

Medicine and the *Querelle des Femmes* in Early Modern Spain

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Introduction

Among the forms of knowledge that express and at the same time shape world views and social standards, scientific discourse, like religious discourse, has played a key part in producing an appearance of truth, appealing to “nature” as incontrovertible evidence. Throughout history, medicine has helped to theorize and justify gender differences and inequalities by naturalizing them, that is, by basing the attribution of social functions and hierarchies on a set of physical, moral and intellectual inclinations and aptitudes, supposedly rooted in nature, which doctors declared themselves to be the persons most authorized to disclose and interpret. Indeed, in various ages and societies scientific discourses (particularly medical discourse) have persistently wondered about the meaning of gender difference and inequality, and in doing so they projected the conventions, expectations and prejudices of their own time on to their questions and responses, and on to the attitudes and results of their research and practice.¹

The influence of medical science became particularly intense in European culture and society in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, as the secularization of thinking reduced the preponderant role of providentialist explanations in favour of others based on “reason” and “evidence”, and the medical profession experienced an increase in its social prestige and power. Since medieval times, however, medical or philosophical explanations of classical origin and the Christian tradition based on the Bible and theological authorities had been the main pillars that supported theories about the different “nature”, functions and authority which corresponded to men and women in society.² And therefore, in what they wrote for their professional colleagues or for a broader range of readers, doctors had an important influence on the societies in which they lived. They shaped the thinking, social practices and ways in which people understood and experienced their own bodies, their identity and their relation with others; on the one hand, by formulating and disseminating theoretical thinking about the sexually differentiated body, its influence on the moral and

¹ Ludmilla Jordanova, *Sexual visions: images of gender in science and medicine between the eighteenth and the twentieth centuries*, New York and London, Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1989; Ludmilla Jordanova (ed.), *Languages of nature: critical essays in science and literature*, London, Free Association Books, 1986; Teresa Ortiz Gómez, *Medicina, historia y género. 130 años de investigación feminista*, Oviedo, Ediciones KRK, 2006.

² Danielle Jacquart and Claude Thomasset, *Sexualidad y saber médico en la edad media*, Barcelona, Labor, 1989 (first published as: *Sexualité et savoir médical au moyen âge*, Paris, PUF, 1985); Claude Thomasset, ‘La naturaleza de la mujer’, in Christine Klapisch-Zuber (ed.), *Historia de las mujeres en Occidente. 2: La edad media*, Madrid, Taurus, 1992, pp. 61–90 (first published as: *Histoire des femmes en Occident, 2: Le moyen âge*, Paris, Plon, 1991).

intellectual plane, and its connection with social organization, and on the other, by providing practical advice about how to lead one's life which echoed those ideas and helped to spread them.

In the Hispanic monarchy and the rest of Europe, the theories of humours formulated in Greek philosophy and medicine which had survived during the Middle Ages remained in force during the early modern centuries as a result of the influence of Galen's work and the revival of the Hippocratic texts due to humanism.³ Their principles concerning gender difference are well known: men and women possess different degrees of the basic qualities (hot or cold, dry or moist), men being hotter and drier and women comparatively moister and colder.⁴ The greater heat of men supposedly makes it possible for their blood to concoct into semen, whereas in women, because of their lack of heat, the blood is transformed only imperfectly, leaving menstrual blood as an excess or residue.⁵ As for intellectual capacities, the theory of humours states that the hot, dry temperament of the male is better suited for knowledge than the moist, cold temperament of the woman.

In accordance with the same principle, the male and female sexual organs are understood in terms of inverse symmetry or analogy: they are similar, but whereas those of the woman are retained inside the body because of the lack of the heat required to "expel" them, those of the man are external: as Juan Huarte de San Juan repeated as late as 1575, "man . . . is different from a woman in nought els (saith *Galen*) than only in hauing his genitall members without his body".⁶ This explains why medicine sanctioned the possibility that people could experience a change of sex at some time in their life, when those internal organs might return to the outside as a result of some great effort (for example, during childbirth).⁷ Doctors were therefore required to testify in cases of hermaphroditism or sex

³Rosa María Moreno Rodríguez, 'La ideación científica del ser mujer. Uso metafórico en la doctrina galénica', *Dynamis*, 1995, 15: 103–49; Antònia Carré i Pons, 'El cuerpo de las mujeres: medicina y literatura en la Baja Edad Media', *Arenal*, 1996, 3 (1): 75–90; *idem*, 'Des de l'altra banda del mirall: la visió masculina del cos de les dones en l'embriologia medieval', *Asclepio*, 2001, 53 (1): 173–96; Josep Lluís Barona, 'Models històrics i visió de gènere de la imatge del cos', in M^a Teresa Romá Ferri, *et al.* (eds), *Derecho de las mujeres a su imagen. Los trastornos del comportamiento alimentario*, Alicante, Universitat d'Alacant, 2002, pp. 17–32.

⁴Evelyn Berriot-Salvadore, 'Images des femmes dans la médecine du XVIIe et du début du XVIIIe siècle', PhD thesis, Université de Montpellier, 1979; *idem*, 'El discurso de la naturaleza y de la ciencia', in Natalie Zemon Davis and Arlette Farge (eds), *Historia de las mujeres en Occidente: del Renacimiento a la Edad Moderna*, Madrid, Taurus, 1992, pp. 371–413 (originally published as *Histoire des femmes en occident, 3: XVI–XVIIIe siècles*, Paris, Plon, 1991); Ian MacLean, *The Renaissance notion of woman: a study in the fortunes of scholasticism and medical science in European intellectual life*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1980; Elvira Arquiola, 'Bases biológicas de la feminidad en la España moderna (siglos XVI y XVII)', *Asclepio*, 1988, 40 (1): 297–315; Andrés Moreno Mengíbar, 'Tota mulier in utero. La construcción socio-sexual del cuerpo femenino en la España moderna', *Anuario de investigaciones "Hespérides"*, 1994, 2: 443–57.

⁵Gianna Pomata, 'Uomini mestranti. Somiglianza e differenza fra i sessi in Europa in età moderna', *Quaderni Storici*, 1992, 79: 51–103.

⁶John Huarte, *The examination of mens wits, in which, by discovering the varietie of natures, is shewed for what profession each one is apt, and how far he shall profit therein*. Translated out of the Spanish tongue by M. Camillo Camilli. Englished out of his Italian by R. C. Esquire, London, printed by Adam Islip for Richard Watkins, 1594, pp. 268–9; Juan Huarte de San Juan, *Examen de ingenios* (1575), edited by Guillermo Serés, Barcelona, Círculo de Lectores, 1996, p. 400: "el hombre . . . no difiere de la mujer, según dice Galeno, más que en tener los miembros genitales fuera del cuerpo".

⁷Francisco Vázquez García and Andrés Moreno Mengíbar, 'Un solo sexo. Invención de la monosexualidad y expulsión del hermafroditismo (España, siglos XV–XIX)', *Daimon. Revista de Filosofía*, 1995, 11: 95–112; María José de la Pascua Sánchez, '¿Hombres vueltos del revés?: una historia sobre la construcción de la identidad sexual en el siglo XVIII', in M^a José de la Pascua, M^a del Rosario García-Doncel and Gloria Espigado (eds), *Mujer*

change, as in the trial of Elena/Eleno de Céspedes held by the Inquisition in Toledo in 1587.⁸ It was envisaged that this change could occur only from woman to man, in accordance with the idea that nature tends towards greater perfection and can therefore never evolve in the opposite direction, from man to woman. For, according to the Aristotelian dictum, women are “imperfect” or “mutilated” men: as nature tends towards the greatest possible perfection, all embryos are initially male, although some of them become female during their evolution. All this was a way of understanding gender difference in which, as Thomas Laqueur has explained, anatomical condition was not at all decisive; rather, gender was to some extent considered to be the result of a difference in degree which admitted the possibility of intermediate states in nature (hermaphrodites, effeminate men, mannish women), when a person did not fully attain the natural properties of femaleness or maleness, and even accepted, exceptionally, the transition from woman to man, understood as an “improvement”.⁹ In other words, gender, i.e. the social and cultural attribution of a normative identity which involved legal differences and inequalities, and different expectations of behaviour for men and women, was not yet linked to an absolute biological duality, though this did not make it any less decisive in the hierarchical structuring of society and the sense of personal identity.¹⁰

This way of understanding gender difference was not restricted to the area of medicine but pervaded both the cultured and the popular thinking of the time. Thus medicine acted as a witness for the prosecution in the so-called *querelle des femmes* (*querrela de las mujeres* in Spanish; *querrela de les dones* in Catalan), the term used to refer to the literary and philosophical debate about the nature of the sexes and their respective inclinations, qualities and vices which took place in Spain and the rest of Europe between the fifteenth and eighteenth centuries, often linked to another debate, about marriage, extensively developed during the Renaissance and the Reformation.¹¹ Medical arguments were generally used in the controversy to support misogynist attitudes about the inferiority and even perniciousness of women, but they were also sometimes employed in the context of the basically courtly tradition which defended their moral and intellectual “excellence”, as exemplified by the German humanist, doctor and alchemist Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa von Nettesheim in his book *De nobilitate et praecellentia foeminei sexus* (1529), that some years later

y deseo. Representaciones y prácticas de vida, Cadiz, Servicio de Publicaciones de la Universidad de Cádiz, 2004, pp. 431–44.

⁸ Andrés Moreno Mengíbar and Francisco Vázquez García, ‘Hermafroditas y cambios de sexo en la España moderna’, in *Monstruos y seres imaginarios en la Biblioteca Nacional*, Madrid, Biblioteca Nacional, 2000, pp. 91–103.

⁹ Thomas Laqueur, *Making sex: body and gender from the Greeks to Freud*, Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 1990.

¹⁰ From a rather different perspective, Nerea Aresti argues that in early modern societies gender was often eclipsed by estimations of social hierarchy, in an interesting analysis of the figure and myth of the “Lieutenant Nun”, Catalina de Erauso, in her time, the seventeenth century, and of their subsequent reworking. Nerea Aresti, ‘The gendered identities of the “Lieutenant Nun”’: rethinking the story of a female warrior in early modern Spain’, *Gender & History*, 2007, 19(3): 401–18.

¹¹ Gisela Bock, *La mujer en la historia de Europa*, Barcelona, Crítica, 2001, ch. 1 (originally published as *Frauen in der europäischen Geschichte*, Munich, Beck, 2000); Isabel Morant, *Discursos de la vida buena. Matrimonio, mujer y sexualidad en la literatura humanista*, Madrid, Cátedra, 2002.

was published in French under the title *Sur la noblesse et l'excellence du sexe féminin, de sa prééminence sur l'autre sexe* (1537).¹²

In this paper I am interested in showing the way in which ideas about male and female “nature” were expressed in early modern medical literature, and their consequences on the social plane, by an analysis of, on the one hand, Huarte de San Juan’s influential work *Examen de ingenios para las ciencias* (1575) (*The examination of mens wits*) and, on the other, some examples of “counsels for health” or popular medical literature. I shall compare the ideas, values and arguments developed in these medical texts with the ones represented in other moral and literary texts of the time, dwelling on the example of maternal breast-feeding, which provides a very good illustration of the peculiarity of family models and behaviour patterns in the Old Regime in relation to those which began to be popularized in the eighteenth century. I shall conclude with a brief comment on the work published by Benito Feijoo in the 1720s, which revealed the ideological role of physiological and anatomical discourses in the construction of the “nature” of the sexes, thus formulating an early criticism of the biological determinism which became so fashionable in European thinking in the nineteenth century.

Male and Female “Wits”: Huarte de San Juan’s Theories

The knowledge of the body developed and transmitted by early modern doctors with university training was, of course, not the only form of knowledge in a world in which health care was largely the responsibility of other professionals belonging to an empirical tradition, such as midwives and healers.¹³ Yet their influence was considerable, as can be seen not only in medical and philosophical works but also in fiction. For example, in books written in Catalan or Spanish in the late Middle Ages and the early modern centuries, such as the *Llibre de les dones* by Francesc Eiximenis (*Book on Women*, written in 1388), *Lo Somni* by Bernat Metge (*The Dream*, 1398–99), *Coplas de maldecir de mujeres* by Pere Torroella (*Verses that Speak Ill of Women*, 1458), *Repetición de amores* by Luis de Lucena (*Repetition of Loves*, 1497) or the anonymous novel *Triste delectación* (*Sad Delectation*, post-1458), we find, presented in the form of a well-known argument, references to the Aristotelian notion of woman as a “mutilated man”, “imperfect man” or “imperfect animal” because of her lack of heat.¹⁴ In *Espill* (*Mirror*, 1460), written by Jaume Roig, a doctor in the city of Valencia and physician to Queen Maria, wife of Alfons el Magnànim, there is a satirical reference to ideas about the pernicious effects of menstrual blood and Galen’s notion of double semen, male and female, in procreation, whereas fray Luis de León’s *La perfecta casada* (*The Perfect Wife*, 1583) echoes the Aristotelian theory which attributes to women the role of a passive recipient (matter) on which

¹² Modern edition: Henri Corneille Agrippa de Nettesheim, *Discours abrégé sur la noblesse et l'excellence du sexe féminin, de sa prééminence sur l'autre sexe*, Paris, Côté-femmes, 1990; especially with regard to the development of medical arguments, pp. 56–64.

¹³ This is illustrated by some other works in these pages, and in those collected in the section ‘Mujeres y salud: prácticas y saberes’ by Montserrat Cabré i Pairet and Teresa Ortiz Gómez (eds), *Dynamis*, 1999, 19: 17–400.

¹⁴ Robert Archer, *Misoginia y defensa de las mujeres: antología de textos medievales*, Madrid, Cátedra, 2001, pp. 138, 229, 272, 285, 312.

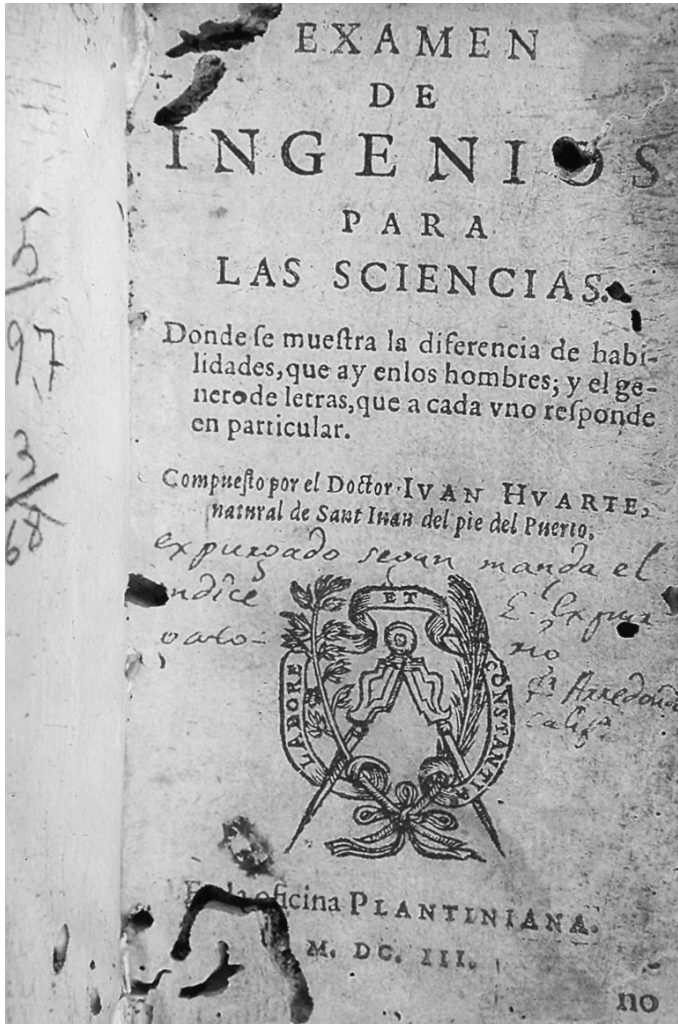


Figure 1: Title-page of Juan Huarte de San Juan's *Examen de ingenios para las ciencias*, 1603. (Biblioteca Histórica-Universitat de València, Y-05/197.)

form is imprinted by the seed of the male.¹⁵ And there are also the traditional tales inserted in Renaissance works of a cultured nature, such as Cristóbal de Castillejo's *Diálogo de mujeres* (A Dialogue on Women, 1544), in which a doctor gives a diagnosis confirming the moral weaknesses traditionally attributed to women, such as the passion for luxury

¹⁵ Carré, op. cit., note 3 above, pp. 77 and 83; fray Luis de León, *La perfecta casada*, Madrid, Librería general de Victoriano Suárez, 1942, p. 174.

and adornment, which induces sickness in some as a result of not having their desire satisfied.¹⁶

In the sixteenth century, these theories were set out in a work of great influence subsequently, the *Examen de ingenios para las ciencias* (translated into English in 1594 as *The examination of mens wits*) by the humanist doctor Juan Huarte de San Juan (c.1529–c.1588).¹⁷ The main aim of this treatise was to explain the physical causes which favour or limit various intellectual abilities, with a view to providing indications so that individuals (implicitly male) could develop their aptitudes to the maximum and embrace the profession or studies for which they were best endowed, and also produce clever and able children by means of eugenic measures.

At the crossroads between tradition and modernity characteristic of the Renaissance, Huarte embraces the assumptions of the theory of humours, but he gives them a modern slant with his personal interest in covering the broad diversity of human beings, arguing that the combination of humours produces temperaments that differ greatly in physical, moral and intellectual aspects; thus, as far as mental aptitudes or “wits” (*ingenios*) are concerned, the predominance of the dry element produces understanding and reason, that of the wet element, imagination, that of the warm element, memory, while the cold element does not favour any kind of aptitude.

Huarte gives only a brief statement of a “truth” which both he and his readers probably took for granted: woman’s natural inferiority to man.¹⁸ Thus deeming it unnecessary to produce proof, he says that, by virtue of her temperament, woman is less endowed for intellectual activity, “the female, through the cold and moist of their sex, cannot be endowed with any profound judgment”.¹⁹ Yet it would be inaccurate to take Huarte as an example of the most traditional misogyny, as is often done. He should be assigned, rather, to the category of “attenuated misogyny” which, with various nuances, also characterizes other lay and ecclesiastical moralists of his time, such as Juan Luis Vives and fray Luis de León.²⁰ It is a position characteristic of much humanist thinking, which softens the ecclesiastical language of female malignity in favour of a somewhat more kindly view of marriage and woman, emphasizing her position as a weaker but necessary and even agreeable companion for man. Huarte makes it clear that the intellectual limitation of women is not a fault for which they should be reproached, as it is the work of nature and therefore of divine providence: “For which dulnesse, themselues are not in blame, but

¹⁶ Cristóbal de Castillejo, *Diálogo de mujeres*, Madrid, Castalia, 1986, pp. 86–8.

¹⁷ On Huarte de San Juan’s thought and work, see Elvira Arquiola, ‘Consecuencias de la obra de Huarte de San Juan en la Europa moderna’, *Huarte de San Juan*, 1989, 1: 15–28; L Rey Altuna, ‘El humanismo psicológico del doctor Huarte de San Juan’, *Huarte de San Juan*, 1989, 1: 65–80; R Sáez, ‘Huarte de San Juan o el nacimiento de la conciencia crítica’, *Huarte de San Juan*, 1989, 1: 81–95; Cristina Müller, *Ingenio y melancolía: una lectura de Huarte de San Juan*, Madrid, Biblioteca Nueva, 2002; Jon Arrizabalaga, ‘Juan Huarte de San Juan (c.1529–c.1588) en la medicina de su tiempo’, in Véronique Duché-Gavet (ed.), *Juan Huarte au XXIe siècle. Actes de colloque*, Anglet, Atlantica, 2003, pp. 65–98.

¹⁸ Arquiola, op. cit., note 4 above; María Luisa Femenías, ‘Juan de Huarte y la mujer sin ingenio en el *Examen de ingenios*’, in Celia Amorós (ed.), *Feminismo Ilustración, 1988–1992: actas del seminario permanente*, Madrid, Dirección General de la Mujer de la Comunidad Autónoma de Madrid, 1992, pp. 15–29.

¹⁹ Huarte, *The examination of mens wits*, p. 286; *Examen de ingenios*, p. 416: “las hembras, por razón de la frialdad y humedad de su sexo, no pueden alcanzar ingenio profundo”.

²⁰ Morant, op. cit., note 11 above.

that cold and moist, which made them women, and these selfe qualities (we haue prooued heretofore) gainsay the wit and abilitie.”²¹ The very characteristics which incapacitate them for knowledge are precisely those required for carrying out the functions proper to them, begetting and giving birth:

So then this defect of wit in the first woman grew, for that she was by God created cold and moist: which temperature, is necessarie to make a woman fruitfull, and apt for childbirth, but enemy to knowledge; and if he had made her temperat like *Adam*, she should haue been very wise, but nothing fruitful, nor subject to her monthly courses, saue by some supernaturall meanes. On this nature *S. Paul* grounded himselfe, when he said, Let a woman learne in silence, with all subiection: neither would he allow the woman to teach, or gouerne the man, but to keep silence. But this is true, when a woman hath not a spirit or greater grace, than her own naturall disposition: but if she obtaine any gift from aboue, she may wel teach and speake.²²

Despite this, Huarte takes it for granted that parents will necessarily prefer to have boys rather than girls (“Those parents who seeke the comfort of hauing wise children, and such as are towards for learning, must endeouour that they may be borne male”).²³ With this in mind he offers detailed advice about how to favour the conception of a male child (“What diligence ought to be used, that children male, and not female be borne”), by the choice of a suitable wife, by strict discipline in the lifestyle (food, digestion, exercise) of the father and mother before conception, and by choosing the appropriate time and method for the sexual act (four or five days before menstruation, and in such a position that the “seed” falls on the right side of the womb).²⁴

Huarte’s main novelty lies in the fact that he establishes differentiated moral, physical and intellectual typologies for women and men, depending on the degree to which they possess the natural characteristics of their sex. In both cases, the greatest perfection is to be found in the golden mean, so that individuals in whom the characteristics associated with their sex appear in an extreme form, and especially those who come close to features associated with the opposite sex, not only lack physical beauty but also have difficulty in begetting children. The classification of male temperaments is more complex, admitting four typologies. Excessively hot dry men are lean, have hard, rough flesh and are “ugly

²¹ Huarte, *The examination of mens wits*, pp. 286–7; *Examen de ingenios*, p. 417: “De la cual rudeza no tienen ellas la culpa; sino que la frialdad y humedad que las hizo hembras, esas mismas calidades hemos probado atrás que contradicen al ingenio y habilidad.”

²² Huarte, *The examination of mens wits*, pp. 274–5; *Examen de ingenios*, p. 405: “Luego la razón de tener la primera mujer no tanto ingenio le nació de haberla hecho Dios fría y húmida, que es el temperamento necesario para ser fecunda y paridera, y el que contradice el saber; y si la sacara templada como Adán, fuera sapientísima, pero no pudiera parir ni venirle la regla si no fuera por vía sobrenatural. En esta naturaleza se fundó San Pablo cuando dijo: ‘Mulier in silentio discat cum omni subiectione; docere autem mulieri non permitto neque dominari in virum, sed esse in silentio’; como si dijera: ‘No quiero que la mujer enseñe, sino que calle y aprenda y esté sujeta a su marido’. Pero esto se entiende no teniendo la mujer espíritu ni otra gracia más que su disposición natural; pero, si alcanza algún don gratuito, bien puede enseñar y hablar.”

²³ Huarte, *The examination of mens wits*, p. 286; *Examen de ingenios*, p. 416: “Los padres que quisiesen gozar de hijos sabios y que tengan habilidad para las letras han de procurar que nazcan varones.”

²⁴ Huarte, *The examination of mens wits*, ch. XV, part III; *Examen de ingenios*, ch. XVI, part II: “Qué diligencias se han de hacer para que salgan varones y no hembras”.

and poorly shaped”,²⁵ haughty, shameless and lustful, whereas hot moist men, though cheerful, imaginative and physically attractive, have little talent for letters and scarcely any desire for women; they share these characteristics with temperate moist men, who, nevertheless, have even more reduced intellectual aptitudes and are incapable of begetting. The temperate dry man, on the other hand, is a veritable ideal, not only male but also human: he is virtuous, intelligent, prudent, moderate in his passions, handsome in face and body, and therefore well-endowed for the highest intellectual and political functions; this temperament, according to the critics, is modelled on the idealized portrait of King Philip II, identified with the icon of the perfect ruler.²⁶

The very cold moist woman, for her part, though delicate in flesh and voice, is not very attractive and has little intelligence (“The tokens of a woman cold and moist in the third degree, are to be dull witted, well conditioned, to haue a very delicat voice, much flesh, and the same soft and white, to want haire and downe, and not to be ouer faire”); in contrast, the woman who has characteristics similar to those of the male is intelligent but ugly, lean and dark-skinned (“wily, ill conditioned, shrill voiced, spare fleshed, and blacke and greene coloured, hairie and euill faoured”).²⁷ The woman who comes between these two extremes is characterized by moderation and equilibrium in everything (including her intellectual ability, which is not “excessive” but also not non-existent), except for her extraordinary beauty, a sign of her ability to procreate (“which yeeldeth an euident signe, that she will be fruitfull, and beare children, and prooue gracious and cheerfull”).²⁸

Huarte’s treatise was widely read in its time, despite his problems with censorship. It was first published in 1575, but in 1581 was subjected to the first of a series of bans and expurgations by the Inquisition, despite which it had numerous editions, reprints and translations, and exerted a considerable influence on Spanish and European thinking and literature at the time and later.²⁹ His ideas about the different temperaments, moral and intellectual qualities and social functions of the sexes were widely repeated throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. All the more important, therefore, is the discordant view of these matters offered by the work of a woman, Oliva Sabuco de Nantes Barrera (b. 1562). Her *Nueva filosofía de la naturaleza del hombre* (New Philosophy of the Nature of Man, Madrid, 1587) is a book which was accepted at the time as

²⁵ Huarte, *The examination of mens wits*, ch. XV, part I: “By what signs we may know, in which degree of hot and dry euerie man resteth”, pp. 278–81, p. 281; *Examen de ingenios*, ch. XVIII of the 1594 edition: “Con qué señales se conoce en qué grado de calor y sequedad está cada hombre”, pp. 409–16; p. 411: “feos y mal tallados”.

²⁶ Huarte, *The examination of mens wits*, ch. XV: “How we may know to what difference of abilitie the office of a king appertaineth, and what signs he ought to haue, who enioyeth this maner of wit”, pp. 238–62; *Examen de ingenios*, ch. XIV (XVI of the 1594 edition): “Donde se declara a qué diferencia de habilidad pertenece el oficio de rey y qué señales ha de tener el que tuviere esta manera de ingenio”, pp. 370–93.

²⁷ Huarte, *The examination of mens wits*, pp. 284–5; *Examen de ingenios*, p. 415: “De la mujer que es fría y húmida en el tercer grado son sus señales ser boba, bien acondicionada; tiene la voz muy delicada; muchas carnes, blandas y blancas; no tiene vello ni bozo, ni es muy hermosa”; p. 414: “avisada, de mala condición, con voz abultada, de pocas carnes, verdinegra, vellosa y fea”.

²⁸ Huarte, *The examination of mens wits*, p. 285; *Examen de ingenios*, p. 415: “Y así, es evidente indicio de ser fecunda y paridera salir de buena gracia y donaire”.

²⁹ In 1583 it was included in the index of banned books drawn up by the Inquisitor General, Gaspar de Quiroga, the ban being removed after the elimination of forty-seven passages and one complete chapter; and, in 1665, in the Roman index, where it remained until 1966. Editions and reprintings in 1575, 1580, 1581, 1591, 1594, 1600, 1603, 1607, 1640, 1662, 1668, 1702; translations into Italian in 1582, 1586, 1588, 1604; into English in 1594, 1596, 1604, 1616. Its influence has been traced in *Don Quijote*, for example.

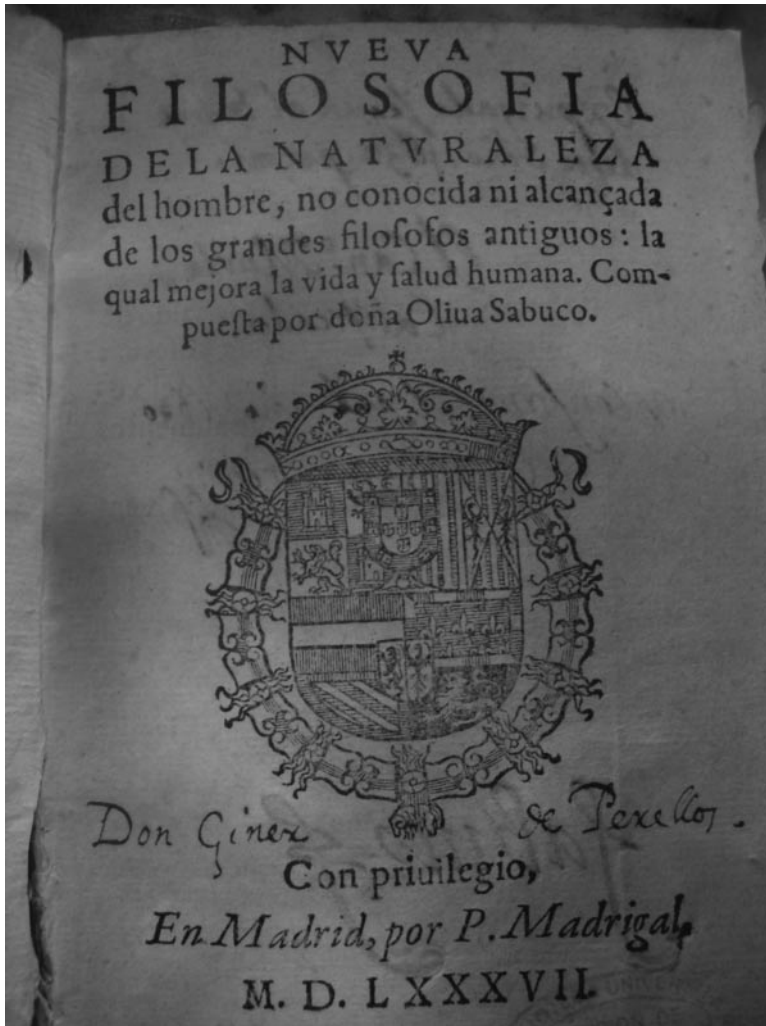


Figure 2: Title-page of Oliva Sabuco de Nantes Barrera's *Nueva filosofía de la naturaleza del hombre*, 1587. (Biblioteca del Instituto de Historia de la Medicina y de la Ciencia López Piñero, CSIC-Universitat de València, C/343.)

being by her, and its authorship was not questioned until 1903; since then it has been disputed by some historians, who attribute it to her father, Miguel Sabuco, with arguments that many scholars, including María-Milagros Rivera and Gianna Pomata, do not share.³⁰

³⁰ On Oliva Sabuco and her *Nueva filosofía*, see María-Milagros Rivera Garretas, 'Oliva Sabuco de Nantes Barrera', in Iris M Zavala (ed.), *Breve historia feminista de la literatura española (en lengua castellana). IV. La literatura escrita por mujer (de la edad media al siglo XVIII)*, Barcelona, Anthropos, 1997, pp. 131–46. The book, consisting of seven dialogues, five in Spanish and two in Latin, was reprinted in 1588 and 1589 in Madrid, in 1622 in

In this book Oliva Sabuco defends a notion of science based on experience rather than authority, making a very personal use of classical tradition (Plato, Aristotle, Hippocrates, Galen) and medieval tradition (Avicenna, Averroes). In 'De la vera medicina', one of the seven colloquies of which the book consists, she rejects as ridiculous the idea that the sex of the embryo depends on the testicle from which the semen comes, and she does not gender the functions of the brain, thus distancing herself from the ideas of Huarte, her contemporary, which, nevertheless, were widely believed for a considerable time.

Advice for Everyday Life: Health "Counsels"

We can also see similar intellectual assumptions, moral principles and social codes expressed in books of "counsels for health" or "governance of health" published in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, intended for a lay audience, predominantly aristocratic and well-off, whom the doctors sought to teach how to conduct themselves in the most healthy way. In these examples of advice for everyday life it is not surprising to find, in many aspects, the same values as those insistently expressed in another kind of literature (moral texts or fiction), since they formed part of the common sense of the time.³¹

One case in which this is so is that of the supreme pledges of decorum and decency which society deposits in women and demands from them. The significantly named *Libro intitulado La conservación de la salud del cuerpo y del alma, para el buen regimiento de la salud y más larga vida* (Book entitled The Conservation of the Health of the Body and the Soul, for the Good Governance of Health and longer Life, 1601), by the doctor and theologian Blas Álvarez Miraval, follows ecclesiastical tradition in presenting woman as a temptation for man, a cause of sinfulness resulting from unruly use of the flesh.³²

Álvarez Miraval bases this view fundamentally on biblical and theological references (the Holy Scriptures, the Church Fathers) and secondarily on classical literature, especially works written in Latin, with almost no mention of Galen's writings. Religious and moral arguments, therefore, rather than medical ones, support the customary assertions about, for example, women's innate decency (which makes their bodies float face downward if they are drowned, unlike men's bodies, a common statement in classical, medieval and early modern natural history). The same thing also happens with regard to the adornment of the body with clothing and cosmetics, a subject to which he devotes no less than three chapters (from LII to LIV); and, although he says

Braga, and again in 1728 in Madrid. Gianna Pomata is currently preparing a translation into English and a study of the dialogue 'De la vera medicina'.

³¹ María José Ruiz Somavilla, "*El cuerpo limpio*": análisis de las prácticas higiénicas en la España del mundo moderno, Malaga, Universidad de Málaga, 1993; *idem*, 'Entre lo privado y lo público: la construcción de la identidad femenina en los textos de higiene (siglos XVII y XVIII)', *Revista de Extremadura*, 1994, 13: 13–24; Rosa Ballester, 'Edades de la mujer/edades de la vida del hombre. Tópicos y lugares comunes en la ciencia médica antigua y tradicional', in Pilar Pérez Cantó and Margarita Ortega López (eds), *Las edades de las mujeres*, Madrid, Universidad Autónoma de Madrid, 2002, pp. 3–20.

³² Blas Álvarez Miraval, *Libro intitulado la conservación de la salud del cuerpo y del alma, para el buen regimiento de la salud y más larga vida*, Salamanca, Nicolás del Castillo, 1601, chapters LII and LIII, especially fols. 204r–v and 213v.

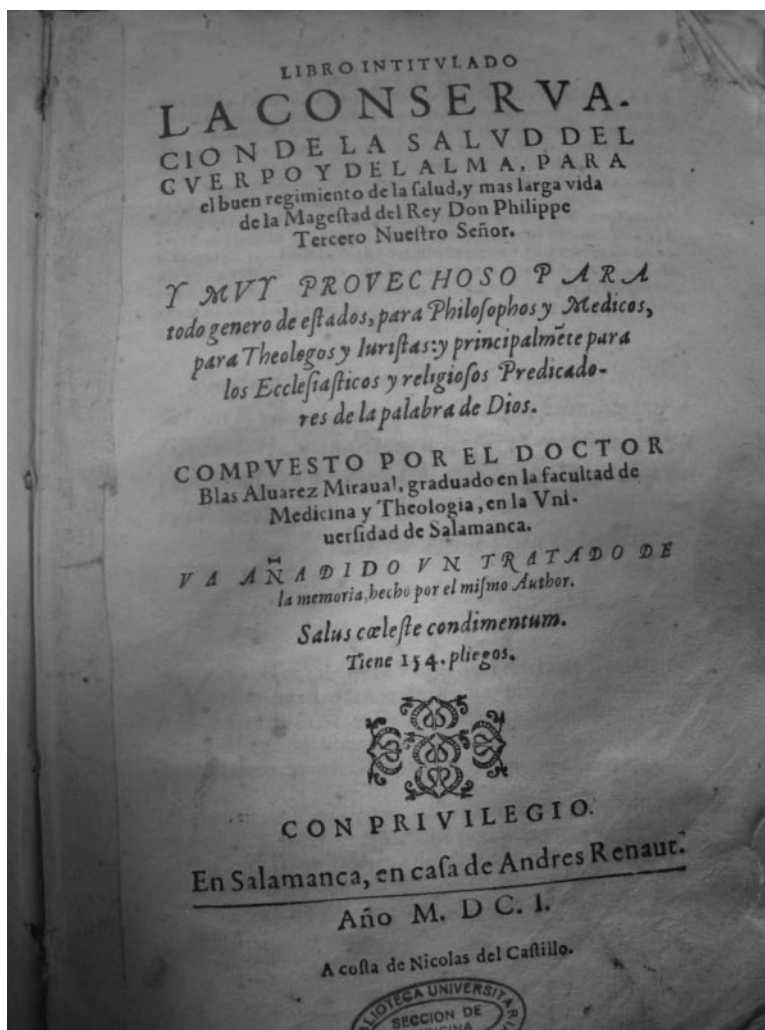


Figure 3: Title-page of Blas Álvarez Miraval's *La conservación de la salud del cuerpo y del alma*, 1601. (Biblioteca del Instituto de Historia de la Medicina y de la Ciencia López Piñero, CSIC–Universitat de València, B/121.)

in the title of one of them that it “tends to bring serious illnesses, and often death”, he says little about its harmful consequences for health, and a great deal about its immorality, in terms identical to those used in sermons and moral compendiums (“superfluity”, “lust”).³³

³³ *Ibid.*, fol. 202r: “superfluidad”, “lujuria”; citing Galen and Aetius, he gives a short list of the harmful effects of cosmetics.

The importance that humanist thinking gave to marriage as a model of society and Christian life (together with its regulation by the civil and church authorities, particularly after the Council of Trent) accords with the attention devoted by some of those manuals to a practical matter which we have already seen included in Huarte de San Juan's *Examen de ingenios*, namely, advice for the proper choice of a wife, not only on the moral plane (in consideration of her virtues) and the social plane (seeking a balance of alliances between families), but also from a physical viewpoint, taking account of her health and habits as a guarantee that she will be able to bear healthy children.

These works of advice or "counsels for health" anticipate the great importance acquired in the eighteenth century by popular medical literature (in the form of tracts on "domestic medicine" or "advice to mothers") in the shaping of lifestyles. With regard to their diffusion and content, however, the two cases differ substantially in many aspects.³⁴ The popular medical literature of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries did not achieve a circulation comparable to that of the new works published in the century of the Enlightenment, written with a desire to reach a wider audience, with larger editions and more reprints, to the extent that some of them (such as those by the Swiss writer Samuel Auguste David Tissot or the Scottish author William Buchan) achieved the status of a veritable publishing phenomenon, both in their countries of origin and in other countries where they were translated (including Spain, where the most widespread books of popular medicine in the eighteenth century were, in fact, versions of French and, secondarily, English works).³⁵

There are also interesting differences in their contents and in the values that they express, especially in the way in which maternity is treated.³⁶ The omnipresence acquired in the eighteenth century by the figure of the mother, who was required to give her children an exclusive devotion which absorbed all her physical and emotional energy, contrasts with the interest shown by sixteenth- and seventeenth-century moralists in regulating the figure of the wife, the man's companion, in her functions and her

³⁴ Enrique Perdigüero, *Los tratados de medicina doméstica en la España de la Ilustración*, Universidad de Alicante, 1990; *idem*, 'The popularization of medicine during the Spanish Enlightenment', in Roy Porter (ed.), *The popularization of medicine: 1650–1800*, London and New York, Routledge, 1992, pp. 160–93; *idem*, 'Popularizando la ciencia: el caso de la medicina doméstica en la España de la Ilustración', in Josep Lluís Barona, Javier Moscoso and Juan Pimentel (eds), *La Ilustración y las ciencias: para una historia de la objetividad*, Valencia, Universitat de València, 2003, pp. 155–78; Mónica Bolufer, "'Ciencia de la salud" y "ciencia de las costumbres": higienismo y educación en el siglo XVIII', in *Higienismo y educación (ss. XVIII–XX)*, monographic volume of *Áreas. Revista de Ciencias Sociales*, 2000, 20: 25–50.

³⁵ Samuel Auguste David Tissot, *Tratado de las enfermedades más frecuentes de las gentes del campo*, transl. Juan Galisteo y Xiorro, Madrid, Pedro Marín, 1774 (*Avis au peuple sur sa santé*, Lausanne, F Grasset, 1761); *idem*, *Aviso a los literatos y poderosos acerca de su salud, o tratado de las enfermedades más comunes a esta clase de personas*, transl. Félix Galisteo y Xiorro, Madrid, Benito Cano, 1786 (*Avis au gens de lettres et aux personnes sédentaires sur leur santé*, Paris, J-T Hérisant fils, 1767); William Buchan, *Medicina doméstica*, transl. Antonio Alcedo, Madrid, Antonio de Sancha, 1785 (*Domestic medicine, or the family physician*, Edinburgh, Balfour, Aud & Smellie, 1769); *idem*, *El conservador de la salud de las madres y los hijos*, Madrid, Fermín Villalpando, 1808 (*Advice to mothers, on the subject of their own health; and on the best means of promoting the health, strength, and beauty of their offspring*, London, T Cadell & W Davies, 1803).

³⁶ Yvonne Knibiehler and Catherine Fouquet, *L'histoire des mères du moyen âge à nos jours*, Paris, Montalba, 1980; Yvonne Knibiehler and Catherine Fouquet, *La femme et les médecins*, Paris, Hachette, 1983.

relations with her husband.³⁷ However, although it is taken for granted that motherhood is one of woman's duties, no details are given of the physical attention that she has to devote to her children in their early years, an occupation which the authors seem to consider so much a concern of women—not only mothers but also maids or relatives—that it needs no further explanation.

This contrast can also be seen in medical literature—for example, in the treatment of a significant subject, breast-feeding. It has become a commonplace to say that in the sixteenth century doctors and moralists “discovered” the desirability of mothers breast-feeding their children and expounded it persuasively, arguing against the use of wet nurses, customary among well-to-do groups since the Middle Ages and even in antiquity. The subject does, in fact, start to appear with a certain frequency in that period, both in moral or educational books (for example, in Juan Luis Vives's *Instrucción de la mujer cristiana* [Instruction of the Christian Woman] in 1524, and in Luis de León's *La perfecta casada* [The Perfect Wife] in 1583) and in “counsels for health” and medical works on childcare. But it also features for the first time, in 1629, as the subject of a long monograph, *Tres discursos para provar que están obligadas a criar sus hijos a sus pechos todas las madres, quando tienen buena salud, fuerças y buen temperamento, buena leche y suficiente para alimentarlos* (Three Discourses to prove that all Mothers are Obligated to Suckle their Children upon the Breast when They are Healthy and Strong and have a Good Temperament and Sufficient Good Milk to feed Them), by the doctor Juan Gutiérrez Godoy.³⁸ Written in Spanish to be read by ladies, according to its author, it is a long, systematic work supported by an abundance of quotations from authorities, ranging from Graeco-Roman philosophers and doctors (Galen, Aristotle, Aulus Gellius, Favorinus) to humanists (Erasmus) and medieval jurists.

The “discovery” of maternal breast-feeding is placed in relation to the greater interest of humanist medicine and pedagogy in children's physical well-being, characteristic of thinking that gave great importance to upbringing and education, and of an age that, according to Philippe Ariès, also “discovered” childhood.³⁹ Insufficient stress, however, has been laid on the fact that sixteenth- and seventeenth-century doctors, like the moralists of their time, did not seem to see the physical care of children, or the act of breast-feeding which symbolized it, as a personal, untransferrable, exclusive responsibility of women of all classes and conditions.⁴⁰ On the contrary, going beyond

³⁷ Yvonne Knibiehler, ‘Madres y nodrizas’, in Silvia Tubert (ed.), *Figuras de la madre*, Madrid, Cátedra, 1996, pp. 95–116.

³⁸ Juan Gutiérrez Godoy, *Tres discursos para provar que están obligadas a criar sus hijos a sus pechos todas las madres, quando tienen buena salud, fuerças y buen temperamento, buena leche y suficiente para alimentarlos*, Jaén, Pedro de la Cuesta, 1629.

³⁹ Philippe Ariès, *L'enfant et la vie familiale sous l'ancien régime*, Paris, Plon, 1960.

⁴⁰ For example, Juan Luis Vives (*Instrucción de la mujer cristiana*, Buenos Aires and Mexico City, Espasa Calpe, 1948, pp. 9–11) devotes a chapter to this subject, citing the classics (Plutarch, Favorinus summarized by Aulus Gellius), repeating some arguments given by them, such as the transmission of moral qualities and vices in the milk, and establishing others of a more “modern” style which we find repeated in authors of the eighteenth century, such as the argument of the mother–son affection developed by physical contact. However, neither the length of the chapter (one of the shortest in the book) nor its emphasis are equivalent to those that the treatment of the subject assumed in the Enlightenment. Fray Luis de León, for his part, gives a more detailed development of reasoning of a moral and philosophical nature rather than related to the affections (León, op. cit., note 15 above, pp. 173–81).

rhetoric, on the basis of their professional and social experience they largely adapted their discourse to the customs of the time and the circumstances of the lives of their audience. And, in fact, although they declared in general terms that the obligation to breast-feed is universally based on natural, positive divine law, they recognized that in many circumstances the mother's physical condition or the work and social commitments that she had to carry out might justify the use of a wet nurse and even make it advisable.

This is suggested by the full title of Gutiérrez Godoy's book, generally cited with an abbreviated title, an omission which prevents a more accurate understanding of its content and gives it a more emphatic tone than it really has. In his foreword, however, the author makes his intentions clear in the following terms:

In these discourses it is not my aim to show that all mothers have an obligation to suckle their children at the breast when they have good health and conditions for suckling them, because the milk of their own mothers, even if healthy, is not good for all children, and not all mothers can suckle them, even if they are healthy and have good milk.⁴¹

He does, in fact, argue at length, with examples taken from the Holy Scriptures, history, and medical and legal literature, that all women are obliged to suckle their children by nature, by law and by the teaching of the Gospel, showing his disagreement with other authors (like the fourteenth-century jurist Baldo de Ubaldis) who excused ladies from this obligation. In contrast, Gutiérrez Godoy, personal doctor to a noblewoman, Mencía Pimentel, Countess of Oropesa, dedicated the book to her and praised her for suckling her children herself, contrary to the general practice of her milieu, and he insisted that this act did honour to noblewomen and their families, preventing their descendants from being contaminated with peasant blood and the rustic customs of wet nurses. However, he differs from the maximalist way in which eighteenth-century doctors, philosophers and moralists presented breast-feeding as a responsibility that could not be renounced in any circumstances, even the most extreme cases, harshly criticizing those who did not fulfil this responsibility, while exalting the pleasures and satisfactions of motherhood as a realization of women's nature and vocation.⁴² This is the case of works such as *Perjuicios que acarrearán al género humano y al estado las madres que rehusan criar a sus hijos* (The Harm done to Society and the State by Mothers who

⁴¹ Gutiérrez Godoy, 'Al lector', in op. cit., note 38 above: "No es mi intento prouar en estos Discursos, que todas las madres tienen obligación a criar sus hijos a sus pechos, quando tienen buena salud, y commodidades para criarlos, porque, ni a todos los hijos les está bien la leche de sus propias madres, aunque estén sanas, ni todas las madres, aunque tengan salud, y buena leche pueden criarlos." However, in some works these discourses have been considered as direct predecessors of the subsequent campaign in favour of maternal breast-feeding, without giving the necessary weight to this important difference. See Pedro Navarro Utrilla, 'Lactancia mercenaria: otra expresión de la doble moral burguesa', *Asclepio*, 1982, **34**: 33–70; *idem*, 'Lactancia mercenaria: hipocresía y explotación', *Asclepio*, 1983, **35**: 375–87.

⁴² Antoinette Fauve-Chamoux, 'La femme devant l'allaitement', *Annales de Démographie Historique*, 1983, 7–21; Marie-France Morel, 'Théories et pratiques de l'allaitement en France au XVIIIe siècle', *Annales de Démographie Historique*, 1976, 393–427; Valerie Fildes, *Breasts, bottles and babies: a history of infant feeding*, Edinburgh University Press, 1986; *idem*, *Wet nursing: a history from antiquity to the present*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1988; Mónica Bolufer, 'Actitudes y discursos sobre la maternidad en el siglo XVIII: la cuestión de la lactancia', *Historia Social*, 1992, **14**: 3–22.

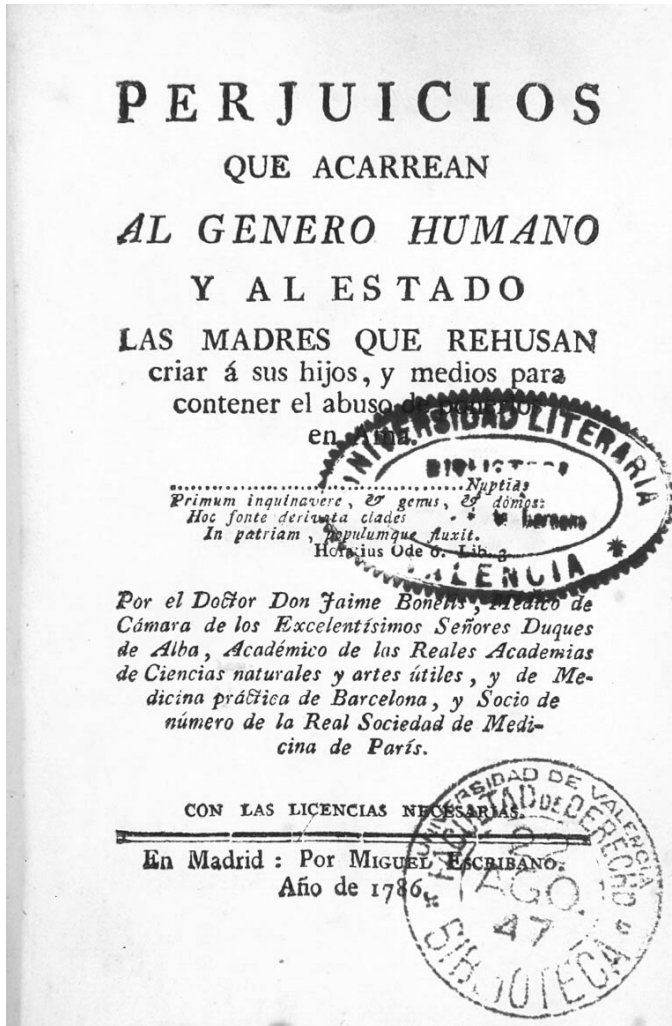


Figure 4: Title-page of Jaime Bonells' *Perjuicios que acarrean al género humano y al estado las madres que rehusan criar á sus hijos*, 1786. (Biblioteca Histórica-Universitat de València, E/626.)

refuse to Suckle their Children), 1786, by the Catalan doctor Jaime Bonells, which is sometimes considered to have drawn on Gutiérrez Godoy's work, but from which it differs in important ways that reveal the social and ideological transformations of the century of the Enlightenment.⁴³

⁴³ Jaime Bonells, *Perjuicios que acarrean al género humano y al estado las madres que rehusan criar a sus hijos, y medios para contener el abuso de ponerlos en ama*, Madrid, Miguel Escribano, 1786. The work *De l'obligation aux mères de nourrir leurs enfants* (1707) by the French Jansenist Philippe Hecquet, a doctor at Port Royal much quoted by later Spanish and European authors, adopts a severe, serious tone, extolling breastfeeding as

The fact is that, despite his emphatic tone and the prolixity with which he expounded his arguments in favour of breast-feeding, Gutiérrez Godoy admitted a wide range of exceptions: for example, women who, in spite of being in good health, produce milk that is not very nutritious or is even harmful, or who become weak when they breast-feed. He was not the only one; in fact, the sixteenth-century doctors who dealt with this subject, such as Damián Carbón in his *Libro del arte de las comadres o madrinas y del regimiento de las preñadas y paridas, y de los niños* (Book of the Art of Midwives, and of the Governance of Women who are Pregnant or have given Birth and of Their Children), Luis Lobera de Ávila in his *Libro del regimiento de la salud, y de la esterilidad de los hombres y mugeres* (Book for the Governance of Health and Sterility in Men and Women), and Huarte himself, provided detailed instructions for the selection of a good wet nurse, taking into account not only her physical condition (well-proportioned body, good colour, medium-sized breasts, milk that is neither too thick nor too watery) but also her habits.⁴⁴ The parental obligation, at least among well-to-do and distinguished families, to rear their children properly was understood to be fulfilled by the effort of providing them with the best possible wet nurse, which is why, in 1617, the Cádiz doctor Toquero published his *Reglas para escoger amas y leche* (Rules for Choosing Wet Nurses and Milk), a compendium aimed at a lay audience, containing advice provided by other medical authors.⁴⁵

Toquero's book admits that it is well known that practical reasons or deeply rooted customs excuse noblewomen from breast-feeding their children themselves: "It is clear that not all women who give birth are necessarily able to suckle, either because they are in a very serious condition or ill, or because of the customs of the land or people, or for some other reason."⁴⁶ But also, even though he says, almost as if it were an inevitable cliché, that "the greatest cruelty that can be done by women who give birth is not to give milk to their children",⁴⁷ the author dedicates the book to a lady, Constanza Ibáñez de Ávila, praising her as an example of a "perfecta casada" or "perfect wife" and declaring, paradoxically, that the only thing wanting for her to correspond to the celebrated model of woman and wife advocated by fray Luis is to follow the advice of the doctors in the choice of a wet nurse. All this indicates that in the sixteenth and

an inexcusable but troublesome duty, still far from the lyrical tone adopted by the doctors and moralists of the Enlightenment (Ballexerd, Landais, Rousseau, Bonells, etc.). See Philippe Hecquet, *De l'indécence aux hommes d'accoucher les femmes et de l'obligation aux mères de nourrir leurs enfants*, Paris, Côté-femmes, 1990.

⁴⁴Damián Carbón, *Libro del arte de las comadres o madrinas y del regimiento de las preñadas y paridas, y de los niños*, Majorca, 1541, fols. LVIr–LVIIIr; Luis Lobera de Ávila, *Libro del regimiento de la salud, y de la esterilidad de los hombres y mugeres, y de las enfermedades de los niños y otras cosas utilísimas*, Valladolid, Sebastián Martínez, 1551, fols. LXXVIr–LXXIXr). Although Lobera briefly echoes Avicenna's recommendation that children should be suckled by their mothers, he devotes most of the chapter to systematizing the qualities that distinguish a good wet nurse, following the same author. Also Huarte, *Examen de ingenios*, op. cit., note 6 above, p. 458.

⁴⁵Toquero, *Reglas para escoger amas y leche*, Cadiz, Fernando Rey, 1617.

⁴⁶Ibid., 'Al Lector' (unpaginated): "Siendo cosa clara, que no todas las que paren han de poder criar, o por muy graves, o por enfermas, o por uso de tierra o de personas, o por cualesquiera otra causa."

⁴⁷Ibid., 'Al Lector' (unpaginated): "... la mayor crueldad que las que paren pueden hacer, es no dar leche a sus hijos".

seventeenth centuries doctors placed their knowledge and expertise at the service of the regulation—rather than suppression—of a practice deeply rooted in the social logic of the time, which only began to be questioned extensively in the eighteenth century, in connection with profound changes in the understanding of privacy, family relations, the respective roles of men and women, and their inherent nature.

Questioning Scientific Authority: Feijoo's *Defensa de las Mujeres* (1726)

At a point of transition between the representations of gender difference in the early modern world and the new models developed and disseminated in the mid-eighteenth century, there is a book which is interesting for its critical view of the use of science to “naturalize” the social inequalities between the sexes. It is Benito J Feijoo's *Defensa de las mujeres* (Defence of Women), published in 1726 as discourse XVI in volume 1 of his *Theatro crítico universal* (Universal Critical Theatre).⁴⁸ An innovative work, it was crucial to the development of a discourse of intellectual and moral gender equality, causing lively debate by rebutting those theories which sought to establish a natural foundation for women's inferiority.⁴⁹

Although he still reiterated the idea of opposite temperaments (cold and moist for women, hot and dry for men), on which, in his words, “all physics and physicians agree”, Feijoo denied that women's moistness should produce diminished intellectual aptitudes.⁵⁰ A staunch anti-scholastic, he insisted that Aristotelian principles did not prove women's inferiority, and that nature by no means produced women by error, as “imperfect animals”.⁵¹ By limiting gender differences to the body, more specifically to the reproductive organs, he concluded, “Women are not differently formed from men with respect to the organs which serve for discursive ability, but regarding those which Nature has assigned for the propagation of the species.”⁵² Being to some extent familiar with medical debate and having participated in some of its controversies, he benefited from the authority of his friends, including important physicians.⁵³ Among them, Martín Martínez, a

⁴⁸ Benito J Feijoo, *Theatro crítico universal, o discursos varios en todo género de materias, para desengaño de errores comunes*, Madrid, Francisco del Hierro, 1726–1740, 9 vols. The quotations come from the modern edition: *Defensa de las mujeres*, Barcelona, Icaria, 1997.

⁴⁹ On the significance of Feijoo and his work in the Spanish and European context of the debate, see Mónica Bolufer, *Mujeres e Ilustración. La construcción de la feminidad en la España del siglo XVIII*, Valencia, Institució Alfons el Magnànim, 1998, ch. 1; *idem*, “‘Neither male, nor female’: rational equality in the Spanish Enlightenment”, in Sarah Knott and Barbara Taylor (eds), *Women, gender and Enlightenment*, London, Palgrave, 2005, pp. 389–409. Apart from complete English editions of Feijoo's essays, his *Defence of women* had at least two additional English translations (among other languages), under the titles of *An essay on woman, or physiological and historical defense of the fair sex* (1765) and *An essay on the learning, genius and abilities of the fair sex* (1774).

⁵⁰ Feijoo, *op. cit.*, note 48 above, vol. 1, pp. 50–5: “... en esto convienen todos los físicos y médicos”.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 18–21.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 48: “Las mujeres no son distintamente formadas que los hombres en los órganos que sirve a la facultad discursiva; sí solo en aquéllos que destinó la naturaleza a la propagación de la especie.”

⁵³ On Feijoo's knowledge of medical science, see Gregorio Marañón, *Las ideas biológicas del Padre Feijoo*, Madrid, Espasa Calpe, 1934; Fabián Alejandro Campagne, ‘Medicina y religión en el discurso antisupersticioso español de los siglos XVI al XVIII: un combate por la hegemonía’, *Dynamis*, 2000, 20: 417–56.

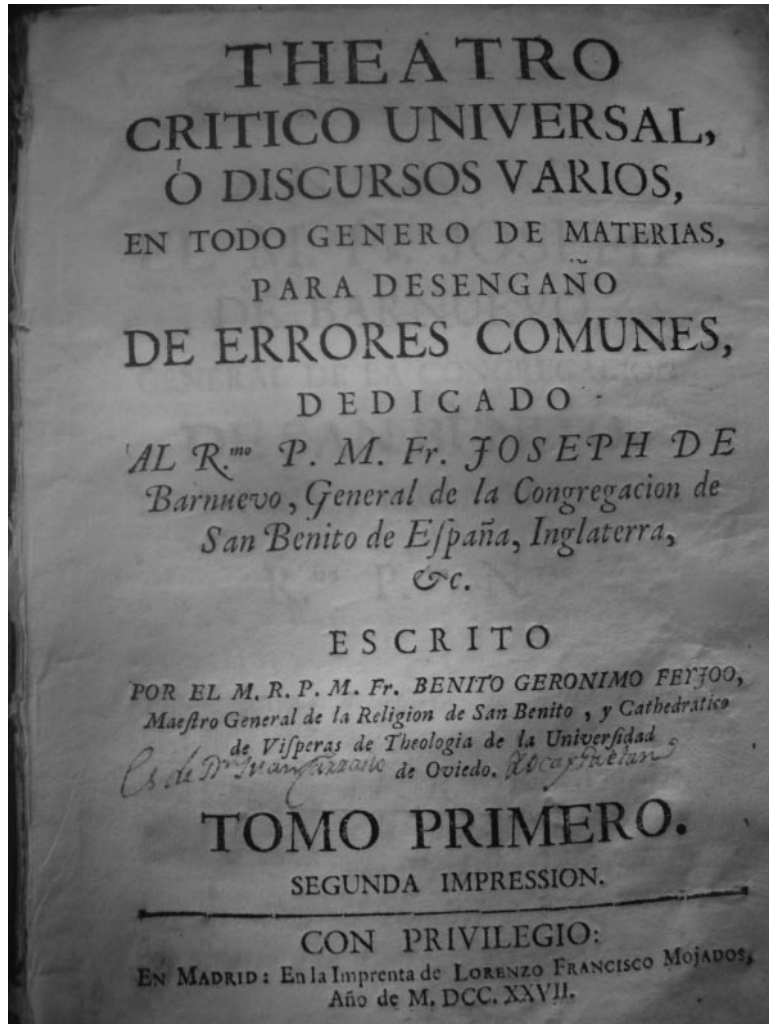


Figure 5: Title-page of Benito J Feijoo's *Theatro crítico universal*, 1726–1740. (Biblioteca del Instituto de Historia de la Medicina y de la Ciencia López Piñero, CSIC–Universitat de València, P/0238.)

leading figure of the so-called eclectic school, who published a short work in support of Feijoo when the controversy about *Defensa de las mujeres* became more intense. In his *Carta defensiva, que sobre el primer tomo del Theatro crítico universal* (Letter in Defence of the first Volume of the Universal Critical Theatre), Martínez wrote:

I can at least say, as a Professor of Anatomy, that as the organization which makes the two sexes different is not an instrument of thought, and man and woman come together in the manufacture of

thought (the sole seat and emporium of ideas), I am bound to believe that in the aptitude for the sciences the functions are no different, for the organs are no different.⁵⁴

Thus Feijoo was able to use empirical evidence, together with a rationalist style of argument, to reject the existence of any natural basis which might allow one to assert the inferiority of women. On the contrary, his concept of reason as a neutral principle, the same for both sexes, links his work with the so-called European “rationalist feminism” of the late seventeenth century, represented by Marguerite Buffet, Anna Maria Schurman and François Poulain de la Barre, among others: “And so,” Feijoo concludes, “women who say that the soul is not male or female can stand firm, for they speak truly”, words reminiscent of one of his possible sources, Poulain de la Barre’s *De l’égalité des deux sexes* (On the Equality of the two Sexes, 1673).⁵⁵

Feijoo not only attacked humoral medicine, already discredited in Enlightenment circles. He also questioned another justification of women’s inferiority which was taking the place of older theories: the notion of women’s sensitivity (that is, the excessive delicacy of the brain’s fibres) as an obstacle to reason, elaborated by the French Cartesian Nicolas de Malebranche (*De inquirenda veritate*, 1674), thus anticipating ideas about gender which were strongly supported by many physicians later in the eighteenth century and became influential in the context of the new culture of sensibility.⁵⁶ On the one hand, Feijoo questioned the empirical basis of those theories (“I have read two anatomists who do not say a word about this”).⁵⁷ On the other, he pointed out the paradox of attributing a diminished rationality to women on the basis of their supposedly greater sensitive receptiveness precisely when the empiricist epistemology in fashion in the eighteenth century situated the origin of knowledge in sensory impressions, so that, if anything, that possible difference should act in their favour.

In short, Feijoo’s familiarity with medical theories—with the theories and debates and those who featured in them—helped him to perceive and explain how anatomical and physiological “evidence” was constructed to justify social inequality: “It is known that everyone seeks physical explanations and points to them when one is, or thinks one is, sure of their effects by experience.”⁵⁸ One of Feijoo’s most important contributions to the

⁵⁴ Martín Martínez, *Carta defensiva, que sobre el primer tomo del Theatro crítico universal . . . le escribió su más aficionado amigo*, Madrid, Imprenta Real, 1726, p. 18: “A lo menos, yo como Professor Anatómico puedo decir que no siendo la organización que diversifica los dos sexos instrumento de los pensamientos, y conviniendo hombre y muger en la fábrica del pensamiento (única silla y emporio de las ideas) debo creer que en la aptitud para las ciencias no son desiguales los oficios, pues no son diferentes los órganos.”

⁵⁵ Feijoo, op. cit., note 48 above, vol. 1, p. 46: “Y así, bien pueden estarse firmes las mujeres que dicen que el alma no es varón ni hembra, porque dicen bien”. On Poulain de la Barre and “rationalist feminism” in France, Italy and England, see Ruth Perry, *The celebrated Mary Astell: an early English feminist 1666–1731*, University of Chicago Press, 1986; Siep Stuurman, *François Poulain de la Barre and the invention of modern equality*, Cambridge, MA, and London, Harvard University Press, 2004; also by these two authors, Ruth Perry, ‘Mary Astell and Enlightenment’, and Siep Stuurman, ‘The deconstruction of gender: seventeenth-century feminism and modern equality’, in Knott and Taylor (eds), op. cit., note 49 above, pp. 357–70 and 371–88, respectively.

⁵⁶ Yvonne Knibiehler, ‘Le discours médical sur la femme: constants et ruptures’, *Romantisme*, 1976, **13/14**: 41–54, and *idem*, ‘Les médecins et la nature féminine au temps de code civil’, *Annales E.S.C.*, July–Aug. 1976, **31**(4): 824–45; Mónica Bolufer, ‘Ciencia, reforma social y construcción de identidades sexuales: la “naturaleza femenina” en los textos médicos del siglo XVIII’, *Cuadernos de Ilustración y Romanticismo*, 1997, **4–5**: 21–38.

⁵⁷ Feijoo, op. cit., note 48 above, vol. 1, p. 58: “Dos anatómicos he leído que no dicen palabra de eso.”

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 41: “. . . estas causas físicas ya se sabe que cada uno las busca, y señala a su modo, después que por la experiencia está, o se juzga asegurado de los efectos.”

gender debate from a scientific perspective lies in this clear and lucid awareness, later revived by writers such as Josefa Amar and Inés Joyes, particularly sensitive to the bias of the medical view.

Epilogue

It can, therefore, be said that during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries medicine helped to justify and reproduce inequalities between men and women by constructing and disseminating the idea of male and female natures, with differences in temperament which determined unequal moral and intellectual capacities, and these in turn served as a basis for the differentiated, hierarchic assignation of social functions and areas. At that time, however, the voice of the doctors was part of a chorus in which the clergy played a more important part and had greater influence on the thinking and social practices of the time. It was not until the eighteenth century that churchmen began to yield their central role in this respect to men of science. And when scientists made their voice heard with greater intensity and persistence in the second half of that century, they did so by reformulating the ways in which the difference between the sexes was conceptualized. Most especially, since then medicine has played a decisive part in the construction of social norms and models of behaviour and subjectivity by its growing influence on society and the dissemination of its principles in a wide range of popularizing literature (works on hygiene, physical education, childcare) which spread beyond the channels of medical literature and made an impact in the press and in moral and pedagogical literature and works of fiction, particularly the new sentimental novel. The doctors' intellectual and social authority thus helped to establish the new way of thinking of gender difference which was characteristic of modernity: the essentialist paradigm or the paradigm of the "incommensurable difference", which understood male and female as radically different essences, physically and morally, and which emphasized and redefined the domestic and, especially, maternal status and the moral and hygienic obligations of mothers, whom doctors addressed with particular insistence, exalting the political importance of their domestic role and seeking to intervene in homes through their mediation.

Needless to say, in seeking to reveal this nature, what was being done was to construct it, presenting those agreements with the new patterns of utility, order and respectability as more "natural", healthy and moral. And, in the case of women, the individual body and the social body were represented in a particularly insistent manner as two faces of the same coin: caring for themselves appeared as a responsibility of their body towards others, so that the behaviour which was said to provide the best assurance of physical and moral well-being seemed, almost providentially, to coincide with the behaviour considered favourable for the propagation of the species and the maintenance or transformation of social structures. Thus, with various nuances, in the eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth centuries medical discourse made a powerful contribution to creating a new sense of the responsibility of families in the construction of moral and social order. And it did so especially by emphasizing the moral and hygienic obligations

of mothers, whom doctors addressed with particular insistence, exalting the importance of their domestic role and attempting to intervene in households by their mediation, first among the urban elites, and later, with the development of social medicine, in the working-class areas of cities.⁵⁹ However, as Michael Ende wrote in *The neverending story*, “that’s another story and shall be told another time”.

⁵⁹ Jacques Donzelot, *La police des familles*, Paris, Éditions de Minuit, 1977; Mónica Bolufer, ‘El plantel del Estado. La “educación física” de las mujeres y los niños en la literatura de divulgación médica del siglo XVIII’, in Mary Nash and Rosa Ballester (eds), *Mulheres, trabalho e reprodução. Atitudes sociais e políticas de proteção à vida*, Porto, Edições Afrontamento, 1996, pp. 57–75; *idem*, ‘Cos femení, cos social: apunts d’historiografia sobre els sabers mèdics i la construcció cultural d’identitats sexuades (segles XVI–XIX)’, *Afers*, 1999, **33/34**: 309–28; *idem*, ‘Les vêtements de la santé. Le discours des apparences dans l’Espagne du XVIIIe siècle’, in Anne-Lise Head-König and Liliane Mottu-Weber (eds), *Les femmes dans la société européenne*, Geneva, Droz, 2000, pp. 11–30; Catherine Jagoe, Alda Blanco and Cristina Enríquez de Salamanca, *La mujer en los discursos de género: textos y contextos del siglo XIX*, Barcelona, Icaria, 1998; Nerea Aresti, *Médicos, donjuanes y mujeres modernas. Los ideales de feminidad y masculinidad en el primer tercio del siglo XX*, Bilbao, Universidad del País Vasco, 2001.