

The Century of Women

*Enlightenment Ideals of
Women in Print Culture*

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Writing at end of a life and literary career which had spanned much of the eighteenth century, Pietro Chiari branded the age he lived in ‘the Century of Women’ (see item #277)⁴. Rebecca Messbarger borrowed this idea for her eponymous book (2002) recognizing that “women stood as a leitmotif at the centre of Italian Enlightenment discourse”⁵; for Paula Findlen, Chiari’s epithet “captured the incessant fascination with educated, independent-minded, and socially unconventional women that characterized the eighteenth century.”⁶ While Findlen and Messbarger hardly intended to limit their analyses to a handful of 18th century Italian women and their works, the joy of this bookseller’s labors suggests that there is ample – and often thrilling – opportunity to apply these critical models to a vast trove of less canonical literature, across a much wider swathe of Western Europe.

⁴ Pietro Chiari, *Il Secolo Corrente: Dialoghi d'una Dama col suo Cavaliere, scritta da lei medesima* (Venice: Fratelli Bassaglia, 1783), p. 1 (“Dama: ‘Gran Secolo è questo nostro, Secolo illuminato, e di meraviglie ripieno!’”)

⁵ Rebecca Messbarger, *The Century of Women: Representations of Women in Eighteenth-Century Italian Public Discourse* (University of Toronto Press, 2002), p. 3

⁶ Paula Findlen et al., *Italy's Eighteenth Century: Gender and Culture in the Age of the Grand Tour* (Stanford University Press, 2009), p. 18

An Argument for Obscurity

We often think of the long eighteenth century as a well-trodden scholarly path, in which most currents of thought have been well-described; print runs were large, allowing for dramatic societal changes to be substantially reflected in the materials which survive today. The present collection argues against this by bringing to light hundreds of lesser-known texts, and particularly lesser-known women writers. Just because Fontette de Sommetry's *Doutes sur les Opinions reçues dans la Société* (1782) survives in only a handful of copies, and perhaps was not widely-read or critically received, does not mean that the questions she asked of her supposedly 'enlightened' society and her sex's station within it should not be more widely-discussed today. Particular care was thus taken in the present collection to select items otherwise poorly-preserved in institutional collections; thus, some 48% of the items are not recorded in any US institution; nearly 50 items are wholly unrecorded in any library database worldwide.

Unlike the remarkable Lisa Unger Baskin Collection at Duke, the relatively modest *Century of Women* does not focus on women as writers (or women in the workforce). Instead, in its attempt to gather examples of idealized and non-idealized female behavior, *The Century of Women* seeks to include as many men writing about women as women writing about women; after all, both positive and negative representations of the female sex were heavily influenced by the predominantly male discourse of the time. The result is that a third of the items in the collection were authored by women; many more bear some form of female ownership inscription. Among women writers, the collection avoids some of the more canonical names, which are already well-represented institutionally, in favor of women whose stories have been somewhat less 'told' – for example in the rich peritexts of Louise-Geneviève de Saintonge, who adapted Montemayor's famous novel *La Diana*, with some rather daring improvements to its plot (1699, 1 US copy); or Marianne-Agnès Pillement Fauques' semi-autobiographical *Memoires de Mlle d'Oran* (1755, no US copy), in which the narrator often disguises herself as her own brother in order to enjoy all of the trappings of Parisian society. Virtually every work in the present collection offers a peritextual introduction or translator's preface in which we learn something of the woman who created it or the writer's ideas on the role of women in society.

The Century of Women is also rich in popular didactic literature aimed at women and young girls. Although sometimes a little prosaic and moralizing for the modern palette, it is certainly worthy of further study. For example, in the popular French tale of a pious young Sicilian girl, 'Virginie', understandably forgotten by modern scholars, we find an entire chapter describing the ways in which Virginie and her boon companion Rosalie avoid entering into a romantic relationship. They are advised to form a set of six ground-rules: they only see each other during pious exercises or domestic chores; they never talk about current affairs; when they are together they can leave each other's company without feeling any obligation to remain; etc. By strictly observing these regulations, "the affection between these two friends remained pure... But if they were to deviate from these rules, the danger existed that their amity would have degenerated into wrongdoing, and caused them to commit many mistakes..."⁴.

⁴ Michel-Ange Marin, *Virginie, ou la Vierge Chrétienne. Histoire Sicilienne, pour servir de Modèle aux Filles qui aspirent à la Perfection* (Avignon: Giroud, 1758), Vol I, pp. 62-64.

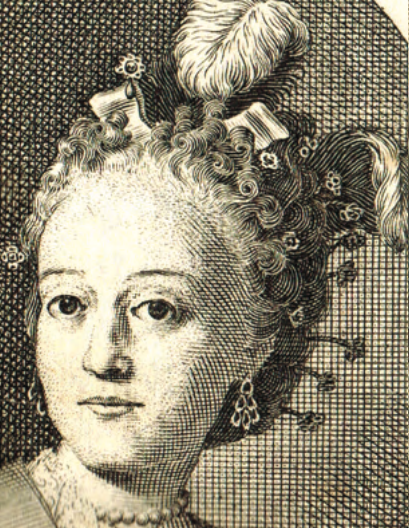
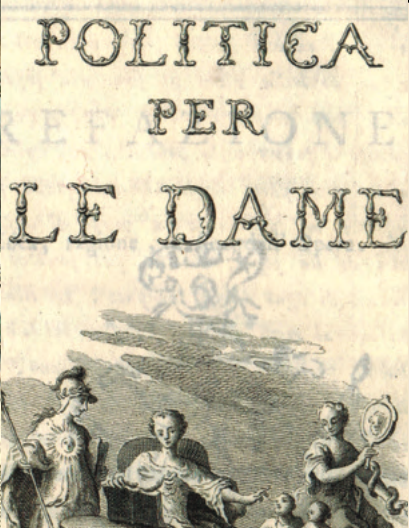


Finally, the collection often focuses on the Platonic ‘ideal types’ of women both explicitly prescribed in the dozens of conduct books found here, as well as suggested in the hundreds of depictions of female heroines, written for popular consumption by both male and female authors. On the other hand, particularly fascinating are the examples in which men write about women subverting their traditional (and often gender) roles: thus we find the *De Vrouwelyke Cartouche* in which the heroine becomes a highway robber; *L’Heroine Mousquetaire* based on the life of the Comtesse de Meyrac; and many of the novels of Pietro Chiari, in which the female protagonist takes on countless male attributes: engaging in piracy, murdering wantonly, travelling across the world, creating her own fortune, etc etc. Finally, women as producers and translators of content, and the reactions which they provoked, also form a core of the collection. On a certain level, *The Century of Women* thus offers a barebones history of misogyny and anti-misogyny; and above all a history of the changing societal perceptions of what it meant to be a woman from the 17th century onwards.

The collection consists of 450 titles including a handful of manuscripts, predominantly in French, Italian, German, and Dutch. Chronologically, the collection runs from 1595 to 1829. 62 items date to before 1700; 327 were printed between 1700 and 1800; and 62 items were printed after 1800.

The price is \$450,000.

A note on duplication: a spot-check of duplication with existing institutional collections reveals that Harvard, Princeton, and Yale hold around 10% of these titles; UCLA holds around 15%, and all other major libraries including Duke and Stanford hold around 5%. Any institution which acquires the collection reserves the right to have any duplicated items refunded on a pro-rata basis; a list of duplicated titles is easily available upon request.



POLITICA
PER
LE DAME

U L I E

The following pages present a few selections from the corpus.

The *Querelle des Femmes*

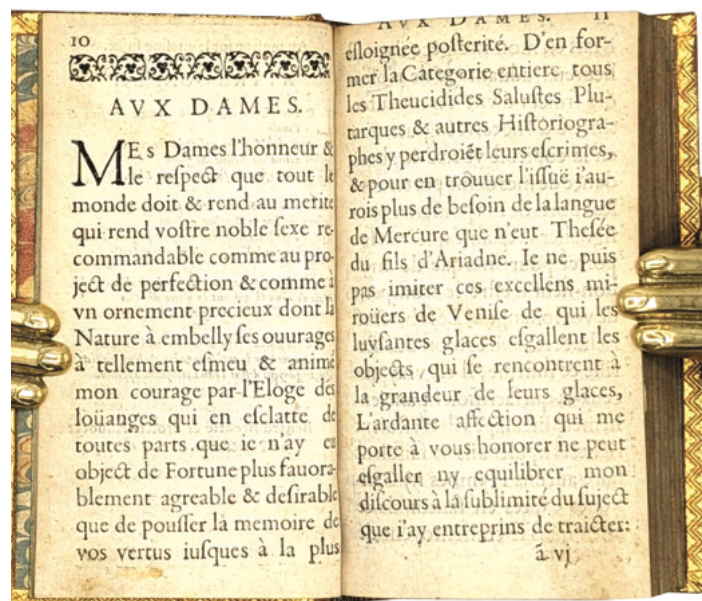


Although most famously associated with early 17th century France, reverberations of the *querelle des femmes* can be felt well into the late 18th century. Notable defenses of women include Simon Gedik's *Defensio sexus muliebris* (Leipzig, 1595) and Jan van Beverwyck's 'Of the Excellence of the Female Gender' (Dordrecht, 1643), which offers an early portrait and praise of Anna Maria van Schurmann. The very rare *Satyres sur les Femmes Bourgeoises* (1713, no US copy) excoriates in image and text women who 'rise above their station'; and the celebrated 'Scourge of Humanty' (1774) is found here in its first edition, with an evocative frontispiece.

PICTURED: a preening wife ignores her dying husband. Frontispiece to *Lo Scoglio dell' Umanità* (Venice, 1774)

One of the highlights of the collection is the fourth recorded copy of *Le Bouclier des Dames* (1621), a little-known treatise which includes the unique argument that women cannot be inferior to men, because transsexuality and androgyny have always existed in human societies, and throughout history even married women have suddenly changed sex, married, and impregnated their wives.

PICTURED: preface to the sole edition of Louis Bermen de la Martiniere's *Le Bouclier des Dames, contenant toutes leurs belles perfections* (Rouen, 1621).

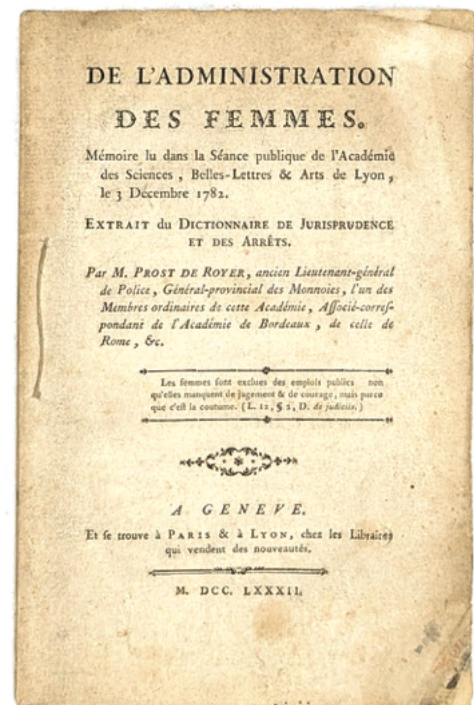




PICTURED: Anna Maria van Schurman (1607-1678) held up as an example of 'excellence' by her contemporary Jan van Beverwyck in *Van de Wtnementheyt des Vrouwelicken Geslachts* (1643), alongside nearly 600 other modern and historical women.

A radical proposal printed in Geneva in 1782 demanded that women be allowed into public service and administrative posts. The author, a respected jurist and friend of Voltaire, asks the reader “Is it not rather our jealousy which, considering women as property, has more or less reduced them to servitude, and degraded the qualities which the Creator had distributed to them? Is it not this unjust and barbarous division which, in our guilds, assigns us men lucrative, sedentary and easy-going trades, leaving women nothing but domesticity, debauchery, despair, and misery?”.

PICTURED: in *De l'Administration des Femmes* (Geneva, 1782) - found in one other US copy



Women Writing about Women

The 19 year-old poet Virginia Bazani Cavazzoni wrote most of her *Divertimenti Poetici* about the specific women of her circle (Rosa Agnese Bruni, who returns the favor; Gonzaga Rivora; Cristina Strozzi; Trotti Gonzaga; Eleonora Strozza; Clarina Rangoni; Olimpia Arrivabeni; and so on). The delightfully witty *La Sphere de la Lune, composée de la Teste de la Femme* (1652) by Charlotte Saumise de Chazan sardonically explains away female intemperance by blaming the moon.

PICTURED: a feathered headress atop Virginia Bazani Cavazzoni (1681-ca. 1715), in *Divertimenti Poetici* (Venice, 1701)



The study of famous women and womanhood had long been considered an appropriate field for female intellectuals, giving rise to a fascinating array of texts written from a female perspective, some quite conservative. Here we find the elusive first edition of Madeleine de Scudéry's *Les Femmes Illustres, ou les Harangues Heroïques* (1642); Maria Basadonna Manin's *La Donna Onesta* (1742), in which an entire chapter cautions women against the dangers of 'Curiosità'; and a remarkable pamphlet titled *Triomphe de la saine Philosophie, ou, La vraie Politique des Femmes* by the 'Citoyenne Booser', describing the Revolutionary ideal of womanhood, printed by the short-lived Imprimerie des Femmes (active between 1791-5).

PICTURED: frontispiece to the elusive first edition of Scudery's *Les Femmes Illustres* (1642)



PICTURED: Anne-Marie Du Boccage, *Le Amazoni* (trans. Luisa Bergalli Gozzi). The caption of the frontispiece compares the two women to Amazons themselves: “*To Amazons fair Lesbia life supplies / Still they want charms to please without her eyes*”.

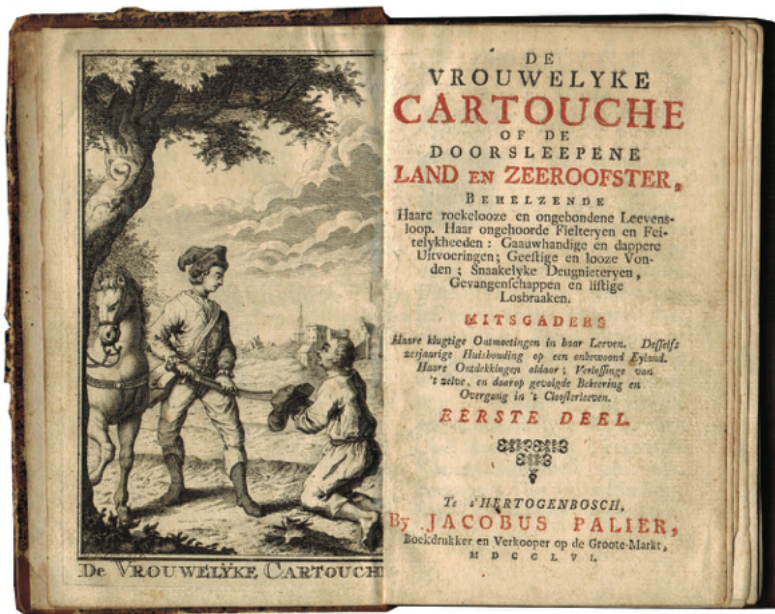
Fictional depictions of women are equally illuminating, including Mary de la Rivière Manley’s elaborate allegorical satire on Queen Anne’s favorite, Sarah Churchill, Duchess of Marlborough, found here in an anonymous printing replete with a key to all of the characters. In 1699, Louise-Geneviève Gillot de Saintonge published her own re-writing of *La Diana*, the celebrated pastoral romance focused on the adventures of a shepherdess, in which the heroine never re-marries. In a similar vein, Anne-Marie du Boccage’s *Le Amazoni* (1756) upends the usual Greek and Roman legends and instead has her heroines defeat and take prisoner Theseus, king of Athens.



During the French Revolution, the publisher-bookseller Marie-Perrette Henneveux Lesclapart printed and sold a collection of ‘Amusements of the Chubbies and Skinnies’, poking fun at a series of hapless female characters; our copy was read by a certain “Mademoiselle Ragontier” in 1791.

PICTURED: the bookshop of Marie-Perrette Henneveux Lesclapart, pictured on the title-page of her *Amulette des Grasses et Maigres* (ca. 1790). Madame Lesclapart took over her husband’s publishing business around 1790 and was executed by the Revolutionary Government for the “distribution d’écrits contre-révolutionnaires” in 1794, aged 47.

Gender Reversal



PICTURED: The sole edition of this imaginative tale of a cross-dressing highwayman.

Readers were both horrified and amused by the spectacle of women taking on masculine traits, a trope most often found in 18th century fiction. Perhaps the most famous example of the 17th century was *L'Heroine Mousquetaire*, present here in an early edition (1679) annotated throughout all four parts by a Germanic hand. The titular heroine of the *Memoires de Madame de Barneveldt* (first edition, 1732) leads a no less swashbuckling lifestyle, passing as a man for most of her early life; and in the sole edition of Marianne-Agnès Fauques' *Memoires de Mlle d'Oran* (London, 1755), the autobiographical heroine disguises herself as her own brother, successfully wounding a rival with her epee after being called to a duel.

The *Trasformazione delle Donne in Uomini, e degl' Uomini in Donne* (Venice, 1757) is a rather blunt attack on the perceived emasculation of men in the mid-18th century. The engraved frontispiece drives this argument home by depicting a typical domestic scene in which the gender roles are horrifyingly reversed: a woman dressed as a man negotiates with two merchants while writing in her ledger, while a man reclines in an armchair in the background. A painting hanging on the wall of the room shows a man exchanging his axe for a woman's distaff (spinning tool). In *De Vrouwelyke Cartouche* (the third recorded copy), a cross-dressing highway-woman cheats, steals, and murders her way through life as a true female 'Cartouche' – referring to the legendary 18th century French criminal.



PICTURED: unrecorded in OCLC: the 'Transformation of Women into Women, and Men into Women' (not in fact a translation from French).

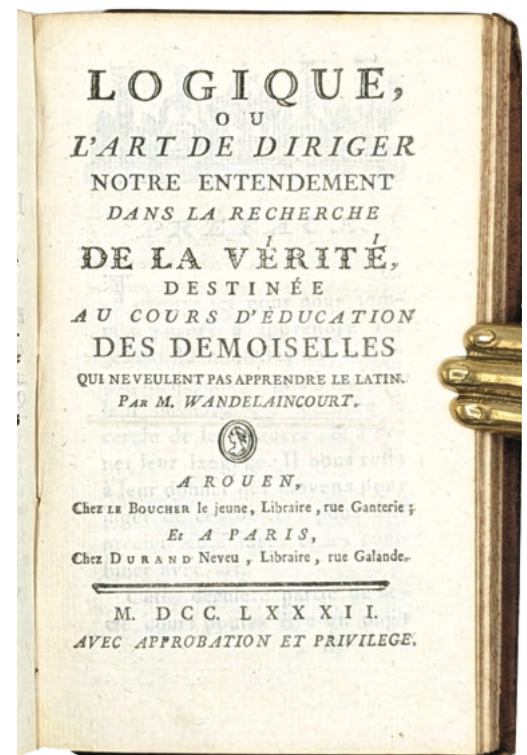
Women and Education



PICTURED: detail of Jan Suijderhoe's separately-issued portrait of the celebrated polymath, printed in Haarlem or Leiden by Cornelis Banheiningh ca. 1649

Although the printed works of the 17th century prodigy Anna Maria van Schurmann are well-represented in institutions, material such as this large-format, separately-issued broadside portrait are not. The Suijderhoe engraving is rather charming in its frankness and simplicity, capturing Schurmann at what she did best: reading and studying. Moving into the 18th century, the 'learned woman' becomes more accepted, for example in Johann Andreas Planer's *Tractatus de Gynaecio Docto, d. i. Von gelehrtem Frauenzimmer* (Wittenberg, 1715), which favors the right of women to earn an education and offers an exhaustive list of educated women throughout history. An 'Ode of an Educated Woman' (Duderstadt, 1747) offers support to a petition of the same year by Johann David Michaelis (1717-1791) urging Frederick the Great to found a university for women in Prussia.

Juliana Cornelia de Lannoy's very rare first published work, *Aan myn Geest* ['To my Intellect'] (Breda, 1766), is couched as an internal dialogue in which the author confronts her fears of exposing her intellectual abilities to society, thus running the risk of rejection and social exclusion. At the age of just 21, Elisabetta Caminer Turra (1751-1796) undertook a translation of the Jeanne-Marie Leprince de Beaumont's best-selling *Instructions pour les Jeunes Dames*, providing educational guidance to young women "who are entering into society, and marrying". A more nuanced perspective is offered by the self-educated son of a bricklayer, Pierdomenico Soresi, whose *Saggio sopra la Necessità e la Facilità di Ammaestrare le Fanciulle* (Milan, 1774) holds up the mathematical prodigy Maria Gaetana Agnesi as a model of female intellect, but cautions about the effect of the 'sublime' sciences in undermining women's primary domestic responsibilities. The present collection contains a large number of specific subject guides aimed at women; aside from the sciences (see below), we find manuals of politics, poetry composition, grammar, Italian, and logic.



PICTURED: Logic for young ladies

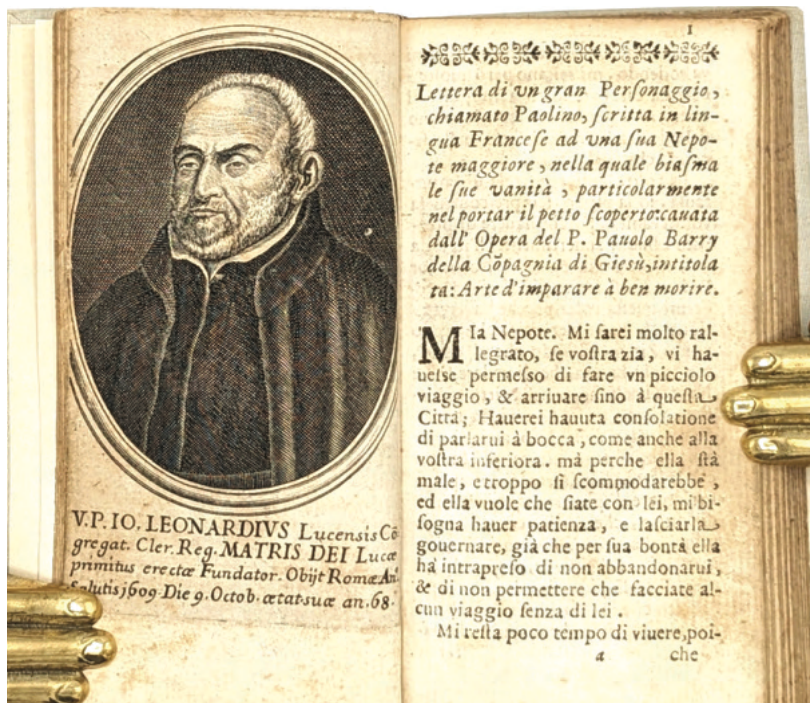
Female Beauty



PICTURED: the salacious portrait of the middle-aged Sara Maria van der Wilp, subsequently destroyed (left); and its corrected state (right)

When her portrait first appeared in print in her *Gedichten* (Amsterdam, 1772), the 55-year old Sara Maria van der Wilp was told that she ‘looked like a shrew; a dragon of a wife, [...] an impertinent Whore, with Breasts like the udders of a cow’. In response to this public outcry, “Van der Wilp decided to commission a new portrait from a competing artist... and urged her readers to destroy the first portrait.” (van Deinsen). Our copy – with a non-integral poem by Wilp on the traumatic episode – is accompanied by a loose copy of the original, ‘uncensored’ portrait.

Unrecorded in any edition, an anonymous *Discours Moral sur la Beauté des Femmes* (1770) argues that society grants the title of ‘beautiful’ to women far too freely, and that “beauty itself exists only by the fictions & delirium of the imagination, & by national prejudices”.



PICTURED: the author of the 'Useful Treatise on the Vain Ornamentation of Women' (Rome, 1673)

Although Giovanni Leonardi's *Trattato Utilissimo del Vano Ornamento delle Donne* (1673) had offered a pointed critique of any sort of beautification in the 17th century, the late 18th and early 19th centuries saw an explosion of manuals devoted to cosmetology, written by both men and women. In fiction, Pierre-Antoine de la Place's *La Laideur Aimable, et les Dangers de la Beauté* (Liege, 1767) also earns a place in this selection, with its cautionary tale of the perils of beauty, and the triumph of the 'ugly but virtuous' heroine; our unrecorded edition features a list of subscribers (many female) who paid for its publication.

Various German and French treatises ('Grace and Beauty from the Mysteries of Nature, for Single or Married Women'; 'Dietetics of Female Beauty'; 'The Ladies' Toilette, or Encyclopedia of Beauty'; 'The Toilette of the Graces, or the Art of Preserving and Enhancing Women's Beauty, and Correcting its Defects'; and so on) discuss the physical and moral bases of attractiveness, often highlighting changing societal tastes along the way. The present collection also contains two treatises specifically discussing women's hair: Mullet's *L'Art de la Parure* (1811) and Villaret's *Art de se Coiffer soi-même, enseigné aux Dames* (1828) by a 'hairdresser to the stars' including the King and Queen of Bavaria, the Duchess of Baden and her court, etc etc.

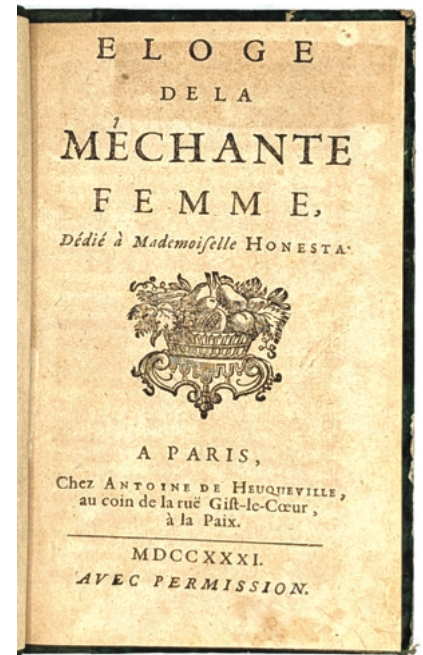
PICTURED: 'The Art of the Haircut'



The Good & Bad Wife

As we discover, the trope of the idealized wife often included a broad range of abilities far beyond ‘cooking and cleaning’. In the anonymous manual *Des galanten Frauenzimmers bequemes und nützliches Hand-Buch* (Esslingen, 1756), we find instructions for dyeing, weaving, medicine, and cosmetology, as well as the lost art of ‘dressing’ prints – i.e. applying strips of silk or embroidery to pre-printed engravings or paintings, a popular past-time in late 18th century Southern Germany. The third recorded copy of the *Kleine Haus-Apothek vor das Frauenzimmer* (Tübingen, 1761) would have been similarly used, describing in detail the expected duties of housewives or their servants.

PICTURED: ‘In Praise of the Evil Woman’



PICTURED: detail of the last five skins of the ‘bad wife’

On the other hand, the ‘Bad Wife’ is epitomized in Hans Sachs’ astonishingly-illustrated broadside *Von den neun Hauten der bösen Weiber* [On the Nine Skins of the Bad Wife], in which the narrator proceeds to beat his wife, with each round of beating uncovering a new ‘skin’ on her body. An intriguing example of another unfortunate spouse is Elisabeth Christine Ulrike of Brunswick-Wolfenbüttel (1746-1840), who was banished by her husband after aborting the fruit of an extra-marital affair with a musician; her life-story is revealed in the anonymous roman-a-clef *Geschichte und Ursachen der Gefangenschaft einer indianischen Prinzessin* (Prague, 1792). Louis Coquelet’s *Eloge de la Méchante Femme* (Paris, 1731) is certainly misogynistic in places, but also speaks out against many commonly-held ‘superstitions’ about the evil wife.

Women and the Law

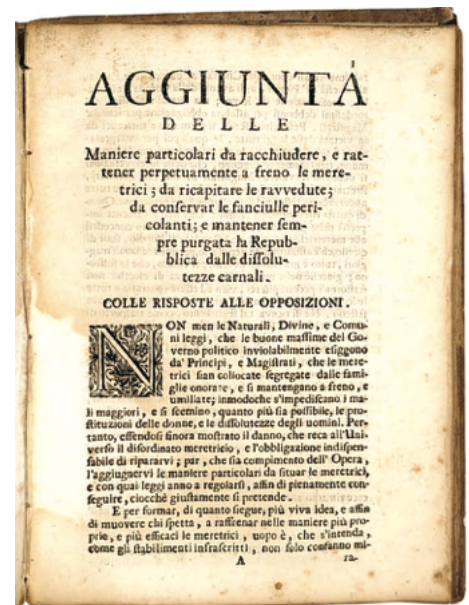
On the night of November 15, 1654, the noblewoman Lucrezia Orologi was murdered in her bedroom by a jealous lover. Evidently delighting in the scandalous circumstances of her death, the publisher Frambotto and the Royal Councilor Luigi Manzini together produced this 'report', replete with an engraved portrait. The work gathers poetic tributes from female and male admirers across Europe who write in Portuguese, Spanish, English, Southern German dialect, High German, French, Hebrew, Greek, and Latin.



PICTURED: the 42-year old Lucrezia Orologia, murdered in a crime of passion by her jealous lover, in *Le Lagrime della Fama* (Padua, 1655).

Literature on prostitution and the legal travails of sex-workers has enjoyed much recent scholarly interest, and is represented here for example by Sarnelli's extremely rare *Difesa delle Republiche Rovinate dall' insolentito Meretricio*. Rather than the vituperative attack on 'insolent prostitutes' suggested by the title-page, Sarnelli (a priest by profession) instead offers an in-depth discussion of all possible facets of the trade in early 18th-century Naples, based on observation and experience. His 'remedy' consists of designating certain areas of the city for prostitution, restricting the type of clothing they may wear and the houses they may reside in, and providing avenues to support women and their children who leave the trade.

A legal briefing or factum was printed in 1706 to highlight the curious case of Marie-Anne Martin, daughter of a coachman and 'fille de l'Opera', who was pursuing François Bernard Berard Demonge "still a minor and a law student" for uncollected fees. The preface notes succinctly that "this petition concerns the question of whether a girl convicted of *mal commerce* and prostitution is eligible to sue for the price of her debauchery", and goes on to apologize for the unavoidable use of colorful language in the account, which may shock some readers.



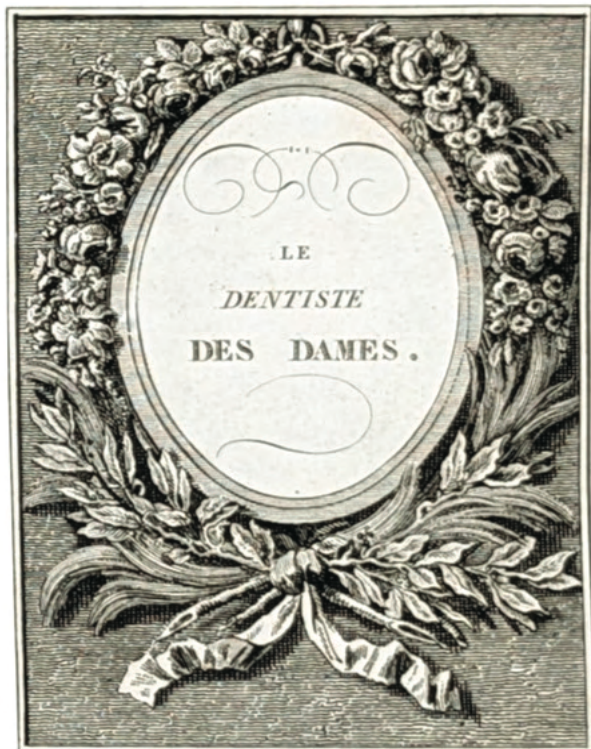
PICTURED: methods of reigning in prostitution in Naples in 1739

Medicine and the Sciences



Rather than focusing on the large trove of extant obstetrical literature, the collection favors general medical manuals aimed specifically at women. For example, Johann August Oehme's *Sophia oder Weibliche Klugheit* (Dresden, 1750) promises its reader that she will learn 'the Art by which a Woman can know her own Nature, cure herself of acute illnesses, and improve her Life. As well as a Conversation on Birthing-Help'. Oehme even describes a "Sophia Pill" which remedies too-frequent menstrual flows and 'restores unnaturally congested' menstruation without the least discomfort as well as a discussion of the effects of coffee on women (bad!); disorders of the breast including cancer; and so on.

PICTURED: 'every woman her own physician'



Giraudy's *Conseils aux Femmes sur les Moyens de Prévenir ou d'Arrêter les Suites Facheuses de leur Temps Critique* (Paris, 1805) is similarly concerned with menstruation and its 'prevention and regulation'; the 1818 *Dentiste des Dames*, by the dashing young practitioner Joseph Le Maire (portrait included, of course) reminds women to "ayez de votre bouche un grand soin chaque jour; / Le désordre et le tartre épouvantent l'amour..." [take great care of your mouth every day / for disorder and tartar frighten away love.."].

PICTURED: the first illustrated edition of the *Dentiste des Dames* (Paris, 1818)



PICTURED: title-page vignette to *Naturlehre für Frauenzimmer* (Vienna, 1785)

Marie Meurdrac’s ‘Chemistry for Ladies’ has long been the source of enduring interest, offering its readership a window into practical experiments with chemistry as well as alchemy. It is represented here in an illustrated French edition (1687) as well as its sole Italian translation, dedicated to Anna Altieri Colonna (Venice, 1682). In the vein of Algarotti, Louis-Aimé Martin’s *Lettres à Sophie, sur la Physique, la Chimie et l’Histoire Naturelle* (Paris, 1810) seek to explain the works of Newton, Lavoisier, Beccaria, etc., to a young girl. In the German-speaking realms, we find Christian Gottlieb Atze’s *Naturlehre für Frauenzimmer*; Johann Heinrich Helmuth’s *Anleitung zur Kenntniß des großen Weltbaues, für Frauenzimmer* was financially supported by dozens of female subscribers; and August Batsch’s *Botanik für Frauenzimmer*, with hand-colored illustrations (Weimar, 1798). The nearly 3,500 pages of the *Neues Natur- und Kunstlexicon* are expressly advertised as “zum bequemen Gebrauch insonderheit auch für Ungelehrte und für gebildete Frauenzimmer” [‘for the convenient use especially of uneducated as well as educated women’], offering a cornucopia of technical knowledge to a class of women wealthy enough to purchase its four sizeable volumes.



PICTURED: title-page vignette to *Anleitung zur Kenntniß des großen Weltbaues, für Frauenzimmer* (Braunschweig, 1791)

