

expresses parallels Bijns' harshness toward Lutherans in her religious poetry, and it may also reflect her own feelings. We know that she did not marry and that her younger sister married quickly and unhappily.

How good to be a woman, how much better to
be a man!

Maidens and wenches, remember the lesson
you're about to hear.

Don't hurtle yourself into marriage far too soon.
The saying goes: "Where's your spouse?
Where's your honor?"

But one who earns her board and clothes
Shouldn't scurry to suffer a man's rod.
So much for my advice, because I suspect—
Nay, see it sadly proven day by day—
'T happens all the time!

However rich in goods a girl might be,
Her marriage ring will shackle her for life.
If however she stays single

With purity and spotlessness foremost,
Then she is lord as well as lady. Fantastic, not?
Though wedlock I do not decry:

Unyoked is best! Happy the woman without a
man.

Fine girls turning into loathly hags—
'Tis true! Poor sluts! Poor tramps! Cruel mar-
riage!

Which makes me deaf to wedding bells.
Huh! First they marry the guy, luckless dears,
Thinking their love just too hot to cool.
Well, they're sorry and sad within a single year.

Wedlock's burden is far too heavy.
They know best whom it harnessed.

So often is a wife distressed, afraid.
When after troubles hither and thither he goes
In search of dice and liquor, night and day,
She'll curse herself for that initial "yes."

So, beware ere you begin.
Just listen, don't get yourself into it.

Unyoked is best! Happy the woman without a
man.

A man oft comes home all drunk and pissed
Just when his wife had worked her fingers to
the bone

(So many chores to keep a decent house!),
But if she wants to get in a word or two,
She gets to taste his fist—no more.
And that besotted keg she is supposed to obey?
Why, yelling and scolding is all she gets,
Such are his ways—and hapless his victim.
And if the nymphs of Venus he chooses to fre-
quent,
What hearty welcome will await him home.
Maidens, young ladies: learn from another's
doom,
Ere you, too, end up in fetters and chains.
Please don't argue with me on this,
No matter who contradicts, I stick to it:
Unyoked is best! Happy the woman without a
man.

A single lady has a single income,
But likewise, isn't bothered by another's whims.
And I think: that freedom is worth a lot.
Who'll scoff at her, regardless what she does,
And though every penny she makes herself,
Just think of how much less she spends!
An independent lady is an extraordinary prize—
All right, of a man's boon she is deprived,
But she's lord and lady of her very own
hearth.

To do one's business and no explaining sure is
lots of fun!
Go to bed when she list, rise when she list, all
as she will,
And no one to comment! Grab tight your inde-
pendence then.

Freedom is such a blessed thing.
To all girls: though the right Guy might come
along:
Unyoked is best! Happy the woman without a
man.

Prince,
Regardless of the fortune a woman might bring,

Many men consider her a slave, that's all.
Don't let a honeyed tongue catch you off guard,
Refrain from gulping it all down. Let them rave,
For, I guess, decent men resemble white ravens.
Abandon the airy castles they will build for you.
Once their tongue has limed a bird:
Bye bye love—and love just flies away.
To women marriage comes to mean betrayal

And the condemnation to a very awful fate.
All her own is spent, her lord impossible to
bear.
It's *peine forte et dure* instead of fun and games.
Oft it was the money, and not the man
Which goaded so many into their fate.
Unyoked is best! Happy the woman without a
man.

66. Reflections on Widowhood

Many women in early modern Europe, like those of earlier (and later) eras, spent part of their lives as widows. The death of a spouse brought a more significant change in a woman's life than it did in a man's, a situation reflected in the fact that the word for *widower* in most European languages derives from the word for *widow*, rather than the more common reverse pattern. Widows' situation varied widely; widowhood generally brought a decline in economic status—similar to that experienced by divorced women today—and the households of widows were usually among the poorest in any city. On the other hand, widows had a wider range of action than married women, and, if they owned property, could handle it as they wished. This freedom was disturbing to many authorities, who, in contrast to the opinion of Jerome that we read in Chapter 3, advocated quick remarriage to bring widows under male control again. Despite this suspicion of widows—a suspicion arising from the fact that widows were sexually experienced as well as possibly financially independent—widows remarried at a lower rate than widowers. The following are extracts from letters written by two well-educated eighteenth-century German women about their situation as widows.

A. Isabella von Wallenrodt

I laugh away the prophecy that I would quickly
remarry, for I had firmly decided to fulfill the
wish of my husband and not make a second
choice. It was easy to strengthen my resolve in
this, for I found the independence which I en-
joyed unbelievably sweet. I repeat, that I did
every duty to my husband willingly and avoided
none of them, but it was also natural that I
began to feel that this was a burden that I car-
ried, and who would not finally be worn out
from this? ... Though I had the truest and most
just husband, who got along with me very well,

and appeared to let me have my will in all
things, I was still a slave; I prized him, whose
chains I wore, I loved him, but still I felt the
burden. So I firmly decided not to lay this yoke
on myself again. ... I want to enjoy my freedom
completely. It seems very agreeable to me to get
up, go to sleep, stay at home, or go out, etc.,
when I want to, without having the expression
of my will get in the way of someone else.

B. Sophie Rosine Richter

[To her brother-in-law] Please don't take of-
fense that I am so free and write to you and in-

quire about your health. I would not have burdened you with this letter, if I had not been in such great need. It is so expensive to live here and I have had to pay off [so many debts] for my husband; the legal processes also cost a lot of money and I have five children to raise. Now next Monday I have to move out of my lodgings, and because I owe rent for the last quarter-year, I must also pay 15 gulden or

the people [who own the place], who are so rude and lacking in sympathy, will not hand over any of my things. Therefore I send this obliging request to you, that you would be so kind and loan me 15 gulden, with my garden-house as security [for the loan]. You would save me from great misery and God would reward you for this. I hope that you would not refuse the request of a widow and a relative.

QUESTIONS FOR ANALYSIS

1. The phrase *traditional family values* is frequently used by contemporary commentators and politicians to describe their ideal of family life. Based on the sources reproduced here, what were the "family values" of early modern society? What similarities and differences emerge in the impact of these on men and women?
2. The poems by Vittoria Colonna and Anna Bijns both discuss disadvantages of marriage for women, but quite different ones. Compare them.
3. What aspects of the relationships between husband and wife set out in the Salzburg law code does Bijns highlight in her poem? What aspects are highlighted by the artist of the family portrait?
4. Bijns and Isabella von Wallenrodt both note advantages to being single or widowed, while Sophie Rosine Richter's letter points out some disadvantages. Why might their opinions be so different?



CONTROL OF WOMEN'S TONGUES AND BODIES

The emphasis on order and discipline in the early modern period often led to stricter control of both sexual behavior and speech, two activities that, as we saw in Chapter 5, were linked in people's opinions of women. Gossip, slander, scolding, and aggressive speech were criminalized, as were flirting (described as "lewd and lascivious carriage"), giving one's attention to several suitors ("wanton dalliance"), and courting without parental approval. Laws regarding more serious sexual acts, such as adultery and premarital sexual activity, were stiffened. In some cases, such laws increased parental control of children and husbandly control of wives; for example, in many parts of Europe, parental approval became obligatory for marriage, with those marrying against the wishes of their parents subject to arrest as well as disinheritance. In other cases, political authorities interfered with patriarchal control in families, ordering men to set aside money for their wives and children if the authorities thought they were spendthrifts or drunkards, or punishing men whose physical coercion went beyond acceptable limits. (In England, men who beat their wives with a stick wider than their thumb were subject to arrest; this is the origin of the phrase *rule of thumb*.)

Laws and punishments were not the only means of accomplishing social control and discipline, for such external measures could go only so far. People also heard these ideals preached in sermons, learned about them in the growing number of primary schools, and read about them in moral literature and conduct books. They thus developed internal measures of control—what we usually call "self-control"—and grew more guarded in their speech and actions. Some historians view this as a positive process that made Europeans more "civilized," while others see it as negative, repressive, or neurotic. A few argue that this development of internal controls never extended to the majority of the European population, while others stress that stability and order had been important to the villages where most Europeans lived all along, and so measures to assure them were not really new or different. All of these points of view find support in the sources, for people continued to violate laws and standards, but also helped to impose such standards on their neighbors and family members. Because most women's best chances for well-being lay in a good marriage ("good" in both economic and emotional terms), members of the community rarely supported women who deviated from the norm and instead reported suspicious words and actions to the authorities.

67. Regulation of City Brothels

During the Late Middle Ages, most cities in Europe established licensed or official brothels and often regulated the hours, prices, and clothing of prostitutes. Some cities issued very specific and detailed ordinances regarding life in the brothel, forbidding men to carry weapons, forbidding prostitutes to have special favorites, and forbidding the brothel manager to sell women to other houses. The brothel was to be closed on Sundays and holidays, and a minimum age—usually fourteen—was set for its residents. In many cities, particularly those of northern Europe, further restrictions were added beginning in the late fifteenth century as civic leaders became more concerned about enforcing morality and excluding those who deviated from the norm of male-headed households. These restrictions culminated in the sixteenth century with the closing of brothels in many cities of northern Europe, which made all prostitution illegal, but, of course, did not end it. (The timing of these restrictions was attributed by earlier historians to fears about the spread of syphilis, a disease that first appeared in Europe during the 1490s. It is now clear, however, that worries about order and decorum played a much greater role than concerns about disease.) Italian cities generally chose to regulate prostitution more strictly but chose not to suppress it completely. The following come from the records of the city government of Florence in 1415 and Nuremberg in 1562.

"Regulation of Prostitution: Florence: Florentine State Archives, Provvisioni, 105, fols. 248r 248v" From *The Society of Renaissance Florence: A Documentary Study* edited by Gene Brucker. Copyright © 1971 by Harper. Reprinted by permission from the author. Nuremberg: Bavarian State Archives in Nuremberg, Ratsbücher, 31, fols. 316, 350; 36, fol. 15; Ratschlagbücher, 36, fol. 150–153. Translation by Merry E. Wiesner.

dear," he said, "if you are willing to do that, it will ease me of my difficulties, and no one need lose a penny through me."

The next day I went with my son to his store, and truly, he was badly overladen with goods. He gave me 3000 Reichsthalers of merchandise at the price it cost him. And you can imagine the face I made. But regardless of everything, I only sought to help my children.

We had the goods packed in bales to send on to Hamburg. Then I noticed the two bales of goods my son had bought in Leipzig from Reb Isaac and Reb Simon the Hamburg merchants, and I said to my son, "Send back those two bundles of goods, and I shall see to it they are accepted, even if I pay for them from my own pocket. And now," I continued, "that you have repaid your debt to me, what of my sons Nathan and Mordecai?" He had on hand bills of exchange and Polish paper amounting to over 12,000 Reichsthalers, and he gave them to my son Mordecai by way of payment.

After sitting the whole day in his store, we went home together; and you would be right in thinking I did not enjoy my supper....

At that time I was busied in the merchandise trade, selling every month to the amount of five or six hundred Reichsthalers. Further, I went twice a year to the Brunswick Fair and each time made my several thousands profit, so in all, had I been left in peace, I would have soon repaired the loss I suffered through my son.

My business prospered, I procured me wares from Holland, I bought nicely in Hamburg as

well, and disposed of the goods in a store of my own. I never spared myself, summer and winter I was out on my travels, and I ran about the city the livelong day.

What is more, I maintained a lively trade in seed pearls. I bought them from all the Jews, selected and assorted them, and then resold them in towns where I knew they were in good demand.

My credit grew by leaps and bounds. If I had wanted 20,000 Reichsthalers *banko* during a session of the Bourse, it would have been mine.

"Yet all this availeth me nothing." I saw my son Loeb, a virtuous young man, pious and skilled in Talmud, going to pieces before my eyes.

One day I said to him, "Alas, I see nothing ahead of you. As for me, I have a big business, more indeed than I can manage. Come then, work for me in my business and I will give you two per cent of all the sales."

My son Loeb accepted the proposal with great joy. Moreover, he set to work diligently, and he could soon have been on his feet had not his natural bent led him to his ruin. He became, through my customers, well known among the merchants, who placed great confidence in him. Nearly all my business lay in his hands.

[Under her guidance, Loeb's business skills improve and he died solvent. This was not true for Glickl's second husband, whom she married a decade after the death of her first. He went bankrupt, and the couple had to be helped by their children; after his death, Glickl lived with one of her daughters.]

over 130 deliveries per year—making them the most complete record of any midwife's activities that exist from this period and among the most complete records of any medical practitioner, male or female. When she was in her eighties, Schrader decided to pull together her more complicated cases into a single book, which she titled *Memoirs of the Women*, dedicating it to the women she had delivered. During the early modern period, childbirth was a female matter, handled by neighbors, friends, and, where they were available, by professional midwives who were self-taught or trained by other midwives. A few men—usually called "man-midwives"—were beginning to venture into the field, but generally doctors or surgeons were called only in the most serious cases, and their own training rarely included obstetrics. From her notebooks, it is clear that Schrader became known as someone who could handle difficult cases—she was often called when things were going badly—and she also handled other types of surgical and gynecological matters along with childbirth. As men moved into the field, they attempted to portray female midwives as superstitious, bungling, and inept, but Schrader's memoirs, along with guides written by other prominent midwives such as Jane Sharp in England, Louise Bourgeois in France, and Justina Siegemund in Germany, suggest otherwise.

Thereupon in my eighty-fourth year of old age in my empty hours I sat and thought over what miracles The Lord had performed through my hands to unfortunate, distressed women in childbirth. So I decided to take up the pen in order to refresh once more my memory, to glorify and make great God Almighty for his great miracles bestowed on me. Not me, but You oh Lord be the honour, the glory till eternity. And also in order to alert my descendants so that they can still become educated. And I have pulled together the rare occurrences from my notes.

In my thirty-eight years living in Hallum in Friesland I saw my good, learned and highly esteemed, and by God and the people loved husband, go to his God to the great sadness of me and the inhabitants, leaving six small children in my thirty-eight years of age. But then it pleased God to choose me for this important work: by force almost through good doctors and the townspeople because I was at first

struggling against this, because it was such a weighty affair. Also I thought that it was for me and my friends below my dignity; but finally I had myself won over. This was also The Lord's wish.

1. 1693 on 9 January fetched to Jan Wobes's wife, Pittie, in Hallum. A very heavy labour. Came with his face upwards. A dangerous birth for the child and very difficult for me. The afterbirth had to be pulled loose. But everything well. (The notebook mentions that Schrader was called at five o'clock in the morning to the labour. With God's "grace and help," Schrader delivered a boy.)¹

3. 1693 on Shrove Tuesday (26 February) in the evening I was fetched for the very first jour-

¹Sometimes the notebook of all cases contains additional information; this is included here in parentheses.

Excerpted from *Memoirs: Mother and Child Were Saved: The Memoirs (1693–1740) of the Frisian Midwife Catharina Schrader*. Translated and annotated by Hilary Marland, *Nieuwe Nederlandse Bijdragen tot de Geschiedenis der Geneeskunde en der Natuurwetenschappen*, No. 22 (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1984). Reprinted by permission.

75. Catharina Schrader Midwife's Activities from *Memoirs of the Women*

Catharina Schrader (1656–1746) was a professional midwife in Frisia (part of the Netherlands) who kept notebooks of all her cases between the years 1693 and 1745. These number over 3,000—in her most active years, Schrader attended

ney in my life to Wijns to a widow whose husband was called Chlas Jansen, in terrible weather, stormy wind, hard frost. The three of us travelled by sleigh over the ice. The wind blew so hard that one could not stand. Pieces of ice got stuck in my legs, so that blood dripped into my hose. And came at last by sleigh to Wijns, three hours going, we were almost dead. The people carried me into the house and forced my mouth open; and poured brandy into my mouth. There was a good fire. I thawed out a little. First I demanded a bowl with snow and rubbed my hands and feet with it until life came into them. Otherwise I would have been ruined for life. After I recovered again, I went to help the woman. And also her dead husband's brothers had taken everything away from her and had said that she would not give birth; therefore the life of this child was of great consequence.² The woman had a very heavy labour, like her previous labours had also been; she had had two midwives from Leeuwarden [in her previous labours]. I prayed to [The] Lord, and he answered me and delivered the woman of a good, big daughter to the great delight of her and me. This introduction was oppressive for the first time. The Lord be thanked. All well. And the woman got all her belongings back. . . .

20. 1694 on 27 January I was fetched to the wife of Derck Jans, Antie, after another [midwife] had been with her two days and nights. Everything was in a terrible state. The child was deeply embedded, with the feet round the neck [and] trapped behind the pubic bone, the cord round the legs and round the neck. Must be choked. Was stuck two hours in the birth canal. Had to loosen it with enormous difficulty. I had almost given up, but The Lord brought solution. The mother does

²Because the woman's husband was dead and she had no children yet, his brothers stood to inherit much of his property and goods and had already taken it.

well. (The notebook mentions that she was fetched on Sunday morning. The child was dead.) . . .

161. 1697 on 30 June fetched to Oostrum to wife of Gerrben Teyepkes, farmer. There had already been another midwife there for two days. Could only help her with the first [child]. A dead child. But The Lord be thanked, I delivered her of the afterbirth within one hour. They both lay strangely. Turned them. The middle one was dead. The afterbirth was stuck, so that [there were] three children; one living, two dead. So that there were three children. They were big; the parents small, delicate people. The woman fresh and healthy. (The notebook states that the first child was dead, the second alive, and the third dead. Two boys and a girl, who was alive. There were three afterbirths. Schrader managed the deliveries in an hour. The smallest and last child presented with its bottom.) . . .

743. 1702 on 4 May [I] was fetched to Rinsumageest to the former sweetheart of the town clerk, Veenema, who had promised to be hers in marriage, but who had left her on the advice of friends. Was four days in labour. Could not be helped. Then I was fetched and delivered her quickly through the help of my God. Yet a heavy birth, because of the heartache caused to her.³ (The notebook mentions that she delivered a son. Another midwife had been there for three days. According to the baptismal register of Rinsumageest, the child was a daughter.)

796. 1702 on 12 October delivered two sons to the knitter, Swaantie. The first came well, the second with his stomach [first]. Had difficulty with turning [it]. Still all was well for mother and children. The Lord be praised and thanked. . . .

³I.e., because this was a child born out of wedlock.

1672. 1710 on 5 February with Jan Gorrtacke's daughter, Hinke, whose husband, Wattse, was a corn merchant, who was visiting her mother. And delivered her quickly of a son. Lived but half an hour. But, The Lord works mysteriously, I [was] terrified. Found that between the stomach and the belly [there] was an opening as big as a gold guilder, all round it grew a horny border. Out of this hung the intestines with the bowels. Had grown outside the body. One saw there the heart, liver, lungs clear and sharp, without decay. One could touch wholly under the breast. It was worthy to be seen by an artist, but she did not want it to be shown. I inquired [of] the woman if she had also had a fright or mishap. She declared that she was unaware of anything, but that [when] it had been the killing time they had slaughtered a pig. They had hung it on the meat hook, and the butcher had cut out the intestines and the bowels.⁴

1795. 1711 on 10 February I was fetched to Nijkerk to Wattse Jennema, whose wife was called Alltie Jouwkes. She wanted me to attend her, but didn't call for me. And fetched a midwife from Morra, who tortured her for three days. She turned it over to the man-midwife, doctor Van den Berg. He said, he must cut off the child's arms and legs. He took her for dead. And he said, the child was already dead. Then I was fetched in secret. When I came there her husband and friends were weeping a great deal. I examined the case, suspected that I had a chance to deliver [her]. The woman was very worn out. I laid her in a warm bed, gave her a cup of caudle⁵, also gave her something in it;

sent the neighbours home, so that they would let her rest a bit. An hour after her strength awakened again somewhat. And I had the neighbours fetched again. And after I had positioned the woman in labour, [I] heard that the doctor came then to sit by my side. I pulled the child to the birth canal and in half of a quarter of an hour I got a living daughter. And I said to the doctor, here is your dead child, to his shame. He expected to earn a hundred guilders there.⁶ The friends and neighbours were very surprised. The mother and the child were in a very good state. (The notebook maintains that altogether it took Schrader three hours to deliver the child.) . . .

Now I have had more than a hundred bad and heavy complicated births. There was much writing involved. Of these mentioned all were dangerous. And yet there is not one of them, whether or not they had the life and bodily health left to them, that The Lord alone had not ordained; otherwise it would have been impossible many times. Him alone the praise. I have seen over this, and to my wonder, [the memoirs are] there to be used as a guide, or after my death, so someone still may get use or learning from it, to the advantage of my fellowmen. I have [written] this in my eighty-fifth year of old age, 1740 on 18 September. And it shall now be my last light. And I have during the time of my sinful life had a heavy time. And about over four thousand children helped into the world, these including 64 twins and three triplets.

⁵*Caudle*: a warm, thin soup made of grain, sugar, wine, and spices given to invalids and women in childbirth to strengthen them. After a birth, the women who had helped drank caudle together in celebration of the delivery.

⁶A hundred guilders was a huge sum of money. Elite families might pay an experienced midwife fifty guilders for an extremely complicated delivery. For most of her cases, Schrader was paid between one and six guilders; a few were as high as forty guilders and in some she received no fee at all.

⁴Like most early modern people, Schrader believes strongly in the power of the maternal imagination, that what a woman saw or dreamed during pregnancy could affect the child. Pregnant women were advised not to watch executions or butchering or to look at injured or handicapped people.

Secondly, because in the free enjoying of Christ in his own laws, and a flourishing estate of the church and commonwealth, consisteth the happiness of women as well as men.

Thirdly, because women are sharers in the common calamities that accompany both church and commonwealth, when oppression is exercised over the church or kingdom wherein they live; and an unlimited power have been given to Prelates to exercise authority over the consciences of women, as well as men, witness Newgate, Smithfield,³ and other places of persecution, wherein women as well as men have felt the smart of their fury.

Neither are we left without example in scripture, for when the state of the church, in the time of King Ahasuerus, was by the bloody en-

emies thereof sought to be utterly destroyed, we find that Esther the Queen and her maids fasted and prayed, and that Esther petitioned to the King in the behalf of the church: and though she enterprised this duty with the hazard of her own life, being contrary to the law to appear before the King before she were sent for, yet her love to the church carried her through all difficulties, to the performance of that duty.

On which grounds we are emboldened to present our humble petition unto this Honorable Assembly, not weighing the reproaches which may and are by many cast upon us, who (not well weighing the premises) scoff and deride our good intent. We do it not out of any self-conceit, or pride of heart, as seeking to equal ourselves with men, either in authority or wisdom: But according to our places to discharge that duty we owe to God, and the cause of the church, as far as lieth in us, following herein the example of the men which have gone in this duty before us.

³Newgate and Smithfield were places where Protestants had been imprisoned or executed.

QUESTIONS FOR ANALYSIS

1. How would you compare Knox's attitude toward women's rule with Elizabeth I's? Which takes precedence for them, gender or rank?
2. What are the consequences of viewing, as T.E. notes, "all women as either married or to be married" in terms of women's rights to their property and to their persons in cases of domestic violence and rape? Why might granting married women the right to own their own property have been viewed as so threatening? (England did not allow this until 1870.)
3. Knox and T.E. both agree that women's secondary status is permanent. What similarities and differences do you find in the reasons they give for that secondary status?
4. What do the women petitioners want the House of Commons to do? What justifications do they give for their actions? How do these compare with those given by Argula von Grumbach for publishing her pamphlet?
5. How would you compare Knox's view of women's nature with that of the authors of the *Malleus Maleficarum*? What other parallels do you see in the literature about witchcraft and that about women's rule in a country or a household?



THE ENLIGHTENMENT

In the growing cities of early modern Europe, new places for social and intellectual interaction among both men and women developed outside of the formal institutions of universities and academies. Reading clubs, voluntary associations, and weekly gatherings known as salons brought people together to discuss books and poetry, the latest plays, and, by the eighteenth century, political developments. At such meetings, like-minded individuals increasingly criticized what they viewed as unjust and irrational traditions and called for judging everything according to the "enlightened" standards of reason.

Among the many topics open for debate in the Enlightenment was that perennial favorite—"The Woman Question." Did women's secondary status result from innate inferiority or social traditions? If the latter, were these unjust and thus in need of change, or proper and in need of reinforcing? Were the problems in modern society the result of women having too much independence or too little? Was marriage an institution ordained by God or a form of despotism worse than absolute monarchy? Enlightenment considerations of these questions, which emerged in novels, letters, newspapers, and treatises written and read by women and men, created a foundation for later calls for both greater equality and "separate spheres" for the two sexes.

89. Antoine-Léonard Thomas

Essay on the Character, Morals and Mind of Women Across the Centuries, Paris 1772

Antoine-Léonard Thomas (1732–1785) was a writer, teacher, and government official who was a frequent recipient of prestigious prizes for his works. In 1772 he published a long essay surveying the role of women throughout history, building on the lists of noble and praiseworthy women that had been part of defenses of women since Christine de Pizan. Like many Enlightenment writers, he compared his own culture with those of earlier times and other parts of the world, seeing progress but also worrying that the emphasis on sociability, conversation, and literature had gone too far. The end of the book, from which this excerpt is taken, highlights both the problems Thomas sees in contemporary society and the way changes in gender relations would solve them.

In the last years of Louis XIV's reign some terrible sort of seriousness and sadness had spread through the court and part of the nation. At heart, penchants were the same, but they were more repressed. A new court and new ideas changed everything. A bolder sensuality became

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fashionable. Audacity and impetuosity colored all desires, and a part of the veil which covered gallantry was torn away. The decency which had been respected as a duty, was no longer even maintained as a pleasure. Shame was dispensed with on both sides. Fickleness matched excess, and a corruption took shape that was at once profound and frivolous, that, blushing at nothing, laughed instead at everything.

The upsetting of fortunes precipitated this change. Extreme misery and extreme luxury followed from it; and we know what influence these have had. Rarely does a people receive such a quick jolt in regard to property without a prompt alteration in manners and morals. . . .

At the same time, and by the same general trend which carries everything along, the taste for the society of women grew. Seduction was made easier, the opportunities for it increased everywhere. Men lived together less; less timid women became accustomed to throwing off a constraint which honors them. The two sexes were denatured; one placed too much value on being agreeable, the other on independence.

Thus the weight of time, the desire to please, necessarily spread the spirit of society farther and farther; and the time had to come when this sociability pushed to excess, in mixing everything up, succeeded in spoiling everything; and this is perhaps where we are today.

Among a people in whom the spirit of society is carried so far, domestic life is no longer known. Thus all the sentiments of Nature that are born in retreat, and which grow in silence, are necessarily weakened. Women are less often wives and mothers. . . .

Put all of this together and a disturbing frivolity in the two sexes must arise, along with a serious and busy vanity. But what must above all characterize morals, is the fury of appearance, the art of putting everything on the surface, a great importance given to small duties, and a great value to small successes. One must speak gravely of petty things from last night and from the next morning. In the end the soul and the mind must be engaged in a cold activity, which spreads them over a thousand objects

without interesting them in any, and which gives them movement without direction. . . .

As the general mass of enlightenment is greater, and as it is communicated through greater movement, women, without taking the least trouble, are necessarily better instructed; but faithful to their plan, they do not seek enlightenment, except as an ornament of the mind. In learning they wish to please rather than to know, and to amuse rather than to learn.

Moreover, in a state of society where there is a rapid movement and an eternal succession of works and ideas, women, occupied with following this panorama which flees and changes around them constantly, will better understand the idea of the moment in each genre, than eternal ones, and know the dominant ideas, rather than those which are forming. They will thus know the language of the arts better than their principles, and have more specific ideas than systems of thought.

It seems to me that in the sixteenth century women learned through enthusiasm for learning itself. There was in them a profound taste which derived from the spirit of the age and that was nourished even in solitude. In this century, it is less a real taste than a flirtation of the mind; and as with all objects, a luxury, [although] more represented than based on wealth. . . .

It would perhaps be interesting to examine now what must result among us, from all this mixture of movement and ideas, of frivolity and wit, of philosophy in the head and of liberty in morals. It would be interesting to compare the present character of women with that which they have had in all ages; with their timid reserve, and their sweet modesty in England; their mixture of devotion and sensuality in Italy; their ardent imagination and their jealous sensitivity in Spain; their deep retreat in China, and the barriers that, for four thousand years have separated them in this empire from the gaze of men; finally, with the character and the morals that must result for them from their enclosure in almost all of Asia, where, existing for one person alone, not being able to cultivate either their character, or their reason, and destined to have only senses, they are forced by the

bizarreness of their state, to join modesty with sensuality, flirtation with retreat; but to make this parallel, it is enough to point it out.

I will observe only that in this century there is less praise of women than ever before. The sad dignity of funeral panegyrics is now reserved almost exclusively for women who have occupied or were destined to occupy thrones. The philosophe orators only celebrate that which has been useful to humanity as a whole, or to nations. The poets seem to have lost that delicate gallantry which for a long time characterized them. They sing more of pleasures than of love, and are more sensual than sensitive. This general taste for women which is neither love, nor passion, nor even gallantry, but the effect of a cold and artificial habit, no longer arouses anywhere either the imagination or the mind. Among social circles, in the eternal mixing of the sexes, one learns to praise less, because one learns to be more severe. Egoism, judge and rival, sometimes indulgent out of pride, but almost always cruel out of jealousy, has never been more vigilant, in looking for faults and planting the seeds of ridicule. Praise is produced out of enthusiasm; and never during any century has there been less of it, although perhaps it is affected more. Enthusiasm is born of an ardent soul, which creates objects rather than seeing them. Today we see too much: and thanks to enlightenment, we see everything coldly. Vice itself ranks among our pretensions. The less we esteem women, the more we appear to know them. Each one prides himself on not believing in their virtues; and he who would like to be a fop and can not succeed by speaking ill of them, prides himself on a satire that, as the height of ridiculousness, he has no right to make. Such is, with regard to women themselves, the influence of this general spirit of society which is their work, and which they do not cease to vaunt. They are like those Asian rulers who are never honored more than when they are seen less: by communicating too much to their subjects, they encourage them to revolt.

However, despite our morals and our eternal satires, despite our fury to be esteemed without merit, and our even greater fury never to find anything worthy of esteem, there are in our cen-

tury, and in this capital itself, women who would do honor to another century than ours. Several bring together a strong soul and a truly cultivated reason, and bring forth by their virtues, feelings of courage and honor. There are some who could think with Montesquieu,¹ and with whom Fénelon² would love to be moved. There are some who, in opulence, and, surrounded by this luxury that today practically forces avarice to join with pomp and renders souls small, vain, and cruel, take from their property each year a portion for the unfortunate; they are familiar with shelters for the poor, and will learn to be sensitive in shedding their tears there. There are tender wives, who, young and beautiful, pride themselves on their duties, and in the sweetest of attachments offer a ravishing spectacle of innocence and love. Finally, there are mothers who dare to be mothers. In several houses beauty can be seen taking charge of the most tender cares of nature, and by turns pressing in her arms or to a breast the son whom she nourishes with her own milk, while in silence the husband divides his tender regards between son and mother.

Oh! if these examples could restore among us nature and morals! If we could learn how much superior are virtues to pleasures for happiness itself; how much a simple and calm life where nothing is affected, where one exists only for oneself, and not for the gaze of others, where one enjoys by turn friendship, nature, and oneself, is preferable to this anxious and turbulent life, in which one is forever running after a feeling that one does not find! Ah! then, women would regain their empire. It is then that beauty, embellished with morals, would command men, happy to be subjected, and great in their weakness. Then an honorable and pure sensuality seasoning every moment, would make of life an enchanted dream. Then troubles, not being poisoned by remorse, troubles softened by love and shared in friendship, would be a touching sadness rather than a tor-

¹The Baron de Montesquieu (1689–1755) was a French jurist and political philosopher.

²François Fénelon (1651–1715) was a French theologian and writer.

ment. In this state society would doubtless be less active, but the interior of families would be sweeter. There would be less ostentation and more pleasure; less movement and more happiness. One would talk less to please, and one would please oneself more. The days would flow on pure and tranquil: and if in the evening one did not have the sad satisfaction of having dur-

ing the course of the day played at having the most tender interest in thirty random people, one would have at least lived with the one whom one loves; one would have added for the morrow a new charm to the feelings of yesterday. Must such a sweet image be only an illusion? And in this burning and vain society, is there no refuge for simplicity and happiness?

90. Louise d'Épinay's Letter to Abbé Ferdinando Galiani

Thomas's essay sparked responses from several writers, among them the writer Louise d'Épinay (1726–1783), whose home in Paris was a place where Enlightenment philosophers and authors gathered to discuss literary and political issues. She shared her thoughts on it in a letter to Abbé Ferdinando Galiani (1728–1787), a brilliant Neopolitan scholar and writer who had been a regular guest at her home but who had returned to Naples. Galiani answered her letter, but focused on another subject and did not address her concerns.

You haven't written me at all this week, my dear Abbé. I am not well: therefore, I don't have much to tell you. So, I am resolved to read in front of the fire Monsieur Thomas' book: *On the Character, the Morals and the Spirit of Women*. This work just appeared a few days ago; and, if it gives rise to certain ideas, I will share them with you. I will tell you, as usual, everything that comes into my head, provided that my views remain between you and me.

Well then! I've read it and to anyone but you I would be careful about saying what I think, or of taking so definite a tone in the world; but I confess that this [book] seems to me nothing but pompous chattering, very eloquent, a little pedantic, and very monotonous. One finds there some little dressed-up sentences, the sort of sentences that, heard in a small circle, cause people to say of their author, that day and the next: "He has the wit of an angel! He is charming! he is charming!" But when I find them in a work that

has the pretention to be serious, I have real difficulty being satisfied with them. This one doesn't add up to anything. One does not know, after one has read it, what the author thinks, and if his opinion about women is anything but received opinion. He writes with great erudition the history of famous women in all fields. He discusses a bit dryly what they owe to nature, to the institution of society and to education; and then, in showing them as they are, he attributes endlessly to nature that which we obviously owe to education or to institutions, etc.

And then so many commonplaces! "Are they more sensitive? More devoted in friendship than men? Are they more this? Are they more that?" "Montaigne,"¹ he says, "decides the question clearly against women, perhaps like that judge who so feared to be partial that on princi-

¹Michel de Montaigne (1533–1592) was an essayist who wrote, among other topics, on friendship.

ple he always lost cases in which his friends were involved." And then, in another place: "Nature," he says, "makes them like flowers in order to shine softly in the garden from which they rise. One ought thus perhaps to desire a man for a friend for the great occasions, and for everyday happiness, one ought to wish for the friendship of a woman." How small, common, and unphilosophical these details are!

He claims that they are not able to transact business with as much continuity and constancy as men, nor with as much courage in their resolutions. This is, I think, a very false vision; there are a thousand examples of the contrary; there are even some very recent and rather remarkable ones. Moreover, constancy and courage in the pursuit of an object could be, it seems to me, calculated out of idleness, and this would be a strong argument in our favor. I don't have the time to work out this idea to the extent that I would like. But fortunately this is not necessary with you, and you will figure out the rest. "We have seen," says monsieur Thomas, "in [times of] great danger, examples of great courage among women; but this is always when a great passion or an idea that moves them strongly carries them beyond themselves," etc. But is courage anything else among men? Opinion or ambition is what moves them strongly. Were you to attach, in the institution and the education of women, the same prejudice to valor, you will find as many courageous women as men, since cowards are found among them, despite opinion, and the number of courageous women is as great as the number of cowardly men. Of the sum total of physical ailments spread over the face of the earth, women's share is more than two-thirds. It is quite constant also that they suffer them with infinitely more constancy and courage than do men. There is in this neither prejudice nor vanity for support: [woman's] physical constitution has, moreover, become weaker than man's as a result of education. One can thus conclude that courage is a gift of nature among women, just as it is among men, and, to carry this view farther, that it is of the essence of humanity in general to struggle against pain, difficulties, obstacles, etc.

One could, to even greater advantage, make the same calculation regarding moral troubles.

In speaking of the minority of Louis XIV, he says: "All women of this era had this sort of restless agitation produced by partisan spirit: a spirit less far from their character than one would think." That's true, Monsieur Thomas. But, since you would like to be scientific, here was a case for examining whether this restless disposition, which they have by nature, is particular to them and is not found equally among men; whether men, deprived as they are, of serious occupations, excluded from business and strangers to all great causes, would not display this same restless disposition, which is, in your eyes, extinguished by the nourishment given them by the role they play in society. The proof of this is that [this restless disposition] is noticed nowhere as much as among monks and in religious houses. Your work is not at all philosophical, you examine nothing on a grand scale, and once again I do not find any point. . . .

He finishes his work by expressing a wish for a return to morality and to virtue. So be it, certainly! These last four pages are the most agreeable of his book because of the picture he paints of woman as she ought to be; but he sees it as a chimera.

It is well established that men and women have the same nature and the same constitution. The proof lies in that female savages are as robust, as agile as male savages: thus the weakness of our constitution and of our organs belongs definitely to our education, and is a consequence of the condition to which we have been assigned in society. Men and women, being of the same nature and the same constitution, are susceptible to the same faults, the same virtues, and the same vices. The virtues that have been ascribed to women in general, are almost all virtues against nature, which only produce small artificial virtues and very real vices. It would no doubt take several generations to get us back to how nature made us. We could perhaps reach that point; but men would thereby lose too much. They are quite lucky that we are no worse than we are, after all that they have done to denature us through