The Hidden Labors of Mary Mottley, Madame de Tocqueville

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In Democracy in America, *Tocqueville described the ideal wife of a democratic citizen as a capable domestic helpmeet who enables the citizen-husband to endure the daily trials of political activity. Tocqueville's biographers have presented Tocqueville's own wife Mary Mottley as having approximated this ideal. Mottley's importance, it is claimed, lay in providing the domestic calm and psychological support that Tocqueville needed to think, act, and write as he did. My aim in this article is to challenge this interpretation by offering an overdue reassessment of Mottley's life and work, uncovering the hidden labors she performed in Tocqueville's circle and giving scope, where possible, to her own political views and activities. Mottley, I argue, refused to confine herself to the domestic-management and emotional-support roles typical of a Tocquevillian citizen-wife. Instead, she carved out a role for herself (albeit limited) as Tocqueville's political and intellectual interlocutor.*

In *Democracy in America*, Alexis de Tocqueville remarked on how marriage in a democratic society provides a haven in which the male citizen can find relief from the turbulence of public life (Tocqueville 2000, 291).[1] Soothed by his wife and the placid domestic environment she provides, he argued, the husband in a democracy enters public life determined to reproduce there the calm orderliness he enjoys at home. This, for Tocqueville, was in sharp contrast to aristocratic marriages in Europe, which, as the products of chance or family alliance, were characterized by mutual contempt, rampant infidelity, and tumultuous passions that spilled over into public life.

As with so many of Tocqueville's schemas, this neat dichotomy between the democratic and the aristocratic struggled to capture many *actual* nineteenth-century marriages. This was nowhere truer than in the case of Tocqueville's own marriage to Mary (or Marie) Mottley.[2] Despite Tocqueville's aristocratic background, this union was in many respects the antithesis of the aristocratic marriages described in *Democracy in America*. Far from being arranged, it was a marriage of choice between two

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people who had known each other for years and whose decision to marry was carried out in spite of early reservations in the Tocqueville family. From the perspective of that family, everything about Mottley was wrong: she was too old (at six years Tocqueville's senior), too liberal in her politics, too Protestant, too middle-class, and too English, shortcomings that some members of the family evidently never forgave. Moreover, although their relationship was plagued by frequent bouts of mistrust, infidelity (on Tocqueville's part at least), and occasional rancor, they respected each other deeply, and there is little reason to doubt Tocqueville's sincerity when he described Mottley as perhaps his only true friend (*OC*, XIV, 32M, 420; 95M, 514; 104M, 529).[3]

Nor, however, did their relationship reflect Tocqueville's idealized democratic marriage. Although Mottley labored continuously to make the chateau de Tocqueville a restorative respite from the demands of Tocqueville's political and intellectual life, she refused to subordinate herself exclusively to managing the domestic sphere. If a commitment to rigid gender roles was essential to a democratic marriage, then theirs did not qualify as such. Mottley was an effective domestic manager and provided emotional support for her husband, helping him to better know his own thoughts and reassuring him in times of acute distress (the home she provided was, as he put it to her, "the port from all his storms") (*OC*, XIV, 26M, 412). However, she also carved out a limited set of roles for herself as a political and intellectual interlocutor to Tocqueville and did so with his encouragement. In what follows, I tease out these roles from a sample of the evidence available and reconstruct, where possible, Mottley's own political opinions and activities. The result will fall far short of a comprehensive biography of Mottley, but it should nevertheless cast light on her formidable presence in Tocqueville's working life as well as on the unacknowledged intellectual labors typically performed by wives of philosophical and political men in mid-nineteenth-century France. As I proceed, I will also reflect on the frequent reluctance on the part of Tocqueville's biographers to take seriously their subject's own insistence on the importance of Mottley's contributions to his career.

The Foreign Wife

Information about Mottley has been slow to come to light, and some of what Tocqueville biographers assumed they knew about her has turned out to be false. This situation has recently improved thanks largely to the efforts of an amateur historian working far beyond the usual circles of Tocqueville scholarship. In 1997 Sheila Le Sueur, a retired nurse living in an Arizona suburb, watched a C-Span documentary about Tocqueville and, convinced that Mottley had been unduly neglected, embarked on a hunt for information about her. In the process she uncovered a great deal of material about the Mottley family, including Mary's birth certificate, which confirmed that she was born in Hampshire (not Devon as previously thought) and that her age had been misrepresented on both her marriage certificate and her tombstone. Le Sueur shared her materials with two Tocqueville specialists, Jean-Louis

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Benoît and Hugh Brogan, both of whom acknowledged her contribution in their biographies of Tocqueville.[4]

Here, then, is what we know with relative certainty about Mottley's early life. She was born on August 20, 1799 in Alverstoke in Hampshire, the eldest of George and Mary Martin Mottley's thirteen children. Her father worked as an agent for the Royal Hospital at Haslar in Portsmouth before transferring, in 1833, to an equivalent position in Plymouth (where Tocqueville would go in 1835 to meet the family and request Mary's hand). At around four years of age she went to live with her maternal aunt, Elizabeth Mottley Belam, whom she accompanied to France in 1815 to set up home in Versailles, joining a sizable community of English expatriates attracted by the low of cost of living. Although Mottley would remain, in Tocqueville's words, "profoundly English in her heart, habits, and ideas," she would never return to her homeland (*OC*, VI (3), 139, 273). This was doubtless in part due to her difficulties with travel (she was prone to seasickness), but her friend Harriet Grote would later cite English class prejudices as the real reason for her staying away (*OC*, VI (2), 256n).

It was at Versailles, around 1828, that Mottley met Tocqueville, who had taken up a position as a magistrate and rented a house nearby with his friends Gustave de Beaumont and Ernest de Chabrol. Although little remains of their early correspondence, it is clear that from the beginning of their relationship Tocqueville believed Mottley to be a cut above the women he usually encountered in elite political and social circles. Not long after they first met, he wrote excitedly to Beaumont that Mottley spoke to him with a refreshing openness that set her apart from other women.[5]

After a seven-year liaison, the couple married in October 1835—not long after the publication of the first installment of *Democracy in America*—with Mottley's aunt and the Tocqueville family (who must have swallowed their objections) in attendance. After living for a brief time in Baugy with Tocqueville's brother Édouard and his wife Alexandrine, the couple moved in 1836 into the chateau de Tocqueville, which would be their main home for the remainder of the marriage (though they would keep a residence in Paris until the end of Tocqueville's political career). Mottley quickly took charge of the restoration of the building and converted part of the grounds into an English-style garden. She also took in hand the household expenditures; Tocqueville memorably referred to her as his "minister of finance," so effectively did she manage their affairs (*OC*, XIV, 40M, 437). The couple never had children, and Mottley had to endure the suggestion from well-intentioned male friends that this lack of "another interest in life" was the source of all her unhappiness (*OC*, XIII (2), 180, 81).

Tocqueville seems to have got on well enough with the Mottley family during his brief encounters with them and eventually would use his connections with the First Lord of the Admiralty to try to advance the naval careers of Mary's brothers (he eventually secured Joseph Mottley a long-sought-after promotion) (Brogan 2006, 605). By contrast, Mottley's introduction to life in the Tocqueville family was, by all accounts, not easy. Tocqueville's brother Édouard, writing to Beaumont six months

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after Mottley's death in 1865, recalled that Tocqueville's decision to marry "a foreigner, a protestant, without fortune" had "afflicted" the family terribly (Benoît 2013, 54). But he also blamed Mottley's personality for the failure of true bonds of affection to form, tetchily accusing her of failing to reciprocate the love they did eventually show her (55).

Tocqueville himself was painfully aware of the initial difficulties Mottley had with his family, even if he occasionally felt she overstated the degree of mistreatment she suffered.[6] In the second installment of *Democracy in America*, written during these first years of their marriage, Tocqueville commented ruefully on the difficulties faced by couples who defy the class snobberies of aristocratic society, foremost among them being the "sway of custom and tyranny of opinion" (Tocqueville 2000, 597). (Brogan has suggested that Tocqueville in these passages was "vindicating his decision to marry Marie" [Brogan 2006, 365].)[7] But Mottley's foreignness meant that she invited a degree of prejudice surpassing the usual scorn that a *bourgeoise* marrying an aristocrat could expect. Whereas Tocqueville was endeared to Mottley's Englishness (he affectionately scattered English phrases into his letters to her), his sisters supposedly mocked her accent (Jardin 1988, 49).[8]

Tocqueville may well have had such treatment in mind when, in an exchange of letters from 1857 with his American friend Edward Vernon Childe, he solemnly advised that a woman should never choose a husband from "outside of her nation, whatever that nation might be." Expanding on his theme, he noted how "rare" it was that "marriages turn out well when races are mixed" and "when different educations and religions are blended." And although Tocqueville conceded that occasionally such unions do "turn out well," more commonly "the outcome is a false situation and a painful inner torment."[9] Whether Tocqueville meant to imply here that his own marriage to a foreign Protestant fell among the few cases that *truly* turn out "well" is not apparent. Far more certain is that the letter demonstrates sensitivity on Tocqueville's part to the difficulties that foreign wives such as Mottley encountered.

What Tocqueville hoped to get out of his marriage to Mottley were two things that he admitted were difficult to combine, namely a "busy intellectual and a tranquil calm home life" (*OC*, VI (3), 6, 49). What Mottley sought is less clear, though she seems to have viewed marriage partly as an escape from the oppressive and monotonous existence reserved for single bourgeois women. Whereas Tocqueville disdained arranged marriages, Mottley herself was happy to act as a marriage broker for young women born, as she had been, "without fortune," and in one case even persuaded the mother of a potential groom to call off her son's engagement and have her son marry Mottley's protégé instead (*OC*, VI (2), 293). Mottley was highly aware of the limitations placed on married women in nineteenth-century France, but she was also sensitive to the plight of single women who were largely confined to their mother's side, tightly regulated in the kinds of interaction they could have with men, excluded from conversation, and forced to be self-effacing lest they incur the displeasure of those same men (*OC*, VI (2), 293). Marriage, for Mottley, may have been an imperfect liberation from such confinement, but a liberation of sorts it nonetheless could be.

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In seeking insight into Tocqueville's marriage, his biographers have engaged in plentiful speculation about Mottley's personality, much of it unflattering (Le Sueur's quest to learn more about Mottley was born partly out of frustration at how poorly she had fared at the hands of Tocqueville scholars). They have variously described her as mentally disturbed, a "hypochondriac" (Brogan 2006, 98), prone to "fits of sulking" (Jardin 1988, 51) (when Tocqueville, in a rage that she was eating her pâté too slowly, smashed her plate upon the floor, she allegedly responded by calmly requesting more pâté), deficient in wit, humorless, plagued by the "insecurity" of a "childless woman" (Brogan 2006, 395), full of "British phlegm" (Jardin 1988, 373), and endowed with a "true Englishwoman's" preoccupation with gardening (Brogan 2006, 560). To several scholars, Mottley's jealousy and distrust of Tocqueville during their long separations was a source of needless distraction to him, and some have expressed disappointment that she did not listen better to Louis de Kergolay, who advised her not to confuse Tocqueville's notorious "bad habits" with "infidelities of the heart" (Benoît 2013, 20). One goes so far as to portray Tocqueville's infidelities as the sort of revenge often taken by "husbands who feel they are being ruled by a despot" (Jardin 1988, 51). In spiritual matters, too, Mottley is said to have tyrannized her husband, badgering him about his piety and ultimately pressuring him into seeking absolution from a priest in his final days (on which more below) (Jardin 1988, 528).

The aversion toward Mottley found in these biographies stems partly from frustration that Mottley erased much of the evidence concerning her relationship with her husband. Although we have over two hundred letters from Tocqueville to her, Mottley destroyed without exception the letters that she wrote to him. She also exercised considerable control over how the letters Tocqueville wrote to her have come down to us.[10] She redacted several passages (some of which have been recovered), and in many cases the only versions we have of the letters are copies produced in her own handwriting, with no original to compare them against. The image we have of their relationship, in other words, is one constructed largely by Mottley herself.

Spiritual Confidant

However severe they have might have been in commenting on her personality, few Tocqueville biographers doubt Mottley's importance to Tocqueville during the twenty-four years of their marriage. Even so, they have tended to reduce her role to that of Tocqueville's idealized democratic wife; that is, a capable domestic manager and provider of the emotional support her husband needed to act and write as he did. This trend began with Tocqueville's very first biographer, his friend Gustave de Beaumont, whose brief *Notice sur Alexis de Tocqueville* celebrated Mottley as precisely the kind of "auxiliary force" that a public man like Tocqueville needed, a never-ending source of "care, devotion, and energy" throughout "all his trials" (Beaumont 1861, 46). Others have followed Beaumont's lead in playing up Mottley's ability to counterbalance Tocqueville's stormy personality and buttress him psychologically at

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crucial junctures in his life. Brogan, writing very much in this vein, sees Mottley as Tocqueville's "harbor," albeit one capable of generating storms of its own (Brogan 2006, 279). André Jardin similarly recognized Mottley's importance as a stabilizing influence in Tocqueville's life but concluded that, whatever her own ambitions might have been, her influence "did not extend beyond the couple's domestic life" (Jardin 1988, 52). In an important recent study of Tocqueville's ideal *citoyenne*, Cheryl Welch has noted that Tocqueville demanded more from a citizen-wife than mere domestic succor, and insisted that wives look beyond domestic concerns to nourish their husbands' public-spiritedness. But though Mottley may have come closer to approximating this ideal than most, Welch nevertheless concurs with the biographers that she was mainly "a private soul without public ambitions who managed the household" and who served Tocqueville primarily as a "psychological and spiritual ballast necessary to moor his life and work" (Welch 2008, 26 and 30).

There is admittedly no shortage of evidence that Mottley was a domestic and psychological prop to her husband (OC, XIV, 40M, 437). Her letters (from what we can gather from Tocqueville's replies) were often concerned with domestic matters as she kept him up to date on work at the chateau and on the health of their beloved dogs (Blackey and Jem appear to have been particular favorites). Her capacity to restore Tocqueville's mind to an even keel is everywhere in evidence, and his letters to her abound with gratitude at how she has not only calmed him but accurately interpreted his "smallest thoughts" and actions (OC, XIV, 12M, 388). She was, he declared in one of his more hyperbolic moments, a gift from Providence, sent to relieve the great miseries of his nature (OC, XIV, 24M, 410; 19M, 399).

It is tempting to dismiss these effusions of praise and gratitude as cynical attempts to appease a wife who seems to have required (not without reason) regular reassurance of Tocqueville's devotion. After all, many of Tocqueville's more ardent declarations of his reliance on her arrive in letters where he is clearly on the defensive or seeking to placate Mottley for one reason or another. Nevertheless, the sheer volume of correspondence that passed between them (during some absences they wrote to each other daily, or at times even more frequently than that), and Tocqueville's impatience at any delays in their communication, testify to a profound psychological dependence. The degree of detail he went into in his updates to her, moreover, went far beyond what was necessary had reassurance been his main aim. Indeed, in some cases he sent her details that were anything but reassuring. During his first trip to Algeria in 1841, Tocqueville explained that whereas the other men on the expedition were withholding mention of a forthcoming military excursion from their wives for fear of alarming them, he would disclose everything to her (OC, XIV, 34M, 423). Even during a year-long crisis in their marriage that flared up when Mottley suspected that Tocqueville was lying about how he spent his evenings during the 1842 Parliamentary session in Paris, Tocqueville continued to be impatient to hear from her (even though he was reticent about having her leave the chateau to join him in the capital). At times he could sound almost desperate to hear from Mottley: "I need your letters. I need for them to arrive often. I need them to save me from dejection and sorrow. I need them in order to work and make an effort" (OC, XIV, 69M, 477).

These letters were, he wrote later, his "daily bread" (OC, XIV, 100M, 522; 172M, 612).[11]

Tocqueville's emotional dependence on Mottley can also be discerned in what third parties said about their relationship. Writing to his own wife during Tocqueville's last days, Beaumont described how Mottley had "spoilt" Tocqueville for the duration of their marriage and that her dedication to serving his needs was total, a view not unusual among those who knew the couple best (Brogan 2006, 635). Dedication, however, can take many forms, and over the course of their marriage, Mottley consistently transcended the role of domestic helpmeet and psychological prop in ways that even the more sympathetic of the biographers have overlooked. To see how this was the case, I will next analyze Tocqueville's idolization of Mottley as the kind of political wife who could exercise a powerful, if necessarily indirect, influence on French political life, before providing some illustrations of Mottley's political intelligence at work.

The Work of a Public-Spirited Wife

In order to present Mottley as merely a domestic manager and comforter to her husband, much of the commentary on her has had to downplay Tocqueville's assessments of Mottley's other contributions. Tocqueville himself, if not always his biographers, appreciated that Mottley disrupted any sharp distinction between the sphere of politics and the personal or quotidian. This comes across with special clarity in the favorable contrast Tocqueville made between Mottley and the wives of other political men. To appreciate this contrast fully, we need to take stock of just how appalled Tocqueville was at the influence wielded by most wives in French politics, particularly during the dying days of the July Monarchy. In a recent study of Tocqueville's views on political corruption, William Selinger notes Tocqueville's dismay at how a craving for money encouraged the abuse of office for private gain among France's bourgeois ruling class (Selinger 2016, 85). Less noted by Selinger, however, is that Tocqueville attributed much of this rot to the infectious materialism of politicians' wives. In 1850 the English economist Nassau William Senior recorded Tocqueville's disappointment at how wives were sapping their husbands' appetite for grand public deeds instead of propelling them toward political greatness, as their more public-spirited counterparts during the *ancien régime* had done. By thinking and acting as wives rather than as citizens, these women "destroy[ed] political independence," deflecting the attention of their husbands away from the public good and toward securing the money that comfortable and fashionable living required (OC, VI (2), 302).

Tocqueville was careful to attribute this decline in the public virtue of politicians' wives not to any essential female traits but to the bad effects of their education. In a pair of letters to Madame Swetchine, Tocqueville repeated an argument from his second part of *Democracy in America*, namely that women excluded from public life nevertheless exercise considerable *indirect* influence over politics, making it all the more

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imperative that they be educated properly (OC, XV, 19, 292). In the second of these letters he related to Swetchine how he had seen "weak men" demonstrate a strong degree of "public virtue" owing to the support and direction they received from their wives (OC, XV, 19, 297). But such occasions, he soon clarified, were very much the exception that proved the rule. Far more typical was for domestic commitments to "transform" a "noble and unselfish" man into a "vulgar and egoistical" place-seeker who treats public life as a means for private enrichment (OC, XV, 19, 298).

To Tocqueville's mind, the worst culprit among political wives was not the greedy or dishonest woman but rather the "well-conducted woman," the "faithful wife," the "excellent mother" (OC, XV, 19, 298). It was precisely because such women demonstrated private virtue that public men were willing to exploit public office to satisfy their needs. So convinced was Tocqueville of the prevalence of this problem that he was even prepared to extend the critique to members of his own family. Much as he thought well of Alexandrine, the wife of his brother Édouard, he ultimately judged her to have been a terrible political wife for the very reasons he had related to Senior and Swetchine. Consider the following scathing portrait of her in Tocqueville's account of the 1848 revolution:

> Never before did I realize so vividly that, while a brave helpmeet is a great support in times of revolution, a craven, even if she has the heart of a dove, is a cruel embarrassment. What made me most impatient was that my sister-in-law had no thought for the country's fate. … She was, after all, very kind and even intelligent, but her mind had contracted and her heart frozen as both were restricted within the narrow limits of a pious egotism, so that both mind and heart were solely concerned with the good God, her husband, her children, and especially her health. … She was the best woman and the worst citizen that one could conceive of. (Tocqueville 1987, 39–40)

Tocqueville was no less dismissive of wives who threw themselves into the thick of the revolution with patriotic fervor. The wives who ran to the barricades in 1848 to carry ammunition to the men were, to his mind, acting only with their husbands and children in mind, and brought the passions of a housewife ahead of true public-spiritedness to the struggle (137).

Tocqueville made clear on numerous occasions that his own wife escaped this mold entirely. He might have complained to Senior that most women were prone to act as "wives" rather than "friends," but he had no such misgivings about Mottley, whom he addressed repeatedly using the language of friendship (OC, XIV, 104M, 529). Moreover, to the extent that Mottley influenced her husband's political conduct, this in Tocqueville's eyes was only to the good. Observing the troubling influence of Mary Ann Elisa Birch, Madame de Lamartine (another English wife and a friend of Mottley's) on her husband's actions, Tocqueville took the opportunity to comment on what a healthier spousal influence on a politician might look like. Lamartine, he explained to Mottley, had put himself forward to be President of the Chamber of Deputies, a calamitous move that would result in a damaging split among

his supporters. Behind this decision, Tocqueville surmised, lay Birch stoking her husband's ambition. In relating these suspicions to Mottley, Tocqueville expressed gratitude that his own wife's influence was of a different sort entirely: "I said to myself that Marie would never act this way. And if I ever allowed myself to be led by my pride and ambition into an error of that kind, at least I would receive warning of the pitfall, and from a kind and devoted friend who would have the courage to tell me the truth in time" (*OC*, XIV, 46 M, 445). This is not faint praise. Nor can it be described as just another example of how Tocqueville leaned on Mottley for psychological comfort. Tocqueville credits Mottley not only with exerting a calming influence on his passions, but also with being capable of correctly reading the political situation. What Tocqueville finds repellent in Birch's behavior is not that a woman is exercising political influence, but that she is exercising the *wrong kind* of political influence. Mottley, by vivid contrast, emerges from this letter as an astute judge both of Tocqueville and of politics itself.

On other occasions Tocqueville saw fit to praise his wife's unique qualities more publicly. In 1842 he reported to Mottley how the Lieutenant General, Fortune Laidet, had been unexpectedly reelected as Quaestor. Aware that taking the position would entail a prolonged separation from his family, Laidet was moved to tears by a letter from his wife assuring him that she was happy to suffer for the sake of his honor. Having been invited to read the letter himself, Tocqueville shook Laidet's hand and declared that if he were in a similar situation his "Marie" would not fail to offer similarly unqualified support (*OC*, XIV, 64M, 470).

Tocqueville reserved his greatest tributes to Mottley's public-spiritedness, however, for his political memoirs. In his *Recollections*, the same work in which he had castigated his sister-in-law for her narrow-mindedness, Tocqueville extolled Mottley's virtue as "a devoted wife of penetrating insight and staunch spirit, whose naturally lofty soul would be ready to face any situation and triumph over any setback" (Tocqueville 1987, 85). And although Mottley hardly plays a central role in Tocqueville's narration of the events of 1848, she emerges from it as a wife who combined personal devotion to her husband with service to the public. It is Mottley, for example, who successfully warns Tocqueville of the beginning of the end of the July Monarchy, imparting to him the "anxiety" she herself took from Birch who had called on her in a panic (24). On other occasions in the text, Tocqueville credits her with prudently delaying news of events. When gunfire announces the beginning of the June insurrection, Mottley hears it first but decides not to rouse Tocqueville immediately. When he finally awakens after an hour and enquires about the noise, she reveals its source and then (in a rare direct quote from her) justifies her decision in terms that made clear her understanding of what the day had in store: "I did not think I should wake you, as you will certainly need all your strength today" (142).

Elsewhere in the *Recollections* Tocqueville took care to illustrate how adamant Mottley was that conjugal happiness must come second to the needs of the public. When a political crisis prompts Tocqueville to hurry from Germany to France, Mottley's health threatens to delay them, only for her to insist that he go on alone. He eventually agrees, but only after she overcomes his reluctance to abandon her in a

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country "still torn by civil war" and thus deprive himself of her "courage and good sense" (188).

Political Advice and Analysis

Fortunately, we are not forced to rely on Tocqueville's idealizations alone for evidence of Mottley's "good sense." Her political acumen is very much evident in some of the few letters by her available to us. During Tocqueville's second trip to Algeria, he took Mottley along with him in place of Beaumont, his usual traveling companion. Once there she took it upon herself to keep friends and relatives back home informed of what was going on. In one update to her brother-in-law Édouard, Mottley showed herself ready not only to analyze in detail a political dilemma that Tocqueville was faced with but also to criticize some of his choices. Tocqueville had departed on an ambitious tour of the Algerian coastal settlements with the Governor General Marshal Bugeaud, whose heavy-handed military rule Tocqueville would later denounce. Mottley spied the political risks in such a venture, correctly predicting that the Marshal would organize the trip in such a way that Tocqueville would see only what the Marshal wanted him to see. (As it happened, Tocqueville slipped free of his guides to talk with Arab leaders directly.) But also, more worryingly, she saw that by associating so closely with Bugeaud, Tocqueville could alienate the very colonists whose concerns about military rule he was there to report on. She continued the letter with a teasing jibe about her husband's weak political judgment, steering her analysis from events in Algeria to a more global assessment of Tocqueville's struggle with Thiers, his opponent on France's political left:

> You see, dear brother, that I am more political than Alexis himself: politics, for me, is him, and for him I forget everything else. I know the difficulty of his position. . . . Not even I, who observe political men up close, can predict their behavior. My husband cannot fight face to face with Thiers and yet that would be the only sure way to destroy him. [A]ll that is left to him are men who won't open their mouths to oppose M. Thiers' crushing eloquence and whose very existence is unknown to the country. Alexis will do, for sure, all that a passionate man can do, and as he has not ceased to do since he entered political life, but from now on, for a long time, I don't expect him to have much of an effect. (*OC*, XIV, 91, 249–50)

The letter concludes with Mottley summing up what she takes her role to be during this trying time. Because she often reads the letters addressed to Tocqueville before passing them on to him, she learns first of any bad news and reflects on how she may "cushion the blows" [*adoucir les coups*] that she cannot deflect (*OC*, XIV, 91, 250). It is a poignant description, though one doubtless crafted to appeal to Édouard's own notions of how a loyal and steadfast wife should behave. It also marks the difficulty of neatly separating the realms of personal care and politics in Mottley's case. For

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although Mottley might have collapsed her political interest into a concern for her husband ("politics, for me, is him"), she also demonstrated throughout this letter a kind of strategic nous that belies any easy description of her as a mere soother of cares.

Other episodes suggest that Mottley was not always so reluctant to predict the behavior of political men she observed. In the atmosphere of profound disorientation following Louis Napoleon Bonaparte's 1851 coup d'état, Tocqueville and his circle struggled to gauge how the new regime would conduct itself on the European stage. Mottley correctly predicted that, whatever else he may do, Bonaparte would strive to keep France at peace with England. Tocqueville disagreed, judging it possible that Bonaparte would find a patriotic war with England an enticing prospect (OC, VI (2), 377–78). That Bonaparte would not long thereafter seek alliance with England reveals Mottley to have been the better reader of Bonaparte and his intentions, on this occasion at least.

These forays into political analysis were unlikely to have been an exception. From the outset, Tocqueville held that he and Mottley enjoyed not only a fusion of hearts but of minds as well (this is what made their marriage "superior" to any other) (OC, XIV, 31M, 415). Throughout their marriage, Tocqueville sought out Mottley's advice ("your impressions, even on politics, are precious to me") and she expressed frustration with him if he withheld political news or his assessment of public affairs from her (OC, XIV, 57M, 459).[12] In some cases Tocqueville reserved his most frank and illuminating political analyses for her eyes alone. It was to Mottley, for example, that he sent his predictions for the "great democratic revolution" of 1848, an analysis that surpassed anything he shared with other family members (he may also have judged that his frank predictions of an ever-expanding influence for the social question in politics would alarm his bourgeois wife less than his more aristocratic relatives) (OC, XIV, 99M, 521). In this letter, as Laurence Guellec has noted, Tocqueville addressed Mottley as his equal, revealing to her how the revolution had quickly ceased to be an "adventure" and was now set to inflame Europe, leaving in its wake a profound reconfiguration of class relations (Guellec 2005, 405).

Aside from analysis and advice, the political tasks Mottley took on were numerous and varied. She acted as Tocqueville's proxy in local affairs under the July Monarchy (Benoît 1998, 21), managed some of his correspondence, and advised him on his entry into journalism as the editor of *Le Commerce* in the mid-1840s (Kergolay would refer to *Le Commerce*, in a letter to Mottley, as "your" [*votre*] journal, using "your" in the plural to refer jointly to Mottley and Tocqueville) (OC, XIII (2), 204, 151). Her letters to Francis Lieber in relation to this latter project reveal an expansive intellect keen to demonstrate both a knowledge of current affairs and a hunger to know more of goings-on in America ("Write to me, I take an interest in everything") (Craiutu and Jennings 2009, 80).[13] She comes across as particularly well versed in Tocqueville's proposals for prison reform, sizing up where the key players stood on the issue (she finds Beaumont, a close Tocqueville confidant, to be disappointingly "*apathique*"), and imploring Lieber to send anything along to her that might lend support to Tocqueville's scheme (79).

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Crucially, Mottley also appears to have weighed in on Tocqueville's speech-writing. In September 1850, an ailing Tocqueville was tasked with delivering an address welcoming Bonaparte to Cherbourg for a review of the navy. It was a speech that required a great deal of delicacy as Tocqueville sought to use the occasion to press the Prince-President to support a Cherbourg-to-Paris railway line, a project dear to his heart since at least the early 1840s. When his speech was met with universal acclaim (including from the President himself), Tocqueville was quick to credit Mottley with having suggested crucial alterations to the draft (OC, XIV, 119M, 547–48; Benoît 1998, 21). Knowing they would be of interest to her, he also sent Mottley copies of the newspapers that published his speeches. On one such occasion, his sensitivity to her opinion of what he had written was all too apparent. Promising to send her a copy of a speech that appeared in the *Journal de l'arrondisement de Valognes*, Tocqueville devoted a whole paragraph to explaining how the speech had been transcribed imperfectly by a Parliamentary secretary who was able to capture only the "general sense" of what was said (the secretary's work being "far from stenography") (OC, XIV, 119M, 547–48). It is not the sort of preemptive apology offered to a reader whose views one regards with indifference.

Mottley's interest in politics was no mere function of her role as a political wife, and it did not pass away along with her husband. In the years following Tocqueville's death, she continued to vigorously debate political topics with their common friends. During one of the last conversations recorded in Senior's memoirs of the Tocqueville household, Mottley lambasted the British government for their neutrality in America's civil war and sympathized with the North's indignation that the British would not support a struggle against slavery. It is a conversation that not only reveals her hatred of slavery but also shows Mottley's reading of international diplomacy to have been on point. Senior, responding to her argument, defended British policy by insisting that all that the North could legitimately expect was for Britain to remain neutral between belligerents. Mottley's cool retort was that the British had been far too "avid" to recognize the southern rebels as belligerents in the first place (OC, VI (2), 519).

Critic and Editor

During their marriage, Tocqueville relied not just on Mottley's political sense but also on her analytical powers and editorial eye. He had good reason to. Mottley was an avid reader, an accomplished linguist (she spoke Italian and German), and was intellectually curious. She debated the style and substance of Tocqueville's published articles in her letters to Kergolay and served as a critical sounding board for Tocqueville when he was producing new work.[14] In the summer of 1852, when writing *The Old Regime and the Revolution*, Tocqueville and the philologist Jean-Jacques Ampère would work during the day and then in the evenings read what they had written to Mottley, their "only audience," for feedback (OC, VI, 134).[15] During this time, Tocqueville appears to have taken Mottley's suggestions concerning style particularly seriously, a

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reflection, perhaps, of the kinds of contributions he thought female critics could best make. In a note in the manuscript of *Old Regime*, Tocqueville registered some of her criticisms and conceded that she had been correct: "Marie thinks this chapter is difficult to understand and boring, which unfortunately seems to me true enough" (Tocqueville 2015, 385). Similarly, in the margins of the manuscript of his *Recollections*, he recorded how Mottley found "somewhat labored and colored" the passage that relates how the revolutionaries of 1848 could only imitate the revolution of 1789 rather than continue its work (Tocqueville 1987, 53).

It is difficult to tell whether Mottley ever took it upon herself to defy the obstacles to women's intellectual work more directly by writing anything of her own. It is conceivable that she did, particularly given the precedent set by some of her acquaintances. Her friend Harriet Grote published a defense of property in a pamphlet on pauperism. Closer to home, Mottley's compatriot and friend Elizabeth Birch performed vast amounts of secretarial, editorial, copying, and translation work for her husband, Lamartine, and even composed whole sections of his *Voyage en Orient*, an act of authorship that was never publicly acknowledged (Schreier 2008, 20). It is possible that Mottley undertook similar tasks, but if she had plans to write, then they likely went unsupported by her husband. For all of his professed commitment to democracy, Tocqueville was generally cool on the idea of female authors (he admitted detesting "women who write") (Tocqueville 1987, 134). He made certain exceptions, admiring Grote's work in particular (in the letter telling her so, he expressed embarrassment that in French *auteur* was a masculine noun) (Tocqueville 1985, 251).[16] All the same, for Tocqueville, women authors never ceased to be women, and the condescending compliment he paid to Grote was that she had brought the imagination of a woman to bear on a dry subject like economics (250). Finally, had Tocqueville been keen to include Mottley directly in the writing process, then he could have drawn on her bilingualism to aid the translation of his work into English (as Birch had done for Lamartine). But there is little indication that he did so, instead entrusting the work exclusively to his English friend Henry Reeve. Much as Tocqueville relied upon Mottley's critical faculties, therefore, there were clearly some skills of hers that he felt little desire to exploit.

Mottley's interest in Tocqueville's research never wavered. If anything, it grew toward the end of their marriage. The year before he died, Tocqueville noted with fondness how, although Mottley had always been important to his work, her assistance was increasingly "practical and effective" and her "encouragements and advice" invaluable (OC, XIV, 187M, 638). She was always anxious for updates on his research and his health (the two things that "interest you the most") and when away from the chateau, Tocqueville expressed impatience to return to "our studies," a phrase that suggests, if not collaboration, then at least an intimate exchange of ideas (OC, XIV, 184M, 630; Guellec 2005, 407). He shared with her all of the petty frustrations he encountered in researching the second volume of his *Old Regime*, complaining to her bitterly about the classification system (or lack thereof) in the papers on the French Revolution he was rummaging through at the British Museum (OC, XIV, 168M and 172M). She learned of his anxieties about how his works would be

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received by different political factions in France and offered him much needed reassurance on that front (*OC*, XIV, 157M).

Tocqueville recognized Mottley's level of investment in his writings and wholly trusted her abilities as an editor. This is particularly apparent from the will he drew up in Saint-Cyr-les-Tours in 1854. The document is remarkably light on mentions of other family members, and it ends with a passionate declaration of his love for Mottley, reminiscent of his letters to her. But of greater interest is the detailed set of responsibilities he conferred upon Mottley regarding his literary estate. In the first place, Tocqueville made clear that she alone would be responsible for handling his papers after his death and for making any decisions concerning what materials should be published. Trusting her "fine judgment and good taste," he also authorized her to choose any co-editors from among their inner circle (she would eventually call on Beaumont's services) and with selecting the appropriate time to publish the manuscript of his *Recollections*, the memoir of 1848 that Tocqueville deemed particularly sensitive. Not only that, he authorized Mottley to amend the text itself by suppressing any judgments of individuals that may come across as "too severe" (one wonders if the savage description of Alexandrine discussed above featured among those he deemed fit for deletion).[17]

That Tocqueville would entrust his manuscripts to his wife rather than to a male colleague or collaborator should not come as a surprise. As the historian Bonnie Smith has recently shown, the wives of nineteenth-century French intellectuals were often "the natural editors" of their husbands' works, particularly as many of them assisted in producing the work itself (Smith 2000, 85). François Guizot's wife Pauline took notes for her husband's articles and edited his documents on the English Revolution. Athénaïs Michelet, the wife of Jules Michelet, performed similar research tasks and even (as with Birch and Lamartine) wrote sections of her husband's books. She was, therefore, the obvious choice to receive the rights to Michelet's books and papers when he came to draw up his will (Smith 2000, 90).

However common this practice might have been, it has been equally common for scholarship on the thinker in question to either downplay the widow's role or resent her activity.[18] Criticism of Mottley's handling of her husband's archive has followed this pattern, much of it focusing on her treatment of Tocqueville's correspondence. Tocqueville's will stipulated unequivocally that Mottley should either return to their senders or destroy without exception all letters written to him. That this was Tocqueville's declared wish, however, has done little to shield Mottley from accusations that she meddled with the letters during the five years between Tocqueville's death and her own. Brogan, to take a recent example, regrets that it fell to Mottley to edit Tocqueville's papers and charges her with pushing "the prerogatives of a widow to their limit." Only Mottley's death and the intervention of a more "honorable" editor in Beaumont, he writes, put an end to her "lamentable" quest to destroy and doctor evidence (Brogan 2006, 641).[19]

Contemporary witnesses to her editorial labors, by contrast, judged Mottley's handling of Tocqueville's literary estate far more sympathetically. In the preface to the first volume of the *Oeuvres complètes*, Beaumont credited Mottley with the idea of

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publishing the complete works as a monument to her husband's memory (Beaumont 1864, xlv). As Mathew Mancini has argued, the decision by Mottley to publish previously unseen work in this way sparked a Tocqueville revival in America, where the English translation of the *Oeuvres complètes* was well received (Mancini 2006, 77). Furthermore, in his foreword to the 1866 *Nouvelle correspondence*, Beaumont confirmed that the compilation of the *Oeuvres complètes* began under Mottley's direct "supervision" [*sous ses yeux*], and he praised her for setting everything in order so that the work might be completed after her own death (Beaumont 1865, iv). Here Beaumont doubtless alluded to Mottley's decision to bequeath her husband's papers to him (thereby enabling him to complete the editorial work they had started together) rather than to the Tocqueville family, who would have to wait until the 1890s before finally recovering them through a financial settlement. This could have been Mottley's parting shot against a family who had been cool to her from the beginning, but it more likely reflected her recognition that Beaumont would prove the more reliable guardian of Tocqueville's literary legacy and could finish what they had begun (the very final touches on the project would be made by anothe widow, Clémentine de Beaumont) (Mancini 2006, 125).

The charges leveled against Mottley as widow-editor have extended beyond tampering with letters, however. It has also been alleged that she used her control over Tocqueville's papers to misrepresent her husband's final days. Controversy has long simmered over whether Tocqueville embraced Catholicism on his deathbed or persisted in his religious doubts to the end. Not only is the evidence patchy, but there also exist two different versions of a key source, namely Beaumont's account of Tocqueville's death. In the version of this text published by Mottley and Beaumont in the first edition of the *Oeuvres complètes*, Beaumont insisted that Tocqueville had no need to convert to Catholicism because he had been strong in his faith all along. A second version of the account, however, seems to tell a different story entirely. In it Beaumont recounts how Tocqueville rebuffed Mottley's suggestion that he confess to a priest because he detested the idea of insincerely endorsing Catholic dogmas that he had long disbelieved. Mottley eventually succeeded in reassuring him, Beaumont continues, that the priest would not ask him to subscribe to any doctrines but would only listen to his repentance. Persuaded, Tocqueville sent for the priest himself before asking that Mottley replace the priest and hear his full confession herself.[20]

On the surface, this account would seem to conflict with Beaumont's published portrait of a man who had not the "slightest trace of irreligion in him" and has prompted speculation as to why Beaumont altered the original (Beaumont 1861, 120). Whereas Lukacs saw Beaumont as having acted alone from his own hypocritical motives, Jardin sees Mottley's hand at work, stating that "in all probability" she convinced Beaumont to modify the text before going to print (Lukacs 1964, 165; Jardin 1988, 529). He likewise accuses her of suppressing, out of "misguided devotion," a famous letter to Madame Swetchine in which Tocqueville came clean about his religious doubts, a copy of which was made by Clémentine de Beaumont. This accusation, based on "unpublished texts" of which he neglects to cite details, is consistent

with Jardin's overall portrayal of Mottley as a "spiritually narrow" Catholic convert (she had abjured her Protestantism to marry Tocqueville) (Jardin 1988, 530 and 52).

Jardin's accusation against Mottley is likely overblown. This is not least because the version of the text that Beaumont and Mottley *did* publish still contained hints that Tocqueville's Christian convictions were weak. Having insisted on Tocqueville's piety, Beaumont's account took a surprising turn by recognizing that Tocqueville was a man frequently "disturbed by doubt" (Beaumont 1861, 120). Christianity was, he suggested, ultimately part of Tocqueville's "political creed," and even if he had not been sincerely devout, he would never have behaved irreligiously at death for fear of the bad example he would set. If Mottley had been truly determined to scotch any reference to religious doubt from Beaumont's text, then she would have had to insist on further revisions. But she did not. Moreover, Mottley was fully aware of Tocqueville's fraught relationship with religion from relatively early on in their relationship and seems to have tolerated it well enough. Writing to her from America before they were married, Tocqueville conceded that she "alone" knew the "depths of his soul" on religious matters and predicted that if he "ever became a Christian" that he would be obliged to her for it (OC, XIV, 6M, 379–80). There is little in the letter to suggest, however, that she was actively trying to convert him.

Mottley's Double Presence

In a memorable description of Mottley from 1857, Tocqueville alluded to his wife's passionate manner both of "feeling" and of "thinking" (OC, XV (2), 26, 309). Up to now only the first of these has been considered of real importance for understanding Mottley and her relationship to Tocqueville. Mottley's passionate way of feeling, it has been supposed, sheds light on her fits of jealousy and on her uncanny ability to counterbalance Tocqueville's own perturbed mind. Her way of *thinking*, by contrast, has been largely passed over, presumably on the spurious grounds that thoughts must be published before they can be studied. What I have attempted to show is that traces of Mottley's thoughts and judgments can be glimpsed, if only dimly, in her work as a political confidant, adviser, critic, editor, and conversationalist, a set of tasks that engaged her to varying degrees over the course of her married life.

Once we contemplate the range of Mottley's labors, it becomes difficult to conclude that she was little more than an emotional crutch or that her influence was confined to domestic management. Yet this is the line that many Tocqueville scholars have persisted in toeing. That they do so is of interest not only because they may have misrepresented the nature of the Tocquevilles' marriage, or have given Mottley short shrift, but also because it reveals the extent to which Mottley has been not so much forgotten as resented. That Tocqueville entrusted his manuscripts to his wife has been a source of regret to Tocqueville's biographers and shows that Tocqueville had a degree of trust in Mottley's abilities that they think was misplaced. Intellectual historians are usually quite happy to recognize wives as supporting players in a great

philosopher's life. A wife promoted to gatekeeper of the philosopher's *thought*, however, is a different proposition altogether.

One gets the impression from some biographers that had it not been for Mottley's distorting influence, then a purer, more pristine version of the Tocqueville *oeuvre* could be recovered. But to say that Mottley tampered with an otherwise pure *oeuvre* would be misleading at best. Most wives or domestic partners of philosophers are present at those crucial moments in which a work is thought up, spoken about, and committed to paper. But particularly when her editorial labors are taken into account, we can see that Mottley was present in a second sense as well. Not only was she part of the context in which Tocqueville's ideas germinated, but she also oversaw the packaging of those ideas into a corpus, even if she delegated much of the editorial work to Beaumont. Her presence in this second sense is what has proved most irksome to Tocqueville's biographers. But it is precisely this that requires more attention from scholars keen on recovering untold stories of women's intellectual labor.

Notes

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1. All quotations from Tocqueville's letters to Mottley are from Tocqueville 1998. All in-text citations to letters in OC, XIV (and to other volumes in the Gallimard Oeuvres complètes [Tocqueville 1959; 1977; 1983; 1991]) include the letter number (for example, 32M) followed by the relevant page number. Unless specified otherwise all translations are my own.

2. Throughout this article I refer to Mary Mottley simply as "Mottley" rather than as "Mary," "Marie" (as she would have been known to her acquaintances), or "Madame de Tocqueville." The use of first names has been too often used to belittle or otherwise undermine female thinkers in the past and I hope the reader will agree that alternating between Monsieur and Madame de Tocqueville would be too cumbersome.

3. According to Tocqueville, he and Mottley were united by a unique, unnameable sentiment unknown to other couples, a kind of cross between friendship and love (more passionate than the former but more stable and enduring than the latter) (OC, XIV, 24M, 384). Tocqueville's argument that love alone is an unstable foundation for a relationship recalls Wollstonecraft's *Vindication of the Rights of Woman*. For a reading of Tocqueville as a Wollstonecraftian protofeminist, see Botting 2015.

4. Much of what follows in the next paragraph draws on Le Sueur 2015 and on Brogan 2006, 96–100.

5. To Mottley herself he later expressed satisfaction at their habit of speaking frankly to each other as equals (OC, XIV, 9M, 384; Benoît 2013). On the "free communication"

between their "two souls," see OC, XIV, 91M, 508. For Tocqueville on the uniqueness of their marriage, see OC, XIV, 116M, 545.

6. In October 1836 Tocqueville wrote to his brother Édouard to complain bitterly about how his other brother Hippolyte, and particularly Hippolyte's wife, Émilie, had judged Mottley harshly, causing him "violent anger" (OC, XIV, 66, 194). However, just over a year later, in December 1837, Tocqueville wrote to Mottley to assure her that her fears that his family disapproved of her influence on him were unfounded (OC, XIV, 25M, 411).

7. The English poet and politician Richard Monckton Milnes recorded how Tocqueville's choice of bride displeased his family, but that he contradicted the doubters by proclaiming his "marriage of love" a grand success (Milnes 1861, 527).

8. Jardin reports here from Redier 1925. Tocqueville scholars have generally been far too quick to repeat disparagements of Mottley contained in Redier's book. For instance, Redier's description of Mottley as a plain-looking English woman with yellow teeth has become regrettably standard. More importantly, Redier also levels some heavy charges against Mottley, the most serious being that that she refused to speak to her husband for the last three weeks of his life (in fact she suffered a throat ailment that robbed her of her voice, forcing her to communicate with Tocqueville via a slate) (Lukacs 1964, 156). Brogan reproduces a letter from Mottley to Clémentine de Beaumont in which she confirms that she could not "speak at all" (Brogan 2006, 630). As Brogan notes, Redier's claim that Mottley insisted on English as the language of the Tocqueville household is thrown seriously into doubt by the fact that Tocqueville struggled with his spoken English during his second visit to England in 1857 (602).

9. Tocqueville to Edward Vernon Childe, April 2, 1857 (Craiutu and Jennings 2009, 223).

10. Mottley was not the only one who suppressed letters or tampered with them. As Benoît has observed, Redier failed to return (or possibly destroyed) the originals of several letters in the Tocqueville archives, leaving only his copies behind. One could thus be forgiven for taking his portrait of Mottley as an ugly, obstinate wife (not to mention what he writes about Tocqueville himself) with a substantial grain of salt (Benoît 2013, 589).

11. Tocqueville could be petulant if that daily bread was not forthcoming. In 1851 he complained that of the fifty deputies he was imprisoned with in Vincennes, he was nearly the only one who had not had word from his wife (OC, XIV, 136M, 566).

12. For Mottley's complaints about a lack of political news from Tocqueville, see OC, XIV, 59M, 461. On Tocqueville's praise for her "good counsel" see OC, XIV, 104M, 529. For an example of how Tocqueville discussed political strategy with Mottley see OC, XIV, 85M, 494–95.

13. Mottley to Francis Lieber, January 8, 1845. Italics and French in original.

14. Kergolay discussed Tocqueville's articles on public education in *Le Commerce* with Mottley, expressing to her his fear that although his ideas were sound, his style might prevent them from convincing a large number of readers (OC, XIII (1), 204, 151).

15. These "little readings" were commonplace. See OC, XIV, 132M and 189M.

16. Tocqueville to Harriet Grote, July 24, 1850.

17. The relevant passage from the will is reproduced in Benoît 2013, 572–73. *Recollections* would eventually be published in redacted form by Tocqueville's grandnephew.

18. As editor, Athénaïs Michelet respected her husband's request that a section of his earliest writings should "never be published." His other editors have had no such qualms (Smith 2000, 96).

19. John Lukacs was less convinced than Brogan by Beaumont's editing and found that he rather than Mottley had been "unscrupulous" and had taken "all kinds of liberties" (Lukacs 1964, 159).

20. This version was published by Jean-Jacques Chevalier as a footnote in OC, IX, 13–14.

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