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GREAT DISPUTES OVER WOMAN IN EARLY MODERN TIMES

Disputes over woman, her nature and place in society and in the family, carried on from Graeco–Roman times and throughout the Middle Ages, were conducted mainly by men. The only exception was Christina of Pisa (1363–1431), a Venetian woman living in France, who wrote an “apology” for women (*Tresor de la Cité des dames*, 1497), demanding that they should be given access to education. At the threshold of the modern era humanists raised the problem again and the dispute flared up with unprecedented force. The 16th and 17th centuries, in particular, were a period when hundreds of publications appeared on this subject, from learned treatises to popular and gutter literature, the latter frequently vulgar and obscene, its aim being to amuse the reader at any price in order to boost sales.

The Renaissance, however, added new elements to the old dispute. Neoplatonism turned back to the tradition of medieval courtly love, which led to the idealisation of woman¹. Three great humanists, the Erasmus of Rotterdam, the Spaniard Juan Louis Vives and the Englishman Thomas Elyot, expressed the view that woman was equal to man spiritually, but they did not propose women’s social and political equality. Erasmus saw only one way of life for women: marriage, having in mind a partners’ marriage. Inspired by Aristophanes, he supplemented his *Colloquia familiaria* by an essay *Senatulus*, in which he presented a group of women who decided to set up a parliament in order to defend their interests. The work was so ambivalent that researchers still vary in their opinions, some holding the view that it was a satire, others asserting that it was a picture emphasising women’s capability to organise themselves and to conduct a joint campaign

¹ Cf. S. Davies, *The Idea of Woman in Renaissance Literature. The Feminine Reclaimed*, Brighton 1986.

for the sake of their sex². Erasmus's idea was copied in France³ and England⁴ and, as we shall see later, "women's parliaments" became a current in literature also in Poland.

The German humanist Cornelius Agrippa von Nettesheim, author of the treatise *De nobilitate et praecellentia sexu foeminei*, published in Antwerp in 1529 with a dedication to Margaret of Austria, regent of the Netherlands, showed the greatest devotion to the cause of women. It is worth adding that Agrippa presented his work to the world twenty years after he wrote it, when Margaret became regent and he could count on her protection. Using biological and theological arguments, Agrippa asserted that women were not only equal but even superior to men (Eve was formed from Adam's rib, that is, from a nobler matter than dust; women produce milk which nourishes babies; Adam, and not Eve, was responsible for the original sin, for the order not to eat of the tree of knowledge was given to him; the Virgin Mary, the greatest of women, surpasses by her dignity the greatest of men, John the Baptist). Agrippa not only was in favour of giving women access to education but also criticised their legal and political discrimination; in his view, women should hold public offices, perform public functions and take part in socio-political life on an equal footing with men. Agrippa's treatise was known all over Europe, having been translated from Latin into German, French, English, Italian, and Polish and was frequently referred to in discussions.

Passionate theological discussions on the values of both sexes were held throughout the 16th and 17th centuries; all possible references in the *Holy Scriptures*, especially in *Genesis*, were analysed in detail and the *Gospels* were studied from the point of view of Jesus' attitude to women. Fragments taken out of context were interpreted literally, primitively, and the sense was often stretched or even falsified. Additional inspiration was drawn from ancient philosophers, Aristotle and Plato, from their statements unfavourable to women, as well as from the Fathers of the Church (Saint Augustine, Saint Jerome, Saint Thomas Aquinas) and, first and foremost, from Saint Paul; in this way the misogynous attitude of previous centuries was used and copied also in the 16th and 17th centuries.

Most Renaissance theologians held the view that woman was inferior to man because of the way she was created and that therefore she was a

² The view that this is not a satire is held, among others, by M. Mc Kendrick, *Woman and Society in the Spanish Drama of the Golden Age*, Cambridge 1974, p. 9.

³ Henri Estienne, *Carmen de senatulus foeminarum*, Strasbourg 1596.

⁴ A petition concerning the decline of trade in the middle of the 17th century was sent to the English parliament by 400 women; in reply to this petition the republican politician and pamphleteer Henri Neville published the satire *The Ladies' Parliament* and in 1650 *The Commonwealth of Ladies*; both satires mocked women's public activity.

“weaker vessel”, that is, lacked man’s moral backbone. Being regarded as inferior to men and more compliant to sin, women were under religious proscription: they were not allowed to express their opinions in church, preach and administer sacraments.

It was especially the question of whether woman was equal to man in Paradise, before committing the original sin, that absorbed theologians’ attention; their reply was usually negative. Agostino Inveges, a Sicilian priest, in his tract *Historia sacra paradisi terrestri et sanctissimi innocentiae status* (Palermo 1649) wrote that “Eve’s sanctity and talents almost equalled those of Adam”. However, because of his future public activity Adam benefited from the assistance of an Archangel, in addition to the Angel who looked after his private life. Eve, whose future life was to be of a purely private character, had only a “private” Angel to assist her. John Salked, an English Catholic who converted to Protestantism, rector in Somerset, author of *A Treatise of Paradise* (London 1617) also considered this question and was obviously confused by St. Paul’s words in his *First Epistle to the Corinthians* (XI, 7–9): “For a man... is the image and glory of God; but the woman is the glory of the man. For the man is not of the woman; but the woman of the man. Neither was the man created for the woman; but the woman for the man”. Salked was troubled by the disparity between these words and *Genesis* (I, 27), where we read “So God created man in his own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female created He then”, a formulation which suggests equality between man and woman, who were both created in the image of God. Salked solved this perplexing problem by introducing two meanings of the word “image”. He suggested that when it referred to “natural gifts”, man could be regarded as the head of woman, but when “supernatural gifts”, such as immortal soul, grace and free will, were taken into account, man and woman were equal before God and it had even to be admitted that some women were more generously endowed with virtues than men and were therefore closer to God, for example the Virgin Mary.

Salked solved the problem of whether woman was subordinated to man before the original sin or whether her subordination was the consequence of the original sin by suggesting that there were two kinds of subordination, voluntary and non-voluntary, pleasant and unpleasant, a subordination stemming from grace and another one stemming from sin. Being a “weaker vessel”, Eve, even if she had not tasted the apple, would have accepted the dominance of her husband voluntarily, without the resistance, which some contemporary women allowed themselves to show, added Salked reproachfully.

Theologians' views penetrated literature and poetry. In *Paradise Lost* John Milton strongly emphasises Adam's superiority over Eve even before the fall, pointing out the differences of sex:

though both
 Not equal, as their sex not equal, seem'd;
 For contemplation he and valour form'd,
 For softness she and sweet attractive grace;
 He for God only, she for God in him.

What is more, Milton's Eve accepts her low status with fervent elation:

O thou, for whom
 And from whom I was form'd, flesh of thy flesh,
 And without whom am to no end, my guide
 And head...⁵

Many Renaissance thinkers adopted St. Thomas Aquinas's view derived from Aristotle that woman was a "defective man", an imperfect faulty creature, the result of Nature's mistake. In the Middle Ages discussions were even held on what the resurrection of women would be like; some theologians (e.g. Duns Scotus) thought that women could be resurrected as men for: a) the bodies would arise on the Last Day in a state of perfection, b) there was to be no subordination in Heaven, all were to be equal. Thus, the day of resurrection was expected to eliminate the lower sex: women.

These views hostile to females took an extreme form in the pamphlet *Disputatio nova contra mulieres qua probatur eas homines non esse*, published anonymously in Germany in 1595; it asserted bluntly that woman was not a human being. The pamphlet was attributed to Vallens Acidalius, but he denied its authorship⁶. The publication was intended as an attack on Anabaptists for their too "liberal" attitude to women, but was accepted by readers as a voice in the dispute over woman's nature. The author's arguments, like the whole literature of that type, were based mainly on an analysis of the book of *Genesis*. According to the author, the Bible did not say explicitly that woman was created in the image of God; in his opinion Eve was subordinated to Adam; the fact that she was made from Adam's rib proved that she was an inferior creature. Moreover, the Bible used the word *vir* and not *homo* to define those who will be redeemed; besides, no woman was defined as *homo* in the Bible, nor did the Bible say anything about the resurrection or damnation of women (the last statement is untrue). The views expressed in the pamphlet were criticised by Simon

⁵ Quoted after J. Delumeau, *Une histoire du Paradis. Le jardin des delices*, Paris 1992, pp. 193–194.

⁶ *Epistolae*, ed. Christianus Acidalius, Hanau 1606, p. 339.

Gediccus (Leipzig 1595) and were also later attacked by some physicians (e.g. J. P. Lotz, *Gynaecologia*, Rinteln 1630) and lawyers (e.g. J. U. Wolff, *Discursus de foeminarum*, Rostock 1615). But the pamphlet gained such popularity that an extended popular version appeared in Germany in 1615 in the form of “a merry conversation” (*ein lustiges Gespräch*) between a Benedictine monk, Andrew, an enemy of women, and a Jesuit, Father Eugene, a friend of the fair sex; the text had several more editions⁷. As a brochure entitled *Disputatio per jucunda* it also appeared (together with a reprint of Gediccus’ polemic) in the Netherlands (The Hague 1638, 1644), France (Paris 1683, 1690, 1693) and Italy (Leone 1647). The drastic statements and their sensational character attracted many readers and the publishers encashed rich profits.

Theological discussions were accompanied by medical ones. Although the 16th century witnessed progress in the field of medicine, woman and her body were for a long time regarded as a surprising and mysterious phenomenon⁸. The famous Paracelsus accorded a special place in the cosmos to woman for in his opinion she was the final element in the divine process of creation thanks to her capacity to produce children. Paracelsus also maintained that the Virgin Mary was a more important figure than Christ for she was God wife (these ideas were to inspire the German Pietists in the 17th century). On the other hand, although poets sang the praises of woman’s body⁹, many Renaissance physicians regarded woman as a monstrum. According to Ambroise Paré, a famous Parisian physician and surgeon, woman was a *chose outre le cours de la Nature*¹⁰. Woman was frequently described in medical treatises as *mas mutilatus, aberratio naturae, defectus naturalis, animal occasionatum*. The German physician Casper Hoffmann asserted, for instance, that woman was “an imperfect man” for she was “colder” in her humours and temperature (a reference to Galen’s theory of humours) and her genitals were an ineffective version of masculine ones; this is why they were hidden inside her body¹¹. Opposite opinions were, of course, also expressed. Julius Caesar Scaliger, a French humanist, argued that men and women had the same temperature¹². The Parisian

⁷ In 1617, 1642, 1643; cf. Herzog August Bibliothek in Wolfenbüttel, 160.2 Quodl.(10), the German version is entitled *Ob die Weiber Menschen sind*.

⁸ E. Berriot-Salvadore, *Un corps, un destin. La femme dans la médecine de la Renaissance*, Paris 1993.

⁹ Cf. H. Weber, *La célébration du corps féminin dans les Amours de Ronsard: variations sur un répertoire connu*, “La Renaissance, l’Humanisme et la Réforme”, N° 45, Décembre 1997, pp. 7–24.

¹⁰ Cf. *De monstres et prodiges*, ed. J. Céard, Genève 1971, p. 3.

¹¹ C. Hoffmann, *Commentarii in Galeni*, Frankfurt 1625, pp. 307–310.

¹² *Exercitationes*, 1st ed. 1576.

physician André Du Laurens rejected comparisons of male and female genitals, pointing out that they served different purposes¹³. It is worth recalling that as early as the beginning of the 17th century Bartłomiej Keckermann from Gdańsk categorically objected to the opinion that woman was a *monstrum*¹⁴. When a public dispute on phenomena which could be described as monstra took place in Germany at the University of Altdorf in 1611, Wolfgang Waldun, a professor of medicine, said that woman was not one of them¹⁵.

But the view that woman was colder and more humid than man persisted in medicine for a long time, like the opinion that she was fickle, had a fertile imagination, was swayed by greater emotions and was less able to practise active virtues; in short, she was less rational and more prone to evil than man was. A special current in these medical discussions focused on the uterus. Some Renaissance physicians were influenced by Plato's view that the uterus could be regarded as an independent, separate entity in a woman's body, a sort of animal *avidum generandi*. Most physicians rejected such extreme opinions and maintained that the uterus was an organ like any other. Nevertheless, it was a widespread view that woman was a prey to the incessant craving of her uterus which she must satisfy. Popular literature in particular kept repeating such views, thus creating a negative picture of sexually voracious women¹⁶.

Lawyers also discussed this question. Most Renaissance lawyers held the view that women were a species inferior to man, that they were incapable of holding an office, appearing in court, performing legal functions (e.g. Philippus Francus, Philippus Decius, Jacobus Ferrarius, Hieronimus Cagnolus, Jacobus Raevardus, Jean Bodin). The spread of the ideas of Roman law favoured such opinions. The Frenchman Jacques Cujas even went so far as to say in his *Observationes* (Lyon 1606) that *foemina non est homo*. He was echoed by German late 17th century lawyers Franciscus Hoeltich and Johannes Waltz. Women's amenability to law, which was then being expanded, created some difficulties. This is why Johannes Goddeus maintained that although woman was inferior to man this did not mean she was of a different species and the fact that punishment was equal for both sexes signified that she was an equal member of the human

¹³ *Historia anatomica humani corporis*, Frankfurt 1605, pp. 210–212.

¹⁴ *Systema physycorum*, Hanau 1617, pp. 593–601.

¹⁵ Cf. Herzog August Bibliothek Wolfenbüttel, 218.15 Quodl(14).

¹⁶ Cf. Jean Auberry, *L'antidote d'amour*, Paris 1599; Jacques Ferrand, *De la maladie d'amour*, Paris 1623; A. Troussset, *L'Alphabet de l'imperfection et malice des femmes*, Paris 1617, pp. 43–49.

species¹⁷. Nevertheless, all juridical treatises in the 16th and 17th centuries took it for granted that women were unfit for legal action and should be excluded from public life. The necessity of discriminating women was explained by their special status (they should preserve the modesty proper to their sex, and this does not allow public appearances) and also by their character (women were supposed to be inconstant, emotional, incapable of expressing impartial opinions, they were unable to keep a secret, etc.). *Fragilitas*, *imbecillitas* and *inconstantia* were the main characteristics attributed to women which disqualified them from appearing in a public forum.

In addition to learned treatises, the discussion on women was also conducted in many countries in the form of leaflets, satires, illustrated poems and ballads and also literary works on various levels. This kind of discussion started probably in the cradle of the Renaissance, Italy, where as early as 1380 Giovanni Boccaccio, following the example of Plutarch, created a galaxy of prominent women in his *De mulieribus claris*. Boccaccio's tract became a model for dozens of similar works which enumerated famous women, from the Bible and ancient times, the Middle Ages up to the times in which a given author lived. But Boccaccio and his imitators can hardly be classed as pro-feminist writers, for their books present exceptional women who rose high above mediocrity and were thus unfeminine in a way. Their life had nothing in common with the life of ordinary women and could not be used as an argument for a change of women's general position¹⁸.

The discussion on women flared up in Italy in the 16th century. Although B. Castiglione in his *Il Cortegiano* (1528) approached the question cautiously¹⁹, several years earlier Galeazzo Flavio Capra, Francesco Sforza's ambassador in Venice, using the pseudonym of Capella, published a true paean to women²⁰. He was echoed a hundred years later by Lucrezio Bursati, who not only eulogised women but also severely criticised men²¹. On the other hand, a violent attack on women was launched by a certain Giuseppe Passi at the end of the 16th century²². Women joined in the polemics. A Venetian woman, Modesta da Pozzo,

¹⁷ J. Goddaeus, *De verborum significatione*, Nassau 1614 (5th ed.).

¹⁸ See P. J. Benson, *The Invention of the Renaissance Woman. The Challenge of Female Independence in the Literature and Thought of Italy and England*, Univ. Park, Pennsilv. 1992, pp. 91 ff.

¹⁹ *Ibidem*, pp. 73 ff.

²⁰ G. F. Capella, *Della Eccellenza e dignita delle donne*, 1525.

²¹ L. Bursati, *La vittoria delle donne; nella quale si scuopre la grandezza donnesca e la bassezza virile*, 1621.

²² G. Passi, *I donnesci diffetti*, Venice 1599.

using the pseudonym Moderata Fonte, wrote a tract entitled *Il merito delle donne* (Venice 1600) in the form of a discussion of seven women—friends discoursing on the virtues and vices of men and women. Lucrezia Marinella also came out in defence of women at that time²³. The fact that females took part in a public discussions does credit to Italian women and testifies to their good education.

Women in Spain found an ardent defender in Fray Luis de León, who in a book *La perfecta casada* (1583) argued that woman was a noble being, full of dignity, and that she was not inferior to man but only weaker. This weakness gave woman moral superiority over man for it was more difficult for her to be good.

Vehement discussions were held in France and, as in Italy, women took part in them. In reply to François Loryot's gallant essay *Pourquoy le sexe féminin est fort honoré de l'homme*, in which the author emphasised women's weakness and their need for protection (published in his *Secrets moreaux*, Paris 1614), Margaret Valois wrote a letter which was published in Loryot's *Fleurs des secrets moreaux* (Paris 1614). Margaret said that women surpassed men *en toute sorte d'excellence, de perfection et de dignité*. Woman was created as the crown of the world; the fact that Eve persuaded Adam to eat the apple meant that she dominated over him. God chose a woman to be the mother of His Son, no man had been granted such an honour. One can hardly think of a more convincing praise of women.

However, women were also brutally attacked in France. In 1617 A. Troussel published his *Alphabet of women's imperfection and malice*²⁴ and this litany of invectives turned out to be so much to readers' liking that it ran into four editions in 1617–1650. Monsieur de Ferville's tract *La Méchanceté des femmes* (Caen 1618), inspired by Troussel, had 18 editions till 1650. The authors did not write anything new. They both based their works on a 14th century lampoon against women by St. Antoninus Forcigliani, archbishop of Florence. Troussel's list of women's vices is very long — here are a few examples of how he described women: *avidissimum animal, concupiscentia carnis, falsa fides, garullum guttur, invidiosum ignis, mendacium monstrosum, naufragium vitae, peccati auctrix, regnorum ruina, vanitas vanitatis*, etc. Many of these picturesque expressions infiltrated deeply other works and the social consciousness of those times.

Nevertheless, Troussel's tract provoked polemics. A certain Sieur Vigoreux (a pseudonym) published *La défense de femmes contre l'Al-*

²³ *La nobiltà e l'eccellenza delle donne co' difetti e mancamente degli uomini*, Venice 1601.

²⁴ A. Troussel, *L'Alphabet de l'imperfection et malice des femmes*, Paris 1617.

phabet (Paris 1617) in which he argued that women were simply what men made them. He was attacked violently by Sieur de la Bruyère and by Troussel himself²⁵. These publications were followed by a spate of writings in 1618 and the next few years. Women also took part in these vehement disputes: in 1622 Marie de Gournay argued for the equality of both sexes²⁶. The increasingly important role played by women in 17th century France, especially by aristocratic females in salons (it started with the famous salon at the Hotel de Rambouillet), the large employment of women in charitable works by Francis of Sales, the development of Marian cult as well as the growing courtesy to women (the appearance of *Astrée* marked the breakthrough in literature), all this changed the social climate in women's favour. These changes were reflected in many works glorifying extraordinary exceptional women, the so-called *femmes fortes* (Jacques du Bosc, Pierre le Moyne, Francois de Grenaille, George de Scudery, Hilarion de Coste, Gabriel Gilbert).

The fact that women ruled over 16th century England (Mary Tudor, Elizabeth I) influenced the tone of polemics and discussions, dissuading English writers from indulging in violent, vulgar attacks. The problem, however, attracted public opinion. It was probably Edward Gosynhill who wrote two contradictory texts, one praising and the other rebuking women: the satire *Schoolhouse of Women*, and *Mulierum Pean* (1542). Such ambivalence was not a rare phenomenon at that time for some writers had no opinion of their own and in order to make money wrote pamphlets on subject, which happened to be *en vogue*. As an example of such ambivalence in one work let us mention the anonymous pamphlet *The Praise and Dispraise of Women* (1569). Edward More's slightly earlier text *Defence of Women* (1560), as its title implies, unequivocally pleaded in favour of women's cause.

It was only after Elizabeth's death, in the 17th century, that more vehement polemics started during the reign of James I, who was an open enemy of women and even denied his own daughter the right to education²⁷. In 1615 Joseph Swetnam published a lampoon *Arraignment of lewd, idle, froward and inconstant women* which had run into six editions by 1702. Three women-authors, Rachel Speght, Ester Sowernam and Constantia Munda (these were probably pseudonyms) answered the accusa-

²⁵ Publications from 1617.

²⁶ *Egalité des hommes et des femmes*, s.l. 1622.

²⁷ James I forbade his daughter, Elizabeth, to learn Latin. He said: "To make women learned and foxes tame had the same effect: to make them more cunning", A. Fraser, *The Weaker Vessel. Woman's Lot in 17th Century England*, London 1989, p. 135.

tions at once²⁸. In a pamphlet *A Mouzell for Melastomus. Vindication of Women... against J. Swetnam* (London 1617), Rachel Speght defended Eve, saying that she had yielded to temptation for she was the “weaker vessel”, but Adam was as much to blame as Eve for he could have refused to eat the apple. Woman had been created from a bone, a better stuff than the dust used to make Adam. She had not been taken out of Adam’s head, which would have given her ascendancy, nor had she been made from Adam’s foot, which would have meant she could be trampled upon; she had been made from Adam’s rib to be a partner standing at man’s side. This explication echoed the arguments circulated in the mid–16th century in German Protestant literature (Johannes M a t t h e s i u s). Ester Sowernam was bolder in her defense of women in *Ester hath hang’d Haman or an answer to a lewd pamphlet entitled The Arraignment of women* (London 1617). She also argued that the rib was a nobler stuff than dust and reminded readers that the snake was of the masculine gender and that Adam’s guilt was greater than the guilt of Eve for he had eaten the apple while Eve had only tasted it. In an interesting passage the author recalls women’s services to civilisation; according to her it was women who invented writing, initiated hunting and agriculture. She ends her arguments saying that she had no intention of asserting that women were better than men, but she thought that men were not so clever as she would have liked to see them. Constantia M u n d a (or a person writing under this pseudonym) also came out strongly against Swetnam’s assertions in her pamphlet *The Worming of a Mad Dogge* (London 1617).

When in 1639 John T a y l o r published a booklet presenting a galaxy of vixenish women (*A Juniper Lecture*, London 1639), he was at once rebuffed by two authoresses (authors?) who, writing under the ingenious pseudonyms of Mary Tattle–well and Joan Hit–him–home, underlined that they were spinsters, thus challenging the conviction that woman’s noble lot was to be married²⁹. Their pamphlet bore the significant title *The Women’s Sharp Revenge or An Answer to Sir Seldom Sober*, London 1640. It was of course John Taylor who was mockingly named Sir Seldom Sober. In their pamphlet the two authoresses stressed that society was using double standards, different for men and different for women; they criticised the practice of hampering women’s access to education to make them more dependent on men, and argued that women were morally superior

²⁸ Cf. J. Maclean, *Woman Triumphant. Feminism in French Literature 1610–1652*, Oxford 1977, pp. 30–31; A. Fraser, *The Weaker Vessel*, p. 253; S. Shepherd (ed.), *The Women’s Sharp Revenge, Five Women’s Pamphlets from the Renaissance*, London 1985, *passim*.

²⁹ *Ibidem*.

to men. According to the British researcher A. Fraser, the pamphlet was written by a woman (or women) of the middle class which was then pervaded by new views on women's role³⁰.

A subject which as in Germany, attracted the attention of theologians in England was whether woman was a human being and had a soul; most writers answered this question in the affirmative and even expressed the opinion that human soul was neither masculine nor feminine and was the same in men and women (William Austin, Richard Allestree). The conviction seems to have also been growing that women were by no means stupider than men but were simply worse educated³¹. Despite the fact that the English marriage was usually rather a partners' marriage, some publications kept propagating women's patriarchal subordination in the family (Richard Braithwaite, *The Good Wife*, London 1618; Thomas Gataker, *Marriage Duties*, London 1620). Nevertheless, the English society showed indulgence to women who refused to get married, in contrast to Germany where such attitude was usually sharply condemned³².

Disputes over the role and character of women were without a doubt the most acrimonious and vehement in Germany. Dozens and even hundreds of popular satires, pamphlets and libellous leaflets were published there, showing women in a distorted mirror, women beating and cheating their husbands, women guzzlers and gluttons, lazy women neglecting their household duties, scandalmongers and, what was even worse, clients of witches. The illustrations in these publications showed the world upside-down, it was a world in which women usurped man's roles (wore trousers, beat their husbands, broke them in like a horse), manifested their insatiable sexual appetite, evaded control. Authors frequently made use of drastically misogynic scenes from the Bible and mythology, e.g. Eve seducing Adam, Samson and Delilah, Hercules and Omphale, David and Bathsheba, Aristotle and Phyllis, in order to show women's destructive influence on men. When in 1543 Johannes Feder, a Protestant theologian, published *Apologia pro sexu foemineo*, which appeared in German under the title *Dialogus dem Ehestand zu Ehren*³³, and was therefore in praise of marriage rather than women, the tract was strongly attacked by another supporter of the Reformation, Sebastian Franck, in the preface to his collection of

³⁰ A. Fraser, *The Weaker Vessel*, p. 253.

³¹ *Ibidem*, pp. 3 ff, 5 ff.

³² Cf. J. Willenburg, *Disorderly Woman and Female Power in the Street Literature of Early Modern England and Germany*, Charlottesville and London 1992, pp. 40–70.

³³ *Lob und Unschuld der Frauen. Ein Dialogus dem Ehestand zu Ehren geschrieben durch M. Johannem Federum*. A copy of the reprint brought out in Rostock in 1573 is kept in the Herzog August Bibliothek in Wolfenbüttel, Hl 38.

German proverbs³⁴. This volume of proverbs contained extremely misogynic folk adages and wise sayings on popular themes, also antique and medieval ones, expanded by the author and enriched with 16th century notions and anecdotes. A book of this kind could not but be a success; it ran into many editions, moulding a negative picture of women in mass consciousness.

Theological tracts on whether women were human beings, in particular the popular form of these tracts, “merry conversations” of a Benedictine monk and a Jesuit, fanned up the atmosphere.

17th century Germany saw the appearance of a vast literature about “bad women” (*böse Weiber*) who in their lust for power embittered their husbands’ lives³⁵, as well as many pamphlets about hen-pecked husbands and cuckolds, husbands who did not know how to tame their wives and their sexual appetites³⁶. The current defending women and showing “good women” (*gute Weiber*) was much weaker and publications of this kind, being less amusing and not so sensational, undoubtedly had fewer readers and did not sell well³⁷. It is worth recalling, however, that a Latin treatise

³⁴ *Die deutschen Sprichwörter*, Frankfurt 1541, 1543, 1555. A copy in the Herzog August Bibliothek in Wolfenbüttel, 56 Ethica.

³⁵ *Malus mulier* denoted an energetic woman, a counterpart of the French and Spanish *femme forte*, but in Germany, far from being admired, she was vehemently criticised. A pamphlet on this subject, entitled *Ethnographia Mundi oder Malus Mulier... durch Johannem Olorinum Variscum*, was published in Frankfurt in 1628 (the publisher emphasised in the preface he was doing his best to bring the pamphlet out in time for the fair); it had been repeatedly reprinted and imitated till the beginning of the 18th century, cf. Herzog August Bibliothek HL 28 (P1, P2, P3), also HI 18 and Qu N 606.1 (3). Olorinus was the pseudonym of Johann Sommer (1559–1622). The pamphlet is written in the form of a dialogue between either Andrew and Simon or, in other editions, Regina, Hermannus and a certain Italian (the name Regina stands for the queen, Hermannus for man); the whole conflict is reduced to foolish jokes and errors interspersed with stories and folk saying about women.

³⁶ Siemann, a hen-pecked husband, is a frequent figure in these pamphlets; conflict between the sexes is then presented as a joyful quarrel between trousers and the apron. Pamphlets about cuckolds were to warn husbands against the shrewdness and licentiousness of wives and also to provide pleasant reading for leisure time to replace a game of chess or cards. Cf. *Der gute Mann oder der wohl begabte Hörner-Träger... dem neubegierigen Leser zum Nutzen und Ergehen vorgestellt... von Archievo Cornemico*, Ohne Ort 1682, Herzog August Bibliothek HI 24; the author’s name is, of course, a pseudonym.

³⁷ Cf. *Die gute Frau, das ist wahrhaftige Beschreibung der Art und Weise auff was masse heut zu Tage die Weiber von ihren ungehobelten und ungeschliffenen Männern gemartert, gekränkelt, geängstigt und gequälet werden... durch die Feder entworfen von Patientia*, Ohne Ort 1685. The pseudonym is symbolic (*Patientia* = patience); the book is dedicated to the author’s sister whose symbolic name is Constantia. This is a dialogue between two good men Musander and Lysander who have travelled round the world and seen women’s sufferings. A copy in Herzog August Bibliothek Wolfenbüttel HI 135. Another publication of this type, also anonymous, is the pamphlet from the beginning of the 18th century entitled *Der lustige Weiber-Procurator, Welcher das weibliche Geschlecht gegen alle Spötter und Verächter denselben bester massen defendiret... von F.J.R.J.U.P.*, Cölln 1714, Herzog August Bibliothek Qu N 606.1.

by Heinrich F r e d e r from Gdańsk, in which the author criticised the use of force in marriage, denied the husbands' right to punish their wives and supported a partners' marriage based on mutual respect, was translated into German and published in Dresden in 1652³⁸. Works of this kind must have been considered revolutionary in mid-17th century Germany. It is not surprising therefore that the copy kept today at Wolfenbüttel is equipped with many marginal notes, showing that the text had been attentively studied. It is also worth pointing out, that publications devoted to prominent famous women, modelled on Boccaccio, were very popular e.g. in France; in Germany they appeared less frequently, though, of course, some works of this kind were also published³⁹.

It should be said, that the rich, international output of discussion on women was rather monotonous and primitive. The authors repeat the same examples and arguments, the same paradoxes. They do their best to be funny and their main aim is usually not to convince the reader but to amuse him. A drastic presentation of vices and weaknesses of women was obviously more entertaining than a description of their virtues and merits. This is probably why satires and primitive but funny attacks were more numerous than works with thoughtful reflection. German literature appears to be the most misogynic, French and English publications — much more moderate⁴⁰. In France, in Italy, in England women took an active part in the discussion, and their views influenced somehow the public opinion.

At the end of the 16th and in the 17th century an important social phenomenon developed, which resulted in some changes in social mentality. In France salons had emerged, salons in which women played the dominant role, forming opinions, fashions, political views. It was the beginning of the new era on the international scale. The *précieuses*, ridiculed by M o l i è r e and attacked for "immorality" (among others by François de S a l i g n a c de la M o t h e – F é n e l o n) in spite of this influenced old social cus-

³⁸ *Der Hochgelahrten Herrn Heinrich Freders von Danzig Lustige Frage: Ob ein Mann sein Ehe-Weib zu schlagen berechtigt sei. Aus dem Lateinischen ins Teutsche gebracht durch David Schirmern*, Dresden 1652. The translator, D. Schirmern, was a poet, employed as the prince's librarian in Dresden. Copy in Herzog August Bibliothek Wolfenbüttel H1 37.

³⁹ Cf. *Historien von allen den furnembsten Weibern... allen frommen Weibern zu einer Ehr und exempel furgemalt... durch D. Henricum Steinhöwel von Weil*, Francfurt am Mayn 1576. The volume comprises a German translation of B o c c a c i o 's *De claris mulieribus* enriched with some new stories and is dedicated to the Austrian duchess Eleonora. *Die lobwürdige Gesellschaft der gelehrten Weibern... Durch Johann Frauenlob* (pseudonym, of course) *der löblichen Societate der gelehrten Weiber General Notarius*, Ohne Ort 1631, is of a similar character.

⁴⁰ Cf. J. W i l t e n b u r g, *Disorderly Women, passim*.

toms⁴¹. The second half of the 17th century brought new life to the ancient discussion. A publication full of “feminist” verve appeared in Paris in 1665: Jacqueline Guillaume tried to bring it home to readers that women were superior to men; a few years later a theologian François Peullain de la Barre put forward the bold theory, that the two sexes were equal⁴². Thus it was the 17th century which paved the way to the women’s “emancipation”.

In the 19th century brothers Edmond and Jules de Goncourt set women in the centre of culture and politics in the times of Enlightenment, claiming their dominant position in the 18th century society⁴³. Recently Shearer West pointed out, however, that women in the 18th century were still marginalised. She recalls e.g. that German artist Johann Zoffany while painting (1771–1772) members of the English Royal Academy of Art presented its two female members (Angelica Kaufman and Mary Moser) not as living persons, but in the form of portraits, that is, rather as models, as art objects, than as active members of a professional body⁴⁴. Of course, there is no doubt, that in the 18th century women enlarged their participation in political, artistic and even scientific life, but they still did encounter many difficulties in their activities. In 1706 for instance the French Royal Academy introduced a sex-related restriction on its membership, admitting as members only foreign females and excluding all French female artists. Nevertheless, the number of female writers and artists increased rapidly in all European countries and some of them gained world fame. Royal English, French, German courts competed for services and works of such female celebrities as Rosalba Carriera, Elisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, Angelica Kaufman and Mary Moser.

The Enlightenment thinkers, however, did not much contribute to the advancement of women’s cause. In the *Spirit of the Laws* Montesquieu writes at length about the connection between woman and depravation; his female ideal is a priestess of the home, enclosed in the four walls of the house. In his *Lettres persanes* he criticises women’s freedom and the way they meddle in government. J. J. Rousseau, while proclaiming partnership of souls, in fact wanted to confine women to the bearing and raising of children. The 18th century, proclaimed by some researchers as the age of

⁴¹ Cf. C. L. Lougee, *Le paradis des femmes: Women, Salons and Social Stratification in Seventeenth Century France*, Princeton 1976.

⁴² A. L. Backer, *Precious Women: A Feminist Phenomenon in the Age of Louis XIV*, New York 1976.

⁴³ E. and J. Goncourt, *La femme au XVIII^e siècle*, Paris 1862.

⁴⁴ S. West, *Women and the Transmission of Culture in the Eighteenth Century*, in: *La ville et la transmission des valeurs culturelles au bas Moyen Age et aux temps modernes, Actes du 17^e colloque international*, Spa 16–19.5.1994, Bruxelles 1996, pp. 193–205.

women, did mark some progress indeed especially in educational opportunities for women. In other aspects, however, the changes were insignificant. Early Romanticism, idealising women, created a “new” model of womanhood which, in fact, was based on old canons of womanly virtues: self-sacrifice and devotion to others. The sentimental currents (Sophie de La Roche) regarded woman as ivy and man as an oak, thus copying the medieval stereotype of the “weaker vessel”. It is, of course, to the credit of the Age of Enlightenment that it eliminated the most absurd theories about the inferiority of woman’s body and her supposed malicious character and rejected doubts about her having or not having a soul; but radical changes did not come until the 19th and even the 20th century.

In Poland the discussion about women was but a faint echo of what was going on in the West of Europe. Nevertheless, an extremely interesting statement in favour of women was made at the beginning of the 16th century; in the 1530s Andrzej Glaber, a writer from Great Poland, expressed the view that the two sexes were equal intellectually. In his work *Talks about the Harmony of Human Limbs* (1535), dedicated to a woman, Jadwiga Kościelecka, daughter of the Castellan of Żarnów and wife of the Burgrave of Cracow, he says that it is out of envy that men deny women access to books and education. But “the fair sex has a very subtle nature and their (women’s — M.B.) mind is sharp; it grasps and understands all things faster than the mind of boys, as can be clearly seen in childhood when girls start speaking earlier than boys... this is why they (men — M.B.), being afraid of losing their eminence, of being outdistanced by women in wisdom, ...forbid them to read serious writings, with the exception of prayers and devotions”. Glaber also argues, probably repeating foreign arguments, that woman was created “from a white bone” while man was made from “coarse earth”; she thus is certainly not worse than man, “so why should these poor dear things be disdained and regarded as inferior to men?”⁴⁵

Thirty years later (in 1566) Łukasz Górnicki published *The Polish Courtier*, an adaptation of Baldassare Castiglione’s work. In Górnicki’s book there are no women; as he explains, “it would not be fitting to put them in a Polish *Dialogue*, for neither are our Polish women so learned as Italian women nor would their ears tolerate certain things mentioned here and there”⁴⁶. This means that *The Polish Courtier* had to be emasculated because of the poor education and lack of refinement of Polish women and because their modesty would not have allowed them to take part in revelries

⁴⁵ *Gadki o składności członków człowieczych*, ed. J. Rostański, Kraków 1893, p. 3.

⁴⁶ Łukasz Górnicki, *Dworzanin Polski (The Polish Courtier)*, ed. Kraków 1914, p. 5.

at which risky jokes and sayings could be heard. Whereas the first argument is acceptable, for the level of Polish women's education was really rather low in the 16th century, the second cannot but arouse doubts. We know from other sources that women did sometimes take part in society life in those years, and even Górnicki quotes a juicy anecdote about Mrs. Kochanowska, mother of the famous poet, who did not mind obscene jokes at parties⁴⁷.

While excluding women from the *Dialogue*, Górnicki discusses the question of women in *Book 3* and presents the ideal of a "courtly lady". He says that she should differ from man "for while man should always show he is like an oak, there should be something tender in every woman, befitting feminine frailty, so that there should be nothing masculine in her posture, walk, speech, in anything she does". As we see, woman, in Górnicki's opinion, was different from man but not worse than he. What is more, Górnicki argues that she should be well educated and draw wisdom from books⁴⁸. When one of the discutants, Mr. Bojanowski asks scornfully whether women should then not become members of parliament or hetmans while men should take to spinning, Górnicki once again stresses that the two sexes are equal. "I do not know, Mr. Bojanowski, what you regard as a women's imperfection, for if what you mean is that they lack men's strenght and robustness, this does not mean that they are imperfect; if it were strength and size that counted, a soldier who fights would be of greater weight than a hetman... a woman can know everything that man knows, her wit is not a bit worse than man's, and as philosophy teaches us, those who have a subtler body must also have a sharper wit. And since women have this, it is obvious that they are more capable to understand subtle sciences than men are"⁴⁹. This shows that Górnicki, like Glaber, concurred in the opinion that women were more competent intellectually than men.

The great Polish reformer and politician, however, Andrzej Frycz-Modrzewski, declared himself an overt enemy of women. In his book *De Republica emendanda*, he argues under the significant title "Women should not meddle in public affairs" that God himself subordinated women to men, that they were born for the distaff and should confine themselves to home matters and that men who ask their advice on public matters should be ashamed of their discreditable weakness⁵⁰.

⁴⁷ Cf. J. Krzyżanowski, K. Żukowska, *Dawna facecja polska, XVI-XVIII w. (Old Polish Facetiae. 16th-18th Centuries)*, Warszawa 1960, p. 37.

⁴⁸ Ł. Górnicki, *Dworzanin*, pp. 51-63.

⁴⁹ *Ibidem*.

⁵⁰ A. Frycz-Modrzewski, *O poprawie Rzeczypospolitej (How to Improve the Commonwealth)*, Warszawa 1953, p. 193.

A Polish *Senatulus*, modelled on that of Erasmus, appeared as early as the middle of the 16th century. Many years ago K. Badecki attributed it to Andrzej Glaber⁵¹. The first work of this kind on which full information is available was Marcin Bielski's *Women's Parliament* (Cracow 1586), regarded by some researchers as a satire⁵². If it is indeed a satire, it is targeted not so much against women as against men and the deficient organisation of socio-political life in 16th century Poland. The preface itself playfully but firmly sets women above men:

You, bearded gentlemen, think we are laughable
But God gave us gifts to you unavailable⁵³.

In Bielski's opinion women are more beautiful and more moderate in eating and drinking; this is why they live longer, are better, more compassionate, more sober than men and also more industrious. The author goes on to criticise the way the Polish Sejm is run (bad organisation of debates, idle talking, the deputies' exclusive interest in their own affairs) and censures men in bitter words: they are always drunk at supper, are never at home, shift all work on their wives. Although some of the females taking part in the discussion object to excessively radical opinions ("Nature herself shows that in life, man must give orders to his wife"), the women bring themselves to draw up a reasonable programme of political reforms (organisation of efficient common defense, alert in the case of war, reduction of excessive imports, prevention of Ducal Prussia's separatist ambitions, recovery of Silesia) and social reforms (education of girls, ban on marriages between partners of excessively disparate age, expansion of women's inheritance rights up to two-thirds of the property, reform of the state's finances and taxes). The resolutions adopted by the females show that they are able to participate in government: They already exert a great influence on management; one of the women says "though I am only a female and am not well versed in books, my husband, when he goes to the dietine, for my advice looks"⁵⁴.

Bielski's *Parliament* was soon reprinted (1595) and it was undoubtedly his work that at the beginning of the 17th century inspired two books: *Women's Diet*, an anonymous work, and *Maidens' Diet* by Jan Olecki; both books had several reprints, e.g. in 1684 and 1697⁵⁵. They contain

⁵¹ K. Badecki, *Z badań nad literaturą mieszczańsko-ludową XV–XVII w. (Studies on Urban and Folk Literature in the 15th–17th Centuries)*, Wrocław 1953, p. 21.

⁵² M. Bielski, *Satyry (Satires)*, ed. W. Wisłocki, Kraków 1889.

⁵³ *Ibidem*, p. 56.

⁵⁴ *Ibidem*, pp. 60 ff.

⁵⁵ Cf. K. Badecki, *Literatura mieszczańska w Polsce XVII w. (Urban Literature in 17th Century Poland)*, Lwów 1825, pp. 305 ff.

women's complaints against brutal husbands and proposals on how to form good, harmonious marriages; opinions are expressed not only by noblewomen, as is the case in Bielski's book, but also by townswomen and peasant women; the discussion does not concern public affairs as in Bielski's work but private household matters only. The author listens discreetly and hears the women's complaints:

She'd been so hard beaten by her man, one complained,
That her headscarf fell off; she feared him, she explained.
Another said: my husband, as you all well know,
Flings bowls about when angry, mine's a tale of woe.
To conciliate men, complaints are of no avail,
We must advise one another, or we shall fail⁵⁶.

What the author presents is a women's diet deliberating on how to placate their husband and induce them to be more indulgent; he clearly takes the side of the oppressed women and realises that his work may arouse men's anger ("I know that your husbands will find fault with my book"); he explains therefore that he did not mean to offend anybody and asks the reader to be "magnanimous to me — the writer — and to women"⁵⁷.

Pro-female feelings may have been awakened in Poland by Agrippa's book which was translated into Polish in 1575. It was published in Cracow by Maciej Wierzbęta in his own translation and with his preface in which he stressed that his aim was "to stop some people's foul language in which they assail the female sex"⁵⁸. The translation was dedicated to Krystyna Chodkiewiczowa, wife of the starost of Samogitia, Jan Chodkiewicz, and to all "virtuous women", so that "conscious of their dignity", they should practise their virtues all the more willingly.

The only really misogynous work in 16th century Poland, a work which its brutality and pathological aversion to women reminds one of German gutter literature, was Bartosz Paprocki's *The Husbands' Ten Commandments* and also his *Test of Virtues* and *The Teachings of Various Philosophers on How to Choose a Wife* (Cracow 1586–1590)⁵⁹.

First take a thick strap made of coarse ox hide,
Then round her head wrap a longish shirt tight.
Don't let her amble, lash her body well,

⁵⁶ K. Badecki, *Literatura mieszczańska*, p. 306.

⁵⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 308.

⁵⁸ H. K. Agrippa, *O szlachetności a zacności płci niewieściej* (*On the Nobleness and Respectability of the Fair Sex*), Translated by M. Wierzbęta, Kraków 1575, published by S. Tomkiewicz in Cracow in 1891.

⁵⁹ Cf. K. Bartoszewicz, *Dziesięcioro przykazań mężowo. Ze studiów nad humorem polskim* (*The Husbands' Ten Commandments. Studies in Polish Humour*), Kraków 1901.

Keep her at a trot, every blow will tell.
 Have this prescription always in your mind
 A rod will sure allow you peace to find⁶⁰.

Having married a rich widow much older than himself, Paprocki was so tyrannised and humiliated by his wife that he ran away from home and became a pathological enemy of women until the end of his life. In his pamphlets he traces women's origin to dogs, pigs, donkeys; he was convinced that all evil in the world was due to woman, who was a fiend incarnate, a *malum*, unfortunately, *necessarium*. Arguments of this kind were, of course, not taken too seriously by readers, but Paprocki's pamphlets were reprinted several times because of their sensational character. The *Ten Commandments* ran into seven editions in the 16th and 17th centuries.

A greater influence was undoubtedly exerted by the opinions of priest-moralists, who were frequently unfriendly to women. At the end of the 17th century Szymon Starowolski asserted in a popular sermon that females were always inferior to males. "Nature has herself arranged it so that the females of all wild beasts are always worse than males. A she-bear is fiercer than a he-bear, a lioness fiercer than a lion and a she-wolf worse than a he-wolf. It is the same among people, a woman is always worse than a man when she loses all shame and yields to evil... As a rule women are incapable of keeping within bounds in life and customs, they tend to turn to one side or the other. When they love someone, they love boundlessly, when they hate, they hate and are cross beyond measure; when they start being good, they can be so good that they even become saints"⁶¹. Though reprimanding women for immoderation, Starowolski admits that they can surpass men in goodness and sanctity. Protestant preachers, too, often painted women in dark colours. Pastor Adam Gdaciusz, referring to St. Augustine, depicted women as temptation incarnate and the cause of sin. "St. Augustine did not want to live under the same roof with his sister and when he was asked why, he replied: It is wrong to look at a woman, worse to talk with her, and the worst to touch her"⁶².

Antifemale accents can be found in the Polish Baroque literature, e.g. in the works of Waclaw Potocki, Wespazjan Kochowski and Jan Andrzej Morsztyn. Nevertheless, it is a fact that Poland did not experience such an aggressive hostile campaign against women as was conducted

⁶⁰ *Ibidem*, pp. 76–77.

⁶¹ S. Starowolski, *Świątelnica pańska zawierająca w sobie kazania na uroczystości świąt całego roku* (God's Temple with Sermons for All the Holy Days of the Year), Kraków 1682, pp. 470–471.

⁶² A. Gdaciusz, *Kontynuacja albo kończenie dyskursu o grzechach szóstego przykazania Bożego* (A Continuation or Termination of the Discourse on Sins against God's Sixth Commandment), Brzeg 1682, p. 42.

in Western Europe at the threshold of modern times. What is more, Polish humour, old Polish *facetiae* and Polish folk literature are not obsessively antifemale. They deal with male–female relations but this is but one of the themes and by no means the most important one. In A. Brückner's volume of *facetiae* only 22–24 of 183 anecdotes, that is about 13 per cent, clearly concern women⁶³. Of the 900 *facetiae* gathered by J. Krzyżanowski and K. Żukowska only just over 50, that is a mere 6 per cent, refer to women⁶⁴. It is worth adding that in 16th and 17th century noblemen's records ("silva rerum") entries of an erotic–sexual character referring to women are of minor importance, compared with political and social observations. The same can be said about folk literature⁶⁵. A. Brückner rightly points out that "wags are constantly rebuking women but also beg for their favour"⁶⁶.

Although Abraham Prowana (Serweryn Bączalski, as some say) painted women in dark colours in *The Golden Marriage Yoke* and *The Trained Wife* and advised 17th century readers not to get married, Andrzej Żydaczowski rebuked these publications in his pamphlet *A Youth's Bitter Freedom* (after 1670). In the 16th and 17th centuries antifemale literature in Poland focused on women's extravagance, love of fashionable dresses and fashionable hair styles and the way they squandered money on useless luxury.

A fine lady must always have new shoes
And closely fitting gloves, by no means loose,
And a fine piece of soap, cost what it may,
He will kill his cattle to make her gay

lamented *New Wagabond* in 1596⁶⁷. Andrzej Wolań complained in *The Commonwealth's or Noblemen's Freedom* (Wilno 1606): "extravagance is ripe, so much wantonness is manifested, in particular by the fair sex which shows off such luxurious attire and ornaments that it seems that nearly all

⁶³ A. Brückner, *Facecje polskie z roku 1624 (Polish Facetiae from the Year 1624)*, Kraków 1903.

⁶⁴ J. Krzyżanowski, K. Żukowska Billip, *Dawna facecja polska, XVI–XVIII w. (Old Polish Facetiae, 16th–18th Centuries)*, Warszawa 1960.

⁶⁵ K. Badecki, *Literatura mieszczańska w Polsce XVII w. (Urban Literature in 17th Century Poland)*, Lwów 1926; *idem*, *Polska komedia rybałtowska (Polish Folk Comedy)*, Lwów 1931; *idem*, *Z badań nad literaturą mieszczańsko–ludową XVII w. (Studies on Urban and Folk Literature in the 17th Century)*, Wrocław 1951.

⁶⁶ A. Brückner, *Cechy literatury szlacheckiej i miejskiej w XVII w. (The Characteristics of Noblemen's and Burghers' Literature in the 17th Century)*, in: *Księga pamiątkowa ku czci P. Orzechowicza*, vol. I, Lwów 1916, p. 178.

⁶⁷ Quoted after K. W. Wójcicki, *Niewiasty polskie. Zarys historyczny (Polish Women. An Historical Outline)*, Lwów 1845, p. 51.

the money of the Commonwealth has been spent to embellish women”⁶⁸. Stanisław Grochowski said in *The Christmas Carol* (1608):

Through the wastefulness and ambition of their wives
Many have brought to ruin, and wrecked their lives⁶⁹.

Women were rebuked for forcing their husbands to spend money uselessly: “If her husband objects to buying what she wants, she sulks, pretends she is ill, does not speak to him for several days or weeks”⁷⁰. Similar opinions could be quoted *ad infinitum*. They can also be found in the satires of Łukasz and Krzysztof Opaliński and in those of Piotr Zbylitowski and Jakub Łącznowolski⁷¹. But these satires show anxiety rather than aggressiveness. Zbylitowski even apologises to his female readers for rebuking them:

Don’t be cross, my ladies, when you see in my books
That I condemn your dresses, though never your looks.
I humbly pray you, forgive me, for goodness sake,
I shall be sorry if a dislike to me you take⁷².

A more scathing attack was launched by an anonymous writer in *The Infernal Parliament* (1622). Smółka, the devil in women, says: “where I can’t manage, I do it through a woman; when possessed, she will be seven times as bad” (as a man — M.B.). “When the woman rules at home, woe to the servants”. “Don’t believe a woman, even if she cries when praying”. “Believe me, sometimes I dare not sit next to a woman”. “There can be no greater sins than those committed by women... each female is like a magnet and draws you to herself”. “Women have done away with their babies [an allusion to abortions], it was all my work”⁷³. These sentences are but small fragments in a satire which is directed against the whole of society, men as well as women, and men are not painted in brighter colours if as an example of murder the author cites uxoricide⁷⁴.

⁶⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 53.

⁶⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 53.

⁷⁰ *Poprawa niektórych obyczajów w Polsce (Improvement of Some Customs in Poland)*, Kraków 1625, *ibidem*, pp. 61–62.

⁷¹ P. Zbylitowski, *Przygana wymyślnym strojom białogłowskim (Reprimand of Women's Extravagant Attire)*, 1600, ed. K. Bańdecki, Lwów 1910; Jakub Łącznowolski, *Zwierciadło nowe modzie (A New Mirror of Fashions)*, 1678; cf. K. Bańdecki, *Literatura mieszczańska*, pp. 448–453.

⁷² P. Zbylitowski, *Przygana*, p. 39.

⁷³ *Sejm piekielny. Satyra obyczajowa 1622 (Infernal Parliament. A Satire of Manners 1622)*, ed. A. Brückner, Kraków 1903, pp. 44 ff., 58 ff. It is interesting that the blame is not put on woman, as in the West, but on the devil.

⁷⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 58 (the husband strangled his wife). The author blames both men and women for unchastity but it is dressy women, coquettes and prostitutes that he condemns most strongly.

An anonymous poem about women's ruses and habits, written in about 1684, depicts the faults and vices of different types of women: spinsters, married women, widows, old women and crones, but without malice, good-humouredly; the author addresses his satire to women and writes:

And you, my righteous damsels, with blond or dark hair,
 Young ladies, wives and widows, talkative but fair,
 Read a line or two in my book, just to have fun,
 An if you think there is something I have well done
 Admit it⁷⁵.

Jakub Boczyłowic's tract *The Four Parts of Women's Nature* (1st ed. Warsaw 1691, 2nd ed. Toruń 1694) is also a gentle satire. The individual parts of the tract correspond to women's status and deal with maidenhood, matrimony, widowhood and, separately, with "common ladies". Boczyłowic starts with "Miss Eve" and says that the world would be worthless without maidens for it is they who are "the first part of the world and graceful Dianas", but they are like air, wind and gale, they favour you one day and turn away the next; married women are real mistresses, they run the house and look after their husbands; married women are like fire, they are fiery when angered⁷⁶. Boczyłowic mentions women's inconstancy and quick temper as their defects, but he varnishes his statements so as not to offend anyone.

The pamphlet *The Woman or an Old Inventory*, repeatedly reprinted in the 17th century, is a satire directed rather against fortune hunters who marry old females than against women⁷⁷. It brings to mind the life story of Paprocki and his marital misfortunes; it seems that marriages in which the age of the spouses was disparate were not rare, for they are mentioned in many satires, especially in the 17th century, and are also the subject of anecdotes and Old Polish *facetiae*.

The 17th century also saw the publication of a defence of women against literary attacks by men; it was written under the pseudonym of Wierchosława Kendzierzowska, "referendary of the *Women's Circle*", an allusion to *Women's Parliament* which must have influenced the defence⁷⁸. The title of the brochure is most significant: *An Apology of Eve's Gender, that is, a defence of ladies and girls, showing their virtues and worthiness and aimed at protecting them against the slanderous writings of inconsiderate men*. At the bottom of the title page was a couplet: "If you feel

⁷⁵ K. B ad e c k i, *Literatura mieszczańska*, p. 418.

⁷⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 79.

⁷⁷ *Ibidem*, pp. 21–26.

⁷⁸ K. B ad e c k i, *Literatura mieszczańska*, pp. 18–19.

you want your neighbour to blame, see if to blamelessness you may lay claim". The text praised women and their good qualities; it was obviously written by an educated person versed in antique literature (L i v y , I u v e - n a l i s). We shall never know whether it was written by a man or a woman.

Old Polish anecdotes and epigrams give rich food for thought. The stories and advice on how to choose a wife are free of antifemale aggressiveness⁷⁹. Even a satire attacking a bad wife (J a n f r o m K i j a n y ?) ends happily with the reconciliation of the quarrelling couple⁸⁰. Marital infidelity, the misfortunes of a cuckold, described in dead earnestness in the West, are in Poland presented in a humourous forbearing manner, only to recall the jokes put down by Jan K o c h a n o w s k i in his *Apophthegms* (a woman in labour consoles her husband, don't worry, it isn't yours; a wife sheltered from the Tartars in a monastery is exposed to a greater danger from the monks) or 17th century stories about unfaithful wives deceiving their husbands, e.g. in Maurycjusz T r z y p r z y c k i 's volume⁸¹. Wives mean trouble (they are often quarrelsome, fight with servants, etc.) but without them it is quite a job: "Who takes a woman to wife has trouble, but without her the trouble is double"⁸². "Who takes a woman to wife will do penance all his life"⁸³. And much more brutally: "There are only two joyful days with a wife, the first, the wedding day, and the second her burial"⁸⁴. Some jocular sayings express sensible opinions about marriage, for instance, that marriage can be successful only if the spouses are sexually suited to each other and if it gives both sides satisfaction⁸⁵. Many anecdotes present various tricks and ruses applied by wives, but what dominates in them is not rebuke but rather admiration for women's smartness and cleverness (a shrewd widow sells an ox for a penny and a cat for 4 zlotys in order to save on the alms she promised to give for her husband's soul; a beggar woman cheats the devil; a girl swindles a fortune hunter, etc.). In the end the writer says: "The fair sex has indeed strange talents. You may safely say that shrewdness is woman's nature"⁸⁶. "Women, even if they do mischief, know how to wriggle

⁷⁹ Cf. K. B a d e c k i , *Z badań*, pp. 10 ff; i d e m , *Polska komedia rybałtowska*, Lwów 1931, esp. p. 426.

⁸⁰ K. B a d e c k i , *Z badań*, p. 17–18.

⁸¹ J. K r z y ż a n o w s k i , K. Ż u k o w s k a , *Dawna facecja*, pp. 75, 113, 114, 216 ff.

⁸² A. B r ü c k n e r , *Facecje*, p. 58.

⁸³ J. K r z y ż a n o w s k i , K. Ż u k o w s k a , *Dawna facecja*, p. 123.

⁸⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 472.

⁸⁵ "In marriage there should be concord and mutual satisfaction"; a widow, urged to marry a learned man, says: "he who works only with his head is no good". "It is other limbs, not the head, that the wives need in bed", J. K r z y ż a n o w s k i , K. Ż u k o w s k a , *Dawna facecja*, pp. 219, 221, 226.

⁸⁶ A. B r ü c k n e r , *Facecje*, p. 150.

out of difficulties”⁸⁷. *Facetiae* abound in situations manifesting women’s intelligence: they know well how to make a swift, sharp riposte. Old Polish jokes and anecdotes show woman as a person who is able to do the right thing at the right moment, is resolute and witty, and even surpasses man in exchange of opinions. “A lady stared at a man; he rebuked her: You had better fix your eyes on earth. She: This is what you should do for together with Adam you derive from earth while I, with Eve, derive from human being”⁸⁸. “A young man said to a girl: You are picking holes in me. She: I couldn’t. There’s but one big hole”⁸⁹. “The widow of Radziwiłł marries Mr. Zebrzydowski. Chancellor Ossoliński asks her whether she does not regret having lost the (princely — M.B.) title. Without a moment’s hesitation the lady replies: “I don’t, because the gentleman is very amiable and also because this did not happen through law”⁹⁰ (Ossoliński lost his princely title by virtue of a law of 1638). It is worth recalling that at that time West European literature rebuked witty-tongued women, regarding a sharp tongue as the main characteristic of *malus mulier*⁹¹.

Echoes of the West’s dead serious theological dispute on whether woman is a human being can be found in Polish 17th century *facetiae*. A courtier teasing a girl says: “A crab is no fish, a bat is no bird, liver is no meat, woman is not a human being. The girl replies: Thank God that woman is not a human being for the human being as well as the devil are God’s enemies”⁹². The resolute girl at once turned the problem upside down, arguing that women were superior to the sin-tainted human species.

Many anecdotes show acts of violence in marriage; these were probably no isolated facts, though they could not have been widespread. But it is not only the anecdotal man that beat his wife, she also knew how to give her husband a thrashing. This is presented as something absolutely normal, not as a reprehensible change of roles or a deed turning the world upside down, as this was interpreted in the West. In a 17th century popular folk comedy entitled *Shrovetide* (1622) one of the heroes, Łapikufel (Mugcatcher), wants to go home after his adventures with the devil and rascals, but he is seized with fear:

And will my wife let me in when I let her know
How I spent the time and where in fact I did go?

⁸⁷ J. Krzyżanowski, K. Żukowska, *Dawna facecja*, p. 118.

⁸⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 438.

⁸⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 266.

⁹⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 284.

⁹¹ J. Wiltenburg, *Disorderly Woman*, pp. 141–182.

⁹² J. Krzyżanowski, K. Żukowska, *Dawna facecja*, p. 225.

I doubt it and am scared, as to go to the inn
 She forbade me, for she regards this as a sin.
 She'll make me do what she wants and will remind me
 That I beat her the last time I was drunk, you'll see.
 She will scold me. I know I'm despicable
 But she'll lash my back and this is formidable.
 Woe to me, a thousand times woe⁹³.

Satirical disputes over women abated in Poland, as they did in other European countries, in the 18th century; the debates during the Enlightenment were of a slightly different character and were less vehement. When Ignacy Krasicki in his *Fashionable Wife* rebuked the extravagance of women, this was part of a broader national polemic between supporters of Sarmatism and the wave of foreign influence. Patriotic discussions stressing that social and political reforms were necessary to save the endangered motherland suppressed conflicts between the sexes. Nevertheless, in 1792 Gabriel Taszyccki published a vehemently antifemale treatise entitled *On Women's Property*, in which he accused all women of extreme sinfulness and postulated to abolish their rights to possess real estates. In the first half of the 18th century, a Polish woman for the first time took part in the discussion; she was Franciszka Radziwiłł, née Wiśniowiecka, one of the better educated Polish women active in the field of culture (there were many such women at that time). In a tract on marriage and love (*Du mariage*), written in French, she recognised man's leading role but emphasised that *il ne doit regarder sa femme ni comme esclave, ni même, comme inférieure, mais comme son égale*. In her opinion God endowed man with greater talents and gave him authority, but this authority should be based on love and justice⁹⁴. She was for a partners's marriage but with the predominance of the husband. It was probably her own marriage and the marriages of many of her contemporaries that inspired her opinions.

This rather moderate opinion by a woman, should be compared with the view of a luminary of the Polish Enlightenment, Franciszek Salezy Jezierski. He wrote: "Woman, a petticoat, the other half of mankind, is of the same nature as man; she is not forbidden to exercise her will, use her brain and her power. Both sexes can have vices, men as well as women". What is more, Jezierski stresses the role played by women in the development of culture and civilisation: "It must be admitted that we do not know who was the author of so many crafts, perhaps there was a woman among them; women's bodies are nimbler, their hearts more tender, more passiona-

⁹³ K. B a d e c k i, *Polska komedia rybaltowska*, pp. 459–460.

⁹⁴ A. S a j k o w s k i, *Staropolska miłość (Old Polish Love)*, Poznań 1981, pp. 259–260.

te, they put no dam to activity”⁹⁵. Thus Jezierski held the view that women were equal to men, that both sexes had their vices and virtues, and that women, because of their physical dexterity and intellectual sensitivity, must have played an important role in history as creators of crafts, i.e. activities in various fields. Adam Czartoryski chimed in with Jezierski; in his *Doświadczyński's Letters* Czartoryski paid homage to women, stating that “it is easier to find the strength of man’s mind in a woman than the subtlety of female wit in a man”⁹⁶. These opinions closed the dispute over women in Old Poland and also opened a new epoch: the 19th century, when Polish women faced new tasks and when their position was to be reassessed in connection with the tragic turn in Poland’s history.

(Translated by Janina Dorosz)

⁹⁵ F. S. Jezierski, *Niektóre wyrazy porządkiem abecadla zebrane (Some Words Arranged in Alphabetical Order)*, in: *Wybór pism*, ed. Z. Skwarczyński, Warszawa 1952, p. 192.

⁹⁶ Quoted after Ł. Charewicz, *Kobieta w dawnej Polsce do rozbiorów (Woman in Old Poland up to the Partitions)*, Lwów 1938, p. 77.