THE EQUALITY
OF MEN AND WOMEN
(1641)

INTRODUCTION

With this explicitly feminist essay, we move into more familiar territory (if any portion of Gournay's oeuvre may be so described). As previously mentioned, the Equality was (together with the much shorter The Ladies' Complaint of a few years later) not only the first of her works to be translated into English but also the first to be reprinted in modern times. After Schiff's initial edition, moreover, and latterly with the encouragement of feminist trends in literary scholarship, these two texts have been regularly included in collections and featured in critical discussions. The result is that, at least for many non-specialists, they now virtually epitomize Gournay's intellectual identity.

Such a picture would necessarily be imprecise, given that these works comprise a small fraction of her literary production and originally appeared during the 1620s, when she was about sixty, thirty years or so after she began to publish (with the Promenade). Further, as essays devoted to the cause of women, they are unique within the canon: such advocacy was not, at least avowedly, Gournay's primary project as a writer. For that matter, the essay in general is not self-evidently her "essential" genre, despite her proximity as an essayist—and, of course, the towering precedent of Montaigne. (In fact, Gournay's generic practices and preferences are intriguingly consistent with the other evidence of a profound ambivalence regarding her "father.")

At the same time, a strong case can be made that the Equality and the Complaint are, if not representative of Gournay's achievement as a "woman of letters," unavoidably central to her position as one—hence essential to a volume documenting the other voice. In them, it is particularly in the former, the intellectual underpinnings of attitudes expressed throughout her career are revealed in detail—and, equally to the point, revealed as coherent. The ultimate result, therefore, of restoring these texts to their less-than-dominant position within the oeuvre—an effect approximated here by juxtaposing them...
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with the *Promenade* and the *Apology*—is to highlight their multiple connection with works that are less explicitly (indeed more equivocally) feminist. Gournay herself attached particular importance to the *Equality*. She first published it on its own, and with a dedication to the queen (Anne of Austria) that remarkably combines the typical deferential flattery, redolent of hope for the patronage of which Gournay was always in need, with an audacious insistence that the queen educate herself so as to set an example to other women. Gournay further drew attention to the essay in introducing her collected works, at once making a claim for its originality (in its heavy reliance on male authorities to make the case for women) and effectively inviting its placement within the *guerre de femmes*.

Gournay has already been situated generally in relation to that debate (see above, 13–16); our annotations to the *Equality* will document particular indebtedness to the contributions of Boccaccio, Agrrippa, and Taillemon. Many (though not all) of her instances of notable women are to be found in the two former authors; the last is chiefly reflected in her celebration of learning and virtue, currently denied to women by male tyranny, as the means whereby they may accede to their appointed place in the divine creation. For Gournay, that place is emphatically an equal, not a superior, one, in contrast with the common tendency among advocates of women to ‘redirect the preference’ to that sex, as Gournay puts it (below, 75). Even the generally egalitarian Taillemon, at once for arguments sake and under the spell of the countly love tradition, tends to counter traditional misogynist arguments by standing them on their head, as when he maintains that woman’s creation from human matter (the rib of Adam) proves not remotesness from God, as was frequently argued, but remotesness from the base clay of which the first man had been composed.

The originality of Gournay’s arguments in the *Equality* has sometimes been overblown—a tribute, perhaps, to her rhetorically effective presentation of them, which gains force from a passionately yet dexterously managed irony. There is, however, at least one vital aspect of her case for ‘mere’ equality that goes to the heart of her distinctiveness as a thinker and writer in early modern France. For that case, as she makes it, is inextricable from her ideal of an intellectual community transcending gender and from her aspiration to join that community by dint of scholarly merit. It is originality of this kind to which she effectively lays claim when she draws the attention of the reader of her collected works to her extensive enlistment of male authorities on behalf of women. At the same time, that claim does not obviate her palpable imaginative identification, throughout the *Equality*, with paragons of female strength, including physical strength, whom she draws from both the secular and religious spheres—or from both at once, in the case of Jeanne d’Arc.

Jeanne happens to be a conservative point of reference—a figure already serving to rally patriotic and religious sentiment. Nevertheless, another striking feature of Gournay’s method is her generally free handling of religious issues, to adduce divine authority and instances in confirmation of human proofs was standard argumentative procedure in the period, but Gournay shows greater daring in this domain than do, say, Agrrippa and Taillemon. This is especially clear when she intimates a discrepancy between God’s will and current teachings of the Church. Thus, with reference to the limited role allowed women in the religious life, she affirms the precedent of Mary Magdalene as a public preacher and maintains—even citing pagan in addition to early Christian practice—that women have an inherent right to administer the sacraments. The opposite side of this coin, undoubtedly the enabling condition of her iconoclasm, is a profound religious seriousness: these are evidently not arguments for arguments sake, for Gournay, they touch on the highest order of truth. She is also able, thanks to wide reading in theological texts, especially the Church Fathers, to bolster her opinions with reference to unimpeachable authorities, who are, of course, men. Nowhere, it may be added, is her propensity for choosing and using evidence selectively more apparent.

Comparison of the final published version of the *Equality* (1641) with the first (1622), of which translations are also available, serves to demonstrate not only Gournay’s general habit of revision but also the particularly careful attention she bestowed on this essay over the last twenty years of her career. The text translated here is longer by roughly one-third, mainly as a result of “fleshing-out” the case with further illustrations—a procedure for which she had the notable precedent of Montaigne’s successive versions of his Essays. In some cases (such as the naming of Hypatia [see below, 77 and n. 93]), Gournay is clarifying points previously made; more often, she is adding evidence, some of it gleaned from more recent reading. In a strict view, this elaboration may entail some cost to the focus and cohesiveness of the argument, but in practice the sheer intellectual exuberance of her additions, which tend to take on a life of their own, obscures any such detriment. In them the scholar’s life-long curiosity joins compellingly with the female scholar’s unabated commitment to justice for her sex. The consequent impulse to “get it all in” must have become increasingly acute as Gournay anticipated a decisive final publication.

Madam

Those who determined to assign a sun as a device for the late King your father, with this motto, "There is no West for me," did better than they supposed, because in representing his greatness, which almost always, without interruption, saw that Prince of Stars upon one of his territories, they rendered the device hereditary to your Majesty, presaging your virtues, the light and felicity of peoples. It is, I say, Madam, in your Majesty that the Light of Virtues shall have no West, when time has converted their flower into fruit, and consequently the felicity of the French, which they illuminate, shall also have no West. Now, while you are in the East of your age, as of your virtues, design, Madam, to resolve to arrive at their noon at the same time that you arrive at that of your years. I mean at the noon of your Virtues, which, in order to mature, must benefit from leisure and culture. For there are several of the most commendable—among others, religion, charity to the poor, chastity, and marital love—that the noble instinct of Nature and fortunate birth may inspire of themselves, of these you attained the noon tide even in your morning. But truly, for that effort, one must have the requisite courage, courage as great and potent as your Royalty (as great and potent as that is), Kings being afflicted by this unhappiness—that the infernal plague of flatterers 3 who slip

1. Anne of Austria (1601–66), daughter of Philip III of Spain, who had married the French King Louis XIII in 1615.

2. "La peste infernale des flateurs", the metaphor was firmly entrenched as a commonplace—cf. Pierre de Ronsard, La Francide 4.1513–17, "flateurs / Peau des Rois, courtisans et menteurs, / Qui des plus gais assèchent les oreilles . . ." [flatterers, the plague of kings, courtiers and liars.]
into palaces renders Virtue, and her guide Clear-sightedness, of infinitely more difficult access for them than for their inferiors.

I know but one means by which you may hope to attain these two zeniths of age and the virtues at the same moment, that is, may it please your Majesty, by wholeheartedly plunging into sound writings concerning prudence and morality. For as soon as a Prince has heightened his mind by that exercise, the flatterers, finding themselves less subtle than he, no longer dare to trifle with him. And commonly potentates and kings cannot receive appropriate instruction except from the dead, because those who surround the great, being divided into two groups, the fools and the wicked (that is, those flatterers), neither know how nor wish to speak well in their hearing. The wise and well disposed can and wish to do so, but they do not dare. It is in Virtue, Madam, that persons of your rank must seek true loftiness and the Crown of Crowns, inasmuch as they have the power—but not the right—to offend against laws and justice, and they meet with as much danger and more shame than others do when they commit such excesses. Thus does a great king himself teach us—that all the glory of the daughter of the king is inward.

But what a country bumpkin am I! All others approach their princes and their kings by adoring and praising them. I dare to approach my Queen by preaching! But pardon my zeal, Madam, for I burn with desire to hear France cry, with applause, this acclamation, ‘The Light has no West for me,’ wherever your Majesty shall go, the new Sun of the Virtues; and I wish further to draw from you—so I hope from your worthy beginnings—one of the strongest proofs of the treatise that I offer at your feet to uphold the equality of men and women. And, not solely because of the unique greatness that is yours by birth and by marriage, you will serve as a mirror for your sex, and as an object of emulation for men, to the farthest extent of the universe, if you design to raise yourself to the degree of merit and perfection that I propose to you by the aid of those great books. But as soon, Madam, as you have resolutely determined to shine forth with that precious brilliance, the sex as a whole will seem to be illuminated in the splendor of your rays. I am, Madam,

Your Majesty's most humble and obedient
subject and servant,
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1624

THE EQUALITY OF MEN AND WOMEN

Most of those who take up the cause of women, opposing the arrogant preference for themselves that is asserted by men, give them full value for money, for they redirect the preference to them. For my part, I fly all extremes. I am content to make them equal to men, given that nature, too, is as greatly opposed, in this respect, to superiority as to inferiority. But what am I saying? It is not enough for certain persons to prefer the masculine to the feminine sex, they must also combine women, by an absolute and obligatory rule, to the distaff—yep, to the distaff alone. Still, what may console them for this contempt is that it comes only from those men whom they would wish least to resemble—persons who would lend plausibility to the reproaches that might be heaped upon the female sex, if they were of it, and who feel in their hearts that they have nothing to recommend them but the credit of being masculine. Because they have heard it cried in the streets that women lack value, as well as intellectual ability—indeed, the constitution and physical make-up to arrive at the latter—their eloquence exults in preaching these maxims, and all the more nicely for the fact that value, sufficiency, physical make-up, and constitution are imposing terms. They have not learned, on the other hand,

3. This includes Agrippa, who sets out to demonstrate women's "preeminence," but not Tillemon. On the context of the au revoir des femmes, see Margaret L. King and Albert Kaitz, Jr., "The Other Voice in Early Modern Europe: Introduction to the Series," in this volume, xvii, and Richard Hillman, "Introduction to Mary Stuart de Gournay (1563-1645)," also in this volume, 13-16.
4. Constant Verenece, in his edition of Egalit de l'egalité des hommes et des femmes, Crie des domes, La P Regiment de Moins de Montaigne, by Marie le Jars de Gournay (Geneva, 1993), n. 9, cites a proverb to this effect.
5. In this text, "intellectual ability" (which for humanists extended to moral development) often seems the most appropriate rendering of suffisance. Compare above, Pronouncing, n. 3.
that the chief quality of a dolt is to espouse causes on the basis of popular belief and hearsay.

Amid the chirping of their lofty conversation, bark how such intellects compare the two sexes: in their opinion, the supreme excellence women may achieve is to resemble ordinary men. They are as far from imagining that a great woman might style herself a great man, if her sex were simply changed, as from allowing that a man may raise himself to the level of a god. Men braver than Hercules, truly, who merely took on a dozen monsters in a dozen combats, while, with a mere single word, they vanquish half the world. But isn't it beyond belief that those who seek to exalt and strengthen themselves through the weakness of others feel compelled to insist that they can exalt or fortify themselves by means of their own strength? And the best of it is that they think themselves exonerated for their effrontery in viliﬁying the female sex when they employ equal effrontery to praise, or rather to gild, themselves—sometimes (I say) in particular, sometimes in general, and, moreover, in whatever wrong and false measure may be, as if the validity of their boastings gained weight and worth from their impudence. And God knows I am acquainted with some of these merry braggarts, among the most fervent in their contempt for women, whose brags have even become proverbial. But truly, if they lay claim to being men of reﬁnement and sufﬁciency, since they proclaim themselves to be so by edict, why would they not, by a contrary edict, proclaim women to be stupid? It is only reasonable that their ball should roll right to the end of its course. My God, doesn’t the desire ever come upon these embodiments of sufﬁciency to furnish a smudgeon of a just and precise example and a ﬁtting rule for perfection to that poor sex? And if I judge well, either of the worthiness or of the capacity of women, I do not propose at present to prove it with reasons, since the opinionists might dispute them, nor with examples, since they are too common, but indeed only by the authority of God himself, of the Fathers—the butresses of His Church—and of those great philosophers who have served as a light to the universe. Let us rank those glorious witnesses in front and reserve God, then, the holy Fathers of His Church, for the innermost, as the treasure.

Plato, whose title of divine no one has disputed, and consequently Socrates, his interpreter and guarantor in his writings—if Plato is not rather in them that of Socrates, his most divine preceptor, since they never had but a single sense and a single mouth—attribute to women the same rights, faculties, and functions in their Republics, and everywhere else. What is more, they maintain that women have often surpassed all the men of their nations, for indeed they have invented a number of the ﬁnest of the ﬁne arts, even the Latin alphabet; they have excelled, they have instructed magisterially and with sovereign authority over men, in all sorts of disciplines and virtues, in the most famous cities of antiquity, including Alexandria, the premier city of the Empire after Rome. Hypatia held such an exalted position in that much-celebrated place. But did Themistoclea in Samothrace, the sister of Pythagoras, do any the less, not to mention the wise Theano, his wife? For we are informed that the latter taught philosophy as he did, having as a disciple even her brother, who had difﬁculty in ﬁnding in all of Greece disciples worthy of him. What, too, was Damo his daughter, in whose hands, as he died, he placed his Commentaries and the task of propagating his doctrine, with those mysteries and high seriousness that he practiced all his life? We read even in Cicero, the Prince of Orators, what luster and vogue were enjoyed, at Rome and nearby,

7. Republics: plural, conceivably, because Cournaux has both Plato and Socrates in mind as authors of The Republic, or because he is thinking less of that work than of the model it provides for forming future states. The section referred to is in bk. 5 (Plato, The Republic 5.3451C–5.457B). The sweeping expression, "and everywhere else," reveals, as much as it conceals, Cournaux's tendency to read selectively.

8. This legend is developed by Boccaccio, in particular—see his account of 'Nicostata, Who Was Called Carmenta,' in Concerning Famous Women, 53–54 (chap. 25), to whom he also attributes grammar. Here Cournaux conspicuously moderates the 'extremism' of Henricus Cornelius Agrippa, who claims that women 'have invented all the liberal arts' (Declamation, 76).

9. Born around 370 C.E., Hypatia, the daughter of Theon, was a philosopher and mathematician renowned for her knowledge and eloquence. In 415, when she was head of the school of Platonic philosophy in Alexandria, she was seized by a gang of men, who stripped her and cut her to pieces, evidently at the instigation of Christian monks. There is an account of her in Suidas (see below, 83, and n. 40), and Cournaux may also have read about her in a compilation known as the Hellenic Exegetical Scriptures Græci (Greek writers on the history of the church), which was produced in several editions during the period, see that of N. Choron (Paris, 1571), 569–70 (570 misnumbered as 569). Hypatia received an ample notice in the late seventeenth-century survey of Mesnage, The History of Women Philosopher, 26–29, and her significance is increasingly recognized today: see Mary Ellen Waithe, 'Hypatia of Alexandria,' in A History of Women Philosophers, 1.169–95, and 'Finding Bits and Pieces of Hypatia,' in Hypatia's Daughters. Fifteen Hundred Years of Women Philosophers, ed. Linda Lopez McAlister (Bloomington, Ind., 1993), 4–15.

Hypatia was clearly in Cournaux's mind even in her ﬁrst version of the Equality, when she similarly refers to Alexandria. This sentence initiates, however, a series of embellishments of the original text.

10. Modern texts of Diogenes Laërtius (8.22) identify Themistoclea as the Delphic priestess, rather than the sister, from whom (according to Aristotle) the philosopher Pythagoras (ca. 582–500 B.C.E.) was supposed to have derived his doctrines. Compare Mesnage, History of Women Philosophers, 47–48. On Theano, see above, footnote n. 48.

11. Damo (as 'Dama') is said by Agrippa (who has likewise just mentioned Theano) to have been "renowned in explaining her father's veiled opinions" (Declamation, 81). Another tradition
by the eloquence of Cornelia, the mother of the Gracchi, and, further, by that of Laelia, the daughter of Caius Laelius, who in my opinion was Sylla. They did not only the daughter of Laelius, any more than that of Hortensius, fail to receive a famous encomium in Quintilian on the subject of that exquisite virtue. But then if Tycho Brahe, the famous astronomer and Danish baron, had lived in our day, he would not have been celebrated that new star recently discovered in his region—let us call her thus—Mademoiselle van Schuman, the rival of those illustrious ladies in eloquence, and of their lyric poets also, even in their own Latin language, and who, besides that language, possesses all the others, ancient and modern, and all the liberal and noble arts? But would Athens, August queen of Greece and learning, be alone among the foremost cities in not having seen women triumph in the highest rank of the preceptors of humankind, as much through their illustrious and prolific writings as by the spoken word? Arete, the daughter of Anistippus, acquired in that glorious city a hundred and ten philosophers as disciples, publicly occupying the chair that her father had left vacant by his death, and because, apart from that, she had composed excellent writings, the Greeks honored her with this praise: that she had had the pen of her father, the soul of Socrates, the tongue of Homer.

I single out here only those women who have taught publicly in the most celebrated places, and with a brilliant luster. For it would be a tedious business, because an infinite one, to enumerate the other great and learned minds of women. Why indeed would the peerless Queen of Sheba have accorded the wisdom of Solomon, even across as many seas and territories as separated them, if not because she knew it better than all her age? Or why would she have known it better, except by a corresponding wisdom, equal or closer to it than all those of the other minds of that time? It is thus in sustaining the esteem and deference that women have deserved that this double miracle of Nature—preceptor and disciple—named at the opening of this section believed that he gave more weight to certain speeches of great importance if he pronounced them in his books through the mouths of Diotima and Aspasia; Dioctus, whom he did not at all shrink from terming his mistress and preceptor in several of the most exalted branches of learning—he, the preceptor and master of all the nations under the sun.

From the subject Theodoret so readily broaches in the Oration Concerning Faith, it seems to me quite evident that he found a favorable opinion of the
sex highly plausible. Then look at that long and magnificent comparison that the famous philosopher Maximus of Tyre makes between the mode of loving of Socrates himself and that of the great Sappho. To what extent, too, does that king of sages delight himself with the hope of conversing in the other world with the sufficiency of the great men and the great women whom the ages have fostered, and what pleasures does he promise himself from that exercise in the divine Apology where his great disciple reports his last words? After all these testimonies from Socrates on the subject of women, it is easy to see that if, in the Symposium, he lets slip some remark of Xenophon disparaging their prudence, in comparison with that of men, he is considering them according to the ignorance and inexperience in which they are nurtured, or rather, at the worst, in general, intending to leave ample room for frequent exceptions—something that the blatherers we are discussing are far from comprehending. With regard to Plato, we are also told that he did not wish to begin teaching unless Lastenia (I have read the name in this form) and Axiotea had arrived among his auditors, saying that the former was intelligence, the latter memory, and that they could understand and retain what he had to say.

If, therefore, women attain less often than men to the heights of excellence, it is a marvel that the lack of good education—indeed, the abundance of outright and blatantly bad education—does not do more to prevent them from doing so entirely. If proof is needed, there is more difference between them and men than among themselves—according to the training they receive, according to whether they are brought up in a city or a village, or according to nationality! Therefore, why should not their training in public matters and in letters, of a kind equal to men’s, fill up the gap that commonly appears between their minds and those of men, when we see, likewise, that such training is of such importance that, because just one of its branches—namely, dealing with the world—is common among French and English women and lacking among the Italian, the latter are in general so far exceeded by the former? I say in general because in particular the ladies of Italy sometimes excel, and we have drawn from them queens and princesses who did not lack intellectual ability. Why indeed might not the right sort of upbringing succeed in filling the gap between the understandings of men and theirs, given that in the example I just cited, those of inferior birth surmount their betters purely and simply by dint of this dealing and engagement with the world? For the air breathed by the women of Italy is more subtle and fit for rendering the mind so than that of England or France, as appears by the

19. Theodore (ca. 392–466), Bishop of Cyrinus (in Syria), one of the Church Fathers. Gournay seems likely to be referring to his commentary on the Apostles’ Creed, where he is himself concerned with faith and where, typically for Theodore, he emphasizes the doctrines that Christ derived humanity and life from the Virgin Mary. Also to the point, perhaps, is Theodore’s work commonly known as the Philemon or Historical History, which introduces several accounts of holy women in the following (by no means unequivocal) terms: “Having written the lives of these heroic men, I believe that it will be useful also to mention women who have struggled in no lesser way, if not with even greater strength. They deserve, indeed, still greater praise, these women who, though having a weaker nature, have given proof of the same courage as the men and have delivered their sex from its hereditary shame” (Theodore de Cyr, “Histoire Philosophique,” in Histoire des moines et Sages. Sources Chrétiennes 297 [Paris, 1979], 29:2, 1, our translation).

20. Maximus of Tyre, Greek sophist and philosopher of the 1st century B.C.E., whose work would have been available to Gournay in Latin and French translation, as well as in the original! The passage mentioned may be found in The Disputation of Maximus of Tyre, trans. Thomas Taylor, 2 vols. (London, 1804), 98–99 (dissertation 8). The discussion is conducted very much in the shadow of Plato, with this dissertation on the “Anatomy of Socrates,” including references to Aspasia and, especially, Doximia. Gournay would have found further references to Sappho, one of the most celebrated ancient Greek poets (ib. 612 B.C.E.), in many classical authors. She is also praised in chap. 45 of Boccaccio, Concerning Famous Women, 99–100.


22. Socrates’ remark comes in reply to a display of skill by a dancer: “This girl’s feat, gentlemen, is only one of many proofs that women’s nature is not at all what inferior to men’s, except in its lack of judgment and physical strength” (Xenophon, Symposium, trans. and ed. C. J. Todd, in Anabasis, Books IV–VII. Symposium and Apology. Loeb Classical Library [London and New York, 1922], 292–93 [2.9]).

23. Deeners—corrected from derveners, following the 1641 list of errata.

24. Following Diogenes Laertius, 3.46 and 4.2, Lactantius of Mantineia and Axiotea of Phlius are mentioned by Agrippa as disciples of Plato (Dehaemia, 81; and Rabl in Declama, 81 n. 173). We have been unable, however, to trace the detail supplied by Gournay, which appears in neither these nor two other more remote but conceivably sources: Themistius, Orations 23.295C, and Clement of Alexandria, The Miscellanea, 6.25–8 in The Writings of Clement of Alexandria, trans. William Wilson, 2 vols. Ante-Nicene Christian Library, vol. 12. (Edinburgh, 1869), 2:493–96 (4.19); and in the company of the following example also cited by Gournay: Judith, Thess, Arete, Aspasia Corina, and Sappho. In another chapter, where granting the generally superior abilities of males, he praises women’s capacity to endure the tortures of martyrdom, insists that virtue is the same for both sexes, and opines that women should engage in philosophy (165–70 [4.8]), Clement’s work would have been available to Gournay in Latin translation, as well as in the Greek original.

25. As Vanessoven points out (in Gournay’s Égalité des hommes et des femmes, 44 n. 19), the restrictions placed on Italian women with regard to normal social contact had been deplored by Montaigne (Essays, 3.5.886).”

26. The first edition (1622) specified “deux Révènes à la prudence desquelles la France a trop d’obligation” (two queens whose prudence France is only too obliged) (Égalité des hommes et des femmes, ed. Vanessoven, 44)—obviously Marie de Médicis and Catherine de Médicis.
ability of the men of the Italian climate when compared ordinarily with that of Frenchmen and Englishmen, but I have touched on this idea elsewhere.

Plutarch, in his little work on the virtuous deeds of women, maintains that the virtue of the man and that of the woman are the same thing. Seneca, by the same token, affirms in the Consolations that one cannot suppose Nature to have treated them harshly or restricted and curtailed their virtues and their intellects more than the virtues and intellects of men, but, on the contrary, she has endowed them with equal vigor and with resources sufficient for everything honorable and praiseworthy. Let us look, after these two, at what judgment the third chief of the Triumvirate of Wisdom: human and moral makes of them in his Essays. It seems to him, he says—hence, he does not know why—that one rarely finds women worthy of commanding men. Is this not to place them, individually, in equal counterpoise to men and to confess that, if he does not so place them in general, he is afraid of being wrong, though he can excuse his restriction by the poor and unseemly manner in which that sex is nurtured? Nor does he neglect, moreover, to cite favorably in another place in the same book that authority which Plato grants to them in his Republic and the fact that Antisthenes denies all difference in ability and in virtue between the two sexes. As for the philosopher Aristotle, in the course of enquiring into heaven and earth, he has by no means contradicted the opinion that favors women, unless he has done so on general terms because of their poor upbringing, and without ruling out exceptions, thus he has confirmed that opinion, relying, apparently, on the sayings of his spiritual father and grandfather, Socrates and Plato, as on something constant and determined by the authority of such sages, through whose mouths it must be admitted the entire human race, and reason itself, have pronounced their decree.

27. Plutarch, Moralia, Book of Wisdom 243A, this translation of the title accurately reflects the sort of "virtue" primarily illustrated by Plutarch's collection of stories.


29. The reference, of course, is to Montaigne, who is similarly characterized in Promenade—see above, 35.

30. Montaigne refers to Plato's Essai, 1.8 388A, but her reading is hard to square with what Montaigne goes on to say about the untrustworthiness of women's judgments.

31. Montaigne, Essai, 3.3 387C, "Virtue is the same for women as for men" was a saying of the Athenian philosopher Antisthenes (ca. 445-360 B.C.E.), founder of the Cynic school (Diogenes Laertius 6.12). Montaigne chooses at this point to ignore Xenophanes' Symouleia (392-93 [2.10]), where, following the remark of Socrates cited above, 80 and n. 22, Antisthenes teases him about his inability to "educate" his notoriously shrewish wife, Xanthippe.

32. There is no point in adding here the dozens of key passages, ranging over a number of works in his vast oeuvre, where Aristotle sets forth his views on women, both biological and social. Those essentially negative views, which had been enormously influential for hundreds of years before Courtonne's era, were already beginning to be challenged by advocates of women, and her uphill struggle to reconcile traditional intellectual authority with progressive thinking is reflected in the mixture of evasiveness and theoretical overkill here. Both for documentation and for a good sense of the issues from a feminist perspective, see Maryanne Cline Horowitz, "Aristotle and Women," Journal of the History of Sexuality 9 (1994): 183-213. For Aristotle on women in the Renaissance context, see Ian Maclean, The Renaissance Nation of Women (Cambridge, 1980).

33. As previously mentioned (see above, 14), Courtonne is indebted to the explicit encouragements of women written by Boccaccio and, especially by Agrippa. In general, however, her tendency to identify authors she admired as advocates of women—a tendency most notable in the case of Montaigne—involves some selective reading and wishful thinking. This is true for Desiderius Erasmus, the Dutch humanist (ca. 1466-1536), as well as for the two Italian poets, Torquato Tasso (1544-95) and Politian i.e., Angelo Poliziano (1454-94). All three figures, however, did contribute to the burgeoning literature on women by way of such topics as love and marriage, see their listings in Kelso's exhaustive bibliography (Courtonne for the Lady of the Renaissance, 326-424). The "preceptor of courtesans" is Baldassare Castiglione (1478-1529), who wrote the enormously influential (and heavily Neoplatonic) Il Cortegiano (The courtier). Again, see Kelso, 210-22, for a summary of Castiglione's prescriptions for women as courtiers, esp. in relation to the ideal of courtly love.

34. Tacitus, Annals 4.56, records this argument in the context of a competition among Asian cities for the privilege of building a temple dedicated to the Roman imperial family and the senate.
hood of that heroine? And since we have happened upon the subject of women poets, we learn that Corinna publicly took the prize over Pindar in their art and that at the age of nineteen, the last year of her life, Eraste had made a poem of three hundred verses achieving such a height of excellence that it paralleled in majesty those of Homer and plunged Alexander into doubt as to whether he must think more highly of the good fortune of Achilles for having met with that great poet to be his herald, or of the poet himself for having had as his rival such a heroine. Have ladies possessed the knowledge to choose, between those two poets, to whom to accord gloriously the victory, or at least equal standing?

On the question of the Salic law, which deprives women of the crown, it applies only in France. And it was invented in the time of Pharamond, solely because of the wars against the Empire, whose yoke our forefathers were throwing off, the female sex seemingly being physically less fit for bearing arms because of the necessity of bearing and nourishing children. It must still be noted, however, that the peers of France having originally been created to serve as virtual associates of royalty, as their name makes clear, the lady peersesses in their own right had a seat, privilege, and voice in deliberations wherever the peers did, and of the same extent. One can consult Hotman for the etymology of peers, and Du Tillet and Matthieu in the Historie du Roy for the peeresses. So, too, it is worth considering that the Lacedaemonians, that brave and generous people, consulted their wives on all business, becoming, in effect, official historians under Henry IV, there had been multiple editions of his historical works, which concentrate on the sixteenth-century France.

35. Corinna of Tanagra; see Pausanias, Description of Greece 9.22.3, who explains her victory over Pindar with reference to her dialect and her beauty; Eraste, see again, Agrippa, Declaration, who includes in her list of female orators and poets: Eraste de Telos or de Lesbos, who was sentenced the epigrammatist (682). The reference to Lesbos may be due to an erroneous association with Sappho, with whom she was probably not contemporary. She was especially well known for a poem in memory of a girl friend. For further references to both women, see Rabl, in Agrippa's Declar, 50-51. We have not traced Courmay's story about Alexander, which looks to be gleaned from Plutarch's report, in his life of Alexander, that at the tomb of Achilles that monarch declared 'the hero happy in having, while he lived, a faithful friend, and after death, a great herald of his fame' (Plutarch, Lives, 7.263 [Alexander 15:4]).

36. Pharamond, a figure from Roman romance whose legend credits with founding the line of Merovingian kings in the fifth century CE.

37. As Venesien notes (in Courmaye's Éloge des femmes et des jeunes, 47 n. 35), this fact comes by way of Montaigne, Essais, 1.4.1 230C.


39. For cataloged title of either Du Tillet or Matthieu, see in Courmaye, De Tillet (d. 1570), a churchman, wrote La Chronique des roys de France (Chronicle of French kings), first published in Latin in 1539, then translated and several times updated until the reign of Henri III. Pierre Matthieu, 1563-1621, produced biblical and legal commentary, poetry, and drama (including vitriolic texts on behalf of the Ultra-Catholic Holy League), before becoming, in effect, official historian under Henri IV, there had been multiple editions of his historical works, which concentrate on the sixteenth-century France.

40. Pausanias, whose Description of Greece has previously been cited, was active around 130 BCE. Suda (also Suda), is now commonly considered to designate the title, rather than the author, of this compilation of information on classical literature and history, which probably dates from the latter part of the second century CE.

41. G centers Fregoso, in our opinion, must be Battista Fregoso, regularly identified as Battista Fregoso, in the early editions of his works, Digest of Venice from 1453 to 1504. He produced a compendium of memorable sayings and deeds, which, in Latin translation (Dig. Fregosiae selectarum historiae memorabilium libri IX), went through at least eight editions between 1509 and 1604. Anonad (letter to Richard Hillman, 16 December 1599) has supported this identification and pointed out that bk. 3, chap. 3, of Fregoso's work entitled 'De formis qui doctrinae excellunt' (Of women who have excelled in learning) was, in turn, included in De memorabilibus et famosis mulieribus (Of memorable and famous women) by Jeanne Raisonnement (Paris, 1572).

As for Diognites Laernis, a number of our notes reflect Courmaye's considerable debt to his collection of philosophers' lives, nothing is known about the author, but he is usually assigned to the earlier part of the third century CE.

42. The Dial of Ptolemy is the title of Thomas North's translation (1558) of the enormously popular Spanish work of moral counsel, Relaciones de Sierras y Los Emperadores, Alegoria Alabada (written by Antonino de Cabezarruiz, 1509). Compare above, Promenade, n. 57. The translation into French (by René Berthault de la Gose, as Les Nombres des Peices) was first published in 1531, there were numerous subsequent editions, including one in 1608.

43. The Theater of Human Life ('Théâtre de la vie humaine') alludes, according to Allard (letter to Hillman, December 1599), to the Theater of human lives produced in the second half of the sixteenth century by the dramatist, who adapted the works of Conradus Lykosthenes (or Lykosthenes). The scope of this vast compilation of instances, which was owned by Montaigne, may be judged from the title of the text of the 1565 Basel edition: Anatomia rerum humanarum atque tablea historiae (Historical examples of almost all the good and bad things that can happen to mankind).

44. Venesien, in Courmaye's Éloge des femmes et des jeunes, 47 n. 37, traces the practice back to Blanche de Castille, 1188-1252.

The Equality of Men and Women

animal Tans only in its rational soul. And it is permitted to laugh in the cause of our journey: the jest would not be out of season that reaches us that there is nothing more common to all, not even the woman who is more than a man, the woman who is more than a man... Man, woman, and all that exist is according to the great St. Basil. Man, woman, and all that exist is according to the great St. Basil.

the ethics of the two sexes, 1.2.3.4.5.6.7.8.9.10.11.12.13.14.15.16.17.18.19.20.21.22.23.24.25.26.27.28.29.30.31.32.33.34.35.36.37.38.39.40.41.42.43.44.45.46.47.48.49.50.51.52.53.54.55.56.57.58.59.60.61.62.63.64.65.66.67.68.69.70.71.72.73.74.75.76.77.78.79.80.81.82.83.84.85.86.87.88.89.90.91.92.93.94.95.96.97.98.99.100.
victories, in witness whereof their hymns of praise have the honor of finding a place in the Holy Bible, and likewise those of Marie, the sister of Moses, and Anna, the daughter of Phanuel. 17 What is more, they have many times prevailed and triumphed in various regions of the world — and over whom? Cyrus and Theseus, 29 to these two one may add Hercules, whom they have, if not vanquished, at least well thrashed. 30 Likewise, the fall of Penthesilia gave the crowning touch to the glory of Achilles — you have only to hear Seneca and Ronsard speak of him.

The Amazon he vanquished, final terror of the Greeks.

Penthesilia he cast into the dust. 60

Nor could Virgil consent to the death of Camilla in the midst of a furious army, which seemed to fear nothing but her, except by means of ambush and the surprise of a shot from afar off. 31 Epicharis, Leaena, Porcia, the mother in Maccabees — will they serve us as proof of how capable women are of that other triumph, the magnanimous strength that consists in constancy and endurance of the most rigorous sufferings? 61 Have they, moreover, excelled less in keeping faith, which comprises all the chief virtues, than in strength, considered in all its aspects? Paternus informs us that during the Roman proscriptions, the fidelity of children was nonexistent, that of freedmen slight, that of women preeminent. 62

And if Saint Paul, to follow my trail of testimonies from the saints, forbid them the ministry and commands them to keep silence in church? 63 It is plain that this is not at all out of contempt but rather, indeed, only for fear lest they should arouse temptations by that display, so plain and public, that must be made in the course of ministering and preaching, since they are of greater grace and beauty than men. It is clear as day, I affirm, that contempt has nothing to do with it, since that Apostle speaks of Theophane as his cohelper in the work of our Lord 64 — apart from the fact that Saint Thecla and Apphia have a place among his dearest children and dis-

57. Agrippa, Declaration, 76–77, 80; likewise cites the sister of Moses (see Exod. 15:20–21, Num. 26:59)—whose name was Miriam, however, not Marie — as well as Anna. Not surprisingly, neither writer mentions God’s disgrace and punishment of the former (Num. 12:1–15). According to Luke 2:36–38, Anna was a prophetess who received the child Jesus in the temple. She served as a type of the virtuous woman for Saint Jerome — see Letter, in The Principal Works, 127.

58. Cyrus died in battle against Thamiros (or Tommyris), the queen of Scythia, whose story figures in Boccaccio, Concerning Famous Women, 104–6 (chap. 47), and Agrippa, Declaration, 86. Notable classical sources are Herodotus, 1:214, and Valerius Maximus, 8:10, ext. 1. Plutarch, Lives, Theseus, 26–27, recounts the wars of Theseus against the Amazons. Boccaccio, 40 (chap. 18), portrays their famous reputation for that hero’s abduction of Hippolyta.

59. The allusion is to the great resistance offered by the Amazons to Hercules’ achievement of the girdle of Hippolyta, his North Labor. Compare Boccaccio, Concerning Famous Women, 40 (chap. 18), where, however, the queen is Antiope.

60. Penthesilia was a legendary queen of the Amazons — see Amad, 1:490–93 and 11:661–68, cf. Boccaccio, Concerning Famous Women, 65–66 (chap. 30). The first of Gouraud’s lines translates Seneca, Troades 243; Ronsard makes passing mention of Penthesilia, likewise at the ultimate conquest of Achilles, in “Institution pour l’adulation du Ray Trev Chrestien Charles IX de ce nom” (in Oeuvres complétes, ed. Jean Gérard et al., 2:1007, line 45). The context in Seneca renders Gouraud’s allusion intriguingly double-edged, since Pythius, the son of Achilles, is detailing his father’s achievements in order to justify sacrificing Polyxena to Achilles vengeful spirit — an emblem of female martyrdom appropriated by Gouraud for herself in the Aestras (see below, 148 and n. 71 in the same work).

61. Camilla was the queen of the Volscians, allied with Hannibal against the forces of Ancus and finally slain with a spear thrown by Appius. See Amad, 11:432–33, 498 ff., 532 ff., and exp. 648–833. She, too, figures in Boccaccio, Concerning Famous Women, 79–80 (chap. 37), and is mentioned by Agrippa, Declaration, 74, 86.

62. Epicharis, Leaena, and Porcia are all included in Boccaccio, Concerning Famous Women. Epicharis, though of base birth and shamefaced morals, heroically resisted torture and committed suicide rather than reveal information about a conspiracy against the Roman emperor Nero (29.9–11 (chap. 91). Her story was further accessible in Tacitus Annals 15:51 and 15:57, which was Boccaccio’s own source (Guarino in Concerning Famous Women, 256).

According to Boccaccio, 107–9 (chap. 48), the prostitute Leaena similarly endured torments and finally bit off and spat out her tongue to avoid betraying the conspirators against an Athenian tyrant. Although she is briefly mentioned by Pausanias, Description of Greece 1:23.2, the main classical source for her story, as Guarino indicates (255), is Pliny, Natural History 7:29, where her endurance is termed "most famous." There, however, it is Anaxarchus who is executed, later in the same passage, with biting off his tongue. Boccaccio evidently followed the later account of Terullian (one of the Church Fathers), who it seems may have read Pliny carelessly. Compare Méjanes, History of Women Philosophers, 56. Gouraud’s text actually reads “Leaena” and Arnold has suggested (letter to Hillman, 16 December 1999) that she may have had in mind Lenea, whom the Athenians raised a bronze statue to a tongueless hero in token of her constancy and love of country. This reference might have been found in Le Béatissime des Dames, contenant toutes leurs belles perfection (The ladies shield, containing all their great perfections), by Louis de Bermo, seigneur de la Martinère, a rare volume published in Rouen in 1621.

The fame of Porcia (or Portia) is more widespread, although Agrippa (Declaration, 73) makes her the wife of Marcus Cato rather than her daughter, she is, instead, the wife of Marcus Brutus, the prominent conspirator against Julius Caesar. As Guarino observes (256), Boccaccio incorporates the two mentions of her by Valerius Maximus, 1:2:15 and 4:6.5, by having her first test her capacity to endure pain, then, after her husband’s death, commit suicide by swallowing live coals. Plutarch also gives these details in his biography of Marcus Brutus, 13:3–11 and 33:5. The mother referred to in the Apocryphal books of the Bible known as 1 and 4 Maccabees was willing to see her seven sons killed, then to sacriifice herself for their faith — see 2 Macc. 7 and the amplification of the story, including extended praise of the mother, in 4 Macc. 8–18.

63. That is, their loyalty to the proscribed men — see Vellutus Paternus (ca. 19 B.C.E.—after 30 C.E.), Compendium of Roman History 2.67.2. The historian’s point is that the sons were corrupted by self-interest.

64. See 1 Tim. 2:12 and 1 Cor. 14:34–35. Agrippa, Declaration, 96, also needs to explain away this injunction, though he uses a different argument.

65. The name Theódæ is not found in the Bible, Venesson, in Gouraud’s Épitaphe des hommes et des femmes, 51 n. 36. Plausibly suggests an error for Phobe (Rom. 16:1–2), who is praised by Paul immediately prior to his commendation, in terms resembling Gouraud’s, of two other women, Priscilla and Aquila (Rom. 16:3).
picles. Not to mention the great credit of Saint Petronilla with respect to Saint Peter—or to add that Mary Magdalene is named in the Church as equal to the Apostles ("Par Apostolis"), among other places in the calendar of the Greeks published by Génebrard. Indeed, the Church and those very Apostles allowed an exception to that rule of silence for her, who preached for thirty years in the Baume of Marseilles, as all of Provence reports. And if someone impugns this testimony of the preaching of the Magdalene, let them be asked what else the Sibyls were doing but preaching about God's universe by divine inspiration, in anticipation of the future coming of Jesus Christ? And he would then have to tell us whether he can deny the preaching of Saint Catherine of Siena, which the good and holy Bishop of Geneva has just taught me about. Moreover, all nations grant the priesthood to women impartially with men, and Christians must at least agree that they are capable of administering the sacrament of baptism. Then, if the right to administer that one has been justly accorded, how can they be justly denied the capacity to administer the others? As for the claim that necessity, because of the death of little children, compelled the ancient Fathers to establish this practice against their will, surely they would never have believed that this necessity could excuse such prevarication as to bestow permission to violate and profane the administering of a sacrament. In the end, one sees plainly that in granting this power to women they esteemed them worthy of it and that they have not forbidden them to administer the other sacraments except in order always to preserve more complete the authority of men, whether because they themselves were of the male sex or, rightly or wrongly, so that peace between the two sexes might be better assured by the weakness and repression of one of them. Truly, Saint Jerome wrote wisely in his Letters that with regard to serving God, the spirit and the doctrine must be considered—not a person's sex. This pronouncement should be applied generally so as to allow to women, on still stronger grounds, all other branches of knowledge and all the most excellent and soundest actions, to put it in a word, of the most exalted kind.

And this too would be to follow the intentions of the same Saint, who in all his writings highly honors and grants authority to that sex, hence dedicating to the maiden Eustochium his commentaries on Ezekiel, although it was forbidden even to priests to study that prophet before the age of thirty. Whoever will read what Saint Gregory, too, writes on the subject of his sister will

66. According to the second-century Acts of Paul and Thecla (an Apocryphal Book of the New Testament, The Twelve Patriarchs, etc, The Anti-Nicene Fathers, ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, rev. ed. A. Cleveland Cox, Buffalo, N.Y., 1886; 8:487–92), Thella dedicated herself to virginity and followed Paul (at one point traveling to meet him in boys' clothing), she preached the gospel in Iconium, and a chapel dedicated to her honor in St. Peter's, Rome, became the chapel of the kings of France. Paul sends greetings to Apphia, among his fellow laborers, in Philippians 1:1. Petronilla (or Petronilla), according to legend, the daughter of Saint Peter, probably in a spiritual sense. Saint Francis of Sales speaks of Peter's "particular love" for her—and, in the same breath, of Paul's for Thelia (Introduction to the Douai Life, 141); she was supposedly married after refusing to wed. B. Génebrard (1597–97), Benedictine monk, active in the Catholic League during the wars of religion, he was named Archbishop of Aix by the duke of Mayenne. His most highly regarded work is a Latin commentary on the Psalms of David (1577).

67. The saint's name is also "at least three years there, in the pre-Christian era, it was associated with a fertility cult. Sibyls: women who, in classical times, were thought to possess the power of prophecy—a point endorsed by Agrippa (Oraculum, 76, 80). Especially renowned was the Sibyl of Cumae. Christian tradition often extended their foresight to the coming of Christ—see, e.g., Boccaccio, De virtutibus Virorum Illustrium, 61–42 (chap. 19) and 59–51 (chap. 24). Saint Augustine, The City of God against the Pagans 10, 27, so expounds the reference to the Sibyl of Cumae in Virgil's famous fourth Eclogue.

68. Saint Catherine of Siena (1347–80): influential visionary and theologian, author of letters and a much read work of meditations and revelations called the Dialogue or Treatise on Divine Providence. The Bishop of Geneva referred to is Saint Francis de Sales (1567–1622), who held that post from 1602 until his death. Both his Introduction à la vie éternelle (Introduction to the devout life) first published in 1609, then revised and expanded in 1619, and his Traité de l'amour de Dieu (Treatise on the love of God), which appeared in 1616, make reference to Catherine of Siena, although the 1622 edition of the Equity does not. Commonly, when Catherine's charitable works come in for due praise from Francis, her preaching is not stressed but, rather, her intense, quasi-erotic, mysticism, as when she "shar'd the burning pain of our Saviour's wounds" and "girding love set a keen edge on acting pity" (The Love of God, trans. Vincent Kavanagh, London, 1602; 194). Moreover, Francis advises that in her "there is more to admire than to imitate" (Introduction to the Douai Life, 76). See also above, "Introduction to Marie le Jarre de Gournay," 15.

72. Venetian, in Gournay's Éloge des femmes et des notes, 55 n. 61, documents Gournay's simplification of this question.

73. Gournay perhaps has in mind Jerome's statement in Letters 127, 5, justifying his great esteem for the holy Marcella (the friend of Paula and precursor of Eustochium): "For we judge of people's virtue not by their sex but by their character" (p. 285). This belongs to the same discussion of women's apostolic role on which she will shortly be dwelling. Gournay is at least making a reasonable inference from a number of Jerome's letters to and about his female associates—see, e.g., Letters 22, 24, 34, 108, and 130—as well as from the prologue to his commentary on Zephaniah (see below, n. 81).

74. Eustochium (ca. 368–420) was an important follower of Jerome, a founder of monasteries and an accomplished biblical scholar. Besides dedicating her letters to and about her female associates—see, e.g., Letters 22, 24, 34, 108, and 130—as well as from the prologue to his commentary on Zephaniah (see above, n. 81). Eustochium also wrote againstermo and Zephaniah (see The Principal Works, 346–416), on which Chausse's Wife of Bath draws in idiosyncratic fashion.

75. The sister of Saint Gregory of Nyssa was the religious Macrina, whose holy asceticism is admirably chronicled by her brother in Life of St. Macrina—see Saint Gregory of Nyssa.
find him no less favorable to women than is Saint Jerome. I was reading the other day a blatherer who complained against the prerogative that the Protestants commonly accord to the supposed insufficiency of women to explore freely in scripture. In this, I found he was as right as right could be, if he had made a similar objection to the insufficiency of men in the case of such a general permission—in sufficiency, however, that he is unable to see because they, like him, have the honor of wearing a beard. Further, Saint John, the Eagle's and the most cherished of the Evangelists, did not disdain women, any more than Saint Peter and Saint Paul, and those three Fathers (I mean Saint Basil, Saint Jerome, and Saint Gregory), since he addresses his Letters to them in particular—to say nothing of innumerable other saints, or Fathers of the Church, who take the same position in their writings.

As for the accomplishment of Judith, 77 I would not be so particular as to mention it, that is, dependent on the initiative and the will of its author. No more will I speak of the others of that caliber, though they are immense in quantity, as they are equally heroic in qualities of every kind as those that are the crowning glory of the most illustrious men. I do not record private deeds, for fear that they might seem to be base manifestations of personal energy rather than of the advantages and endowments of the female sex. But that of Judith deserves a place here, since it is true that her plan, coming into the heart of a young woman among so many feeble-headed men, in such need, in such a difficult enterprise, and for such a benefit as the salvation of a people and of a city faithful to God, seems to be rather an inspired favor and a gift of divine and special grace toward women than a purely human and voluntary action. So, too, appears that of the Maid of Orleans, accomplished by much the same circumstances but of more extensive value, inasmuch as it extended even to the salvation of a great kingdom and its prince.

That illustrious Amazon, whom Mars took pains to teach,
Mows down squadrons, and brains hazards,
Wearing the hard breastplate upon her round breast
Whose rosy nipple sparkles with graces:

To crown her head with glory and laurels.
She, a mere virgin, dares to confront the most famous warriors. 78

Let us add that the Magdalene is the only living being to whom the Redeemer ever spoke these words and promised this august grace. Wherever the gospel is preached, you shall be spoken of. 79 What is more, Jesus Christ declared the supreme joy and glory of his resurrection to women first of all, 80 so as to render them, according to the famous expression of Saint Jerome in his prologue to the prophet Zephaniah, female apostles to the Apostles themselves 81—and, as we know, with an express mission. Go, he said to that

78 C'est une Amazone; la voici illustrée sous les traits de Mars.
Fausse les escarons, a brave les harsons,
Vestant le cas plastron sur sa cuisse mamelle,
Douc le bonnet pourpre de graces extatlique.
Pour cornemmen son chef de gloire & de lauriers,
Venge elle une affreter les plus fauex guerriers.

The French is Courmay's own translation of the Amed
duct Amazons Amazondum fuitrix agmina pelvis
Pendetilla furons medicinus in milibus ardet,
aurea substantive cossactia cingula manumae
bella roscam aurea subiecta aurea suscitera virgo.
(1.490–93)

The combination of sexual modesty with intimations of divine blessing in Courmay's flamboyant rendering brings the queen of the Amazons close to the popular images of Jeanne d'Arc, who qualified for Extremois Pasquier, C. P., writing in 1512, as a "lusty Amazon" (lettres familières, ed. D. Thickeir (Paris, 1974). 374). Agrrippa also compares Jeanne to an Amazon (Declaration, 381), and she had figured in the tradition of the praise of women since Christine de Pizan (a contemporary) and Martin Le Franc (Le Chanson de Jeanne) toward the mid-fifteenth century—see Rabl, introduction to Agrrippa's Declaration 22 and 85–89 in 206. Courmay himself composed several poems in Jeanne's honor—see Willey, A Daughter of the Renaissance, 292–93.

79 Matthew 26:13, though the association of the woman mentioned there with Mary Magdalene is merely traditional.
81 The prologue to Jerome's commentary on Zephaniah (or Sophonias) was addressed to Paula and Eustochium. Obviously, a key text for Courmay—after all, his authority was impeccable—this very brief piece (barely a page in modern type) not only contains the biblical reference and the phrase in question but also supplies a list of exceptional women from religious and secular history that overlaps considerably with her example: the biblical instances include Judith (as 'Olda'), Deborah, Judith, Anna, and Elizabeth, among the secular women praised are Aspasia (by way of Plato), Sappho, Perse (for rivaling in constancy both her father, Cato, and her husband, Brutus), and Cornelia, the mother of the Gracchi. The last is even paired with Grecianidas (Cf. below: Comment., n. 3), "eloquentissimus philosophorum, audaxissimus rhetorium" (the most eloquent of philosophers, the most sharp-minded of orators) (En Sophoniani Prophet., S. Heronemii Prudenter Opera, pt. 1 [Commentarii in Prophetias Maioribus], ed. M. Adriaen, Corpus Christianorum Series Latina, vol. 76A (Turnhout, 1970), 655), who, although accustomed to the plaudits of
very woman, and relate what you have seen to the Apostles and Peter. On this point, it must be noted that he revealed his new birth in the same instance and in the same way to women as to men. In the person of Anna, the daughter of Phanuel, mentioned above, who recognized him by prophetic spirit along with the good old man Saint Simeon at the time when he was circumcised, and before them Saint Elizabeth, from the time when he was still unfolded within the hidden places of the womb of the Virgin. That birth, moreover, was predicted by the Sibyls, whom I recently mentioned, alone among the Gentiles: a transcendent privilege for the female sex. What honor accorded to women was, as well, the dream that occurred in Pilate's house, directed to one of them to the exclusion of men, and on such and so exalted an occasion. And if men boast that Jesus Christ was born of their sex, we answer that it had to be thus for necessary reasons of decency, since he would have been unable without scandal to mingle as a young person and at all hours of the day and night among the crowds in order to convert, succor, and save the human race, if he had been of the female sex, especially in the face of the malice of the Jews.

But further, if anyone is so dull as to imagine masculine or feminine in God—for although His name may seem to have a masculine sound to it, it does not follow that one sex needs to be chosen above the other to honor or exalt the incarnation of His Son—such a person shows in a plain light that he is just as bad a philosopher as he is a theologian. On the other hand, the advantage that men possess by virtue of His incarnation in their sex (if they can draw an advantage from it, given the necessity noted earlier) is counterbalanced by His priceless conception in the body of a woman, by the entire perfection of that woman—the only one to carry that title of perfect among all purely human creatures since the fall of our first parents—and by Her Assumption, also unique in a human being. What is more, it may perhaps be said of Her humanity that she exceeds that of Jesus Christ in this prerogative—that sex was by no means necessary in him for the Passion and for the Resurrection and the redemption of human beings.

his very functions, while it was so in her for motherhood, which was likewise her function.

Finally, if Scripture has declared the husband the head of the wife, the greatest folly that men can commit is to take that as a license conferred by their worthiness. For in view of the instances, authorities, and reasons noted in this discourse, by which is proved the equality—let us even say the unity—of graces and favors on the part of God toward the two sexes, and in view of the fact that God declares, "The two shall be one," and then declares, "The man shall leave mother and father and give himself to his wife," it appears that this declaration of the gospel is made solely for the express need of fostering peace in marriage. This need would require, undoubtedly, that one of the conjugal partners should yield to the other, for the usual weakness of intellects made it impossible for concord to be born of reason, as should have been the case in a just balance of mutual authority, nor, because of the imposing presence of the male, could the submission come from his side. And however true it may be, as some maintain, that such submission was imposed on woman in punishment for the sin of eating the apple, that still hardly constitutes a decisive pronouncement in favor of the supposed superior worth of man. If one supposed that Scripture commanded her to submit to man, as being unworthy of opposing him, consider the absurdity that would follow: woman would find herself worthy of having been made in the image of the Creator, worthy of the holy Eucharist, of the mysteries of the redemption, of paradise, and of the sight—indeed the possession—of God, yet not of the advantages and privileges of man. Would this not declare man to be more precious and more exalted than all these things, and hence commit the gravest of blasphemies?

82. Mark 16:7. The privilege accorded Mary Magdalene in particular, which also figures in Jerome's Letter, 127:5, was sometimes cited in the Middle Ages on behalf of women—see Rabl, introduction to Agrippa’s Declaration, 15 and 15 n. 32.

83. For Simeon (or Simon) and Anna, see Luke 2:25–38; for Elizabeth, see Luke 1:41–42. It sheds some light on Gournay’s train of references to note that the biblical Anna is compared by Jerome to the virtuous woman Marcella (to the latter's advantage) in Letter, 127.

84. See Matt. 27:19. The reference is to Priscilla, the wife of Pilate.

85. 1 Cor. 11:3, the most commonly cited biblical authority for man's dominion over women was Gen. 3:16.


87. This was standard misogyny theology from the earliest days of the Church but had been notably rebutted by Agrippa (Declaration, 62–63).