Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies Vol. 48 No. 2 (2025) doi: 10.1111/1754-0208.12982

Lord Chesterfield and Elizabeth du Bouchet: New Light on an Eighteenth-Century Liaison

RICHARD WENDORF

Abstract: Almost no trace has survived of the life of Elizabeth du Bouchet after she moved from The Hague to London and gave birth to Philip Stanhope, the illegitimate son of Philip Dormer Stanhope, the 4th Earl of Chesterfield, in 1732. Thirty-three unpublished letters in the archive of the Chevening Estate, now at the Kent History and Library Centre in Maidstone, therefore offer scholars an unprecedented perspective on du Bouchet's life, on her continuing relationship with Chesterfield, and on their mutual concerns about the health and education of their son. These letters, all written in French by Chesterfield to du Bouchet over a thirty-year period, also provide an intimate view of the Earl's debilitating deafness, of his hopes for his son, and of his affection for — and occasional frustration with — his former mistress.

Keywords: Chesterfield, Chevening Estate, Countess of Walsingham, deafness, du Bouchet, Georgian society, illegitimacy, spa treatments, Stanhope, The Hague

Philip Dormer Stanhope, the 4th Earl of Chesterfield, was one of the most prolific correspondents of the eighteenth century, perhaps only eclipsed by his sparring partner Horace Walpole. As an ambassador early in his career, and later as Britain's Viceroy in Dublin and as one of the country's two Secretaries of State, he was an incessant writer, often dispatching fifteen letters a day and sending two versions of a letter to the same correspondent. Throughout his career as a statesman, moreover, his official letters were more than matched by his overflowing personal correspondence.[1] It is therefore somewhat surprising that almost no letters to the women who were closest to him have survived. We can trace only one letter to his wife, Melusina, Countess of Walsingham, and none to the mistress he took at about the time he celebrated his marriage to Melusina: Lady Frances Shirley, one of the great beauties of her day.[2] This may seem natural, given the fact that Chesterfield spent much of his time with either his wife or his mistress, when letter writing would rarely have been necessary. But the Earl travelled a good deal in the 1730s and 1740s, often on his own, so we might expect that there would have been some form of paper trail that we could follow.

Scholars interested in his earlier liaison with Elizabeth du Bouchet, the French mother of his son, whom he met while serving as Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary at The Hague, have been stymied here as well, for no letters between them have ever been published. Du Bouchet followed Chesterfield to London in 1732, where she gave birth to his only child, also named Philip Stanhope, soon to be the recipient of what is arguably the most famous series of letters in the English language. Once du Bouchet arrived in London, however, the historical record of her existence almost entirely vanishes. We have had only the briefest of glimpses into the life she led and no sense of what her continuing relationship with Chesterfield was like. It turns out, however, that thirty-three letters from Chesterfield to his former mistress have indeed survived, part of the cache of papers that

were long held at Chevening, seat of the Earls Stanhope, Chesterfield's collateral descendants. These letters, all written in the Earl's formal French, provide us for the first time with some sense of what Elizabeth du Bouchet's life was like once she and Chesterfield parted ways, apparently by mutual consent. They offer us a particularly interesting perspective on their relationship during du Bouchet's first year in London, a partial view of her somewhat peripatetic life in the decades that followed, a more intimate understanding of Chesterfield's aspirations for his son's education and career, a candid assessment of his own ill health (which he believed was congenital), and a glimpse of how his polite patience with du Bouchet could eventually wear thin.

Chesterfield described Madalena Elizabeth du Bouchet (1702–84) as a 'gentlewoman very well born'.[3] She was part of a distinguished Huguenot family living on one of the more fashionable streets in The Hague. Her father was a captain in the Dutch army; she was the oldest of four children. Chesterfield met her when she was twenty-nine, working as a governess or companion in the house of Count Wassenaer-Twickel.[4] She was pregnant by the time the Earl returned to London; she soon followed, and their son was born on 2 May 1732. Chesterfield found a residence for them in Marlborough Street with a governess and a maid; they appeared in public together once they were settled in London, and in due course she became a naturalized citizen.[5] Du Bouchet moved house several times during her lifetime, but she continued to live as a gentlewoman with good addresses in London. She made visits to Chesterfield House, to the family seat of the Chesterfields at Bretby in Derbyshire, and to Bath, where the Earl also had a residence. Chesterfield supported her through an annuity of £200, which he gave her in 1735, and he later bequeathed her £500 in his will 'as a small reparation for the injury I did her' (which she refused).[6]

Chesterfield met du Bouchet through his friendship with Baron Frederik Willem Torck, who served as Secretary of the Dutch Deputation for Foreign Affairs, and it is from a series of letters to Torck that we know that the two lovers had discussed marriage and had dismissed the idea. 'She knows me too well to want me', he confided to Torck. 'And besides it is better for us both that I find someone else, upon whom I can saddle my past pleasures, and who will furnish a bit to the support of la Bouchet and her child.'[7] What Chesterfield very much needed was a marriage that would repair his finances after his expensive tenure in The Hague. He also had to assume the cost of maintaining a household on Marlborough Street and counterbalance the loss of his lucrative position as Lord Steward as he moved against Sir Robert Walpole and his Excise Bill and into the ranks of the Whig Opposition.[8]

Chesterfield was therefore actively looking for a reputable partner who could well afford to support him. Here is how he put it to his friend Torck: 'I want merit and I want money — two qualities rarely united. Feminine merit without money would not be enough; money without merit would furnish a bad alloy.'[9] He continued in this vein to Torck a few months later: 'here's the difficulty: I need a woman who in every way would be content to give much and to receive little, who in a word would put up with an outworn body, and would patch up an outworn fortune. I fear that such a one would be like the wife of La Fontaine, who never existed and never will exist.'[10] The solution to his dilemma came in the form of Melusina von der Schulenburg, the illegitimate daughter of George I. Chesterfield had courted her before he left for The Hague, but the King objected to the Earl's penchant for serious gambling, a vice the monarch simply could not abide.[11] By 1732, however, the Countess remained unmarried and her father had died; with no obstacles remaining, the couple married in September 1733. It was apparently a marriage of convenience for both of them, made all the more convenient when Chesterfield took a

house next to his wife's in Grosvenor Square (she would remain in her own residence until her mother died several years later). Chesterfield was now enriched by a dowry of £50,000 (almost £10 million today) and by his wife's annual income of £3000 from the Civil List, which was worth over half a million.[12] The Earl could therefore afford to live in style and to ensure that his former mistress and their little son could live quite comfortably, with a series of tutors hired as part of Philip's educational programme, a stint at Westminster School, and then several years of study and 'polishing' while on the Grand Tour with his governor, the Rev. Walter Harte.

It is within this context that Chesterfield's letters to du Bouchet can now be examined for the first time. The Earl wrote ten letters to his former lover in 1732 and 1733. They are, for the most part, fairly mundane notes about his health, her well-being and that of their child, and his travels in Derbyshire and Yorkshire. All of this is to be expected as they accommodated themselves to their new lives and as Chesterfield sought relief from his various ailments at Scarborough, a spa that he would eventually abandon in favour of Bath. Of considerable interest in these letters, however, is the Earl's profession of love for du Bouchet and his increasing interest in the welfare of their child. In his first letter (27 June 1732), he complains about business matters and bad company at Bretby but concludes by assuring her that 'je vous aimeray toujours' (I shall always love you). Ten days later, he takes the opportunity, while travelling to Scarborough, to send a brief message to du Bouchet, saying that he will begin to take the waters tomorrow and assuring her 'que je suis tendrement a vous' (I am tenderly yours).[13] Having arrived in Scarborough, he is alarmed not to have heard from her and assumes that she is unwell rather than simply negligent: 'In God's name, my dear, do not abandon me to this disquiet.'[14] If she is very ill, at least her chambermaid could send a few words to him: 'I prefer that she be in the secret than to continue suffering as I have suffered these past ten posts.' 'Chaque jour', he concludes, 'me montrent aquel point je vous aime, et ces deux ou trois derniers jours ne l'ont fait que trop' (each day shows me how much I love you, and these past two or three days have done so all too well). When he finally does hear from her, on 27 August 1732, he discovers that he has been accused of coldness: 'No one could be less so', he replies, 'and I am dying with impatience to see you again'. Were it not for his need of the waters in Scarborough, he would rush back 'to embrace you in London'. Young Philip has been suffering from cholic, and he therefore asks du Bouchet to 'assure him that I love both him and his Mama as much as one can love'.

These would seem to be tender and encouraging messages, and I see no reason to believe that Chesterfield was insincere in expressing sentiments that continue to verge on the amorous. But it is clear that the Earl had no intention of curtailing his lengthy stay in Scarborough for the 'cure', no matter how much he complains about the dreadful company he must keep in 'this accursed place'.[15] There is now a hiatus of a year in Chesterfield's correspondence, presumably because he was once again in London, where he saw both du Bouchet and his son. He only writes again in the following summer, having returned to 'the most detestable place on earth' to take the waters one more time.[16] He now refers to her as 'Ma chere Enfant' and again assures her that 'je seray toujours a vous'. A few days later, he calls her a 'paresseuse' (lazybones) for not writing more often and says that she must surely be aware of 'my impatience to hear from you'.[17] A fortnight later, however, he is on the defensive after she has complained to him about seldom writing to her. He blames this on the curious 'gentlemen' of the Post who open everyone's mail, read what they wish, and then forget to send them on. At the end of this letter, dated 7 August 1733, he cautions her not to write to him after the 14th of the month 'as I shall be moving around by highway and byway'. This would certainly seem to be the case, for

almost exactly a month later, on 5 September, Chesterfield would marry Melusina von der Schulenburg in London and, at roughly the same time, begin a long-term affair with Lady Frances Shirley.

Chesterfield was a complex figure, but even by his own standards, his situation in the late summer of 1733 was rather extraordinary. He was about to support two women in London — and be supported in his endeavours by a third. Du Bouchet knew that he needed to enter into a marriage that was both respectable and lucrative; knowing that she and her son would be taken care of in London was presumably preferable to staying behind with her son in The Hague. Although it is impossible to know precisely what the Earl and du Bouchet thought of each other more than a year after their arrival in London, it is almost certain that Chesterfield's marriage would have had some effect on his relationship with his former mistress — and on her need for assurances of his continuing friendship and esteem.

There is a lacuna of four years between Chesterfield's letter of August 1733 and his next surviving letter, which was sent from Bath on 2 December 1737, when Philip would have been five years old. Chesterfield must have sent letters to her during this period, especially when he was travelling, but they do not form part of the cache of letters that have been preserved within the Chevening Estate. These letters have survived almost by accident, as part of the larger story of the transmission of Chesterfield's letters to his son after they had been posthumously published by Philip's widow, Eugenia Stanhope, in 1774. The manuscript letters remained in Eugenia Stanhope's possession, divided into four volumes. Three of those volumes were eventually purchased by Viscount Mahon (later Earl Stanhope), a collateral descendant of Chesterfield, after he had published his own edition of the letters in the 1840s. Here is the note he inserted into the bound volume of letters to du Bouchet:

> These letters were interspersed in the three volumes of Lord Chesterfield's Letters to his Son (original MSS) when I obtained the latter from Messrs Rodd in December 1845.
> I have now arranged these letters according to their dates & caused them to be bound together.
> These letters have never been published & I do not think that they should be.
> 1846 Mahon[18]

There are other gaps in the correspondence. Following the one letter of 1737, there is a hiatus of eight years before Chesterfield writes to du Bouchet in 1745. The remaining letters date from 1747, 1749, 1750, 1751 (four letters), 1752, 1753, 1759, and 1765 (three years before Philip's death). Two of the letters are undated (by either Chesterfield or Mahon), but they appear to have been written between 1759 and 1765.

These dates are interesting, for of the four volumes in which Chesterfield's manuscript letters to his son had been bound, the second volume has gone missing, covering the years 1748 and 1749 and part of 1747 and 1750. We are therefore fortunate to have the letters to du Bouchet from 1747, 1749, and 1750, which might also have disappeared. This prompts us to ask, however, exactly how these letters became 'interspersed' in the four volumes of Chesterfield's manuscript letters to his son in the first place. Eugenia Stanhope published those letters in 1774; she died in 1783, a year before du Bouchet. It therefore appears that du Bouchet gave or bequeathed the letters to her two grandsons, who then placed them in the four bound volumes. The letters then descended from one of those two grandsons, Philip Stanhope, to his daughter, who married John Keir, who eventually sold them to Messrs Rodd in London, who in turn sold them to Lord Mahon. They remained at

Chevening House until 1971, when they were transferred to the Kent Archives in Maidstone.[19]

Convoluted as this paper trail is, the remainder of the surviving letters do provide us with a more intimate perspective on Chesterfield's views on his son's development and a sense of his continuing relationship with du Bouchet. We learn, for instance, that by the time Philip was five, in 1737, he was receiving massages ('a etre frotté'), which 'will do him a lot of good and he will derive pleasure from it as soon as he has grown accustomed to it. I myself do it every morning and it does me good.'[20] The 'petit Gaillard' (the strong little chap) is already writing letters to his father, who encloses his own in return.[21] We then jump to 1745, when Chesterfield was the King's Viceroy in Ireland and Philip was now thirteen and on his grand tour of the Continent. The Earl does not want him to visit him at Dublin Castle: 'I do not anticipate bringing the boy over as he would get spoiled in so many ways. He would see too many bad instances of drinking. He will improve his manners better in Paris than in Dublin.'[22] Two years later, now a harried Secretary of State, Chesterfield tells du Bouchet that 'you ask me my dear whether I am pleased with the boy, and how long he must stay in Leipzig. I am very pleased with him, he applies himself well and I have to admit that he studies sufficiently.'[23] Better, he adds, that their son be well based in the sciences in Leipzig 'before being cast into the whirl of Turin, or of Paris, which will turn his head'.

By 1749, it is clear that du Bouchet would like to see her son return to London, at least for a while, whereas Chesterfield politely puts her off, declaring that 'it depends on a thousand circumstances beyond my control'.[24] He then inserts one of his characteristic parables concerning parenting by citing the example of Lord Eliot's son, who has been allowed to break up his tour by returning briefly to London: 'I will not indulge in the weakness of his father who would like to interrupt the course of his travels in order to satisfy the pitiful curiosity to see him for a few days.' The Earl has, by now, a clear sense of how his son should be treated: 'For my part, I love the boy, as he deserves to be loved, that is to say for himself and not for myself. His best interest will always overcome my curiosity and weakness.' And Chesterfield certainly was a curious parent, savouring reports from friends who had met his son on the Continent, having his son's portrait painted, and even, at one point, having Philip's height measured with a ribbon that would be sent to the Earl.[25] 'You can confidently trust me to take care of the big chap', he concludes his letter. 'I have not yet failed him, and I have no desire to avoid whatever remains for me to do.'

By the time Philip is eighteen, in 1750, Chesterfield is advising du Bouchet that it is time he make his way without a tutor: 'I do not wish to make a monk ["Capuchin"] of him. It is time for him to begin to learn how to cope alone in the world. All he lacks at this time is the gift of good company, social graces, polite manners, and the outward appearance of a man of the world.'[26] And these he will acquire by studying the fashionable world in Paris. When Philip finally returned to London, in 1751, both parents were naturally eager to see him once again. Before they did so, however, there was a somewhat puzzling exchange of letters between them. On 8 January, Chesterfield indicates that Philip asked his mother to send him the manuscripts of his studies with his tutors when he was quite young. The Earl fails to see why he wants them: 'I am quite sure he will never have time to read them, nor that they would be worth it. They are childish things which he rightly scorns at this time. Therefore do not forward them to him even when you are back here. It was only a fantasy that will leave him.' It appears, moreover, that Philip has requested more than just his old notebooks — that he wishes his mother to send him the letters his father wrote to him when he lived in London — which

prompts Chesterfield to write the most extensive description we have of the nature of his famous letters:

> The letters I wrote before he left here all reflected his age, and his situation at the time, and consequently should not see the light of day. Those I have written while he is on his travels, are a very mixed bunch reflecting the circumstances and a thousand small things that I learnt from time to time about him, and that led me to encourage or reprimand him. Therefore I should read them again and burn those that do no credit to him or to me. This is why I beg you never to let him see them but give them to him when he is here and we can peruse them together.[27]

Although Chesterfield's tone is offhand and even dismissive here, he is nonetheless determined to retain control over the letters that are now in du Bouchet's keeping. We cannot know how many of these early letters were actually read and then burnt; quite a few of them have survived, presumably given back to Philip by his father and eventually published by Philip's widow.[28]

By July of 1751, we find the Earl preparing du Bouchet for Philip's arrival in London by lowering some of her expectations: 'Do not expect to see him as pretty as he was when you last saw him, as his features have thickened, and he is very short, and stocky.'[29] And then in August: 'You must be prepared to see him short and plump; and not as pleasing to the ladies, as you may have wished.'[30] And then in November, he was gone, on his way to Paris again, without saying farewell to his mother. Chesterfield explains to her that Philip avoided a formal parting 'in order to spare you the tears of separation' but that their son was inconsiderate in doing so.[31] Philip 'has gained much in manner, and airs during his stay with me', but the Earl had good reasons to send him away again, he argues: Philip 'had a great desire to go owing to an arrangement he has in Paris, with a very respectable person, who was pressing him to return', while many of the 'not very edifying Englishmen' he met on the Continent are now in London, where they will do him little good.

This letter of November 1751 is by far the longest in this cache of papers, and for good reason. Du Bouchet has been hurt by Philip's departure and by Chesterfield's readiness to send him away again, and we therefore find the Earl immediately on the defensive when he takes pen to paper:

> You do not act fairly towards me, my dear, in the ideas you have formed of me regarding you. I protest that I hold and will forever hold for you all the friendship, regard, and gratitude for which you could wish. Our meetings might perhaps tell you more, but on the contrary might they not arouse your regret? There are situations in which it is better to avoid than to seek each other if friendship is not to lose its rights. We can write to each other everything one can tell, and letters are a sweeter pledge of our friendship than conversations.

Chesterfield and du Bouchet have, by now, known each other for twenty years, and it is clear that she feels emotionally short-changed during a period of reunion with her son, which she had been looking forward to for several years. As a master of elegant, genteel, 'courtly' language, Chesterfield is at his most evasive here, placing the blame on his correspondent, professing his undying admiration, and making it clear that he prefers to write to her rather than that they should meet.[32] He concludes his letter by bidding her 'Adieu my dear, banish all doubts that are injurious to the friendship and esteem with which I shall always be yours. Adieu.'

This is an important letter for another reason as well, for it provides us with an evaluation of their son that is more extensive and more personal than in any of his other letters.

The Earl professes to be very pleased with him: 'he has an excellent heart, and good sense. He has a great deal of knowledge, supported by a good memory.' His figure, on the other hand, 'is not favourable', although it may become more pleasing when he has taken 'more air'. He has a happy appearance when he is in a good humour. He dances very well and gracefully, 'which one would find hard to believe if one had not seen it for oneself'. Philip 'stands in awe of me although he loves me, and that is just what I want'. When you write to him, he instructs du Bouchet, tell him that 'I am dissatisfied with his inattention to the dictates of social politeness, with his brusque and common manners and with his surly looks.' Preach to him often from the same text, he tells her, for one cannot return too often to this subject. 'Trust him to get there in the end. At any rate I spare neither my care nor my wealth' on him. As he makes clear in a later letter, he wants her to work closely together with him, but without Philip knowing that they are 'colluding'.

The remainder of the letters to du Bouchet, between 1751 and 1765, focus almost exclusively on three subjects: Philip's illnesses, their own illnesses, and their son's incipient sex life. The Earl's letters make it clearer than ever that his son suffered from a range of complaints that were not unlike his own, including headaches, fevers, bronchial congestion, and liver problems. We will never know precisely what these diseases and conditions were, but they were serious enough — and frequent enough — to keep both parents alternatively anxious or relieved. At one point, in a letter of 14 June 1759 from his summer retreat in Blackheath, Chesterfield dismisses du Bouchet's suggestion that their son is suffering because of the climate where he is currently located; the source is much more serious than that: 'I will tell you what it is, and that it is incurable. It is in my blood and my father's, which he inherited, infected with all the evils of Pandora's box. He [Philip] is strong at present, I was too at his age but he carries, as I do, the germ of all the ills that have developed since to weigh me down.' It will be necessary, he concludes, for Philip to 'bear his fate, whatever that may be, and physical ills are unfortunately the destiny of human beings'. As for Chesterfield himself, he includes a characteristic line about his own imminent demise: 'the play draws to its conclusion, and whether sooner or later, is a matter of indifference to me and to the world.' He would, in fact, live another fourteen years, with no significant improvement in his physical health.

Elizabeth du Bouchet was not immune to illness either, and several of his letters to her are peppered with expressions of concern and commiseration. In the letter of 14 June 1759, for instance, we learn that she is taking the waters at Bristol: 'those waters, and those of Seltzer, are the very best for weak chest problems.' But accompanying his words of sympathy are several passages in which he is critical of her tendency to be overly anxious and possessive and even melancholic. Chesterfield's most strenuous outburst occurs in a letter of 1752 that tells us as much about him as it does about her:

> For some time, my dear, you have given vent to the vapours, and you see everything in black. If a giddy young twenty-year-old doesn't write to you regularly, you think he is dead or dying, and I refuse ever to see you again because I avoid doing so when I won't be able to hear a single word you were saying to me. It is rather for me to imagine the bad side of things, I who finds himself deprived of the delights of society, and no longer hearing human speech. But I try not to complain.[33]

In another letter in the same year, he remonstrates with her once again:

> Your sickness has left you with a dejection that has you giving in too willingly to melancholy. You must resist, go out, go for walks, divert yourself. It is rather I who should be melancholic, if I wanted to allow it. I, who no longer keep up with society at an age when I have no other consolation. I, who have no resource other than reading, and who every day sees people older than me, enjoying all the delights of society. But I resist, by busying myself with reading, and suitable concerns and arrangements besides the education and establishment of the boy.[34]

What we see here is a rare display of the famously polite Chesterfield beginning to lose his temper and reveal his irritability, something that his editors completely masked in their edition of his letters in 1774.[35] In a much later letter, from Bath on 26 November 1764, he argues that it is not necessary to Philip's health that 'you and I see him every day' when he is in London. This is the difference between us, he says to her: 'your maternal tenderness relates everything to you, whereas my paternal tenderness relates everything to him and his true interests' (by which he means Philip's professional prospects).

Part of Chesterfield's 'paternal tenderness' extended to their son's love life, and his advice to Philip in the letters that were published in 1774 led to an outcry in which he was condemned for corrupting his own child. The Earl mentions matters of a sexual nature only eight times in the more than 400 letters that were included in Dodsley's edition, but that was reason enough to tar him with the brush of immorality for decades to come. Of particular interest in these unpublished letters is thus the unblushing straightforwardness with which he addresses Philip's foray into 'gallantries' when he writes to du Bouchet. In 1752, he reports that their boy is in very good health 'and that he wants to appoint me as his official procurer'.[36] 'You will say', he continues, 'that the role he proposes for me is not the most honourable one. That is true, but on the other hand as it is only after the event, out of gratitude and not for the purpose of lust, and given that one is obliged to assist one's neighbour, I have supplied to his order some small items for his tender dispatches.' What those 'dépêches' were remains a mystery, but presumably they were small gifts with which Philip would 'thank' his amorous companion. Later in the year, the Earl walks back a phrase he used to describe Philip when he told her that their son had the mindset of a forty-year-old. He meant only to emphasize Philip's *savoir fair*, his ability to promote himself in the world; in all other ways, he very much has the desires of a twenty-year-old, and with regard to debauchery, he is at least not encountering the bad examples and bad company he would see in London. 'I in no way claim that at twenty he is not debauched — he surely will be, and even should be. But I insist that it should be honest profligacy and in good company, which is more than I can say of our English youth.'[37] Given their original relationship, one wonders what du Bouchet would have made of this argument for 'honest profligacy'.

Although this thirty-year epistolary conversation necessarily reveals more about Chesterfield than it does about Elizabeth du Bouchet, it nevertheless brings her at least partially back to life, no longer entirely in the shadows of Georgian England. From what we can gather from the letters, these two parents remained in close touch with each other, inevitably focused on the well-being of their child and on his precarious journey in the world. Chesterfield's expressions of tenderness and respect never disappear. Du Bouchet remains 'ma chere' throughout these three decades, and he continues to write that he is 'ever yours' well into the 1750s: 'As for me I am more deaf and foolish than ever, but always yours.'[38] Some of the letters have their addresses attached to them, and so we learn that du Bouchet was the recipient of the Earl's correspondence in Thrift Street and Greek Street in Soho and 'next Door to the French Rose [in] Marybone'. Although

Chesterfield was responsible for the change from the Julian to the Gregorian calendar in 1752, house numbers would not be imposed in Westminster for another decade.[39]

It would be useful — and only fair — to have du Bouchet's side of this story as well, providing us with a more complete sense of how she continued to view her former lover and, more importantly, how she viewed her own lot in life. Young Philip began an affair with Eugenia Pieters, an illegitimate Irishwoman whom he had met in Rome, but their liaison remained a secret for some time — and perhaps even after she had given birth to their two children. Did du Bouchet know about her son's secret marriage before Chesterfield did? Did she meet Philip's two sons before he married Eugenia Pieters? What kind of relationship did she have with her daughter-in-law? What kind of relationship did she have with her two grandsons, if any at all?[40] And how did she cope with the news of her son's death in Avignon, at the age of thirty-six? Did Chesterfield comfort her? Did she comfort Chesterfield? One of the most peculiar aspects of the Earl's copious correspondence is that we have no reference to his son's death in any of the letters to his closest friends, only in the beginning of his correspondence with Eugenia.

The archives have therefore shed some rays of light onto this complicated relationship, but much remains a historical puzzle, and it might be useful to consider the options at Chesterfield's disposal as his affair with du Bouchet drew to a close. The birth of an illegitimate child was not a rarity within aristocratic circles — Chesterfield had married an illegitimate daughter, after all — nor within the professional classes. The 5th Duke of Devonshire and his wife Georgiana were perhaps the most prominent — and infamous — couple to engender and care for a mixed brood of children (and in a *menage-á-trois* to boot). Chesterfield's colleagues Sandwich, Halifax, Calcraft, and Grafton all lived openly with their mistresses.[41] Charles James Fox followed in Chesterfield's footsteps by siring both a daughter and a son long before he married his mistress. Young Henry Fox was born with disabilities (he was probably both deaf and dumb), and his father had to relinquish his hope that there would be yet another Fox in Whig politics. He wrote to his nephew, Lord Holland, that when he had 'a mind to build castles and to look forward to distant times with pride & pleasure I must think of you & only you'.[42]

In 1731, a year before Philip was born, 3% of all births in England were out of wedlock; by 1780, that figure had reached 6%.[43] So Chesterfield was hardly alone in his predicament, and he had several options before him when he realized that Elizabeth du Bouchet was pregnant. The first was to leave both mistress and son behind him at The Hague and provide for their support without inviting Philip into his life. He decided against this and consequently gave Philip his own name. He could have lived openly with Elizabeth in London, taking her either as his wife or as his mistress, but he (apparently *they*, as we have seen) chose not to — nor, as he acknowledged, could he afford to.

Because Philip was *filius nullius*, legally no one's son — in effect, no man's son — Chesterfield could have placed the entire burden of Philip's support on Elizabeth's shoulders, which he also decided not to do. Nor did he make Philip part of his own, separate household, and that crucial decision produced serious consequences, particularly in the Earl's later insistence that Philip should sacrifice to 'the graces' and assume the stature, dignity, and polite comportment of his noble peers. Bright and learned as he was, Philip needed to learn the rudiments of good breeding at second hand — that is, at his father's hand, in the hundreds of letters he wrote to him — rather than by growing up within the 'habitus' of the Earl's household, where custom and observation would have made such behaviour second nature to him.[44]

Chesterfield decided, however, that Philip should live with his mother, supported by appropriate tutors, and these new letters provide us with a much clearer view of just

how closely Chesterfield continued to confer with du Bouchet as they discussed the next steps in their son's education. The Earl naturally had the last word (and usually the first) in these matters, which was certainly the norm within the aristocracy at the time, but this previously unpublished correspondence indicates just how willing Chesterfield was to include his former mistress in discussing his programme. Both of them, moreover, had to care for their child within the circumstances in which Philip was enmeshed. When he served as Secretary of State in the late 1740s, Chesterfield believed that his son could eventually succeed him in that high office; and as late as 1752, we see, in one his letters to du Bouchet, how carefully he was preparing Philip for his diplomatic roles: 'He is still too young for business matters and I prefer him to be completely ready before being burdened with them, rather than burdened a little earlier and make some beginner's errors for want of worldliness and a little sang froid.'[45] Chesterfield will be happy if, in a year's time, he can 'find the means of finding an advantageous place for him as I am very fastidious in the matter; otherwise I could find a place for him tomorrow'. Only a year later did he learn, much to his disappointment, that his brother-in-law, George II, was determined to block Philip's progress just as he had already delayed the Earl's political ascent. Although Philip would eventually become Britain's Resident in Dresden, an ambassadorship — let alone high office in Whitehall — was not within his reach. As Chesterfield wrote to Lord Bute, 'I am sensible of one great objection which may be urged against him, but in justice and equity both the shame and the guilt are mine, not his.'[46]

Later in life, when he decided to write private 'Characters' of George II and other members of the royal household, Chesterfield included a fascinating passage on the probability that the King never consummated his relationships with his mistresses:

> The Prince had a singularity proceeding chiefly from Pride, that made him dread being the known father of a natural Child, and he has often said to me, what could I possibly do with a Bastard if I had one[,] to which I answered what other Kings and Princes had done before him, but he replied No I could not make him what he ought to be, and I could not bear the thoughts of his being perhaps a Tradesman or at Most an obscure private Gentleman. This notion he tenaciously retained to the last, which I have reason to be convinced hindered him from enjoying thoroughly, any Unmarried woman, or even any married woman who lived in a State of separation from her Husband.[47]

If this conversation had taken place while George was still Prince of Wales — and before Chesterfield's son had been born — then we could understand why George's remarks were not deemed to be insensitive at the time. But Chesterfield specifies that the King had often talked to him about this issue and that he retained his horror of fathering an illegitimate child 'to the last', which makes the passage discomfiting as well as intriguing. It also appears that Chesterfield was finally willing to forgive the King a great deal.

The very fact that the Earl and his former mistress lived apart — and that so much of their conversation took place through their letters to each other — provides us with an unusually candid view of just how these issues were raised and debated. In letter after letter, we find Chesterfield responding to du Bouchet's questions, suggestions, and fears. He was often dismissive and sometimes condescending in his answers, but he clearly kept du Bouchet informed of his proposals and decisions — and allowed her to have her say. This is a revelatory aspect of Chesterfield's role as a father, for the Earl has long been thought to have acted entirely alone as he fashioned the building blocks for his son's development. Although we have only Chesterfield's letters to Elizabeth du Bouchet from which to judge,

they clearly reveal that this famous process was, at least in part, a decades-long dialogue between two parents who loved their son very much.

The Earl's letters also provide us with another perspective on how he behaved with the women in his life. It is commonly said that Chesterfield did not think much of women. It would be more precise to say that his written comments about women are often condescending, dismissive, or flagrantly misogynistic. It would also be accurate to say that he thought a good deal *about* women, that he enjoyed writing about them, writing to them, hearing from them, and socializing with them. One of the complications in trying to understand Chesterfield is that he could be brutal in what he said about women in general and yet be kind, attentive, and respectful when he wrote to individual women or interacted with them. Swift famously told Pope that 'I hate and detest that animal called man, although I hartily love John, Peter, Thomas and so forth.'[48] Chesterfield also had a strong tendency to generalize — about courts, politics, the French, the English, the countryside, the city, the common 'herd', the *beau monde*, and mankind itself — and his generalizations about women are legion (and often derisory, as in his description of them as 'but children of a larger growth'). Jenny Davison has rightly said of his most egregious, 'secret' comments to his son that 'this is clearly completely awful', not least because of the duplicity and hypocrisy they reveal.[49]

Chesterfield's letters to his two closest female correspondents, in English to Henrietta Howard and in French to Madame Monconseil, are filled with the witty banter that would have characterized their actual time together, and the Earl informed his son that letters between close friends should be written as if they were simply conversing with each other.[50] Chesterfield's letters to Elizabeth du Bouchet lack (for the most part) the sparkle of his letters to his aristocratic friends, but they are polite, considerate, and often quite witty. In a sense this places them apart from many of the other letters he wrote over this decades-long period, for Chesterfield and his former mistress knew each other quite well, they had the strongest of ties through the welfare of their son, and the letters are consequently both candid and even informal — they get down to business. If one were to find a counterpart to them in Chesterfield's immense correspondence, it would be in the hundreds of letters he wrote to Solomon Dayrolles, a close friend who witnessed his final words: 'Give Dayrolles a chair.' With du Bouchet as with Dayrolles, Chesterfield could dispense with formal courtesies and superficialities. As he wrote to Baron Torck near the beginning of his liaison with her, 'she knows me too well'.

NOTES

1. The standard modern edition is *The Letters of Philip Dormer Stanhope, 4th Earl of Chesterfield*, ed. by Bonamy Dobrée, 6 vols (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode; New York: Viking Press, 1932) (subsequently cited as 'Dobrée'). It is by no means complete, and Dobrée has simply summarized much of Chesterfield's official correspondence. He has also, I have discovered, not transcribed some of the letters with complete accuracy nor in their entirety. For most of the Earl's letters to his son, readers will want to consult Christopher Mayo's edition, noted below. Also of interest are *Some Unpublished Letters of Lord Chesterfield*, introd. by Sidney L. Gulick, Jr (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1937); *Private Correspondence of Chesterfield and Newcastle, 1744–46*, ed. by Sir Richard Lodge (London: Royal Historical Society, 1930); and *French Correspondence of Philip Dormer Stanhope, Fourth Earl of Chesterfield*, ed. by Rex A. Barrell (Ottawa: Borealis Press, 1990), which does not include the thirty-three letters to du Bouchet.

2. There are, on the other hand, numerous letters from Chesterfield to three female friends with whom he lived at a distance: Henrietta Howard in England and Marie-Anne du Bocage and Cécile-Thérèse Monconseil in Paris. A copy of the only surviving letter to Lady Chesterfield is in the Chevening archive at the Kent History and Library Centre in Maidstone (U1590/Z333/13), subsequently cited as KHLC.

Chesterfield's letters to du Bouchet are in the same archive (U1590/C5/5), and I quote from them with the kind permission of the Board of Trustees of the Chevening Estate. These letters have not been individually catalogued, but they do bear dates for which a year has later been added by Lord Mahon when he had them bound in a separate volume. I therefore cite the letters by their dates, incomplete as they often are, based on Lord Mahon's sequencing, as in 'KHLC, 7 July 1732'.

The Kent Archive also includes Chesterfield's letters to his son (three volumes), copies of unpublished letters to his godson and heir, his postmortem, and various other documents. I wish to thank Paul Sladen for his invaluable help in translating Chesterfield's letters, some of which are exceedingly faint, and the staff members of the Kent History and Library Centre for their generous assistance. It should be noted that I have not corrected Chesterfield's French when I do quote directly from the letters.

For a summary of previously untapped archival sources, see Richard Wendorf, 'Chesterfield in the Archives: New Light on an Elusive Figure', *The Eighteenth-Century Intelligencer* (Sept. 2024), 1–12.

For other explorations of the life of a woman on the margins of polite eighteenth-century society, see *Secret Comment: The Diaries of Gertrude Savile, 1721–1757*, ed. by Alan Savile (Devon: Kingsbride History Society and Thoroton Society of Nottingham, 1997), and Richard Wendorf and Charles Ryskamp, 'A Blue-Stocking Friendship: The Letters of Elizabeth Montagu and Frances Reynolds in the Princeton Collection', *Princeton University Library Chronicle*, 41 (1980), 73–207.

3. Quoted by Christopher Mayo, 'Lord Chesterfield's *Letters to His Son*: A Critical Edition' (unpublished doctoral dissertation, Brandeis University, 2004), p. 1218.

4. Stella M. Brewer, *Design for a Gentleman: The Education of Philip Stanhope* (London: Chapman & Hall, 1963), pp. 28–29.

5. Brewer, *Design for a Gentleman*, p. 33; Willard Connely, *The True Chesterfield: Manners — Women — Education* (London, Toronto, Melbourne, Sydney: Cassell, 1939), p. 149; Samuel Shellabarger, *Lord Chesterfield* (London: Macmillan, 1935), p. 144.

6. The annuity is noted by Mayo, 'Lord Chesterfield's *Letters to His Son*', p. 105, who does not provide a source. Chesterfield's will is in the National Archives, Kew: NA 12/71/37.

7. Dobrée, II, 261 (I essentially follow Shellabarger's translations here, in his *Lord Chesterfield*).

8. For Chesterfield's secret history of the defeat of the Excise scheme, see Richard Wendorf, 'Chesterfield, Scarbrough, and the Excise Bill: A New Manuscript Source', forthcoming in *Parliamentary History*.

9. Dobrée, II, 263.

10. Ibid., II, 264.

11. The 'modern' biographies of Chesterfield are all quite dated, but they provide fairly consistent information about his early years. See Shellabarger, *Lord Chesterfield*; Connely, *The True Chesterfield*; and the first volume of Dobrée's edition.

12. Chesterfield's marriage was widely reported and commented upon. See, for instance, *The Gentleman's Magazine*, September 1733.

13. KHLC, 7 July 1732.

14. KHLC, 17 July 1732.

15. KHLC, 27 August 1732.

16. KHLC, 14 July 1733.

17. KHLC, 21 July 1733.

18. KHLC, opening page.
19. The most complete history of this transmission trail can be found in Mayo, 'Lord Chesterfield's *Letters to His Son*', p. 35 and *passim*.
20. KHLC, 2 December 1737.
21. KHLC, 2 December 1737.
22. KHLC, Monday, 1745.
23. KHLC, Sunday, 1747.
24. KHLC, 12 August 1749.
25. Chesterfield was obsessed with the issue of Philip's height or 'stature', not least because he thought that he himself was rather short — as were all of the Stanhopes, he lamented. See Richard Wendorf, 'The Elusive Earl of Chesterfield', *Quarterly Review* (online edition, 30 April 2024).
26. KHLC, 26 July 1750.
27. KHLC, 8 January 1751.
28. These early letters are among Chesterfield's most charming and should be compared to those he wrote to his godson and heir decades later, when his godson was also quite young. It is clear that the Earl enjoyed his time with his sons and grandsons — even though his visits with them were often sporadic — and his early letters to them reveal a gentle and playful parent at this point in their relationship.
29. KHLC, July 1751.
30. KHLC, 8 August 1751.
31. KHLC, November 1751 (but only inscribed 'Lundi').
32. For a discussion of Chesterfield's use of such language, see Carey McIntosh, *Common and Courtly Language: The Stylistics of Social Class in 18th-Century English Literature* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1986), pp. 139–45, and Alan T. McKenzie, 'Courtliness, Business, and Form in the Correspondence of Lord Chesterfield', in *Sent as a Gift: Eight Correspondences from the Eighteenth Century*, ed. by McKenzie (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1993), pp. 48–67.
33. KHLC, 1752 (simply inscribed 'Vendredi').
34. KHLC, 12 October 1752.
35. See Christopher Mayo, 'Manners and Manuscripts: The Editorial Manufacture of Lord Chesterfield in *Letters to His Son*', *The Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America*, 99 (2005), 37–69, where Mayo demonstrates just how much Eugenia Stanhope and the bookseller James Dodsley removed from Chesterfield's manuscripts.
36. KHLC, May 1752.
37. KHLC, 12 October 1752.
38. KHLC, Friday, 1752.
39. See Richard Wendorf, *Printing History and Cultural Change: Fashioning the Modern English Text in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022), ch. 7.
40. It seems likely that du Bouchet had some form of relationship with her grandsons based on her son's will, which specified that she be appointed their guardian if Eugenia should predecease her. See Brewer, *Design for a Gentleman*, pp. 178–79.
41. See John Brewer, *Sentimental Murder: Love and Madness in the Eighteenth Century* (London: HarperCollins, 2004), p. 90 and *passim*.
42. Quoted by L. G. Mitchell, *Charles James Fox* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), pp. 181–82.
43. Lawrence Stone, *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England 1500–1800* (New York: Harper & Row, 1977), p. 614.
44. For the 'habitus', see Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, trans. by Richard Nice (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984), p. 101 and *passim*. Also

relevant here is Michael Polyani's argument for tacit learning in *The Tacit Dimension* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966), p. 4.

45. KHLC, July 1752.

46. Quoted by Cecil Price, 'Some New Light on Chesterfield', *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen*, 54 (1953), 273. See Chesterfield's similar observations in Dobrée, V, 2036 and 2038.

47. Lilly Library, Chesterfield MSS II; quoted with the kind permission of the Lilly Library, Indiana University.

48. *The Correspondence of Jonathan Swift*, ed. by Harold Williams (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963), III, 103.

49. *Hypocrisy and the Politics of Politeness: Manners and Morals from Locke to Austen* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 60. For some of Chesterfield's remarks, see, for instance, Dobrée, IV, 1209–10.

50. Mayo, 'Lord Chesterfield's *Letters to His Son*', pp. 296–97.

RICHARD WENDORF retired at the end of 2021 as the Director of the American Museum & Gardens in Bath, where he had served for twelve years. Previous to this appointment, he served as the Stanford Calderwood Director and Librarian of the Boston Athenæum for twelve years, from 1997 to 2009. Before joining the Athenæum, he served for eight years as Librarian (Director) of the Houghton Library and Senior Lecturer on the Fine Arts at Harvard University. Earlier in his career (from 1976 to 1989), he was Professor of English and Art History at Northwestern University in Chicago, where he served as the undergraduate academic dean and received the College of Arts and Sciences' Distinguished Teaching Award. Richard was educated at Williams College in Massachusetts; at Worcester College, Oxford; and at Princeton University. He has held fellowships from the Guggenheim Foundation; the American Philosophical Society; the ACLS; the National Endowment for the Humanities; the British Academy; Exeter College, Oxford; the Yale Center for British Art; and the Newberry, Folger, Huntington, and Lilly libraries. As a scholar, Wendorf specializes in portraiture, eighteenth-century British art and literature, British and American library history, British and American printing history, and the theory and history of collecting. His book *Sir Joshua Reynolds: The Painter in Society* won the Biography Prize awarded every two years by the American Society for Eighteenth-Century Studies. He is currently writing a critical biography of the 4th Earl of Chesterfield and editing the World's Classics edition of Chesterfield's works for Oxford University Press (with Christopher Mayo). His most recent book, *Printing History and Cultural Change: Fashioning the Modern English Text in Eighteenth-Century Britain*, was published by Oxford University Press in 2022.