further collaborating information see James Traer, *Marriage and the Family in Eighteenth-century France* (London, 1980), 50-52.

¹²¹ Deffand to Choiseul, 4 October 1777, "Votre dernière lettre, chère grand'maman, respire le bonheur et le plaisir; elle m'aurait appris...que vous étiez en pleine jouissance du grand-papa. Je suis intimement persuadée qu'il est aussi content et heureux que vous." Deffand, *Correspondence*, 3:295.

happiness.”¹²² Choiseul shed any doubt regarding her husband’s affection for her, and her ability to contribute to his happiness. Her deep need to believe that she was the woman in the letter is evidenced by her refusal to question the woman’s identity. Instead she jumped to the conclusion that it must be her. Deffand’s desire to make her friend happy, and Choiseul’s need to believe that her husband loved her, lead them both to assume that the duc was referring to Choiseul. However, the duc’s numerous affairs throughout his marriage were well-known; he had even admitted as much to several individuals, including Voltaire. Thus the duchesse’s assumption that the duc was referring to her is highly unlikely.¹²³

Choiseul genuinely prized Deffand’s friendship with the duc and would turn to her for counsel on how her husband was faring while he was in Paris. Choiseul even used her as an intermediary, encouraging both the duc and Deffand to meet when he was able. Choiseul believed such occasions might provide Deffand with an opportunity to ascertain the duc’s state of mind in regards to the duchesse, and if nothing else they could occasionally serve to carry letters. When the duc missed such an occasion in May 1769 due to his busy schedule, Choiseul wrote to Deffand explaining how she had scolded him for not making time to visit her in Paris. However, despite her desperate hope to gain love from her husband, Choiseul realized that true and unconditional love could only be found elsewhere: “I will tell him that I love you, because it is always my first thought, because it is my last feeling...it is to say, my dear child, that which is permanent, by

¹²² Choiseul to Deffand, March 1769, “Ce qui m’en fait le plus de plaisir, c’est l’endroit de sa lettre où il dit que la grandpapa lui a mandé qu’il avait une femme qui contribuait à son bonheur.” Deffand, *Correspondence*, 1:214.

¹²³ Craveri, *Madame du Deffand*, 346. It is also suspected by Deffand, as well as a few of her close friends that in June of 1769 he was having an affair with Madame Rouillé, however the details are not discussed between Deffand and Choiseul. See Deffand’s letter to Choiseul on 7 June 1769.

which one ends and to which one always returns.”¹²⁴ Choiseul was thus able to find a surrogate in Deffand for the attention and love she failed to receive from her husband.

Deffand and Choiseul both felt a need to be loved, and managed to use their friendship to help sustain and supplement this need with the love they derived from female friendship. For Deffand, Choiseul’s friendship was a substitute for what she did not and could not have. Her blindness, age, and personality had predisposed her to this deprived emotional state. Choiseul, despite her own loveless marriage, was the more self-assured and dominant of the two. But for Choiseul, Deffand’s friendship proved to be a much-needed supplement to her life. However, the frequent and lonely separations of Choiseul from her husband would soon end, and this act would prove pivotal to the friendship between the two women.

Exile

By late 1770, the duc’s position at court had grown precarious. A conspiracy formed by the duc d’Aiguillon, the Chancellor Maupeou and Madame du Barry, Louis’ mistress, lead to Choiseul’s downfall. On 24 December 24 1770, Louis issued a *lettre de cachet* and exiled the duc and the duchesse to their estate in Chanteloup, considered one of the most magnificent private establishments in all of Europe.¹²⁵ In light of the duchesse’s frustrations with her social obligations at court, one should not be surprised at the calm demeanor that is evident in her letters to Deffand. After all, their exile would

¹²⁴ Choseul to Deffand, 28 May, 1769, “M. de Choiseul sera ici Mercredi; je le gronderai de ne vous avoir pas été voir; je tâcherai de vous l’envoyer à son retour. Je lui dirai que je vous aime, car c’est toujours ma première pensée, parce c’est mon dernier sentiment...c’est-à-dire, ma chère enfant, celui qui est permanent, par lequel on finit, auquel on revient toujours.” Deffand, *Correspondence*, 1:241.

¹²⁵ Clergue, *The Salon*, 101. Also see Gaston Maugras, *La Disgrace du duc et de la duchesse de Choiseul, la Vie a Chanteloup, le Retour a Paris, la Mort*. (Paris, 1903).

mean that the duc would be obligated to spend more time with her, as his presence would no longer be required at court. Choiseul's reaction to their exile was one of enthusiasm and eagerness at this prospect:

The abbé should have given you our news. Grandpapa carried himself marvelously. The trip, a big event, a powerful diversion, it has done me good. I do not distress myself even for modesty's sake...I am with who I love best, in the place which pleases me the most.¹²⁶

Perhaps for other women of the court being exiled from Versailles and Paris would have meant death to their social life, and they would have thought it unfortunate. Choiseul, however, viewed it otherwise. All that mattered to her was that she would be with her husband. And despite her growing closeness with Deffand and her reliance on their friendship, instinctively her first response was a feeling of joy at the prospect of time to be with her husband, and she expressed no dismay that she would no longer be able to visit her old friend. Curiously, Deffand's reaction was also one of sympathy and supportive reassurance; she demonstrates a perceptive understanding of Choiseul's feelings, as well as a sense of relief, if not surprise, at the duchesse's cheerful response to the exile. Deffand seemed almost amazed that Choiseul's reaction was not bitterness at the disgrace. Deffand hoped the exile would result in peace for the duchesse's soul. Aware of Choiseul's unrequited love for her husband, Deffand wrote, "Yes you are happy I cannot doubt you are with whom you love uniquely; you will be without his constant business and you will have the satisfaction of him finding happiness that he

¹²⁶ Choiseul to Deffand, 26 December 1770, "L'abbé a dû vous donner de nos nouvelles. Le grand-papa se porte à merveille. Le voyage, un grand événement, une puissante diversion, m'ont fait du bien. Je ne puis affliger, même par pudeur. Je suis avec ce que l'aime le mieux, dans le lieu qui me plaît le plus." Deffand, *Correspondence*, 1:296. The friend that she refers to was M. de Thiers, brother of her father, M. du Châtel. The abbé to which she refers is the Abbé Barthelmey, a close and longtime friend of the Choiseul's and Deffand.

could not imagine...”¹²⁷ Deffand’s response to Choiseul’s letter is particularly interesting for her choice of words. Whereas Choiseul had openly explained that she was happy because she would be with the one she loved the “best,” Deffand, apparently not offended at this declaration, nevertheless chose to characterize Choiseul’s love for her husband as being merely “unique.”

Two weeks later, after the Choiseuls were settled back in Chanteloup, the duchesse’s excitement at the prospect of having her husband to herself is still obvious. She explained to Deffand her wish to have the duc believe she had become “young, and, if I am able, pretty” again, in hopes that this would endear her to him.¹²⁸

However, despite the appearance of Deffand’s initial relief that the happiness of her close *confidante* now seemed certain, the exile would mean the two women would be forced apart, and this issue would eventually surface in their letters. The Choiseuls’ estate in Chanteloup required several days journey from Paris. Although Deffand made a few visits during their exile, she did so at the risk of offending Louis XV and Madame du Barry, which could have resulted, at the very least, in the revocation of her pensions.¹²⁹ Such economic and social consequences could not be taken lightly, and yet Deffand did not let this stop her from making the long journey to Choiseul’s estate. It was not long after the Choiseuls’ exile that Deffand and the duchesse began careful planning of their reunion. A few months after their exile, Choiseul, despite the prospect of being drawn

¹²⁷ Deffand to Choiseul, 30 December 1770, “Oui, vous êtes heureuse, je n’en puis douter; vous êtes avec ce que vous aimez uniquement; vous serez sans cesse occupée de lui, et vous aurez la satisfaction de lui faire trouver un bonheur qu’il ne connaissait...” Deffand, *Correspondence*, 1:297-98.

¹²⁸ Choiseul to Deffand, 12 January 1771, “Je veux redevenir jeune, et, si je peux, jolie Je tâcherai au moins de faire accroire au grand-papa que je suis l’une et l’autre...” Deffand, *Correspondence*, 1:309.

¹²⁹ Craveri, *Madame du Deffand*, 355.

closer to her husband, still clearly yearned for her friend and was eager for the prospective visit:

Finally, Finally! M. de Stainville arrives and handed me the two letters from the dear granddaughter. I am in starvation, it is for me a need of primary necessity... Yes, you will be better here than at Paris. You will be there in the midst of friendship and you will share with us the peace, the tranquility, the happiness, the freedom which we enjoy.¹³⁰

However, despite a few scheduled visits throughout the exile, they seldom saw each other and continued their friendship mainly through correspondence. Most of their letters during the exile (1770-1774) were carried by family members, such as M. de Stainville, or trusted friends like the abbé Barthelemy, rather than by the post that was too unsafe due to the risk of the interception of their letters.¹³¹

By the time of the Choiseuls' exile, Deffand was no longer holding her salon regularly, although she continued to entertain and dine with close friends such as Voltaire, the Luxembourgs, Beauvaus, and Horace Walpole and a few of his friends. However, such affairs did not provide her with the intimate friendship and closeness that she found with Choiseul. And unfortunately for Deffand, the Choiseuls' exile only heightened her anxieties and insecurities. In a letter dated 12 April 1771, Choiseul reassured Deffand how important her friendship and letters continued to be, claiming they were journals which instructed her "of the event of each day, the opinions of the

¹³⁰ Choiseul to Deffand, 21 March 1771, "Enfin, enfin! M. de Stainville arrive et me remet les deux lettres de la chère petite-fille. J'en étais affamée, c'était pour moi un besoin de première nécessité...Où, vous serez mieux ici qu'à Paris... Vous y serez au sein de l'amitié et vous partagerez avec nous la paix, la tranquillité, le bonheur, la liberté dont nous jouissons..." Deffand, *Correspondence*, 1:375.

¹³¹ Towards the end of Louis XV's reign all letters from England were opened in Paris, and were likely to be sent to Versailles if they contained the name of well known people. Even though Choiseul and Deffand's letters were not from England, the fact that the Choiseul's had been exiled made all correspondence subject to confiscation. Their concerns were therefore warranted. The mention of the receipt or anticipation of letters by various friends and family are numerous. Some of these letters are: 22

public and the particular sentiments of my friends” and eased her friend’s worries that her letters were never dull for her. To the contrary, Choiseul insisted they pleased and instructed her “more than any title.”¹³²

Deffand was correct in having doubts and anxieties about Choiseul’s exile. In exile the duchesse’s letters arrived less frequently due to extended stays by visitors and the slowness of mail. It appears that in late summer of 1771, Choiseul took two weeks to respond to Deffand’s letter from 27 July due to visits from Madame d’Aiguillon and Madame de Lauzan. However, she later did her best to reassure Deffand of her continued affection and her preference for her friendship: “It is by pure personality that I love you and that I want you.”¹³³ Deffand’s insecurities about being separated and perhaps fears of growing apart were still apparent in later correspondence.

It seems that time did little to ease Deffand’s anxieties at being separated from her closest friend. In another letter later in Choiseul’s exile in May 1773, Deffand again professed her love for Choiseul emphasizing her need for Choiseul’s friendship: “I say to you...without figure nor metaphor that I love you passionately, that your friendship is necessary for me and that I would die of sorrow if you no longer loved me.”¹³⁴

January 1771; 16 March 1771; 19 March 1771; 17 July 1772; 25 September 1772; 18 October 1772 and 11 May 1773.

¹³² Choiseul to Deffand, 12 April 1771, “Ce sont précisément des journaux qui m’instruisent des événements de chaque jour, des opinions du public et des sentiments particuliers des mes amis...votre lettres n’en auront jamais la sécheresse pour moi; elles me plairont, m’instruiront, m’intéresseront à plus d’un titre, et vous aurez la certitude de amuser et de m’être utile.” Deffand, *Correspondence*, 1:397.

¹³³ Choiseul to Defand, 9 August 1771, “C’est par pure personnalité que vous aime et que vous veux.” Deffand, *Correspondence*, 2:25.

¹³⁴ Deffand to Choiseul, 1 May 1773, “Je vous dis...sans figure ni métaphore, que je vous aime passionnément, que votre amitié m’est nécessaire, et que je mourrais de chagrin si vous ne m’aimez plus.” Deffand, *Correspondence*, 2:394.

Views on Happiness

Deffand's constant state of depression and Choiseul's seeming cheerfulness had caused Deffand to begin questioning the emotion that they knew as happiness. Perhaps some women had a better sense than others of the differences between being happy and merely being content. Deffand, an older wiser women seemed acutely aware that there was more to life than what they were experiencing. In a letter dated 22 July 1766, Deffand conceded to Choiseul that she believed her friend was gay because she was reasonable and happy only because she had feelings. However, she affirmed to Choiseul that this was only possible because "your conscience never makes the smallest reproach. Here is your true happiness. It is independent of all states and of every situation."¹³⁵ Deffand maintained that it was because Choiseul had never known complete happiness that her conscience could not distinguish effectively between gaiety, contentment, and happiness. However, Deffand believed that whichever sentiments she, or other women, were to express the end result would ultimately be the same: "In the end, there is only misfortune for those who, having been born with sensibilities, encounter only indifference."¹³⁶ Here Deffand expresses the frustrations that she felt as a woman living in eighteenth-century. In her view having or expressing such feelings of happiness or contentment would only be met with indifference from society. Deffand best encapsulated her views on happiness in July 1769:

¹³⁵ Deffand to Choiseul, 22 July 1766, "Vous êtes gaie parce que vous êtes raisonnable; vous êtes heureuse parce que vous avez des sentiments, et vous êtes contente parce que votre conscience ne vous fait jamais le plus petit reproche. Voilà votre vrai bonheur. Il est independent de tout état et de toute situation." Deffand, *Correspondence*, 1:56.

¹³⁶ Deffand to Choiseul, 14 April 1773, "Au fond, Il n'y a que malheur pour ceux que, étant nés sensibles, ne recontrent que de l'indifference." Deffand, *Correspondence*, 2:387.

What means do we have to catch it [happiness]? Do we know that we can get it? Oh! Yes we know it, and I am sure that we are of the same opinion...our object is not to be imaginary, it is the individuals who have flesh and bone that we love, by whom we want to be loved...But who do we know who is loved?¹³⁷

Deffand understood that happiness was not derived from physical objects, but rather from the love of another human being. And although Deffand and other women were able to find happiness and love from one another, here she revealed her frustration with the fact that she knew no one who was truly loved, and thus truly happy. As a result Deffand and Choiseul depended on each other for their emotional well-being; perhaps just as importantly, they reassured and valued each other in a male dominated world.

During Choiseul's exile years the two women grew closer despite the fact that they were living so far apart. In fact, the exile years mark the peak of their friendship, undoubtedly because of their forced separation. And although the subject of happiness had appeared randomly through their letters in previous years, Deffand and Choiseul expressed their views and concerns regarding happiness even more during the duchesse's exile.

While the duchesse was certainly delighted at the prospect of having her husband constantly by her side now that they were exiled, both women were dismayed at the prospect of their being separated indefinitely. Deffand was even more distraught that her closest friend had been exiled, because it only intensified her separation anxieties and provided her with more time to dwell on her problem of boredom. A few months after

¹³⁷ Deffand to Choiseul, 14 July 1769, "Quel moyen avons-nous pour l'attraper? Connaissons-nous ce qui peut nous le procurer? Oh! Oui, nous le connaissons, et je suis bien sure que nous sommes du même avis...Notre object n'est point des êtres imaginaires; ce sont des individus qui ont chair et os, que nous aimons, don't nous voulons être aimées; point de bonheur sans celui-là. Mas à quoi connaît-on qu'on est aimé?" Deffand, *Correspondence*, 1:242.

the exile, Deffand expressed discontentment and anxiety to Choiseul, “Oh! If I was near you, that I would be happy and tranquil.”¹³⁸ Comments such as these became commonplace in Deffand’s letters to Choiseul during their separation, and prompted more correspondence between the two women on the subject of happiness.

Deffand’s separation from Choiseul and her growing complaints of unhappiness and boredom lead her to question the nature and achievement of happiness. In an October 1771 letter to Choiseul she observed, “I see no person who has been so completely and so continuously happy as you; nature and fortune liberally gave you what others vainly search to acquire.”¹³⁹ Deffand’s assessment that Choiseul’s happiness had been granted to her by something beyond her control corresponds with the Enlightenment idea of happiness as presented by abbé Pestré in Diderot’s *Encyclopedié*. Pestré contends that happiness “does not entirely depend on ourselves since it is not within our power to have fortune place us in a humble station.”¹⁴⁰

Nearly two years into Choiseul’s exile, on 31 August 1772, Deffand revealed that she was feeling sad once again, and rhetorically asked who was truly happy. She identified two women, Madame de Caraman and Madame de Beauvau, whom she regarded as the only two people she knew who were gay and content. The first owed her happiness to her environment, and especially her husband and children, while the other

¹³⁸ Deffand to Choiseul, 28 August 1771, “Oh! Si J’étais près de vous, que je serais heureuse et tranquille.” Deffand, *Correspondence*, 2:30. Other letters in which Deffand complains about her sadness which are directly related to her friend’s exile are 11 September 1771; 16 September 1771; 21 September 1771; 27 September 1771, 18 October 1771; 17 December 1771; 30 January 1772; 25 February 1772 and 11 July 1772.

¹³⁹ Deffand to Choiseul, 23 October 1771, “Je ne vois personne qui ait été si complètement et si continûment heureuse que vous; la nature et la fortune vous ont donné libéralement tout ce que les autres cherchent vainement à acquérir.” Deffand, *Correspondence*, 2:73.

achieved contentment from within herself.¹⁴¹ The duchesse responded that “gaiety, even when it is habitual, seems to me only an accident,” as in Madame du Beauvau’s case, who was innately happy. She declared her understanding of happiness to be “the fruit of reason; it is a tranquil state, enduring, which has neither rapture nor splendor, maybe it is the sleep of the soul, death, nothingness.”¹⁴² Choiseul explained that she did not see the sleep of the soul, or the nothingness to which she referred as being bleak. For Choiseul, whose life had been filled with constant social activity and obligations, tranquility and nothingness were a welcome state. Choiseul’s optimistic nature lead her to further explain to Deffand in the same letter that she believed that, “boredom was not the worst of evil.”¹⁴³ Choiseul’s statement highlights the very heart of their problems. For Deffand, boredom was her worst evil and her only method of conquering it, of quieting it, was Choiseul’s friendship. For Choiseul, her worst evil centered on the fact that her husband did not return her feelings in kind. Choiseul’s method of overcoming this fact was to redefine her sense of what being happy truly was, and to rely on the feeling of ‘nothingness’, ironically, to escape the void she felt.

¹⁴⁰ Prestré, “Happiness,” in Denis Diderot, *Encyclopedia*, trans. by Nellie Hoyt (New York: Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1965), 146.

¹⁴¹ Deffand to Choiseul, 31 August 1772, “Votre petite-fille est bien triste, mais qui est-ce qui est véritablement gai et content? Je ne sache que deux personnes, madame de Caraman et madame de Beauvu, celle-ci par le contentement qu’elle a d’elle même, et l’autre par celui de tout ce qui l’environne, de son mari et de ses enfants qu’elle aime passionément et dont elle est aimée de même.” Deffand, *Correspondence*, 2:237.

¹⁴² Choiseul to Deffand, 5 September 1772, “La gaieté, même la plus soutenue, ne me paraît qu’un accident; le bonheur est le fruit de la raison, c’est un état tranquille, permanent, qui n’a ni transport ni éclats, peut-être est-ce le sommeil de l’âme, la mort, le néant.” Deffand, *Correspondence*, 2:242.

¹⁴³ Choiseul to Deffand, 5 September 1772, “Elle n’est que l’effet de l’ennui; comme si l’ennui n’était pas le pire des maux.” Deffand, *Correspondence*, 2:242.

Prestré's Encyclopedia article states that true happiness required periodic stimulation; without such stimulation one would experience only a state of tranquility, a very incomplete kind of happiness. The article also conceded that one should not expect to be in a constant state of happiness, because pleasures could not exist in one's life at every moment, as perhaps Deffand thought would be possible if only Choiseul could be forever by her side.¹⁴⁴ Choiseul, on the other hand, was convinced that she was in a continuous state of happiness because of her sensation of tranquility and 'nothingness'.

Whereas Deffand considered the status of gaiety and contentedness to be closely connected, Choiseul distinguished between the two. Acquainted with both women to whom Deffand had referred, Choiseul confidently insisted that Madame de Caraman was only content because she was "surrounded by objects of satisfaction that her reason approves and on which her feelings rest," a reference to her husband and children. Choiseul asserted that contentment was contingent upon objects of satisfaction, something reasonable, although not necessarily predictable. Choiseul's assumption that happiness was the effect of reason reveals her understanding of happiness as a passive concept, rather than a dynamic sensation. Happiness, in effect, was nothing more than the dulling of the senses, where one, as she put it, felt 'nothingness,' which for her was a welcome feeling. In her view, happiness and contentment were only possible if one reasoned it to be so, and one's lack of happiness must have a logical explanation. Such reasoning is what lead her continuously to question Deffand's unhappiness and attempt to help her find its source.

¹⁴⁴ Prestré, "Happiness," 144

By contrast, Choiseul believed Madame de Beauvau only to be gay, attributing her gaiety not to how objects painted themselves in her imagination, or how she perceived them to be, but rather to the “wonderful movement of her soul.”¹⁴⁵ In Choiseul’s view, gaiety was accidental and something over which she had no control because it was based on something innate. Unfortunately, Deffand’s temperament did not allow her to be a naturally a happy person, and she therefore turned to her object of satisfaction -- namely Choiseul -- just as Madame de Caraman had turned to her husband and children, in an attempt to be happy. Choiseul, on the other hand derived happiness from loving her husband rather than from his loving of her, and depended on her intrinsically happy nature to sustain her when her attempts to elicit love from her husband?

Choiseul’s plight with true happiness demonstrates that happiness for eighteenth-century women was bound by certain limits. Most other avenues were closed to them. They were prohibited from participating in government, and forced into marriages with little or no other recourse. Choiseul clearly believed she loved her husband and desperately tried to make the marriage a genuine one, but ultimately her attempts to do so seemed to leave her just as unhappy as Deffand. Neither her innately happy nature, nor the joy she derived from loving her husband had proved permanent. Could she have been truly happy then? And although it does not seem that Choiseul was acutely aware that Deffand’s friendship served to supplement this need to be happy, perhaps this could

¹⁴⁵ Choiseul to Deffand, 5 September 1772, “Vous dites que vous ne connaissez que deux personnes dans le monde que soient parfaitement gaies et contents, Madame de Caraman et Madame de Beauvau; je crois que la première est contente parce qu’elle est environnée d’objets de satisfaction que sa raison approuve et sur lesquels son sentiment se repose; pour l’autre, je crois qu’elle n’est que gaie, et sa gaieté tient moins encore à la manière plaisante dont les objets se peignent à son imagination qu’au prodigieux mouvement de son âme.” Deffand, *Correspondence*, 2:242.

explain why Choiseul seemed quite unhappy at those times when she was not surrounded by close friends, like Deffand, despite the presence of her husband whom she loved and cared for deeply. When Deffand had inquired how she passed her time during her exile, Choiseul replied, “I don’t know. I only know that it passes,” claiming that “without knowing why nor how, I am happy, very happy, as much as one can be separated from their friends.” Here Choiseul is again insisting that she is happy, although with false bravado.

While Choiseul may have truly convinced herself that she was happy because her restricted notion of happiness rested on a lack of stimulation, in reality she did not know the meaning of true happiness. To Choiseul, nothingness was not pain, and so therefore it must be happiness. She likened the “pleasures of friendship” to true bliss, but like Prestré conceded and was prepared to accept that “one could not always be in the heavens.” And despite the fact that happiness could be fleeting, she resumed her motherly role by reassuring Deffand that happiness was not difficult to obtain.¹⁴⁶ Despite Choiseul’s sadness as a result of her exile and thus separation from her closest friend, she nonetheless held fast to her optimistic views, content to try and live her life in a tranquil state, hoping to help others do the same.

¹⁴⁶ Choiseul to Deffand, 5 June 1775, “Vous demandez comment je passé mon temps toute seule. Hélas! Je n’en sais rien. Je sais seulement qu’il passé..Enfin, sans savoir ni pourquoi ne comment, je suis heureuse, très-heureuse, autant qu’on peut l’être séparée des ses amis; car les jouissances de l’amitié, je l’avoue, sont la veritable beatitude; mais on ne peut pas toujours être dans les cieux; et tout ce qui rampe sur la terre, exposé à la douleur, n’y est cepedant pas toujours en proie...Croyez-moi, ma chère petite-fille, il n’est pas si difficile d’être heureux, et cette idée du moins est consolante si elle n’est pas neuve.” Deffand, *Correspondence*, 3:471.

A Closer Look Into the Nature of Female Bonds

Carroll Smith-Rosenberg was among the first historians to explore the intimate bonds that tended to form between women as a direct result of social conditions and rigid gender roles. Although her work focuses on American women in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth-century, her discussion of the intimate bonds in the female world addresses the issue of homoeroticism can also be applied to European female relationships. She contends that several factors encouraged women to form such emotional relationships, one being severe gender role differentiation within society. Smith-Rosenberg asserts that women in nineteenth-century American society did not understand intimate female relationships to be taboo, and deemed them acceptable throughout their lives. These relationships provided them with “closeness, freedom of emotional expression, and uninhibited physical contact,” largely opposite of their relationships with men. Women had learned to form these supportive and intimate female friendships since childhood.¹⁴⁷ This was especially true in France, where many aristocratic girls were sent to a convent to be educated at very young ages.¹⁴⁸ Smith-Rosenberg further argues that because of strict gender roles, marriage required an extraordinary adjustment for these women and further segregated them emotionally. She surmises that as a result women experienced a further intensification of already close friendships after marriage, a circumstance exemplified by Choiseul and Deffand.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁷ Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, “The Female World of Love and Ritual: Relations Between Women in Nineteenth Century America,” *SIGNS: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 1, no. 1 (1975): 74.

¹⁴⁸ For further information about the domestication of French women see Margaret Darrow, “French Noblewomen and the New Domesticity,” *Feminist Studies* 5, no. 1 (1979): 44-52.

¹⁴⁹ Smith-Rosenberg, “The Female World of Love,” 55-60.

This is not to say that such friendships prevented them from developing close and personal relationships with male correspondents; however, those friendships were of a different nature and purpose altogether. Female relationships ranged from the love of sisters, enthusiasms of adolescent girls, to sensual, yet supportive declarations of love by mature women, as exemplified by one of Choiseul's letters to Deffand where she wrote: "I love you because I love you...I love you again because you love me...rightly or wrongly I love you."¹⁵⁰

Friendships, such as that of Choiseul and Deffand, served to provide women support and emotional sustenance in a socially acceptable form. Even more importantly, female friendship demonstrated the value each placed in the other in an age that, despite its reverence for feminine traits, still regarded males as the superior gender. As a result of their social and emotional seclusion, they turned to forming these supportive relationships. However, the passionate nature of their friendship may suggest that strong female friendships involved more apprehension than friendships with men, as evidenced by the intense separation anxiety they felt when apart. For instance, Deffand's letter on 16 September 1771 confesses to Choiseul:

The pain accompanying the tenderness does not collapse the soul; to the contrary, I feel that it draws me out from the void of boredom. When I think to that which I love and to that which loves me, although I am separated, I taste a pleasure that nothing which surrounds me can procure for me.¹⁵¹

¹⁵⁰ Choiseul to Deffand, 3 February 1771, "Je vous aime, parce que je vous aime...je vous encore parce que vous m'aimez...à tort ou à raison je vous aime." Deffand, *Correspondence*, 1:332. Also see Smith-Rosenberg, "Female World of Love," 53.

¹⁵¹ Deffand to Choiseul, 16 September 1771, "La douleur accompagnée de tendresse n'affaïsse point l'âme, au contraire; j'éprouve qu'elle tire la mienne du néant de l'ennui. Quand je pense à ce que j'aime et à ce qui m'aime, quoiqu'il j'en sois séparée, je goûte un plaisir que rien de ce qui m'environne ne peut me procurer." Deffand, *Correspondence*, 2:41.

Smith-Rosenberg examines similar relationships that echo the intensity and dependence of women upon one another. She describes the complexity of these female relationships, brought on by the age, the distance between the women, and their marital situations.¹⁵²

Elizabeth Colwill addresses similar issues in a recent article, where she also maintains that the relationships between men and women were more complex than scholars have previously imagined. The domestic ideology of the eighteenth-century did not necessarily indicate that matters of the heart were never discussed with their male counterparts. However, Colwill identifies the main difference between male and female friendships as being that sisterhood derived from mutual suffering that served as the foundation of liberation. Her article examines the friendship of Constance de Salm with various female and male counterparts. Salm's relationship with certain women was characterized by intense attachment.¹⁵³ Similarly, Deffand's letters demonstrate the fervent, almost obsessive nature of her relationship with Choiseul. For instance, during a temporary separation in 1768 she wrote, "You my only thought, you are the happiness and the torment of my life..." For Deffand the happiness was self-evident, but "the torment, is being separated from you, so few days to devote to you [so] that I am unable to demonstrate my gratitude, my tenderness..."¹⁵⁴

Choiseul's sentiments at the prospect of separation echo Deffand's. After a few months of exile the two women were attempting to plan for Deffand to visit the

¹⁵² Smith-Rosenberg, "Female World of Love," 68-71.

¹⁵³ Elizabeth Colwill, "Epistolary Passions: Friendship and the Literary Public of Constance de Salm, 1767-1845," *Journal of Women's History* 12, no. 3 (2000): 39-40.

¹⁵⁴ Deffand to Choiseul, 9 May 1768, "Vous êtes mon unique pensée, vous faites le bonheur et le tourment de ma vie. Le bonheur n'a pas besoin d'explication; le tourment c'est d'être séparée de vous, de ce qu'il me reste si peu de jours à vous dévouer, de ce que jamais je ne pourrai vous faire connaître quelle est ma reconnaissance, ma tendresse..." Deffand, *Correspondence*, 1:460.

Choiseul's estate in Chanteloup. However, when bishop d'Arras, who was to arrange for Deffand's trip, failed to come through the two women were severely dismayed. Choiseul expressed her disappointment in her letter to Deffand: "my heart is still sad...I was expecting the pleasure of seeing you." Choiseul conveyed her sense of deprivation and exclaimed, "Alas! I believe that he has cheated me."¹⁵⁵

On another occasion, Deffand, who anticipated Choiseul's return from a long trip, as would a forlorn lover wrote, "I have the greatest need for you..." But she also expressed her fear for the future of their relationship, "I hardly know that I am destined to pass my life without seeing you, but I sense the possibility."¹⁵⁶ Such language demonstrates the strength of female friendship and confirms Smith-Rosenberg's contention that female bonds were physical as well as emotional, and that at times romantic tones marked such friendships.¹⁵⁷

Christine Roulston's article, "Separating the Inseparables: Female Friendship and Its Discontents in Eighteenth-century France," contends that in the second half of the French eighteenth-century the concept of inseparability in female friendships helped guide and inform the construction of gender in eighteenth-century discourse. She defines inseparable friendships as being dependent on both class and gender markers, as well as the relationship between public and private. She further claims that within the aristocracy

¹⁵⁵ Choiseul to Deffand, 11 September 1771, "Mon coeur est encore plus triste...Je comptais sur le plaisir de vous voir; j'en suis privée pour cette année, et j'en suis au désespoir. Au nom de Dieu, ne vous, ve vous arrangez plus avec les gens capables de faire manquer votre voyage...Hélas! Je crois qu'il m'a trompée." Deffand, *Correspondence*, 2:34.

¹⁵⁶ Deffand to Choiseul, 22 July 1766, "J'ai le plus grand besoin de vous; je ne sais que trop que je suis destinée à passer ma vie sans vous voir, mais j'aime à en sentir la possibilité." Deffand, *Correspondence*, 1:56.

¹⁵⁷ Smith-Rosenberg, "The Female World of Love," 71.

these inseparable friendships engaged a more public arena than friendships within the bourgeoisie. The lines of demarcation lay with the fact that the aristocracy was a class whose social relations depended on publicity, while the bourgeoisie sought a more private model.¹⁵⁸ The aristocracy then used these separable friendships to create a space, which afforded them a private, intimate domain as illustrated by Deffand and Choiseul's friendship. It allowed them to be private away from the public eye, and offered them, especially Choiseul, a social refuge from the demands of court and public life.

The inseparable nature of their friendship is evidenced in one of Choiseul's a letter to Deffand in October 1769 where she pleaded, "I love you, it is the feeling which brings me closer to eternity, it is for me the beginning and the end and it fills the intervals."¹⁵⁹ She viewed her relationship with Deffand as not only filling a void in her life, but also characterized it as being an eternal and binding love, curiously akin to marriage. Choiseul carries this theme of infinite love in another letter where she professed, that "I do not know, neither how to finish my letter nor how to end loving you."¹⁶⁰

Throughout their friendship and correspondence it appears that both women, who were suffering from either unrequited love or loveless lives, turned to each other in

¹⁵⁸ Christine Roulston, "Separating the Inseparables: Female Friendship and Its Discontents in Eighteenth-Century France," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 32, no.2 (1999): 215-216.

¹⁵⁹ Choiseul to Deffand, 10 October 1769, "Je vous aime, c'est le sentiment qui m'approche de l'éternité; il est pour moi le commencement et la fin et il remplit l'intervalle." Deffand, *Correspondence*, 1:249.

¹⁶⁰ Choiseul to Deffand, 26 April 1771, "Je ne sais ni finir ma lettre ni finir de vous aimer." Deffand, *Correspondence*, 1:407. For other examples, aside from those contained in this section see: 6 May 1772, 30 March 1772, and 29 February 1772.

search of a substitute for sentimental love. In 1771, Deffand made these feelings quite clear in a letter to Choiseul:

You satisfy all of my desires, you fulfill all my ideas of friendship, you love me as I maintain that one should love, in one word, as I love, it is the last word. Voltaire has said of friendship: 'Change into good all the evil to which heaven has subjected me.' Here is the effect that your friendship produces in me. It is no longer a misfortune to be old, blind, etc., my grand'mama, ... I enjoy a happiness that I have always desired and that I had been ready to believe a pure dream, I am loved... ¹⁶¹

Many of their letters profess their love for one another repeatedly. At the times when they become insecure regarding their love for each other, due mainly to slow correspondence or unanswered letters, the feelings they expressed are reminiscent of two young lovers newly in love.¹⁶² On one occasion Choiseul had been without any news of Deffand for some time, and wrote to her dear friend that she was "very indulgent on the absences of the mind, but not one of the heart."¹⁶³

Choiseul and Deffand's friendship clearly illustrates the close-knit and intimate bonds between them. Smith-Rosenberg's article also supports the contention that women who enjoyed such friendships, valued one another, sympathized with one another and helped to reinforce a sense of inner security and self-esteem. In the eighteenth-century, women in both America and France were still largely separated from male society. For

¹⁶¹ Deffand to Choiseul, 20 January 1771, "Vous satisfaites tous mes desirés; vous remplissez toutes mes idées sur l'amitié, vous m'aimez comme je pretends qu'on doit aimer, en un mot, comme j'aime, c'est le nec plus ultra. Voltaire a dit de l'amitié: 'Change en bien tous les maux où le Ciel m'a soumis.' Voilà l'effet que votre amitié produit sur moi. Ce n'est plus un malheur d'être vieille, aveugle, etc... je jouis d'un bonheur que j'ai toujours désiré et que j'ai été prête à croire une pure chimère, je suis le aimée..." Deffand, *Correspondence*, 1:349.

¹⁶² Such letters that express sentiments of female-female love are numerous throughout their correspondence, particularly around and after the Choiseul's time of exile. Other letters of similar caliber are: 16 May 1770; 1 May 1772; 1 January 1771; 26 December 1770; 20 June 1770; and 17 May 1770; 21 September 1771; 30 January 1772; 4 February 1772; 6 May 1772, and 11 July 1772

¹⁶³ Choiseul to Deffand, 6 May 1772, "Je suis donc très-indulgente sur les absences de l'esprit, mais non pas sure celles de coeur." Deffand, *Correspondence*, 2:481.

the most part, they were still expected to fulfill their roles as wives and mothers and refrain from participating directly in the public sphere.¹⁶⁴ According to their contemporaries women's lives were to remain in the female sphere as dictated by God and nature. However, neither Deffand nor Choiseul were mothers, and they certainly filled a larger social and intellectual role than many other women -- Deffand as a *salonnière*, and Choiseul as an aristocrat married to the most powerful minister of France. Nevertheless, they were still women who were trying to find a place in a male-dominated society, and they sought female friends with whom to share frustrations and anxieties, as well as their somewhat limited triumphs. Although women might enter the public sphere through the world of salons, it is evident in the letters of these women that the rigid confines of society wore heavily on their minds.

The Last Years of Deffand's and Choiseul's Friendship

Louis XV's death in December 1774 finally allowed the Choiseuls to leave their exile and return to Paris; however, the two women did not remain as close as they might have hoped. Although the duc was not reinstated to his previous position at royal court, there were undoubtedly many social obligations that monopolized the duchesse's time. After 1774, correspondence from Choiseul to Deffand slowed considerably compared to the earlier years, leaving Deffand feeling even more isolated and depressed. According to Deffand's biographer Craveri, Choiseul's irregular correspondence was due to her re-entry into Parisian life. In 1774, Choiseul was 37 years old, and though no longer young, it appears that she still considered herself in her social prime. The infrequency of

¹⁶⁴ Smith-Rosenberg, "The Female World of Love," 63-64.

Choiseul and Deffand's correspondence seems to verify Craveri's initial assertion; however, it is possible that the duchesse could have visited her old friend frequently, but Deffand's letters indicate a cooling friendship. During the last few years of Deffand's life, she wrote relentlessly to Choiseul but received little response to her letters. In 31 July 1775, a year after the Choiseuls returned from exile, Deffand wrote to the duchesse:

I think without ceasing of you, dear grandmamma, I reflect on your character, on your sentiments, on your conduct...and me, unfortunately, I grow apart from her, her presence, her words would make me participate in her happiness; I am distressed, I detest the life that I lead...I find pleasure in loving you, but living separate from you is for me insupportable...¹⁶⁵

Deffand often wrote to Choiseul asking why it had been so long since she had written, or would comment how long it had been since she had received a response.¹⁶⁶ What correspondence there is from Choiseul is friendly and welcoming; however, there is simply not enough of it to conclude why she wrote so few letters to Deffand during these years.

Choiseul's letters in 1775, the year after their return from exile, were predisposed to being reassuring and comforting: "I have the intimate confidence that I will never be loved by a person as much as I am from you. I have never loved more a person

¹⁶⁵ Deffand to Choiseul, 31 July 1775, "Je pense sans cesse à vous, chère grand'maman, je réfléchis sur votre caractère, sur vos sentiments, sur votre conduite...et moi, infortunée, je végète séparée d'elle; sa présence ses propos ne feraient participer à son bonheur; je m'afflige, je déteste la vie que je mène...Je trouve du plaisir à vous aimer; mais vivre séparée de vous m'est insupportable..." Deffand, *Correspondence*, 3:480.

¹⁶⁶ Examples of Deffand complaining at Choiseul's lack of correspondence can be found in the following letters: 30 November 1772; 23 March 1773; 2 April 1773; 6 April 1773; 8 May 1773; 30 April 1774; 5 May 1774; 1 July 1774; 20 August 1775; 31 August 1775; 3 August 1776; 27 May 1777; 2 September 1777 and 2 November 1777.

as lovable as you.”¹⁶⁷ Deffand’s letters during those last few years continued to be warm, loving and supportive. Her letter to Choiseul, on 4 June 1778, reveals that the duc who had been away now had returned, and so she reassured Choiseul that her loneliness would now end knowing she found much happiness in the presence of her husband. But Deffand’s depression clearly remained as she ended her letter, “Goodbye, I finish, because I am sad for the simple reason that I exist.”¹⁶⁸

Throughout her correspondence, Deffand attributed her sadness to indifference from the world around her, separation from Choiseul, and solitude. Sadly many of her close friends had also begun to die, among them Hénault in 1770 and Voltaire in 1778, while others such as Formont and Fontenelle had passed away years before. The combination of old age, blindness, isolation, and the passing of her friends appear to have been too much for Deffand. Admittedly, she had first gone blind in 1752 when her salon was reaching its peak, yet by now she was almost eighty years old and feeling the effects of age more keenly. A sizeable portion of her letters to Choiseul in the 1770’s mostly concern complaints of boredom and loneliness. In October 1776, she grieved: “the life that I lead is so boring...boredom results from the boring...it numbs the soul and all that

¹⁶⁷ Choiseul to Deffand, 4 August 1775, “J’ai l’intime confiance que je n’ai jamais été aimée de personne autant que je le suis de vous. Je n’ai jamais non plus aimé personne d’aussi aimable que vous.” Deffand, *Correspondence*, 3:483.

¹⁶⁸ Deffand to Choiseul, 4 June 1779, “Voilà, chère grand’maman, vos moments de solitude passes; depuis l’arrivée du grand-papa, vous auriez sans doute souhaité qu’ils durassent toujours de même... Votre grand bonheur, c’est d’aimer...Adieu, je finis, parce que je suis triste sans aucun sujet, mais parce que j’existe.” Deffand, *Correspondence*, 3:350 Their correspondence beginning in 1777 slowed considerably. At times only one or two letters per month were exchanged. At other times they were chronically infrequent for months at a time. It should also be noted that a large portion of the letters after 1777 were only from Deffand to Choiseul. And although many of Choiseul’s responding letters have been apparently lost or omitted from these volumes by the editors, many of Deffand’s letters also indicate that the duchesse was also rather preoccupied with her new life out of exile. Some of these letters are: 19 April 1777; 27 May 1777; 6 August 1777; 2 September 1777; 2 November 1777; 30 July 1778; 14 April 1779; 21 September 1779; 13 May 1780 and 8 June 1780. Of the letters that are available from Choiseul, many express her fixation with loving and being loved by her husband.

one experiences; I proved it, and except for the feeling that I have for you, all in me is a premature death... There is no one here.”¹⁶⁹ Her constant separation from Choiseul only increased this melancholy as the letter dated 19 July 1778 indicates: “be well persuaded that I think, without ceasing, of you, that the worst of my misfortunes is to be separated from you. It is the greatest inconvenience that I find in my old age.”¹⁷⁰ At this point in her life Deffand seems resigned to live the rest of her years as an unhappy, removed, and insecure woman.

Deffand was near the end of a long line of *salonnières*; Mme Geoffrin had died in 1777, Mlle Lepinasse in 1776, and Mme d’Epinay and Mme Necker would follow in 1783 and 1794 respectively. By the 1770’s, the salon culture as Deffand had known it was coming to an end. However, she continued to rely on Choiseul even more during these years to help her find her bearings. “Teach me to know myself, that I may see all the faults of my character, the shortcomings of my mind, but tell infinitely of the good of my heart; it is only able to be excellent since you fulfilled it, Oh dear grand’mama, why is it that the end of my life is so sad?”¹⁷¹ And even though she did have close friends

¹⁶⁹ Deffand to Choiseul, 13 October 1776, “La vie que je mène est si ennuyeuse...l’ennuyeux résultait de l’ennui...je l’éprouve, et excepté le sentiment que j’ai pour vous, tout en moi est une mort prématurée.” Deffand, *Correspondence*, 3:248. Such letters from Deffand to Choiseul are numerous. Among some of the more interesting which I did not include in the text are: 13 March 1767; 16 May 1770; 30 January 1771; 11 September 1771; 16 September 1771; 3 August 1773; 13 May 1780; 13 July 1775 and 17 March 1774.

¹⁷⁰ Deffand to Choiseul, 19 July 1778, “Soyez bien persuadée que je pense sans cesse à vous, que le plus grand de mes malheurs est d’être séparée de vous; c’est les plus grand inconvénient que je trouve dans ma vieillesse.” Deffand, *Correspondence*, 3:322.

¹⁷¹ Deffand to Choiseul, 6 April 1773, “Apprenez-moi à me connaître, que je voie tous les défauts de mon caractère, les travers de mon esprit, mais dites infiniment de bien de mon coeur; il ne peut être qu’excellent, puisque vous le remplissez. Ah! grand’maman, pourquoi faut-il que la fin de ma vie soit si triste?” Deffand, *Correspondence*, 2:382.

visit her in her private chambers, she was no longer the lively, young *salonnière* and so she felt the loneliness of high society more than ever.

Only a few years later, in a letter dated 18 December 1778, she had bitterly related to Choiseul, “passions are the malady of the soul that sustain it, but which wear it out and which, in the end, reduce it to nothingness.”¹⁷² At the age of 83, having lived the life of one of the leading *salonnières* of France and having known and befriended the greatest philosophers of the Enlightenment, she became even more melancholy. Yet at the very end she seemed to reach a personal enlightenment. On June 8, 1780, four months before her death, she wrote to Choiseul, “When one has a content heart, nothing is painful, all is easy. Reminiscences come to me which make me understand all the dispositions of the soul.”¹⁷³ It seems that Deffand regarded love and passion as both a curse that one possessed, and yet one that she desired but was never to have. She realized that happiness was ultimately the only deterrence to life’s pain, and it so happens that she sought to obtain happiness not from her husband, lover or male friends, but rather from the duchesse de Choiseul, another woman who could sympathize with her disappointments and frustrations with her life.

An Epistolary Friendship

The initial quest of this chapter was to examine the private correspondence of two aristocratic women in eighteenth-century France, focusing on the concerns that plagued

¹⁷² Deffand to Choiseul, 13 December 1778, “Passions sont une maladie de l’âme qui la soutiennent, mais qui l’usent et qui, en finissant, la réduisent au néant.” Deffand, *Correspondence*, 3:346.

¹⁷³ Deffand to Choiseul, 8 June 1780, “Quand on a le coeur content, rien n’est pénible, tout devient facile. Il me vient des reminiscences qui me font comprendre toutes les dispositions de l’âme...” Deffand, *Correspondence*, 3:367.

them as women living in a male-dominated society, and, even more importantly, the role that friendship played in their lives. The intimate and unique bond that formed between Deffand and Choiseul is evident from their letters. The friendship that developed can be characterized by mutual pledges of unconditional love and devotion, and eternal friendship. Despite underlying differences between the two women, such as temperament, age and marital status, their friendship managed to withstand the test of time and the vast distances that frequently separated them.

Deffand and Choiseul's letters indicate that their friendship was one of great strength and support, unwavering commitment, and most importantly, unconditional love and acceptance. In each other they were able to find emotional fulfillment by forming intimate relationships, which were separate and distinct from the male dominated world of the eighteenth-century. They had, instead, turned to female friendships in which they were emotionally free to share with each other all that they experienced as aristocratic women in eighteenth-century France. And although each woman needed and benefited from the friendship in a different manner, it is clear that their friendships was, for a time, essential for Deffand and Choiseul's true happiness.

CHAPTER 3

THE ENLIGHTENMENT'S INFLUENCE ON DEFFAND AND CHOISEUL'S FRIENDSHIP

The eighteenth-century was an era that encouraged a rethinking of European social, economic and political structures, while paradoxically attempting to keep certain institutions unchanged.¹⁷⁴ The Enlightenment encouraged a new sense of confidence that men could improve the very quality of their lives. Men theorized that they were no longer subject to the capricious will of God. Faith and religion were replaced by reason and logic. Relying increasingly on their own intelligence, men began to question the economic and political structures of society.

Certainly most of the ideas published during the Enlightenment were produced by men, but women's interest and desire to be a part of this movement is clear by their success in its participation. Madame du Châtelet, Madame de Graffigny, Madame Riccobini, Madame de Lambert, Julie de Lespinasse, Madame Geoffrin, Madame d'Epinay and Madame de Genlis all contributed intellectually through their salons. As the judges and authorities of taste, they had a great and direct effect on the style and content of author's works, providing writers with hospitality and protection, which could

¹⁷⁴ Lieselotte Steinbrügge, *The Moral Sex: Women's Nature in the French Enlightenment*, trans. Pamela Selwyn (New York, 1995), 3.

mean the difference between success and acceptance, and anonymity and rejection.¹⁷⁵

The presentation of a writer's work in a salon brought young authors one step closer to being introduced into the Republic of Letters. After all, if a writer's manuscript was read aloud in one salon and made an impression, or if by being well received they were able to establish a contact, it would often be introduced to other "networks of intellectual exchange."¹⁷⁶ The *philosophes* accepted the salons as a gathering place for the Republic of Letters. They respected the women who held them and provided a social space free from censorship. The *salonnières* main purpose was to enforce the rule of polite conversation, and even though many men complained about the constraints placed upon them by the *salonnières*, nevertheless, they willingly and often times enthusiastically sought out their salons.¹⁷⁷ By doing so, the *philosophes* were both acknowledging the salon as an important Enlightenment institution and proving that the salons were ideal for serving the Enlightenment.¹⁷⁸

For the *salonnières*, their participation in salons facilitated their involvement in intellectual matters because their salons constituted what was deemed to be a socially acceptable forum by many men and, thus, provided them with access to what may be considered a man's domain.¹⁷⁹ Indeed, many women such as Deffand and Choiseul had close correspondence and associated themselves with a wide variety of philosophers and aristocrats. And while Deffand and Choiseul did not directly involve themselves in the

¹⁷⁵ Lee, *The Reign of Women*, 116-117.

¹⁷⁶ Goodman, "Enlightenment Salons," 344-345.

¹⁷⁷ Goodman, *Republic of Letters*, 91.

¹⁷⁸ Goodman, "Enlightenment Salons," 340.

¹⁷⁹ Steinbrugge, *The Moral Sex*, 3.

Enlightenment by writing or publishing works of their own, they certainly took a keen interest in it.

Of particular interest is the friendship that formed between Deffand, Choiseul and Voltaire. This relationship provides a great deal of insight into Deffand and Choiseul's own friendship. The previous chapter demonstrated the personal relationship between the two women. This chapter will reveal the role their friendship played in sponsoring the enlightened projects of Voltaire, perhaps the most respected of all philosophers. Through their correspondence with Voltaire, this chapter will present readers with an insight into friendship of the two women that their personal letters could not provide.

Deffand's role as a very popular and well-respected *salonnière* exposed her to Enlightenment thought on a regular basis. Her interest in and association with the writers, philosophers, musicians and artists of the Enlightenment preceded the establishment of her salon. In fact, her friendship with Voltaire had long been established for nearly fifteen years when she began her first salon in Paris, in 1739. She had met Montesquieu, Fontenelle and La Motte while attending Madame du Maine's salon from about 1720 until 1747, when Deffand then began her own salon. Deffand's correspondence with Choiseul reveals a woman with many of the personal characteristics of the *philosophes*. She was skeptical, untrusting, judicious and extremely inquisitive -- qualities that other *philosophes* of this age also demonstrated and promoted throughout their own works.

Interestingly, much of their early correspondence (1766-1769) demonstrates something of Choiseul's interest in Enlightenment ideas as well. As the wife of the

Minister of Foreign Affairs for France, Choiseul met and had contact with a variety of philosophers and well-known writers who appeared at court. Although Choiseul was no intellectual her letters indicate she enjoyed books and reading. Her letters to Deffand often referred to Pliny, Horace, Cicero, Voltaire, and Rousseau and their works, and she enjoyed discussions on political and social theory, or abstract matters, such as love and happiness. And even though the majority of their letters focused on personal concerns and shared emotions, both women were intensely involved in the intellectual issues of the period.

Voltaire and Deffand

Voltaire was a frequent subject of discussion and regular participant in Deffand and Choiseul's early correspondence, particularly from 1767 to 1770. Voltaire and Deffand had actually been close friends for nearly fifty years and had been corresponding since 1726.¹⁸⁰ It was common for a *salonnière* to know intimately and to correspond with the philosophers who frequented their salons, but Deffand's friendship with Voltaire had begun long before she had established her own salon. Voltaire and Deffand's friendship endured until Voltaire's death in 1778. Their paths first crossed in the early 1720's at the duchesse du Maine's court at Sceaux where they had been introduced by Président Hénault, a favorite of Queen Maria Leszczyńska and well-known at court for

¹⁸⁰ Craveri, *Madame du Deffand*, 191, 195. Even though they initially began corresponding in 1726, Craveri maintains that there are only sixteen letters in his own handwriting to Deffand between 1732 and 1758. She surmises this was due to Voltaire's long time obsession and love affair with Madame du Châtelet. However, Craveri does contend that Deffand's name is frequently mentioned in his correspondence with Formont and Hénault in the 1730's and 1740's. The lack of correspondence between Voltaire and Deffand is most likely due to the fact that he visited her often, or they visited at Mme du Maine's salon at Sceaux. It was not until January 1759 that their real correspondence began.

his music, witty poetry and light-hearted literature.¹⁸¹ Their letters demonstrated a common interest in the salon society, even after 1732 when Voltaire's popularity had increased and he had secured several pensions from the king and queen.¹⁸²

For Deffand, a well-established correspondence with one of the most popular, talented, and well-placed philosophers of France was especially significant. Voltaire's friendship insured that she was among the first to learn of his new works and their intimate details, thus contributing to the success of her salon. In March 1764, she chided him for not fulfilling his promise to send her more copies of his works:

I have read four stories of which you sent me only the first. *L'éducation d'une jeune fille* and *Macare* have been printed and so I have them! But I have not been able to obtain *Les Trois Manières*. It is very bad of you, Monsieur to grant only half of your favors... Will you not distinguish between me and the public?¹⁸³

Deffand enjoyed reading and discussing with Voltaire a variety of philosophical works, as well as plays, verses, and essays written by an array of authors; however her letters reveal her clear preference for Voltaire's works. The two old friends shared many of the same views on French society. His witty and cynical approach to life delighted her and matched wholly her pessimistic outlook on life. She once admitted to him the reason

¹⁸¹ Craveri, *Madame du Deffand*, 16, 188. Also see her biographical notes on Hénault, pg. 414.

¹⁸² He had earned 1200 francs from the duc d'Orleans in 1718, 2000 francs from the king in 1722, 1500 francs from the queen in 1725. And although this was not sufficient to allow him to live as others in high society did, his financiers helped give him an understanding of banking and commercial operations. Through various investments and with the help of his courtly connections he was eventually able to acquire quite a small fortune. Gustave Lanson, *Voltaire*, (New York, 1960), 23.

¹⁸³ Deffand to Voltaire, 7 March 1764, "J'ai lû vos quatre contes dont vous ne m'avez envoyé que le premier. L'Education d'une fille et Macare sont imprimés, ainsi je les ai. Mais je n'ai pû parvenir à avoir les trois manières. C'est bien mal à vous monsieur de n'accorder vos faveurs qu'à demi... Ne me distinguerez vous point du public?" Voltaire, *Correspondence*, 54:167.

she enjoyed reading his works so much was because, “whenever I read your judgment on something, my good opinion of myself increases because I am always in agreement.”¹⁸⁴

Throughout their friendship Deffand depended on Voltaire for reading material for her own amusement. She would often complain to Voltaire that she did not know what to read. Knowing her so well he would reply in turn, “You ask me what you should read, as the sick ask what they should eat; but they must be hungry and you have little appetite but considerable taste...Happy is he who is hungry enough to devour the Old Testament! Do not mock it!”¹⁸⁵ Of course, Deffand refused his advice in this case, as she always did when it came to reading or discussing religion. This perhaps was no different than his refusal to read her recommendation of various English novels, which she loved and revered.¹⁸⁶

Their relationship had always maintained a jovial tone, in which both were earnest in their concerns for the other. Deffand enjoyed the attention and welcomed and admired his letters, namely because Voltaire provided her with the intellectual stimulation that she craved and helped her pass the time. It was his intellect in particular that she found captivating, telling him “Monsieur, if you were as good as I would like...you would write down everything that goes through your head...It is entirely your

¹⁸⁴ Deffand. to Voltaire, 28 October 1759 “Enfin, quand je lis vos jugemens sur quelque chose que ce puisse être j’augmente de bonne opinion de moi même parce que les miens y sont absolument conformes.” Voltaire, *Correspondence*, 37:167.

¹⁸⁵ Voltaire to Deffand, 13 October 1759, “Vous me demandez ce que vous devez lire, comme les maladies demandent ce qu’ils doivent manger; mais il faut avoir de l’appétit, et vous avez peu d’appétit avec beaucoup de gout; heureux qui a assez faim pour dévorer l’ancien Testament! Ne vous en mocquez point.” Voltaire, *Correspondence*, 37:138.

¹⁸⁶ Deffand to Voltaire, 28 October 1759, “Je ne vous parle plus des romans anglois, sûrement ils vous paroistroient trop long; il faut peut être n’avoir rien à faire pour se plaire à cette lecture, mais je trouve que ce sont des traits de morale en actions qui sont très intéressants et peuvent être fort utiles; c’est Pamela, Clarisse et Grandisson; l’auteur est Richerson, il me paroît avoir bien d’esprit.” Voltaire, *Correspondence*, 37:167.

mind alone that satisfies me.”¹⁸⁷ Again, in May 1770, Deffand illustrates her reverence for Voltaire and his works declaring to him that “be it instinct, sentiment or reason. I will never have another master than you.”¹⁸⁸

Likewise, Voltaire recognized Deffand’s intellectual ability early in their relationship, and encouraged her to use her intelligence to her advantage. In 1736, years before Deffand had established her own salon, he urged her, “do not be afraid of discussion. Do not be ashamed to add the strength of your intelligence to the charms of your person.”¹⁸⁹ Some of Voltaire’s letters also indicate that he was very interested in what she had to say about the manuscripts he sent her. On one occasion he asked Deffand if she had ever read Polignac’s *Anti-Lucrèce*, claiming to only have a very bad translation of it by baron des Coutures, and wondered if she would be “bold enough to have merely forty or fifty pages of [this] Coutures” read to her. He was interested in putting the third canto into verse, and wondered if the twelfth to the twenty-seventh argument made it worth his while.¹⁹⁰ On another occasion in late May 1764, after he sent Deffand a copy of another work, Voltaire implored her to, “send me, I beg you, Madame,

¹⁸⁷ Deffand to Voltaire, 28 October 1759, “Mais monsieur si vous aviez autant de bonté que je voudrais, vous auriez un cahier de papier sur votre bureau, où vous écririez dans vos moments de loisir tout ce que vous passeroit par la tête...c’est de tout vérité qu’il n’y a que votre esprit qui me satisfasse...” Voltaire, *Correspondence*, 37:167.

¹⁸⁸ Deffand to Voltaire, 24 May 1770, “Mais soit instinct, sentiment ou raison je n’aurai jamais d’autres maîtres que vous.” Voltaire, *Correspondence*, 75:94.

¹⁸⁹ Voltaire to Deffand, 18 March 1736, “Ne craignez point de faire la disserteuse. Ne rougissez point de joindre aux grâces de votre personne la force de votre esprit.” Voltaire, *Correspondence*, 5:97.

¹⁹⁰ Voltaire to Deffand, 13 October 1759, “Avez vous jamais lu, Madame, la faible traduction du faible anti Lucrece du cardinal de Polignac? Il m’en avait autrefois lû vingt vers, qui me parurent fort beaux...nous n’en avons qu’une mauvaise traduction par le Baron Des Coutures...Examinez ce douzième argument jusqu’au 27 avec un peu d’attention, si la chose vous paraît en valoir la peine. Nous avons tous un procès avec la nature, qui sera terminé dans peu de temps; et presque personne n’examine les pièces de

your criticism of part of the *Horaces*, it would amuse you and enlighten me...confide in me everything that passes through your head.”¹⁹¹ Clearly, Voltaire realized that her intellect and connections that she had formed through her salon could serve him as well.

From the beginning of their correspondence, Voltaire complied with her incessant requests for reading material and sent Deffand copies of his works, at times before they were even completed.

If you are an honest person, Madame, as I have always believed you to be, I would have the honor of sending you a canto or two from *La Pucelle*... You will read it when you have nothing at all to do, when your soul is in need of trifles; for there is no pleasure without need.¹⁹²

Such letters exemplify his concern for her happiness, and how he strove to personally amuse and please her: “It is you that I want to please; you are my public. I would want to amuse you for some four hours when you don’t sleep...when you do not abandon the world.”¹⁹³ Voltaire voluntarily and enthusiastically sent Deffand his works with the hopes that through her patronage and support they might flourish through her salon, and hopefully expand further beyond its boundaries into high society. After all, if his dear old friend was kept happy, perhaps she would be more inclined to pass along his works to other influential *habitués* in her salon. For example, in a 24 July 1769 letter Voltaire

ce grand procez.” Voltaire, *Correspondence*, 37:137. Also see, Craveri, *Madame du Deffand*, 207. Evidently, Voltaire never did so.

¹⁹¹ Voltaire to Deffand, 22 May 1764, “Dites moi, je vous prie, Madame, votre critique de ma critique sur un endroit des Horaces, cela vous amusera et m’éclairera...confiez moi tout ce qui vous passe par la tête.” Voltaire, *Correspondence*, 55:47.

¹⁹² Voltaire to Deffand, 13 October 1759, “Si vous êtes une honnête personne, Madame, comme je l’ai toujours crû, j’aurai l’honneur de vous envoyer un chant, ou deux de *la pucelle* que personne ne connaît...vous lirez celà quand vous n’aurez rien à faire du tout, quand votre âme aura besoin de bagatelles, car point de plaisirs sans besoins.” Voltaire, *Correspondence*, 37:135.

¹⁹³ Voltaire to Deffand, 28 January 1770, “C’est à vous que je veux plaire, vous êtes mon public. Je voudrais pouvoir vous désennuier quelques quarts d’heures, quand vous ne dormez pas...quand vous n’êtes pas livrée au monde.” Voltaire, *Correspondence*, 74:64.

wrote to Deffand hoping she would help advocate the theatrical performance of one of his most controversial works, *Les Guèbres*, in Paris. He professed that his friends would do “all that they can to obtain that justice,” but that he placed her “at their head.” He further pleaded, “Madame... I ask you of employing...all your eloquence and all your kindness.”¹⁹⁴

For Voltaire, Deffand’s friendship provided a vital link to the current trends in *le monde*. Within salons such as Deffand’s, factions formed based on the personal preferences of the women who hosted them. Goodman likens their power and influence to that of the monarchy and the court.¹⁹⁵ Voltaire recognized that he needed Deffand’s influence and good humor in order to navigate the more hostile factions at court. Early in their friendship Voltaire inquired about the acceptance of his works by various aristocrats that visited Sceaux. For instance, on 23 May 1734 he anxiously wrote to Deffand asking whether Madame la duchesse du Maine was “really vexed” that he had “put Newton before Descartes” in his *Lettres philosophiques*. His concern that his works would displease or offend the women who attended du Maine’s salon is also evident when he asked Deffand what Madame la duchesse de Villars, who was “fond of innate ideas,” thought of “the boldness with which I treat her innate ideas of chimera?”¹⁹⁶ In essence, Deffand was the social mediator who assisted in helping to moderate the scandals that his

¹⁹⁴ Voltaire to Deffand, 24 July 1769, “Mes amis feront tout ce qu’ils pourront pour obtenir cette justice. Je vous mets à leur tête, madame, et je vous conjure d’employer pour...votre éloquence et toutes votre bontés.” Voltaire, *Correspondence*, 72:176.

¹⁹⁵ Goodman, *The Republic of Letters*, 69.

¹⁹⁶ Voltaire to Deffand, 23 May 1734, “N’admirez vous pas madame tous les baux discours qu’on tient à l’égard de ces scandeuses lettres? Mme la duchesse du Maine est elle bien fâchée que j’ai mis Newton au dessus Descartes? Et comment Mme la duchesse de Villars qui aime tant les idées innées de chimère?” Voltaire, *Correspondence*, 3:254.

works tended to create, such as the *Lettres philosophiques*. At the time that this work was written, Voltaire had already been imprisoned in the Bastille twice; these letters which condemned everything established in the church and state of France and proclaimed English ways, thought and political practices as supreme, only served to fuel the fire.¹⁹⁷ His concern over its reception at the Madame du Maine's salon is therefore understandable. Deffand's close relationship with Madame de Luynes, who had a strong position at court as lady in waiting to the queen as well as her friendship with Hénault, also provided her with considerable direct influence at court as well.¹⁹⁸ In return for such favors, Deffand would often ask Voltaire to receive particular people, to defend certain friends of hers in prose, or even to attribute verses or works to them.¹⁹⁹

Voltaire was keenly aware that even a negative remark from the great *salonnière* would prove detrimental to the success of his works. Upon sending her his tragedy *Les Guèbres*, Voltaire cautioned her, "you will hurt me extremely if you say publicly your thoughts on this tolerance, which you do not care about and which touches me infinitely."²⁰⁰ His close friendship with Deffand provided him with the necessary

¹⁹⁷ Lanson, *Voltaire*, 41-48. Voltaire's *Lettres* were subsequently condemned on June 10, 1734. All copies were seized, burned and a warrant was issued against Voltaire. He then fled to Mme de Châtelet, who lived in the independent duchy of Lorraine.

¹⁹⁸ Craveri, *Madame du Deffand*, 188-189. Other examples of such letters, where Voltaire is asking Deffand to intervene on his behalf are: 27 June 1764 and 1 July 1764, where he asks for support against Rousseau, and in same letter asks her to defend him to Mme. De Luxembourg; also see letter dated 18 March 1736, where she is asked to speak to Hénault in Voltaire's favor.

¹⁹⁹ Some examples of such letters are: 23 May 1734; 1 October 1736; 20 June 1764; 25 June 1764; 24 June 1770; 9 September 1774; 24 November 1774; 2 December 1774; 5 December 1774; 7 December 1774; 9 December 1774; 12 December 1774 and 15 December 1774.

²⁰⁰ Voltaire to Deffand, 24 July 1769, "Vous me feriez une peine extrême si vous disiez publiquement votre pensée sur cette tolérance dont vous ne vous couciez guères, et qui me touche infiniment" Voltaire, *Correspondence*, 72-146.

contacts, literary, political and social. Deffand's growing friendship with the duchesse in the 1760's would offer Voltaire a new opportunity to strengthen their friendship and his contacts.

However, even though Deffand's connections to high society made her an appealing ally and friend to have, Voltaire's connections to the French court and its nobles was by no means contingent solely upon her friendship. Nevertheless, Voltaire needed her influence in order to accomplish his humanitarian goals and present many of his works. Early in his career, Voltaire had established connections with young King Louis XV and his Queen Maria Leszczinska, and was well received by many other courtiers, including Madame du Pompadour, Louis' mistress. However, his controversial and provocative works often created tensions with important figures in the court and society causing him trouble. His humanitarian interests often pitted him against important French nobles and clergy, and so the support of Deffand was extremely valuable.

Another of Voltaire's patrons was the duc de Choiseul, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Minister of War, and Minister of Navy, one of Louis XV's most powerful ministers, and a man with whom Voltaire had been in correspondence since 1759. Both Voltaire and the duc shared similar ideals including support for religious toleration, which probably persuaded the duc to provide Voltaire with pensions and most importantly protection from persecution.²⁰¹ However, despite having obtained the duc's patronage, it was Deffand who had introduced Voltaire to the duc's pretty, young wife, who herself had many connections at court. Deffand's close friendship with the duc had

²⁰¹ Haydn Mason, *Voltaire A Biography* (Baltimore, 1981), 89-110.

lead her to become close and intimate friends with his wife, the duchesse de Choiseul, in the 1760's. Although it is uncertain whether initial introductions were made by Deffand in person, or through correspondence, in February of 1768 Voltaire sent the duchesse a letter formally introducing himself. Perhaps Voltaire felt that the duchesse's influence with either her husband, or the court, could further provide him with influence beyond that associated with the duc.

Voltaire had always been reputed to be beneficent, but he became particularly interested in improving the social order after 1755, and even more so after 1760. His works in the 1760's mainly concerned attacks on abuses, recommendations for reforms, or appeals to the government and public for change.²⁰² Voltaire's social agenda formed the basis of his relationship with the duchesse de Choiseul. Choiseul herself had a reputation for being kind, sympathetic and especially devoted to those less fortunate, and she was willing to do everything in her power to alleviate suffering.²⁰³ However, her greatest devotion was to her husband. The duc's financial patronage stimulated her fascination with Voltaire and encouraged the moral support she was able to provide him.

Choiseul and Deffand's Involvement With the Enlightenment

By the late 1760's, Deffand and Choiseul had as we have seen, grown intimately close. Their correspondence had become regular and more personal, and their common interests in the *philosophes* and their work facilitated the formation of a professional

²⁰² Lanson, *Voltaire*, 120-121. After Voltaire purchased Ferney in 1759 and began his humanitarian efforts he wrote thousands of letters regarding the subject, as well as numerous works. His most notorious works that were inspired by his humanitarian interests were, *Traité sur la tolérance* (1763) and *Dictionnaire philosophique* (1764).

²⁰³ Gamaliel Bradford, *Portraits of Women* (Boston, 1916), 160-161.

friendship between them and Voltaire. As a *salonnière* and close friend of Voltaire's, Deffand often received copies of his works first hand, which she would share with Choiseul: "I send you a new story by Voltaire; it praises our great minds, males as well as female. Our lords and masters the encyclopedists find it admirable."²⁰⁴

Deffand's friendship and correspondence with Voltaire was not the only means by which Choiseul interacted with the *philosophes*. Her position at court also presented her with some opportunities to interact with various writers. In an undated letter in 1765, Choiseul complained to Deffand, "I hardly see M. Hume, although I have great urge to see him; he is lost in the crowd of Fontainebleau, as for me, I'm submerged there; there in no way to meet."²⁰⁵ Hume, along with d'Alembert and Voltaire shared friendships with both women, and their activities helped set off discussion and philosophical banter between the two. Choiseul was not a part of the salon culture; however, she did show interest in much of what was discussed within its realm.²⁰⁶

Despite the fact that Choiseul's position at court put in her a position to meet philosophers, writers, and poets, her correspondence with Deffand enabled her to enjoy the discussions on a more intimate and genuine level. Both Choiseul and Deffand were well read in the works of Voltaire and Rousseau, and they enjoyed discussing the merits

²⁰⁴ Deffand to Choiseul, 3 May 1772, "Je vous envoie un nouveau conte de Voltaire; il fait l'admiration de tous nos beaux-esprits, tant mâles que femelles. Nos seigneurs et maîtres les encyclopédistes le trouvent admirable." The work to which Deffand is referring is Voltaire's *La Bégueule*. Deffand, *Correspondence*, 2:180.

²⁰⁵ Choiseul to Deffand, 1765, n.d., "Je ne vois guère M. Hume quoique j'aie grande envie de le voir; il se perd dans la foule de Fontainebleau, et moi, j m'y noie; ce n'est pas le moyen de se rencontrer. Je regrette les occasions de parler de vous, ma chère enfant, car je vous aime, je vous assure, infiniment." Deffand, *Correspondence*, 1:18.

²⁰⁶ Clergue, *The Salon*, 109-111. Also see Butler, *Choiseul*, 1027.

of each writer. Indeed, much of their early correspondence revolves around philosophical discussion inspired by the works of Voltaire and Rousseau.

Robert Darnton's essay, "Readers respond to Rousseau," in his work, *The Great Cat Massacre*, considers how readers read Rousseau during the Enlightenment. He examines several of Rousseau's works, but mainly concentrates on *La Nouvelle Héloïse*, written during the philosophic crisis of 1757-58. This novel, written in the form of correspondence between two bourgeois lovers, appealed to all ranks of society but was especially popular with aristocratic women. They were particularly attracted to one of his reoccurring themes: the corruptive nature of eighteenth-century society.²⁰⁷ The love letters between the two characters were written in an unrefined manner, meant to evoke pure emotion from the reader. Rousseau's goal was to draw out truth, clarity of sentiment, and virtue from his readers. He encouraged his readers to put themselves in the place of his characters and to experience what they were experiencing -- what Darnton refers to as Rousseauistic reading. Rousseau wanted his readers to throw themselves into his works, and apply what they had learned from them to their own lives.

Women responded to Rousseau with an overwhelming, almost religious fervor. Darnton's examination of Rousseau's fan mail written directly to him reveals that readers from all ranks of society were often afflicted with uncontrollable sobbing, tears, sighs, and "delicious outpourings of the heart" after reading his *Nouvelle Héloïse*. Ironically, this was his intent. He wanted his readers to read his works as if they were the Bible and he the prophet of divine truth.²⁰⁸ Rousseau's other works, *Confessions* and *Emile*, also

²⁰⁷ Robert Darnton, *The Great Cat Massacre And Other Episodes in French Cultural History* (New York, 1984), 229.

²⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 232.

reveal his proclivity for themes of love, marriage and parenthood. These themes also appealed to women, who had at one point in their lives also loved, sinned, and suffered just as his characters had.²⁰⁹ Darnton thus concludes that Rousseauistic reading revolutionized the relationship between reader and text, and paved the way to the Romantic Age in the following century.²¹⁰

Choiseul's serene and optimistic nature made her partial to Rousseau. In a lengthy letter on 17 July 1766, Choiseul, like many of Rousseau's devotées, reveals her fondness for his works. She comments to Deffand that, "Rousseau is perhaps one of the authors who has the greatest intellect, who has written with the most warmth, and whose eloquence is the most seductive." She believed him to be one of the best and most modest preachers of good morals and warmth. Rousseau's emphasis on morals appealed to her. She agreed with his contention that nothing was "so simple as morality," and that if the world understood that then "there would be only virtue on earth."²¹¹ She had always strove to lead the life of a righteous, devoted and loving wife; Rousseau's works served to further validate her attempts to do so.

Deffand responded to this declaration with disdain for Rousseau and an affirmation of her admiration for Voltaire. She esteemed and loved the style of Voltaire

²⁰⁹ Ibid., 246.

²¹⁰ Ibid., 232.

²¹¹ Choiseul to Deffand, 17 July 1766, "Rousseau est peut-être un des auteurs qui a eu le plus d'esprit, qui a écrit avec le plus de chaleur, et dont l'éloquence est la plus séduisante...Heureusement pour nous rien n'est si simple que la morale...Tout le monde sait cela, tout le monde entend cela; et si tout le monde le pratiquait, il n'y aurait que de la vertu sur la terre..." Deffand, *Correspondence*, 1:54. Although Choiseul does not specify to which of his works she is referring, it is very likely that she was referring to *La Nouvelle Héloïse* first published in 1761. This particular novel was very popular among some women, and was admired by them for its warmth, clarity and emphasis on virtue – the same qualities to which she is referring in this letter.

too much to “enjoy that of Jean-Jacques.” She stated that it was “the soundness, the facility, the clarity and the warmth, the four qualities which make good style” that she found most appealing in Voltaire’s writings. And although she admitted that Rousseau had some of these qualities, Deffand’s sarcasm denotes her true feelings about his works. She asserted that Rousseau had “clarity, but it is in flashes of lightening; he had warmth but that of the fevered.” However, it seems most of all she disliked his taste for Christian morality and misleading emphasis on virtue.²¹²

Choiseul’s direct correspondence with Voltaire exposed her to Enlightenment thought. Not only did Deffand share her copies of Voltaire’s works with the duchesse, at times Voltaire sent some of his works directly to her requesting her assistance. Just as he asked Deffand to use her influence to encourage the reception of his works in Paris, he also recognized that Choiseul could serve as a valuable champion of his causes. Voltaire for instance wrote to Deffand asking for her support with *Les Guèbres*, but he feared she would not do so because she did not care for the piece. Thus, he also decided to plead his case with the duchesse and urged her, “give us your protection...my name is still very dangerous” and the support of the duc “would be worth an army to us.”²¹³

Deffand’s Influence on Voltaire and Choiseul’s Friendship

Voltaire often thanked Deffand in his letters. She had opened many doors for him and would serve as a faithful intermediary in the years to come. He would be forever in

²¹² Deffand to Choiseul, 22 July 1766, “J’estime et j’aime trop le style de Voltaire pour goûter celui de Jean-Jacques; la justesse, la facilité, la clarté et la chaleur...Rousseau a de la clarté, mais c’est celle des éclairs; il a de la chaleur, mais c’est de la fièvre...Il n’est permis qu’à ceux qui veulent la rendre chrétienne de l’entortiller de métaphysique.” Deffand, *Correspondence*, 1:59.

²¹³ Voltaire to Choiseul 26 July 1769. “Donnez nous votre protection, madame...mon nom est encore plus dangereux...Le suffrage de m. le duc de Choiseul nous vaudrait une armée.” Voltaire, *Correspondence*, 72:182.

her debt and vowed that he owed her for “all the graces with which she [had] blessed” him, and for entry into “a society so delicious.”²¹⁴ Voltaire acknowledged that it was Deffand’s kindness that had obtained him an entry into the duchesse’s private life. He often professed his appreciation and made clear that without Deffand, in all likelihood, the duchesse might have ignored him.²¹⁵ Even after his correspondence with the duchesse began, Voltaire heavily relied upon Deffand as an intermediary, and he sought constant reassurance that his position with the duchesse was secure. On 9 April 1770, Deffand answered one of his inquiring letters by assuring him that he was “extremely well with the grand’mama,” and that “we do not cease of speaking of you; when one of your letters to her or to me arrive it is a big joy for our little committee.”²¹⁶ His interest in maintaining a correspondence with Choiseul centered on his humanitarian interests and the well-being of his estate.

Deffand’s close relationship with the duchesse at times benefited Voltaire more than his own correspondence with the duc, which explains his motives and desire to establish a correspondence with her. After he purchased an estate at Ferney in 1759, Voltaire’s interest in the local community became one of his chief concerns. And although the duc de Choiseul was able to offer him some political and monetary

²¹⁴ Voltaire to Deffand, 26 March 1770, “Madame, que je dois toutes les graces dont elle m’a comble...Jou_ssez pendant quarante ans, Madame, d’une société si délicieuse.” Voltaire, *Correspondence*, 74:203.

²¹⁵ Voltaire to Deffand, 18 June 1770, “Il faut toujours que je vous remercie madame de toutes les bontez dont elle m’a comblé; car sans vous elle m’aurait peut être ignore.” Voltaire, *Correspondence*, 75:164.

²¹⁶ Deffand to Voltaire, 9 April 1770, “ Vous êtes Extrêmement bien avec la grand maman, nous ne cesson de parler de vous; quand il arrive une de vos letters soit à elle ou sons de parler de vous; quand il arrive une de vos letters soit à moi, c’est une grande joye pour le petit comité.” Voltaire, *Correspondence*, 75:14.

assistance, when presented with the chance to further his cause with the duchesse he gladly accepted it.²¹⁷

Voltaire's social projects had taken shape by 1767, when he had succeeded in converting his estate at Ferney into a self-sufficient, self-reliant colony of artisans based on his own philosophy and ethics. When he first purchased the estate, the land had been barren and fallow for some years and the fifty peasants that lived on the land were very poor and burdened with numerous taxes even though they had little work.²¹⁸ Voltaire's main goal was to establish a societal order that provided basic rights, such as freedom from slavery, liberty of speech and conscience, and civil liberty with the right to have and hold private property.²¹⁹ He became, in essence, the community patriarch. Voltaire did manage to accomplish much of this with help of patrons, including the duc de Choiseul. In 1770, however, he turned to the duchesse to better help him with a new colonial project. Late into their friendship Voltaire even confessed to the duchesse why he had turned to her for help: "It is true Madame that I don't take such liberty with m. le duc as

²¹⁷ In June of 1767, Voltaire was able with the help of the duc de Choiseul, to petition the king for an exemption for the pays de Gex, in which Ferney was set, from paying any taxes to the French government, and in being completely independent except in the judicial domain. Ferney is located just outside Geneva on the French-Swiss border. Mason, *Voltaire*, 89-110.

²¹⁸ Voltaire's wealth was a combination of endeavors. He received many pensions over the years, and also received a minimal amount from his works. However, his initial wealth was established early in his career. In 1728 the city of Paris instituted a monthly lottery for the repayment of municipal bonds, whereby those who owned bonds had the right to buy tickets pro rata. With the help of a mathematician friend he figured out that if all the tickets in a given lottery were cornered by one person, the profits would automatically follow. Consequently he won seven and a half million francs. He then reinvested a good portion of this money in various markets such as corn and trade. By the 1750's Voltaire had amassed a large sum of money, and which enabled him to buy Ferney and live a life of relative ease. Mason, *Voltaire*, 22-24.

²¹⁹ Lanson, *Voltaire*, 151-155.

with you, but it is that I imagined that you have a little more time than him.”²²⁰

Voltaire’s timing could not have been better. By 1770, Deffand and Choiseul’s friendship was at its height. They had been friends for several years and had had a chance to form an intimate bond with each other. This friendship facilitated Voltaire’s relationship with the duchesse. Despite his past correspondence with the duc, once Deffand introduced him to the duchesse his preference was made clear. He obviously felt more comfortable asking the duchesse to assist him than approaching the duc personally. His friendship with Deffand made this approach possible.

In order to improve his poor little colony, he realized that he would need to build better housing, reduce the incredible French taxes, and establish a viable local economy. On 15 February 1770, a number of Genevan watchmakers fled from their city and took refuge at Ferney. For the next six months this event sparked a series of letters among and between Voltaire, Deffand and Choiseul. This correspondence best reveals the nature of their relationships and their effects on each other.

Aside from obtaining permission from the authorities, the duc de Choiseul in this case, to settle permanently at his estate, Voltaire also needed to find a way for them to earn an income. Voltaire was excited by the prospect of establishing a watch making industry on his very estate. Within six weeks he had watches ready to be sold, but he still needed someone to market them on his behalf or, perhaps, someone even to purchase them.²²¹ On 11 May 1770, he wrote to the duchesse suggesting that perchance the six

²²⁰ Voltaire to Choiseul, 2 September 1770, “Il est vrai, madame, que je ne prends point tant de liberté avec m. le duc qu’avec vous, mais c’est que j’imagine que vous avez un peu plus de temps que lui ..” Voltaire, *Correspondence*, 76:149.

²²¹ Evelyn Beatrice Hall, *The Life of Voltaire* (London, 1910), 492.

watches, which accompanied the letter, could be given as presents in the name of the king. He carefully explained the situation of his colony and manufacture, hoping to interest her in becoming involved. The duchesse, of course, immediately wrote to Deffand relating Voltaire's request regarding the watches and indicating her intention of sending them to her husband.

On 24 May 1770, Deffand assured Voltaire that the duchesse was so determined to help him that she had "sent them [the watches] to country to her husband," and that she had "threatened to take all six watches on her account; if they were not bought by the king."²²² A month after Voltaire's initial request to the duchesse asking her to take the watches on her account, she apprehensively wrote to Deffand "do you believe that grandpapa does not ever want to respond to me if he has found use for the watches, although I ask every moment?" Choiseul's incredulity that her husband ignored her requests should not come as a surprise. Although their marriage was probably on cordial terms, it was a marriage of convenience in every sense of the word for him. The duchesse's infatuation with her husband was so intense that she refused to see that her husband did not share her feelings in return. Typical of many married eighteenth-century men, and as a man far too busy to pay her any heed, he simply ignored her requests. The duchesse's immediate response was to ask Deffand to intervene with the duc: "You, who sees him as much as you want, my dear child, you who tells him all that you please, finally, you have the ear of the minister, tell me what he has done with the watches."²²³

²²² Deffand to Voltaire, 24 May 1770, "Qu'elle les a envoyée sur le champ à son mari, qu'elle le menace de les prendre toutes six sur son compte s'il ne les fait pas acheter par le roy." Voltaire, *Correspondence*, 75:93.

²²³ Choiseul to Deffand, 13 June 1770, "Croirez-vous que le grand-papa n'a jamais voulu me répondre s'il avait trouvé à employer ses montres, quoique je le lui demande à tout moment? Vous que le voyez tant que vous le voulez, ma chère enfant, vous qui lui dites tout ce qui vous plaît, vous qui avez enfin

As the previous chapter demonstrated, Choiseul often depended on Deffand to inform her on matters regarding the duc, however this did not keep her from feeling a bit of resentment and a touch of jealousy that Deffand was physically, and perhaps emotionally closer to the duc than she was.

Deffand, whose role as an intermediary was a familiar position for her, was asked to mediate between the duc for his wife. And just as she had become an important part of the duc and the duchesse's relationship, she became a central part of Voltaire and the duchesse's as well. Voltaire, of course, depended upon her for news of Choiseul, while Choiseul would frequently turn to Deffand in order to fulfill Voltaire's requests. Curiously, according to several of Voltaire's letters, he never met or even visited the duchesse during their brief correspondence, and, consequently, he depended upon Deffand as a third party administrator to ease the flow of communication and provide him with crucial updates on his requests.²²⁴ He would often become apprehensive if Choiseul did not respond to his requests for aid and favors. For example, in April of 1770 the duchesse had gone too long without answering his letters, and Voltaire complained to Deffand that she had "written me charming letters, but she is becoming a cruel one, a treacherous one, who has abandoned me in my greatest distress, in an affair very important, in a manufacture that I have established and that I have put in her

l'oreille du ministre, vous qui savez tout ce qu'il fait, mandez-moi ce qu'il a fait des montres de Voltaire." Voltaire, *Correspondence*, 75:145.

²²⁴ On 26 March 1770 he wrote to Deffand that he had no idea of her pretty figure, and only knew her by her shoe, referring to the a shoe she had sent him so that he could measure her for some silk stockings. By December of 1770 the Choiseul's were exiled and his correspondence with the Choiseul's all but stopped. It is doubtful that he had a chance to meet her in between these months given the volume and frequency of their letters throughout.

protection.”²²⁵ Ironically, unbeknownst to Voltaire, Deffand seemed to have more influence with the duc than did his wife. And while the issue is never mentioned again in any correspondence, the duc in the end did purchase all six watches, perhaps due to Deffand’s intervention. In fact, Voltaire eventually was able to promote the watches in China, Spain, Italy, Russia, America, Turkey, Portugal and North Africa thanks to the advertising he gained by having the king wear his watches.²²⁶

The Affair of St. Claude

Assisting Voltaire in establishing his watch making industry was only the beginning of the duchesse’s involvement with the philosopher. In May of 1770, in the midst of the affair of the watches, Choiseul once again had another opportunity to aid Voltaire. In 1765, a lawyer, Charles Christin, living in the community of St. Claude, wrote to Voltaire advising him of the situation of some *main-mortables* [serfs with limited property rights] just outside of Ferney. Christin surely knew of Voltaire’s involvement in humanitarian cases like the Jean Calais affair of 1762, and hoped Voltaire could also lend his support in this case. He advised Voltaire that a chapter of twenty monks had been holding some twelve hundred peasants in serfdom. As mainmortables, they were obligated to pay a tax to their feudal lords on every sale of property and could not even make the sale without permission from the monastery. The right to inherit was also strictly controlled. Their freedom could be obtained only by moving elsewhere,

²²⁵ Voltaire to Deffand, 25 April 1770, “Elle m’a écrit des lettres charmantes; mais elle est devenue une cruelle, une perfide, qui m’abandonne dans ma plus grande détresse, dans une affaire très importante, dans une manufacture que j’ai établie et que j’ai mise sous ses protections.” Voltaire, *Correspondence*, 75:45.

²²⁶ Hall, *The Life of Voltaire*, 493.

which of course would lead to their total destitution since their property would revert back to the monastery. Voltaire readily agreed to help and went to work trying to find support for his new humanitarian cause.²²⁷

On 13 May 1770, Choiseul wrote to Deffand advising her that she was sending her an essay that Voltaire had sent to her pleading the case of the peasants. Voltaire hoped she would intercede on his behalf with the king and his council. Choiseul told Deffand that she believed in Voltaire's cause, but feared that his treatment of the issue was "a little too philosophical," and that the very name of Voltaire would prejudice the case even more.²²⁸ Choiseul had every reason to be concerned for the success of Voltaire's petition. His sharp wit and his reputation as a critic of society and religion made any petition or request suspect. Indeed, Voltaire's petition strongly defended the serfs' cause by insisting that the Royal Council would "see well without us that their [the monks'] vows made at the foot of the altars did not make them princes," and vowed that the serfs had exhibited the same titles as their oppressors "by showing that they [the monks] had no excuse" to oppress them.²²⁹

²²⁷ Mason, *Voltaire*, 118.

²²⁸ Choiseul to Deffand, 13 May 1770, "Mais je crains bien que la manière un peu trop philosophique dont elle est traitée et le nom de Voltaire y nuisent beaucoup." Voltaire, *Correspondence*, 75:75. It should be noted that Voltaire sent this petition directly to the duchesse, and not her husband the duc de Choiseul. Several biographies of Voltaire, such as Hadyn Mason's, Gustave Lanson, and Evelyn Hall, downplay or ignore the duchesse's role and imply Voltaire only corresponded with the duc, when in reality her letters reveal that she was the one to send the petition on to her husband. The name of the petition was *Au Roi en son conseil, pour les sujets du roi qui réclament la liberté en France, contre des moines bénédictins devenus chanoines de Saint Claude en Franche-comté*.

²²⁹ Moland, Louis, ed., *Oeuvres Complètes de Voltaire*, vol. 28, *Au Roi en son conseil, pour les sujets du roi qui réclament la liberté en France; contre des moines bénédictins devenus chanoines de Saint Claude en Franche-comté*, by Voltaire (Paris, 1877-85), 353-355. "Le conseil verra bien sans nous que leurs vœux faits au pied des autels n'ont jamais été d'être princes; que nous ne devons nos biens, nos sueurs, notre sang qu'au roi, et non à eux. Aussi nous ne plaidons pas ici contre l'esclavage de la mainmorte; nous plaidons contre la fraude que nous suppose mainmortables. Nous montrons les titres

Interestingly, despite Choiseul's own position and courtly connections, as well as those of her husband, she felt uncomfortable advising Voltaire on such a matter. Instead, she chose to refer the matter to her dear old friend, claiming that Deffand's correspondence with Voltaire was more regular than her own. Thus, she asked Deffand to speak with the great man about his petition. Deferring such a matter to Deffand seemed to make sense since she was a close confidante of Voltaire, as well as a *salonnière* skilled in the art of criticizing the *philosophes* within the social realm of the salon. According to Goodman, *salonnières* cultivated the ability to govern and to mediate discourse within the newly formed boundaries of Enlightenment sociability.²³⁰ Choiseul herself had never been a part of the salon culture; therefore, she did not feel qualified to speak on philosophical issues. "Tell him..." Choiseul tried to rationalize, "you who has the right to tell him everything, that you do not counsel jesting with the king, that the ears of kings are not made like those of other men, and that it is necessary to speak a more measured language."²³¹ Choiseul's discomfort with approaching Voltaire in so frank a manner is clear. She deferred to Deffand's experience in dispensing advice to the most famous of philosophers.

In many areas of their relationship, it had been Choiseul who proffered the advice to Deffand; however, the introduction of Voltaire into their friendship greatly altered particular aspects of their relationship. Choiseul had, in fact, taken an early dominant

mêmes de nos oppresseurs, pour démontrer qu'ils n'ont eu nul prétexte de nous opprimer, et qu'ils n'ont transmis au chapitre de Saint-Claude qu'une prétention vicieuse dans tous ses points."

²³⁰ Goodman, *Republic of Letters*, 5.

²³¹ Choiseul to Deffand, 13 May 1770, "Dites-lui...vous qui êtes en droit de lui tout dire, que vous ne lui conseillez pas de badiner avec le roi, que les oreilles des rois ne sont pas faites comme celles des autres hommes, et qu'il faut leur parler un langage plus mesuré." Deffand, *Correspondence*, 1:265.

role in their relationship by continuously and willingly counseling Deffand on overcoming her boredom and finding some measure of happiness in her life. Regarding Voltaire, however, Choiseul clearly felt out of her element and inadequate in criticizing his writing, even though her knowledge of the court convinced her that the piece would be ineffective. For this very reason, she asked Deffand, a renowned *salonnière* to step-in. Choiseul's dependency on Deffand is also unmistakable when, in the same letter, she asks Deffand to send a copy of Voltaire's petition on to the duc. The duchesse, who was at her estate in Chanteloup outside of Paris, reasoned that she trusted the duc would have the petition more promptly and safely if she relied on Deffand to deliver it.²³² However, it stands to reason that this may not have been the only reason why Choiseul insisted that Deffand be the one to send the request on to the duc. After all, both the duc and Deffand were in Paris, and Choiseul had entrusted the safe delivery of Voltaire's petition to Deffand to begin with. Perhaps Choiseul realized that a petition referred by Deffand, a long time friend and highly respected *salonnière*, would be better received by her husband than if she had sent it herself. Considering that her husband would ignore her pleas regarding Voltaire's watches only a month later, perhaps Choiseul was correct to assume her ineffectiveness. With her limited contacts with *philosophes*, Choiseul was now the one who appeared to be unsure of herself.

On the other hand, Deffand was very comfortable serving as an intermediary between Choiseul and Voltaire, and she quickly responded Choiseul's requests. On 17 May 1770, Deffand wrote to let Choiseul know that she had sent the request on to the duc

²³² Choiseul to Deffand, 13 May 1770, "Je vous prie aussi d'envoyer la requête au grand-papa, dès que vous l'aurez lue... parce qu'il l'aura sûrement et promptement de cette manière." Deffand, *Correspondence*, 1:265.

as she had requested. Deffand indicated that she had nothing to add to the duchesse's judgment; she just agreed with Choiseul that the philosophical tone in the petition was inappropriate.²³³

The St. Claude Affair highlights the role reversal that Deffand and Choiseul experienced. Earlier correspondence between the two women, as shown in the previous chapter, demonstrated Deffand's emotional dependence on Choiseul. In many of those letters Deffand constantly demanded that Choiseul express affection for her.²³⁴ However, in this affair Deffand was in her element because this was probably the only area of her life where she had some measurable control, not only over her intellect but also her emotions. Despite her insecurities, at heart she was a woman of the salon, one who had been skilled in mediation and persuasion, and practiced presenting and instigating new conversations and ideas. Deffand's ease and self-assurance are evident in the letter to Voltaire on 24 May 1770, in which she echoed Choiseul's concern regarding his petition. Deffand cautioned Voltaire that his request "modeled the style of lawyers," and carried a philosophical tone that was not "necessary to combat injustice."²³⁵

Deffand's observance that his petition imitated the work of lawyers was correct, and Voltaire conceded that much of the content was from Christin, the lawyer from St. Claude. He acknowledged that any attribution of his name to an ecclesiastical related

²³³ Deffand to Choiseul, 16 May 1770, "Je n'ai rien à ajouter au jugement que vous en portez. Ce n'est que parce que mes jugements sont toujours soumis aux vôtres que je me crois de la justesse." Deffand, *Correspondence*, 1:268.

²³⁴ The letters that express such insecurities on Deffand's behalf are numerous and continuous throughout their friendship. Some are: 18 June 1766; 22 July 1766; 28 December 1766; 18 July 1771; 16 October 1772; 6 April 1773.

²³⁵ Deffand to Voltaire, 24 May 1770, "Votre requette m'a parû le modèle du stile des avocats; peut-être voudrois-je en retrancher le ton philosophique qui n'est pas nécessaire pour combattre l'injustice." Voltaire, *Correspondence*, 75:93.

petition would surely prevent its success at court, and for this reason his name did not appear on the document. Voltaire retorted in his defense and carefully explained to her that the king did not read the preliminary facts, but rather his counsel and that his intention had been merely to amuse those who decided the proceedings.²³⁶

Nevertheless, Choiseul remained hesitant to help Voltaire any further. In June of 1770, Deffand once again stepped in as the mediator and apologetically explained to Voltaire, "If I had not written to you sooner, it is because I am always waiting for grand mama, to tell me something for you; I have hurried her, but she is in a lazy spirit from which one cannot draw her out." Deffand informed Voltaire that the duchesse wished for him to be "satisfied above all things," namely and specifically in regards to the affairs of St. Claude, but even though she found the cause just she "could not assist by representations and solicitations" any further at court.²³⁷ Several months later, Voltaire wrote to Choiseul, asking her to read to the duc, *La Nouvelle requête*, a revised version of the original petition, indicating the success of Deffand's intervention.²³⁸

²³⁶ Voltaire to Deffand, 1 June 1770, "Le Roi ne lit point ces factums préparatoires. On ne les met point sous ses yeux. Le rapporteur seul est écouté, et comme tout dépend ordinairement de lui il nous a paru essentiel que les juges bien au fait. Ils jettent souvent un coup d'oeil égaré sur ces pièces ennuyeuses. J'ai voulu les intéresser par la tournure. J'ai voulu les amuser, eux et non pas le Roi, qui a d'autres affaires, et qui très communément laisse décider ces procès sommaires sans y assister..." Voltaire, *Correspondence*, 75:108-109.

²³⁷ Deffand to Voltaire, 24 June 1770, "Si je ne vous ai pas écrit plutôt, c'est que j'attendois toujours que la grandmaman, me dicta quelques choses pour vous; Je l'en ai pressé, mais elle est dans une paresse d'esprit, donc on ne peut la tirer... Elle voudrait vous satisfaire sur toutes les choses que vous désirez, et nommément sur votre affaire de St. Claude; elle trouve la cause que vous défend très juste; mais elle ne peut vous seconder que par ses représentations et ses sollicitations." Voltaire, *Correspondence*, 75:182-183.

²³⁸ Voltaire to Choiseul, 8 October 1770, "Je vous supplie de vouloir bien lire cette anecdote au généraux mari de la généreuse grand-maman." Voltaire, *Correspondence*, 77:12-13. The anecdote to which he is referring is *La Nouvelle requête*, Sept. 1770.

Unfortunately for Voltaire, in late December of 1770 the duc was dismissed from his position at court, and the Choiseul's were exiled, thus ending their active patronage for Voltaire. A few weeks later Voltaire offended and then fell out of favor with the Choiseuls, as well as Deffand, by putting himself at the disposition of Maupeou, the duc de Choiseul's successor. Deffand's devotion, affection, and loyalty to her friends are apparent, as she was also greatly offended by Voltaire's actions and suspended her correspondence with Voltaire for an entire year.

Analysis of the Relationships

Voltaire admired and valued Deffand for her intelligence, social position, and political connections. Voltaire and Deffand's relationship was based on their intellectual discussions regarding his works or enlightened thought. As a *salonnière*, this activity placed Deffand in her element while providing enjoyment, as well as relief from her problem with boredom. He often asked her advice regarding his work, and even when Deffand provided him with her unsolicited opinions, he took them seriously. Voltaire's acquaintance with the duchesse was altogether different in nature. Here was the wife of one of his most powerful and influential patrons, who had been introduced to him by Deffand, one of the most famous *salonnières* of the Enlightenment. Voltaire clearly understood the importance of forging a correspondence with both of these women. Choiseul's connections at court could prove just as important as Deffand's associations through her salon. Voltaire probably also assumed that the duchesse's personal interest in his causes could help procure for him support more quickly. He apparently did not realize that Deffand's influence over the duc was greater than that of the duc's own wife. His letters to the duchesse express a respectful, less assertive tone, than that used with

Deffand, whom he addressed in a more familiar and personal manner. And although his correspondence with both women was based on common interests, his correspondence with Deffand centered on his works and intellectual matters. He recognized Deffand's quick wit and intellect and was eager to learn her opinion on how his works would fare in Paris.

An analysis of Deffand, Choiseul, and Voltaire's interrelated correspondence provides additional light on the nature of the relationship of the two women. Choiseul's deference to Deffand in the matter of Voltaire's petition reveals that Choiseul did not trust her ability to criticize the great *philosophe*. She sheepishly admitted to Deffand that "showing all that one thinks, all that one feels, seems to me the great proof, and you are perhaps the only one in the world to whom I dare give it."²³⁹ Her respect and admiration for Deffand's intellectual abilities and social experiences was most clearly demonstrated during the months that they corresponded with Voltaire. Despite her acquaintance with various *philosophes* and their works, Choiseul plainly felt inadequate in expressing her judgements on the work of a writer of Voltaire's stature. However, she was confident that his tract would fail with the king. Her role at court as the wife of the most powerful minister of France put her in a position to understand the proper method of negotiating one's way through the maze of court politics. Voltaire seemed well aware of Choiseul's skills, which explains why he sought her patronage in the first place. Certainly, Deffand had her own set of connections at court, for she herself had been an intermediary with

²³⁹ Choiseul to Deffand, 13 May 1770, "Montrer tout ce qu'on pense, tout ce qu'on sent, me parait en être la grande preuve, et vous êtes peut-être la seule du monde à qui j'osasse la donner." Deffand, *Correspondence*, 1:266.

Louis XV and the duc de Choiseul during the 1760's.²⁴⁰ However, Voltaire's desire to establish the duchesse as another patron testifies as to how things got accomplished in the Old Regime. Voltaire had a large number of connections and patrons at court, yet he was never one to pass up another opportunity to further his causes even more, and the duchesse de Choiseul appeared to be a perfect choice.

Many of Deffand's previous letters to Choiseul portrayed her as dependent on the younger woman, while Choiseul remained the more independent minded and self-assured of the two women. Even their nicknames for each other were significant as to the nature of their relationship. Choiseul had been from the very beginning, *grand' mama*, while Deffand was always referred to as *chere enfant*, dear child. Deffand's letters to Choiseul and Voltaire indicate another side of her persona. Despite being elderly and blind, her correspondence with Voltaire demonstrate the continuing ability to play her familiar role as the self-assertive *salonnière* -- a vivid contrast to her pleas for attention from the duchesse. Unfortunately, during the months of the most active correspondence between Deffand, Choiseul and Voltaire, only two letters from Deffand to Choiseul exist, and therefore it is a challenge to fully illustrate this other side to Deffand's personality evident in their personal letters. Nevertheless, Choiseul's own reaction to the situation with Voltaire, and her decision to have Deffand mediate and handle the matters with him as well as her own husband, demonstrates her reliance on the older woman in intellectual matters.

Even in the midst of Voltaire's intrusion into their friendship the personal correspondence continued. During the months of May and June in 1770, both women

²⁴⁰ Craveri, *Madame du Deffand*, 188.

still shared as close and intimate a bond as they had enjoyed before Voltaire became a subject of their letters. Deffand's letter, on 16 May 1770, unmistakably shows her continued need for intimacy and closeness with Choiseul. She claimed her longing to see Choiseul had left her very sad and rendered her "soul paralytic."²⁴¹ Choiseul responded with an expression of her love for Deffand, insisting that her feelings were never "illusory" and that her feelings for Deffand were very real indeed.²⁴²

What does the interchange of letters between Voltaire and these women reveal about their relationship? The nature of the letters between Deffand and Voltaire indicate their friendship revolved around Voltaire's writing. Deffand relied on his letters for intellectual stimulation, while Voltaire relied on her for the influence that her name and salon could provide him. Similarly, Choiseul enjoyed having access to his works and sharing her thoughts on them with Deffand. Although Choiseul received a few of Voltaire's works first hand, most often it was Deffand who shared her copies with her so that they could discuss them. Both women had at one point expressed their incessant boredom and loneliness in their lives, and attention from the great philosopher Voltaire was welcome from them both.

However, it is also apparent that Deffand viewed Choiseul's correspondence with Voltaire with some indifference. Although, she clearly enjoyed discussing his works with the duchesse, Deffand does not seem particularly enthusiastic in playing her role as an intermediary. She was faithful to Choiseul's requests to serve as a mediator with

²⁴¹ Deffand to Choiseul, 16 May 1770, "Tous les jours, mon réveil est bien triste; n'avoir point l'espérance de vous voir, ni même le plaisir de vous rendent l'âme paralytique." Deffand, *Correspondence*, 1:269.

²⁴² Choiseul to Deffand, 17 May 1770, "Mes sentiments ne sont jamais illusoires, et ceux que j'ai pour vous sont très-réels." Deffand, *Correspondence*, 1:270.

Voltaire, but the manner in which Deffand relates her messages could be indicative of her true feelings about this newly formed correspondence among Choiseul and Voltaire. In her letter on 24 May 1770, where she relayed Choiseul's concern about Voltaire's petition, Deffand was careful to have her secretary transcribe a copy of the duchesse's letter, so that Voltaire could read for himself Choiseul's concerns. However, after adding a line of her own comments in supporting Choiseul's, she dedicated the rest of her very lengthy letter to a philosophical discussion inspired by his article, *Âme*. And, while her letters do not indicate an outright annoyance at having to play the mediator, it seems Deffand would rather keep her relationships with those two correspondents separate. With Choiseul she played the role of a child, someone who needed to be loved and taken care of. Her correspondence with Voltaire served an altogether different purpose than her letters with Choiseul. Undoubtedly, she discussed Voltaire's works with Choiseul; however, that friendship mainly served as an emotional buttress for Deffand. From Choiseul she derived intimacy, affection and reassurance -- all of which were threatened by inserting Voltaire's concerns into their correspondence.

The letters in this chapter reveal that Voltaire's long standing friendship did nothing to permanently alter the friendship, but rather showed how in situations revolving around Enlightenment thought, the roles of these two women would be reversed. In fact, Deffand's letters to Voltaire's letters reveal her to be a strong, opinionated and assured woman. Here, she is noticeably more secure and confident in taking the lead role as an intermediary between the wife of one of the most powerful men in France, and Voltaire one of France's most famous philosopher and leader of the Enlightenment!

Deffand's role as a *salonnière* was the only role that she knew how to play publicly, the only role in fact, that she had ever played. Unlike Choiseul, Deffand had been without the domineering influence of a husband since 1728 and therefore free to live her life as a *salonnière*. Choiseul, on the other hand, had been locked into a marriage of convenience for most of her life, and required to live the prescribed life of the wife of a court aristocrat. Undoubtedly, the Enlightenment played a role in the lives of both women, who did their best to participate within their own spheres. Nevertheless, their interaction with Voltaire ultimately had no real or long-lasting effect on their friendship. While Deffand and Choiseul clearly enjoyed his attention and discussing his works, in the end this pleasure became an important part of their relationship, but not a defining one. The role reversal that they experienced during their correspondence with Voltaire was short-lived. Of course, one could argue that Voltaire strengthened Deffand and Choiseul's friendship, because for a short time Choiseul found herself needing Deffand's expertise as a *salonnière*. However, Choiseul had found herself in a similar predicament everytime she relied on Deffand for news of her husband. The fact that Choiseul needed Deffand, albeit to a lesser degree than Deffand needed her, was nothing new. Deffand and Choiseul's letters during her exile years illustrate that both women, regardless of other outside factors such as Voltaire, continued to rely on each other for emotional support and fulfillment. And while their personal relationship was not strengthened as a direct result of their correspondence with Voltaire, most importantly, these letters help illustrate the strength in their relationship that existed before and even after their correspondence with him ended. In the end, the core of their friendship remained intact;

Voltaire's correspondence had become another part of their relationship, separate and distinct from the private one they enjoyed with each other.

CONCLUSION

Because of the work of Goodman, Lougée, Landes, Goldsmith, and Lee, women have been finally recognized as having played a vital role in the Enlightenment of the eighteenth-century. However, their attempt to prove this assertion has illustrated the countless challenges that the female gender faced in a society ruled by the male ego. And although, scholars could claim that the Enlightenment benefited women by venerating their feminine qualities and placing them on a pedestal, it is abundantly clear that these women silently endured much under these false pretenses. A few women, like Deffand, were able to find some liberation through their roles as *salonnières*, where they truly participated in something spectacular - the Enlightenment. They had persevered and delighted in the fact that for once they had the upper hand, that they were the ones who could influence the careers of many great men. Other aristocratic women, like Choiseul, found themselves caught in the confines of high society. However, here too, some women clearly yielded power and influence. As the wife of the king's most commanding minister, she also held great sway in many social and political matters. This much becomes clear in Voltaire's wish to acquire her aid for his many humanitarian causes.

Nevertheless, the research done by these historians has concentrated only on establishing women's achievements, and determining that women attempted to circumvent the rigid confines of a male-dominated society through their involvement in salons, or through their influences at court. In an attempt to supplement their works, this

study examined the intimate correspondence of two aristocratic women in order to establish how they coped with the problems and challenges of women living in eighteenth-century French society. Both women expressed discontent with their lives in one form or another and remedied their unhappiness through the establishment of their friendship. This relationship proved to be just as important, if not more so, than they shared with their husbands, lovers, or other male friends. Deffand and Choiseul's letters indicate that their friendship served as a source of strength, reassurance and understanding; a relationship that remained unparalleled and invaluable in their worlds. With each other they were able to share sorrows, anxieties and joys because they knew that the other had also experienced similar emotions. They had turned to a cult of friendship that allowed them to share with each other all that they alone experienced as aristocratic women. Their letters relate how these women were able to find emotional fulfillment by forming a community, or network of their own, separate and distinct from the male dominated world of the eighteenth-century, for in this sphere was the place where their status as women could be truly and eternally validated.

Despite underlying differences between the two women, such as temperament, age and marital status, their friendship managed to withstand the test of time and the vast distances that frequently separated them. However, their temperaments would prove to play a vital role in setting the parameters for their correspondence, and more importantly in their relationship. In fact, it was their individual temperaments that determined the themes found throughout their correspondence. Despite Deffand's status as the most famous *salonnière* in Paris, one said to be clever, witty, charming and exceptionally intelligent, her letters to Choiseul disclose her intense need for companionship. As a

result many of her letters focused on her problem with boredom and loneliness. Ironically, her display of submissive behavior and fixation with finding relief from boredom is what, by and large, determined the nature of their relationship and the subjects of their correspondence. Thus, Deffand's blindness, growing age, and relentless need for intimacy directed how their correspondence evolved. After all, it was because of Deffand's melancholy nature that their conversations about happiness took place. Her persistent sadness and despair prompted her to question if any woman was truly happy. Their letters on happiness illustrate, not just the clear frustrations that the two women experienced at not being able to attain happiness with any sort of permanence, but how each woman used friendship to supplement what was missing from their own lives. While Deffand's happiness was largely contingent upon Choiseul's friendship, Choiseul was a bit more measured in her needs and merely used Deffand's friendship to further sustain her in her times of despair resulting from her husband's frequent absences and disregard for her love and devotion. Deffand's inquiry on happiness, did however, demonstrate that neither woman was truly happy, but that by turning to each other that they were able to better cope with their own situations.

In great contrast to Deffand, Choiseul was deemed to be beautiful, graceful, proper, charming and also quite intelligent despite the inutility of her education. She was loved and admired by many of her contemporaries, including Deffand, for her gay character. Just as Deffand's character had helped to determine how their relationship evolved, Choiseul's temperament also played an important part. Deffand's gloomy disposition provided Choiseul with a perfect opportunity to express her perpetual optimism and fulfill her need to play a caretaker role, having been denied this as a wife

and a mother. Deffand's character represented her as being more passive and child-like, and yet Choiseul's loving, mothering response only encouraged her to be this way. Choiseul's own loveless marriage highlights similar problems that many other contemporary women suffered. Her problem with unrequited love had left her unfulfilled and lacking any real source of affection, devotion, praise or reassurance. While Deffand did not share in her situation for the duration of their friendship, she had at one point also experienced the woes of a loveless marriage and subsequently she chose the salon as her way out. However, it is apparent that the salon could not provide Deffand with everything she needed. Although Deffand's letters to Choiseul reveal virtually nothing of her thoughts on romantic love, it is evident that she sees Choiseul's love and affection as a genuine substitute for such romantic love. It is only through Choiseul's letters about unrequited love that scholars can see how these women defined romantic love, and how they coped with its absence from their lives.

Nevertheless, it is clear that each woman needed and benefited from the friendship in a different manner than the other, and yet the longevity of their correspondence only further illustrates the genuineness of their feelings for one another. Although, Deffand's letters depict her as the more needy of the two women, the letters of both women at one time or another resounded romantic-like and homoerotic tones, and echoed the intensity and emotional dependence they had on one another. In addition to their differing personalities, which allowed them emotionally to feed off of each other and wholly fulfill each other's needs, Deffand's desire to quell her never-ending boredom and Choiseul's need to escape from her role as the busy wife of the most powerful minister of France, demonstrate how they were able to become such steadfast and close

friends. What Deffand's life lacked, Choiseul provided, and what Deffand experienced as the most famous *salonnière* in France, Choiseul reveled in.

Even though their relationship was unique owing to a variety of factors, their letters allow readers to explore the private bonds of the female world. They illustrate how these female friendships fashioned a space that was even more privatized and intimate, and offered them relief from the stress of being politically and emotionally secluded from the rest of eighteenth-century society.

One of the most interesting themes revealed in their correspondence is addressed in the last chapter. After having explored their personal relationship, how it evolved and established its importance, one can more easily see the role that they played in the Enlightenment and how it influenced their friendship. Their letters illustrate that the Enlightenment was habitually a topic of their correspondence, especially regarding Voltaire and Rousseau's works. Interestingly, the introduction of Voltaire into their relationship illustrates a brief reversal of the roles between Deffand and Choiseul as described in chapter two. Deffand's role as a *salonnière* required that she shed her submissive and insecure nature, and step in to take control of the correspondence between Voltaire and Choiseul. Both Voltaire and Choiseul acknowledged her expertise in mediating and disseminating Enlightenment discourse, and further substantiate what historians Goodman, Landes and Lougée have stated about the importance of *salonnières* in the Enlightenment. Choiseul, on the other hand, demonstrates that even as a court aristocrat and wife of the most powerful and leading political figure in France, does not trust herself when it comes playing a direct role in the Enlightenment. Instead, she deferred all matters to Deffand, despite the fact that her initial intuition about several of

Voltaire's causes were correct. In this case, Deffand's role as a *salonnière* seemed to dominate that of Choiseul's role as an aristocratic wife, even though both had many of the same influential acquaintances. In the end, however, none of this mattered for Voltaire's intrusion in their relationship, as both a man and an Enlightenment figure, did not alter their friendship in the least. If anything, his part in their correspondence illustrates the pre-existing strength their friendship, and validated the very establishment of female bonds in eighteenth-century France.

What has been established here is not the importance of women's role and success of their participation in the Enlightenment and the upcoming French Revolution, nor even the fact that they suffered many injustices along the way -- that much has already been demonstrated. This study demonstrates the need women had for intimate relationships with other women for assistance, support and relief. Deffand and Choiseul's friendship exemplifies the incredible strength they derived from intimacy with one another. Through their personal letters scholars are afforded a glimpse into their innermost thoughts and feelings -- private thoughts that they could not, nor would not share with anyone else. The fact that Deffand and Choiseul were so dissimilar in character and age, and even very frequently kept apart from one another, attests that these women had formed their friendship mainly on need, not convenience. Of course, it could be argued that the fact that both women shared many of the same acquaintances in and out of court played a major factor in the establishment of their correspondence. After all, as Goodman and many others have shown, the Old Regime was largely driven by power and influence. However, this drive is only dominant in Voltaire and Deffand's letters and plays no role in the beginning of Deffand and Choiseul's correspondence. Their

relationship remained unchanged all the while, indicating that these intimate friendships were seen as separate and distinct relationships from those that they shared with their husbands, lovers, and male correspondents. Indeed, they have proven Rochefoucauld's statement, which placed a greater importance on true friendship and recognized its marvel and scarcity.

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