

# Women, Gender and Enlightenment

edited by

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# SECTION 4 GENDER AND THE REASONING MIND

## Introduction

*Mónica Bolufer Peruga*

Women's education, their access to learning, and what uses they should make of their reason, were intensely controversial subjects in eighteenth-century Europe. In fact it can be argued that education, broadly defined to include intellectual, moral, emotional and physical formation, was at the centre of early modern debates on gender. It was the focal point of discussions of women's intellectual and moral character and potential, and their appropriate social responsibilities and locations; education was regarded as crucial in determining whether gender-ascribed traits were natural or a product of acquired patterns of behaviour, thinking and feeling.

The debate over female education during the Enlightenment reiterated issues that had long been controversial: how much education should women receive (that is, what type and degree of learning, besides basic moral, religious and domestic training, should be included in their curriculum); by which methods should they be educated ('formal' or 'informal'); where and by whom should they be educated (at home, in the convent or boarding school, by mothers or governors/governesses). These questions were all underpinned by a more fundamental one: why and for what purpose should women be educated? At a time when new intellectual constituencies were appearing on the cultural scene, the issue of female entitlements could not be evaded. What types of knowledge should women be allowed to display, and in which contexts? How tightly should the boundaries be drawn around women's participation in the realm of ideas, as students, as rational mothers, as readers and writers? The figure of the female intellectual - the 'woman of letters', to use the characteristically ambiguous early modern phrase - will be examined later in this volume, but it is important to note here how the meaning of this phrase changed with transformations of the social rules governing female intellectualism.

The chapters in this section deal with these issues as they appeared in French and British educational literature, and in contemporary controversies about correct forms of written French. Jean Bloch and Michèle Cohen look at debates on women's education by focussing, in Bloch's case, on women's own writings about education in eighteenth-century France, and, in Cohen's chapter, on the British controversy over 'public' and 'private' education and its implications for



women's relationship to intellectual practices. Dena Goodman takes the unusual and illuminating starting point of debates over French orthography to open up issues of female cultural authority. Goodman shows how seventeenth-century initiatives to simplify and systematize French orthography by bringing it closer to the spoken language instituted an alliance between 'modern' men of letters and cultivated women (who were deemed experts in the arts of conversation) against the erudite, etymological tradition; however, in the eighteenth century male writers turned to the written word as the norm for orthography while at the same time deprecating female speech and writing.

Together, these chapters show very clearly how debates over female education in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were inflected by changes in women's cultural roles. Focussing on two national examples, Britain and France, they raise some interesting comparative points that can be extended to other European countries such as Spain, Italy, or Germany. The historiography of eighteenth-century women's education shows that although pedagogical habits and institutions differed considerably from country to country, the points under dispute were basically the same.<sup>1</sup> This is hardly surprising, given the international diffusion of pedagogical literature, particularly French writings on education: in 1797 a (probably fictitious) writer to a Spanish periodical depicted cooking maids as avid readers of translated editions of *Mme Le Prince de Beaumont* and *Mme de Genlis*, while cultivated ladies were reading them in French: a piece of satirical hyperbole that nonetheless points to the widespread popularity of such texts, with their address to common European concerns.<sup>2</sup>

Nearly all writers agreed on the value of women's education as an instrument of social reform. In the case of plebeian women, educating them to be devout Christians, obedient subjects and efficient workers was almost universally advocated. The education of elite women was more contentious. The genteel acquisition of 'accomplishments' (music, dance, foreign languages, manners) was rejected as merely frivolous, and there were the usual calls for 'moral' and 'useful' education about Christianity and domestic affairs. Disagreements arose, however, over the importance of 'politeness', especially the cultivation of conversational abilities, and real erudition in women was generally deprecated. Some knowledge of history, geography, and modern languages (French, Italian) was regarded as appropriate, but classical languages, philosophy and the sciences were highly contentious, as was the choice between 'private' (home-based) or 'public' education (in convents or schools). Authors also disagreed about women's intellectual potential and the uses to which female education should be put. In the eighteenth century, as traditional misogyny gave way to notions of complementary gender-specific attributes, it was increasingly argued that women's education ought to be adapted to their different (rather than inferior) intellectual capacities; women were depicted as more inclined to wit, taste, and practical reasoning than to abstract speculation. It was taken for granted that, far from genderless, minds did have a sex, and 'masculine reason' in women was not to be encouraged.

Across Europe, in the expanding print culture of the eighteenth century, the pedagogical obsessions of Enlightenment intellectuals resulted in reams of



writings on education. For women writers, this presented a golden opportunity for respectable authorship. In the late eighteenth century, as ideals of sentimental domesticity took hold across European society, education became a very safe subject for women writers, one where maternal pedagogic authority could be successfully exploited in the increasingly competitive terrain of professional authorship.<sup>3</sup> Bloch's essay provides an illuminating survey of women's writing on education in France from the beginning of the eighteenth century to the post-revolutionary period. Her verdict on the contributions of these women is ultimately critical: their prescriptions, she judges, were too narrow and subservient to male opinion. Yet her essay implicitly shows how rather than just writing in the shadow of male educationalists, women actively participated in the elaboration of Enlightenment pedagogical thought and practices, engaging critically with emergent educational theories. This was true of Mme de Lambert's relationship to Fénelon, of Mme Le Prince de Beaumont's morally conservative yet fiercely rationalist approach to girls' education, and of Mme d'Épinay's and Mme de Genlis' critical appraisals of Rousseau. Something similar can be said of other European women writers, like the Spaniard Josefa Amar y Borbón who, well aware of contemporary international debate, diverged from many of the usual assumptions in her *Discourse of women's physical and moral education* (1790), making significant use of her French predecessors.

In fact, across national and linguistic boundaries, in remarkably dissimilar cultural contexts, shared attitudes to educational issues gave rise to common approaches among women writers, although with varying emphases. All expressed a strong confidence in women's (especially their own) rational potential and judgement; they energetically denounced the general neglect of women's education, whether resulting from social indifference or a desire to keep women dependent on men. All called on women to take responsibility for themselves, both as moral individuals and as members of the social community, while at the same time managing to avoid the censorious tone common among male moralists and reformers. Also, in contrast to men who tended to stress the utilitarian side of women's education (educating women to be responsible wives and mothers, or polite participants in elite society) women writers tended to value learning as a route to emotional and intellectual autonomy, a path to self-esteem and the pleasures of solitary reflection as well as those of literary glory. 'It is good to depend as little as possible on others, as in the noble exercise of study', Josefa Amar declared, before citing Mme de Lambert on the same subject, in a strikingly revealing paragraph.<sup>4</sup> But then she hurried to add that 'fame and immortal glory go in hands with merit, wherever it is found': Amar clearly thought of herself, and behaved, as one deserving of a high literary reputation. This view of female learning as a source of pleasure and a site of public recognition was shared by many of her European contemporaries, in sharp contrast with the ideal propounded in Rousseau's *Émile* (and implicitly assumed by most male – and some female – pedagogical writers) that 'all women's education must be related to men', that is, directed to meeting the material and sentimental needs of children and husbands.

This issue of for *whom* women should be educated (themselves or their families) underlay many pedagogical debates, including that of 'public' versus 'private' education. As Michèle Cohen shows, arguments over whether boys should be sent to school were common in British pedagogical literature, whereas the outcry against boarding schools for girls, the call for their domestic education, seems to have been unanimous. In France, enlightened critics blamed convents for producing frivolous, ignorant females who were either immoral themselves or the innocent victims of male seduction (as Cécile de Volanges in Choderlos de Laclos' *Les Liaisons Dangereuses*); however, both in France and in Italy, some writers acknowledged the benefits of public education and urged its reform. In Spain, where female public (convent) schooling was very limited, proposals for colleges that would offer elite girls a more secular, modern instruction were widespread in enlightened circles (although they rarely materialized), while at the same time education by mothers was held up as the real ideal. Far from a merely practical alternative, such home-based education was seen as a symbol of maternal dedication, an emblem of the new sentimental family, and a moral and social panacea. This viewpoint was highly influential in eighteenth-century Europe (and most powerfully expressed in Rousseau's *La Nouvelle Héloïse*); it was, however, less popular in Britain, where mistrust of women's moral and intellectual capacity to educate the young, and concern about the effeminisation of boys under maternal influence, dominated pedagogical debate.

In her essay, Cohen throws light on the dichotomies of 'public' versus 'private' and 'formal' versus 'informal' which have dominated assessments of women's education. She shows how these categories, far from merely descriptive of pedagogical practices, were in fact highly prescriptive and led to a radical devaluation of women's intellectual achievements in their own eyes, as well as in contemporary social opinion and in the historiography. Not only was girls' education defined as 'informal' in comparison to boys' education (which in fact was far from uniform and systematic), but also, and more crucially, 'informal' modes of learning had very different gender implications. By the end of the eighteenth century, informal learning for men was praised as encouraging individual autonomy, in contrast to hidebound pedagogical methods, whereas in women's case it was discouraged as conducive to anarchic, superficial learning and, implicitly, as encouraging a degree of personal initiative and intellectual ambition improper for their sex.

As in the case of orthographical norms, it can be argued that certain types of female education, like self-learning (rather than institutional education) and learning to write according to the model of oral speech (instead of the printed word) were devalued because they were branded 'informal', that is, unsystematic and lacking in proper method. As Cohen shows, these pedagogical categories not only shaped social definitions of 'solid' versus 'superficial', 'masculine' versus 'feminine', but also, in many cases, undermined women's self-confidence and self-presentation and, to some extent, even their own sense of intellectual entitlement.

Pedagogical debate was not mere intellectual speculation. It took place in a precise social and cultural context broadly similar throughout Europe: women



were playing an active role in the intellectual public space, and an influential model of domestic femininity was emerging and consolidating. Women's intellectual presence and performance in the social arena was intensely controversial, as revealed in stereotypes of the learned woman to be found all over seventeenth and eighteenth-century Europe: the French *femme savante*, the Spanish *bachillera*, the Italian *dottoressa* or *letteratta*, the English 'female pedant', which represented women intellectuals as dilettante, impolite, and immodest.<sup>5</sup>

Yet despite the apparent uniformity of these caricatures, the image of the woman intellectual, Dena Goodman argues, was not constant. The rules governing women's public use of knowledge shifted over time, with changes in reading, writing, and publishing practices and in the meanings of concepts like 'culture' and 'public'. Aristocratic culture had traditionally allowed some public role for women intellectuals, who were regarded as 'exceptions' to their gender. Renaissance and Baroque celebrations of 'illustrious women' must be seen in this light, as well as the public examinations of young female 'prodigies', who were praised as national treasures; both practices were characteristic of the social customs of the privileged classes.<sup>6</sup> If the ousting of the Old Regime in revolutionary France and the construction of a new political culture there implied a more drastic exclusion of women from the acquisition and public display of knowledge, as Geneviève Fraisse argues, this came after an earlier and more gradual change – the expansion of the public literary sphere from the late seventeenth century to the 1780s – which had invested women's education and intellectual roles with new significance.<sup>7</sup>

In her essay on the reform of French orthography, Goodman argues that this earlier process had had ambiguous consequences for woman, who actively participated in the construction of the public literary sphere (as readers, writers, and arbiters for literary taste), but who were ultimately relegated to the more passive role of consumers of culture. Thus, French elite women, who had exerted – and were recognized as exerting – intellectual authority over the 'essentially oral culture of the salon', experienced a degradation of their cultural status. As the world of conversation, so central to seventeenth and early eighteenth-century notions of polite culture, gave way to literature as the key field of professional intellectual activity, women's cultural role was redefined and reduced.<sup>8</sup> Rather than their prominent (albeit ambiguous) role as *salonnières*, French elite women found themselves occupying the more passive position of readers; they became the target audience of eighteenth-century male and women writers, with the latter both numerous and often successful, but marginalized. This is an appealing yet controversial thesis, which will be discussed in other sections of this volume.

What is evident from these essays is that, by the late eighteenth century, discursive and institutional practices with regard to women's education did not entirely succeed in containing women in the narrowly defined roles of cultivated wives and hostesses, educating mothers or sympathetic readers. In many instances women took these roles into their own hands, investing them with new meanings and public authority while at the same time secretly or openly claiming knowledge as a source of pleasure and happiness, 'a room of one's own'.



## Notes

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4. Josefa Amar, *Discurso sobre la educación física y moral de las mujeres*, Madrid, Cátedra, 1994, p. 67.
5. M. Bolufer, *Mujeres e Ilustración ...*, pp. 145–151; L. Guerci, *La sposa ...*; Ann B. Shteir, "'With matchless Newton now one soars on high": Representing Women's Scientific Learnedness in England', in H. Bödeker and L. Steinbrügge, *Conceptualising Women ...*, pp. 115–128.
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8. Elizabeth C. Goldsmith, and Dena Goodman, 'Introduction' to *Going Public. Women and Publishing in Early Modern France*. Ithaca and London, Cornell University Press, 1991, pp. 1–9. Dena Goodman, 'Women and Enlightenment', in R. Bridenthal, S. Stuard, M. Wiesner, eds, *Becoming Visible. Women in European History*. Boston, Houghton and Mifflin, 1998, pp. 233–61.

## 6.3

# 'Neither Male, Nor Female': Rational Equality in the Early Spanish Enlightenment

*Mónica Bolufer Peruga*

### Introduction

In Spain, as elsewhere in the early Enlightenment, the rational equality of men and women was crucial to discussions of gender or, to use the term of the day, the 'woman question'. Early modern pro-woman positions had been based on women's moral worth and spiritual equality. Now they focussed on intellectual equality and, later in the eighteenth century, on women's entitlement to education and public participation in literary and social circles. Enlightenment arguments for equality – like earlier arguments for women's 'excellence' – were invariably polemical, designed first to be weapons against popular and learned assumptions of women's necessary inferiority. Like other social inequalities, gender differences were traditionally thought of in terms of a simple hierarchy of power relations, social roles, and 'natural' aptitudes: women's inferior physical, moral and rational abilities. Women's natural inferiority, usefully explained as natural and divinely ordered, was widely touted in both popular and learned texts, from proverbs to scriptural and patristic references, Scholastic philosophy and humoral medicine.

Voices countering this prevailing misogyny were not lacking in early modern Europe. Alternative representations of gender, as well as criticism of inequalities between the sexes, can be found in men's as well as in women's writings, particularly from the fifteenth century. Scholars have sought to draw a clear line between (earlier) discourses stressing women's worth and 'excellence' in terms of their superior moral and spiritual qualities, and (later) discourses labelled seventeenth-century rationalist or Enlightenment 'feminism'.<sup>1</sup> Modern feminism is deemed to have its roots in these later debates, which advocated gender equality rather than women's 'superiority' and which used rational rather than historical, theological, biblical, or even alchemical arguments. But there are problems with this deceptively straightforward approach. The evolution from pre-modern to rational or Enlightenment 'feminism' was not a simple and linear development, but a process that included the reworking of older concepts and arguments and within which different traditions coexisted. It is too easy to dismiss 'traditional' advocacies of women as rhetorical, irrational, theoretically irrelevant and bound



to die, as did the Ancien Régime to which they belonged, and to reserve approval for those intellectual lines taken to be directly related to the origins of modern feminism. What we need is a less teleological position. For the *querelle des femmes* did not simply vanish, swept away by a rational feminism that heralded Enlightenment egalitarianism. Rather, it coexisted side by side (and sometimes face to face) with new pro-woman arguments, and often blended with them.

In his work on the early French Enlightenment, Siep Stuurman suggests that feminism existed prior to the Enlightenment. It was an important factor in the making of the Enlightenment, he tells us, not its consequence.<sup>2</sup> We might have reservations about searching for the origins of modern feminism or about the use of 'feminism' as a category in early modern times. But certainly the Enlightenment did not *open* the path of critical considerations of gender, or even of egalitarian arguments. Both had a long prior history. Arguments for rational equality between the sexes were based on intellectual positions and social experiences that long predate the eighteenth century, and can best be understood as a crucial component, not a result, of Enlightenment debates. Stuurman rightly implies that we should abandon a study of history that isolates 'forerunners' of feminism, in favour of a richer, more nuanced picture which examines inherited traditions as well as contemporary debates: one that seeks to reconstruct the links between intellectual discussion and its social framework and places individual thinkers in both a national and an international context.

This essay takes a comparative perspective on debate around the 'woman question' in the early Spanish Enlightenment. It focuses on the debates generated by Benito J. Feijoo's *Defense of women*, a 1726 work that was crucial to the development of a discourse of gender equality. It shows, first, how the Spanish version of the *querelle des femmes* had, by the late seventeenth century, established a basis for the advocacy of women's moral dignity, spiritual equality, and literary entitlement. Secondly, it traces the emergence of egalitarian arguments in Spain, connecting them to contemporary European debate, and particularly with those positions usually labelled 'rational feminism'. The essay concludes by exploring the contested legacy of these arguments in later debates between those who sought to reconcile conventional concessions to equality by pointing to women's diminished reason, enhanced sensibility and domestic role, and those who used rational equality to build arguments for women's access to Enlightened sociability and publication.

### **From 'excellence' to equality: fifteenth- to eighteenth-century developments**

Early modern Spain had been intensely involved in the Renaissance and Baroque European tradition of the *querelle des femmes*. From the fifteenth to the eighteenth centuries, as a response to mainstream misogyny, hundreds of dialogues, apologies, tracts, and lists of 'illustrious women', all seeking to prove women's nobility and merit, were published in almost every European language.<sup>3</sup> Works belonging to this genre were often dedicated to women of the royalty or of high



rank, and represented the political, social and cultural influence of a female elite. The discussion of women's 'excellence' found its natural milieu in courtly and aristocratic circles. Intellectually, it was often found in the philosophical orbit of neoplatonism, with its stress on physical beauty as sign of a superior soul and a reflection of divinity. Even more crucially, this discourse corresponded to the logics of privilege in the Old Regime, where social hierarchies of rank and gender were thought of as sanctioned by nature, and difference between women and men tended to be represented in terms of 'preeminence' or 'superiority' of one sex over the other. Works written in Castilian and Catalan in early modern times, such as Álvaro de Lunas's *Libro de las virtuosas y claras mujeres* (*Book of Virtuous Women*, 1444), Cristóbal de Castillejo's *Diálogo de las mujeres* (*Dialogue on Women*, 1540), and Juan de Espinosa's *Diálogo en laude de las mujeres* (*Dialogue in Apology of Women*, 1580) belong to this rich tradition, as do many others published in Spain up to the eighteenth century.<sup>4</sup>

In a different social context, that of religious life, early modern Spanish women writers (like the fifteenth-century nuns Teresa de Cartagena and Isabel de Villena) defended spiritual equality, to vindicate women's equal dignity and justify their own incursions in theological writing.<sup>5</sup> The religious argument for the non-gendered nature of souls, which also had Platonic and Stoic roots, was used in Christian theology (by Saint Augustin, among others) to argue that women, inferior to men by nature, were their spiritual equals by grace. Because of the vagueness of the very concept of 'Soul' (meaning immortal spirit as well as mind), it became a reference not only to spiritual, but also to intellectual equality, a thesis to which Cartesian dualism gave a sound philosophical basis. Seventeenth-century women such as Marie de Gournay, Anna Maria van Schurmann, Elisabeth Marie Clément and Marguerite Buffet, were among the first to use the concept of spiritual equality to build arguments for women's natural equality with men. For them, Siep Stuurman argues, intellectual equality as a theoretical principle was tightly linked with their experience as learned women struggling to be considered as equals by their fellow men of letters.<sup>6</sup>

A similar experience and intention might have inspired their Spanish contemporary María de Zayas, who developed this position in the preface to her *Exemplary novels* (*Novelas ejemplares*, 1637; 'To the Reader'): 'If this matter, of which we, men and women, are formed, be it a mixture of fire and clay, or a mass of spirit and earth lumps, is not nobler in them than in us, if our blood is the same, as are the same our senses, powers, and organs, and our souls the same, for souls are neither male nor female, why should they be wiser and pretend that we are not?'.<sup>7</sup> She followed this half-materialist, half-rationalist declaration with the argument that intellectual inequalities between the sexes were the result of differences in upbringing and education: 'the true reason why women are not learned is not their lack of aptitude, but of application. ... If they gave us books and teachers, we would be as fit as men for any office or University professorship'. In her arguments, humoral medicine and Aristotelian philosophy were coupled (quite contrary to custom) with a defense of natural equality between the sexes. María de Zayas was a celebrated writer, whose short narratives were

widely read, reprinted, translated, and copied during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.<sup>8</sup> Her lasting popularity suggests that her plea for women's rational equality and entitlement to intellectual activity must have been widely known, even if this aspect of her work was seldom mentioned either in her own time or thereafter.

Many women writers of the Spanish 'Golden Age' (sixteenth and seventeenth centuries) acted, like María de Zayas, as men's spiritual and intellectual equals in religious experience or in the world of letters.<sup>9</sup> However, almost a century had to elapse before we find another explicit discussion of rational equality between the sexes, that undertaken by the cleric and Enlightened writer Benito Jerónimo Feijoo in his *Defense of women* (1726).<sup>10</sup> Feijoo's essay, which caused lively debate, was innovative in its Spanish intellectual context and illustrates the international connections and similarities of early Enlightenment discussion of gender. Spain did not lead in the birth and development of the Enlightenment, but played a rather marginal role in the eighteenth-century European republic of letters. However, the Spanish Enlightenment, notwithstanding its distinctive features – moderation, limited diffusion, pragmatism and close connection (as well as conflict) with official reformism and Enlightened absolutism – shared many of the main concerns of the general European Enlightenment.<sup>11</sup> Although it had its origins in the 1670s, the Spanish Enlightenment did not flourish completely until the 1760s. This accounts for the later framing of a distinctively Enlightened pro-woman discourse, and makes Feijoo, to a great extent, a symbolic contemporary of seventeenth-century French women's advocates, most prominently Poulain de la Barre (discussed below.)

Feijoo's *Defense of Women* (a work that was widely read and frequently cited) was published as essay XVI in the first volume of his most popular work, the *Universal, Critical Theater of Common Errors* (*Teatro crítico Universal de Errores comunes*, 1726–40), an extensive collection whose title seems modelled on Pierre Bayle's *Dictionnaire historique et critique* (1697).<sup>12</sup> The general aim of this collection was to fight 'errors' and 'prejudices' by means of reason; this particular essay (*Defense of Women*) assertively set out to prove gender equality, both moral and intellectual. Feijoo recognized the difficulties of such a project, opposed as it was to general opinion and to most intellectual authorities. Because of the wide and fierce reactions it provoked, this essay stands out among Feijoo's extensive and highly controversial writings.<sup>13</sup> It has long been recognized as one of the most relevant texts of early Spanish feminism, while Feijoo has been praised as a lone forerunner of modern feminism, rather than being considered in the wider intellectual context of early modern European debates. The result is that its arguments usually have been oversimplified, its paradoxes omitted and its debt to early modern pro-woman arguments (dismissed as highly formal, conventional and chivalric) played down.<sup>14</sup>

In fact, instead of being an absolutely original, unprecedented personal creation, Feijoo's work had deep roots in the Spanish and European tradition of the *querelle des femmes*. He acknowledged his debt in particular to Lucrezia Marinella's *La nobiltà e l'eccellenza delle donne* (1600), and also mentioned



Madeleine de Scudéry's *Les femmes illustres* (1636) and abbé de Bellegarde's 'Si les femmes sont inférieures aux hommes par le mérite de l'esprit' (*Lettres curieuses de littérature et de morale*), among other fifteenth to eighteenth-century French, Dutch, Spanish, Italian, English and German works (Buffier's *Examen des préjugés vulgaires*, Anna Maria van Schurmann's *Question célèbre*, dialogues by Juan de Espinosa, Geronimo Ruscelli and Giacomo del Pozzo, and the anonymous *Defence of the Fair Sex, or Women, the main work of creation*).<sup>15</sup>

Feijoo, however, clearly aligned himself with the 'moderns'. As the totality of his work shows, he was well acquainted with English authors such as Newton and Locke, and particularly with Boyle's empiricism and Bacon's scepticism (his friend the famous physician Martín Martínez labelled him 'a new Bacon'). He had read many French writers, among them Descartes, Bayle, Fontenelle, Malebranche, the *libertins erudits* (Diodati, La Mothe Le Vayer, Gassendi, Naudé), Nollet, Pluche and Maupertuis. Bayle's *Dictionnaire* was, in fact, one of his main references, taken as an endless source of erudition and the model of a critical attitude he pursued (only as far as faith and moral certitudes were not shaken.) In these authors he found support and nourishment for his intellectual (never religious) scepticism, which he shared with other Spanish writers and scientists of his time. He captured this scepticism brilliantly when he wrote: 'I do not concede, I do not deny, but I doubt.' He distanced himself from Rousseau, Voltaire and Montesquieu, his own thought and religious beliefs being far removed from their critique of the Catholic Church and of the Old Regime.

The rhetorical construction, strategies and arguments of Feijoo's *Defence of women* are a mixture of old and new. Although he repeatedly distanced himself from champions of women's preeminence, many of his arguments are full of resonances of the *querelle*, such as his defense of female moral 'excellence' as based in a set of gendered virtues and particularly women's sexual continence. He discusses qualities usually attributed to men and women ('feminine' beauty, docility, simplicity and modesty; 'masculine' strength, constance and prudence) and concludes that they counterbalance each other and have, therefore, the same moral dignity, although 'masculine' virtues are more useful for the public good, while 'feminine' ones are nobler in themselves.<sup>16</sup> His assertion is based on the traditional theme of women's 'excellence' on the grounds of their moral superiority over more lascivious men, but he introduces significant variations: a utilitarian notion of virtue, and a nuanced approach to gendered moral values, which, while opposing 'masculine' utility to 'feminine' moral worth, does not consider them dichotomic pairs, but qualities to be found and appreciated in both sexes.

Nevertheless, Feijoo's major concern is the defense of women's intellectual equality, which he considers the most innovative and difficult to demonstrate of his theses. He devotes the longest part of his essay to this, using both modern and traditional arguments. He first rebuts the theories which pretend to establish a natural foundation for inferiority; he then gives examples of illustrious women of the past; and finally, he inquires into the social obstacles which interfere with women's achievements and concludes that social opportunities, and



not invariable natural differences, account for the imbalance in men's and women's intellectual success.<sup>17</sup> His essay, taken as a whole, makes a significant departure from previous advocacies of women, by building an argument for gender equality which relies on reason and empirical evidence, rather than authority and example.

In this sense, an interesting comparison can be drawn between Feijoo's discourse and that of Poulain de la Barre, whose 'social Cartesianism' focussed on women's intellectual and moral inferiority. Although Feijoo may never have read Poulain, he did mention him as the author of *De l'égalité des deux sexes* (with a wrong spelling – 'Mr. Frelin' – literally taken from Bayle's *République des Lettres*).<sup>18</sup> Their works, it must be admitted, show relevant divergences. Women's inferiority was for Poulain 'the most universal of prejudices', and its overturning his main intellectual concern; Feijoo did not give to the 'equality of the sexes' such a central position, but took it as one more of his encyclopaedic interests, which included, under the banner of the fight against prejudices in the name of reason, subjects as varied as astronomy, medicine, education, agriculture, religion, orthography and aesthetics.

Their social and intellectual contexts were also very different. Poulain wrote in a period of intense intellectual life and cultural sociability in France. The salons, presided over by women, and public lectures and academies of debate (to one of which, Richesource's *Académie des Orateurs*, Poulain was himself a regular attendant) offered spaces of social mixing and literary and philosophical discussion open to men and women. These set the foundation for the diffusion of new philosophical theories (mainly Gassendism and Cartesianism) among an educated public of both sexes.<sup>19</sup> Women participated significantly in conversation, cultural sociability, writing and publication, to such a extent that seventeenth-century French feminism, Stuurman argues, emerged from the contradiction between women's (limited) experience of equality in the literary field, and their exclusion from the more institutionalized *Académies*. Poulain has to be understood in this context, as a heir to seventeenth-century debates, whose pro-woman arguments he reshaped into a coherent and innovative theory of gender equality.

Feijoo belonged to a later generation: he was born in 1676, three years after the appearance of Poulain's *De l'égalité des deux sexes*, and he published his *Defense of women* in 1726, three years after Poulain's death. The cultural atmosphere in which he wrote was, unlike Poulain's, that of a backward country in Europe's cultural periphery. Although significant improvements had started to take place in Spain, both in intellectual and scientific innovation and in cultural practices from the 1670s,<sup>20</sup> intellectual gatherings, which were neither as numerous nor as influential as in other parts of Europe, were attended less often by women, and literacy levels and editorial production lagged behind those of England and France. Feijoo was one of that minority of Spanish intellectuals and members of the cultivated elites who were eager to propel their country out of its intellectual decline since the sixteenth century; they urged politicians to take responsibility for cultural renewal, and strove to educate the public in favour of change.

Rational equality of the sexes became the battleground between the 'ancients' and 'moderns' in Spain, one in which defenders of intellectual progress looked to Europe as a model, while supporters of tradition feared that foreign influence would contaminate Spanish morals and religious orthodoxy. Feijoo was well aware of the cultural gap between his country and those most advanced in Europe; he took the belief in women's inferiority to be one of the 'prejudices' no cultured individual and no Enlightened country should maintain.

Feijoo was not a man with a lively social life: he was a Benedictine monk who seldom left his provincial town of Oviedo, which was far from the capital and its cultural life and political opportunities.<sup>21</sup> Feijoo led a secluded and austere existence and hardly ever travelled, in contrast with the increasing cosmopolitanism of the 'republic of letters' in the eighteenth century. However, he had extensive intellectual contacts with distinguished Spanish and foreign scholars, who paid him visits or corresponded with him, such as the erudite Father Sarmiento, the royal physician Martín Martínez, and members of the cultured elites who granted him their protection and friendship. He kept well informed about contemporary issues and was an active and assiduous participant in the debates of his time, including polemics about his own work and that of others. In fact, he despised intellectuals who confined their activities to limited circles and prided themselves on communicating only with the learned. On the contrary, he seems to have enjoyed controversy, and he represented himself as an intellectual involved in public discussion, ready to take up his pen every time an issue of social interest and implications arose. Happy to stir debate, he conceived the lifetime project of his *Critical Theater* and *Erudite Letters* as a battle against 'prejudices' and a means of Enlightening public opinion and modernizing his country.

Feijoo addressed his works not only to scholars, but also to a general, cultivated public – an audience ideally constituted of 'wise' readers (*discretos*) with whom he engaged in a complicit dialogue, as opposed to 'foolish' readers (*necios*), whether uneducated or learned. Because of the design of his intellectual project, as well as its wide reception, he played a key role in the formation of Enlightenment public opinion in Spain. His writings were reprinted many times, were translated into several languages and provoked passionate debate until in 1750 a Royal Order declared Feijoo a favourite author of King Fernando VI (who had honoured him two years before with the title of royal counsellor) and forbade further attacks on him.<sup>22</sup>

Some of the social foundations of Feijoo's defense of gender equality can be found in his explicit support for the modernization of Spain, and in his admiration for European, particularly French, models. He considered gender equality an issue which required no discussion. When praising learned women of the Renaissance and Baroque, he wrote with particular approval about seventeenth and early eighteenth-century French women (Marie de Gournay, whom he praised as a learned woman, rather than as a defender of her sex; Mlle. de Lafayette; Catherine Descartes; Mme. Dacier), presenting them as examples of the achievements of which women would be capable if allowed to study and write ("There are very many French learned women, because in that country



women have more opportunity, and I would dare say more freedom to study'<sup>23</sup>). Whether his thought was also shaped by his more immediate social experience, though likely, is hard to assess. Although women's participation in cultural life in early eighteenth-century Spain can hardly be equated with that enjoyed by women in France or Britain, aristocratic women such as the duchesses of Lemos and Osuna had a significant role in cultural sociability, which Feijoo could not have ignored. Also, he corresponded with a woman, Ana María Moscoso de Prado, and discussed with her some of his views on gender differences (allowing himself to express in this private writing some conventional ideas he had not developed in his published work, about women's suitability for wit rather than for poetic rapture, because of their 'feebler temperament').<sup>24</sup>

More significantly, Feijoo and the other participants in the polemic, both the misogynists and the 'defenders of the sex', seem to have been addressing their arguments to an audience that included women readers. A sympathetic journalist, when reprinting in his periodical Feijoo's essay in 1772, summarised the latter's contribution in these terms: 'Dear Ladies: the sciences were not written for men only. Souls have no sex or, to put it more clearly, they are neither male, nor female; women can learn if they put themselves to the task'.<sup>25</sup> At the other end of the spectrum, Feijoo's opponents showed considerable anxiety about female readers using his arguments to justify resistance to male authority. Feijoo's writing, although largely framed as an abstract, philosophical dissertation, was in fact closely linked to his social environment: it suggested the emergence of a stronger female presence in Spanish public opinion and viewed other European countries (Britain, Italy and particularly France) as idealized models of women's wider participation in intellectual life.

### Reason's tribunal

Notwithstanding their differences, Feijoo and Poulain shared similar concerns and attitudes, in a common environment of intellectual and social change (the '*crise de la conscience européenne*' in France and the early Enlightenment in Spain).<sup>26</sup> They had both studied theology, which provided them with solid scriptural knowledge and a strong hostility towards Scholasticism. They both took the side of the 'moderns' in debates of their time: they defended the use of vernacular language rather than Latin as a vehicle for intellectual communication, and used rational evidence against 'vulgar' beliefs and 'learned' scholastic or humoral theories of women's inferiority. Both were strongly convinced of the novelty and rigour of their own arguments. They not only refused to use authoritative references but undermined the very principle of intellectual authority by affirming that only reason and evidence could prove equality. However, while Poulain derided the usual arguments for men's superiority (evidence, nature, universal opinion, authority) and substituted historical examples of women's worth for conjectural history (arguing that isolated cases could not prove a general statement), Feijoo was more inclined to make concessions to traditional arguments, using erudite references for cultivated readers, or examples of virtuous and



learned women, warriors and sovereigns of the past, which were more likely in his view to persuade ignorants than abstract propositions.<sup>27</sup>

Feijoo showed his debts to the *querelle des femmes* to a greater extent than did Poulain, but, like his French predecessor, he diverged in many ways from this well-trodden path. For instance, he made rational equality, rather than women's moral or physical aptitudes, the central point of discussion: 'we arrive now at the main battlefield, which is the question of women's understanding. Regarding this I must admit that I have the sole help of reason and no recourse to authority, because authors who have treated this subject (with a very few exceptions) are so inclined to vulgar opinion, that they despise women's understanding'.<sup>28</sup> Both writers expressed their disdain for the style of chivalric respect displayed for centuries by the *champions des femmes* and proudly adopted instead the role of the 'impartial philosopher'.<sup>29</sup>

Although their philosophical orientations were different (Poulain was a Cartesian and Feijoo an eclectic with Gassendian and Lockean sympathies) they both drew on Descartes' mind-body dualism as a rhetorical device to prove rational equality of women and men; both used abstract, formal arguments as well as empirical evidence to discount the relevance of anatomical differences between men's and women's brains. By limiting gender differences to the body, more specifically to the reproductive organs ('cette partie qui serve à la production des hommes'), they reached the conclusion that 'women are not differently formed from men in respect to the organs which serve to discursive ability, but regarding those which Nature has assigned to the propagation of the species'.<sup>30</sup> Feijoo's friend Martín Martínez supported this view, throwing into the debate the weight of his opinion as a highly-regarded physician: 'As an Anatomy Professor I can affirm that, not being the organization which makes the difference between the two sexes the instrument of thought, and being woman equal to man in the fabric of knowledge (the only site of ideas), they must have the same aptitudes for Science, because their organs are not different'.<sup>31</sup> Rationalistic demonstration and material evidence thus served to deny any natural foundation for women's inferiority, and supported a non-gendered concept of reason: 'L'esprit n'a point de sexe', in Poulain's words, or, in those of Feijoo, 'the Soul is neither male, nor female' ('la Alma no es varón ni hembra').<sup>32</sup>

Aristotelian philosophy and Galenic medicine drew an analogy between mind and body and the natural and the social; this analogy was extended to women's inferiority and social subordination, which were seen as natural and divinely ordered. A staunch anti-Scholastic, Feijoo despised those for whom the revered name of Aristotle was in itself a token of truth ('we must not be persuaded by some doctors, no matter how grave, who affirmed the female sex to be defective, only because Aristotle had said so'<sup>33</sup>), and insisted that Aristotelian principles did not prove women's inferiority. In this he was not alone: while these theories were still respected by conservative intellectuals, they had been subject to considerable criticism and were no longer respected in Enlightenment circles. But he also attacked another justification of women's inferiority which was taking the place of older theories: the notion of women's sensitivity (that is, of the excessive

subtlety of the brain's fibres) as an obstacle to reason, elaborated by the French Cartesian Malebranche (*De Inquirenda Veritate*).<sup>34</sup>

Taking his usual sceptical approach, Feijoo set out to dismantle Malebranche's theory in both rational and empirical terms. On the one hand, he questioned its experimental basis ('I really do not know whether these suppositions about the alleged softness are true. Two Anatomicists I have read, who do not say a word about it'); on the other hand, he pointed at the paradox implicit in a reasoning that used women's allegedly more sensible fibres to assign them diminished rational aptitudes, instead of considering this to be an advantage, given that, according to empiricist epistemology, all knowledge had its origins in impressions received through the senses.<sup>35</sup> If Feijoo's rebuttal of Aristotle looked at a philosophical position from the past which was still present in Spanish intellectual life, in a way his disagreement with Malebranche anticipated debates about gender which would arise later in the eighteenth century in the context of the new culture of sensibility.<sup>36</sup>

Feijoo and Poulain both believed that equality of intellectual aptitude between the sexes was something no reasonable and informed reader could deny. How to account, then, for women's more limited achievements? It was here that the argument of education and environment, although not absent from the earlier *querelle*, came to play the central role that was so characteristic of the Enlightenment. Women's ignorance, Feijoo argued, was not a sign of their lack of intellectual aptitude but the result of unequal opportunities for education and participation in cultural interchange and social life. Implicit in his argument was an empiricist view of human nature (a basic feature of Enlightenment discourse) which took individuals to be the result of their experience and education: 'Nobody knows but what one has studied, and only the most barbarous would argue that ability is the same as application'.<sup>37</sup> A secluded life and limited options for intellectual fulfillment were, according to him, obstacles which prevented women from developing their own potential. Here he seems to have been looking at the social experience of the local elites and middle classes, where women's educational opportunities and mixed cultural sociability were particularly limited. However, he made no specific proposals for educational improvement (unlike Poulain's Cartesian-based model in *De l'éducation des dames*), his defense of equality being rhetorically shaped as a theoretical critique of intellectual 'prejudices' rather than as a program for social reform.

Feijoo's concept of gender equality, rooted in the language of rationalism and empiricism, was stated in moral and intellectual terms. Rational equality, for him as for many of his contemporaries, should not question men's authority both in the family and in society at large. Unlike Poulain, who suggested that all inequalities, although justified as based in nature, were in fact constructions of custom and power, Feijoo did not explicitly undermine, in any of his writings, the foundations of social hierarchies. He admitted historical and anthropological exceptions, conceding that 'exceptional' women had ruled countries and had led armies in the distant or recent past, and that some remote, exotic cultures (such as those of Meroe or Borneo) might have granted them power over men. However, he considered women's subordination – the prevailing practice in



'almost all societies' – to be in accordance with reason and with God's will, as imposed on Eve after the Fall.<sup>38</sup> Probably in an effort to deprive his thesis of any menacing implications, give it additional respectability, and appease men's anxieties about women's fidelity and obedience, he argued that recognising women's equality with men would contribute to morality and social harmony, by increasing their self-esteem, thus making them better wives and mothers.<sup>39</sup>

Feijoo, nevertheless, realized that removing all natural foundations for gender inequality gave rise to an uncomfortable and difficult-to-answer question: why social hierarchy between natural equals? As a pious Church man, he resorted to the obscurities of Providence to explain what he clearly considered a puzzling paradox: 'Why, if one of them had to be superior, being talents equal, did God want it to be the man? We can suggest some explanations, such as men's superiority in virtues as constance or fortitude ..., but we would better say that we ignore the reasons for divine decisions'.<sup>40</sup> Rather than seeing this appeal to divinity as a prudent or conventional reliance on traditional arguments, it should be viewed as a rhetorical device which allowed him to bridge a theoretical gap and bring together rational equality and social order, without ignoring the resulting apparent contradiction. His humble prostration before God's designs was a lucid and courageous recognition of doubt about this crucial matter. He could not answer this question in terms which were at the same time rationally sound and attuned to social order, but, all the same, he dared to formulate it.

His antagonists were not assuaged by his prudence but were outraged by the possibility of doubt. For them, the social and the ontological orders should be tightly bound; gender equality was a revolutionary concept, full of disruptive and potentially subversive implications. Claiming that society should be a reflection of nature, in accordance with God's will, they considered that any alternative, even a purely intellectual one, endangered essential hierarchies and questioned not only women's subordination but also the whole chain of social obediences and dependencies. 'Father [Feijoo] wants wives to answer back to their husbands, consider themselves their equals and not acknowledge their superiority. ... Believe me, this Father has found the way to ruin all republics, Catholic and non-Catholic, because the subject could say to the ruler, that he owed him no obedience', argued one of them.<sup>41</sup> Even Feijoo's appeal to Providence was for them a dangerous concession to the idea that nothing in nature justified women's subordination and therefore social order was contingent rather than ontologically necessary, and could admit alternative configurations:

It is as if he had taken the divine decree to be out of the natural order, and [implied], that we cannot understand it but by reference to the incomprehensible character of God's resolutions. Good Heavens, how inclined he is to put the world upside down; I think that if he had ordered the decree himself, he would have declared women, rather than men, to be the Head.<sup>42</sup>

The analysis above makes it clear that Feijoo was not an isolated predecessor of Spanish modern feminism, but a part of the European rationalist reassessment of



gender differences, which was a crucial bridge between the early modern *querelle des femmes* and Enlightenment advocacy of rational equality. He questioned the empirical basis of past and present justifications of women's inferiority, and undermined the so-called 'scientific' viewpoint, which used untested hypotheses, rather than research, to define 'nature': 'It is known that everyone seeks physical explanations and points at them when one is, or thinks to be, sure of their effects by experience'.<sup>43</sup> Thus rational equality allowed him to reveal intellectual strategies which relied on constructed evidence. His advocacy of equality stemmed from a non-dogmatic use of rationalism, which left open questions and doubts about the complexities of gender difference and of reason itself. Unlike many writers, who pretended a position of infallible neutrality when discussing 'woman's nature', Feijoo openly admitted the difficulty of finding absolute truth in a matter about which no-one could claim absolute disinterest and equanimity. He expressed this view in an elegant manner: 'Neither they [women] nor we can be judges in this trial, because we are all parts in it, and thus we should leave the sentence to Angels who, having no sex, are indifferent in this matter'.<sup>44</sup> His irony reminds us of Poulain's: 'tout ce qu'on en dit les hommes doit être suspect, parce qu'ils sont Juges et parties'.<sup>45</sup> Both men made a self-critical use of 'reason', which gives to their works a particular richness. They used it as a critical device to examine their own well-rooted beliefs as well as those of others and as a constructive instrument to assert women's moral and intellectual equality. At the same time they acknowledged that absolute objectivity was an unattainable goal, inasmuch as the philosopher cannot ignore the personal and social circumstances which influence judgment, the philosopher's own gender being among these.

### **Late eighteenth-century debates: equality affirmed and contested in the public sphere**

The late eighteenth century, in Spain as in the rest of Europe, was a period of particularly intense debate about women's nature, moral and intellectual capacities, education and social roles. This discussion took multiple forms: essays on the 'women's question'; educational treatises; medical advice books; and debates on luxury, morality and social reform, marriage and the family. Intellectual polemic in Spain was firmly connected with cultural and social changes: commercial development; the expansion of printing (which came later and was more modest than in other countries); a push for economic and cultural reforms; the rise of polite culture and sociability; and the development of the concepts of privacy and the sentimental family. Some aristocratic women became prominent contributors to the expansion of Enlightenment thought and culture by keeping salons and participating in cultural and reformist institutions, or through the practice of patronage. As well, women writers increasingly participated in an expanding literary market.<sup>46</sup> Crucial connections with the wider European Enlightenment were made possible by translations, adaptations and readings, and revealed shared concerns, anxieties and values.

The language of gender difference was modified during the later decades of the eighteenth century, in the course of a debate which many contemporaries perceived as more widely spread and sharper than ever. Unlike the earlier debate on Feijoo's *Defense of women*, later discussion was not a dispute between 'ancients and 'moderns', but rather among Enlightened reformers themselves. The debate seems to have cut across ideological lines, with more restrictive views sometimes being found in ostensibly more 'advanced' political or social circles.

Elucidating the nuances of Spanish Enlightenment discourse on gender goes beyond the aims of this paper.<sup>47</sup> But I would like to show, by means of a few examples, how arguments for rational equality were assumed, appropriated and sometimes distorted in the late eighteenth century, and how debate about that thorny issue would give birth to two opposed lines of thought: nineteenth-century discourse on women's domestic role (that of the 'angel in the house'), and Spanish liberal feminism.

Feijoo's words clearly resonated in Enlightened circles, with the result that overtly misogynistic positions became unacceptable. In these *milieux*, when the 'women's question' was discussed, a certain, limited version of equality was usually taken for granted (or at least lip service was paid to it), and Feijoo, highly regarded by *ilustrados* (Enlightened writers), was constantly cited and invoked. For those who prided themselves on representing enlightened attitudes, on raising the banner of reform and modernization of the country against the forces of traditionalism and reaction, admitting the 'equality of understanding' between men and women became an inescapable requirement, at least in public writing and speech.

However, recognition of this equality, while brandished as a necessary concession to modernity, was often used to close debate and prevent further developments which might endanger social conventions. As a result, in this particular formulation rational equality lost its cutting edge, and was not incompatible with a sharp definition of women's and men's 'complementary' and radically different cognitive potential, moral and sentimental inclinations, responsibilities and roles. This position is illustrated by the reference made by the royal minister Pedro Rodríguez Campomanes to the 'woman question' as a controversy that had already been resolved in a society struggling to define itself as modern, and one which did not need further discussion: 'it would be impertinent to enter a dispute where Father Feijoo surely took the best position, by considering a vulgar error the difference that common opinion used to establish in favour of men and against women'.<sup>48</sup> Some decades later, the liberal Valentín de Foronda, in an essay entitled *On all understandings being equal* (1820), considered equality to be a self-evident truth 'which reason admits, and many centuries of History confess'. He urged his readers, in a somewhat condescending tone, to forget 'that fastidious question of men's preeminence over women': he thus halted debate without stopping to weigh the implications of his statement.<sup>49</sup>

However, over the course of the century the concept of equality was also used and reformulated in more assertive ways, to support further demands for education and for the social and intellectual enhancement of women's roles and



status. Two particularly significant examples should be mentioned here: the debate on women's admission to the Economic Society, and the struggle of women writers to take part in the public world of letters. From soon after its foundation in 1775, to 1787 and beyond, the Economic Society of Madrid was a platform for debate on women's and men's 'nature' and social roles.<sup>50</sup> Economic Societies were voluntary, patriotic associations, created by the Enlightened elites as a way to contribute to agricultural innovation, domestic industry, charity and education of the lower classes; the Societies provided a public sphere for discussion, debate and social criticism. Therefore, the question whether to admit women in their ranks had powerful symbolic implications. Essays dealing with this contentious issue were widely published and read; some of them were translated and elicited responses from abroad. The essays revealed a significant difference of opinion among the members.<sup>51</sup> One faction, lead by Francisco de Cabarrús, did not accept any public role for women and used Rousseauian ideas to urge a redistribution of the social space, both physical and symbolic, envisaging a rigid sexual division in public and private spheres (a point of view which foreshadowed 19th century bourgeois society.)

Nevertheless, many distinguished members of the Economic Society favoured women's admission (with interesting differences in the rationales for their support, which are discussed below) and it was this position which prevailed, by royal decree of King Carlos III in 1787. For a majority of its advocates, including the monarch himself, women's admission had an essentially pragmatic sense – they saw the contributions women would make to moral and social reform through economic, educational and charity projects as 'suitable to their sex' and thus not contradicting, but rather reinforcing the specificity of their role. A minority, however, maintained that admission was a logical and desirable consequence of women's intellectual equality; entitlement to equal participation in social and cultural life, it was argued, should be acknowledged by any society wanting to define itself as modern. One of the members of the Economic Society to publicly adopt this viewpoint was Ignacio López de Ayala. He disagreed with Rousseauian ideas of sharply differentiated gender identities and took as his starting point a notion of humanity as essentially defined by reason. Anatomical differences, in his view, were completely irrelevant as a basis for establishing hierarchies:

There is absolutely no reason to privilege men over women as far as reason – the foundation of human excellence – is concerned. Claiming superiority on the basis of our strength or resilience would amount to preferring horses or elephants to men. Our distinctive feature is reason, not force, and the true mark of superiority is a superior lucidity of mind.<sup>52</sup>

While other members discussed the practicalities of women's admission, López de Ayala's text was a philosophical dissertation on the natural equality of the sexes. He considered recognition of this equality as a theoretical principle to be a welcome sign of progress, and an inescapable requirement for the enlightened



members of these voluntary associations: 'In our time, and even more at this place, that women are capable of the same instruction, and almost the same employments as men, is something that should not be disputed.' Instead of summing up, in the name of social utility, pragmatic arguments about women's potential collaboration, he tried to expose the inherent incoherence of a negative position: 'Equality accepted, why should we exclude the ladies from Societies?'

By taking ungendered reason as the very essence of humanity, López de Ayala can be considered an intellectual heir to seventeenth and early eighteenth-century ideas of rational equality between the sexes. At the same time, because he accepted the practical consequences of this principle in terms of women's equal participation in public life (at least in some of its eighteenth-century facets), his position can be related, in spite of crucial differences in political context and position, to arguments in favour of women's enfranchisement expressed by men such as Antoine Caritat de Condorcet during revolutionary France's debate on *citoyenneté*.

Like López de Ayala, the reputed scholar Josefa Amar, in her *Discourse in Defense of the Talent of Women* (1786) represents the fullest development of the discussion of equality in the late Enlightenment. In her works, as well as in her life, she displayed a solid confidence in her own merit and entitlement and in women's intellectual equality, saying: 'He who doubts this truth wants to shut his eyes to the light'.<sup>53</sup> However, for those who did close their eyes to the light of evidence, her essay made a strong case for women's right to admission to these reformist institutions on the grounds of their intellectual and moral equality and their civic duties. She used a variety of arguments, from Feijoo's considerations about men's authority over women stemming from God's will, rather than from natural superiority, to the usual arsenal of the *querelle des femmes*: reinterpretation of Genesis and historical examples. She did so from an unequivocal Enlightened position and skilfully exploited paradoxes in Enlightenment discourse, which shrank from flatly affirming the inferiority of women, but did not assume the implications of equality. Unlike many eighteenth-century advocates of women, Josefa Amar believed that full recognition of rational equality was still inexcusably lacking, even among those who defined themselves as modern and enlightened ('They are still disputing the talents and capacities of women as though it was a newly discovered natural phenomenon, or a difficult problem to resolve'<sup>54</sup>). In her view, the Economic Society debate offered the opportunity to eradicate such a prejudice and to move on towards true Enlightenment.

If Josefa Amar was the only Spanish woman who joined publicly in the debate, she was not the only one to argue for rational equality in order to validate her own entitlement and that of her sex to the republic of letters. In a way, all women who wrote for publication entered that debate, whether they intended it or not. Even those who did not get involved in extensive discussion of this issue had to address it in order to justify their own claim to an equal presence in the expanding literary market. They often did so by invoking a century-long tradition of learned women.<sup>55</sup> They also frequently invoked the equality of unsexed minds in order to assert their own entitlement and to ask for effective intellectual recognition.<sup>56</sup>

Margarita Hickey, a celebrated poet and translator, used this well-known argument in the introductory verses to her *Various Poems (Poesías varias)*, published in 1789, when she stated that 'true wisemen' had to accept her work if they truly believed that 'soul, like spirit/has no sex'.<sup>57</sup> María Laborda, an obscure playwright, explained the argument of an unpublished comedy full of resolute and energetic female characters, by arguing that 'the soul produces ideas, without distinction of sex'.<sup>58</sup>

Inés Joyes y Blake struggled to persuade women of their intellectual capacity and moral worth in her *Apology of Women (Apología de las mujeres)*, 1798: 'never believe that your souls are not the equal of those of the sex that wants to tyrannise you: use the light that the Creator gave you'.<sup>59</sup> She also tried to reveal the partiality of male opinion, obscured as it was by a deceptive gloss of scientific discourse. To accomplish this she used, among other arguments, a fable (also employed by Feijoo) about a man who, trying to persuade a lion of men's superior strength, was made to note that humans, not lions, had made such statements.<sup>60</sup> Like Josefa Amar, who in her 1786 plea before the Economic Society had explicitly assumed the role of advocate for her sex while noting that men played the more comfortable role of judges, Inés Joyes echoed Feijoo's lucid recognition of the deep imbalance in the debate on gender.

### **Conclusion: rational equality in the European context**

Has mind a sex? Is thinking gender neutral? Historiography has diverged when evaluating the effects of the rationalist idea of a disembodied mind. While many scholars consider it a powerful argument with which to defend women's equality and legitimate their writing,<sup>61</sup> others maintain that the concept of reason as non-gendered and aseptically objective, untainted by the body or by personal circumstances, was part of a dualism which forced upon women a 'masculine' notion of reason.<sup>62</sup> In an attempt to strike a balance, Erica Harth has pointed to the ambiguities which rationalism had for women: in her view, Descartes' philosophy gave credence to the intellectual aspirations of educated women, by allowing them to abstract themselves from their gender, to consider themselves as rational beings and to present themselves as such in public; but at the same time it made it difficult for them to see themselves (and to write as) both thinking beings *and* women.<sup>63</sup> Discrepancies might perhaps be lessened if we consider rational equality not as a compact, unified theory, tightly framed by Cartesian dualism, but as a concept and a style of reasoning which was adapted in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries to various intellectual backgrounds and practical aims.

Indeed, as Siep Stuurman has powerfully argued, the concept and the advocacy of gender equality were not brought about by the Enlightenment. Rather they were a product of seventeenth-century rationalism, not in any mechanical way, but as a result of Renaissance pro-woman arguments and Cartesianism (often only vaguely defined), which can only be fully understood within the framework of public debate and social change that occurred around women's participation in literary life. With a different framing and emphasis, I have tried to suggest



that rational equality cannot be viewed in sharp dichotomy to the content and style of early modern pro-woman positions, but should be seen as a process of gradual evolution which often incorporated and reshaped these positions. At the same time, though, it implied key intellectual and social changes, including the emergence of rationalism and intellectual criticism, sometimes accompanied by a self-conscious, almost defiant, 'modern' attitude. As well, the context in which the *querelle des femmes* was framed was transformed – from a courtly and aristocratic milieu where ideas and models of women's excellence were based on the social roles undertaken by royal and noble women (symbolically evoking an image of necessary and divinely-ordered hierarchies), to a broader social spectrum in which discussions took place in less formal and more open (although still elitist) salons and academies, essays were written for a wider public and, in general terms, social divisions were more fluid.

How can we place the advocacy of women's equality in the context of eighteenth-century Spanish (and European) culture and society? While it might be tempting to present a picture of exceptional individuals (like Feijoo) using ideas of equality to push for change, consideration of social context helps to offer a fuller and more nuanced, if less heroic, picture. We should not forget that their arguments did not take shape in isolation, but as contributions to impassioned debates; their work was published and discussed by readers, particularly in reformist circles; their views were criticized and in some cases publicly defended; on occasion their writings were translated and discussed in other countries, thus merging into a stream of eighteenth-century discussions of gender throughout Europe. Philosophical debate was crucially related to changes in intellectual and social life, leading not only to the formation of modern ideas but also to the emergence of a more widely cultured public which included women. It was sometimes framed as an abstract exchange of ideas, but it was strongly connected (and would become more so) with issues concerning women's education, their place and role in society and in the family, and their claim to participate in the Enlightened republic of letters.

Equality was not a concept born in a particular nation, nor can it be attributed to individual authorship (although the importance of certain individuals, such as María de Zayas and Feijoo, Poulain and Marie de Gournay, must be acknowledged). It was rather a transformation which took shape at a European level, in a chronology encompassing the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. Conceptual similarities between authors cannot be explained as mere coincidences, nor can their ideas be said to have spread from a particular centre (be it Venice, Paris or London); rather these similarities should be seen as evidence of a common pool of intellectual references, ideas and arguments, often helped by translations of foreign works, which combined with local influences and circumstances to produce broadly similar (and at the same time significantly differentiated) results. If this network was clearly polarised around a European centre, the role played by the ideas generated outside this centre reminds us of the flow of intellectual communication, and of the similarities of European societies immersed in the process of cultural and social change.



## Notes

1. I retain some reservations about 'feminism' as a category prior to the nineteenth or late eighteenth century. However, as far as the specificity of critical thought and attitudes towards gender in the early modern period is stressed in relation to feminism as a social movement and as a theory in modern times, I wouldn't object to the use of labels such as 'rational feminism' or 'Enlightened feminism', although I tend not to use them in the context of early modern Spain.
2. See Siep Stuurman's contribution to 'Considering Feminism and Enlightenment', *Women: a Cultural Review*, 12/2 (2001), 236–248, and, in particular, his essay in this volume: S. Stuurman, 'The deconstruction of gender'.
3. J. Kelly, 'Early Feminism and the Querelle des Femmes', in *Women, History and Theory* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1984); J. Geffriaud-Rosso, *Études sur la féminité au XVIIIe–XVIIIe siècles* (Pisa: Goliardica, 1983); F. Tariccone and S. Bucci, *La condizione della donna nel XVII e XVIII secolo* (Roma: Carucci, 1983); B. Rang, 'A "learned wave": women of letters and science from the Renaissance to the Enlightenment', in T. Akkerman and S. Stuurman, eds, *Perspectives on Feminist Political Thought in European History: From the Middle Ages to the Present* (London and New York: Routledge, 1998), 50–66.
4. See, among others, R. Archer, *Misoginia y defensa de las mujeres: Antología de textos medievales* (Madrid: Cátedra, 2001).
5. M. Rivera, 'El cuerpo femenino y la "querrela de las mujeres" (Corona de Aragón, siglo XV)', in C. Klapisch Zuber, ed., *Historia de las mujeres en Occidente. 3. La Edad Media* (Madrid: Taurus, 1992), 593–605, and 'Las prosistas del humanismo y del Renacimiento (1400–1550)', in I. M. Zavala, ed., *Breve historia feminista de la literatura española (escrita en lengua castellana). IV. La literatura escrita por mujer (de la Edad Media al siglo XVIII)* (Madrid: Anthropos, 1997), 83–130.
6. Stuurman, 'The deconstruction...'
7. M. de Zayas y Sotomayor, *Novelas amorosas y ejemplares y desengaños amorosos* (Madrid: Castalia, 1989), 47–48.
8. Before falling into discredit among educated readers and critics, because their Baroque style and values did not meet Enlightenment literary and moral canons. This might explain why she was never claimed as a predecessor by Feijoo or by any other eighteenth-century advocate of women, either male or female.
9. See Zavala, *Breve historia*; J. Boyce and E. Olivares, eds, *Tras el espejo la musa escribe. Lírica femenina de los Siglos de Oro* (Madrid: Siglo XXI, 1993); A. Navarro, *Antología poética de escritoras de los siglos XVI y XVII* (Madrid: Castalia, 1989).
10. On Feijoo and the early Spanish Enlightenment, see J. M. Maravall, 'El primer siglo XVIII y la obra de Feijoo', in *Estudios sobre la historia del pensamiento español en el siglo XVIII* (Madrid: Mondadori, 1991); *II Coloquio sobre el Padre Feijoo y su siglo* (Oviedo: Centro de Estudios del siglo XVIII, 1981; F. Sánchez-Blanco, *La mentalidad ilustrada* (Madrid: Taurus, 1999), 63–122.
11. A brief recent introduction to the Spanish Enlightenment is that of J. Fernández Sebastián, 'Península Ibérica', in V. Ferrone and D. Roche, *Diccionario histórico de la Ilustración* (Madrid: Alianza, 1998), 340–51. Also, L. M. Enciso, 'La Ilustración en España', in *Carlos III y su siglo* (Madrid: Universidad Complutense de Madrid, 1988), I, 621–96; F. Sánchez-Blanco, *Europa y el pensamiento español del siglo XVIII* (Madrid: Alianza, 1991).
12. B. J. Feijoo, *Teatro crítico universal de errores comunes* (Madrid: herederos de Francisco del Hierro, 1742, 7th edition), 331–400. Quotations will refer to this edition. There are several anthologies of this work, and a pocket edition of discourse XVI: *Defensa de la mujer* (Barcelona: Icaria, 1997), but the much needed modern critical edition has not yet been published. On Feijoo and the first Spanish Enlightenment, see J. M. Maravall, 'El primer siglo XVIII y la obra de Feijoo', in *Estudios sobre la historia del pensamiento español*

- en el siglo XVIII (Madrid: Mondadori, 1991); G. Stiffoni, 'Intelectuales, sociedad y Estado', in *La época de los primeros Borbones. II. La cultura entre el Barroco y la Ilustración (1680-1759)* (Madrid: Espasa Calpe, 1985), 5-148; *II Coloquio sobre el Padre Feijoo y su siglo* (Oviedo: Centro de Estudios del siglo XVIII, 1981); F. Sánchez-Blanco, *La mentalidad ilustrada* (Madrid: Taurus, 1999), ch. 2, 63-122.
13. Apart from complete English editions of Feijoo's essays, his 'Defence of Women' had two additional translations under the titles of *An Essay on Woman, or Physiological and Historical Defense of the Fair Sex* (1765) and *An Essay on the Learning Genius and Abilities of the Fair Sex* (1774).
  14. Examples of misinterpretation include P. Villota, 'El siglo de la Ilustración y la capacidad intelectual de la mujer', in *Hombres y mujeres en la formación del pensamiento occidental. VII Jornadas de Investigación Interdisciplinar* (Madrid: Universidad Autónoma de Madrid, 1989), II, 185-196; also J. A. González Feijoo, *El pensamiento ético-político de B. J. Feijoo* (Oviedo: Pentalfa, 1991). The 1997 edition does not escape anachronism. S. A. Kitts, *The Debate on the Nature and Role of Women in Eighteenth Century Spain* (Queenston-Lewiston-Lampeter: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1995) includes in chs 1 and 2 a detailed study of the polemics, which, however, fails to place it in the context of early modern European debate; for a different view, see also M. Bolufer, *Mujeres e Ilustración. La construcción de la feminidad en la España del siglo XVIII* (Valencia: Institució Alfons el Magnànim), ch. 1.
  15. Feijoo, *Defensa de las mujeres*, 361-2, and additions to paragraphs 59 and 75, included in the 1997 edition, 84-7. Feijoo went to great lengths to prove that Lucrezia Marinella's work, which he had seen at the Royal Library in Madrid, did exist and was not his invention, as some of his antagonists had suggested.
  16. Feijoo, 'Defensa de las mujeres', 337-42.
  17. Feijoo, 'Defensa de las mujeres', 334-6, 343-54, 355-76, respectively.
  18. S. Stuurman, 'Social Cartesianism: François Poulain de la Barre and the Origins of the Enlightenment', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 58/4 (1997), 617-40. F. Poulain, *De l'égalité des deux sexes* (Paris: Arthème Fayard, 1984). There is a recent Catalan translation: *De la igualtat dels dos sexes* (València: Universitat de València-Alacant-Jaume I, 1993), while *De l'éducation des femmes* has been translated into Spanish, *De la educación de las damas* (Madrid: Cátedra, 1993). Feijoo, *Defensa de la mujer*, 1997 edition (addition to paragraph 75).
  19. See Stuurman's essay in this volume. Also, C. Lougee, *Le Paradis des femmes: Women, Salons, and Social Stratification in Seventeenth-century France* (Princeton: Princeton University Press); E. Harth, *Cartesian Women. Versions and Subversions of Rational Discourse in the Old Regime* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1992), 135.
  20. Sánchez-Blanco, *La mentalidad ilustrada*.
  21. He occasionally visited the court, but often refused honours and appointments. We lack a good biography of Feijoo. See, however, the introduction to A. Millares Carló, ed., *Obras escogidas del Padre Feijoo* (Madrid: Atlas, Biblioteca de Autores Españoles, 1952-61).
  22. His successor Carlos III, to whom Feijoo dedicated one of the volumes of his *Critical Theatre*, would keep this favourable attitude.
  23. Feijoo, *Defensa de las mujeres*, p. 180. The names and deeds of learned women of the past are arranged in his essay by countries: Spanish (chapter 16), French (ch. 17), Italian (ch. 18), German (ch. 19), and Asian (ch. 20), besides a chapter on female artists (ch. 22).
  24. Quoted by G. Marañón, 'Las ideas biológicas del Padre Feijoo', in *Obras escogidas del Padre Feijoo* (Madrid: Atlas, Biblioteca de Autores Españoles, 1952), volume CXLI, p. CXVI, note 32.
  25. *Diario histórico, erudito y comercial*, no. 80, 25-VIII-1772.
  26. P. Hazard, *La crisis de la conciencia europea, 1680-1715* (Madrid: Pegaso, 1988).
  27. Feijoo, *Defensa de las mujeres*, ch. 6 (women rulers), 7 (warriors), 8 (prudent women), 16 to 22 (women of letters and artists).



28. Feijoo, *Defensa de las mujeres*, 355–6.
29. Poulain, *De l'égalité*, p. 37. Feijoo, *Defensa de las mujeres*, 337, 354 and 374. The editors of the *Mémoires de Trevoux* considered Feijoo's essay, after its French translation, a true piece of philosophy: 'personne avant le P. Feijoo ne l'a fait avec plus de sagesse et avec moins de partialité.... Ce n'est point un panégyriste...mais un philosophe'. Quoted by C. Sáenz de Santamaría, 'Feijoo y las *Memorias de Trevoux*', in *II Simposio*, 59. It must be noted that many of Feijoo's supporters were more conventional *champions des femmes* who displayed a flourished language of gallantry against their migogynist opponents.
30. Feijoo, *Defensa de las mujeres*, 365.
31. M. Martínez, *Carta defensiva que sobre el primer tomo del Teatro Crítico Universal ... le escribió su más aficionado amigo* (Madrid: Imprenta Real, 1726), 18.
32. The exact phrasing corresponds to that of Pierre Bayle: 'Women who say the Soul is neither male, nor female can be sure they are right'. Feijoo, *Defensa de las mujeres*, 363.
33. Feijoo, *Defensa de las mujeres*, 335.
34. Interest to locate in the brain a physical basis for gender inequality took place in a period when Philosophy was increasingly interested in the nature of the mind (Descartes, Locke) and at the same time Medicine granted more importance than before to the brain, considering it to be the noblest part of the body (while Aristotelic and Galenic reserved this place to the heart or the testicles, respectively). See L. Schiebinger, *The Mind has no Sex? Women in the Origins of Modern Science* (Harvard, Harvard University Press, 1989).
35. Feijoo, *Defensa de las mujeres*, 373, 375.
36. G. Barker-Benfield, *The Culture of Sensibility. Sex and Society in Eighteenth-Century Britain*. (Chicago and London: Chicago University Press), ch. 1.
37. Feijoo, *Defensa de las mujeres*, 395.
38. Feijoo, *Defensa de las mujeres*, 345. He insisted, however, that this was positive, not natural law, and therefore implied for women subordination to men's authority, but no natural inferiority.
39. Feijoo, *Defensa de las mujeres*, ch. 24.
40. Feijoo, *Defensa de las mujeres*, 345.
41. J. A. Santareli, *Estrado crítico en defensa de las mugeres contra el Theatro Crítico Universal de Errores Comunes*. (S.l., s.l., s.d.) [1727], 35.
42. Santareli, *Estrado crítico*, 33.
43. Feijoo, *Defensa de las mujeres*, 357.
44. Feijoo, *Defensa de las mujeres*, 356.
45. Poulain, *De l'égalité*, 52.
46. Bolufer, *Mujeres e Ilustración*, ch. 7; also 'Escritura femenina y publicación: de la expresión personal a la república de las letras', in M. Ortega, C. Sánchez and C. Valiente, eds, *Mujeres y ciudadanía. Revisiones desde el ámbito privado* (Madrid: Universidad Autónoma de Madrid, 1999), 197–223.
47. See Bolufer, *Mujeres e Ilustración*, ch. 2.
48. P. Rodríguez Campomanes, *Discurso sobre la educación popular y su fomento* (Madrid: Instituto de Estudios Fiscales, 1975), 190.
49. V. de Foronda, *Cartas sobre la Policía*, in *Los sueños de la razón* (Madrid: Editora Nacional, 1984), 525 and 563.
50. Bolufer, *Mujeres e Ilustración*, ch. 8; also, M. Bolufer and I. Morant, 'On Women's Reason, Education and Love: Women and Men of the Enlightenment in Spain and France', *Gender and History*, 10/2 (1998), 183–216.
51. Texts published by O. Negrín Fajardo, *Ilustración y educación. La Sociedad Económica Madrileña* (Madrid: Editora Nacional, 1984), edition to which I will refer for quotations.
52. Negrín, *Ilustración*, 177.
53. J. Amar, *Discurso sobre la educación física y moral de las mujeres* (Madrid: Cátedra, 1994), 69.
54. Negrín, *Ilustración*, 183.



55. M. Bolufer, 'Celebrating learned women in eighteenth-century Spain: a tradition and its meanings'. Unpublished paper discussed at *Bluestockings: Women, Writing, and the Politics of Sociability*, The University of York Centre for Eighteenth-century Studies, march 2001; 'Galería de mujeres fuertes: el sinuoso camino entre la excepción y la norma cotidiana', *Hispania*, 204 (2000), 181–224.
56. Writers such as the author of *La Pensadora Gaditana* (a 'female spectator' of uncertain identity) had often pointed at the contradiction between rhetorical acknowledgement of equality and dismissive attitudes towards women's intellectual activities. *La Pensadora Gaditana* (Cádiz: Manuel Jiménez Carreño, 1786, reprint of the 1763 edition), I, 3.
57. M. Hickey y Pellizzoni, *Poesías varias sagradas, morales y profanas o amorosas* (Madrid: Imprenta Real, 1789), 417–18.
58. She also justified herself as a writer blending rational equality with religious inspiration: 'I follow the impulse of the Eternal Being who formed my soul as a rational entity, adorned by the admirable gift of the word'. M. Laborda, *La dama misterio*, Ms. Biblioteca Municipal de Madrid.
59. I. Joyes, *Apología de las mujeres*, in S. Johnson, *El Príncipe de Abisinia* (Madrid: Sancha, 1798), 203–04.
60. Joyes, *Apología*, 176.
61. R. Perry, *The Celebrated Mary Astell. An Early English Feminist* (Chicago-London: Chicago University Press, 1986). P. Hoffmann, *La femme dans la pensée des Lumières* (Paris: Ophrys, 1977).
62. S. Bordo, *The Flight to Objectivity: Essays on Cartesianism and Culture* (Albany: State University of New York, 1987); G. Lloyd, *The Man of Reason. 'Male' and 'Female' in Western Philosophy* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984).
63. To her, this explains why seventeenth and eighteenth-century 'Cartésiennes' (such as Elisabeth of Bohemia, Catherine Descartes, Marie Dupré or Anne de la Vigne) were ambivalent about Cartesian dualism. Also in England, the examples of Ann Conway or Margaret Cavendish show that philosophic dualism was not the only basis from which to articulate a defence of women. See S. Hutton, 'The Alterity of History. Towards a History of Feminist Ethics: Mary Astell and Anne Conway', in J. Hermsen, ed., *Het Denken Van de Ander* (Kampen: Kok Agora, 1997).

# Enlightenment Biographies

## Josefa Amar y Borbón (1749–?)

Josefa Amar Borbón was an enlightened Spanish woman. Her date of death is uncertain, but it was not before 1808. Descended on both sides from families of a certain intellectual renown and social standing (both her father and grandfather were distinguished physicians), she lived at the court as a young woman. Later, she married a lawyer, Joaquín Fuertes Piquer, had one son and spent most of her adult life in Zaragoza, a provincial town whose reformist and Enlightened circles she and her husband joined. Her education was rather uncommon for a non-aristocratic woman of the day. She learnt Latin, Greek, and several modern languages; and she gained considerable knowledge of the Classics, of Spanish moralistic and pedagogical writing of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, of eighteenth-century educational works, and, most particularly, of ancient and modern medical texts. Her writings include translations of agronomic, literary, erudite and pedagogical works from the English, French and Italian. However, her most relevant publications are her *Discourse in Defense of the Talents of Women* (*Discurso en defensa del talento de las mujeres*, 1786), written as a contribution to the debate concerning women's admission to the Economic Society of Madrid, and her *Discourse on women's physical and moral education* (*Discurso sobre la educación física y moral de las mujeres*, 1790), the most comprehensive pedagogical treatise for women in eighteenth-century Spain. She enjoyed considerable prestige in her time. She was admitted to the Economic Society of Aragón in 1782, to the *Junta de Damas* (Ladies' Committee) of the Economic Society of Madrid in 1787, and to the Royal Medical Society of Barcelona, in recognition of her contribution to the popularization of medical knowledge.

Mónica Bolufer Peruga

## John Anderson (1726–96)

A Professor of Natural Philosophy at the University of Glasgow, John Anderson dedicated himself to promoting women's higher education. Born in Dumbartonshire, the son of devout Presbyterians (both his father and grandfather were ministers), Anderson demonstrated an early and persistent belief that women – contra popular theories of the period – were 'rational beings' and deserved every opportunity to 'cultivate' their understanding. This commitment culminated in a deathbed wish to found a coeducational technical university. In a detailed will, Anderson outlined a plan whereby 'the ladies of Glasgow' might be provided with 'such a stock of general knowledge' as to make them the 'most cultivated in all of Europe'. His school would offer a 'Ladies Course' in Natural Philosophy where women, 'for a small fee,' would be introduced to a range of scientific subjects. Although Anderson did not live to see his dream realized, the school, aptly named Anderson's Institution, was successfully established in 1796. As Anderson had requested, the Institution offered women courses in astronomy, electricity, magnetism, hydrostatics, hydraulics and optics. Thomas Garnett, one of the school's early instructors, praised Anderson for his recognition that providing women with a better education was a necessary part of the 'civilizing' process. As Garnett wrote in his 1800 *Observations on a Tour through the Highlands*, 'The ladies of this city are undoubtedly much indebted to the founder [Anderson], as being the first person in this island who set on foot a plan of rational education for them, which affords the means of acquiring knowledge, not only useful to themselves in various circumstances of life, and capable of always supplying a



'man' and 'woman', feeling that they were designations that emphasized the differences between the sexes, rather than their overwhelming commonalities: 'Both men and women should certainly, in the first place, regard themselves, and should be treated by each other, as human beings. It might, perhaps, in some measure, contribute to this end, if, beside the sexual appellations of man and woman, we had some general term to denote the species, like... Homo in the Greek and Roman languages. The want of such a general term is a material defect in our language.' Yes, there were biological distinctions, he explained, but most of the perceived differences stemmed less from physiology than from cultural context. It was his aim, he noted, as an enlightened subject, to minimize the gap between the sexes (though not in such a way, he insisted, as to completely 'confound' difference). Enfield himself was no doubt working in this spirit when he decided – likely playfully – to use the pseudonym 'Homo' in the essays he wrote for the radical Norwich periodical *The Cabinet*.

Arianne Chernock

### Louise-Florence-Pétronille Tardieu d'Esclavelles de la Live d'Épinay (1726–83)

Though she married for love, Louise d'Épinay soon discovered that she had made a disastrous marriage to her profligate tax-farmer cousin, La Live d'Épinay. Best known for her association with the *philosophes*, in particular Diderot, Grimm (who was her lover) and the abbé Galiani, with whom she corresponded extensively after his return to Naples in 1769, she was herself a distinguished member of the intellectual society in which she moved. She contributed anonymously to Grimm's *Correspondance littéraire*, taking charge of its production for lengthy periods when he was away. She was also closely acquainted with Jean-Jacques Rousseau, with whom she famously quarrelled. She wrote up her version of events in the *Histoire de Madame de Montbrillant*, often referred to as her *Pseudo-Mémoires*, which was published for the first time in 1818. Her pedagogical work, *Les Conversations d'Émilie* (1774, augmented and corrected in 1782) demonstrates the influence of Rousseau, while at the same time criticising him in the area of the education of women. Written for her grand-daughter, Émilie de Belzunce, *Les Conversations d'Émilie* was awarded the Prix Montyon (a newly established prize offered by the Académie française for the book of the year judged to be the most useful to society) in January 1783. She was in competition for this with Mme de Genlis, who clearly considered that her own pedagogical novel *Adèle et Théodore* deserved to win. It was suggested at the time that Genlis's known anti-*philosophe* stance spoiled her chances. Mme d'Épinay's educational theory designated three developmental stages: (i) up to ten, (ii) from ten till fourteen or fifteen, (iii) from fifteen till marriage. The published work covers only education up to ten.

Jean Bloch

### Father Benito Jerónimo Feijoo (1676–1764)

Feijoo was a Benedictine monk, the eldest son of a family of the lesser nobility, and a Theology professor at the University of Oviedo for almost half a century (1710–59). He was one of the most popular Spanish writers of the eighteenth century, and an energetic advocate of Enlightenment principles. He opposed defenders of traditional scholasticism and was an admirer of modern European philosophy. For a long time, he has been presented by historians as an exceptional figure, heroically standing alone in a landscape of mediocrity and backwardness. Recent research offers a more nuanced version of enlightened change, pointing to its origins in the last third of the seventeenth century, and reassessing Feijoo's significance instead as the most relevant representative of the early Spanish Enlightenment, given his wide range of interests and his determination to reach a large audience. His most important works – two collections of essays entitled *Critical Theater of Common Errors and*



*Prejudices (Teatro Crítico de Errores Comunes)* and *Erudite Letters (Cartas Eruditas)* – attained an unprecedented popularity in the rather bleak outlook of Spanish editorial industry. They went through, respectively, twenty and eleven full or partial editions between 1725 and 1787, as well as dozens of reprints. At the moment of Feijoo's death, almost 500,000 copies had been sold, and dictionaries and indexes of his work had been published to help quick browsing. He was also one of the Spanish intellectuals most famous abroad, with translations into five languages (French, Italian, Portuguese, German and English.) His *Defense of women* (essay XVI of his *Critical Theater*) aroused intense and longlasting polemics and had a strong influence on eighteenth-century Spanish culture.

Mónica Peruga Bolufer

### Mme de la Fite (1737–94)

Marie Elisabeth de la Fite, author, translator and governess, belonged to the sector of northern European Republic of Letters which was moderate, Protestant, Enlightened, and pursued the Baconian and Newtonian goal of demonstrating the compatibility of theology and natural philosophy. She was born in Hamburg (or Altona), possibly of French Huguenot stock. She married a Dutch Huguenot pastor, Jean-Daniel La Fite, who was also a Chaplain to the House of Orange in The Hague; both were involved in educating the royal children. She also collaborated with him in the *Bibliothèque des Sciences et des Beaux Arts*, an explicitly anti-Deistic journal, also devoted to the advancement of the arts and sciences. After being widowed she joined the household of Queen Charlotte in Britain in 1781, as a Reader, and instructress to the princesses in German and French. She also helped Sarah Trimmer with the Queen's charity schools in Windsor. Her educational works, written with the royal princesses in mind, include *Eugénie et ses élèves*, (1787) dedicated to Princess Elizabeth, and *Entretiens, Drames, et Contes Moraux à l'usage des femmes*, (1801) dedicated to Queen Charlotte. These were modelled on similar works by Mme LePrince de Beaumont, and as well as dialogues on natural history include playlets by progressive continental educators such as Armand Berquin, C. F. Weisse, C. G. Salzmann and J.H. Campe, many of whom were influenced by English moral writers. (Mary Wollstonecraft in turn translated Salzmann). She cherished her literary friendship with Mme de Genlis. Her moral themes include the need to override passion with reason, to cultivate rural simplicity rather than metropolitan sophistication, and enjoy the pleasures of philanthropy. She also translated *Lady Sophia Sternheim*, by Sophie von La Roche, *Thoughts on the Manners of the Great* by Hannah More and two works by Lavater, the founder of physiognomy.

Clarissa Campbell Orr

### Eliza Fletcher (1770–1858)

Eliza Fletcher, née Eliza Dawson, was the daughter of Elizabeth Hill, from a Yorkshire gentry family, who died at her birth, and Miles Dawson, a surveyor and small landowner. Educated at the Manor School, York, in July 1791 she married the Scottish advocate Archibald Fletcher, a Gaelic speaker and burgh reformer, made Edinburgh her home. From then until her husband's death in 1828 she remained close to the reforming politics of Edinburgh Whiggism, and her autobiography is an outstanding account of early nineteenth-century Edinburgh literary and reforming circles. She shared and celebrated her husband's political sympathies with the early principles of the French Revolution, though not with more radical revolutionary politics, and she wrote of the strength of Tory prejudice against reformers in Edinburgh in the 1790s. Her attractive personality and political interests allowed her to play a lively role in the circles surrounding the *Edinburgh Review*, founded in 1802. With Elizabeth Hamilton and Anne Grant of Laggan, she helped to provide the sociable and conversational contexts in which men such as Francis Jeffrey, Henry Brougham, Dugald Stewart and many others flourished. Her autobiography also

woman-authored, feminist pamphlet of the Revolutionary period, *Vues législatives pour les femmes* (Legislative Views for Women). Part of her surviving estate was left to Mme Diderot.

Felicia Gordon

### Inés Joyes y Blake (1731–1806)

Information about Inés Joyes y Blake is very scarce, as her life is still being researched. She was born in Madrid in 1731 to Gregorio Joyes and Inés Joyes, both members of Irish merchant dynasties established in Spain. She belonged to the middle class, with commercial, financial, bureaucratic and military connections. Her family seems to have been a cultured one, connected with Enlightenment circles (her refined home was praised by English travellers, while one of her sons, Joaquín, and her grandson José played significant intellectual and political roles in the period of liberal revolution in early nineteenth-century Spain). She married another Irishman, Agustín Blake, in 1752, and lived all her adult life in Málaga, a flourishing sea-port, and in Vélez-Málaga, a small provincial town. She had nine children, for whom she had to provide after her husband's bankruptcy and death in 1782. Her name appeared in the world of letters with a 1798 translation of Samuel Johnson's *Rasselas, Prince of Abissinia*, followed by an *Apology of women*, which seems to have gone rather unnoticed in her time. The fact that the Irish in Spain were a compact community, inclined to maintaining their language and customs, accounts for endogamy and also explains her rather unusual mastery of the English language. Her decision to translate a philosophical novel – written by a defender of the talents of women and friend to many women writers, a novel which was sceptical about matrimony and had a heroine with a singular personality – rather than one of the sentimental plots then in vogue, is an indication of her leanings. Inés Joyes' ideas are further developed in her *Apology*, a vehement plea for women's intellectual aptitudes, moral responsibilities and emotional autonomy, with obvious connections to the work of Josefa Amar and more intriguing parallels with that of Mary Wollstonecraft.

Mónica Bolufer Peruga

### Immanuel Kant (1724–1804)

Kant lived his whole life in the city of Königsberg, then part of East Prussia. His father was a saddle maker whose Pietism exerted a lasting influence on his son. Kant attended the University of Königsberg where he focused on philosophy, mathematics, and physics. He spent his entire career at this university, starting as a lecturer, and ultimately becoming its rector. At the same time, he achieved a Europe-wide reputation as a philosopher through his published writings. Around 1769 Kant experienced what he called a great 'upheaval' in his thinking, possibly from reading Hume's works of Philosophical skepticism. His most important works of philosophy were the result of this 'critical turn': *Critique of pure Reason* (1781), *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics* (1783); *Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals*; *Critique of Practical Reason* (1788) and *Critique of Judgment* (1790). Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* established the basic of knowledge claims now associated with the Enlightenment and modernity by working out a position that avoided both skepticism and determinism, but assumed universal human reason. Between 1784 and 1786, Kant's interventions in several public debates, including his response to the question, 'What is Enlightenment', made him a prominent representative of the German Enlightenment. By the 1790s, however, a backlash against the Enlightenment developed in Germany, and Kant's ability to publish freely was constrained by the order of this king. Thereafter Kant avoided the subject of religion but published on other topics until his death in 1804.

Dena Goodman