Essays in Defence of the Female Sex

Essays in Defence of the Female Sex: Custom, Education and Authority in Seventeenth-Century England

By

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To our daughters

Maria Elena and Maëva

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FOREWORD

PAULA R. BACKSCHEIDER

STEVENS EMINENT SCHOLAR, AUBURN UNIVERSITY USA

Eliza Haywood begins *The History of Miss Betsy Thoughtless* (1751) with a brief satire of Samuel Richardson's great novel *Clarissa* (1747-48). She recalls the story of Pyramus and Thisbe, who exchanged love letters through a crevice in a wall as Clarissa and Lovelace had, then eloped, and then died tragically. In her comic opening, "Master Sparkish" had read the Pyramus and Thisbe story and, following its lead, "intrigues with" and ruins Betsy's friend Miss Forward. How did Haywood know that myth? Or other myths that she incorporates into her novels, plays, and periodicals?

The subtitle of *Essays in Defence of the Female Sex: Custom, Education and Authority in Seventeenth-Century England* points to the major battles that many women joined together to fight. There was, perhaps, the most at stake with "custom"; certainly it was the most powerful determinant of education and authority. Throughout the long eighteenth century, women waged a desperate struggle to have their sex primarily defined by what "custom" had done to them rather than by what patriarchal thinkers and common opinion believed that "nature" made them. They sought to reduce the number of limitations that sprung from the category "nature," thereby allowing women to be defined as having greater capacities and, therefore, greater opportunities. They relentlessly expanded and then questioned "custom." Sarah Fyge Egerton wrote,

> Shall I be one, of those obsequious Fools, / That square there [sic] lives, by Customs scanty Rules; […] That all the business of my life must be, / Foolish, dull Trifling, Formality.

Mary, Lady Chudleigh, went further: "Those who are govern'd by Opinion, inslav'd to Custom, […] are Objects of Pity"[1]. Education for men and women was dominated by "custom" normalized by conceptions of "nature." In a time when women in the West have almost equal access to higher education and in the U.S.A. women outnumber men enrolled and

graduating at the undergraduate level, it is hard to remember seventeenth- and eighteenth-century women's struggle for education. In fact, we should be alert to moments that reveal extraordinary learning and pause for a few seconds in silent tribute. Catherine Trotter Cockburn was a philosopher and polemicist praised for her defences of John Locke and her participation in debates now seen as crucial to the Enlightenment[2]. Elizabeth Elstob was one of the most impressive Anglo-Saxon scholars of the century and assisted her brother and members of the Oxford Saxonists in such projects as an edition of the Anglo-Saxon laws while she completed the first grammar of Old English in English. Elizabeth Carter's translation of Epictetus was the standard English translation until at least 1966. Elizabeth Montagu's *Essay on the Writing and Genius of Shakespear* (1769) was a ground-breaking book characterized by deep learning and experience with performances of his plays. It included a "ferocious" defence of Shakespeare against Voltaire's criticisms and took an approach still too rare today, considering plays as much as performance pieces as literary texts[3]. Mary Robinson undertook impressive research before writing *Sappho and Phaon* (1796).

One of the most striking things about women's writing in the long eighteenth century is how clearly they understood the benefits of education. Few were as acerbic as Egerton, who wrote in 1703:

> They fear we should excel their sluggish Parts, / Should we attempt the Sciences and Arts, / Pretend they were design'd for them alone, / So keep us Fools to raise their own Renown; / Thus Priests of old their Grandeur to maintain, / Cry'd vulgar Eyes would sacred Laws Prophane. / […] / And shall we Women now sit tamely by, / Make no excursions in Philosophy, / Or grace our thoughts in tuneful Poetry? / We will our Rights in Learning's World maintain, / Wits Empire, now, shall know a Female Reign; / Come all ye Fair, the great Attempt improve [….][4].

Perhaps accidentally, she is echoing Hannah Woolley's "Hence I am induced to believe, we are debarred from the knowledge of human learning, lest our pregnant Wits should rival towring conceits of our insulting Lords and Masters"[5]. Anne Finch, Countess of Winchilsea, complained that women were told that fashion, dancing, dressing, and activities such as card-playing composed their proper "accomplishments," while "To write, or read, or think, or to enquire/ Wou'd cloud our beauty, and exaust [*sic*] our time". She continued in *The Introduction*,

> How far are we fal'n [from Deborah's time], fal'n by mistaken rules? / And Education's, more then Nature's fools, / Debarr'd from all improvements of the mind[6].

A decade earlier Woolley had supplied a list of exemplary learned women including Cornelia and Niostrata. Such statements multiply as decades pass. In mid-century, Mary Masters wrote,

> From diff'rent Teaching, diff'rent Notions rise, / Hence Women less, and Men appear *more* wise, / But Erudition chang'd, we soon should see, / What stupid Things these Boasters then would be; / Whilst Wisdom, Science, ev'ry Art divine, / In Woman would with fullest Lustre shine [7].

The most fortunate women were the daughters and granddaughters of clergymen, judges, and noblemen, because they often had access to large libraries and lived in homes that valued and enjoyed reading. Churches in the Nonconformist tradition emphasized that believers should have the ability to read and interpret scripture, and this helps explain the striking number of women writers from merchant families. For instance, born in 1632, Katherine Fowler Philips, "the Matchless Orinda," was the daughter of a Presbyterian cloth merchant and attended Mrs. Salmon's school, one of the excellent Nonconformist academies in Hackney. Her translation of Corneille's *Pompée* was performed on the Dublin and London stages (1663 and 1664), perhaps the first British woman to achieve that. Some women were recognized early as protégés. Isaac Newton encouraged Elizabeth Tollet's father to educate her, and Erasmus Darwin did the same for Anna Seward[8]. Lonely struggle, however, is the most common story. Trotter, child of Scottish parents, was largely self-taught although she received some tutoring in logic and Latin[9]. Elstob was carefully taught by her mother, but after her death encountered serious hostility toward education from her uncle, her guardian. When we find these educated women, we often find a record of extraordinary violence, of emotional coercion and even physical force used to control women and push them away from learning. Masters' parents resisted her learning anything beyond "common Household Affairs" and writes of being "brow beat and discountenanced" for writing poetry, yet she persevered. Mary Wollstonecraft, who was beaten by her father, had a year or so at a day school and taught herself everything else, including several languages. Even Anna Seward, who came to be known as Britannia's Muse, was admonished that sewing was a more appropriate activity than writing poetry.

Women found creative ways to be educated and to educate themselves and each other. And they pointed out in a variety of tones—ridicule, anger, resignation, declaration—that many husbands "considered a wife no more than an upper servant, bound to study and obey, in all things" (507). And that meant study the husband's every whim and desire. *Betsy Thoughtless* begins with the heroine stashed away in boarding school: "The old gentleman was so well pleased with having placed his daughter where she was so likely to improve in all the accomplishments befitting her sex, that he never suffered her to come home, even at breaking-up times, when most of the other young ladies did so"[10]. "Befitting her sex" divides the world, confining women to "accomplishments" rather than serious education that might prepare them for life or for supporting themselves economically. As the Bathsua Makin's Postscript quoted in this volume makes clear by its typography, the valued education of a woman was composed of "works of all sorts," dancing, music, singing, writing, and keeping household accounts, while Makin in smaller print promised languages, especially Latin, the great classical language, and French, the language of court and the envied, more prestigious nation across the Channel. Knowledge of French was described throughout the century as an "ornament" for English women. Haywood's novel is punctuated by violence, including Betsy's husband flinging her pet squirrel at the marble mantelpiece, "dash[ing] it to pieces" (507). Egerton's poem is one of the first to compare wives to slaves, and she writes, "From the first dawn of Life, unto the Grave,/ Poor womankind's in every State, a Slave". She calls marriage "the fatal Slavery, / The Husband with insulting Tyranny / Can have ill Manners justify'd by Law; / For Men all join to keep the Wife in awe" (593). Three years earlier in *Some Reflections on Marriage*, Mary Astell had pointed out that a man will often call himself a woman's "Slave a few days, but it is only in order to make her his all the rest of his Life." She stated matter-of-factly that married men were inclined to become tyrants and had called many wives "*poor Female Slaves*"[11].

Essays in Defence of the Female Sex is about the pioneering women who took brave, decided action, who joined a very few men in proposing enlightened education for women. It was their generation that began serious critiques of normative models of marriage and began to answer some of the most public and publicized definitions of and attacks on women's "nature." They began to combat such proliferating statements captured in a very influential one in the *Tatler*: "[…] there is a sort of Sex in Souls […] the soul of a Man and that of a woman are made very unlike" (16 May 1710). The women featured in this book were leaders in opposing

this opinion. Manuela D'Amore quotes Woolley: "Nature hath differ'd mankind into Sexes, yet she never intended any difference in the Intellect" and "A Woman's capacity is no way inferior to mans in the reception of any sort of learning".

They were the women who began to create the space that became what Martine Watson Brownley has theorized to be an adjunct public sphere. She traces the periodic efforts to limit women's public sphere participation (such as requiring ability to bear arms, property ownership, or passing a written test) and locates the establishment of this adjunct public sphere in the nineteenth century when "the public realm of 'the social,' where questions of health, poverty, delinquency, and other formerly familial problems were adjudicated" was feminized[12]. Education was quickly added to this list, and teachers, nurses, and social workers became overwhelmingly female. If women chafe at being pushed toward the adjunct rather than the authentic public sphere now[13] and see the negative impact on women including gendered job categorization and compressed pay, that space had to exist before women could escape the dungeon of conceptions of their nature and limited capabilities. Makin's curricula, which she described as fighting "barbarous Custom," recalled the education of Queen Elizabeth and helped prepare the way for the first major feminist movement, that of the 1690s. As D'Amore writes, a major goal was to encourage men and women to "stand against prejudice".

By the end of the century, the benefits of the existence of the adjunct public sphere are clear. As the novels of the last quarter of the eighteenth century prove, employment for women was a serious problem. In Frances Burney's *Wanderer* (1814), Juliet waits for hours, sometimes for half a day, in antechambers only to have her pay for commissioned needlework delayed and withheld altogether for the music lessons that she gives because the amount owed was allegedly so small, and Mrs. Morley in Mary Robinson's *Natural Daughter* (1799) finds and then loses a series of jobs that include strolling actress, governess, and novelist. Indeed, Wollstonecraft worked in most of the occupations available to middleclass women and found them all drudgery.

The expanding adjunct public sphere, however, was improving conditions, and women were clearly following in the paths that the women in this book blazed. Woolley's *Companion* notes that before she was fifteen, she kept "a little School," and women in increasing numbers did the same, some to use the gifts God gave them and some for sustenance.

Widows are often portrayed in novels as keeping schools, as is Mrs. Teachum in Sarah Fielding's *Governess* (1749). Education became an acknowledged women's domain. Wollstonecraft ran a school for girls and published *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters* (1787). Much more successfully, Anna Laetitia Barbauld and her husband opened a school for boys that was so renowned that children were sent from as far away as New York and the West Indies[14].She followed in the footsteps of the women in this book by writing the four-volume *Lessons for Children* and other educational materials. A sign of the acceptance of teaching as an occupation for women is the fact that Hannah Moore was carefully and comprehensively educated because her father were was preparing her to teach.

Sarah Trimmer was a leader in the Sunday School movement and, as Hannah More and other women did, began to model the kinds of social work for which women became famous in the nineteenth century. Her *Oeconomy of Charity* (1787) created jobs for women in this branch of the public sphere and promised to benefit society by curbing the "dreadful," threatening unrest all over the kingdom. The title page advertises that it will explain "the establishment of schools of industry under female inspection." Dedicated to the queen, whom she compliments for her patronage of a school for girls at Windsor, the text credits her for the spread of religion among "that rank of people […] on whose integrity and industry [the nation's] welfare principally depends." She asserts that she is addressing "her own sex" to explain "the great advantages that would […] arise […] from their taking a more active part than it is at present usual for them to take in the management" of the schools[15]. Combining education and social work became common, as did the dual promise of the practice of Christian charity and control of the laboring classes. The Bluestocking women and many others paid for the education of women and much of their philanthropy was directed at women. The novel *Millenium Hall* (1754) by Sarah Scott is filled with working women of every class. The central characters establish a refuge for themselves and others by designing and administering a utopian commune where women work at a variety of jobs and find safety and financial security. There refuge is a model both of philanthropic charity and shrewd industrialization. Like Judith Drake, many women dispensed medicines and health advice to less fortunate women, and the gatherings of the sick and needy at designated places near the homes of wealthy women were common throughout the century and may be seen as encouraging helping occupations such as nurse practitioner.

These essays and selections from major texts provide an effective overview of important early women's efforts to improve the situation and future of their sex. The struggle that is far from won involves the third term in their subtitle: authority. Their essays open fascinating explorations. Clearly Woolley, Makin, Astell, Drake, and "Eugenia" were authorities, as were many of the women mentioned in my preface, but which of them were recognized as authorities and by whom and for what reasons? What social, rhetorical, and genre choices did they make that either increased or decreased acceptance of their authority? How did their sex both award and limit their authority? Are these factors still in play? The identification of custom, education, and authority as key battlegrounds in *Essays in Defence of the Female Sex* is astute and opens new lines of inquiry.

Notes

[1] Quoted in Paula R. Backscheider, *Eighteenth-Century Women Poets and Their Poetry* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005), 100; and see discussion of the nature versus custom debate, 99-109.

[2] See Melanie Bigold's illuminating discussion in *Women of Letters, Manuscript Circulation, and Print Afterlives in the Eighteenth Century*, forthcoming from Palgrave Macmillan.

[3]See Elizabeth Eger, "'Out rushed a Female to Protect the Bard': The Bluestocking Defense of Shakespeare," Huntington Library Quarterly 65, no. 1&2 (2002): 127-51, quotation, 148.

[4] Sarah Egerton, "The Emulation," in British Women Poets of the Long Eighteenth Century: An Anthology, ed. Paula R. Backscheider and Catherine E. Ingrassia (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 2009), 593-94. Quotations from this poem are from this source.

[5] [Hannah Woolley], *The Gentlewomans Companion; or A Guide to the Female Sex: Containing Directions of Behaviour, in all Places, Companies, Relations, and Conditions, from their Childhood down to Old Age* (London: 1673), 1. Also William St. Clair and Irmgard Maessen, *Conduct Literature for Women, 1640-1710*, vol. IV (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2002), 187.

[6] Anne Finch, "The Introduction," written before 1689, in British Women Poets, ed Backscheider and Ingrassia, 800-802. In the Old Testament, Deborah went to battle with Barak against Sisera and then celebrated the victory in a famous son; she is sometimes styled, "the judge and restorer of the house of Israel," *Judges* 4, 5.

[7] This poem is in letter 18 in Mary Masters, *Familiar Letters and Poems on Several Occasions* (London, 1755), 77-78.

[8] See Claudia Kairoff, *Anna Seward and the End of the Eighteenth Century* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2012).

[9] Literacy rates were higher in Scotland than in England until the last quarter of the eighteen century; on her education see *ODNB*. Information on these women comes from this source and from my *Eigtheenth-Century Women Poets and Their Poetry*.

[10] Eliza Haywood, *The History of Miss Betsy Thoughtless*, ed. Christine Blouch (Peterborough, Ontario, Canada: Broadview Press, 1998), 27. Quotations are from this edition.
[11] Mary Astell, *Some Reflections on Marriage* (London, 2nd. Ed., 1703), 25, 28-9.
[12] Martine Watson Brownley, *Deferrals of Domain: Contemporary Women Novelists and the State* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000), 41-42. She sees "the social sphere" protecting high politics as a male enclave and points out that these topics are still called "women's issues," 41-47.
[13] Readers often forget that Jürgen Habermas described three, not two, spheres: the state (the "sphere of public authority"), the private (civil society and the family), and the authentic public sphere where public opinion is formed, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, trans. Thomas Burger (Cambridge, MA: MITH Press, 1991), 30-31.
[14] See the *Oxford Dictionary of National Bibliography* (*ODNB*).
[15] Sarah Trimmer, *The Œconomy of Charity* (London, 1787), i-v, 1-4.

PREFACE

Essays in Defence of the Female Sex. Custom, Education and Authority in Seventeenth-Century England was started early in 2009, but it has its roots in a much longer period of study. Part I, in particular, can also be considered the product of a Ph.D research activity which was carried out at Université Paris 3 Sorbonne-Nouvelle[1]; most of the contents in Part II had been selected in the years 2006-2008 to investigate women's literary prose in early modern England at the University of Catania (Italy)[2]. The necessity of going even more in depth, and of creating a wider and a more complete picture of that type of production in that specific period, is at the basis of the choice to collaborate in writing this two-part volume.

The topic, women's legacy and writings in the long seventeenth century, is not new to academic criticism. Key volumes on the making of early feminism as a socio-cultural phenomenon in Britain have been published since the late 1990s[3], and today original texts are included in anthologies, or published in facsimile form[4], yet the number of monographic studies on the most active figures of this period is still relatively low[5]. What are the reasons for such a contradiction? This may be due to the fact that women rarely signed their works[6], that fame and circulation were limited to upper-class intellectual salons, and that the later generation of writers had a stronger impact on the cultural debate of their times. Only recently, in fact, has this phase in proto-feminist pamphleteering been considered strategic in the fight against the fundamentals of patriarchal society[7].

The aim of this volume is to provide the reader with background knowledge about women's prose writing, and to show that the presence of opposite elements like tradition and innovation, as well as utopia and realism, made their reform projects more acceptable for men[8], and laid the bases for the rights movements in the following centuries.

The link between this complex (transition) period and the more revolutionary feminist activity at the end of the Enlightenment has been shown by Paula Backscheider: Anna Laetitia Barbauld's[9], Sarah Trimmers's[10] and Hannah More's[11] pedagogic practices remind us of Bathsua Makin's pragmatic approach; figures like Sarah Fyge Egerton[12],

Anne Finch[13], and Sarah Fielding[14], were probably inspired by Hannah Woolley and Mary Astell when they associated knowledge with freedom.

In fact, women's access to formal education in Seventeenth-century England is one of the key issues in Part I, *From Texts to Context: Women's Writings under the Stuarts: Sources, Forms and Issues*. The wide spectrum of writings that are mentioned and described not only reflects the distance between women's real nature and patriarchal stereotypes, but also shows that it was necessary to re-examine traditional syllabuses, and create new public educational spaces, to cope with the problem of sex inequality.

Hannah Wolley, Bathsua Makin, Mary Astell, Judith Drake and "Eugenia" have been chosen to represent the *querelle des femmes* in Restoration England. Apart from the critics' interest in most of their works[15], as shown for instance by the 2000-2002 volumes of *Conduct Literature for Women, 1500-1640*, and *1640-1710*[16], it seems obvious that the compromise these women found may be contradictory, but it was instrumental both to the gradual passage from conduct literature to early feminist pamphleteering, and to the acquisition of further intellectual/social freedoms. Mainly focusing attention on texts, in fact, Part II, *From Context to Texts: Signs of Proto-Feminism at the End of the Century: Tradition and Innovation*, closely analyses them, and demonstrates that new interpretation paths are certainly possible.

Tradition and aspiration to change, then; utopian reform projects leading to more advanced (concrete) forms of education and emancipation for women: the rationale in *Essays in Defence of the Female Sex* is constantly to parallel more general information with precise textual references. The presence of a six-part annotated appendix section also reveals that it can be used by both specialist and non-specialist readers. As a reading/hermeneutical tool and for didactic purposes too.

Notes

[1] See Michèle Lardy, *L'éducation des filles de la noblesse et de la gentry en Angleterre au XVIIème siècle* (Berne: Peter Lang, 1994).

[2] The research projects funded by the University of Catania in the years 2006-2008 were mostly focused on Restoration and Augustan England. They also resulted in Manuela D'Amore, "A Fascinating 'Other'. Bodies as Metonyms of 'a New World' in Lady Montagu's *Turkish Embassy Letters*", GRAAT on line, n. 5, vol. I (2009): 67-82; and Manuela D'Amore, "Donne comete nell'Inghilterra tra '600 e

'700," in *Studi in onore di Nicolò Mineo*, ed. Salvatore C. Sgroi and Salvatore Trovato, vol. II (Acireale-Roma: Bonanno, 2009), 513-536.

[3] See, among others, Helen Wilcox, *Women and Literature in England, 1500-1700* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1996); Deirdre Raftery, *Women and Learning in English Writing, 1600-1900* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1997); Jacqueline Eales, *Women in Early Modern England 1500-1700* (London: UCL, 1998); Anita Pacheco, *Early Women Writers 1600-1700* (London: Longman, 1998); Patricia Crawford, *Women's Worlds in Seventeenth-Century England: A Sourcebook* (London: Routledge, 1999); Susan Kingsley Kent, *Gender and Power in England 1640-1990* (London, Routledge, 1999); Merry E. Weiser, *Women and Gender in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); George L. Justice and Nathan Tinker, eds., *Women's Writings and the Circulation of Ideas* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002); Cristina Malcomson and Mihoko Suzuki, *Debating Gender in Early Modern England* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002); Patricia Demers, *Women's Writings in English: Early Modern England* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005); Edith Snook, *Women, Reading, and the Cultural Politics of Early Modern England* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2005); Kimberley Anne Coles, *Religion, Reform and Women's Writing in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008); Julie Campbell and Anne Larsen, *Early Modern Women and Transnational Community of Letters* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2009); Elizabeth Mazzola, *Women's Wealth and Women's Writing in Early Modern England. Little Legacies and the Materials of Motherhood* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2009); Anke Gilleir, Alicia Montoya, Suzanna Van Dijk, *Women Writing Back, Writing Back Women. Transnational Perspectives from the Middle Ages to the Dawn of the Modern Era* (Leiden: Brill, 2010); and Ulricke Tanke, *'Bethinke of Thy Selfe' in Early Modern England. Writing Women's Identities* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2010).

[4] Readers should consider Charlotte Otten, ed., *English Women's Voices, 1540-1700* (Gainsville, University Presses of Florida, 1992); Anita Pacheco, ed., *A Companion of Early Modern Women's Writings* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002); Katherine Binhammer, Jeanne Wood, *Women and Literary History."For There She Was"* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2003); and Arturo Pacheco and Anita Pacheco, *A Companion to Early Modern Women's Writings* (Bognor Regis: Wiley, 2008).

[5] See, among others, Paul Salzman, ed., *Early Modern Women's Writing: An Anthology 1560-1700* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); Anita Pacheco, ed., *A Companion to Early Modern Women's Writing* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002); Laura Lunger Knoppers, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Early Modern Women's Writing* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009). However rich and varied, these volumes provide readers with little biographic information about the chosen authors, and no critical appreciation of their works.

[6] The contents in Part I will prove that in the seventeenth century women had a limited education, and could not propose themselves as intellectuals. Makin, Astell, and Drake, for instance, chose not to sign the works examined in Part II of this book. As for "Woolley" and "Eugenia", their true identity is still a mystery, and authorship problems have not been solved yet.

[7] More details on the critical debate on early feminism in England is in Stephanie Hodgson-Wright, "Early Feminism," in *The Routledge Companion to Feminism and Postfeminism*, ed. Sarah Gamble (London: Routledge, 2006), 3-24.

[8] Even though early feminist tracts were addressed to women, men readers were considered too. Bathsua Makin, for instance, wanted to answer all their possible (misogynistic) objections; Mary Astell was very clear about the fact that the Monastery experience would make her "Ladies of Quality" better wives for their husbands. For textual evidence and interpretation, see the related chapters in Part II.

[9] Anna Laetitia Barbauld (1743-1825) was a successful professional writer and a noted teacher. As an intellectual, she promoted the values of both the Enlightenment and Early Romanticism. Her most renowned works are*: Poems* (1773), *Lessons for Children* (1778-1788), *An Essay on the Origin and Progress of Novel Writing* (1810), *The Female Speaker* (1811), and *Eighteen Hundred and Eleven* (1812).

[10] A critic, a writer and a philanthropist, Sarah Trimmer (1741-1810) contributed to the development of children's literature in the eighteenth century. She founded several Sunday schools and charity schools in her parish, and wrote textbooks and pedagogic manuals. Her main works are: *Easy Lessons for Young Children* (1790), *The Little Spelling book for Young Children* (1791), *The Guardian of Education* (1802-1806), and *Instructive Tales: Collected from the Family Magazine* (1810).

[11] The daughter of a schoolmaster, Hannah More (1745-1833), started her career as a teacher, and then became a writer. In the mid 1770s, she met David Garrick, Samuel Johnson, and the Bluestockings. When the French Revolution broke out, however, she published *Village Politics* (1793) to express her conservative position. In the following years she wrote *Strictures on the Modern System of Female Education* (1799) *and Hints towards Forming the Character of a Young Princess* (1805).

[12] Sarah Fyge Egerton (1660-1723) is the author of *The Female Advocate* and of a tribute to John Dryden, *Nine Muses*, both written in 1686. Her *Poems on Several Occasions together with a Pastoral* date back to 1703.

[13] A well-educated lady, Anne Finch (1661-1720) experimented with all forms of poetry, and employed the Pindaric ode too. She mocked La Fontaine's fables, and wrote sullen verse like *A Nocturnal Reverie* and *Ardelia to Melancholy*.

[14] The sister of Henry Fielding, Sarah began to write in 1742. Her *The Adventures of David Simple*, one of the earliest sentimental novels, was published anonymously in 1744. Other significant works are: *The Governess, or the Female Academy* (1749), *Remarks on Clarissa* (1749), and *The Lives of Cleopatra and Octavia* (1757). She died in 1768.

[15] Bibliographical references on the latest critical contribution to these women authors' productions can be found in Chapters Three-Seven of Part II.

[16] Full bibliographic references for these texts are: St. Clair, William, and Irmgard Maessen, eds., *Conduct Literature for Women, 1500-1640* (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2000); and St. Clair, William, and Irmgard Maessen, eds., *Conduct Literature for Women, 1640-1710* (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2002).

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—Manuela D'Amore and Michèle Lardy
October 2012

List of Abbreviations

AE	*An Essay to Revive the Ancient Education of Gentlewomen*
BWC	*The Bride-Womans Counseller*
DFS	*An Essay in Defence of the Female Sex*
ECCO	*Eighteenth Century Collections Online*
EEBO	*Early English Books Online*
FA	*The Female Advocate; or A Plea for the just Liberty of the Tender Sex*
GC	*The Gentlewoman's Companion; or a Guide to the Female Sex*
LD	*The Ladies Defence: or A DIALOGUE between Sir John Brute, Sir William Loveall, Melissa, and a Parson*
ODNB	*Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*
OED	*Oxford English Dictionary*
SP I	*A Serious Proposal to the Ladies, For the Advancement of their true and greatest Interest* (1694)
SP II	*A Serious Proposal to the Ladies. Wherein a Method is offer'd for the Improvement of their Minds* (1697)

A NOTE ON EDITORIAL POLICY

Apart from traditional study tools, online archives like the Internet Medieval History Sourcebook, Early English Books Online (EEBO), and Eighteenth Century Collections Online (ECCO) were essential for this work, as they offered valid alternatives to first paper editions. Other useful resources were the Oxford English Dictionary for archaisms, and the Oxford Dictionary of National Biography to offer the reader short biographies of the writers mentioned in both Part I and II.

The works appearing in this volume, either as quotations or as more extensive extracts in the Appendices, cover a large time-span. Seventeenth-century English is somewhat different from current-day English, as the standardisation of spelling in particular did not begin until the latter half of the century.

We have decided to keep spelling variants and transcribe the texts as they appear in their original version, always using first editions when accessible on EEBO for seventeenth-century works. The only modernisation for early texts is that of "i" into "j", "v" into "u" and "vv" into "w". Punctuation has not been modernised since it does not impair comprehension of the works. Italics have been kept as in the original writings, and capitalisation, which was often used as a form of emphasis, was respected. Archaic or obsolete words however have been clarified in the notes.

These choices were made in order to preserve the original flavour of the texts while making them accessible to non-specialists.

PART I
FROM TEXTS TO CONTEXT

WOMEN'S WRITINGS UNDER THE STUARTS
SOURCES, FORMS AND ISSUES

MICHÈLE LARDY

CHAPTER I

"THE ENGLISH GENTLEWOMAN, DRAWNE OUT TO THE FULL BODY"[1] FROM PASSIVE OBJECTS OF CONDUCT-LITERATURE TO ACTIVE SUBJECTS OF THEIR OWN WRITINGS: A WIDE SPECTRUM OF COMPLEX FEMALE FIGURES

Women's nature, education and status in society were highly controversial issues in the seventeenth century[2]. A great many texts discussed these topics, antagonistic positions were defended, similar arguments were used over and over again by detractors and champions of women.

Many books written by male authors discussed the nature of women, only to add more arguments to a tradition going back to classical antiquity which constantly presented them as flawed creatures, inferior in every respect. Medieval and Renaissance writers had propagated this vision, which was still thriving in the seventeenth century.

This view was spread with the development of printing which facilitated the dissemination of misogynistic pamphlets to a wide readership made up of the literate members of the nobility, gentry and mercantile classes. These writers drew their inspiration from the myth of Pandora, as well as the writings of Greek and Roman authors whom they often misquoted to demonstrate women's inferiority. Other sources of inspiration were the Bible and early Christian texts which, referring to the story of Eve, portrayed women as weak creatures who were nevertheless to be feared because they wielded considerable powers of seduction.

Moreover, various treatises, some of which were reprints of works from the Sixteenth century, such as Thomas Becon's *Catechism* (1564)[3], or Juan Luis Vivès's *The Instruction of a Christen Woman*[4], translated from Latin into English in 1541, were quite popular well into the seventeenth century. They examined not only women's nature, but also children's place within the family, their duty towards their parents: giving instruction as to how they should be brought up, these treatises enable the reader to visualise the ideal young lady, mother and housewife of those times.

Finally, conduct literature–advice books as well as conduct books written either for parents or for children, and even specifically for young ladies– offered guidance on how to lead a virtuous life and behave in society[5]. In these didactic texts, women were the objects of men's discourse, a discourse which aimed at moulding them to fit a male-defined ideal, that of the virtuous, humble, silent, and above all submissive daughter and wife. These works allow us discover a system of values; they are revealing of the mental representations that defined the role of women and set standards of behaviour. They do not reflect reality, which was far more complex.

Rather few testimonies written by women have come down to us. Indeed, the degree of literacy was lower among women than men, even if it increased considerably throughout the century among the nobility, gentry and mercantile classes. Women were moreover relentlessly being told that silence was an eminent virtue to be cultivated. From the early seventeenth century, however, some took a bold step and challenged the law of silence: no longer passive objects of discourse, they became active subjects.

Compared to the great number of works written by men, it might be argued that few books were written by women. Indeed, there were not many female authors in the first half of the century who wrote with the intent of being published[6]. Most of those who ventured into the masculine sphere of writing felt bound to justify this boldness. Their first and foremost arguments were motherhood and religion, two domains in which it was acceptable for a female opinion to be voiced. Indeed, the seventeenth century saw the publication of advice books written by women who, as mothers and Christians, stepped out of their traditional role because they cared for their sons' and daughters' upbringing and salvation. Fearing they might die in childbirth, or when their children were