SONJA GRECKOL

Emilie Explains Newton To Voltaire
Gabrielle Emilie le Tonnelier de Breteuil
du Chatelet (1706–1749)

Matter puzzled me—gravity, the universe
I explained fire, bodies in motion, proposed
From experiment that matters' force
Is something greater than equal and opposed.
We made what was to be; seared in intellect
Multiplied forces, inspired our passion
But did not anticipate my body's project,
When without recourse but with conviction,
I face mere months to parcel this work.
Then dark, I will sluice the leak that drains
Women from this earth, diseased in childbirth
There is no special pleading; it wastes my gains
When on the clock face of this belly's girth
This mind, our coupling, go to earth.

Emilie Du Chatelet translated and commented upon Newton's Principia. She completed the manuscript three days before she gave birth and died five days later.