

*Debating Women,
Politics, and
Power in
Early Modern
Europe*

SHARON L. JANSEN



**Debating Women, Politics, and Power
in Early Modern Europe**

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The Monstrous Regiment of Women: Female Rulers in Early Modern Europe. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002

Dangerous Talk and Strange Behavior: Women and Popular Resistance to the Reforms of Henry VIII. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996

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Sharon L. Jansen

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For Vickie: Sisters at Last

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P R E F A C E

In the early spring of 1996, I spent a few weeks working intensely, almost frantically, in the British Library at its old Great Russell Street location, moving back and forth between the Main Reading Room, the North Library, the North Library Gallery, and the Manuscripts Students' Room.

I worked intensely because I was mid-way through my sabbatical leave, and I was conscious of the passage of time. And I worked intensely because I was more than a little homesick—as long as I stayed busy, I wasn't missing my son, worrying about how much money my trip was costing me, or fretting about my garden at home. So I planned my days carefully. The reading rooms opened at 9:00 a.m. six days a week; six days a week I was waiting on the steps, ready for the Library to open. During the day, I never left the Library, not even for lunch. Well, I suppose that, technically, I left the Library when I left my seat in the reading rooms, exited the various checkpoints, and headed to the British Museum's self-service cafeteria. It was not only handy but relatively inexpensive, and if I timed my break just right, I could avoid the worst of the crowds and still enjoy a few moments of casual conversation with tourists at the tables we shared. These brief moments of talk were the only exchanges I had that didn't involve ordering meals or books. On Mondays, Friday, and Saturdays, the reading rooms closed at 5:00 p.m., but on Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays, I worked twelve-hour days, because the Library stayed open until 9:00 p.m.

Although I was working intently, then, I still couldn't help feeling a little frantic. The British Library was preparing for its move to St. Pancras, and although no one was going to be grabbing the chair out from under me while I was reading, banners announcing the move were everywhere, and it seemed as if new pamphlets and brochures appeared daily—my memories about the frequency of these publications are not

completely misleading, since the one I'm holding right now informs me that "This leaflet is number 6 in a series designed to inform readers and users how each stage of the move will affect them and their use of the collections." This small pamphlet also reminds me that the well-publicized move to St. Pancras was accompanied by the equally well-publicized "introduction of the British Library Online Catalogue and the Automated Book Request System (ABRS)."

All the signs, pamphlets, displays, and models were intended to be helpful and reassuring, but I found them somewhat ominous. Would the Online Catalogue really "overcome the limitations of traditional catalogues"? I loved the huge volumes of the printed and well-annotated catalogues in the center of the great Round Room. Could a computer terminal—even though there were to be eighty-six (!) of them—ever substitute for the old book application slips, filled out in triplicate? I loved those old tickets with their bold-faced reminders to "PLEASE WRITE FIRMLY IN BLACK INK." I loved carefully entering my delivery location, my seat number, and, on the "Application for a Manuscript," noting my "Students' Room pass number." I loved seeing the books waiting for me at my place each morning when I arrived. I loved getting tickets returned with a red stamp telling me to "Please present this slip at the North Library Issue Desk" or a green stamp telling me to "Please present this slip at the North Library Gallery Issue Desk." I even loved finding a slip returned to me with the "Please see reason for non-delivery" box ticked—I didn't mind being informed that the book I wanted was "in use," because if it was "urgently required," I could "apply to the North Library Issue Counter." I didn't mind that "Permission of Superintendent" was required before certain manuscripts could be delivered, and I didn't even mind being informed that I would *never* get the book I wanted, because the information was phrased so gently: "It is regretted that this work has been mislaid." I cherish my book application for one volume that failed to appear: "This work was destroyed by bombing in the war, we have not been able to acquire a replacement."

All this came back to me recently. I was cleaning out a filing cabinet and pulled out a couple of manila folders, one labeled "BL-printed," the other "BL-mss." As I removed them from the drawer, they wound up on top of a slippery stack, and as they fell to the ground from my overloaded arms, a cascade of book tickets fluttered to the floor. I read through them all as I picked them up and carefully sorted them, their titles bringing back those cool March days in London now more than a decade ago. *The First Blast of the Trumpet against the Monstruous regiment of women. An Harborowe for Faithfull and Trewe Subjectes, against the late*

blowne Blaste, concerning the Government of Wemen. A Shorte Treatise of politike power. Six Livres de la République. Sphaera civitatis. Politique Tirée des Propres Paroles de l'Écriture-Sainte. Discours de la Légitime Succession des Femmes aux Possessions de leurs parents: & du gouvernement des princesses aux Empires & Royaumes. Patriarchia: Or the Natural Power of Kings. What also came back, as I looked at these titles, was another emotion. I had spent every day in London immersed in a sixteenth-century debate about women's nature and abilities, and at the end of each day, it hadn't been easy returning to the late twentieth century. I was a college professor, the single parent of a child soon headed off to college, a socially, politically, intellectually, and financially liberated woman, independent in every way possible, traveling on my own in one of the great cities of the world, yet at the end of every day I was left feeling overwhelmed. I remember leaving the BL each day, walking down the steps and through the gates of the British Museum, emerging into the bustle and traffic of Great Russell Street, and finding it hard to shake off the sense that, despite everything, I was a weak, irrational, incapable, and despicable creature.

And as I sat on the floor in my home office, looking again at those carefully preserved book-order forms, I also thought about the manuscript that sat at the back of the bottom drawer in the same filing cabinet. Maybe it was time to pull it out and look at it again. When I was in London that spring in 1996, I was writing a book about female rulers during the early modern period, and I had decided to prepare myself by reading the primary sources in the "gynecocracy" debate of the late sixteenth century. I was interested in the argument itself, which was a particularly toxic one, but I was also intrigued by the fact that so many women had gone about the task of governing even while their right—and ability—to do so was being bitterly disputed. I came home to finish that book about women rulers, but I had been so profoundly affected by the texts I read during those weeks at the British Library that I prefaced my study of women rulers with a detailed analysis of all arguments offered by the many combatants in that debate. When she received my draft, my wonderful editor at Palgrave, Amanda Johnson, tactfully suggested that perhaps a 200-page "preface" was a bit too much. In the end, all that remained from my stay in London and my obsession with the texts of the gynecocracy debate was the title that I borrowed from John Knox and then deliberately subverted: *The Monstrous Regiment of Women: Female Rulers in Early Modern Europe* (2002).

But even then I couldn't quite get the debate out of my system. Every once in a while I added to my "preface," eventually embedding my

analysis of the debate about female sovereignty in the larger Renaissance humanist debate about women's nature and ability, and then, as their work began to appear in accessible modern editions, juxtaposing the responses of women writers to the arguments of their male contemporaries. When the whole thing got completely out of control, I shoved it to the back of the file drawer, where it sat. I never forgot it, but I tried to.

Then the book slips fell out of a file folder and onto the floor. Even now I'm not convinced that I would have pulled my book manuscript out again, but two days later, on 18 December 2006, as I was driving home from my last obligation of the fall semester, I was tuned into *All Things Considered* and heard NPR's Michele Norris asking a number of political strategists, legal experts, and well-published academics whether Americans were ready to vote for a black presidential candidate—or for a woman candidate. The subsequent interviews of likely voters from across the country seemed to suggest, at least to me, that there was less resistance to a black presidential candidate—always assuming that candidate was male, that we were talking about Barack Obama and not Shirley Chisom or Carol Moseley Braun—than there was to the idea of a female candidate. That night, I opened my filing cabinet, pulled out the bottom drawer, reached into the back, and took out my manuscript. I left it lying on the floor by my desk.

On 20 January 2007, Hillary Rodham Clinton announced the formation of a presidential exploratory committee. "I'm in. And I'm in to win," she said. "We will make history and remake our futures."

Ellen Malcolm, president of EMILY's List, responded quickly, endorsing Clinton's candidacy: "I am one of the millions of women who have waited all their lives to see the first woman sworn in as president of the United States, and now we have our best opportunity to see that dream fulfilled."

"Clinton Hopes to Make History" read the headline on my *Seattle Times/Seattle Post Intelligencer* on Sunday, 21 January 2007. The front-page news continued on page A-2, but nearly half of the story detailed the candidate's personal liabilities rather than her political strengths. And four of the five columns on page A-2 were filled not by the continuation of the page-one story but by another piece, this one an extended analysis of the Clinton marriage, the Clinton scandals of the 1990s, and the Clinton psyche—Bill Clinton's psyche, that is. "Bill: Will He Help or Hurt?"

And in July 2007, just as I was preparing the final draft of this book to meet my 1 August deadline, the story in the news, on television and radio, and all over the Internet was not Clinton's campaign but her cleavage.

Although it's been nearly 450 years since John Knox argued that "to promote a woman to bear rule, superiority, dominion, or empire above any realm, nation, or city is repugnant to nature," an insult to God, and a "subversion" of order, equity, and justice, and since he concluded that rule by women is the "most detestable and damnable" of all the "enormities" faced by men, somehow the time seems right for *Debating Women, Politics, and Power in Early Modern Europe*.

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Introduction: An Age of Queens

Let us now sing the praises of famous men, the heroes of our nation's history, through whom the Lord established His renown, and revealed His majesty in each succeeding age. Some held sway over kingdoms and made themselves a name by their exploits. . . . Some led the people by their counsels and by their knowledge of the nation's laws. . . . Some there are who have left a name behind them to be commemorated in story. There are others who are unremembered; they are dead, and it is as though they never existed, as though they had never been born or left children to succeed them.

—Ecclesiasticus 44:1–3, 4, 8–9

Abraham, the father of Isaac, Isaac the father of Jacob. Moses and his brother Aaron. David, the father of Solomon, and Solomon of Rehoboam. Like the “praises” of these “famous men” sung by the author of Ecclesiasticus, the historical narrative of Western Europe has focused on generations of men. Political histories, biographies, and genealogies trace lines of power from fathers to sons and grandsons, brothers and nephews. One king follows another in succession, springing forth as if by spontaneous generation. In England, for example, over the course of some 200 years, Edward III is followed on the throne by his grandson Richard II; Henry IV is followed by his son Henry V, who is followed, in turn, by his son Henry VI; Edward IV was to have been followed by his son, who would have been the fifth English Edward, but instead is succeeded by his brother, Richard III; Henry VII is followed by his son Henry VIII, who is followed by his son Edward VI. But then, something strange disrupts this familiar narrative. At his death in 1553, Edward VI is succeeded by his sister, Mary.

The succession of a woman to the throne of England horrified many, including the Protestant reformer John Knox, who denounced “gynecocracy,” or rule by women, and whose astonishing *The First Blast of the Trumpet against the Monstrous Regiment of Women* will provide our starting point here for an examination of the debate about women, power, and politics in early modern Europe. Knox wrote as if women had never before ruled as queens, or at least as if they had never ruled since biblical times—and we might be tempted to agree with him. Even now, in the first decade of twenty-first century and after nearly four decades of feminist scholarship, the “story” of early modern European political history is still largely defined by the lists of “famous men” we have constructed, lists that have, in the words of Ecclesiasticus, “revealed . . . majesty in each succeeding age,” lists that have told us who “held sway over kingdoms.” There are, indeed, some “who have left a name behind them to be commemorated in story,” just as there are “others”—primarily women—who have largely been forgotten. A student of mine recently commented that, while her Western civilization textbook did introduce her to a few powerful medieval and Renaissance women, their stories were still relegated to the margins, enclosed in pastel-colored textboxes near the end of the relevant chapters.

If it is still difficult to find women rulers in our history books or in our classrooms, they are an even more elusive presence in our imagination. A few queens make regular—and predictable—appearances every generation or so. Popular feature films such as *Elizabeth* and *Shakespeare in Love*, both of which appeared in 1998, focused attention, however briefly, on the very women whose sovereign power so troubled poor John Knox. But these two movies only retold stories that had been told before—Vanessa Redgrave and Glenda Jackson played Mary Stuart and Elizabeth Tudor on the screen for audiences thirty years ago, while Katharine Hepburn and Bette Davis played the same two queens for an even earlier generation of filmgoers. Television has been obsessed by the same figures: Helen Mirren plays the English queen and Barbara Flynn the Scottish in the TV miniseries *Elizabeth I*, jointly developed by Channel 4 and HBO and broadcast in the United Kingdom in 2005 and in the United States in 2006. This dramatization followed a four-part *Elizabeth* aired by the History Channel in 2002, and PBS’s three-episode series *The Six Wives of Henry VIII* shown in 2003—Henry’s marital career has also been a popular subject for popular culture. But rather than telling us anything new about queens and queenship, these twenty-first century dramatizations and documentaries are merely updated versions of *The Six Wives of Henry VIII* and its sequel, *Elizabeth R*, both

of which were produced by the BBC in 1971 and broadcast in the United States during the first year of PBS's *Masterpiece Theater*.

Sometimes we catch a glimpse of other powerful women: Queen Isabella of Castile, for example, makes a brief appearance in *1492: Conquest of Paradise* (1992), a movie primarily about Columbus; Catherine de' Medici serves as a formidable villain in the 1994 French film *La reine Margot* (*Queen Margot*); and Marie of Guise has a great scene or two in 1998's *Elizabeth*, even if, in the context of the film, it isn't clear exactly who she is or why she's important. Since we see the same few queens over and over again, the impression remains that there were only a handful of women—maybe three or four—who ever played an influential role in early modern power politics.

And yet, in spite of arguments like Knox's against female rule, and despite what our textbooks and popular culture have led us to believe, there were dozens of women who ruled in the early modern period, generations of powerful women who both preceded and followed their more famous "sisters" with whom we are now so familiar. Why do we keep hearing the same stories over and over? Why don't we know more about the "regiment" of those other remarkable women?

In the past few decades, certainly, historians have begun to answer these questions, reclaiming women's history and writing a counternarrative to a history composed solely, and for so long, of lists of famous men. My own efforts to write women into the history of the early modern period have led me to the topic I explore here, the so-called gynecocracy debate of the early modern period.¹ This debate, and the larger philosophical debate about women of which it is a part, took place at an interesting historical moment. The controversy arose not when women were poised to achieve greater freedom and opportunity than they ever had, but just as a series of profound changes—social, economic, legal, and religious—would restrict their lives and activities in new and fundamental ways. And it occurred not because a series of "dynastic accidents" resulted in an unprecedented number of women occupying seats of power, but almost in a vacuum, irrespective of historical realities.² Those who sided with John Knox in the gynecocracy debate might argue against women's right and fitness to rule, but women had and could and did rule—and rule well—even as Knox and his brothers were debating whether they should and ignoring the fact that they did.

In fact, women always played a role in governing the various independent principalities, minor states, and kingdoms of Western Europe. In the Holy Roman Empire, for example, many ecclesiastical territories were ruled by princess-abbesses. Their imperial abbeys often functioned

as small, autonomous states that could raise their own armies, coin their own money, establish their own educational systems, oversee their own economic concerns, and seat a representative at the imperial Diet; in some cases, the princess-abbess even had the right to vote at this assembly.³ Outside these religious institutions, women inherited property, titles, power, and, with some regularity, sovereignty in the fiefs, counties, duchies, principalities, seigniories, states, territories, and kingdoms of medieval Europe; many of these women ruled in their own right while many more governed as regents for their absent or incapacitated husbands or for their minor sons.⁴

The political situation in Western Europe during the sixteenth century, then, was not unprecedented; as Pauline Stafford notes, “A combination of Italian legal and personal traditions, French dynastic insecurity, Ottonian family and church politics, and a movement of church reform throughout Europe made the 900s a century of women. For a brief period in the 980s Western Europe was ruled by queen-regents.”⁵ Of course their power and authority were not always appreciated. Just as Knox and his cohorts fulminated against sixteenth-century queens, comparing them to the Old Testament Jezebel, their tenth-century predecessors—Æthelflæd of Mercia, Elvira of León, Theophanu of Byzantium, Emma of Italy, and Beatrice of France, to name only a few—were also the subject of male ire, wicked women to be condemned as second Jezebels.⁶

The whole scene replayed itself in the twelfth century, when, as Marjorie Chibnall notes, “Three daughters of kings, all near contemporaries, who stood in the direct line of succession, forced the problem [of female sovereignty] into the open.”⁷ The successions—or potential successions—of Urraca of Castile and León, Melisende of Jerusalem, and Matilda of England were met by a flurry of opposition. To account for Queen Urraca’s “weakness” and “changeability” (her “feminine perversity”), she was denounced by her contemporaries as Jezebel. Although no less a man than Bernard of Clairvaux urged Melisende, who inherited the crown of the crusader kingdom of Jerusalem from her father, to “show the man in the woman” and to “order all things . . . so that those who see you will judge your works to be those of a king rather than a queen,” her own husband tried to wrest power from her. And in the “gynecocracy debate” that surrounded Matilda’s claims to the English throne, the very arguments that would be marshaled for and against female rule in the sixteenth century, even down to the obscure example of the daughters of Zelophehad, were iterated and reiterated in the political propaganda produced in the twelfth.⁸

Although he doubtless knew little, if anything, of all this, John Knox could hardly have been unaware of all the women rulers who had preceded Mary Stuart and Mary Tudor. Scotland, for example, had been governed by a number of female regents, including Margaret Tudor earlier in the sixteenth century. Indeed, as Antonia Fraser notes, "there had been no adult succession to the Scots throne since the fourteenth century."⁹ A series of royal minorities during those two centuries had allowed many women to wield a degree of political power, including Joan Beaufort, regent for her son James II, and Mary of Guelders, regent for her son James III. Margaret Tudor, Henry VIII's elder sister, married James III's son; she was regent of Scotland when her husband, James IV, went to war against her brother in 1513, and then again for her son, James V, after her husband's death at the battle of Flodden. Meanwhile, at the very moment Henry's sister was acting as regent in Scotland, his first wife, Catherine of Aragon, was regent of England; that she would make a suitable regent for the absent Henry VIII should surprise no one, since Catherine was the daughter of the formidable Isabella, queen regnant of Castile.

Though Knox, born in 1514, would not himself remember the regencies of Margaret Tudor or Catherine of Aragon, he would certainly have been aware of the regency of Henry VIII's last queen, Katherine Parr, in 1544, and he could hardly have been ignorant of Margaret of Austria and Mary of Austria who, between them, had governed the Netherlands for some forty years in the first half of the sixteenth century.¹⁰ And farther afield? Could Knox have been unaware of Juana of Castile? Although she never functioned effectively as queen of Spain, Juana of Castile had at least succeeded to her mother Isabella's title as queen regnant of Castile *and* to her father's kingdom of Aragon.¹¹ In Navarre, Jeanne d'Albret was ruling as queen regnant when Knox published his *Blast* in 1558, just the last in a series of female sovereigns in the Pyrenean kingdom.¹² At the same time, Juana, the widowed queen of Portugal, was acting as regent of Spain for her brother Philip II (who was in England married to that "Jezebel," Mary Tudor), while her mother-in-law Catalina, the dowager queen, was acting as regent of Portugal for Juana's son Sebastian. Within a few months of the publication of Knox's *Blast*, Margaret of Parma would follow her foremothers in taking up the role of regent of the Netherlands, and just months after that, Catherine de' Medici would become regent of France.¹³

Thus while the combatants in the gynocracy debate argued about the succession of a woman to the throne, attacking queens regnant and queens regent as "monsters in nature" or defending them and their

abilities, women went about the business of government. Their “regiment” was neither monstrous nor unnatural. They could govern, they had governed, and they *were* governing, even as Knox wrote—and they would continue to do so, at least for a time.



In what follows, I begin by examining carefully the particular debate ignited by Knox’s inflammatory pamphlet, though it may seem somewhat arbitrary to do so. Why begin with Knox when, as I have just noted, women had regularly governed throughout Western Europe during the Middle Ages and when the controversy about female sovereignty was not new? And since most of Knox’s argument was not new either, why begin with a close reading of his text? Why focus on the sixteenth-century gynecocracy debate at all, since it was only part of a much larger, ongoing debate about women’s nature, ability, and proper social role?

I begin with Knox and the controversy that erupted after the publication of *The First Blast of the Trumpet against the Monstrous Regiment of Women* because, at least for those of us who grew up reading and dreaming about Mary Tudor, Queen Elizabeth I, and Mary, queen of Scots, that’s where the story begins. Widely read, popular biographies like those by Antonia Fraser (*Mary Queen of Scots*, 1969), Carolly Erickson (*Bloody Mary: The Life of Mary Tudor*, 1978), and Alison Weir (*The Life of Elizabeth I*, 1998) all refer to Knox and his attack on women rulers. Although scholarly books seem to go out of print almost as soon as they are published, these biographies are still in print, even Fraser’s, which is now nearly forty years old, and used copies of all three are readily available online and on the shelves at Half-Price Books and Powell’s. I also begin with Knox because references to and selections from his *Monstrous Regiment* regularly appear today in the textbooks used in our college classrooms. And I begin with Knox because his text has even achieved a certain status in popular culture—Laurie King’s second novel about the adventures of Mary Russell and Sherlock Holmes, for example, borrows Knox’s title—*A Monstrous Regiment of Women*—while in one of John Mortimer’s Rumpole-of-the-Bailey short stories, a character named Nurse Pargeter is described as looking “as relentless as John Knox about to denounce the monstrous regiment of women.” In verifying the publication information for these two books, I stumbled on yet another *Monstrous Regiment*, this one by Terry Pratchett, which is advertised as the thirty-first novel in the Discworld series.¹⁴ And, as if to demonstrate

that the spirit of Knox is alive and well today, a film entitled *The Monstrous Regiment of Women* is scheduled for release in the summer of 2007; self-described as the product of “Faithful, Christian, [sic] Filmmaking,” the documentary “goes all out to demolish the feminist worldview.” Working from a “consistently Christian perspective,” the film’s writers claim to “show how feminism has had a devastating impact on the church, state, and family,” particularly in the United States, “where feminists vie for every possible office including the presidency.”¹⁵ I start with Knox, then, because that’s where so many of us have begun and because I think it’s important to move beyond allusions, references, and selections to a thorough and extended analysis of his argument.

I begin with Knox because the publication of *The First Blast of the Trumpet against the Monstrous Regiment of Women* sparked a fiery debate that was waged over the course of the next fifty years, with combatants entering the fray not only from England and Scotland but from across the continent. I begin with Knox because his *Blast*—in print and in English—was intended to engage as many of his contemporaries as possible. I begin with Knox because he not only engaged his contemporaries in debate but because he continues to engage us—scholarly articles examining Knox’s work and its role in igniting the debate about gynecocracy have appeared, with regularity, at a rate of two or three a decade, beginning in the 1940s. And I begin with Knox because his text has undergone something of a renaissance. For many years it was difficult to read Knox’s text in its entirety—while snippets of it were anthologized, a complete text was available only in the nineteenth-century edition. A scholarly edition was published in the 1980s by Folger Books, and a collection of Knox’s political tracts was published by Cambridge in the early 1990s. But since 2000, several small presses have published inexpensive editions of *The Monstrous Regiment of Women*.¹⁶ After detailing the arguments Knox presents in the “blast” (chapter one), I will then turn to the contemporary responses to it (chapter two). In looking at the so-called gynecocracy debate, I will examine the works that disputed the evidence Knox provided in his *First Blast* as well as those that supported his attack on female sovereignty. While Knox’s text is now readily available, some of the responses to it remain inaccessible; they have not been published in modern editions, much less in English translations, and a few remain available in manuscript only.

Beyond their vitriol and violence, what is most striking now is how little the arguments of the participants in the gynecocracy debate reflected in any significant way the intellectual and political ferment of

the early modern period beyond the particular set of historical circumstances that ignited the controversy. While it is a commonplace among historians to assert that the pamphlets arguing for and against female sovereignty emerged as part of the larger humanist exploration of the proper role of women in society, this is simply not the case. And so, having looked in detail at the specific texts associated with the gynecocracy debate, I place them into the context of this larger exploration of the “woman question” (chapter three). My aim in this chapter is to examine what these products of the “golden age” of the European “Renaissance” had to say about women and political power. Such an examination not only reveals how little the gynecocracy debate reflected this broader context, but it also further explores the extent to which the “rebirth” and “renewal” of the early modern period extended to women and their lives.

Obviously and notably, all the texts mentioned so far have been written by men, and, until very recently, it would have been possible to conclude that whatever women might have thought about their ability to govern, only men had the opportunity to speak (or write). But—although their voices have been silenced for centuries—women did participate in this early modern debate about women and rule. The most well-known of these “other” voices is that of Christine de Pizan, and in turning to women writers, I begin with what Pizan, writing back to Giovanni Boccaccio, had to say about women and sovereignty. Although Pizan herself has now become a canonical figure (assuming that inclusion in a Norton anthology of literature “canonizes” a writer), and although a new book devoted to her political writings appeared recently, my focus here on Pizan’s views of women and rule is, as far as I know, unique.¹⁷

Following Pizan, I look briefly at a number of the early women humanists, for example, Laura Cereta, several of whose letters touch on the subject of women and political power—in one of her letters, for example, she rewrites Boccaccio’s history of women, challenging the notion of the “exceptional woman” by demonstrating that each individual woman descends from a long and “noble lineage” of the “enduring race” of women, whose generations make up a “republic of women.” This chapter also discusses in detail works by Isotta Nogarola, Louise Labé, Moderata Fonte, Lucrezia Marinella, Rachel Speght, and Arcangela Tarabotti, among others. Texts by women writers of the Middle Ages and Renaissance are now appearing with great frequency, in series like Boydell and Brewer’s *Library of Medieval Women*, the University of Chicago’s *The Other Voice in Early Modern Europe*

series, Ashgate Publishing's Early Modern Englishwomen in Print facsimile editions, and Oxford's Women Writers in English, 1350–1850. As I complete this chapter of my book, the challenge is not to find enough material written by women but to keep up with the rapid publication of material newly available. My hope is that readers of *Debating Women, Politics, and Power in Early Modern Europe* will be encouraged by my references to turn to these primary sources and enjoy them in their entirety.

Finally, as I draw this exploration of women and power in the early modern period to a close (chapter five), I look at what happened in the seventeenth century—not only how the debate was “settled,” but at the remarkable disappearance of women from the political stage. By the time Marie de’ Medici became regent of France in 1610, the political climate for a woman ruler, which was never favorable, had begun to change dramatically. In my final chapter, I show how the development of patriarchal political theory in the seventeenth century changed the nature of the political debate, equating a king’s rule with God’s rule and kingship with fatherhood. In such an equation, there was no place for women to exercise sovereignty.

CHAPTER ONE

Queens and Controversy: John Knox and The Monstrous Regiment of Women

To promote a woman to bear rule, superiority, dominion, or empire above any realm, nation, or city is repugnant to nature, contumely to God, a thing most contrarious to His revealed will and approved ordinance, and finally it is the subversion of good order, of all equity and justice.

This uncompromising assessment of a woman's right to govern serves as both thesis and refrain in *The First Blast of the Trumpet against the Monstrous Regiment of Women*, written by the Protestant reformer John Knox.¹ The publication of this vitriolic pamphlet was precipitated by the political situation in mid-sixteenth-century England and Scotland. Both countries were ruled by women in 1558, the year Knox issued his "blast" against their "monstrous regiment." In Scotland, the infant Mary Stuart had become queen regnant in 1542, when her father, King James V, died just a few days after she was born. James Hamilton, earl of Arran, was the first governor of Scotland during the queen's minority, but in 1554 he had been replaced by Mary's mother, Marie of Guise, who was confirmed as queen regent. In England, meanwhile, yet another Mary had also become queen; in 1553, following the death of her half brother Edward VI, Mary Tudor, the eldest of Henry VIII's three children, succeeded to the throne, becoming the first queen regnant in England.²

Although there is no equivocation in the title of his work, Knox opens his "blast" with strategic indirection. Rather than attack the three women he later identifies as the "mischievous Marys," his preface opens

with an expression of astonishment.³ “Wonder it is,” he begins,

that amongst so many pregnant wits as the isle of Great Britain hath produced, so many godly and zealous preachers as England did sometime nourish, and amongst so many learned men and men of grave judgment as this day by Jezebel are exiled, none is found so stout of courage, so faithful to God, nor loving to their native country that they dare admonish the inhabitants of that isle how abominable before God is the empire or rule of a wicked woman, yea, of a traitoress and a bastard. . . .

Of course, Queen Mary is the “Jezebel,” the “wicked woman” whose birth and reign are both illegitimate, but, at least at the outset, Knox’s focus is on the failures of the “esteemed watchmen” of the nation rather than on the “cruel woman” who rules it.⁴ And without being explicit about it, he includes himself in his bitter indictment of the “universal negligence” and the “universal and ungodly silence” that have allowed her rule: “We see our country set forth [as] a prey to foreign nations,” we see the “blood of our brethren” shed “most cruelly,” we all know the “monstrous” rule of a woman to be “the only occasion of all those miseries,” and yet “with silence we pass the time, as though the matter did nothing appertain to us.”

But Knox, having considered the “contrary examples of the ancient prophets”—Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel—has suddenly been awakened. In “this our miserable age,” he writes, we are “bound to admonish the world”; it is “our duty” to reveal the truth to the “ignorant and blind world” whether that ignorant and blind world wants to hear it or not. To “hide the talent committed to our charge” is to ignore duty and to incur condemnation. Inching carefully forward, Knox writes, “I am assured that God has revealed to some in this our age that it is more than a monster in nature that a woman shall reign and have empire above man. And yet with us all there is such silence as if God there with were nothing offended.” But the “empire of women” is an “impiety” and “abomination” of such importance that a man should stand ready to “hazard his life.”

And so, recalling the faith, courage, and constancy not only of the Old Testament prophets but also of the New Testament apostles and identifying himself as one of “God’s messengers,” Knox takes up the heavy burden: “. . . therefore I say that of necessity it is that this mon-striferous empire of women—which amongst all enormities that this day do abound upon the face of the whole earth is most detestable and

damnable—be openly revealed and plainly declared to the world to the end that some may repent and be saved.” We have been misled by princes, Knox reminds his readers, but even “more than princes,” we have been misled by the “great multitude” of men who, mistaken or misguided, have helped “to establish women in their kingdoms and empires, not understanding how abominable, odious, and detestable is all such usurped authority in the presence of God.” Acknowledging the difficulties and dangers he faces—he knows he will be called foolish, strange, spiteful, a “sower of sedition,” and he suggests that he may even be charged with treason—Knox ultimately presents himself as a man of conscience whose duty is to obey God rather than any earthly power. He is ready to follow his conscience even if, thereby, “the whole world should be offended with me for so doing.”

Knox’s preface thus presents his readers with the rationale for his text. It is also a subtle and nuanced negotiation of his role as author and of the subject he addresses. In positioning himself, Knox moves from the general to particular, from “we” to “I.” In identifying his subject, by contrast, he moves from the particular to the general; he initially identifies the English Mary as the target of his denunciations, the opening sentence of his preface blasting her as the “Jezebel” ruling England. But, without naming the other Marys—Mary Stuart and her mother, Marie of Guise—his preface implicitly includes both the Scottish queen and the Scottish regent as he attacks all of those who, by their silence, have accepted not just the “usurped authority” of *one* woman but the “monstriferous empire” of *all* women.

His rhetorical sleight-of-hand also allows Knox to deflect criticism of his own negligence and silence, for he had obviously delayed for some time before he “revealed” and “declared” opposition to the “regiment of women”; his trumpet “blast” is being blown some five years after Mary Tudor first ascended the throne. And in finally taking up the cause, his opposition is hardly “openly revealed” or “plainly declared,” for his *Blast* was published anonymously. Indeed, in drawing his preface to an end, he indicates that his intention is to “blow the trumpet” three times, twice “without name”; he will only reveal his identity with his final blast, his purpose being, at the last, “to take the blame” on himself, “that all others may be purged.” Although he boldly asserts that “the fear of corporal punishment is neither the only, neither the chief cause” of concealing his name, he ends his preface without any explanation at all for publishing the *Blast* anonymously.⁵

Despite some modern scholars’ criticisms that Knox’s *Blast* is a “long, repetitive tirade,” a “confused mixture of righteous indignation, personal

bitterness, animosity, and frustration,” and perhaps even an attempt to “pander to popular prejudices” with views of women that its author “did not really share,” the impact of his *Blast* was far-reaching, and the power of his denunciation endures.⁶ It is a critical text for our understanding of the arguments against female rule and of the context in which early modern women attempted to exert their authority, and because it remains a text that we encounter frequently, often in places where we least expect it.⁷ What follows here, then, is an extended account of Knox’s argument.

The purpose of this first blast is signaled at the beginning of his argument: it is “to awake women degenerate.” Despite this bold proclamation, however, Knox does not address himself *to* women. They are not the subjects who are called upon “to awake”; they are the objects who must be awakened. To that end, Knox opens with the statement quoted at the beginning of this chapter, which serves as the “proposition” of his argument.⁸ To allow a woman to “bear rule” in any “realm, nation, or city” is contrary to nature, a “contumely”—or insult—to God, and “the subversion of good order,” and “of all equity and justice.” Thus Knox lays out his intention to argue against female rule on the basis of natural law, divine law, and civil law.

Knox is also explicit about the evidence he will use to support his proposition. Immediately after the statement of his argument, he informs his readers,

I will not be so curious as to gather whatsoever may amplify, set forth, or decore [decorate or embellish] the same, but I am purposed, even as I have spoken my conscience in most plain and few words, so to stand content with a simple proof of every member, bringing in for my witness God’s ordinance in nature, His plain will revealed in His word, and the minds of such as be most ancient amongst godly writers.

Thus Knox seems to limit himself to reason rather than experience and to the authorities of traditional—Scholastic—argument rather than to the wider range of authorities cited by humanist scholars.

He begins with natural law. To understand why the rule of woman is “a thing repugnant to nature,” Knox seems at first to betray the limits he has just set for his evidence by suggesting a simple empirical test for his readers: they should open their eyes. The reasons why God has “spoiled [despoiled, or stripped]” women “of authority and dominion” and why man “hath seen, proved, and pronounced just causes why that should

be" are "so manifest" that women's unfitness for sovereignty "cannot be hid": "For who can deny but it is repugnant to nature that the blind shall be appointed to lead and conduct such as do see? That the weak, the sick, and impotent persons shall nourish and keep the whole and strong? And, finally, that the foolish, mad, and frenetic shall govern the discreet and give counsel to such as be sober of mind?" Such—foolish, mad, and frenetic—is the state of "all women," whose "sight in civil regiment is but blindness, their strength, weakness, their counsel, foolishness, and [their] judgment, frenzy, if it be rightly considered."

Knox concedes that, for some inexplicable reason, "known only to Himself," God might exempt a certain woman "from the common rank" of her sex, but, as he notes in his marginal annotation, particular examples "do not break general ordinance." He doesn't acknowledge—or even seem to recognize—the possibility that Mary Tudor, Marie of Guise, or Mary Stuart might be such an exceptional woman, exempted by God "by singular privilege." Rather, without examining whether any of these queens might represent such a particular case, Knox returns to his examination of the general condition of woman.

Knox reminds his readers that women are, by nature, faulty creatures: "Nature, I say, doth paint them forth to be weak, frail, impatient, feeble, and foolish, and experience hath declared them to be unconstant, variable, cruel, and lacking the spirit of counsel and regiment." A woman's natural state is thus obvious; her "notable faults have men in all ages spied." Here Knox cites Aristotle, specifically his *Politics*, in support of his argument. Men "illuminated only by the light of nature," men who "in many other cases" may be utterly "blind," are able to "see very clearly" that the "empire of a woman is repugnant to nature." Because men "in all ages" have seen and judged woman's nature, they have "removed women from rule and authority." They have even gone so far as to judge husbands "subject to the counsel or empire" of their wives to be unfit for public office; Knox again cites Aristotle's *Politics* in support of his claim that a wife's domination of her husband is a violation of natural order. Wherever women "bear dominion, there must needs the people be disordered . . . and . . . they must needs come to confusion and ruin."

Interestingly, Knox supports his argument from nature by citing Roman law. He argues that women are prohibited from civil and public office, forbidden from acting as judges or as magistrates, forbidden from speaking in assemblies and from acting as witnesses. A woman is even forbidden, by law, from exerting any "motherly power" over "her own sons." His concluding point is a devastating insight into the way that the

“natural” condition of woman is reflected in her legal status, at least according to Knox: “For those that will not permit a woman to have power over her own sons will not permit her (I am assured) to have rule over a realm, and those that will not suffer her to speak in defense of those that be accused [or] admit her accusation . . . against man will not approve that she shall sit in judgment crowned with the royal crown, usurping authority in the midst of men.”⁹

Having concluded the first part of his argument, his examination of natural law, Knox moves into his second, his discussion of divine law. Female sovereignty is a thing “repugnant to nature”—and natural law itself a reflection of God’s divine moral law.¹⁰ Female sovereignty is an offense to God, a “contumely” (or insult), because the “revealed will and perfect ordinance of God” comprise the “second part of Nature.”

Knox begins his explication of divine law with an allusion to Genesis 3. The order of Creation clearly establishes the subordination of woman: woman was created “to serve and obey man, not to rule and command him.” As further evidence of woman’s subjection, Knox turns to the New Testament, citing and glossing St. Paul’s injunction that women cover their heads (1 Corinthians 11:3–10): “therefore ought the woman to have a power upon her head, that is, a coverture in sign of subjection.” For Knox, the meaning of these verses is clear: “Of which words it is plain that the Apostle meaneth that woman in her greatest perfection should have known [should be aware of or understand] that man was lord above her, and therefore that she should never have pretended any kind of superiority above him, no more than do the angels above God, the creator, or above Jesus Christ, their head.”

In Knox’s view, the order of Creation ought to be enough to prove his point: “such as altogether be not blinded plainly see that God by His sentence hath dejected [rejected] all women from empire and dominion above man.” But Knox realizes that Genesis 1, a “first” Creation story that specifies the simultaneous creation of man and woman, might be seized upon to discredit his argument from the order of Creation, and so he returns to Genesis 3, taking time to examine in detail verse 16, “the irrevocable sentence of God” punishing Eve for her “fall and rebellion” both with pain in childbirth and man’s dominion over her. No “art, nobility, policy, nor law made by man” has been able to remove the agony of childbirth, even though ignorance, ambition, and tyranny have led to women being “lifted up to be heads over realms and to rule above men at their pleasure and appetites.” Knox promises vengeance for both the “promoters” and the “persons promoted” unless they speedily repent. And although nothing can be “more manifest” than God’s

purpose, articulated in Genesis 3:16, Knox nevertheless adds his own gloss to the verse, prefacing his interpretation by labeling it as what "God should say," that is, what God meant. Admitting that "the most part of men" interpret these verses to refer specifically to the subjection of wives to their husbands, Knox replies to this objection by claiming the "Holy Ghost giveth to us another interpretation of this place, taking from all women all kind of superiority, authority, and power over man."

To support his interpretation of Genesis 3:16, Knox turns once more to the epistles, here citing 1 Timothy 2:11–12 and 1 Corinthians 14:34–35. In the letter to Timothy, Paul states clearly that women must "learn in silence with all subjection" and forbids them ("excepting none") from teaching and from "usurp[ing] authority" over men. In his letter to the Corinthians, Paul advises that women should "keep silence" in churches—they are "commanded to be under obedience" by the law. According to Knox, these instructions represent "the immutable decree of God" and are further evidence of the need to "repress the inordinate pride of women" and to "correct the foolishness of those that have studied to exalt women in authority above men, against God and against His sentence pronounced." The apostle specifically "taketh power from all women to speak in the assembly"; by extension, "he permitteth no woman to rule above man."

Anything more than this scriptural evidence is, for Knox, "superfluous," but he acknowledges that the "multitude" may not be so easily convinced; "the world is almost now come to that blindness that whatsoever pleaseth not the princes and the multitude . . . is rejected as doctrine newly forged and is condemned for heresy." Thus Knox turns to "some ancient writers in this same matter" so that those who are not "altogether . . . blinded by the devil" will see that his argument presents "no new interpretation of God's Scripture" but, instead, represents "the uniform consent of the most part of godly writers since the time of the Apostles." Those "godly" authorities include, in the order they are introduced by Knox, Tertullian, Origen, Augustine, Ambrose, Chrysostom, and Basilus the Great, each one contributing his support of Knox's interpretation of God's ordinances.¹¹ This section of the *Blast* is lengthy, and although "innumerable more testimonies of all sorts of writers may be adduced for the same purpose," Knox contents himself with the support of his scriptural interpretation offered by these references, judging their authority sufficient "to stop the mouth of such as accuse and condemn all doctrine as heretical which displeaseth them in any point."

For the third part of his *Blast*, that the "empire of women" subverts order and justice, Knox says he needs only "few words."¹² Here, too,

although he introduces a third point, Knox is not really adding a new argument but reinforcing the one he has already made. God has given men “two other mirrors” in which to see “the order which He hath appointed and established in nature”: “the one is the natural body of man, the other is the politic or civil body of that commonwealth in which God by His own word hath appointed an order.” The analogy of the “natural body” of man is a familiar one. The head occupies the “uppermost place” in the human body, and from it “life and motion flow to the rest of the members,” each one of which has its own “place and office appointed.” A body with no head “eminent above the rest” is monstrous and “could not long endure”; “no less monstrous is the body of that commonwealth where a woman beareth empire,” for such a body has either no “lawful head” or else “an idol exalted in the place of the true head.”

This simple and familiar analogy, easily and quickly explicated, launches Knox into a lengthy digression; forgetting his claim that he could deal with the third part of his argument in a few words, he undertakes an extended attack on both the English, “for they must have my sovereign lady and mistress,” and the Scots, who have also consumed “the enchantment and venom of Circe.” In Knox’s view, the men who have promoted and supported these women are worse than animals, for “nature hath in all beasts printed a certain mark of dominion in the male and a certain subjection in the female, which they keep inviolate.” Men in England and Scotland, on the other hand, are “inferior to brute beasts” because “they do to women which no male among the common sort of beasts can be proved to do to their female, that is, they reverence them and quake at their presence, they obey their commandments, and that against God.”

Recalling himself from his digression, which has come from the “anguish of his heart,” Knox moves on from the “first glass,” the “natural” human body, to the “second glass” set before the eyes of man, the “laws, statutes, rites, and ceremonies” that comprise the civil body of “the commonwealth.” Although he had used Roman law as part of his argument from nature, here, in support of his argument about civil law, Knox turns to the Bible, citing Deuteronomy 17:14–15, where it is specified that a king is to be chosen from among the “brethren.” From this text, Knox asserts “here expressedly is a man appointed to be chosen king, and a man native among [them], by which precept is all woman and all stranger secluded.” This argument is reinforced by Deuteronomy 17:18–20, when God tells Moses that His law about kingship must never be forgotten: “When he [a king] shall sit in the throne or seat of his

kingdom," he should remind himself of God's law and "keep all the words of this law. . . ." Before concluding this part of his argument, Knox takes great care to demonstrate that Deuteronomy applies to *all* men: divine law is immutable, as binding for sixteenth-century Englishmen as it was for Old Testament Jews. The argument Knox constructs is somewhat circular: justice gives every person "his own right"; God denies woman the right to rule; for a woman to "reign above a man" is not her right and is, therefore, unjust.

Having shown that "the authority of women repugneth [is contrary] to justice," Knox proceeds to argue that "nature doth confess that repugnancy to God's will is injustice." To illustrate this point, Knox alludes to two Old Testament queens, Jezebel (1 and 2 Kings) and Athalia (2 Kings 11 and 2 Chronicles 22–23).¹³ He does no more than refer to them, evidently assuming that their wicked lives and deserved deaths would be sufficiently familiar to his readers. But, since he has identified Mary Tudor with Jezebel throughout the *Blast*, the terms with which he discusses the fate of the queen of Israel are chilling: "Jezebel may for a time sleep quietly in the bed of her fornication and whoredom, she may teach and deceive for a season, but neither shall she preserve herself, [nor] yet her adulterous children, from great affliction and from the sword of God's vengeance, which shall shortly apprehend such works of iniquity."

Once he has completed his arguments against the "monstriferous authority and empire of women," Knox turns, in the last part of the *Blast*, to answering the arguments (the "objections") offered by "carnal and worldly men" as support for the "tyranny" and "unjust empire" of women.¹⁴ Knox lists four arguments offered by his opponents in defense of women's rule: first, the Old Testament examples of Deborah and Huldah; second, the laws cited by Moses in defense of the daughters of Zelophehad; third, the consent of those who have accepted the rule of women; and fourth, the "long" custom that has "received the regiment of women, their valiant acts and prosperity, together with some papistical laws which have confirmed the same."

To the first objection, the examples of Deborah (Judges 4–5) and Huldah (2 Kings 22 and 2 Chronicles 34), Knox replies with a point he has raised before, namely that "particular examples do establish no common law."¹⁵ No one knows why God "took the spirit of wisdom and force from all men of those ages" or why He "did so mightily assist women against nature and against His ordinary course." Knox readily admits that "with these women" God worked "potently and miraculously," extending to them "most singular grace and privilege." But,

Knox asserts, no general law can be made from particular examples: “of [such] examples . . . we may establish no law; . . . we are always bound to the law written and to the commandment expressed in the same.” God, in His “inscrutable wisdom,” is free to “dispense” with His laws, but “the same power is not permitted to man, whom He hath made subject to His law.”

Before moving on, Knox “descend[s] somewhat deeper into the matter” in order to “repress the raging of woman’s madness.” In contrast to Deborah and Huldah, Knox identifies a “contrary spirit in all these most wicked women that this day be exalted . . . to this tyrannous authority.” In the “godly matrons” of the Old Testament a “spirit of mercy, truth, justice, and humility did reign.” But in the “mischievous Marys” of his own day, by contrast, he finds only “cruelty, falsehood, pride, covetousness, deceit, and oppression,” the spirit of Jezebel and Athalia rather than of Deborah and Huldah. Those who defend the current “sovereign mistresses” claim that they are like Deborah in “godliness and pity” and that “the same successes” have followed their rule “which did follow the extraordinary regiment of that godly matron.” Here Knox introduces a critical point: in contrast to Mary Tudor, Marie of Guise, and Mary Stuart, neither Deborah nor any other “godly woman” claimed her authority by reason of birth and blood, or by right of inheritance.

Further, Knox argues that Deborah and Huldah were prophets rather than rulers, that they wielded the “spiritual sword”—and that by the “word of God”—rather than “usurping” any “temporal regiment or authority.” And besides, he insists, there was “no lawful magistrate” in Israel at these moments of “great affliction.” As he makes very clear, his fear of the usurped power of the “mischievous Marys” results, at least in part, from the fact that they have “given and betrayed” their realms into the “hands of strangers.” At the time Knox was writing, the Scottish Mary was in France, where she had been sent in 1547 following her betrothal to Francis; she was married to the heir to the French throne in 1558, the year Knox’s *Blast* was published. Although the English Mary remained in her own country, she had married Philip II of Spain in 1554, and Knox was not alone in fearing that the English queen would turn her sovereign powers—and her kingdom—over to the Spanish king. Even worse than marrying “strangers,” these “mischievous Marys” might both give birth to “foreign” heirs who would then claim their mothers’ thrones; what sons or kinsmen, Knox asks pointedly, did Deborah leave to act as “ruler and judge in Israel after her?”

Having thus answered to his satisfaction the objection that Deborah and Huldah offered biblical precedent for female rulers, Knox moves

next to discuss the example offered by the daughters of Zelophehad (Numbers 27:1–11). In the Old Testament story, the daughters of Zelophehad appealed to Moses after the death of their father. Zelophehad left no sons; why, his daughters ask, should the name of their father be lost? They ask that their father's possessions be left to them. Moses takes this problem to God who deems that when a man leaves no male heir, the inheritance should pass to his daughters. In responding to this precedent, Knox concedes that it is not only lawful that women have their inheritance, but that "justice and equity require that so they do." God, after all, has been clear on this point. But Knox adds "what woman would not gladly hear": that "to bear rule or authority over man can never be right nor inheritance to woman, for that can never be just inheritance to any person which God by His word hath plainly denied unto them." Authority—and, by extension, office—are not possessions that can be inherited: "The question is not [whether] women may . . . succeed to possession, substance, patrimony, or inheritance, such as fathers may leave to their children, for that I willingly grant. But the question is [whether] women may succeed their fathers in office, and chiefly to that office, the executor whereof doth occupy the place and throne of God." To this question, Knox's answer is unequivocal: "And that I absolutely deny, and fear not to say, that to place a woman in authority above a realm is to pollute and profane the royal seat, the throne of justice, which ought to be the throne of God, and that to maintain them in the same is nothing else but continually to rebel against God."

Before quitting this point, Knox is compelled to add "one thing" more; the daughters of Zelophehad, he notes, were forbidden to marry outside of their tribe (Numbers 36). Again, according to Knox, the "advocates and patrons of the right of our ladies" have failed in their use of this example, because, even if their thrones were to be considered patrimony, neither Mary Tudor nor Mary Stuart married within her own family or household. To the contrary, Knox believes that they have betrayed their fathers' patrimonies:

England, for satisfying of the inordinate appetites of that cruel monster Mary (unworthy, by reason of her bloody tyranny, of the name of woman), betrayed, alas!, to the proud Spaniard; and Scotland, by the rash madness of foolish governors and by the practices of a crafty Dame [Marie of Guise], resigned likewise, under the title of [Mary Stuart's] marriage, into the power of France.

Rather than helping the causes of Mary Tudor and Mary Stuart, then, Knox concludes that the example of the daughters of Zelophehad “fights against them, both damning their authority and fact.”¹⁶

Knox makes short work of the third objection, that consent establishes authority. To this argument Knox replies that nothing makes something lawful that God Himself has expressly condemned. Even if it were “approved of all men by their laws,” the “odious empire of women” over men is still forbidden.

Knox moves next to the “fourth objection” of his opponents, which he had identified as “custom”—that is, that men have by “long custom” accepted the regiment of women and that their rule has been confirmed by “papistical laws.” This is the closest Knox comes to acknowledging that women had, historically, governed kingdoms, but he avoids dealing directly with historical precedents by implying that Catholic law has been responsible for the “monstrous empire” of women. He focuses on the “two vain shifts” that “the subtle wits of carnal men” have used to justify female sovereignty. First, those who support female rulers argue that although women may not “absolutely reign” by themselves because they “may neither sit in judgment, neither pronounce sentence, neither execute any public office,” they are nevertheless able to do “all such things” through their “lieutenants, deputies, and judges substitute.” Second, his opponents argue that a woman “born to rule over any realm” can choose a husband and “to him transfer and give her authority and right.”

To both of these “vain shifts” Knox’s reply is uncompromising. First, “no wholesome water” can ever come from “a corrupt and venomed fountain,” and second, no person can give away what does not “justly” belong to that person. The authority of a woman “is a corrupted fountain, and therefore from her can never spring any lawful officer.” Since she is not born to rule over men, she can’t appoint any man to serve as her representative, including, by extension, a husband. Any men who accept office or authority from a woman are “adulterous and bastard officers before God,” and any woman who reigns above a man has achieved her position “by treason and conspiracy committed against God.” Men who receive authority, honor, or office from her have declared themselves “enemies of God.” And in Knox’s estimation, their punishment is assured: “If any think that because the realm and estates thereof have given their consents to a woman and have established her and her authority that therefore it is lawful and acceptable before God, let the same men remember what I have said before, to wit, that God cannot approve the doing nor consent of any multitude concluding anything against His word and ordinance. . . .”

Drawing his answer to the appeal to custom—Catholic custom—to a close, Knox reveals his radical position.¹⁷ Citing the biblical example of Athalia, he declares that it is the duty of the nobility “to remove from authority all such persons as by usurpation, violence, or tyranny do possess the same,” and that the “same duty” is required of the common people: “First, they ought to remove from honor and authority that monster in nature. . . . Secondly, if any presume to defend that impiety, they ought not to fear first to pronounce and then after to execute against them the sentence of death.” No man ought to fear to “violate the oath of obedience which they have made to such monsters.” Knox supports this radical position by means of a fascinating analogy. Alluding to Deuteronomy 22:5, Knox repeats his assertion that a woman who presumes to rule is a “monster in nature,” adding “so I call a woman clad in the habit of man, yea, a woman against nature reigning above man.” Or, God forbids a woman to wear the clothing of a man; honor and authority are the “habit of a man”; therefore a woman is violating God’s law against wearing male clothing if she reigns “above a man.” From this comparison, Knox issues a final admonition to his readers: if they presume to defend “the monstrous empire of women,” they have lifted their hands against God. In other words, in acting as obedient subjects to an illegitimate ruler, they have become disobedient to God, the supreme ruler. Only by disobeying an illegitimate ruler are they acting in obedience to God.

Admitting that he cannot understand why God Himself has not removed these female tyrants from their “unjust authority” (he returns once more here to the precedent of Athalia), Knox reminds his readers that God nevertheless retains His “power and justice.” Although the “cursed Jezebel of England” and the “pestilent and detestable generation of papists” who support her might have triumphed for the moment, “let her and them consider that they have not prevailed against God.”¹⁸ Knox’s parting admonition is passionate and unequivocal:

I fear not to say that the day of vengeance which shall apprehend that horrible monster, Jezebel of England, and such as maintain her monstrous cruelty is already appointed in the council of the eternal, and I verily believe that it is so nigh that she shall not reign so long in tyranny as hitherto she hath done, when God shall declare Himself to be her enemy, when He shall pour forth contempt upon her according to her cruelty and shall kindle the hearts of such as sometimes did favor her with deadly hatred against her that they may execute His judgments.

In the event, Knox's prediction that Mary would not reign long was proven correct. Mary Tudor's death was near at the very moment Knox proclaimed that "the trumpet hath once blown": the English queen died on 17 November 1558, a matter of a few months after *The First Blast of the Trumpet against the Monstrous Regiment of Women* was published.

If Knox felt any triumph at the death of the woman who had presumed to rule England, it could not have lasted for long, for she was succeeded on the throne by another female ruler, her half sister Elizabeth. And, shortly thereafter, yet another queen joined the ranks of "monstrous" women when Catherine de' Medici became regent in France.¹⁹



What was Knox hoping for when he published his *Blast*? Or, more correctly, *who* was he hoping for when he blasted female rulers? When he wrote that female rulers should be removed from their thrones, who did he see replacing them? These questions are not purely rhetorical, given Knox's advocacy of active disobedience to, or even rebellion against, secular authority, but, unlike many of his contemporaries, he does not act as a partisan for any particular claimant to the Scottish or English thrones.²⁰

In 1558, as we have seen, the Scottish queen was in France, married to the dauphin. If Mary Stuart were deposed as queen regnant, and if her mother were removed as queen regent, who would have replaced them? From Knox's point of view, this is a vexed question. Mary's son, James, would not be born until 1566, and until then, the Scottish succession was very unclear. The most obvious candidates in 1558 were James Hamilton, Matthew Stewart, and Henry Stuart, all three, like Mary Stuart herself, descendants of King James II of Scotland.

As queen, Mary Stuart claimed her title directly from James II's son, James III, through *his* son, James IV, and through *his* son, her father James V. The Hamilton claim came not from this male line of descent but from James II's daughter, Mary. Mary, sister of James III, was married to James, lord Hamilton. Her son, James Hamilton, was the first earl of Arran, from whom James Hamilton, second earl of Arran, inherited both his title and his claim to the throne. The second earl of Arran had been made regent of Scotland for Mary Stuart immediately following James V's death, but he had been discredited and replaced by Marie of Guise, the queen's mother, in 1554. Arran was an unlikely prospect for king if Mary Stuart were to be replaced on the throne. About Hamilton Antonia Fraser writes, "the man with the hereditary right to this

important office at this critical juncture in Scottish history . . . was singularly unfitted to hold it."²¹

If the second earl were set aside, the Lennox Stewarts could next lay claim to the succession. Their claims also originated with Mary, sister of James III: in addition to her son by Hamilton, Mary had a daughter as well, Elizabeth Hamilton. Elizabeth married Matthew Stewart, second earl of Lennox. Her grandson Matthew Stewart, the fourth earl of Lennox, married Margaret Douglas, daughter of Margaret Tudor and her second husband, Archibald, earl of Angus. Their son was Henry Stuart, lord Darnley, born in 1546.

What is notable about the Hamilton and Lennox Stewart claims is that they both come through the female line—from Mary, daughter of James II. Knox's analysis of the claims of the daughters of Zelophehad suggest that both Arran and the Lennox Stewarts could justly claim their "inheritance" through the female line, but that Knox would not have agreed that this "inheritance" included a claim to the Scottish throne. And although Arran had once been a supporter of the reformed religion, he had returned to the Catholic faith in 1543. Nor would the claimants from the Lennox Stewart line have been any more acceptable to Knox on religious grounds since they, too, were Catholic.²²

More promising in some respects, more problematic in others, was James Stewart, earl of Moray. Moray was Mary Stuart's half brother, the illegitimate son of King James V and Margaret Erskine Douglas, wife of Robert Douglas. James Stewart had led the reform movement in Scotland while Knox was in exile in Geneva and had led the Protestant lords in their opposition to the regent Marie of Guise. His opposition had, in fact, led to rumors that he was aiming at the crown for himself and that Knox had conspired with him in the plot to overthrow Mary.²³ But Knox himself never makes explicit any desire to replace Mary on the throne with Stewart. Meanwhile, Stewart supported Mary when she returned to Scotland to assume the throne, and she made him earl of Moray in 1562.²⁴

And whatever Knox's hopes for the Scottish succession, if Mary Stuart were to be deposed, he faced an equally complicated and difficult situation in England in 1558: all of the immediate heirs to the throne were female. The most obvious of these, Mary Tudor's half sister Elizabeth, was to become queen just months after Knox's *Blast* was published, though her succession was not without problem or opposition. Like her sister, Elizabeth had been declared illegitimate by her father, and although she had been restored to the succession by Henry VIII before his death, there were those who continued to regard her as a bastard.

Her religious preferences were also unclear, and she was viewed with suspicion by Catholics and Protestants alike.

After Elizabeth Tudor, the line of succession extended to her cousins. In his third Succession Act, Henry VIII had set aside the claims of the descendants of his elder sister, Margaret Tudor, in favor of those of his younger, Mary, who had married Charles Brandon, duke of Suffolk. Mary Tudor's daughter, Frances Brandon, married Henry Grey, by whom she had three daughters. Frances Brandon's own claims to the throne had been passed over by Edward VI's Device for Succession in favor of her daughters. Jane, the oldest of these three sisters, had already been executed by the time Knox wrote, but her sisters Catherine and Mary were both alive, and Catherine Grey's claim to the throne was believed by many to be a strong one.²⁵ Still, there were problems; although Elizabeth's religious preferences were unclear when Knox published his *Blast* in 1558, Catherine Grey's were not—throughout Mary Tudor's reign, she remained a Catholic.²⁶

Even worse, at least from Knox's point of view, was the English succession if the claim of Henry VIII's elder sister were *not* put aside, for Henry's sister Margaret had married James IV of Scotland, and the surviving direct heir through this line was none other than Mary Stuart, queen of Scotland. Two further potential claimants to the English throne could also trace their claims through Henry VIII's elder sister. Following the death of James IV, Margaret Tudor had married Archibald, sixth earl of Angus. Margaret Douglas was Margaret Tudor's child by that second marriage, and Henry Stuart, lord Darnley, was her grandson; but both Margaret Douglas and her son were, as we have already noted, Catholics. Their claim also suffered from questions of legitimacy, since Archibald Douglas, earl of Angus, had divorced Margaret Tudor, claiming a precontract (their daughter Margaret Douglas was regarded as a bastard in Scotland).²⁷

Given the lack of promising male candidates who might claim the crowns of Scotland and England—and considering the surplus of female claimants—it is perhaps more clear why Knox was strangely silent about who might succeed the “mischievous Marys.”

Some have argued that Knox's real objection to the “monstrous regiment” was the religion, rather than the sex, of the three Catholic Marys against whom he wrote.²⁸ Although Knox does claim that “papistical laws” have been responsible for the custom of female sovereignty, if his sole objection to the three Marys he attacked in his *Blast* was their religious faith, we might well wonder why he bothered blowing his trumpet at all, for that argument had already been made, and made

forcefully. As early as 1554, in fact, Knox himself had published a series of letters that introduced and developed a theory that subjects were justified in resisting, and even overthrowing, their Catholic sovereigns.²⁹ And late in that same year, Thomas Becon, one-time chaplain to Archbishop Thomas Cranmer, published *An Humble Supplication unto God for the Restoring of His Holy Word unto the Church of England*.³⁰ The Protestant Becon, like Knox, was strongly opposed to the rule of Mary Tudor, whom he attacked in his *Supplication* from the safety of exile in Strasbourg. His objection to the queen was very clear. Rather than attacking her because she was a woman, he attacked her because she was a Catholic.

Becon does acknowledge Mary's sex as something to be lamented. He begins his *Supplication* by contrasting the past, when England had "a man to reign over it," to the present, when God has "set to rule" over the country "a woman, whom nature hath formed to be in subjection unto man, and whom Thou by Thine Holy Apostle [Paul] commendest to keep silence and not to speak in the congregation." And Becon does refer to the biblical precedent of wicked queens: "And verily, though we find that women sometimes bear rule among thy people, yet do we read that such as ruled and were queens were for the most part wicked, ungodly, superstitious, and given to idolatry and to all filthy abomination, as we may see in the histories of Queen Jezebel, Queen Athalia, . . . and such like." But Becon moves beyond Mary's sex to his principal objection, her Catholicism. She has been made queen, he writes, as a warning or a punishment: "to take away the empire from a man and to give it unto a woman seemeth to be an evident token of Thine anger toward us Englishmen."³¹ God has directed his anger at England because, in returning to the old Catholic faith, the country has turned away from the true Christian faith.

Rather than concentrating on Mary alone, Becon turns his attention to the lamentable state of the country, where "true religion is banished, and popish superstition hath prevailed." The body of Becon's *Supplication* contrasts Protestantism and Catholicism, noting all the changes in English religious practice through a series of paralleled comparisons that begin "heretofore we were taught that" and then move on to "but now."³² Becon then turns to a long series of comparisons introduced by "as in the days of the wicked queen Jezebel," but his interest is in the state of the country rather than in the sex of its queen.³³ His appeal, through pleas and prayers addressed directly to God, is for the return of the true religion to the country.³⁴ Rather than attack Mary as Jezebel, Becon instead focuses here on the Catholic church: let "stinking

Babylon fall down," he concludes, and "let the new and heavenly Jerusalem be built up again," her citizens delivered "out of captivity."³⁵

This brief summary of the argument of the *Supplication* suggests how different it is from Knox's *Blast*. Unlike Becon, who laments England's change in religion, Knox focuses on the person of the rulers against whom he directs his blast. Both reformers attack Mary Tudor, but Becon targets her as a Catholic who is queen, while Knox attacks her as a Catholic *and* as a queen. To further clarify Knox's objections to the *femaleness* of female rulers, we can compare it to yet another work that preceded his 1558 *First Blast*, this one the product of John Ponet who was, like Becon, a Protestant exile in Strasbourg.

Ponet's *A Short Treatise of Politic Power and of the True Obedience Which Subjects Owe to Kings*, published in 1556, also takes aim at Mary Tudor. But rather than arguing against the queen because she is a woman or because she is a Catholic, the former bishop of Winchester takes another tack, objecting to the English queen because she is a tyrant.³⁶ In beginning his treatise, Ponet addresses his work to the "gentle reader" who has the "will to foresee," the "heart to perceive," and the "judgment to discern"; his *Short Treatise* is intended to serve as "a plentiful benefit, necessary admonition, and faithful instruction."³⁷ He proceeds historically: he traces the origins and history of political power, analyzes the source of political authority, and discusses what constitutes its "right use" and its attendant responsibilities.

Because the reason of man has become "wonderfully corrupt" after the Fall, man is "not able by himself to rule himself, but must have a more excellent governor." God has taken upon Himself "the order and government of man, His chief creature, and prescribed him a rule, how he should behave himself, what he should do, and what he may not do." This, Ponet writes, is "the rule of nature." By means of His "ordinance and law," God institutes political power and gives authority to men to make further laws because He "would have men to live quietly with man, that all might serve Him quietly in holiness and righteousness all the days of their lives."³⁸ Ponet takes the time to survey the various types of government, including monarchies, aristocracies, and democracies, before moving on to discuss at length "whether kings, princes, and other politic governors be subject to God's laws and the positive laws of their countries." Ponet concludes that no king or governor "is exempted from the laws . . . and power of God," and no king or governor can "break or dispense with the positive laws" of the state. From this conclusion, he proceeds to examine "in what things and how far subjects are bounden to obey their princes and governors."³⁹

After this measured analysis of government and governors, Ponet turns to Mary Tudor. He acknowledges that Mary is entitled to her position; she has "the crown by inheritance," he writes. However, she does not have the crown of England unconditionally. Rather, she has it "with an oath, law, and condition to keep and maintain it, not to depart with [divide] it or diminish it." But Mary *has* "diminished" the crown; he castigates her for having turned Calais over to the French. True governors, as Ponet argues, "may . . . not dispose of the crown or realm as it pleaseth them. They have the crown to minister justice, but the realm, being a body of free men and not of bondmen, he nor she cannot give or sell them as slaves and bondmen." If a king diminishes the kingdom, Ponet concludes, "he ought to be deposed."⁴⁰ Because Mary has "diminished" her kingdom, she rightly deserves to be removed from the English throne. But Mary has not only diminished her realm, she has also given it away; her religion is a betrayal of her country, for by returning to the faith of Rome, she has returned free men to a state of enslavement, reintroducing the "devilish power of the Romish Antichrist," with his "miserable Mass" and "all popish slavery." She has thus betrayed her "natural country."⁴¹

Ultimately Ponet's position is as uncompromising as Knox's. He asks "whether it be lawful to depose an evil governor and kill a tyrant?" In answering this question, he responds that, just as "there is no better nor happier commonwealth nor no greater blessing of God" than a good, just, and godly king, "so is there none worse nor none more miserable, nor greater plague of God than where one ruleth that is evil, unjust, and ungodly." An "evil governor" subverts law and order, and "spoileth the people of their goods, either by open violence . . . or promising and never paying." "To be short," according to Ponet,

There is no doing, no gesture, no behavior, no place can perceive or defend innocency against such a governor's cruelty, but as a hunter maketh wild beasts his prey, and useth toils, nets, snares, traps, dogs, ferrets, mining and digging the ground, guns, bows, spears, and all other instruments, engines, devices, subtleties, and means whereby he may come by his prey, so doth a wicked governor make the people his game and prey, and useth all kinds of subtleties, deceits, crafts, policies, force, violence, cruelty, and such like devilish ways to spoil and destroy the people that he committed to his charge. . . .

It is not only lawful to depose such a "tyrant," Ponet argues, it is "lawful to kill such a monster and cruel beast covered with the shape of a man."⁴²

For support, Ponet turns to the “plain proof” offered by “manifold and continual examples that have been from time to time of the deposing of kings and killing of tyrants.” Such examples “most certainly confirm it to be most true, just, and consonant to God’s judgment.” The Old Testament tells the stories of Saul and Ahab as well as of Jezebel and Athalia, Roman history adds the examples of Caligula and Nero, and English history provides precedents in Edward II and Richard II. Nor do such examples reflect a “private law” limited to “a few or certain people”; these are proofs of a universal law, a law that is “grafted in the hearts of men, not made by man but ordained of God, which we have not learned, received, or read, but have taken, sucked, and drawn it out of nature, whereunto we are not taught but made, not instructed but seasoned, and . . . man’s conscience bearing witness of it.”⁴³ Kings, princes, and governors are “heads of a politic body,” but they are not the “whole body”; though they are the “chief members,” they are “but members.” It is natural “to cut away an incurable member which, being suffered, would destroy the whole body.”

Ponet’s objections to Mary—and his argument that she should not only be deposed but deprived of life—derive from her actions as queen. Her tyranny results from her refusal to obey the law, not from her sex. Ponet had been a supporter of Jane Grey, and in his *Short Treatise* he suggests that, in contrast to Mary Tudor, she would have been a good, just, and godly governor.⁴⁴ Jane’s femaleness did not disqualify her from exercising legitimate “politic power.” Knox, by contrast, argues in his *Blast* that her sex precludes any queen from exercising authority legitimately: because she is a woman, her rule is “monstrous.”



As part of his developing views on active resistance to or rebellion against secular authority, Knox had begun to question the legitimacy of female rulers several years before the *Blast* was published in 1558. As we can see from two letters dated early in 1554, Knox had raised the question with Heinrich Bullinger, leader of the Swiss reform movement, and John Calvin, leader of the Genevan reformers. We can infer something of Knox’s own developing views as we read the responses of his correspondents.

In a letter to Calvin, dated 26 March 1554, Bullinger encloses his “answer given to a certain Scotsman, in reply to some questions concerning the kingdom of Scotland and England.”⁴⁵ Bullinger tells Calvin that Knox wrote to him and posed several questions about royal succession and

about the necessity of obedience. Can the son of a king, “unable by reason of his tender age to conduct the government of the kingdom,” succeed his father “by right of inheritance” and be regarded as “a lawful magistrate?” Is obedience owed to a sovereign “who enforces idolatry and condemns true religion?” Where does a godly man owe allegiance when his king is “an idolatrous sovereign”? And, from our point of view most interesting, can a woman “preside over and rule a kingdom by divine right?” Can she “so transfer the right of sovereignty to her husband?”

In response to this last of Knox’s questions, Bullinger tells Calvin that he acknowledged that the “law of God ordains the woman to be in subjection and not to rule”; nevertheless, the Swiss reformer continues, “. . . if a woman in compliance with, or in obedience to the laws and customs of the realm, is acknowledged as queen and, in maintenance of the hereditary right of government, is married to a husband, or in the meantime holds the reigns of government by means of her councillors, it is a hazardous thing for godly persons to set themselves in opposition to political regulations.”

Responding to Bullinger’s letter on 28 April 1554, John Calvin indicates that he, too, has discussed the question of female sovereignty with Knox.⁴⁶ According to Calvin, Knox had sought him out personally and, at the time of their meeting, had raised the same questions. “He had talked over these matters with me before he came among you,” Calvin tells Bullinger, adding “I had freely exposed to him in familiar conversation my opinion.” In his letter Calvin confirms that his response to Knox’s questions corresponds with those outlined by Bullinger: “The substance of what I expressed orally moreover tallied with what you had written.” Most interesting is Calvin’s opinion about women and rule:

About the government of women I expressed myself thus: Since it is utterly at variance with the legitimate order of nature, it ought to be counted among the judgments with which God visits us . . . because to reproach men for their sluggishness, He raises up women endowed not only with a manly but a heroic spirit. . . . But though a government of this kind seems to me nothing else than a mere abuse, yet I gave it as my solemn opinion, that private persons have no right to do anything but deplore it. For a gynæcocracy or female rule . . . is like a tyranny, and is to be tolerated till God sees fit to overthrow it.⁴⁷

Though Bullinger and Calvin clearly advised caution and acceptance, by 1558 Knox decided he could no longer be cautious or accepting. His

Blast against the “monstrous regiment of women” was one of several attacks on female rule that were published that year. Although the *Blast* appeared anonymously, Knox expanded and republished a letter that he had written in 1556 and addressed to Marie of Guise, regent of Scotland. In his 1558 revision, he admonishes the regent about the relationship of her sex and her power: “I do consider that your power is but borrowed, extraordinary, and unstable, for ye have it by permission of others, and seldom it is that women do long reign with felicity and joy. For as nature hath denied to them a constant spirit of good government, so hath God pronounced that they are never given to reign over men, but in His wrath and indignation.” According to Knox, God had warned the regent about her abuse of authority already, in a manner particularly aimed at her as wife and mother. “Consider, Madam, that God hath begun very sharply with you, taking from you, as it were together, two children and a husband,” he wrote; “in this if ye espy not the anger and hot displeasure of God . . . ye are more obstinate then I would wish you to be.”⁴⁸

Knox’s disdain for Marie of Guise as a woman, apparent in this revised letter to the regent, never diminished. In his *History of the Reformation of Religion within the Realm of Scotland*, begun in 1559, he wrote, “a crown [was] put upon her head, as seemly a sight (if men had eyes) as to put a saddle upon the back of an unruly cow.” In Knox’s judgment about the regent, we can infer something about his opinion of women in general. The regent differed from all women not in kind but in degree: “in very deed, in deep dissimulation, she passed the common sort of women.”⁴⁹

Before drawing this chapter to an end, I will briefly note two further works on female sovereignty that were also published in 1558. To Knox’s attacks on the three “mischievous Marys,” his fellow Protestant exiles joined their voices. Anthony Gilby’s *An Admonition to England and Scotland to Call Them to Repentance* begins with a reference to the various earlier tracts we have just examined; Gilby acknowledges that some have attacked the “regiment of women,” some have argued against “unlawful obedience,” and some have decried “the admitting of strangers” as kings. While acknowledging that these arguments have already been made, Gilby nevertheless feels compelled by duty to issue yet another admonition; his work, like Becon’s before him, focuses on Mary’s religion.⁵⁰ Christopher Goodman’s *How Superior Powers Ought to Be Obeyed of Their Subjects, and Wherein They May Lawfully by God’s Word Be Disobeyed and Resisted*, on the other hand, reiterates John Ponet’s argument against tyranny.⁵¹ Like Ponet, Goodman argues that men owe obedience to God, not to any man, and that all political power comes from God. He

indicates that the scriptures have left lessons for “all men”—nobles, justices, mayors, sheriffs, bailiffs, constables, jailers, “and all such inferior officers” as well as for the common people—that “to obey man in any thing against God is unlawful and plain disobedience.”⁵² In seizing authority, Mary has defied scripture and become a tyrant.



Just months after this deluge of political polemic poured into England from the continent, Mary Tudor died. Her death removed a Catholic “tyrant” from the throne and placed upon it a sovereign who soon made it clear she was not a Catholic. But nothing could change the fact that Elizabeth was a woman, and in short order those who wished to support her rushed their own “blasts” into print. The number of writers who entered the debate indicates the power and influence of Knox’s *Blast*; in defending Elizabeth’s rule, these writers also make very clear how Knox’s argument had been received. However much twenty-first-century defenders might wish to argue the point, Knox’s contemporaries clearly regarded *The First Blast of the Trumpet against the Monstrous Regiment of Women* not as an attack on religion or tyranny but as an attack on *women’s* ability to rule.

CHAPTER TWO

The Gynecocracy Debate

If nature hath given it them by birth, how dare we pull it from them by violence? If God have called them to it, either to save or to spill, why should we repine at that which is God's will and order? Are we . . . so bold to alter that [which] He purpose should come of it? If He able women, shall we unable them? If He meant not that they should minister, He could have provided other. Therefore the safest way is to let Him do His will. . . . It is a plain argument that for some secret purpose He mindeth the female should reign and govern.

—John Aylmer, *An Harbor for Faithful and True Subjects against the Late Blown Blast concerning the Government of Women*¹

The publication of *The First Blast of the Trumpet against the Monstrous Regiment of Women* did not go unanswered; rather quickly after Elizabeth's succession to the throne of England, a number of responses were rushed into print. Before moving on to discuss these entries into what became a virulent pamphlet war, it is important to note that Knox's *Blast* not only sparked the gynecocracy debate, but it also defined its terms and set its limits. The argument Knox constructed is essentially a conservative one. It is, in essence, a Scholastic argument: Knox cites and interprets scripture, appeals to the authority of Aristotle and the church fathers, draws examples from biblical history, and demonstrates by means of analogy. The works that followed his *Blast* are, in most ways, responses to Knox's evidence; in their replies to Knox and his "blast," the new queen's supporters chose to counter, point by point, the specific arguments he had presented.

The first to appear in print was John Aylmer's *An Harbor for Faithful and True Subjects against the Late Blown Blast concerning the Government of Women*, published in 1559.² The one-time tutor to Jane Grey, Aylmer had been implicated in the 1554 Leicestershire rebellion against Mary Tudor; as a result, he had become, like Knox, an exile, spending the years until Elizabeth's accession in Strasbourg and Zurich. His *Harbor for Faithful and True Subjects* was written on the continent after Mary Tudor's death and just before his return to England. Once back in England, the grateful former exile published his work, dedicating it to two of the new queen's loyal supporters, Robert Dudley, earl of Leicester, and Francis Russell, earl of Bedford. For his efforts, Aylmer was pardoned for his involvement in the rebellion (he had been indicted 12 September 1554); in 1562 he became archdeacon of Lincoln, and in 1577, bishop of London.

The tone of Aylmer's response to Knox is suggested by his title: to counter the effects of a "blast," he offers his readers a safe "harbor." Aylmer focuses on healing, beginning with something of a medical metaphor. A "disturbed and maimed" commonwealth is, he writes, like a "sick or feeble" body. So is England, which has been "not a little maimed" and "half made a cripple." The source of this injury is "a little book strangely written by a stranger" that has "not a little wounded the conscience" of many and "almost cracked the duty of true obedience." In laying out "the untruth of the argument," the "weakness of the proofs," and the "absurdity of the whole," Aylmer undertakes a cure: "to defend the cause" but not "to deface the man."³

The tone is also carefully calculated; to counter Knox's heat and anger, Aylmer is cool and calm. Like Knox, Aylmer has suffered for his religious faith, but he has emerged from his experience with very different attitudes. He attributes to his fellow exile not "malice" but "zeal," and relates Knox's attitudes to his personal suffering, which Aylmer compares to the "torments of martyrs," the "imprisonment of innocents," and the "racking of [the] guiltless." Knox, he writes, "could not but mislike that regiment from whence such fruits did spring. Only in this he was not to be excused (unless he allege ignorance) that he swerved from . . . the particular question to the general, as though all the government of the whole sex were against nature, reason, right, and law. . . ." But England's terrible situation was not the fault of "the sex" of Queen Mary but to "the fault of the person"; if Knox had argued against her "particular person," he "could have said nothing too much, nor in such wise as could have offended any indifferent man."⁴ But Knox had gone too far. By arguing against the right of a woman to rule,

Knox had presumed to question nature and God. In the passage that was quoted at the outset of this chapter, Aylmer challenges Knox on this point:

If nature hath given it [rule] them [women] by birth, how dare we pull it from them by violence? If God have called them to it, either to save or to spill [either to preserve or to destroy], why should we repine at that which is God's will and order? Are we . . . so bold to alter that [which] He purpose [intends] should come of it? If He able women, shall we unable them? If He meant not that they should minister, He could have provided other. Therefore the safest way is to let Him do His will. . . . It is a plain argument that for some secret purpose He mindeth [has it in mind, or intends] the female should reign and govern.

In undertaking his refutation of the *Blast*, Aylmer proceeds by reducing Knox's arguments to a series of syllogisms. Whatever is against nature is not tolerable; the government of a woman is against nature and, therefore, is not tolerable. Whatever is forbidden by scripture is not lawful; the rule of a woman is forbidden by scripture and, therefore, is not lawful. If a woman may not speak in church, she cannot rule; a woman may not speak in church and, therefore, she may not rule. Whatever civil law forbids is not lawful; the rule of a woman is forbidden by civil law and is, therefore, not lawful. More "inconvenience" results from the rule of a woman than from the rule of a man; therefore the rule of a woman is "not to be borne." Having thus reduced Knox's *Blast* to these syllogisms, Aylmer responds to each of the arguments as he has constructed them.

To Knox's assertion that the rule of a woman is against nature, Aylmer presents an extended, twofold response.⁵ In the first place, while Knox had argued that women's inferiority was self-evident, apparent through simple observation, Aylmer suggests that simple observation actually reveals something quite different. He observes that women have often ruled "in chieftest empires and monarchies":

Now if this hath so been ingrafted in the nature of all men that no woman should govern but all women should be subjects, then were there no more to be said, the matter were ended. But because we see by many examples . . . [that] women have reigned, and those not a few, and as it was thought not against nature, therefore it cannot be said that by a general disposition of nature it hath been and is denied them to rule.

Thus if what is “natural” is what regularly occurs in nature, Knox’s argument that woman’s rule is against nature is false. For a woman to rule is not contrary to nature as it is “in a stone to move upward, or in the fire not to consume,” for “a great number of histories” prove “that women in all ages and all countries have governed.”⁶

Aylmer also presents a view of woman and her nature that is quite different from the one found in Knox’s *Blast*: “in a woman,” Aylmer writes, “is wit, understanding, . . . the same shape, the same language, and sometimes more gifts” than in man.⁷ In the second part of his response to the first of Knox’s arguments, Aylmer asserts that a woman may well have abilities equal to—or even greater than—a man. She may be “wiser, better learned, [more discreet], and [more] constant” than a number of men—just as she may be “of the worst sort.” It is, perhaps, instructive to note that Aylmer’s list of women’s abilities is much shorter than his list of women’s weaknesses: women can be “fond, foolish, wanton, flibbertigibbets [chatterers or gossips], tattlers, triflers, wavering, witless, without counsel, feeble, careless, rash, proud, dainty [delicate], nice [foolish], talebearers, eavesdroppers, tumult-raisers, evil-tongued, worse-minded, and in every wise doltified with the dregs of the devil’s dunghill.”⁸

Despite this rather exhaustive catalogue of women’s failings, Aylmer nevertheless concludes that woman’s “nature”—that is, her sex alone—does not make her unfit. And even if her sex were to be regarded as a weakness or a deficiency, Aylmer demonstrates that men are not precluded from rule because of similar weaknesses or deficiencies. His arguments here reflect the theory of the king’s “two bodies,” articulated clearly and succinctly by the eminent Elizabethan lawyer Edmund Plowden:

. . . the king has in him two bodies, viz., a body natural, and a body politic. His body natural . . . is a body mortal, subject to all infirmities that come by nature of accident, to the imbecility of infancy or old age, and to the like defects that happen to the natural bodies of other people. But his body politic is a body that cannot be seen or handled, consisting of policy and government, and constituted for the direction of the people, and the management of the public weal, and this body is utterly void of infancy, and old age, and other natural defects and imbecilities, which the body natural is subject to, and for this cause, what the king does in his body politic, cannot be invalidated or frustrated by any disability in his natural body.⁹

As Aylmer develops his argument, the queen's sex represents, like youth or mental instability, what Plowden would later identify as "infirmities" of "accident" or of "imbecility," though Aylmer never uses these terms. Instead, he recalls Henry VIII and his son and successor, Edward VI. Although Edward, by reason of the "tenderness" of his age, was not "so meet to rule as was his father," he had not been judged unfit. Similarly, according to Aylmer, a drunken man may not be "meet," yet drunkenness doesn't preclude him from ruling, a cruel man may not be "meet," yet cruelty doesn't preclude him from ruling, and an old man may "lack strength" and might not be entirely "fit," yet his age does not preclude him from ruling.¹⁰ In like manner, then, a woman may not be as "meet" to rule as a man, but "it followeth not that she is utterly unmeet."¹¹

Aylmer's all-out assault on what is "natural" is representative of his treatment of the remaining syllogisms. To the arguments that scripture forbids women to speak and to rule, for example, Aylmer responds by indicating that "the scripture meddeth with no civil policy further than to teach obedience." To cite scripture "concerning any kind of regiment" is to misuse the Bible; scripture is thus "pulled into the game . . . by the ears to wrestle whether it will or not." Further, Aylmer notes, Paul's restrictions on women were prompted by the unruliness of women in particular congregations at particular moments in history and were not and should not be applied to women in general.¹²

To the claim that a woman's rule is not lawful, Aylmer responds by referring to the laws of inheritance: "the civil law granteth inheritance to the females, which you would pluck away."¹³ To the claim that a woman's rule results in "inconvenience," Aylmer concedes that inconveniences such as "the loss of . . . ancient possessions" (a reference to Mary Tudor's loss of Calais) may certainly result from a woman's rule—but such "inconveniences" may equally result from the rule of men. Besides, women are also responsible for conveniences. Aylmer reminds his readers here that Catherine of Aragon defeated the Scots during Henry VIII's reign, for example, and he earlier had credited Anne Boleyn for another "convenience," having brought "the light of God's word into England."¹⁴

In a passage that deliberately echoes the *Blast*, Aylmer draws his refutation of Knox's syllogisms to a close:

Thou sees it evidently proved that it standeth well enough with nature and all good order, with justice and equity, with law and reason, with God's and man's ordinance, with custom and antiquity,

that a woman left by her progenitors true heir of a realm, having the consent of her people, the establishment of law, ancient custom, and God's calling to confirm the same, may undoubtedly succeed her ancestors, lawfully reigning in lawful succession, both to inheritance and regiment.

There is no scripture, "truly understood," that stands against her rule. There is no law that debars her from her right. And, "thou seest last of all that the inconveniences that be feared be rather bugs to fear babes than matter to move men."¹⁵

Aylmer's *Harbor* is the most well-known refutation of *The First Blast of the Trumpet against the Monstrous Regiment of Women*, but it is by no means the only defense of women's rule. Just as Knox's resounding *Blast* had been accompanied by several other lesser "blasts" aimed at Mary Tudor, Aylmer's *Harbor* is the first in a series of works that defend Elizabeth Tudor and, by extension, the right of women to rule. But, while it is difficult to see just who Knox might have in mind as replacements if the "mischievous Marys" were deposed, the partisan motives of those who defended female sovereignty are quite clear.¹⁶

One of the first to offer his support of the new queen was John Calvin. Elizabeth had succeeded to the throne in mid-November of 1558; by the end of January, Calvin was writing to her secretary, William Cecil. Calvin's letter begins by noting that the messenger he had sent from Geneva to present his "homage" to "the most serene queen" had not been "kindly received" because, he believes, "she had been offended with me by reason of some writings published in this place." Cecil, too, had evidently rebuffed the reformer's messenger. Calvin's 1559 letter, then, is both a defense—he wishes to distance himself from "the writings" he alludes to, namely Knox's *Blast*—and an assertion of his own position on female sovereignty.¹⁷ In explaining himself, Calvin refers to the same meeting with Knox that he had referred to in his 1554 letter to Bullinger.¹⁸ "John Knox asked of me, in a private conversation, what I thought about the government of women," he writes; "I candidly replied that as it was a deviation from the original and proper order of nature, it was to be ranked, no less than slavery, among the punishments consequent upon the fall of man."

This does not seem a very strong beginning to a defense of Elizabeth's rule, or one calculated to mollify the queen's offense. Nevertheless, Calvin continues in much the same equivocal vein. Although the "deviation" of a woman's rule can be considered a "punishment," like slavery, "there were occasionally women so endowed, that the singular good

qualities which shone forth in them, made it evident that they were raised up by divine authority." Such women are "designed" by God for two reasons: either they are a way of shaming "the inactivity of men," or they are a way for God "the better [to] set forth [H]is own glory."¹⁹ Calvin alludes to Huldah and Deborah, indicating that he had reminded Knox of these two biblical examples. God intends that such women "should be the nursing mothers of the church"; such "singular" women are, of course, "distinguished from females in private life." Like Aylmer, Calvin stresses the necessity of obedience to God's chosen ruler:

I came at length to this conclusion, that since both by custom and public consent and long practice it has been established, that realms and principalities may descend to females by hereditary right, it did not appear to me necessary to move the question, not only because the thing would be invidious, but because in my opinion it would not be lawful to unsettle governments which are ordained by the peculiar providence of God.²⁰

Calvin reminds Cecil that he had earlier sent him a personal message distancing himself from Knox and his book, and that he had done so when he could not be accused of expediency: "Mary was still living, so that I could not be suspected of flattery." Although he suggests that he has never even read the books published by Knox and Goodman ("What the books contain, I cannot tell"), Calvin characterizes the *Blast* as the product of "the thoughtless arrogance of one individual." He is disturbed that "the ravings of others . . . should be charged upon [him]," and he writes to express his dismay at having been "burdened" with false accusations and the "ignominy of a repulse." He concludes by a final assurance of his "reverence" for the queen and hope for better relations in the future: ". . . although I have found you less friendly to me than I had hoped, and though you say nothing about mutual good will for the time to come . . . I am unwilling to draw any unfavorable conclusion."²¹

Yet another defense of women's rule—and response to Knox's *Blast*—was written in 1559. Like Calvin's letter, Richard Bertie's "answers . . . against the book of John Knox" were both personally and politically motivated.²² Bertie was married to Catherine Willoughby Brandon, whose previous marriage had brought her important political connections: following the death of his wife Mary Tudor (Henry VIII's younger sister), Charles Brandon, duke of Suffolk, had married Catherine Willoughby, and following Brandon's death, she, in her turn, had married Richard Bertie.²³ Lady Willoughby was not only a considerable

heiress but she was, as well, guardian for Lady Mary Grey, the third of Frances Brandon's daughters and, therefore, a claimant to the English throne.²⁴ Thus Bertie had every reason—religious, political, personal—for defending a woman's right to rule.

Bertie's "answer" to Knox claims to have been written in some haste. Bertie explains that he had been given a copy of the *Blast* and that his immediate reply had been solicited even as he was preparing to return to England from exile on the continent: "before this bearer desired me to note the weakest—as I thought—places in the author's work, I had sent my books forth [on] the journey I intend, God willing, to follow."²⁵ By this explanation Bertie seems to excuse any flaws or failings in his argument. But, despite his apologetic aside, his work is structurally interesting and offers at least one fascinating defense of women's rule that Aylmer's *Harbor* does not.

Bertie begins his response by identifying the proposition of the *Blast* ("A woman to bear rule . . . is repugnant to nature, contumely to God, and against His will"), and then by identifying the two principal reasons offered in support of this proposition. First, Knox argued that "God, in the order of Creation, spoiled woman of authority." Second, according to Bertie, Knox argued that "nature forbiddeth the blind to lead the seeing, the sick to keep the whole, the foolish to govern the discreet, and therefore in all eyes men have removed women from government."²⁶ To these two arguments Bertie offers very simple responses.

In reply to the first reason Knox offered in support of his proposition, Bertie writes, "To be before in order of Creation doth not import a betterness or a more worthiness, as the earth was created before Adam, and Adam after and of it, and yet not therefore inferior creature to it." This is a point that had long been made by many who had debated the nature of woman and her place in Creation.²⁷ In reply to the second, Bertie concedes that Knox's reason is true, but that the reason "serveth against the author": "For as the discreet ought to govern the indiscreet, when may not a discreet woman govern an indiscreet man or many indiscreet men, for we must behold reason and not the sex. It is not so much against nature as a seeing dog to lead a blind man."²⁸ Having thus identified Knox's proposition and the two principal arguments offered in support, and having provided his "objections" to these arguments, Bertie works through the *Blast* by identifying Knox's support for his arguments and then summarizing them under the heading "Th'author." To each of Knox's points, Bertie replies under the heading "Objection."

Bertie is particularly interesting for his comments about women's legal status. To Knox's claim that the "state of a woman in many cases is

worse than of the man," Bertie replies, "As the state of woman in many cases is worse, so it is by law in many cases better." Knox had claimed women could not adopt a child; Bertie adds, "neither may gelded [impotent or castrated] men adopt, yet they may bear office." He also explains why the law denies women the ability to adopt: "It is denied women lest they should neglect to have issue of their own body." Bertie also tackles Knox's argument that a woman could not make criminal accusations; she can, Bertie asserts, if the injury has been a personal one. Similarly, Knox argues that the law prohibits a man from transferring property to his wife; Bertie replies that such a transfer is forbidden "because the law supposeth them [husband and wife] one person."²⁹

Yet in his analysis of women's legal status, Bertie seems perhaps more intent on demonstrating Knox's misunderstanding of the law than he does in defending women rulers. His objections to Knox's remaining arguments are similar; to each of Knox's claims, Bertie's objection demonstrates the reformer's misuse or misunderstanding of the authorities he cites. "A horrible sentence," Bertie writes at one point, and "every logician knows this kind of argument doth not always conclude necessarily" at another. "This similitude is apt, but not to the author's purpose," he notes, or "This is a great oversight." Bertie can be nothing if not succinct. To Knox's argument that "in brute beasts" there is always "a certain mark of dominion in the male over the female," Bertie replies simply: "This is not true at all."³⁰

Though Bertie's analyses, clarifications, and challenges make for fascinating reading, particularly after we have followed Knox's original arguments in some detail, there is really only one notable addition to the arguments provided by Aylmer, and this is a linguistic one. In his discussion of Mosaic law, Knox had argued that the word "brethren" (Deuteronomy 17:15) specifically excluded women from sovereignty.³¹ Bertie challenges Knox for appealing to Mosaic law; in the first place, Bertie observes that the only law relevant to English succession is English civil law, and he notes that Knox himself did not apply Mosaic law consistently to contemporary English life. But Bertie then addresses himself more specifically to Knox's interpretation of the word "brethren." The word is not always intended or used exclusively, Bertie argues; it is often intended and used *inclusively*. "Let one example of many serve," Bertie suggests: "'Thou shalt not give out thy money to usury to the poor brethren.' Will he [Knox] therefore pronounce that thou mayest do it [to] the poor sisters?" Thus, Bertie concludes, the injunction to choose a sovereign from among the "brethren" does not imply that a sovereign must be male, nor does it restrict sovereignty to men.³²

Although he would never accept fully the implications of an argument like Bertie's, John Knox himself realized that the political situation in 1559 was quite different from that in 1558—women still occupied the thrones of both Scotland and England, but Elizabeth, at least, had proven herself to be a queen sympathetic to the Protestant cause. Knox's absolute condemnation of female rule had thus become problematic. How could he continue to oppose Mary Stuart while offering support to Elizabeth? In a series of letters written in 1559, Knox articulates a new, more moderate position on women's rule, one that he himself had rejected in his 1554 correspondence with Bullinger and Calvin, but one that was implicit in most of the arguments that had been produced to counter the effects of the *Blast*: in general, rule by women was, indeed, unnatural and ungodly, but, in particular cases, God in His inscrutable wisdom favored an exceptional woman and raised her to the throne.³³

Knox first signaled his change of position in a letter to William Cecil dated 10 April 1559.³⁴ In a move to curb Protestant influence in Scotland, the Queen Regent, Marie of Guise, had summoned a number of reforming preachers to appear before her at Stirling on 10 May; Knox's Protestant allies had recalled him from Geneva, and Knox wrote to Cecil seeking permission to travel through England on his way back to Scotland from exile on the continent. His letter represents an effort at conciliation, though he can't begin without first reiterating his original position: "... the miraculous work of God's comforting His afflicted by an infirm vessel I do reverence, and the power of His most potent hand, exalting whom best pleaseth His wisdom, . . . I will obey, albeit that nature and God's most perfect ordinance repugne to [are contrary to] such regiment." Knox writes that he is willing to accept the rule of Elizabeth as an example of God's "miraculous work," but only if the queen herself is first willing to acknowledge "the extraordinary dispensation of God's great mercy" in making a position "lawful unto her, which both nature and God's law" deny to women in general. If the queen will "confess" the uniqueness of her position, then—and only then—will Knox be willing to accept her rule as legitimate: "then shall none in England be more willing to maintain her lawful authority than I shall be." But if she fails to make such a confession, "if . . . she ground (as God forbid) the justness of her title upon consuetude [custom], laws, and ordinance of men, then, as I am assured, that such foolish presumption doeth highly offend God's supreme majesty, so do I greatly fear that her ingratitude shall not long lack punishment."

Such an appeal did not get Knox the safe passage that he had hoped for, nor did it effect his reconciliation with the English queen. Knox

does not seem to understand why his moderated views were still objectionable. Late in June, in another letter to Cecil, Knox is wondering why he is still "so odious to the Queen's Grace and to her council that the mention of [his] name is displeasing to their ears."³⁵ In July he wrote to Cecil once more; he repeats his view that women in general are forbidden to rule, and though he again concedes that there may be singular exceptions, he is still cautious:

If the most part of women be such as willingly we would not they should reign over us, and if the most godly and such as have rare gifts and graces be yet mortal, we ought to take heed, least that we, in establishing one judged godly and profitable to her country, make interest and title to many, by whom not only shall the truth be impugned but also shall the country be brought to bondage and slavery.³⁶

Without waiting for a response from Cecil, Knox decided to address himself directly to the queen. In the letter he sent to Elizabeth, he acknowledges his authorship of the *Blast*: "I cannot deny . . . the writing of a book against the usurped authority and unjust regiment of women."³⁷ And he will not deny its central argument: "neither yet am I minded to retreat or to call back any principal point or proposition of the same, till truth and verity do farther appear." But he does attempt to mollify the queen. If she will acknowledge the uniqueness of her position, he will recognize and obey her authority: "It appertaineth to you, therefore, to ground the justness of your authority not upon that law which from year to year doeth change but upon the eternal providence of Him who, contrary to nature and without your deserving, hath thus exalted your head." But even such an acknowledgment is not sufficient. Elizabeth must not only be willing to admit that she is a "weak instrument," unworthy of her place, but she must, as well, humble herself to earn Knox's support:

If thus in God's presence ye humble yourself . . . so will I with tongue and pen justify your authority and regiment. . . . But if, these premises (as God forbid) neglected, ye shall begin to brag of your birth and to build your authority upon your own law, flatter you who so list, your felicity shall be short. Interpret my rude words in the best part, as written by him who is no enemy to Your Grace.³⁸

This appeal did not lead to the reconciliation Knox sought. Still, undaunted by his failure with the English queen, Knox faced the

Scottish queen two years later, on 4 September 1561. Knox's account of his interview with Mary Stuart appears in his *History of the Reformation in Scotland*.³⁹ "The queen accused him that he had raised a part of her subjects against her mother [Marie of Guise, the Queen Regent] and herself," he writes, and she had also charged him with having "written a book against her just authority (she meant the treatise against the regiment of women) . . . and . . . cause[d] the most learned in Europe to write against it." According to Knox, Mary charged him with being the "cause of great sedition and great slaughter." Knox responded by justifying himself: in his account of the exchange, he tells the queen that he simply taught "the truth of God in sincerity," rebuked idolatry, urged people "to worship God according to His word," and exposed "the vanity of the papistical religion, and the deceit, pride, and tyranny of that Roman Antichrist." He admits his authorship of the *Blast* and defends the arguments he presented there:

. . . touching that book which seemeth so highly to offend Your Majesty, it is most certain that I wrote it and am content that all the learned of the world judge of it. I hear that an Englishman [Aylmer] hath written against it, but I have not read him. If he have sufficiently improved my reasons and established his contrary proposition . . . I shall not be obstinate but shall confess my error and ignorance. But to this hour I have thought, and yet think, myself alone to be more able to sustain the things affirmed in . . . my work than any ten in Europe shall be able to confute it.

Continuing his account of their meeting, Knox has Mary then offering him a challenge: "Ye think then . . . that I have no just authority?" Knox replies to the queen's challenge by reminding her "that learned men in all ages" have "born patiently with the errors and imperfections which they could not amend." His statement of his own willingness to "bear patiently" the queen's rule is hardly conciliatory: "If the realm finds no inconvenience from the regiment of a woman, that which they approve shall I not further disallow than within my own breast, but shall be as well content to live under Your Grace as Paul was to live under Nero." He warns her not to "defile" her hands "with the blood of the saints of God"; if she can keep her hands clean, he writes, then "neither I nor that book shall either hurt you or your authority."

Continuing his narration, Knox writes that he then reminded Mary that the *Blast* had been "written most especially against that wicked Jezebel of England," but, according to Knox, the Scottish queen ignored

his point and continued her interrogation: "But (said she), ye speak of women in general." Rather than repeating the argument he had made to Elizabeth—that the queen represented a particular instance of God's grace—Knox sidesteps the issue of special cases in his *History*. Instead, he writes that he defended himself by replying that "it appeareth to me that wisdom should persuade Your Grace never to raise trouble for that which to this day hath not troubled Your Majesty, neither in person nor yet in authority."

Knox concludes his account of his interview with the queen by writing a long defense of his arguments that "subjects having power may resist their princes" when "princes exceed their bounds." Subjects are bound to obedience only when princes are obedient to God. As he had warned Elizabeth in his 1559 letter, he warns Mary Stuart that her authority is legitimate only if she acknowledges God as its source. Queens are to be "nurses unto His people." Her "subjection . . . unto God" must be absolute—and absolutely subject to Knox's interpretation as well, since he denies her "will," "thought," and "conscience" (according to Knox she is not entitled to conscience because she has "no right knowledge," her hearing and reading both faulty and ignorant). Knox's judgment of the queen after this interview? "If there be not in her," he wrote, "a proud mind, a crafty wit, and an indurate [hardened] heart against God and His truth, my judgment faileth me."

Knox met again with the queen in December of 1562. While his views on women and rule were not at issue on this occasion, his disdain for the queen *as a woman* is clear. Having left her presence "with a reasonable merry countenance," he is asked why he is not afraid; "which, heard of him, he answered, 'Why should the pleasing face of a gentlewoman effray [frighten] me? I have looked in the faces of many angry men and yet have not been afraid above measure.'"⁴⁰ A third meeting took place in 1563, and once again Knox urges the queen to "take good advisement": she would not "receive full obedience" from her subjects if she persisted in denying her "duty unto them."⁴¹ Further offended by the queen's popular reception and the pomp of her public display—which he attributes to "the stinking pride of women"—Knox preaches against the negotiations for her marriage with Don Carlos of Spain. He was summoned for another meeting with Mary, their fourth, in 1564. Knox labels the queen's words on this occasion "a vehement fume," and characterizes himself as waiting "patiently" for her "fume" to end. His time is valuable, he reminds her: "God has not sent me to await upon courts of princesses, nor upon the chambers of ladies. . . ." His patience and truth are met by Mary's "howling" and "tears."⁴²

Knox's last word on the subject of women and rule appears to have been made in 1571, the year before his death. A series of charges made against him in the General Assembly again raised the question of his position on female sovereignty. His support of Elizabeth, against Mary, was part of the "sedition, of schism, and erroneous doctrine" of which he was accused. By making an exception for the English queen, it was claimed, he had betrayed his country. Knox defends himself once more by saying that his modified view of a particular case does not change his view of the situation: ". . . my praying for the queen of England cannot prove that I do anything contrary [to] the truth of that book [the *Blast*]." ⁴³

Although Knox thus continued in his opposition, Mary Stuart had her own supporters and, just as Elizabeth Tudor's supporters rushed to defend her sovereignty, several defenses of women's rule were written and published to support the Scottish queen.

John Leslie's *A Defense of the Honor of Mary, Queen of Scotland* appeared after Mary's forced abdication and flight into England in 1567. ⁴⁴ Leslie was the queen of Scotland's representative at the English court, and in his opening address "to the gentle reader" he lays out his twofold purpose in writing: to defend Mary against the works, printed and unprinted, that have aimed "to disgrace, blemish, and deface" her and her just title, as well as to answer the arguments these "rash, hot, hasty, and heady" writers have leveled against "all womanly government" in their "poisoned, pestiferous pamphlet[s]." ⁴⁵

The first two books of Leslie's *Defense* are an exoneration of Mary and support for her claims to the English throne. In the third book, Leslie turns to the larger question of "womanly government," arguing that "the regiment of women is conformable to the law of God and nature." ⁴⁶ Leslie sets aside most of Knox's arguments as "beggarly baggage," arguments "of brawling brains." "What law, what act of parliament, what custom or usage, what ancient record of history . . . doth this man lay forth for himself?" Leslie asks. There is no law or judgment of consistory, civil, or canon law, no law or act of any parliament that will support Knox's arguments, according to Leslie. "This plea must be only maintained with the records of Holy Scripture," he claims, but he denies that scripture "will uphold and bear out" Knox's "strange and stout" conclusions. ⁴⁷

Leslie proceeds to supply his own interpretation of scripture, focusing on Deuteronomy 17:15. Like Bertie, Leslie challenges the application of Jewish law to the English law of succession: ". . . we are not bound to the ceremonial or judicial or other precepts of the Jewish law (except the Decalogue) farther than the Church or civil policy have renewed and

revived" them.⁴⁸ Even though this claim seems to set aside the whole verse, Leslie nevertheless continues his analysis, focusing not only on the meaning of "brethren" but on the mandate that a sovereign be chosen from *among* those brethren and not "a stranger." Leslie argues that Mary Stuart's claim to the English throne cannot be set aside because she is an "alien": "The Scots and we be all Christians and of one island, of one tongue, and almost of one fashions and manners, customs and laws." Mary is "not only in heart well-affectioned and minded to all English men," but is, as well, "by descent and royal blood all English."⁴⁹

Leslie then moves beyond his reinterpretation of Deuteronomy to argue that "women have from time to time born princely regiment in the most notable parts in the world, and in the best and most famous commonwealths that have ever been. . . ." Citing examples as diverse as Cordelia and Margaret of Denmark, Leslie concludes that women's rule is not against the law of nature but is, as such examples prove, "most natural."⁵⁰

The remaining arguments are familiar enough: appeals to the laws of inheritance, reminders that women, like men, were created in the image of God, and reiterations of the theory of the king's two bodies, among others.⁵¹ But Leslie preserves for the last the argument that he believes incorporates all, introducing it in one astonishingly long sentence:

In case all this will not satisfy you, and that ye think it is still to be unnatural and against scripture for a woman that is ordained to be subjected to her husband to be the governess and head of a public state, and that ye think also that though for all other respects a woman might be a governess, yet considering that she must have the managing of martial exploits, which indeed may seem in no wise agreeable to a woman and is surely the difficultest matter of all in our case and question, and that you cannot or will not be satisfied unless ye may for this and all other doubts be by scripture persuaded, Lo, then I bring to you one authority of Holy Scripture to serve all turns. I bring, in faith, noble Deborah, to decide and determine all this controversy and contention. . . .⁵²

What now seems Leslie's most compelling and original argument—his reference to historical evidence and example—is thus, in the end, set aside for a more familiar biblical appeal, the precedent of Deborah.⁵³

Another defense of Mary Stuart was written by David Chambers, who fled Scotland in 1568. Finding refuge at the court of Catherine de' Medici, Chambers wrote and published his *Discourse on the Legitimate*

Succession of Women in Paris and dedicated it to the French queen and some-time regent.⁵⁴ Unlike most of the other participants in the gynecocracy debate, Chambers presents his defense of a particular queen, in this case Mary Stuart, in the context of a general defense of women rulers. Chambers appeals to the law of nature as well as to the law of nations before moving on to discuss the “law of God eternal,” or “divine law,” all of which, he argues, support rule by women. In a noteworthy addition to the gynecocracy debate, Chambers emphasizes the way common practice and common prejudice affect notions of women’s fitness for government.

In his analysis, Chambers incorporates an analogy that will reappear, much differently interpreted, in later political theory: the country is nothing more than a large family. Because women govern families, Chambers observes, they can also govern countries.⁵⁵ To support this argument, Chambers turns to examples of women rulers, and here his argument is also unique. Beyond biblical and legendary examples and beyond the historical examples cited by Leslie, Chambers cites more recent examples of women rulers, notably Anne of France, Louise of Savoy, Margaret of Austria, and, of course, Catherine de’ Medici. The government of such queens and princesses, he concludes, has been “profitable” for their countries.⁵⁶

If our examination of texts in the gynecocracy debate thus far seems exhaustive, it is not. Texts continue to appear throughout Elizabeth’s reign, and their positions reflect the complicated succession questions, debates, and controversies that persist throughout the sixteenth century and into the seventeenth, settled ultimately when Mary Stuart’s son, James VI of Scotland, is named in 1603 by Elizabeth Tudor as successor to the throne of England.⁵⁷ But before drawing this chapter to a close, I will look at one final defense of female sovereignty. In 1590, more than thirty years after Knox’s *Blast* was published and more than thirty years after Elizabeth I followed her sister onto the throne of England, Henry Howard completed his “A Dutiful Defense of the Lawful Regiment of Women.”⁵⁸ In organizing and developing his defense, Howard responded directly to Knox as well as to many of the writers we have examined in this chapter, including those who opposed female sovereignty, like Gilby and Goodman, and those who supported it, like Aylmer and Leslie. Howard’s careful, extended analysis of female sovereignty offers us one last glimpse of the *Blast* and its lingering effects. A detailed examination of his “dutiful defense” will also allow us to see just how far the gynecocracy debate had developed in the years since Knox instigated the argument in 1558.

Howard belonged to an illustrious Tudor family, one that had advanced its fortunes by a series of politically advantageous marriages. Thomas Howard, third duke of Norfolk (Henry Howard's grandfather) managed to marry one of Edward IV's daughters, Anne, and the family secured another royal link when the third duke's daughter was married to Henry VIII's illegitimate son, Henry Fitzroy. Two Howard women were numbered among Henry's six wives, though in these two instances the Howard marital strategy was successful only briefly; Anne Boleyn and Catherine Howard, the king's second and fifth wives, were executed in 1536 and 1541, respectively.⁵⁹

The Howards were also very active in the kind of political intrigue that often ended in treason. Norfolk and his son, the famed poet Henry Howard, earl of Surrey (our Henry Howard's father), were both arrested for treason in 1546. Surrey was executed in 1547, but Norfolk was not. He remained in prison through the end of Henry VIII's reign and throughout the entire reign of Edward VI; he was released at last only after Mary ascended the throne. Henry Howard's elder brother, Thomas Howard, became the fourth duke of Norfolk; he was arrested for treason and executed by Elizabeth in 1572. Howard's nephew, Philip Howard, the second earl of Arundel, was arrested for treason in 1589 and condemned to death.⁶⁰ And as if our Henry Howard's attempts to secure patronage and support weren't complicated enough, they were also affected by his religion; outwardly conforming, he was privately a Catholic.

Despite his family history, or maybe in acknowledgment of her own Howard heritage, Elizabeth awarded the young Howard a small annual stipend after she became queen in 1558. He attended King's College, Cambridge, where he took a degree in 1564. He read civil law at Trinity College and in 1566 was awarded an M.A. degree. He remained in Cambridge as rhetoric reader and lecturer on civil law until 1570, when he left his post, hoping for preferment at court.⁶¹ Was it at this point that Howard began to construct his defense of the "regiment of women"? The 1570 date seems to fit: in his preface, Howard indicates that it is "fast upon the point of thirteen years" since the "copy of a raising invective against the regiment of queens" had been "delivered" to him by "an honorable privy councilor."⁶² His unnamed visitor had charged him to "shape some present answer to the same," reminding him of his duty to the queen and of the love he "professed" for the councilor himself. If the *Blast* had been delivered to him shortly after its publication in 1558 and Elizabeth's accession, Howard might well have left Cambridge the moment he saw his way to gaining a place at court.

Or did he begin his “defense” a bit later, after his brother Thomas was executed for his involvement in the Ridolfi plot? The fourth duke of Norfolk was part of the conspiracy that, in 1568, plotted to secure the throne of England for Mary of Scotland, to marry her to Norfolk, and to return England to the Catholic faith. The Catholic banker and intriguer Roberto di Ridolfi was first arrested in 1570 when the plot was discovered, but he managed to escape to the continent after he was released. Once the scheme unraveled, Thomas Howard and his fellow schemers were not so lucky. The fourth duke of Norfolk was executed in 1572, as we have noted. Although Henry Howard managed to keep himself out of serious trouble, he was arrested and held in custody for some months in 1571.⁶³ Was the “defense” he wrote and addressed to the queen taken up then, as a way of indicating his loyalty in the face of his brother’s treason?

Or did he begin the “defense” later yet? Henry Howard was arrested once more, this time in 1580, and held in custody for the better part of a year before his release. He was arrested again in December of 1583; under suspicion of treason, he was transferred to the Tower, where he remained until August 1584.⁶⁴ All we know for sure about the composition of his “defense” is that it was completed in 1590, for Howard ends his preface by telling the queen that, “for the space of two and thirty years, your court hath been an oracle of fortunate advice to the greatest part of Europe in all doubtful demands, and your state a harbor for distressed persons that complain of injury.”⁶⁵ Whenever Howard came to make his “dutiful defense,” we are left wondering how the charge to deliver a “*present answer*” was fulfilled by the passage of some thirteen years.

Nevertheless, although Howard is not clear about when the “Dutiful Defense” was begun, he is clear about his reasons for writing. He offers his “defense” to the queen herself, not as a proof of his loyalty or as a plea for patronage, but as a scholar, offended by the errors in Knox’s *Blast*. After examining the arguments in Knox’s work and finding the “corners were established upon the winds,” Howard tells the queen in his preface that he was compelled to defend the “regiment of women,” suggesting a kind of scholarly disinterest:

But after I had carefully examined and traced all the reasons upon which this reeling frame was built, it seemed very strange that any man, endowed with understanding by the gift of God and enriched with so many favors by Your Majesty’s most prosperous and happy government, would thus unthankfully lift up his heel against a

princess of so rare desert and bestow the fruits of painful study—or, to speak more properly, the froth of ill-employed time—upon so false, so tickle [threatening], and so seditious an argument.⁶⁶

What can be said about these “wild discourses against the very ground of female regiment upon which our present happiness doth stand,” he asks, a circumstance “by which a world of tragedies not only here in England but in diverse other corners of the world have been prevented?”⁶⁷

In alluding to “wild discourses,” Howard suggests he has read more than Knox’s *Blast*, a point that is clarified as he indicates that there are a number of “whisking [briskly blowing] pamphlets . . . stuffed and complete with malediction” that currently “flicker” about the ears of lawful subjects. These pamphlets “saucily” proclaim a “prerogative” to limit the “laws of nature,” where, in reality, it is the pamphlets themselves that “have shaken” the bonds of natural law and “proclaimed open war both against nature and humanity by removing the true mark by which all claims of kingdom have been bound since the first institution of monarchy”; “I will answer them according to their folly,” says Howard.⁶⁸

But, even though he is writing back to Knox, Howard rarely mentions him by name. He does, however, organize his “defense” into three books, each one responding to the arguments made by Knox, though in a slightly different order: Howard will look first at natural law, then at civil law, and finally at divine law.⁶⁹

The first book of Howard’s defense is by far the longest, occupying nearly half of the entire work.⁷⁰ He begins with an indictment of the “sons of Belial” who have, contrary to “grounded knowledge and deep understanding,” bent their “peevish battery” against “the lawful regiment of women in such states as are inheritable by descent,” and attempted to limit the law of nature by means of their own “crooked rules.” He will answer them, he promises, “according to their folly.” He starts first by defining “what the law of nature is and how it ought to be limited.” The “law of nature” can be divided into “two special kinds,” the first “common unto men with beasts,” the second “only proper unto men, [who] are endowed with the gift of reason.”⁷¹ About the first kind of natural law Howard has relatively little to say except that “experience” teaches that all living things, men and beasts, “agree together upon certain generalities”: they breed for the preservation of their species, they take pains “in bringing up their little ones,” and they seek good while fleeing “the contrary.”

About the second “branch” of natural law Howard has a great deal to say. Natural law in this sense “springs from the ground of reason by

which men resemble God and differ from brute beasts. . . . It consisteth wholly upon principles of honesty and right, which God Himself engraved with His holy finger in the heart of man at the first creation of humanity." In looking at this kind of natural law, Howard asks whether he can "prove by manifest examples of all times that many women have been more temperate, more virtuous, and [more] provident than many men"—and if he can, then "it will follow by the law of nature and opinion" that women are "apt for government," sometimes, perhaps, even "more apt for government" than men. "I will," he states,

make it plain and palpable to the sense of every reasonable man that women are [as] capable of all those gifts which enable men to rule as men themselves and therefore ought not to be limited or hindered in the realm of their inheritance. Furthermore, it shall appear that the regiment of women by succession of blood hath been admitted by all countries, allowed by all persons, and defended upon all occasions.⁷²

The lawyer Howard conceives of what follows, the evidence he provides about the law of nations, as a legal defense: "this is the court in which all pleas concerning titles both by men and women must be tried."

Rather than following in detail Howard's straightforward statement of his position here, we will look simply at the list of points Howard takes up as he prosecutes his case: "That Eve was not subject to Adam at the first Creation," "That the best philosophers have not reprov'd the regiment for women," "That in gifts of the mind and virtues appertaining to a prince, the female sex is not inferior," and "That all nations, . . . heathen [as well as] Christian, have allowed of the regiment of heirs general." This survey of history—"the right of female heirs to crowns and kingdoms by succession hath been acknowledged since the first beginning of the world by all countries under heaven"—is particularly interesting.⁷³ Howard begins "with our own country," mentioning Cordelia, Boudicca, and Mary Tudor, and then goes on to examine evidence of female sovereignty in Germany, Hungary, Bohemia, Denmark, Sweden, Poland, Austria, Flanders, France, Spain, Cyprus, and, beyond Europe, to Ethiopia. His survey includes a digression on French Salic law, which has kept women from inheriting the crown in that kingdom but which has allowed them to function successfully as regents. Salic law, Howard thinks, is "forged," but, if authentic, is still suspect, "because none but men had any voice in making this law [and] therefore it was made against women."⁷⁴

Having worked systematically through the various points in his case, Howard lists, and then responds to, the objections that might be raised against his argument. There is a lengthy list—thirteen—most of which are accusations about women's physical and emotional inferiority. These are, in Howard's words, "frivolous objections which have been urged against female heirs to crowns by . . . brain-sick heads."⁷⁵ The first of these "frivolous" accusations is about women's physical and emotional inferiority: "men of great learning and deep judgment" have alleged womankind's "sundry imperfections and defects of kind by which nature maketh them incapable of regiment."⁷⁶ This objection answered, Howard proceeds to the rest: that the regiment of women is "unjust and dangerous"; that women are weak; that women have "all gifts in less apportion" than men and are thus less "sufficient" for rule than men; that women are intemperate, prone to anger and tears because of the "violence" of their emotions; that women lack discretion and can't keep secrets; that women can't lead armies, a necessary requirement for a monarch; that women are "more unconstant than the wind" and thus lack the courage and resolution required to rule well; that women are covetous and thus incapable of the impartiality needed to mete out "reward and punishment"; that, if women can inherit a crown by "succession in blood," they also "may be elected to kingdoms," and "no nation under heaven having free liberty to choose was ever so foolish as to choose a woman"; that women who have inherited regiment have been dissolute and dishonorable; and, finally, that women who have not been proven to be wanton have either been proven to lack understanding or to have earned their states' contempt.

Following this rather exhausting enumeration of women's weaknesses and failings, Howard turns to his examination of civil law.⁷⁷ With his training as a lawyer, Howard is uniquely qualified to speak to this aspect of the gynocracy debate, and this second book—which in Howard's words contains "a dutiful defense of the lawful regiment of women by warrant of the civil laws and the practice of the Roman empire which authorizes those laws"—is surprisingly short. In essence, Howard argues that those who used civil law to oppose gynocracy had manipulated the law to suit their conclusions: their "false and frivolous" objections were "deceitful, . . . forced out of the civil law in disproof of their approved and sufficient authority." Howard is adamant that no civil law, even in "any one particular," condemns the "regiment of women."

Here Howard does address himself explicitly to Knox—in fact, he focuses this book on Knox's arguments about civil law, for the author of the *Blast* had made civil law an important part of his attack on gynocracy.

Howard's argument here is very simple: civil law is based on justice grounded in "equity and right." His positive argument thus dispensed with, Howard turns to the objections to his position, first stating the assertions of his opponents and then adding his own rebuttal. In reply to the first of a series of eight objections, that civil law excludes women from "all office, both civil and public," Howard argues that blood, not sex, determines inheritance; in reply to the second objection, that women cannot function as judges and, thus, cannot be "admitted" to "the highest place under which the office of a judge as the lesser under the greater is contained," Howard asserts that women are, in fact, allowed to exercise authority in the public realm. Those who raise this objection rely on "equivocation," hoping to "raise a mist before the readers' eyes." In response to the argument that "women ought not to be chosen arbiters between parties," Howard replies that "women are not so simple but they can deal both warily and soundly in resolving matters of debate so often as they are put in trust." If women "have as great interest as men in that which is enacted for a common good," he asks, "why do we shut them out of place and of counsel or deprive them of all means by which they may most aptly further us?" In response to the objection that civil law forbids women to "plead cause" and to "appear before the bar," Howard allows that "though ordinary women in support of modesty" should not place themselves where "heaps of people throng," queens "who never look upon the bar yet appoint the judge" don't have to "put themselves into the press." Their "authority and strength" can be invested in a "substitute that is sufficient in that honorable place and yet reserve unto them . . . an interest to qualify the rigor of the law." The last of the objections are very specific: that women can't enter into bonds, that they can't be attorneys, that they can't exercise authority over their children, and that they can't adopt children. By this point, the lawyer Howard seems exasperated: "It is not probable that any man would rave in this fool manner unless his wits were in wool-gathering."

Having reached the end of this second book, Howard summarizes his arguments. The law does not simply restrict women's rights, as Knox had argued, it also protects them. Women can't be imprisoned for debt, and they can't be tortured or executed within forty days of childbirth. Women have the right to give evidence in treason trials. The civil law does not reflect women's inferiority but responds with sensitivity to their modesty. Women must be respected equally, especially where rights and titles are concerned—if the legal claims of heirs were equal, inheritance

law might prefer men over women, but “all this maketh nothing against succession in blood.”

In his third and final book, the pattern is the same. Howard begins his “dutiful defense of the lawful regiment of women” here by examining the “sacred laws of God” and shows how they support female sovereignty. He then turns to answer the “false and frivolous objections which have been most unjust countenanced with deceitful colors sorted out of the canon of the scripture in disproof of their approved and sufficient authority.”⁷⁸ Here again his approach is straightforward: he will first assert his position and then he will address, and refute, the objections on the other side. Howard proves himself as adept at contextualizing the biblical citations of his sources as he is of placing legal arguments in context. His response to arguments deriving from Genesis 3, for example, is both representative and, yet, noteworthy. Howard follows Richard Bertie in arguing that being created first is not necessarily a sign of superiority, but to the account of Creation in Genesis 3, he juxtaposes Genesis 1:27, the verse that describes a simultaneous creation: “male and female he created them.” Howard uses this verse to refute Knox’s claim that, after the fall, women were to be subjected to men. Women, like men, were created in the image of God, and therefore “the sex of women by the sacred law of God was not created incapable of regiment.”⁷⁹

From this point, Howard works his way through a variety of biblical texts, tracing what scripture has to say about the development of secular governments, the principles of inheritance, and the rights of women to inherit. He deals with Paul’s letters in his response to the objections of those who denied women’s “lawful regiment.” In Howard’s estimation, Knox and his supporters were “libelers” and slanderers, using Paul for their own purposes. Howard states the objections of those who oppose female rule, shows how they have misinterpreted Paul, and then presents specific examples to support the correct position. In the fifth objection, for example, Howard tackles Knox’s claim that “the same apostle [Paul] would have women by the wearing of a veil to signify subjection.”⁸⁰ Howard illustrates a number of reasons why women might wear veils—a veil may be worn by a woman to signal that she is married (“wives ought to profess by outward signs that duty and obedience which in heart they owe not to every man, for that interpretation would make strange works, but only to their husbands”), to show that she is a virgin, to show deference, to show shame (as in the case of Susanna, who wears a veil at her trial because of shame, not as a sign of “obedience and servitude”), or simply to conceal a moment of untidiness (as in the case

of Rebecca, who uses a veil because she is overheated and “soiled in the dusty ways,” which, in Howard’s words, “rather seems an argument of comeliness than a note of subjection”).

We might examine more of Howard’s treatment of the objections to his argument, but the pattern is the same, through all eleven of them.⁸¹ And then, abruptly, Howard brings it all to an end. After some two hundred folios—four hundred closely argued pages of text—he offers his conclusion. “I have proved by the law of nature that excellence in gifts” is not “exclusive to men.” And “we have heard how notably the civil laws” have been misinterpreted by men whose motives were nothing but “willful perversion.” And sacred law favors women: “the word of God doth favor our demand in this behalf of queens, [and] the learned writers of the church approveth it.” Those who argue against female sovereignty “are either for the greater part salacious . . . or impertinent.” “It remaineth only,” then, that “as the zeal and duty which I carried to my peerless sovereign was the strongest motive that enticed me to take in hand this work, so now I may conclude the same.” Howard closes with a graceful and flattering metaphor. Because Elizabeth’s England is a heaven on earth, Howard prays “that it will please Him now and evermore to water the sweet springing seeds of her imperial perfections with the dew of grace to prosper and assist her worthy labors for our country’s quiet with His mighty arms to prolong her happy days as the days of heaven. . . .”



Although we might have continued our examination of texts in the gynecocracy debate, Henry Howard’s “Dutiful Defense” offers us the perfect opportunity to assess how far the argument had progressed after thirty years of vitriol and vituperation: not very far at all.

There could hardly be two more dissimilar figures than John Knox and Henry Howard, at least at first glance—the one a humbly born preacher and the other an aristocratic scholar, one a radical Protestant reformer and the other an adherent to the old faith, one who disdains the court and the other a would-be courtier. And yet, for all their differences, there are a few interesting similarities in their life experiences. For each there is a conversion: Knox had taken holy orders as a young man and seems to have converted to Protestantism at some time in the 1540s; for his part, Howard was constantly suspected of recusancy during the years immediately after Elizabeth’s accession, a suspicion he denied, but he seems ultimately to have converted during the late 1570s. In neither

case was the religious choice a pragmatic one. Knox saw his fellow Protestants burned at the stake before he abandoned Scotland for years of exile; Howard spent most of Elizabeth's reign denying he was a Catholic sympathizer even while he was involved in or associated with a number of Catholic plots. For each there is prison. Knox spent two hard years as a prisoner on a French galley ship; though the circumstances of Howard's custody were undoubtedly less severe, he spent much of the 1580s under arrest.

These curious similarities aside, their habits of mind are clearly at odds. Knox is the biblical literalist, while Howard rejects a literal view of scripture—or, for that matter, a literalist reading of any source. He contextualizes, analyzes, and interprets, and his linguistic, historical, and legal training allow him to expose the limits of Knox's arguments. And, then, Knox issues his *Blast* in a printed edition. By publishing his attack on gynecocracy, he is clearly writing to the widest popular audience, and he addresses this, presumably, large audience in his preface. Howard, by contrast, never has his "dutiful defense" published; in his preface he addresses himself specifically to the queen, and as a nobleman, he eschews print publication and chooses, instead, to produce a few manuscript copies for a select audience.⁸² As he indicates, he is not interested in addressing the "vulgar multitude which hath ears to hear and eyes to see but no discretion to judge."⁸³ In most cases, the surviving manuscripts of Howard's "defense" contain the coats of arms of their original recipients; some copies are prefaced with dedicatory verses addressed to the person for whom the manuscript was prepared. The manuscripts often contain Howard's own annotations and, frequently, the marginal comments of the recipients themselves. Howard addressed these carefully prepared copies to members of Elizabeth's privy council, some of whom were, like Howard, related to the queen by blood or marriage.⁸⁴ Howard's opening preface and his presentation of copies of the "Dutiful Defense" to these influential men suggest that, at least in part, his work was motivated by his hope of preferment, that he might gain, or regain, the queen's favor by his effort. He did manage to survive several brushes with treason, but his defense of the legality of the queen's sovereignty did not help him gain a place at court.⁸⁵ Knox, by contrast, refuses to moderate his views for any personal gain, even after Elizabeth's accession, when it might have been politic to do so and even after his fellow-exile Christopher Goodman recanted the views he had held when he published his *How Superior Powers Ought to Be Obeyed*. The closest Knox came to any politic acceptance of female sovereignty was that he never delivered the promised second and third "blasts" against "the monstrous regiment of women."

But for all the differences between Knox and Howard—their different backgrounds and social class, their different educational experiences, their different habits of mind and professional training, their different audiences and aims—juxtaposing their respective works shows that, for all of its sound and fury, the gynecocracy debate had really not signified very much at all. Knox not only instigated the fight, he set the terms, and it is shocking how little the argument was advanced. Knox stated his proposition, divided his argument into three parts, and, to prove his argument that female sovereignty was denied by natural law, divine law, and civil law, cited authorities, the Bible and Aristotle, principally, but also the church fathers and the *Digest* of Roman law. He introduces objections and then refutes them. Most of those who responded to Knox, either in agreement or in opposition, responded in kind. His opponents relied on the same authorities though, to be fair, they did sometimes incorporate others. Howard, for example, cited Plato in addition to Aristotle. To the church fathers Knox quotes—Tertullian, Origen, Augustine, Ambrose, Chrysostom, and Basilus—Howard adds classical authors like Democritus, Herodotus, and Plutarch, and the English historian, the Venerable Bede.⁸⁶ Knox uses biblical women as his examples, citing only one historical queen, Joanna of Naples, and that in a marginal note, while Howard, like Chambers, names a number of queens regnant and regent in his defense. But even so, in the end, we wind up where we started. We seem to have traveled in one big circle.

And so, although the controversy continued through the end of the sixteenth century, we will end our survey of the gynecocracy debate here, at least for the moment. Those who argued against gynecocracy express themselves in the most certain of terms and may certainly have been guilty of misogyny. Knox, in particular, has come in for a great deal of criticism on this account, though even Knox has had his defenders who argue, among other things, that he “did not have a natural dislike for women” and that his *Blast* represented a “pander[ing] to popular prejudices which he personally did not really share.”⁸⁷ In their defense of Knox, they cite the reformer’s close relationships with a number of women with whom he corresponded, some of whom “doted on him” and many of whom “even followed him abroad” into exile.⁸⁸ These intimate friendships are undeniable, but it should be pointed out that all the women with whom Knox had warm relationships were women who accepted, even embraced, his God-given superiority as a man, as a husband and father, and as a spiritual father. As a woman, I find it hard not to take Knox personally when he asserts so confidently that nature “paints [women] forth to be weak, frail, impatient, feeble, and foolish,”

and that "experience hath declared them to be inconstant, variable, cruel, and lacking the spirit of counsel and regiment." Knox may not hate women, exactly, but he certainly views them with contempt.

And yet even the most ardent defenders of gynocracy do not necessarily defend womankind; they hedge their support of female sovereignty with a certain degree of ambivalence. A queen's sex is a "defect" and equated with other "defects" like youth, "imbecility," drunkenness, cruelty, or feebleness. Even while he is busy defending rule by women, John Aylmer seems to relish providing an exuberant list of women's faults: a woman *may* be wise, learned, discreet, and constant, but she may also prove herself to be "fond, foolish, wanton, flibbertigibbets [chatterers or gossips], tattlers, triflers, wavering, witless, without counsel, feeble, careless, rash, proud, dainty [delicate], nice [foolish], talebearers, eavesdroppers, tumult-raisers, evil-tongued, worse-minded, and in every wise doltified with the dregs of the devil's dunghill."⁸⁹

Although a particular woman may be queen regnant or queen regent, she represents a special case. Not all women or just any woman is fit to rule. "The law of God ordains the woman to be in subjection," Heinrich Bullinger writes, but "in compliance with" or "in obedience to" the laws or customs of the realm, an exceptional woman might inherit the crown.⁹⁰ If "Nature gives birth to her as heir to a kingdo[m]," John Case asks, "why should she not reign?"⁹¹ "I hold not every woman to be fit to rule," writes Henry Howard, "but heirs to crowns whose education hath been suitable to their estate . . . are commonly inspired from above with gifts and graces that are fit for their calling."⁹² "We do reject women . . . to meddle with matters abroad" and to "bear office in a city or a commonwealth," Thomas Smith writes, "except it be in such cases as the authority is annexed to the blood and progeny, as the crown, a duchy, or an earldom, for there is the blood respected, not the age nor the sex":

Whereby an absolute queen, an absolute duchess or countess—those . . . which have the name not by being married to a king, duke, or earl, but by being the true, right, and next successors in the dignity, and upon whom by right of the blood that title is descended—these, I say, have the same authority although they be women or children in that kingdom, duchy or earldom, as they should have had if they had been men of full age. For the right and honor of the blood and the quietness and surety of the realm [are] more to be considered than either the tender age as yet impotent to rule or the sex not accustomed otherwise to intermeddle with public affairs. . . .⁹³

While they might have disagreed about gynecocracy, all of those who engage in the debate, on whichever side, could agree that rule by a woman represents a judgment from God. For Thomas Becon, Mary Tudor's rule is a punishment: "... to take away the empire from a man and to give it unto a woman seemeth to be an evident token" of God's anger.⁹⁴ John Calvin, even while attempting to reconcile himself to Elizabeth Tudor, writes that rule by a woman is "to be ranked, no less than slavery, among the punishments consequent upon the fall of man."⁹⁵ And so a certain degree of resignation seems the only appropriate response. "It is a hazardous thing for godly persons to set themselves in opposition" to a ruler—any ruler—Bullinger writes, for the "Lord will in his own time destroy unjust governments."⁹⁶ In extraordinary times, "to reproach men for their sluggishness," God "raises up women" to rule, and their rule is "to be tolerated till God sees fit to overthrow it," Calvin cautions, adding that "to me it seems the better and safer course to remain quiet. . . . [I]t is our duty rather to ask God for a spirit of moderation and prudence to stand us in aid in the critical moment than to agitate idle enquiries."⁹⁷ In the final analysis, "it would not be lawful to unsettle governments which are ordained by the peculiar providence of God."⁹⁸ Richard Bertie puts it more bluntly: female rulers represent "imperfect kinds of heads, yet not heads to be cut off."⁹⁹

If God has placed a woman on the throne, John Aylmer asks, who are we to "dare" to "pull it from [her] by violence?" God "could have provided other" if he had wished to: "Therefore the safest way is to let Him do His will. . . . It is a plain argument that for some secret purpose He mindeth the female should reign and govern."¹⁰⁰ Or, as Henry Howard concludes, "... if He had not thought a woman fit to rule, He would never have appointed her." God, after all, "hath ever wrought His greatest wonders by the weakest instruments."¹⁰¹

CHAPTER THREE

The Gynecocracy Debate in Context: Humanism and History

... [Y]ou women that will meddle with common matters of realms and cities and ween to govern people and nations with the braids [passions, whims] of your stomachs [desires], you go about to hurl down towns afore you, and you light upon a hard rock, whereupon, though you bruise and shake countries very sore, yet they scape and you perish. For you know neither measure nor order, and yet, which is the worst point of all, you ween you know very well and will be ruled in nothing after them that be expert. But you attempt to draw all thing[s] after your fantasy without discretion. Ween you it was for nothing that wise men forbad you rule and governance of countries and that Saint Paul biddeth you shall not speak in congregation and gathering of people? All this same meaneth that you shall not meddle with matters of realms or cities. Your own house is a city great enough for you.

—Juan Luis Vives, *The Instruction of a Christian Woman*¹

The fire of the gynecocracy debate, ignited by the events of the late 1550s, continued to burn unabated even after the passing of the three “mischievous Marys” whose exercise of political authority had so troubled John Knox: Mary Tudor died in 1558, Marie of Guise in 1560, and Mary Stuart, executed in 1587. The heat and intensity of the argument were the result of the immediate political moment. But beyond its vehemence and currency, what is most striking now is how little the arguments of the participants reflected in any significant way the

intellectual and political ferment of the early modern period beyond the particular set of historical circumstances that sparked the debate. While it is commonplace among modern historians to assert, like Paula Scalingi, that in the late sixteenth century “the question of female sovereignty emerged as part of a much broader controversy over the proper role of women in society,” a careful analysis of the arguments made by participants on both sides of the gynecocracy debate seems to reveal just how little they drew on emerging ideas and new methods of intellectual inquiry as they constructed their arguments.² As we have seen in our discussion of the debate, those who engaged themselves so vehemently in the argument relied largely on the medieval Scholastic tradition of argument in their works: to make their case, they appealed to the authority of Aristotle, to the authority of Roman law, to the authority of Genesis and the New Testament epistles, and to the authority of the church fathers. Those who defended gynecocracy might appeal to Plato, might include classical as well as Christian authorities, and might even incorporate a few historical and linguistic arguments, but they never changed the terms of the debate or moved beyond the limits set by Knox. As they cited, glossed, interpreted, and reinterpreted identical passages drawn from identical sources, the treatises for and against female rule can be read as one long illustration of the dialectic method, a kind of sixteenth-century *Sic et non*.

In their critique of Scholasticism, humanist thinkers undertook a reexamination of the authors, texts, and methods of inquiry inherited from the classical and medieval past. As one part of this critical reassessment, humanist scholars reconsidered woman’s nature and her potential, challenging the conclusions of old authorities by considering new evidence.³ This early modern discussion of women emerged from the so-called *querelle des femmes*, a literary debate initiated by Christine de Pizan in the early fifteenth century.⁴ The debate raised and answered a number of probing questions: What are women, really? Do they possess immortal souls? Are they more—or, perhaps, less—responsible than Adam for the Fall? Are women capable of virtue as well as vice? (That they are full of vice seems to be assumed.) If women can be virtuous, are there virtues that are particular to them, as women, or are women capable of the same virtues as men? Are women capable of moral judgment? Of intellectual achievement? Of noble action in the public sphere? Just what is her proper role in society? How do we properly define the relationship between woman and man? And, strictly speaking, are women even human?⁵ As only one small part of the larger humanist project, scholars turned to an examination of real women and to an exploration of the reality of their lives.

It is in the context of this larger “woman question” that we must now place the texts of the sixteenth-century gynecocracy debate. As we have seen, texts produced by the various participants in the debate reflect the more conservative methods of medieval Scholasticism. The majority of those opposed to gynecocracy were, in fact, written by men trained in theology, like Knox himself. Even those men with a broader intellectual perspective, men like Henry Howard, allowed their defense of gynecocracy to be limited by Knox’s text. The humanist works we will survey in this chapter were produced by men who put the new learning of the Renaissance to use and who experimented with new and varied literary forms, including histories, declamations and orations, dialogues, and conduct books. Rather than an exhaustive survey of all the humanist texts about women, I am interested particularly in those that addressed the issue of female sovereignty, and I will limit our discussion to those texts that made significant contributions to the debate. I will also focus on those texts that, like Knox’s, both demanded and received response. To that end, what follows here is, first, a discussion of how the first histories of women treated the subject of women rulers and, then, a more detailed look at how a few of the more influential sixteenth-century humanist treatises dealt with the question of female sovereignty.



Among the earliest and most influential of the humanist works devoted to women is Giovanni Boccaccio’s *Famous Women* (*De mulieribus claris*), a collection of 106 biographies of notable women composed between 1360 and 1375. The idea of a catalogue of worthies was not new—Boccaccio had already completed a history of noteworthy men, *The Fall of Famous Men* (*De casibus virorum illustrium*), itself modeled on Petrarch’s *On Famous Men* (*De viris illustribus*)—but Boccaccio’s work was, as editor and translator Virginia Brown notes, “the first collection of biographies in Western literature devoted exclusively to women.”⁶ Boccaccio dedicated this work to Andrea Acciaiuoli, countess of Altavilla and sister of Niccolò Acciaiuoli, chief advisor to Joanna I, queen of Naples. Boccaccio’s work, dedicated as it is to Andrea and composed at Joanna’s court, illustrates both the humanist endeavor and the humanist dilemma when it came to the subject of women.

In his dedication, Boccaccio praises Andrea Acciaiuoli for her “character, both gentle and renowned,” her “outstanding probity” (which is “woman’s greatest ornament”), her “elegance of speech,” her “generosity of soul,” and the “powers” of her intellect. By accepting his

“slim book in praise of women” and by emulating “the deeds of women in the past,” Boccaccio hopes Andrea will not allow her “noble spirit” to be “outdone”—that she will “strive to outdo all women in noble virtues.” It is also his hope that his book will make Andrea and her “merits” known to all of those “now alive” and will “preserve” her “forever for posterity”: “I should like to increase your well-deserved fame by dedicating this little book to you,” he writes. Indeed, it is his book, rather than Andrea’s own efforts, that will ensure her reputation; *his book* “will do as much to keep your name bright for posterity” as anything the countess might herself accomplish. Yet Boccaccio’s praise of the countess is not a praise of all women for, as he takes care to note, Andrea Acciaiuoli’s particular excellence “far surpass[es] the endowments of womankind”:

... I saw that what nature has denied the weaker sex God has freely instilled in your breast and complemented with marvelous virtues, to the point where he willed you to be known by the name you bear (*andres* being in Greek the equivalent of the Latin word for “men”)—considering all this, I felt that you deserved comparison with the most excellent women anywhere, even among the ancients.

Andrea is not only a “shining model” of “ancient virtue,” then, but she is also explicitly identified with *andreia*, that is, with courage, one of the four cardinal Greek virtues, an “ancient virtue” embodied by Achilles himself.⁷

Following this remarkable dedication, Boccaccio outlines his intention in composing *Famous Women*. In his preface, he claims that his aim is to construct a humanist and feminist history—a history of women who have participated in the *vita activa*. He expresses some degree of astonishment that women have been so totally excluded from written histories and that no book recounting the lives of women has been written: “What surprises me is how little attention women have attracted,” he exclaims, noting “the absence of any work devoted especially to their memory, even though lengthier histories show clearly that some women have performed acts requiring vigor and courage.”⁸ To remedy this deficiency—and to illustrate women’s potential for the active life—Boccaccio takes upon himself the task of rectifying the situation: “Lest, therefore, such women be cheated of their just due, I had the idea of honoring their glory by assembling in a single volume the biographies of women whose memory is still green.” And, by the way, he has “also

included a few women who, although they performed no action worthy of remembrance, were nonetheless causal agents in the performance of mighty deeds.”

But in composing his history of women, Boccaccio limits his task, and to make his self-imposed limitations clear, he indicates that he thought it “advisable” not to “mix” the stories of pagan women with “Hebrew and Christian women (except for Eve).” These “two groups” of women—pagan and religious—“do not harmonize very well with each other” because they “proceed in different ways.” While Hebrew and Christian women are inspired by “the commands and example of their holy Teacher” and seek “true and everlasting glory,” pagan women, by contrast, attain their “goal” either by some “natural gift or instinct” or, “as seems more likely,” by their “keen desire for the fleeting glory of this world.” In the history of extraordinary women that follows, then, he leads his reader to believe that he will refrain from telling the stories of Christian women who already “live gloriously in their deserved immortality”—“pious men” have already preserved their stories. For his part, Boccaccio intends to focus on “the merits of pagan women,” whose “merits . . . have not been published in any work designed especially for this purpose.” “That is why I began to write this work,” he adds: “it was a way of giving them some kind of reward.”⁹ He asks God’s assistance in this, his “pious endeavour.” In his *Famous Women*, following his stated purpose, he includes biographical portraits of women noted for their learning, their eloquence, and their devotion to family, and, of particular interest to us here, he includes portraits of a number of powerful female rulers, among them the legendary queens Penthesilia and Dido, the historical queens Cleopatra and Zenobia, and a single contemporary queen, Joanna I of Naples.¹⁰

Despite his stated intention to write in praise of women, Boccaccio is a little ambivalent about women. Something of his ambivalence is signaled in his dedication. Although he addresses his work to the “illustrious” and “gracious” Andrea, hoping she will be inspired by it, he characterizes his effort as a “slim volume,” and one that is intended “more for [his] friends’ pleasure than for the benefit of the broader public.” In his lavish praise of Andrea’s “joyous youth and floral loveliness,” he urges her to “strive to outdo all women in noble virtues”—but he also assumes the authority to warn her not to “embellish [her] beauty with cosmetics, as do the majority of [her] sex.”¹¹ In decrying the “absence” of any work collecting the biographies of famous women, he offers a peculiar rationale for compiling such a collection himself: if men, with the strength bestowed on them “by nature,” are praised for their great

deeds, then “how much more,” Boccaccio asks, “should women be extolled—almost all of whom are endowed by nature with soft, frail bodies and sluggish minds—when they take on a manly spirit, show remarkable intelligence and bravery, and dare to execute deeds that would be extremely difficult, even for men?” In thus describing his task, Boccaccio emphasizes the “natural” weakness of women, whose “frail bodies” and “sluggish minds” he contrasts to the “manly spirit” of those women whose stories he will tell. And the “famous” women in the stories he chooses to narrate are not altogether praiseworthy, at least as he tells their stories. “Chaste” women will find themselves “in the company” of women of “strong” but “destructive characters”: “It is not in fact my intention to interpret the word ‘famous’ in such a strict sense that it will always appear to mean ‘virtuous.’” With his readers’ “kind permission,” Boccaccio says that he will “adopt a wider meaning and consider as famous those women whom I know to have gained a reputation throughout the world for any deed whatsoever.”¹² Indeed, the failure of his biographies to praise women for having “performed acts requiring vigor and courage” has led one critic to conclude that, “quite deliberately,” very few of his portraits “depict women leading lives that exhibit *virtus*.” Instead, Constance Jordan argues, “they describe women who appear to be more or less reprehensible, more or less ineffectual, or simply pathetic.”¹³

While critical commentary about Boccaccio’s work abounds, our focus here is on what his *Famous Women* has to say about the question of female sovereignty, and so we will look carefully at his biographical portrait of one historical queen, Zenobia. Just as his dedication to Andrea Acciaiuoli suggests something of his ambivalence about women, Boccaccio’s biography of Zenobia, the queen of Palmyra, illustrates the “doubleness” of his viewpoint.¹⁴ In telling Zenobia’s story, he begins with her physical attributes. Zenobia was beautiful—she had “dark eyes and white teeth” as well as a “beautiful body” with one very interesting qualification—she was beautiful “despite being somewhat dark-skinned, as are all the inhabitants of that region of the burning sun.” Her outer beauty is a reflection of her inner beauty: she was noble, and she was virtuous; Boccaccio tells us that she “scorn[ed] the love and companionship of men” and “place[d] great store by her virginity.” More problematically, however, “she scorned all womanly occupations,” choosing instead a life in the forest, hunting bears, leopards, and lions, and enduring “with admirable fortitude” rain, heat, and cold. Overcoming her “feminine weakness,” she “acquired such hard, masculine vigor that sheer strength enabled her to subdue her young male contemporaries in wrestling

and gymnastic contests." Once she "arrived at marriageable age," she married a "young man toughened by similar exercises" on the "advice of her friends." Having "decided to conceal her beauty beneath armor," Zenobia followed her husband to war. When both husband and stepson were killed, leaving the throne vacant, "this noble-minded woman immediately entered into possession of the empire," Boccaccio asserts, a position that she had "long desired" (although she had "remained quiet," at least for "some time" while her husband was alive). Since her sons were still too young to succeed their father, "she draped the imperial mantle around her own shoulders, put on the royal insignia, and ruled the empire in her sons' names." Her abilities surpassed all expectations, though Boccaccio's assessment of her rule, symbolized by her appropriation of the trappings of male power, is signaled by the qualification that she "ruled the empire in her sons' names *longer than was suitable to her sex*."¹⁵

But, Zenobia had not only wanted to rule, even while her husband was alive, she had also schemed for her husband's throne; Boccaccio does not come right out and say this himself. Instead, he alludes to "some accounts" and "others" who suggest Zenobia's envy of her husband and, perhaps, her complicity in the events leading to her assumption of the rule "she had long desired." Thus he suggests her guilt even while distancing himself from it. He is similarly ambivalent in his assessment of her success: She "was not a weak ruler" is the best that he can muster. Even so, despite her skill in military affairs, the strict discipline of her troops, her care for her finances, and her dedication to learning, Zenobia was ultimately defeated by the Roman emperor Aurelian. She was displayed in Rome as part of the emperor's victory triumphs, shackled by the very symbols of her usurpation of male authority: "Fettered with gold chains around her neck, hands, and feet and burdened by her crown and royal robes and pearls and precious stones, she was exhausted by their weight and often had to stop, despite her inexhaustible vigor." Subjugation complete, she was returned to her proper—female—sphere and allowed to live "privately with her children amidst the women of Rome until she reached old age."¹⁶

Another of Boccaccio's "famous" women is worth our attention here as well. Boccaccio's portrait of his contemporary, Joanna I, queen of Naples, the last woman profiled in the collection, is as ambivalent as his biography of Zenobia.¹⁷ In his dedication to Andrea Acciaiuoli, Boccaccio indicates that he had originally intended to dedicate the book to Joanna, but since her "radiant luster" is "so dazzling" and the "flickering flame" of his "little book" is "so small and weak," he changed his

mind, “fearing that the greater would altogether eclipse the lesser light.”¹⁸ His method of tamping down Joanna’s “radiant luster” here, in his biographical narrative, is particularly interesting.

Joanna, Boccaccio writes, is “more renowned than other women of our time for her lineage, power, and character,” but he is compelled to add, as he had with Zenobia, that she has “a wondrously charming appearance.” In thus emphasizing her beauty rather than her “lineage, power, and character,” is Boccaccio subtly suggesting that her primary role is to be the object of the (presumably male) gaze of others rather than an independent agent engaged in the *vita activa*? As if to answer this question, Boccaccio says Joanna is “soft-spoken, and her eloquence pleases everyone”; she is “affable, compassionate, gentle, and kind.” Thus the challenge to gender norms that Joanna represents has been safely enclosed by Boccaccio’s gendered description of her.

Boccaccio can then address Joanna’s role as a queen regnant. After her crowning “with the royal diadem,” she “took action and cleansed not only the cities and inhabited areas but also the Alpine regions, remote valleys, forests, and wild places from bands of outlaws.” She “curbed the leading men and princes of the kingdom” and “reformed their dissolute ways”; they have even “discard[ed] their former arrogance.” Those “leading men and princes” who “earlier had no respect for kings now tremble at the sight of an angry queen,” Boccaccio notes. And Joanna has accomplished all this despite enduring “flight, exile, the grim ways of her husbands and the envy of noblemen, undeserved ill-repute, papal threats, and other evils.”¹⁹

Nevertheless, Boccaccio suggests that Joanna’s success as a ruler, like that of her ancient predecessor, Zenobia, is an anomaly. Her father died “in his youth”; since her grandfather “had no other offspring of the better sex,” Joanna inherits the kingdom “lawfully” on her grandfather’s orders.²⁰ Despite her lawful succession to the crown, Boccaccio notes his “amazement” at the fact that Joanna’s rule of Naples is tolerated, since her kingdom is “a mighty realm of the sort not usually ruled by women.” Yet “far more admirable,” he writes, “is the fact that Joanna’s spirit is equal to its governance.” Like Zenobia’s, Joanna’s success defies expectations: she has “brought such order to the lands she now possesses that both rich and poor can go safely and joyously by day or night.” She is “generous in the manner of a king rather than of a woman.” Her acts “would have been magnificent accomplishments for a vigorous and mighty king, much less for a woman.” But Boccaccio’s portrait of Joanna does not end on this note. Even as he draws the biography of his “famous” contemporary to a close, he manages once more to emphasize

her sex by suggesting that, despite Joanna's success as a queen, a king might still have been preferable: "When the occasion demands it, she has a regal and unyielding majesty; equally she can be affable, compassionate, gentle, and kind, so that one would describe her as her people's ally rather than as their queen. What greater qualities would one seek in the wisest king?"

Following his portrait of Joanna, Boccaccio draws his history to a close, suggesting as he does so just *why* she is the only living woman in his collection: "As is apparent, I have now come to the women of our own time. But so small is the number of those who are outstanding that I think it more honorable to end here rather than continue with the women of today—all the more so since this work, which began with Eve, mother of the human race, concludes with so illustrious a queen." He admits that "some will say that I have left out many famous women," but he excuses himself by saying that "Time, which triumphs over Fame, has engulfed the majority," that he was not "able to read about all those whose fame has survived" (he doesn't say why), and that his "memory did not serve" him as he might have liked for calling to mind "all those" of whom he did have "knowledge." Besides, he reminds his readers, "as I stated at the beginning of this book, I meant to choose only some from a very large number and to bring these to the reader's attention." And this, he says, he has done "suitably and well."²¹

Before drawing our brief look at *Famous Women* to a close, it is important to note that, among his "famous women," there *are*, after all, a few portraits of "Hebrew or Christian women," including the Jewish princess Mariam, the Christian poet Proba, the legendary Pope Joan, the empress Constance, and the widow Camiola.²² Boccaccio seems to suggest that there were simply not enough women to make up a volume without violating his own predetermined limits. Leaving such speculation aside, it is interesting to note that among these Hebrew women is Athalia (2 Kings 11 and 2 Chronicles 22–23).²³ His portrait of this "famous" woman is hardly ambivalent—from the initial announcement of her "savage nature" to the extended comment on the "divine justice" of her death, the story is a lavish indictment of a woman who, "casting aside every tender feminine sentiment" (failing even to mourn the death of her son), was "inflamed with a desire to rule."²⁴ She lacked "a woman's heart," ruthlessly eliminating with a terrible "ferocity" every man who stood between her and the fulfillment of her desire. And then, "thanks to the blood of so many who had been slain without pity," she "dared to seat herself upon the royal throne . . . and to govern the kingdom." Athalia's story is thus a lesson about the dangers of seeking power: Athalia

ultimately received “her deserts,” Boccaccio concludes. His warning to Andrea Acciaiuoli (and any other female readers) to take heed of the example of Athalia is both direct and explicit:

Truly, a craving for illegitimate rule is a terrible thing and, in the majority of cases, to acquire it demands cruelty. Rarely is mere chance responsible for the longed-for ascent; usually it is necessary to employ subterfuge or violence. If subterfuge is used, you will be assailed by thoughts of deception, traps, perjury, treachery, and similar things. If recourse is had to violence, you can expect to be plagued by upheavals, riots, calumny, cruelty, and rage. Whatever path to the throne you choose to travel, you must have your forces ready. All these means are considered actions proper to wicked men; unless you become the servant of such practices, you cannot become the ruler of a kingdom.

If she ignores his warning, Andrea can expect nothing but “tears, crimes, and murders,” and she will find it necessary to “give arms to cruelty, banish compassion, cast aside reason, encourage wrongdoing, do away with the sacred force of law, dance attendance on lust, invoke wickedness, mock candor, praise pillage, dissipation, and gluttony.” And “in a single hour,” she will “lose in death” all that she has “wickedly accumulated” during her life. This is the lesson that Athalia learned—“but too late.”²⁵

Despite his modesty about his “little book of famous women” and despite—or perhaps because of—his ambivalence about his subject, Boccaccio’s collection of biographical portraits of “famous women” proved popular, inspiring numerous other such collections, the most well-known example in English being Geoffrey Chaucer’s *The Legend of Good Women*.²⁶ But Boccaccio’s humanist approach does not guarantee a more positive view of women. The “new voice” of Renaissance humanism may sound different than the “old voice” of medieval Scholasticism, but, as Boccaccio’s *Famous Women* demonstrates, it does not necessarily express different opinions when it is speaking of women and their capacities. Perhaps the most insightful comment about these collections of the stories of women’s lives is one made several semesters ago by a student in my Chaucer class. After flipping through the biographies of Chaucer’s “good women” in her copy of the *Riverside Chaucer*—Cleopatra, Thisbe, Dido, Medea, Lucrece—she blurted out, “Wait a minute, wait a minute! Is Chaucer saying that the only good woman is a dead woman?”

But some writers of early Renaissance treatises on women did manage to avoid such ambivalence, expanding their narration of women's lives, incorporating argument as well as example in their works. Such is the method of both Giovanni Sabadino degli Arienti, whose *Ginevra, concerning Famous Women* (*Gynevera de le clare donne*) was dedicated to Ginevra Sforza Bentivoglio, and of Mario Equicola, whose *Concerning Women* (*De mulieribus*) was dedicated to Margherita Cantelma, a friend of Isabella d'Este, marchioness of Mantua. Their catalogues of "famous women" are little known today, but on the subject of female sovereignty, I think their work demands attention.

Arienti's stated goal is much like Boccaccio's: he is not praising all women but rather one woman, Ginevra Sforza, the biographical portraits in his collection offered up as lessons for and as compliments to her.²⁷ I believe that Arienti's *Ginevra* is intended as a response to and a challenge of Boccaccio's much more well-known *Famous Women*. This complicated relationship is subtly signaled by the very title he selects for his book: Arienti dedicates the collection to Ginevra, a compound of the Greek noun *gyne*, or "woman," and the Latin adjective *vera*, or "true." Unlike Boccaccio, who writes for a woman whose name identifies her with manly courage, whose name, in fact, is explicitly associated by Boccaccio with "men," Arienti addresses himself and his work to a "true woman."

Arienti challenges Boccaccio's history of women in another way as well. Instead of compiling a list of mythological, legendary, or classical women, Arienti focuses exclusively on contemporary women. Of the thirty-two biographies in his work, completed about 1490, twenty-six tell the stories of fifteenth-century women, from Caterina Visconti, who died in 1410, to his own wife, Francesca Bruna, whose death late in 1486 or early in 1487 is described at the conclusion of the collection. Of these women, a significant number are rulers. Rather than Boccaccio's Dido, Cleopatra, and Zenobia, Arienti writes about women like Caterina Visconti, regent of Milan for her sons; Joanna II, queen regnant of Naples; Isabel of Lorraine, regent for her husband, René of Anjou; Bianca Maria Visconti, regent of Milan for her son, Galeazzo Maria Sforza; and Battista Sforza, regent of Urbino for her husband and the sister, as Arienti notes, of Ginevra Sforza, "our singular lady."

Arienti's portrait of Caterina Visconti is typical of the pattern he establishes in his series of biographies of female rulers. Daughter of the "illustrious" Bernabo Visconti, Arienti writes, Caterina was married to Giangaleazzo Visconti, duke of Milan, and bore him two sons.²⁸ Although disaster seems imminent when her husband dies—"terrors,"

"fires," and "death" are signalled by "fearful omens," including a comet—Caterina is a woman "of great soul, ingenuity, and industry." Unafraid, and calling on God's help, she addresses the citizens of Milan in order to preserve their loyalty and the ducal state for her sons. Her "persuasive words, full of affection" win the citizens to her and her leadership. As regent, Caterina recovers all the territories that had been lost by Milan, governing always, Arienti says, with great prudence and discretion.²⁹

The portrait of Caterina Visconti is followed immediately by a biography of a very different kind of woman. In narrating the story of Joanna II of Naples, Arienti presents Ginevra a more complicated model, one that seems, at the outset, to be an example Ginevra might best avoid.³⁰ In her personal life, he writes, Joanna followed her "immodest nature"; she was "much dedicated to her lustful embraces," a "licentious" or wanton woman whom he compares to Semiramis, a "criminal queen" who rose to the throne of Assyria only after contriving her husband's death.³¹ Meanwhile, the Neapolitan political scene was as unsettled as Joanna's personal life, as the queen named first Louis of Anjou and then Alfonso of Aragon to succeed her, changing her mind and her heir several times. Yet Arienti's portrait ends on a positive note, as he emphasizes Joanna's ultimate contrition. She makes her peace with God, receiving divine grace before her death. In contrast to the "criminal queen" Semiramis, whom he first recalls, Joanna is ultimately judged by Arienti to present Ginevra with "a true mirror of feminine glory."

Giovanna Bentivoglio is presented to Ginevra as yet another model of political power.³² Giovanna is well educated, having studied the works of Dante, Petrarch, and, most significantly, Boccaccio himself, as well as scripture. In addition to her learning, Arienti praises Giovanna for her virtue, the "magnitude of her soul," and her fertility; married to Gasparo Malvezzi of Bologna, she gives birth to twelve children, carefully enumerated in the *Ginevra*. But, as she is represented by Arienti, this "very dear" daughter of Giovanni I Bentivoglio is notable for more than her reproductive success.

Giovanna's father had been proclaimed *signore* of Bologna in 1401, but he had been defeated by Giangaleazzo Visconti in 1402. Visconti's victory was short-lived, however; he died of plague six months after defeating Giovanni. Some twenty years later, in 1420, Giovanni's son, Antongaleazzo, attempted to seize control of the city and defeat his enemies. Into this narrative of the political history of Bologna, Arienti inserts the story of Giovanna Bentivoglio. In this period of turmoil, Giovanna "spoke often, dealing with the circumstances of the state." In

Arienti's judgment, "she knew how to speak about these matters," and her voice was respected; "she was held in regard" because of "her own natural ascendancy." Beyond that, "she was inspired in such away that, putting aside her feminine timidity, she wished to speak on many an occasion (she who lacked nothing other than the mark of manhood) in order to give status and reputation to the house of the Bentivogli [and] chagrin to its enemies."³³

Boccaccio had praised his famous women for overcoming the "natural" weakness of women—"frail" bodies and "sluggish" minds—and for demonstrating a "manly spirit." But for Arienti, by contrast, both the body and mind of a "famous" woman are fully female and equally "natural." As Arienti constructs Giovanna's biography, she is able to fulfill her natural role as a woman by producing children, but her "ascendancy" in a political situation is also "natural." Lacking the "mark of manhood" (more literally, in Arienti's terms, the "virile sign," a penis), she nevertheless contributes both to the fame of her family and to "the humiliation of its enemies." Arienti employs a similar technique in his portrait of Battista da Montefeltro, emphasizing her political skill not by denying her sex but by calling attention to it. Praising her for her government of Pesaro after the death of her husband, Galeazzo Malatesta, Arienti notes, "Testimony of our elders attests that she governed the state better than her husband; for which she was held very dear and greatly venerated by her subjects."³⁴

Thus Arienti does not praise the accomplishments of his "famous women" without noting their sex. But neither does he identify these accomplished women with men, manliness, or virility. Like Ginevra, they are "true women"—they rule with discretion, "even better" than their husbands, they act on their sexual desires, they are "natural" mothers and "natural" political speakers. His *Ginevra* thus represents a very different view of women than Boccaccio's *Famous Women*, and it is equally significant for its use of contemporary lives, rather than ancient stories, as its models.³⁵

Arienti sent a copy of his *Ginevra* to Isabella d'Este of Mantua, one of the most famous of the "famous women" of his day and one who, significantly, functioned successfully as regent of Mantua for her husband. Mario Equicola, in turn, dedicated his *Concerning Women*, composed between 1500 and 1501, to Margherita Cantelma, a friend of Isabella d'Este.³⁶ Equicola's brief work, just fourteen leaves of text, was written and published in 1501. His treatise devotes itself to a discussion of the equality—and perhaps even the superiority—of women, and while it does not directly address the question of women's fitness for rule, it does

suggest that attitudes about what is considered an “appropriate” role for women are culturally constructed rather than divinely determined. Like Arienti’s *Ginevra*, then, Equicola’s *Concerning Women* represents a subtle yet direct corrective to Boccaccio.

The first part of Equicola’s brief text is devoted to his discussion of the equality of men and women’s souls, which leads him to conclude that women are equal to men. Yet, as Equicola observes, men and women have very different roles in society. He notes the “marked discrepancy” between the way men and women are treated: “women find themselves in a state of subjection” as a result of “a tyranny unlawfully exercised by men over women’s natural freedom.”³⁷ He concludes that women’s position is not due to any natural inferiority but to their upbringing and to “the force of custom”:

Since . . . no one with a sane mind will deny that violence, authority, power, and tyranny have been employed against divine law and the laws of nature; and the result has been that the natural freedom of woman has either been prohibited by laws or demolished by custom, at every point absolutely extinguished, abolished, extirpated. The reason is that the lives [of men and women] are turned in different directions. The woman is occupied exclusively at home where she grows feeble from leisure, she is not permitted to occupy her mind with anything other than needle and thread . . .; then scarcely having passed puberty, authority [over her] is given to a husband; he erects and elevates himself a little more highly [than his wife], he puts her in a household as in a workhouse, [treating her] as if she were unable to grasp the most important matters and hold the higher offices . . . so that just as to the victorious go those conquered by war, in the same way the mind of even the most spirited of women yields to habit. We cannot ignore the fact that we do not exist by natural necessity but that we form into groups either by example and private discipline or by chance and favorable circumstance or even through all these.³⁸

In drawing the first portion of his brief work to a close, Equicola refers to societies where women have played a part in the larger world, citing among his authorities Plato, in particular the fifth book of his *Republic*. The stories with which he concludes his *Concerning Women* are patterned after Boccaccio’s biographical portraits, but, in addition to the lives of women from classical history and mythology, he contributes three contemporary portraits, chief among them an extended biography of Isabella d’Este.

The works of Arienti and Equicola point the way for later treatises devoted to more extended discussions of women's potential for active public roles. One further work, Agostino Strozzi's *Defense of Women* (*Defensio mulierum*), is important in this transition from constructing catalogues of women's lives to debating women's capacities and their role in society. Strozzi addresses in an explicit way the abilities of women, questioning traditional assumptions and arguing the fundamental equality of the sexes. Although his work does not address the question of female sovereignty per se, in arguing that both men and women are equally able to perform great deeds, he suggests that women do have a capacity for rule.

Strozzi's defense was composed about 1501 and, like Equicola's *Concerning Women*, was dedicated to Margherita Cantelma.³⁹ Challenging traditional interpretations of scripture and Galen, Strozzi, too, argues that custom, rather than nature, has defined and limited women's roles:

. . . the condition of women is neither inconvenient nor ill suited for all the . . . occupations, offices, and thoughts which seem to belong properly only to men. . . . Because nature has neither forbidden nor denied such occupations to women, but . . . custom, so that if this custom is changed, as we have several times read and heard has already happened, women will begin to apply themselves to the things that men do. . . . And then, such custom being confirmed through long use, astonishment could cease with the cessation of the novelty . . . and at the same time foolish accusations would cease.⁴⁰

Having responded to all the attacks that have been made on women, Strozzi turns to his argument that women, too, are capable of performing all of the glorious deeds for which men have been praised.⁴¹ To support his assertions that women, like men, have "fought in wars and governed republics," Strozzi supplies examples; unlike Arienti and Equicola, however, he includes no contemporary women, claiming (like Boccaccio) that envy might destroy their reputations. Instead, as he discusses women who have demonstrated "excellence" in their administration of the state and in leading armies, he focuses on Deborah, the Amazons, Semiramis, Dido, and Zenobia, ending this section of his defense with an inspiring portrait of the "most glorious" Matilda of Tuscany, renowned for her personal rule of her husband's vast territories and for leading troops against both the Holy Roman Emperor Henry IV and his son, Henry V.⁴²

Like Equicola, Strozzi refers to Plato's *Republic* in support of his argument about women's capacities, noting that Plato divided work equally between the sexes. Strozzi claims that men, "being stronger in physical strength and in daring," have "restrained" women from exerting themselves and proving their abilities. In collecting biographies that show women share a "mind and soul . . . ready and prompt to undertake any hard and difficult thing, and to energetically carry out every big enterprise that they have thought of embracing," Strozzi moves away from a focus on "famous"—that is, exceptional—women and toward a defense of all women.⁴³ The women Strozzi praises are not "exceptions to their sex"; as Pamela Benson notes, each of Strozzi's biographies "illuminates womankind as a whole" because the women whose lives he relates "are of the same kind" as all women, "though more gifted."⁴⁴



Strozzi constructs his history of women, as he says, "so that their glory, which has been obscured and oppressed by the spite of some men, will come to light, and so that in the future the malicious mouths of the unjust slanderers will be closed and locked."⁴⁵ This claim—that the "glory" of women has been "obscured and oppressed" by men—plays a significant part in the first of the sixteenth-century humanist works we will examine in some detail, Henricus Cornelius Agrippa von Nettesheim's *On the Nobility and Preeminence of the Female Sex* (*De nobilitate et praecellentia foeminei sexus*).⁴⁶ Like Giovanni Pico della Mirandola's more famous oration on the "dignity of man," Agrippa's declamation on women's "nobility and preeminence" was first presented as a lecture, delivered at the University of Dole in 1509 "in honor" of the "exalted princess" Margaret, duchess of Austria and regent of the Netherlands, and intended, in Agrippa's words, as "a notable encomium in praise of her."⁴⁷

In publishing his text some twenty years after it had been originally written, Agrippa expresses some reservation. In part, he fears his reputation might suffer because the work will be regarded as a "trifle" of his "youth." But he is also concerned that the work will "prejudice" his "reputation" for other, more fundamental, reasons:

I have undertaken—as boldly as I can but not without shame—to treat a topic previously ignored but by no means far from the truth, namely the nobility and preeminence of the female sex. I confess that more than once, within myself, my boldness has struggled with my sense of shame. For on the one hand, I thought it the height of

ambition and boldness to seek to enumerate in a discourse the innumerable merits of women, their virtues, and their complete superiority. On the other hand, to accord women preeminence over men seemed the height of shame, almost the sign of an emasculated spirit. This is perhaps the reason very few have attempted to set forth in writing the praises of women and no one I know of has yet dared to affirm their superiority over men.⁴⁸

Despite his claim that “no one” had yet dared to argue women’s superiority to men, at least in part because of the “shame” and the fear of emasculation that were involved in such an undertaking, the widely read Agrippa is clearly familiar with earlier humanist treatises defending women and with at least three fifteenth-century texts that had argued women’s superiority, including Equicola’s *Concerning Women*, Juan Rodriguez del Padron’s *Triumph of Women* (*Triunfo de las donas*, 1438), and Bartolomeo Goggio’s *In Praise of Women* (*De laudibus mulierum*, c. 1487).⁴⁹ While the argument he presents may not be as original as he claims, while the work was composed—and first published—in Latin rather than in the vernacular, and while there is some debate about the tone of his work, the influence of Agrippa’s “declamation” in the sixteenth century was profound. His work was quickly and widely translated, adapted, and augmented. According to Albert Rabil, his most recent translator, “It is not an exaggeration to say that Agrippa’s declamation exercised an influence in the continuing *querelle des femmes* similar to that exercised by Erasmus on humanism and Luther on the Reformation. During the following century and more, texts on this subject proliferated, and many if not most of them counted Agrippa as an immediate source.”⁵⁰

In making his case for the superiority of women, Agrippa overturns traditional theological, philosophical, legal, and medical views, employing biblical texts used as evidence of women’s inferiority to “prove,” instead, their superiority, challenging Aristotle’s conclusions about women’s physical, emotional, and mental inferiority, and demonstrating that the oppression of women has relied on custom. He concludes that women’s inferior status is undeserved and arbitrary rather than natural and necessary. According to Agrippa, the difference between the sexes “consists only in the different location of the parts of the body for which procreation required diversity.” Further, “Woman has been allotted the same intelligence, reason, and power of speech as man and tends to the same end he does.”⁵¹

Agrippa’s declamation begins with a reference to a biblical text generally avoided by those who argued women’s inferiority, Genesis 1:26: “God

most beneficent, Father and creator of all good things . . . created humans in his image, male and female created he them." But Agrippa's purpose is not merely to assert that men and women are equal; aside from the equality of their souls, Agrippa argues that "in everything else that constitutes human being the illustrious feminine stock is almost infinitely superior to the ill-bred masculine race." He will prove his position, he says, "not by forged or counterfeit speech or by the snares of logic," and not simply by reexamining scripture and the law, but "by taking for authorities the best authors," by "appealing to authentic historical accounts," and by seeking "clear explanations."⁵² Applying these methods—challenging received views and traditional authorities and relying on empirical evidence—Agrippa goes on to argue the superiority of women in Creation, the superior beauty of women, the superior virtue of women, the superior role of women in salvation, the superior power of women (with a digression demonstrating "that men, not women, are the origin of all evils"), and the superior constancy of women.

Much of Agrippa's evidence and many of his arguments are, now, rather unconvincing if not preposterous. His Neoplatonic notion of beauty, for example, leads him to the conclusion that, since "beauty itself is nothing other than the refulgence of the divine countenance and light which is found in things and shines through a beautiful body," women, who are "much more lavishly endowed and furnished with beauty than man," merit "an increase in esteem and honor, not only in the eyes of humans, but also in the eyes of God."⁵³ To prove woman's superior virtue, he cites her greater "sense of shame": her hair grows long enough to cover "the more shameful parts" of her body, she doesn't have to touch these same "shameful" parts "though it is the usual practice for men to do so" (when they urinate, for example), and, "nature itself has disposed the sexual parts of women according to a marvelous decency, inasmuch as they are not protruding as they are in men but remain internal, concealed in a secret and secure place." He claims that even when she is desperately ill, a woman will choose to die rather than to expose these "private parts" to "the view and touch of a surgeon." Her "virtue of shame" is preserved even in death: if she drowns, "nature, sparing the modesty of the dead, causes the woman to float face down, while the man remains on his back."⁵⁴ And since mothers love their children more than fathers do, at least according to Agrippa, "this same reason explains why we have by nature . . . more affection toward our mother than toward our father."⁵⁵

However unconvincing we may now regard such "evidence," Agrippa's fundamental claim about the ability of women is astonishingly modern: "women can do everything men do." To support this assertion, he turns to examples that will prove, as he says, "that there has never been any exceptional or virtuous deed of any kind performed by men that has not been executed by women with equal brilliance."⁵⁶ In surveying women's contributions to the larger society, Agrippa notes that women have, in the past, served as priests, acted as prophets, performed magic, contributed to society as inventors, and composed works of philosophy, oratory, and poetry. In addition to these contributions, Agrippa notes the "many other illustrious women whose marvelous courage saved their entire nation from a desperate situation."⁵⁷ Quickly listing biblical and then classical examples, he pauses to relate the more recent example of Joan of Arc, focusing on her military capacity. Joan "took up arms like an Amazon," placing herself "at the head of the army." Joan thus excelled in a field crucial to the success of a ruler, a field customarily regarded to be beyond the abilities of a woman: she "fought so vigorously and successfully that she conquered the English in numerous battles." In this instance, in fact, she succeeded where a man failed: she "restored to the king of France a kingdom he had already lost."⁵⁸

But Agrippa is not so much concerned with enumerating specific examples as he is in arguing women's capacities. He could, he says, "recount innumerable exceptional women" from "the histories of the Greeks, Latins, and barbarians, ancient as well as modern," but then his work would be "extend[ed] without measure." Noting that such stories have already been told by others (Boccaccio, for example), Agrippa instead moves on to argue that women are "they on whom depend every family and every state."⁵⁹ He turns to history to support his argument that women's social status has not always been inferior, their legal status so limited, their roles so restricted, and their abilities so overlooked.⁶⁰ How, then, he asks, has women's status been so reduced? Agrippa's answer is unambiguous. The "excessive tyranny of men prevails over divine right and divine law":

. . . the freedom that was once accorded to women is in our day obstructed by unjust laws, suppressed by custom and usage, reduced to nothing by education. For as soon as she is born[,] a woman is confined in idleness at home from her earliest years, and, as if incapable of functions more important, she has no other prospect than needle and thread. Further, when she has reached the age of

puberty, she is delivered over to the jealous power of a husband, or she is enclosed forever in a workhouse for religious. She is forbidden by law to hold public office; even the most shrewd among them are not permitted to bring suit in court.⁶¹

Yet this is not all. Agrippa's indictment of contemporary society continues: "In addition women are excluded from the court, from judgments, from adoption, from intercession, from administration, from the right of trusteeship, from guardianship, from matters of inheritance, and from criminal laws." Such laws, he concludes, "compel women to submit to men, as conquered before conquerors, and that without reason or necessity natural or divine, but under the pressure of custom, education, chance, or some occasion favorable to tyranny."⁶² Further, women are excluded from preaching and teaching the word of God "in contradiction to scripture" by those "who have assumed authority in religion and exercised it over women." To those who have based "their tyranny" on Genesis 3 and Pauline epistles, Agrippa suggests alternative texts: "Therefore those who are justified by faith and have become the sons of Abraham, that is to say, sons of the promise, are in the power of a woman and subject to the command of God, who says to Abraham[,] 'Whatever your wife Sarah says to you, obey her words.'"⁶³

In arguing that woman has been created with the "same intelligence, reason, and power of speech as man," in asserting that she "tends to the same end he [man] does," in claiming that she "can do everything men do," in demonstrating that women have ruled kingdoms, have been permitted "to be judges and arbiters, to have power to invest or be invested with a fief, and to decide a matter of law among their vassals," and, in fact, are as capable as men "even in all that touches military training," including knowing how to "set up camp and a line of battle" and "directing the army," Agrippa draws the inevitable conclusion that "women are not inferior to men either in the quality of their minds or in their physical strength, or in the dignity of their nature."⁶⁴

Despite its circulation and influence in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, *On the Nobility and Preeminence of the Female Sex* has, until recently, been largely forgotten.⁶⁵ In his edition of Agrippa's declamation, Rabil quotes a critic who in 1937 commented that the work "is ignored by everyone today, even our suffragettes" and then notes that even *this* recognition of the treatise "did not change that situation, for no one picked up [this] lead until the 1970s." Unlike the work of his influential contemporaries—Erasmus and Luther, for example—Agrippa's work, and even Agrippa himself, have been "thoroughly forgotten, or at

least reduced to that level of dim awareness indicated by a rather brief entry in the *Encyclopedia Britannica*.⁶⁶ But it is important to stress here that Agrippa's declamation was not ignored by *his* contemporaries but by *ours*—and I will risk the suggestion that the reason for the obscurity of the declamation may be Agrippa's argument that women are not only equal to but *superior* to men. Rabil's edition of Agrippa makes this appealing and influential text readily accessible to English readers for the first time.

By contrast, Baldassare Castiglione's nearly contemporary work, *The Book of the Courtier* (*Il Libro del cortegiano*), has not suffered a similar fate, perhaps because of its focus on the ideal—male—courtier, and perhaps because its view of women is less sanguine than the one presented by Agrippa. In form *The Book of the Courtier* is neither a catalogue of women worthies nor a conduct book nor a declamation—it is a dialogue, one of the most popular of humanist genres in the sixteenth century. While “dialogues” took the form of casual conversations and thus might seem to open up a space for female participants, they did not. As Janet Smarr notes in her discussion of this Renaissance form, “It would be difficult indeed to count how many dialogues were published in the sixteenth century alone, either in Latin or in vernacular languages. . . . Of the many hundreds of dialogues from this period, however, very few even included women speakers.”⁶⁷ We will turn our attention next to several of those exceptional sixteenth-century dialogues.

Written between 1513 and 1518 and published in 1528, Castiglione's description of the ideal courtier—which he compares to “a portrait in painting”—begins with the author's explanation of how the book came to be written.⁶⁸ Asked by a friend to instruct him on the subject of the “trade and manner of courtiers which is most convenient for a gentleman that liveth in the court of princes,” Castiglione at length agrees to “fashion such a courtier,” one worthy to serve a prince “perfectly in every reasonable matter” and, while gaining the prince's favor, one who will “obtain . . . praise of other men.” But he agrees even while distancing himself from the task: rather than describing such a man himself, Castiglione offers to “repeat certain reasonings that were debated in times past, between men very excellent for that purpose.” Although he was away from court at the time this “debate” took place, Castiglione notes that he “heard them of a person that faithfully reported them.” Thus he excuses himself from responsibility for the book even while claiming the authority of the book.

The conversations so “faithfully” transmitted to Castiglione by his anonymous source and then “recorded” in *The Book of the Courtier*

purportedly took place at the court of Urbino over the course of four evenings in March of 1507.⁶⁹ The discussions that Castiglione recounts were, he indicates, presided over by Elisabetta Gonzaga, duchess of Urbino and wife of Guidobaldo da Montefeltro.⁷⁰ Even more shocking than the mere presence of a woman is the inclusion of women in the conversation itself; in addition to the duchess of Urbino, three other women are present: Emilia Pia, Elisabetta Gonzaga's friend and companion; Margarita Gonzaga, the young niece of the duchess; and Costanza Fregosa, a half-niece of Elisabetta's husband. It may be hard for us, as twenty-first century readers, to gauge the significance of Castiglione's inclusion of female speakers in *The Book of the Courtier*, but as Virginia Cox notes, there is no previous text that would have "prepared Castiglione's readers for the novelty of the appearance of women in a dialogue whose style and structure proclaim its affiliation to the hitherto exclusive masculine . . . tradition. The importance of this fact for our reading of the *Cortegiano* can hardly be overemphasized."⁷¹

Following two evenings devoted to the "design" of the ideal courtier, the discussion turns, on the third night, to the "fashioning" of a gentlewoman of the court, a worthy "equal" of the courtier in virtue and accomplishment. But, rather than allowing the female participants in the conversation to seize the opportunity to define for themselves what they are, as women, and what they can do, Castiglione—under the guise of his unidentified informant—relegates the ladies of Urbino, for the most part, to silence.⁷² He assigns the task of designing the noble lady of the court to the men.

Counted a "protector of the honor of women," the Magnifico Giuliano de' Medici, one of those men, takes up the challenge to fashion "a gentlewoman of the palace" with "all the perfections due to a woman." Lady Emilia Pia is happy to have the task so placed; her fear is that if Gaspar Pallavicino, no friend to women, were to undertake the "enterprise," he would create a "gentlewoman of the court" who "can do naught else but look to the kitchen and spin."⁷³ Despite Lady Emilia's fears, as the conversation begins it is Gaspar, the so-called enemy of women, who asserts that "the very same rules that are given for the courtier serve also for the woman." For, "as much as her weakness is able to bear," she is "to observe . . . all the . . . properties that have been so much reasoned upon as the courtier." Giuliano, the supposed defender of women, disagrees, espousing a kind of virtuous double standard: "I am of a contrary opinion. For albeit some qualities are common and necessary as well for the woman as the man, yet are there some other more meet for the woman than for the man, and some again meet for

the man, that she ought in no wise to meddle withal." In her "fashions, manners, words, gestures, and conversation," as well as in "exercises of the body," the woman ought to be "unlike" the man, Giuliano asserts; he does not want a woman to be "virile" but to engage in what is "appropriate" for the "soft delicacy" that best suits her. However, even while discouraging "virility" in her outward appearance and behavior, he asserts that the "many virtues of the mind [are] as necessary for a woman as for a man." Such virtues include wisdom, courage, prudence, temperance, and strength of mind.⁷⁴ Like the ideal courtier, the ideal lady should demonstrate "nobleness of birth, avoiding affectation or curiosity," and she should demonstrate "good grace of nature in all her doings." She should be "witty, foreseeing [mannerly], not naughty, not envious, not ill-tongued, not light, not contentious, not untowardly," and, of course, beautiful. As a woman she should be tender, "soft and mild, with a kind of womanly sweetness" and must also have "all those parts that belong to a good housewife."⁷⁵

As a companion for the courtier, she should have, "beside her discretion," the ability "to understand the condition of him she talketh [with], to entertain him honestly," and "a sight of many things and a judgment in her communication to pick out such as be to purpose for the condition of him she talketh [with], and be heedful that she speak not . . . words that may offend him." Above all, Giuliano wishes his lady to exhibit a "certain pleasing affability" so that she can entertain the men with whom she comes into contact. To that end, he also argues that the lady should "have a sight in letters," a quality that sparks a challenge and that leads us, at last, to the issue of female sovereignty, which makes its first appearance as a joke. "Smiling," Gaspar says, "I wonder then . . . since you give women both letters, staidness, and nobleness of courage and temperance, ye will not have them also to bear rule in cities and to make laws and to lead armies and men to stand spinning in the kitchen."⁷⁶

But the dangerous topic having been raised, even as a joke, it must then be deflected. Neither of Castiglione's speakers addresses himself to Gaspar's sly suggestion. Instead, Giuliano gracefully responds. "Perhaps, too, this were not amiss," he replies. He then continues with a masculine display of his erudition: "Do you not know that Plato (which indeed was not very friendly to women) giveth them the overseeing of cities and all other martial offices he appointed to men? Think you not there were many to be found that could as well skill in ruling cities and armies as men can?" But, because he is fashioning "a waiting gentlewoman of the court, not a queen," Giuliano has "not appointed them [women] these offices." He charges that Gaspar believes the common,

"slandrous report" of women—"namely, that they be most unperfect creatures and not apt to work any virtuous deed, and of very little worthiness, and of no value in respect of men."⁷⁷

Gaspar objects to this characterization of himself as well as to the "fond impossible matters" Giuliano has "appointed to the gentlewoman of the palace." Giuliano ought to have been content to make the lady "beautiful, sober, honest, well-spoken, and to have the understanding to entertain, without running in slander, with dancing, music, sports, laughing jests," and other such matters "that we see daily used in court." To give women "knowledge of all things in the world" and the virtues "that so seldom times are seen in men" is "a matter that can neither be held withal nor scantily heard." In support of his view of women, Gaspar refers, without being explicit about his source, to the views of women "that most wise men have left in writing," namely that they are "unperfect creatures, and consequently of less worthiness than men." The debate then devolves into a familiar controversy, with Gaspar reproducing Aristotelian arguments about women's generation and nature: woman is a "defect" or "accident" of nature, while man, or "form," is superior to woman, or "matter"; "when a woman is born," he asserts, "it is a slackness or default of nature and contrary to that she [nature] would do." To be a woman is to be "a creature brought forth at a chance and by hap." As the result of a "defect of nature," the "defaults of women" cannot really be hated, nor should women be respected less than is "meet."⁷⁸

Responding in kind, Giuliano reminds the group in the ducal palace of another Aristotelian notion, that physical weakness characterizes mental strength; he also resists Gaspar's assertion that "nature's intent is always to bring forth things more perfect, and therefore if she could, would always bring forth a man." "The bringing forth of a woman" is not an example of nature's "default or slackness," he observes, for without women, "mankind cannot be preserved."⁷⁹ After further Aristotelian skirmishes about matter and form and heat and cold, Giuliano then extols women's contributions to philosophy, poetry, law, and crafts. "In case you will measure in every time the worthiness of women with men's," he says, "ye shall find that they have never been, nor yet presently are, any whit inferior to men." He also reminds the assembled group that "such there have been also that have made war and obtained glorious victories, governed realms with great wisdom and justice, and done whatever men have done." Asked by a skeptical Gaspar just who "these great women are," who "have been so worthy [of] praise," Giuliano launches into a long history of women worthies.⁸⁰

The most interesting part of Giuliano's recital of the lives of famous women occurs after a reproof from Gaspar that such "ancient histories" are unreliable. "Tush," he says, "God wotteth [knows] how these matters passed, for these times are so far from us that many lies may be told, and none there is that can reprove them." In response, Giuliano produces more reliable evidence, turning to Italian history. He begins by citing the case of the Gothic queen Amalasuintha, who "ruled with marvelous wisdom," then that of Queen Theodolinda of the Longobards, and two women whom we have already seen used as precedents, the empress Theodora and Countess Matilda of Tuscany.⁸¹ Continuing, he recalls the "many famous" women of the houses of Montefeltro, Gonzaga, and Este, before calling to the attention of the assembled group several noteworthy contemporaries: Anne of Brittany, twice queen of France, "a very great lady, no less in virtue than in state"; Margaret of Austria, "which with great wisdom and justice hitherto hath ruled, and still doth, her state"; and Isabella, queen of Castile.⁸²

The reference to Isabella inspires an interesting exchange. In introducing her, Giuliano asks, "What king or what prince hath there been in our days, or yet many years before in Christendom, that deserveth to be compared to Queen Isabella of Spain?" To which Gaspar quickly and wittily replies, "King Ferdinand, her husband." Giuliano concedes Gaspar's point: "This I will not deny." But he continues by suggesting that Ferdinand's renown has been enhanced by Isabella's: "... since the Queen thought him a worthy husband for her and loved and observed him so much, it cannot be said nay, but he deserved to be compared to her. And I think well the reputation he got by her was no less a dowry than the kingdom of Castile." Gaspar moves quickly to clarify his meaning: "'Nay,' answered Lord Gaspar, 'I believe rather of many of King Ferdinand's acts Queen Isabella bore the praise.'" ⁸³

In response, Giuliano cites the judgment of the people of Spain, "the nobles, private persons, both men and women, poor and rich," in whose judgment, he indicates, "there hath not been in our time in the world a more clear example of true goodness, stoutness of courage, wisdom, religion, honesty, courtesy, liberality, [and,] to be brief, of all virtue, than Queen Isabella." He goes on to summarize her rule:

And who so will weigh her acts shall soon perceive the truth to be so. . . . [I]n the first beginning of her reign, she found the greatest part of Castile possessed by great estates, yet recovered the whole again, so justly and in such sort that they dispossessed themselves,

continued in great good affection, and were willing to make surrender of that they had in possession.

It is also a most known thing with what courage and wisdom she always defended her realms from the most puissant enemies. And likewise to her alone may be given the honor of the glorious conquest of the kingdom of Granada, which in so long and sharp a war against stubborn enemies that fought for their livelihood, for their life, for their law, and to their weening in God's quarrel, declared evermore with counsel and with her own person so much virtue and prowess as perhaps in our time few princes have had the stomach, not only to follow her steps but to envy [imitate] her.

Besides this, all that knew her report that there was in her such a divine manner of government that a man would have weened that her will only was almost enough to make every man without any more business [busy-ness] to do that he ought, so that scarce durst a man in his own home and in secret commit any thing that he suspected would displease her. And of this great part was the wonderful judgment which she had in knowing and choosing ministers meet for the offices she intended to place them in.

And so well could she join the rigor of justice with the mildness of mercy and liberality that there was no good person in her days that could complain he had been smally rewarded, nor any ill too sore punished.

Even now, after her death, her "authority liveth, like a wheel long swung about [whirled around] with violence [force], keeping the same course a good while after of itself, though no man move it any more."⁸⁴

Turning once more to Italy, Giuliano notes Isabella's peers and contemporaries, including, among them, Joanna I and Joanna II, both queens regnant of Naples; Isabella of Aragon, duchess of Milan; and Eleanor of Aragon, duchess of Ferrara, and her two daughters, Beatrice and Isabella d'Este.⁸⁵ To conclude his claims about women's abilities, he asks his listeners to consider their experiences rather than their unconsidered biases: "It sufficeth that if in your minds you think upon women whom you yourselves know, it shall be no hard matter for you to understand that they are not most commonly in prowess or worthiness inferior to their fathers, brethren, and husbands, and that many have been occasion of goodness to men and many times broken them of many of their vices."⁸⁶

Gaspar is not convinced by Giuliano's argument, however, and turns the discussion to women's incontinence, claiming that from their

weaknesses arise "infinite inconveniences that do not [arise] of men's." Appealing to traditional values and unspecified authorities, he claims that they "have wisely ordained that it may be lawful for them [women] to be out of the way . . . that they may apply their force to keep themselves in this one virtue of chastity."⁸⁷ But Giuliano defends women by pointing out the sexual double standard that condemns women for their "appetites" and "lusts" while excusing men. Men have condemned women for the very behavior that they themselves enjoy. They use "common opinion" as a means of control: "And therefore have men laid upon them [women] fear of slander for a bridle to keep them . . . , whether they will or no, in this virtue, without which . . . they were little to be set by. . . ." Giuliano concludes that men govern cities and armies and perform "many other weighty matters," "the which," he indicates, "I will not dispute how women could do; it sufficeth they do it not."⁸⁸

The defense of women continues, however, the cause being taken up next by the duchess's kinsman, Cesare Gonzaga, who "had held his peace a good while." Cesare begins by gracefully suggesting Giuliano rest himself a while, so that he "shall afterward the better go forward to speak of some other perfection of the gentlewoman of the palace." At the same time, he notes that, in his opinion, Giuliano has in "certain few matters" also "falsely spoken against women." Contrary to traditional views, Cesare asserts that "women abstain more from unclean living than men." And, also contrary to traditional views, women "are not kept short with any other bridle than what they put upon themselves." The "great bridle to women," he claims, "is the zeal of true virtue and the desire of good name which many that I have known in my days more esteem than their own life." Citing a series of examples of worthy, chaste women, Cesare argues that, when it comes to virtue, women are superior to men. Such virtue, in turn, inspires men's love.⁸⁹

In defining women's power over men, Cesare, too, turns to the example of Isabella of Castile, but in his view, her success as queen comes from her ability, as a woman, to inspire men to great deeds, rather than, as a woman, to perform great deeds herself:

Many there be that hold opinion that the victory of King Ferdinand and Isabella of Spain against the king of Granada was chiefly occasioned by women. For the most times when the army of Spain marched to encounter with the enemies, Queen Isabella set forth also with all her damsels, and there were many noble gentlemen that were in love, who till they came within sight of the

enemies, always went communing with their ladies. Afterward, each one, taking his leave of his, in their presence marched on to encounter with the enemies with that fierceness of courage that love and desire, to show their ladies that they were served with valiant men, gave them.⁹⁰

After all, love, rather than politics, is to be the “principal profession of the gentlewoman of the palace,” for the remainder of the evening’s conversation among the men and women in Urbino is devoted to women’s authority in love. In the end, it seems that a woman may rule, but her “kingdom,” at least as it is ultimately defined, is limited to the heart of her lover. In turn, a man does owe obedience to a female sovereign, at least in this same kingdom of love: “all your desires should be to please the woman beloved, and to will the self same thing that she willeth, for this is the law of love.”⁹¹

The Book of the Courtier, at first suggesting a wider scope of activity for women, thus ends by restricting the possibilities. Is it just by chance that Castiglione’s work remained so popular, while Agrippa’s fell into secularity? Or is it because Castiglione’s main focus is on the male courtier, while Agrippa’s is on women? Without addressing these questions just yet, it is worth pausing here for a moment to consider Castiglione’s work alongside the most well-known political text of the sixteenth century. The presence of Isabella of Castile in *The Book of the Courtier* makes her absence in Machiavelli’s *The Prince* (*Il principe*) all the more interesting.

Machiavelli’s famous treatise on statecraft was written between 1513 and 1514, making it contemporaneous with Castiglione’s work, composed between 1513 and 1518. Machiavelli refers numerous times to Ferdinand of Aragon throughout his work, but *The Prince* makes no reference at all to Isabella of Castile. Since many of the reference to the Spanish king allude to his wars in Italy after Isabella’s death in 1504, Machiavelli’s omission is, at least in part, understandable.⁹² But one extended passage in *The Prince* is conspicuous both for the achievements it credits to Ferdinand and for its omission of Isabella.

In Chapter Twenty-One, “How a prince must act to win honour,” Machiavelli writes Isabella of Castile completely out of political events:

Nothing brings a prince more prestige than great campaigns and striking demonstrations of his personal abilities. In our own time we have Ferdinand of Aragon, the present king of Spain. He can be regarded as a new prince, because from being a weak king he has risen to being, for fame and glory, the first king of Christendom. If

you study his achievements, you will find that they were all magnificent and some of them unparalleled. At the start of his reign he attacked Granada; and this campaign laid the foundation of his power. First, he embarked on it undistracted, and without fear of interference; he used it to engage the energies of the barons of Castile who, as they were giving their minds to the war, had no mind for causing trouble at home. In this way, without their realizing what was happening, he increased his standing and his control over them. He was able to sustain his armies with money from the Church and the people, and, by means of that long war, to lay a good foundation for his standing army, which has subsequently won him renown.

Castiglione's Giuliano de' Medici rightly notes that Isabella's decision to marry Ferdinand of Aragon had provided him with the "dowry" of the kingdom of Castile; Machiavelli, by contrast, suggests that Ferdinand grew from being "a weak king" to being "the first king of Christendom" by his own achievements. Giuliano also credits Isabella's "counsel," "virtue," and "prowess" with the conquest of Granada in 1492—"to her alone may be given the honor of the glorious conquest." Even the more problematic arguments Castiglione assigns to Cesare Gonzaga—Isabella's mere presence inspires men to do great things—credit the queen's influence in the Spanish victory. Machiavelli, on the other hand, attributes the conquest exclusively to the "unparalleled" achievements of the Spanish king alone.⁹³

Machiavelli continues his praise of Ferdinand with a reference to the 1502 expulsion from Granada of all Muslims who would not abjure Islam and convert to Christianity. Machiavelli writes: "In addition, in order to be able to undertake even greater campaigns, still making use of religion, he turned his hand to a pious work of cruelty when he chased out the Moriscos and rid his kingdom of them: there could not have been a more pitiful or striking enterprise." Machiavelli indicates, as well, that "under the same cloak of religion," Ferdinand "attacked Africa." In both cases, Machiavelli's omission of Isabella is noteworthy since she, more than Ferdinand, was responsible for the 1502 act and expulsion, and she, as well as Ferdinand, realized the importance of the campaign in Africa.⁹⁴

Given the dialogue form of *The Book of the Courtier* and the strategies Castiglione uses to distance himself from the responsibilities of "authorship," it is difficult to determine just what Castiglione's own views about women's abilities as rulers might be. Machiavelli's opinions in *The Prince*

are much less ambiguous. Despite the curious omission of Isabella of Castile from *The Prince*, he seems to have no difficulty in accepting female rulers; he refers both to Joanna of Naples and to Caterina Sforza, countess of Imola and Forlì, for example, not with regard to their sex but as he discusses whether a prince should use mercenary troops (Joanna) and whether a prince will find fortresses useful (Caterina).⁹⁵ Among all the questions he asks, whether a female should or could function successfully as a prince is never at issue in *The Prince*. Machiavelli never asks whether a woman *ought* to rule; alone among sixteenth-century writers on politics, he works from the assumption that women *do* rule.⁹⁶

No such assumption is found in the work of the Spanish humanist Juan Luis Vives, however, in spite of the fact that he, like all of the men whose works we have discussed here, knew women rulers and accepted their patronage. In *The Instruction of a Christian Woman* (*De institutione feminae christianae*), Vives denies any public role at all for women. The prescriptions and proscriptions in his conduct book are all the more noteworthy given the work's origins and audience: Vives was invited to England by Isabella of Castile's daughter, Catherine of Aragon, and was commissioned by the English queen to write a treatise on the education of women for *her* daughter, Mary Tudor.⁹⁷ His work was, then, composed at the request of a woman who herself had been a queen regent and who was the daughter of a queen regnant, and it was intended for a young woman who stood to become a queen in her own right one day.

Vives arrived in England in the spring of 1522; by August he was at work on the book, which was completed by 5 April 1523 and published that same year.⁹⁸ Vives opens *The Instruction of a Christian Woman* with a dedication addressed to Catherine, indicating that the task that he has been asked to undertake is unprecedented. Noting that a "great plenty and variety of wits and writers" (Aristotle, Plato, Jerome, Ambrose, and Augustine, among them) had "exhort[ed] and counsel[ed]" women "unto some kind of living," Vives asserts that none of these men had ever undertaken "to instruct and teach" women how to live: rather, these men had "spen[t] all their speech in the lauds and praises of chastity, which is a goodly thing, and fitting for those great witted and holy men; how be it, they wr[o]te but few precepts and rules how to live, supposing it to be better to exhort them [women] unto the best and help them up to the highest than to inform and teach the lower things."⁹⁹ Vives, however, will right these previous wrongs; he "will let pass such exhortations" and will, instead, "compile rules of living."

But something of the limitation of his plan for women's education becomes immediately apparent as he outlines the book to come: "Therefore," he says, "in the first book, I will begin at the beginning of a woman's life and lead her forth unto the time of marriage. In the second, from marriage unto widowhood, how she ought to pass the time of her life well and virtuously with her husband. In the last book, I will inform and teach the widowhood."¹⁰⁰ Because women's needs are so limited, Vives can afford to be brief: "though the precepts for men be innumerable, women yet may be informed with few words. For men must be occupied both at home and forth abroad, both in their own matters and for the commonweal. . . . As for a woman, [she] hath no charge to see to but her honesty and chastity. Wherefore when she is informed of that, she is sufficiently appointed."¹⁰¹ Thus, although he had said his book would "let pass exhortations" to "chastity," his own "rules for living" are designed to the same end—the means may be different, but the goals are the same. Vives seems to sense none of these contradictions, however. His work is offered to Catherine, he says, "in like manner as if a painter would bring unto your own visage and image, most cunningly painted": "in these books shall you see the resemblance of your mind and goodness." And her daughter Mary "shall read these instructions . . . and follow in living"; if she fails to do so, she will "disappoint and beguile every man's opinion."¹⁰²

Vives's work at once expands and contracts women's horizons. He argues vehemently for their education, noting the fear that "learned women be suspected of many" who claim "the subtlety of learning should be a nourishment for the maliciousness of their [women's] nature." For his part, Vives asserts that "we shall find no learned woman that ever was evil." In support of his case, he cites biblical, classical, and contemporary examples of learned women including Zenobia. But his assessment of the value of women's education is interesting. With no reference at all to her rule of Palmyra, he notes that Zenobia was "skilled in both Greek and Latin and wrote history," and he makes it clear that her "extraordinary continence" is the most important result of her education. Among the examples of his own age, he notes Isabella of Castile's four daughters (Catherine among them) and the daughters of Sir Thomas More. While each of Isabella's daughters earned "words of praise and admiration" for her learning, again what is important is moral character: "There were no women in human memory more chaste." His comments about More's daughters are similar: More "was not content that they be chaste but also took pains that they be very learned." Why? More educated them "in the belief that in this way they would be more truly and steadfastly chaste."¹⁰³

When it comes to answering the specific questions of “what learning a woman should be set unto” and “what shall she study,” Vives limits women to “the study of wisdom,” that is, what will “instruct their manners and inform their living,” what will “[teach] them the way of good and holy life.” A woman is to be given books “that may teach good manners.” When she learns to write, her examples, drawn from scripture and “the sayings of philosophers,” should be “some sad sentence prudent and chaste.” She is, in short, to be educated in a way that will obviate the active, public life of a ruler. She is not, for example, to be trained in public speaking: “As for eloquence, I have no great care, nor a woman needeth it not, but she needeth goodness and wisdom. Nor it is no shame for a woman to hold her peace, but it is a shame for her and abominable to lack discretion and to live ill.”¹⁰⁴ She is not to read about war or armor (much less “to handle” it), nor is she to watch armed men or “give sentence and judgment of them.”¹⁰⁵ In sum, she is not to be educated in subjects beyond “the study of wisdom.” She needs to know nothing beyond “the way of good and holy life”:

. . . it is meet that the man have knowledge of many and diverse things that may both profit himself and the commonwealth, both with the use and increase of learning. But I would the woman should be altogether in that part of philosophy that taketh upon [it] to inform and teach and amend the conditions. . . . For it neither becometh a woman to rule a school nor to live amongst men or speak abroad . . . ; if she be good, it were better to be at home within and unknown to other folks, and in company to hold her tongue demurely and let few see her and none at all hear her.¹⁰⁶

Despite Vives’s humanist position and his “advanced, even revolutionary ideas” about women’s education, his view of women is essentially conservative: “a woman is a frail thing, and of weak discretion,” more-over a “frail thing” that “may lightly be deceived.”¹⁰⁷ Like Castiglione’s Giuliano de’ Medici, Vives believes that a woman’s “unbridled liberty” is dangerous; if a woman is not restrained, “then hath she all the bridle of nature at large and runneth headlong into mischief and drowneth herself therein.”¹⁰⁸ In contrast to Agrippa, who deplores the fact that woman “has no other prospect than needle and thread,” and to Castiglione’s Emilia Pia, who ironically suggests that an “ideal” woman might “do naught else but look to the kitchen and spin,” Vives advocates the “wool and flax” for her: “Therefore, let her learn her book and, besides that, to handle wool and flax, which are two crafts yet left of that old, innocent world, both profitable and keepers of temperance, which thing especially

women ought to have in price." Although he says he will "not meddle here with . . . low matters," he reiterates the necessity that women be kept busy: "I would in no wise that a woman should be ignorant in those feats that must be done by hand, no, not though she be a princess or a queen," he writes, and so Isabella of Castile "taught her daughters to spin [and] sew."¹⁰⁹ Thus the great governor whose rule is praised by Castiglione's Giuliano has been reduced from directing armies to directing girls in the use of a needle and thread.

Once she is married, a woman is to "direct all her thoughts, her words, and her deeds" to preserving "truly and safely the pureness of wedlock." Her relationship to her husband is clearly delineated: "the woman is as daughter unto her husband and of nature weaker." She owes her husband "obedience," certainly; she is "subject" to him as well. As Vives defines the "natural roles" of men and women, then, "the male's duty is to succor and defend, and the female's to follow and to wait upon the male and to creep under his aid and obey him"; in order for a woman to "live the better in wedlock," she must know that "the man resembleth the reason, and the woman the body" and, obviously, "reason ought to rule and the body to obey."¹¹⁰ It is here, at last, that Vives addresses explicitly the subject of women and rule. In conforming to her natural role, a woman clearly has no part to play in ruling a state. A married woman must not "go . . . abroad"; she should, in fact, "go less abroad than maids" because it is her duty, as a wife, to please her husband, and pleasing her husband means remaining isolated from the public. She is neither "hear [listen to] other men" nor to "hear of [about] them"; she should, in fact, "hear but few words" at all, and speak even less, remaining silent except when her silence is harmful. She is not to concern herself with anything at all that does not "pertain . . . to the creating of virtue": women's works "ought to be webs of cloth and not eloquent orations." And truly virtuous women know nothing at all about law or about government—citing Cato, Aristotle, and Seneca, Vives emphasizes this prohibition. Women need to know nothing at all about "any matters of the realm." Any violation of this prohibition is "folly."¹¹¹

Thus Vives's construction of a woman's nature and duty denies her right to sovereignty, and the educational program he designs for Mary Tudor denies her the preparation she would need to function effectively as a sovereign. This denial is emphasized in the quotation from *The Instruction of a Christian Woman* that appears at the beginning of this chapter:

. . . [Y]ou women that will meddle with common matters of realms and cities and ween to govern people and nations with the

braids of your stomachs, you go about to hurl down towns afore you, and you light upon a hard rock, whereupon, though you bruise and shake countries very sore, yet they scape and you perish. For you know neither measure nor order, and yet, which is the worst point of all, you ween you know very well and will be ruled in nothing after them that be expert. But you attempt to draw all thing[s] after your fantasy without discretion. Ween you it was for nothing that wise men forbad you rule and governance of countries and that Saint Paul biddeth you shall not speak in congregation and gathering of people? All this same meaneth that you shall not meddle with matters of realms or cities. Your own house is a city great enough for you.¹¹²

And yet, contrary to what most modern readers know, or think they know, this passage was *not* written by Vives at all. Despite its frequent citation by critics and historians, the passage quoted here is in reality an insertion into the Latin text made by Vives's English translator, Richard Hyrde, whose *A Very Fruitful and Pleasant Book Called the Instruction of a Christian Woman* was published in 1540.¹¹³ That a woman cannot—and should not—take on the “matters of the realm” is explicit in Vives; he is adamant on this point. But in translating Vives, Hyrde adds the prohibition quoted here, addressing it directly to women: “*You* women,” he writes, who are “meddling” and who “think to govern people and nations,” you think you know best, but you are only dreaming. Your own house is the limit of your “rule.”

As we have noted, Vives composed his educational treatise at Catherine of Aragon's invitation—thus his references to Isabella of Castile and his assertion that women have no place in government are all the more surprising and significant. The great Spanish queen is recalled only as a wife and mother, not as sovereign in her own right. We are left to wonder what Catherine of Aragon made of such references to her mother, and how she interpreted them in the context of her own life, since Vives says the English queen will find in his book her own likeness, “as if a painter” had reproduced her “own visage and image, most cunningly painted.” And, more important, we are left to puzzle out how she was to understand Vives's instructions for women in relationship to her daughter—particularly since Mary was Henry VIII's only legitimate heir in 1523, when the Latin original of *The Instruction of a Christian Woman* was published. The English translation of Vives, completed a few years later, further complicates the picture. Can we identify what motivated Hyrde to add this particular passage to his translation of Vives, whose

own views were already so clear, and why Hyrde felt the added necessity of addressing “you women” directly? About Hyrde’s translation, Benson writes that it “confirms the openness of Vives’s text to a more positive reading of woman’s capacities” and its “profeminist confidence in woman’s intellect,” but passages like this one, and images such as the bridle, noted above, do not seem to bear out such an assessment of Hyrde’s views.¹¹⁴

I find it hard to resist any explanation but the most obvious one—that both Vives and, later, his English translator are quite deliberately writing to discourage the possibility of the succession of a queen regnant to the throne of England. In the early 1520s, as Vives was designing his program for Mary Tudor’s education, the possibility that the princess might succeed her father on the throne is still just that, a theoretical possibility. Henry and the aging Catherine might yet produce a son and heir; it remained possible, though increasingly improbable. Vives’s discouraging view of female sovereignty is thus, I believe, his response to the vexed question of the English succession. Despite the example of Isabella of Castile, the book prepared by Vives for her granddaughter was not intended to prepare Mary for a role as queen regnant and, in fact, seems to argue against any such a role for her.

At some point not long after *The Instruction of a Christian Woman* was published in 1523, the king decided to resolve the succession question himself and thereby solve the “problem” of female sovereignty. He at first seems to have considered naming his illegitimate son, Henry Fitzroy, as his successor; in 1525 he made the boy duke of Richmond.¹¹⁵ But by 1527 Henry had changed course, deciding instead to divorce Catherine and produce the requisite “legitimate” male heir with a new queen. It is in this context that we must place Richard Hyrde’s English translation of Vives and his addition to Vives’s original. Hyrde was a member of Thomas More’s household and, like More, a great proponent of women’s education (indeed, he was a tutor to More’s daughters). Although he addressed his dedicatory preface of his “fruitful and pleasant” book to Queen Catherine, his translation of Vives’s *Instruction*, with its amped-up warning against the possible succession of a woman to a position of political authority, a warning that is addressed directly to women, must be understood for its political relevance. The timing of Hyrde’s English translation and his striking insertion represent a significant part of the public debate about the king’s “great matter.”¹¹⁶ While the outcome of the king’s pursuit of a divorce remained uncertain, warnings about female sovereignty—and even a direct warning to the queen herself—have become a necessary component of the debate, and

such arguments are useful to the king as he pursues his divorce. (Less than thirty years later, when the theoretical possibility of a queen regnant became a reality—when the possibility of a queen regnant had morphed into the reality of Queen Mary—it would result in John Knox's attack on female sovereignty and the ensuing vitriol of the gynecocracy debate.)

And yet the very circumstances that produced Hyrde's warning soon came to demand some modification of the negative assessments of female sovereignty. After Henry's split with Rome, the king's single-minded pursuit of a divorce, a new queen, and a male heir plunged his kingdom into the midst of religious turmoil. Sir Thomas Elyot's *The Defense of Good Women* functions as the necessary qualification of these negative views of female sovereignty.¹¹⁷ Like Richard Hyrde, Elyot was a member of Sir Thomas More's humanist circle, and as early as 1531 he signaled his intention of joining Vives and Hyrde in undertaking a work about the education of women.¹¹⁸ In the fall of that year, Henry VIII sent Elyot to the court of Charles V, and it may have been there, during his tenure at the imperial court, that Elyot began the composition of *The Defense of Good Women*—and began to live what Constance Jordan has described as his "double life." While he outwardly "complied with royal policy" and "even participated in Henry's government," Elyot "secretly" plotted against the king and his divorce.¹¹⁹ Elyot's *Defense* was thus produced not only against the background of Henry VIII's divorce proceedings and Elyot's own diplomatic mission to the Holy Roman Emperor, but also as a response to the fears, rumors, and predictions about Catholic conspiracies to depose the English king and to place Catherine of Aragon on the throne as regent for Princess Mary.¹²⁰ While Vives and, even more vehemently, Hyrde explicitly oppose female sovereignty, Elyot's *Defense*, by contrast, responds to the political exigencies of the 1530s, as Henry abandons Catherine and pursues the course that will end in England's separation from Rome and Henry's marriage to Anne Boleyn. Under such extreme circumstances, Elyot suggests that, after all, an exceptional woman might be able to govern.

In the "argument" that precedes his work, Elyot describes the form of his *Defense*: it represents a "contention between two gentlemen, the one named Caninius, the other Candidus." Caninius, "like a cur," is "always barking" about women, while Candidus, as his name implies, is "benign," one who "judgeth ever well." In addition to describing his form, Elyot also outlines his purpose ("Between [the] two, the estimation of womankind cometh in question"), but there is no doubt about the ultimate answer to this "question." Elyot announces the conclusion

of the "contention," even before the debate begins: after "long disputation," Candidus is to have "the preeminence."¹²¹

When the "argument" itself begins, Caninius—the Aristotelian detractor of women—explains that on the previous day he saw Candidus, kinsman to Emperor Aurelian, "devising with ladies." Caninius concludes that Candidus is thus "a lover," one of "Venus's darlings," and adds, "therefore I lamented." He advises the young man to "pluck out" his legs from the trap of love "ere the bolts be riveted," but Candidus, smiling, invites Caninius to his home for dinner instead. After they have had their meal, Candidus promises, ". . . I vanquish your willful opinion conceived against women, or else I, being vanquished with sufficient reason, will from henceforth leave all mine affection."¹²² In the discussion that follows, Elyot presents Candidus as the Platonic defender of women. In reply to Caninius's notions of woman derived from Aristotle's *Generation of Animals*, *History of Animals*, and *Politics*, Candidus presents arguments derived from Book Five of Plato's *Republic*. His strategy, as described by Constance Jordan, is "simple": "He defeats Caninius by logically invalidating the criticisms of misogynists; then he confirms his position with 'experience,' or evidence from 'history'; and, in conclusion, he adduces a living example of the truth of his opinion, the captive Queen Zenobia."¹²³ The "contention" between Caninius and Candidus thus repeats the humanist arguments that we have seen before. Elyot's introduction of Zenobia as a third speaker in the conversation is something unique, however.

While the example of Queen Zenobia had been used in humanist arguments from Boccaccio on, as we have seen, what is most notable in Elyot's *Defense* is that, for once, Zenobia appears not in a catalogue of woman worthies or by way of allusion, but as a participant in the discussion of woman's worth. But Elyot does not allow her to defend the abilities of women; she enters the conversation only after Candidus has demolished Caninius's arguments, one by one. That Elyot allows the queen to speak on her own behalf—and publicly—is innovative, but, even so, her presence in the *Defense* is exemplary, as Elyot makes clear in his prefatory "argument": "at the last, for a perfect conclusion, Queen Zenobia . . . by the example of her life, confirmeth [Candidus's] arguments and also vanquisheth the obstinate mind of froward Caninius, and so endeth the matter."¹²⁴ Candidus prepares Caninius for Zenobia's arrival, in fact, by saying, "we now have one example among us, as well of fortitude as of all other virtues, which in mine opinion shall not be inconvenient to have at this time declared and so of this matter to make a conclusion."¹²⁵

Candidus produces Zenobia as proof that “the wits of women” are not “apt only to trifles and shrewdness” but to “wisdom and civil policy.” Women have the “discretion, election, and prudence which do make that wisdom which pertaineth to governance,” he argues. Zenobia herself has been educated in Greek, Latin, and Egyptian, and she, in turn, has educated her own children. Now, “vacant from other business,” she writes “eloquent stories.” Thus educated and safely occupied, she demonstrates not only “nobility, virtue, and courage” but also “constancy and reason.”¹²⁶ But when she appears, Elyot qualifies Zenobia’s position by having the queen acknowledge the extraordinary—and potentially dangerous—nature of her appearance. She tells Candidus, “ye have caused me to do that [which] I have used very seldom,” that is, to “be out of mine own house at this time of the night.” Candidus reassures her that nothing will “come to your hearing or sight but that both to hear and see may stand with your worship.” Zenobia thanks him for remembering that her “princely estate” does not tolerate “words of dishonesty,” but, because she is now a “private person,” she fears “the common success [consequence] of familiarity”: She dreads the “infamy” that might result from her appearance at Candidus’s discussion, she says, “more than ever I did the loss of my liberty.” The threat to her reputation, then, is what makes her “afraid to come to suppers and banquets.”¹²⁷

Despite her fears and with Candidus’s reassurance, Zenobia remains. She is asked about her age at the time of her marriage. When she says she was married at age twenty, Candidus responds that it “was great pity that you so long tarried.” Zenobia replies that it was to her benefit to have delayed her marriage, because at that age “she knew the better” what belonged “to her duty” as wife. She had spent the years between sixteen and twenty in the study of moral philosophy:

. . . wherein . . . I perceived that without prudence and constancy, women might be brought lightly into error and folly and made, therefore, unmeet for that company whereunto they were ordained, I mean to be assistance and comfort to man through their fidelity. . . . I found also that justice teacheth us women to honor our husbands next after God, which honor resteth in due obedience. . . . Also justice restraineth us to do anything which is not seemly. By fortitude are we still kept in virtuous constancy, as well in resisting affections and wanton persuasion as also to sustain (when they do happen) afflictions patiently. But in a woman, no virtue is equal to temperance, whereby in her words and deeds she alway[s] useth a just moderation, knowing when time is to speak

and when to keep silence, when to be occupied and when to be merry. And if she measure it to the will of her husband, she doeth the more wisely, except it may turn them both to loss or dishonesty. Yet then should she seem rather to give him wise counsel than to appear disobedient or sturdy [obstinate]. In every of these things consisted my duty, which I should not so well have known if to my husband I had sooner be[en] wedded.¹²⁸

Thus, unlike the virile Zenobia of Boccaccio, Elyot's exemplary *queen* speaks first of her training and functioning as an exemplary *wife*. As a wife, Zenobia owes her husband obedience, but with important qualifications. Justice precludes her from doing anything "unseemly," fortitude keeps her "affections" in constancy, and temperance restrains her from obedience to the "will of her husband" if it "turn them both to loss or dishonesty." In fact, Zenobia says, "during the life of my noble husband of famous memory, I was never . . . seen [to] say or do anything which might not content him or omit anything which should delight him. . . ." ¹²⁹

After the death of her husband, Zenobia finds her learning to be "a marvelous treasure." She recognizes that, for "lack of a governor," her state is in imminent danger; her children will be "little regarded" because of their youth, while she, as a woman, "should nothing be feared." Her study of history has prepared her to recognize internal threats—the dangers posed by protectors who "forget their obedience, trust, and fidelity"—and external threats to Palmyra posed by enemies—a "host of Romans" on one side, "thieves of Arabia" on the other. Zenobia is thus compelled—and prepared—to take action: "After that I had a little bethought me, I determined to prepare remedies quickly, and to sustain fortune at all times patiently. And to the intent that the name of a woman should not among the people be had in contempt, I used so my proceedings that none of them might be said to be done womanly." ¹³⁰

In acting contrary to her sex, circumstances demanding that she behave in ways that are "unwomanly," Zenobia makes herself governor of Palmyra. She appears publicly among her "nobles and counselors," she speaks openly her "opinion, so that it seemed to them all that it stood with good reason," she reminds the people of the honors they had been given "by the excellent prowess" of her husband, and she displays her children, using their "tender age" and her own "sundry orations" to "retain [the] fidelity" of her subjects. She also acts to ensure that "the name of a woman should not among the people be had in contempt" by

traveling throughout her realm, by bolstering defenses, and by making “good laws to be published, observing them first in my own household.” She adds to her realm as well, though not by direct military action. Rather than using “force,” Zenobia builds her “empire” by “renown of just and politic governance . . . which all men had in such admiration that diverse of our sundry enemies, which against the realm erst did conspire and had invaded my jurisdiction, chose rather to leave their hostility and to remain in our subjection than to return to their own country.” By this “manner [of] industry,” Zenobia “quietly governed the realm of Palmyra.”¹³¹

At this point in the *Defense*, Caninius capitulates completely: “I see well enough that women, being well and virtuously brought up, do not only with men participate in reason, but some also in fidelity and constancy be equal unto them.”¹³² But in this reply, something of the ambivalent attitude about women rulers is visible, even in *The Defense of Good Women*. Caninius’s unlooked-for change of opinion—“I would never have looked for such a conclusion,” he admits—is cautious and limited. “Some” women are equal to men in reason, fidelity, and constancy, virtues that would allow them to perform male roles. If they are educated, some women are, indeed, *capable* of ruling.

And thus we see the political intent of Elyot’s *Defense*. While Charles Fantazzi regards Elyot’s work as a mark of Vives’s influence on later humanists (“Elyot espouses many of the ideas of Vives”), it represents a more qualified view of female sovereignty.¹³³ The changed political circumstances in Henry’s England make the possibility of a queen regnant or regent preferable to the alternatives. Under certain circumstances, a female “governor,” like Catherine of Aragon, might be acceptable, even preferable, to the alternative. In this sense, Elyot’s depiction of Zenobia is critical: her education, her exemplary nature as a wife, her submission to her husband *unless* his actions lead them “to loss or dishonesty,” her ability to rule but her willingness to do so only to preserve her children’s patrimony, and even her status as a “captive queen,” can all be read as they correspond to Catherine of Aragon’s own experiences in the 1530s when she was abandoned, divorced, stripped of her title, separated from her daughter, exiled from court, and relegated to a series of ever more remote locations.

Thus *The Defense of Good Women*, responding to the political crises of the moment, offers *some* concession to the possibility of female sovereignty. In the contest between Henry VIII and Catherine of Aragon, Elyot is prepared to offer a qualified support for a female “governor.” When there is a failure of male leadership, a queen might be allowed to

rule as long as she can be carefully controlled and safely contained. But it is important to notice Elyot's limits. If she is educated, a woman may be *capable* of ruling, but nowhere does Elyot argue that she has the *right* to do so. An exceptional woman can function successfully in a man's role, at least under exigent circumstances, but only if she is prepared to act in a way that is "unwomanly" and as long as her "reign" is temporary.

Still, it is significant that Elyot has allowed a woman a voice of some substance in his work. Unlike Vives, who uses the example of Zenobia only as an example of chastity and who enjoins all women to silence, Elyot allows her to speak. And he not only allows her to speak, but, in contrast to Castiglione's women, Elyot allows Zenobia to speak to the issue. Even so, we must remember that "Zenobia" is a character created by Elyot, and "her" voice is, in reality, Elyot's. *The Defense of Good Women* may present, as Pamela Benson argues, "radical assertions that men and women participate in the same system of virtues," but, even so, "Zenobia" can speak only when Elyot allows her to speak, and she can say only what Elyot allows her to say.¹³⁴ And while Elyot allows a woman to speak, and even to defend her role as governor, this woman is Zenobia—a political prisoner in Rome, a failed ruler. And so what does his "defense" of "good women" come to in the end? It offers female sovereignty only as a last and temporary resort, the least worst option when all else fails.

That Elyot's *Defense* was intended to respond to the political and religious turmoil unleashed by Henry's pursuit of a divorce should be clear, but equally clear is the work's ultimate ambiguity, a reflection of Elyot's own conflicted situation. With the friendship and protection of Thomas Cromwell, Elyot managed to avoid the bloodbath that overtook Thomas More and so many others in the 1530s. But circumstances in Henry's England changed dramatically after the death of Catherine of Aragon, Henry's execution of Anne Boleyn, the birth of the king's long-desired male heir, and, after the death of Jane Seymour, his international search for a fourth queen. The remarkable printing history of this cluster of works—Vives's Latin *The Instruction of a Christian Woman*, Hyrde's English translation, and Elyot's carefully qualified revisions of their views on female sovereignty—testifies to their continued political usefulness. After Catherine of Aragon's death in 1536 and the prince's birth in 1537, the necessity (and desirability) of a female regent or queen receded, and so Vives's Latin *Instruction* was reprinted in 1538. But the king's marriage to the Protestant Anne of Cleves in 1540 resulted in "war panic," a terrible fear of a three-pronged attack from Scotland, the Netherlands, and Spain.¹³⁵ A Catholic invasion aimed at deposing the

apostate king would mean placing a new monarch on the throne—a new monarch who might well be the Catholic favorite, Henry's daughter Mary. The fear and uncertainty seem to be reflected in the barrage of republished versions of Vives's *Instruction*—editions published in 1540 and 1541 followed the 1538 reprint—and of Hyrde's English translation, first published in 1540, with a second edition quickly following in 1541. Elyot seems to have hedged his bets—or to have continued his “double life”—when his *Defense* was finally published in 1540, he dedicated the published version to the new queen, the Protestant Anne of Cleves.¹³⁶



An interesting twist on Elyot's strategies—if ambiguity can be called a strategy—is employed by the neo-Aristotelian scholar Sperone Speroni in his dialogue *On the Dignity of Woman* (*Della dignità della donna*), which is contemporary with Elyot's *Defense*.¹³⁷ While Elyot juxtaposed the “feminist” Platonic view of women (in the person of Candidus) to the Aristotelian “antifeminist” view (personified in Caninius), Speroni's dialogue introduces two *interlocutori*, or speakers, Michele Barozzi and Daniele Barbaro, both of whom are noted Aristotelian scholars from Padua, as is Speroni himself.¹³⁸ But the dialogue form of Speroni's work is more complicated than that in Elyot's *Defense*, for Speroni embeds a second conversation into the first, thus doubling the number of voices and further distancing the voice of the lone woman who is allowed to speak.

In the framing conversation of Speroni's dialogue, “Barbaro” and “Barozzi” meet by chance. Encountering his friend walking alone, Barozzi hails Barbaro and, after politely greeting him, inquires about what is on his mind; as it happens, Barbaro is thinking about a female “paragon,” Signora Beatrice Pia Obiza.¹³⁹ Although Barozzi says he knows the lady by reputation, he admits that he has yet to meet her, so Barbaro offers to introduce his colleague to Beatrice. Until they can meet face to face, he praises her to Barozzi—and to us—by relating an earlier conversation in which the lady herself had taken part. Thus we have the multiple layers of Speroni's text—one conversation enclosed within, or framed by, another. But unlike the debate between Elyot's Candidus and Caninius, the “debate” between Barozzi and Barbaro is not really a debate at all, since it consists of a one-sided recital of an earlier debate, between two other *interlocutori*, one identified as Count Ludovico da San Bonifacio, the other identified only as a resident of

Padua, but probably representing Speroni himself.¹⁴⁰ And in any case, Barozzi and Barbaro are only passing the time, not engaging in a serious discussion—they agree to talk about something that is “perhaps not true” but nonetheless enjoyable, the purpose of which is “not to correct any error” or even “to decide the question.”¹⁴¹ The purpose of the debate is, it seems, the production of the words themselves.

The embedded conversation between the “adversaries” raises familiar questions. Are women created to be “at the service” of men, or are men “naturally subjected to the seignury of women?” In marriage, is a wife’s duty to serve her husband, or is it a husband’s duty to serve his wife? If a wife is to be subservient to her husband, is her status similar to that of her husband’s “servant,” or is she more like her husband’s “slave”? Are women imperfect by nature? What are, or should be, the relative positions of men and women in society? Should a woman have any public role in government, or is her home the sole sphere over which she is to exercise sovereignty? And if men are superior to women, why would any man, under any circumstances, consent to be “governed” by a woman?¹⁴²

As Barbaro relates the earlier conversation, he tells Barozzi that the adversaries had “solved” the dilemma of women’s relationship to men by placing the question in a kind of historical context. Women’s inferior position in society is not “natural”; to the contrary, “every woman by nature is the governor of man.” And “if custom is contrary, it is because . . . men, more robust and made with greater strength than . . . women, force [them] with violence” and ultimately “tyrannize” over them, “perhaps in the very way that Roman armies used to elect an emperor in contravention of the laws of the republic.”¹⁴³ But this “injustice” is temporary. While mankind has subjugated womankind, an individual man’s “violence” yields ultimately to the “gentle operation” of an individual woman’s love. In marriage, “love, a kind of counterforce, can in time reinstitute a wife’s lawful and benign order of government.” After “having obtained his wife by forcing her into an unnatural and illicit submission,” a man is “convert[ed]” by his wife’s love into becoming her “law-abiding subject.” The very word “wife” indicates her “natural and general governorship.”¹⁴⁴

But this paradoxical—and tenuous—“solution” to the question of women’s status and to the extent of her “government,” even so narrowly defined, is not allowed to stand, for at this very moment “Beatrice” had inserted “her” views into the conversation that Barbaro is relating.¹⁴⁵ Unlike Elyot’s “Zenobia,” who confirms Candidus’s victory over Caninius, “Beatrice” disrupts the balance that has been

achieved by undermining the conclusion that has been reached. The final word is given to her, and her “victory” is to show that woman’s nature is imperfect, her status inferior, and her surrender to men’s lordship is willing. But it is important to remember that Beatrice never actually appears on the scene, or at least she never appears on the scene with Barbaro and Barozzi. She figures prominently in the conversation between Barbaro and Barozzi, but she is never a participant in that conversation; instead, Barbaro merely quotes Beatrice, embedding her words in his own. We hear Beatrice’s voice, but twice-removed: Speroni creates “Barbaro” who, in turn, conjures the figure of “Beatrice” and gives her voice.

According to Barbaro, Beatrice objected to the conclusion about women that had been so cautiously and carefully reached by the count and his unnamed “adversary.” “I do not believe it to be true,” she had said, reacting to their solution. A husband does not become his wife’s obedient servant; to the contrary, Beatrice asserted that it is a woman’s nature—and virtue—to serve and a man’s to command her. In making her point, she compared the “rule of a husband” to Christ’s rule over humankind, and after making this comparison, she concluded that the “yoke” of a woman’s servitude to man is “light, and very gentle.”¹⁴⁶ Indeed, it is a wife’s “joy and happiness to serve her husband”: “it is natural for a wife to serve her husband, and not a harmful or a shameful condition,” she had explained, adding that “a woman is not a woman unless she serves her husband.” A woman is an imperfect thing who can neither see clearly nor reason sufficiently; “therefore the woman serves, knowing that she does not serve as one deprived of liberty, like a slave, but as one to whom it is not convenient to be free for very long or to any great extent, lacking by her nature that part of the soul given to . . . men,” who have been created as lords and masters.¹⁴⁷ Thus while men—“Barbaro” and “Barozzi” in the framing conversation, and the count and his unnamed adversary in the embedded conversation—are willing to allow women some degree of “government,” very narrowly defined, Speroni concludes his reflections *On the Dignity of Woman* by denying even that degree of “governorship” to women—his “Beatrice,” presented as the ultimate authority, returns even limited rule to husbands as lords and masters over their wives.

The limits of female authority are also explored by another neo-Aristotelian, Torquato Tasso, who had studied with Speroni in Padua.¹⁴⁸ Unlike Elyot and Speroni, Tasso does not create multiple voices when he decides to take up the subject of female virtue.¹⁴⁹ Instead, he writes in one voice, his own, and addresses himself and his *discorso* to her “most

serene" highness, Barbara Beatrice of Austria, the duchess of Ferrara. Tasso, her "most devoted" and "most humble" servant, finds in the duchess a perfect model; she is like a work of art—"a statue" or "a painting," for example.¹⁵⁰ In her perfection, she is thus a "mirror," or model, for other women. But she is not only a model to be emulated by others—Tasso's text is also intended to be a mirror in which the duchess can see her own reflection. His "portrait" of the duchess is deceptive, however, because it has two faces.

This doubleness is signalled by the title Tasso has given his discourse. His subject is not the virtue of women, but of *virtù femminile* and *virtù donnesca*, two separate—and distinct—kinds of virtue for two very different kinds of women. The first kind of virtue is "feminine" virtue, the virtue that is expected of women in general, while the second kind of virtue, modified with the adjective *donnesca*, is literally "lady-like" virtue, that is, the special virtue found within—or allowed to—the noblewoman. The doubleness of Tasso's approach is also illustrated in one other critical way. While eschewing the dialogue form so popular with his contemporaries, most immediately Sperone Speroni, Tasso's brief address to the duchess of Ferrara is, nevertheless, a dialogue of sorts as he opposes the philosophical views of Plato and Aristotle.

Tasso begins with Plato: "Plato believes that the virtue belonging to the woman is the same as that belonging to the man, and that whatever difference is in them is due to custom and not to nature." The differences between men and women are the result of their different experiences, just as the right hand differs from the left by its "different experience," that is, by the way it is used. But the left hand is no less worthy than the right, despite its differences, and so women are to be valued no less than men. "This was the opinion of Plato," Tasso concludes after this very brief summary, dispensing with Platonic views when he quickly adds, "but Aristotle judged very differently."¹⁵¹ In Aristotle's judgment, Tasso asserts, the right and the left hands *are* different not only in their use but also in their creation—and so are men and women. They are different by nature, in their "temperature and complexion," for example. Although men and women need to practice the same virtues, certain of these virtues are more important for men, others for women—for example, courage is critical for men, chastity for women. Women should practice thrift and silence; men, generosity and eloquence. And because men are by nature "more robust" and women "more delicate," their positions within the family are different—husbands are superior, their wives subservient—as are their "offices," or duties—men acquire, for example, while women conserve what men have acquired.¹⁵²

In his extended discussion of Aristotle, Tasso does pause to consider the double standard that seems to be the necessary result of having different sets of expectations for men and women. "But how does it happen that an unchaste woman is condemned and an unchaste man is not so repudiated?" he asks. But he is ready with the answer: "For the same reason that cowardice, which is so blameworthy in a man, is no shame in a woman."¹⁵³ Thus, although Tasso—in the guise of Aristotle—begins by asserting that men and women must practice the same virtues, even though certain of these virtues are more important for men and others for women, he ends by suggesting that, after all, *some* virtues, like eloquence, liberality, and courage, for example, are not virtues after all, at least when they are practiced by women. If women are considered virtuous when they are silent, thrifty, and chaste, then their eloquence, liberality, and courage are, perhaps, to be considered as vices.¹⁵⁴

Having thus addressed the problem of what seemed to be a double standard of the Aristotelian position, Tasso moves to another problem. What if moral virtue—the personal—contradicts public necessity—the political? If, for example, a woman, who ought to be chaste, silent, and thrifty, is a woman "of imperial and heroic blood" whose position requires her to act with courage, eloquence, and liberality? Such a noble woman has, by reason of her birth, "the same *virile* virtue" as all of her "glorious ancestors." In such cases, no longer is "feminine virtue" the issue, but *la donnesca virtù* must be considered. With an important reminder that this special category of women does *not* include the *cittadina* (townswoman), the *gentildonna privata* (the lesser gentlewoman), or the *industriosa madre di famiglia* (the busy mother of a family), Tasso moves into an extended consideration of the "heroic" virtue of the noblewoman, who, by reason of her birth and blood, "transcends" the "condition of other women"; the "heroic woman" possesses her own "proper" or unique virtue, and in her, even a lack of chastity is allowed. While Zenobia and Artemisia may be appreciated for their temperance, Semiramis and Cleopatra are not to be condemned for their lack of control.¹⁵⁵

No longer opposing Plato and Aristotle and no longer explaining or explicating their views, Tasso speaks authoritatively in his own voice at this point, assuming, in an interesting way, the position of Elyot's "Zenobia" or Speroni's "Lady Beatrice." But there is a difference—while Zenobia and Lady Beatrice had only been allowed to arrive on the scene once the issue under discussion had been resolved, however

tenuously, “Tasso” arrives here not to confirm what has already been decided but to resolve what is still under discussion. It is Tasso—not Plato, or even Aristotle—who gets the last word: “*I say* that in the heroic woman is a heroic virtue that contends with the heroic virtue of men, and for the woman blessed with this virtue, chastity is not more proper than courage and prudence. Nor can any distinction between their works and offices and those of heroic men be found” (italics added).¹⁵⁶ To illustrate his point, he addresses the duchess directly, offering her “some modern examples” of heroic virtue.¹⁵⁷ And, thus, Tasso’s text takes on yet another mirroring function, becoming not a “glass” through which Barbara will see “darkly,” but one that he claims will allow her to see truth “face to face.”

In an obviously graceful compliment to Barbara of Austria, three of the examples of “heroic” women he offers to her are members of her own Habsburg family: Margaret of Austria, duchess of Savoy and regent of the Netherlands; Mary of Austria, queen of Hungary and regent of the Netherlands; and Margaret of Parma, regent of the Netherlands.¹⁵⁸ Tasso also includes members of Alfonso II’s family among the models of heroic women for Barbara to consider; Lucrezia Borgia was the duke’s grandmother, Isabella d’Este, his great aunt.¹⁵⁹ Two other models are female sovereigns whose political roles aggravated the gynecocracy debate: Elizabeth Tudor, queen of England, and Catherine de’ Medici, regent of France.¹⁶⁰

But by also including Renée of France among the models of heroic women he presents to the duchess Barbara, Tasso complicates the picture. On the one hand, Renée’s presence is natural; the daughter of Louis XII of France and his queen, Anne of Brittany, Renée was Alfonso II’s mother and, thus, Barbara’s mother-in-law. But the “model” of Renée’s heroic womanhood is more problematic than this relationship might suggest. Married to Ercole d’Este in 1528, Renée remained an isolated figure during the thirty years she endured at the court of Ferrara; she refused to learn Italian and surrounded herself with French courtiers. Her sympathies for the Huguenots caused problems for her, as did her support for women like Olympia Morata and Vittoria Colonna.¹⁶¹ In 1554 she was separated from her children and imprisoned by her husband; on her eventual release, she lived apart from Ercole. After her husband died—and estranged from her son, Alfonso—Renée returned to France in 1559, but under continuing pressure from her son, she was forced to cede most of her possessions. Even as Tasso was composing his “discourse” on heroic virtue to the duchess Barbara, the

dowager duchess Renée was still alive in France. The king of France had forced her to yield Brittany, which she had inherited from her mother, while her son had forced her to yield what remained of her independent income and possessions.¹⁶²

Whatever “heroic virtue” to which she may have been entitled by her royal birth and blood, Renée of France was surely an ambiguous model of the “heroic woman,” a figure more admonitory than exemplary. In presenting such a “model” to Barbara, in separating Barbara, by reason of her birth, from the rest of womankind, in opposing what is expected of her as a woman (“feminine” virtue) to what is allowed her as a noblewoman (“lady-like” virtue), and in defining that special virtue as *virile*, or manly, Tasso has revealed an ambivalence about women as great as Boccaccio’s. And his strategies—separation, fragmentation, opposition—are devastating. What truth is revealed in Tasso’s mirror? What will Barbara see reflected when she peers into the mirror of Tasso’s “discourse”? And since she herself is idealized as a mirror for other women, what can they expect to see when they gaze at her?¹⁶³

Tasso’s “mirror” is thus an image with multiple meanings. First, and perhaps simplest, is the idea of the duchess as a mirror—or model—for other women. Second is the complimentary function of Tasso’s work, which is a mirror wherein the duchess can see herself reflected. But the mirror is also a convention of the moral example provided by a written text, in this case Tasso’s discourse itself. Like scripture (“For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part, but then shall I know even as also I am known,” 1 Corinthians 13:12), a text can “mirror” or lead the way to moral or spiritual truth. Tasso’s “discourse” thus plays with all these kinds of “mirroring.” In his portrait of the duchess, other women will find a model, while the duchess will find in the discourse both a mirror in which she finds her own self reflected and, more important, will find “truth” revealed to her.¹⁶⁴

It’s important to remind ourselves here that, in *The First Blast of the Trumpet against the Monstrous Regiment of Women*, John Knox employed the metaphor of the mirror; he argued that God had given men “two . . . mirrors” in which to see “the order which He hath appointed and established in nature.”¹⁶⁵ Castiglione’s *The Book of the Courtier*, too, can be read for its “mirroring” functions. Here Valeria Finucci’s comments on Book Three are particularly relevant. The figure of the ideal lady is, in Finucci’s terms, “iconic”: “Woman is therefore a mirror of a mirror.” That is, the ideal lady herself becomes the mirror “of an ideal courtier about whom men theorize as a mirror of themselves, real

courtiers in a court celebrating its grace and power.” The idealized woman “is not necessarily real, but she is functional to her society. Because she can be drawn and made readable, and thus representable, she is a reflection of others’ fantasies.”¹⁶⁶

The questions that Tasso leaves unresolved at the end of his “mirror” for the duchess of Ferrara—and the unresolved questions, tensions, paradoxes, and opposing voices that we have seen in all these humanist works—are paralleled in a very interesting way in the *Politica* of Justus Lipsius, the last work we will examine before drawing this chapter to a close.¹⁶⁷ Just as Tasso’s *Discourse* presents the topic of women’s virtue as “contentious,” the very form of Lipsius’s commonplace book takes us back to the dialectic of the gynecocracy debate itself and offers no resolution, however problematic, to the question of female sovereignty.¹⁶⁸

Lipsius divides his *Politica* into six books, each devoted to a different aspect of “civil doctrine.” Beyond this division, Lipsius builds his *Politica* by drawing quotations from ancient authorities carefully listed—and categorized—at the beginning of his work.¹⁶⁹ As Ann Moss describes his method, and the form of sixteenth-century commonplace books, Lipsius finds *auctoritates*, or sources relevant to the topic at hand, extracts quotations having both “the stylistic elegance and sharpness of *sententiae*” and “the weight of received authority,” and “marshals” them, “connecting his gathered quotations or building them, as he says, into a fabric of his own design bonded from time to time by his own words.”¹⁷⁰ But what Lipsius “rarely does in the *Politica*,” Moss notes, “is to construct and to close arguments.”¹⁷¹

As he indicates at the outset, Lipsius’s intention is “to instruct” the reader “in the way of civil life.” Necessary to civil life are virtue and prudence, a discussion of which occupies Lipsius in Book One. The second book analyzes the kind of government best suited for such a civil life, the principality, which Lipsius defines as “the government of one, imposed according to custom and laws, undertaken and executed for the good of the subject.”¹⁷² In preferring “the government of one” to government by many, Lipsius asks, “is that understood of man or woman?” “Surely of both,” he responds, then adds, “but especially of the man, because nature commandeth it so.” Men are “more apt” for such tasks than women; God has “given virtue” to women, while denying them “strength of body.” But just as Lipsius seems to foreclose on the possibility of female sovereignty, he turns the reader with a “yet”: “Yet for that weak sex, we have provided these forcible and strong weapons,” because virtue “excludeth none.” And since virtue

respects “neither wealth nor sex,” women have made excellent rulers. “To say truth,” Lipsius notes, “have we not read, heard of, and seen many worthy queens, who being valiant, wise, and chaste, have with a manlike providence cast off all imperfections belonging to women.”¹⁷³

To support this view of women’s ability, Lipsius then offers the observation that the “consent of diverse nations” has allowed some women to rule, though, after considering the examples he provides, we are likely to become increasingly uncomfortable. As if a female ruler is not unnatural enough, having with “manlike providence” rid herself of all her female “imperfections,” the examples that Lipsius cites seem intended to disturb rather than to convince. According to Lipsius, the “ancient Britons did not only make [women] their rulers in peace, but then leaders in war likewise.” He adds that the Britons were actually “accustomed” to going to war “under the conduct of women.” Similarly, the Germans “preferred” women “before men themselves,” and believed that some “sacred and provident thing” remained in them; “for which cause,” the Germans neither rejected women’s counsel nor “set light” by their answers. “Yea, I must tell you that many of them, whether this please or offend you, were reputed amongst them for prophetesses, and as their superstition increased, they held them as goddesses,” he informs his readers. “Wherefore,” he concludes, “these men and myself do deem they are capable of a scepter, except the law or the custom of the country do otherwise prohibit the same.”¹⁷⁴ Unless denied by law or custom, then, Lipsius decides that women are “capable of a scepter.” But even as he acknowledges that women do rule, under certain specific conditions, and that he himself judges that they are “capable” of doing so, he associates female sovereignty with what is unnatural, primitive, and superstitious.



Having worked our way from Boccaccio to Tasso, we should see nothing unusual or surprising about Lipsius’s equivocation, hesitation, and qualification. And thus I think Lipsius’s *Politica* makes a fitting conclusion to our survey of humanist texts: it was published in England just as Henry Howard was circulating his “dutiful defense” of the “regiment” of women.¹⁷⁵ In many ways, it seems as if we find ourselves exactly where we began some two hundred years earlier, with Boccaccio’s *Famous Women*. While the methods and modes of humanist writers may differ markedly from those of the writers engaged in the gynecocracy

debate, their conclusions do not necessarily differ. Humanists argued both for and against women's right to rule, and yet even the so-called defenders of women qualify their support, just as those in the English gynecocracy debate who defended the "regiment of women" couldn't help but express their sense that, while one woman's rule might be an exception or a "judgment" from God, their defense of Elizabeth of England or Mary of Scotland did not—and could not—extend to all women. In concluding that a woman is "capable" of rule, for example, Lipsius qualifies his judgment by adding "except the law or the custom of the country do otherwise prohibit the same." Ambivalence runs from Boccaccio's narratives of "famous" women through Tasso's mirror for Barbara of Austria.¹⁷⁶

But, regardless of their position on female sovereignty, the tone of the humanist discussion is notable. The gynecocracy "debate" is never a debate, for the treatises iterate and reiterate absolute positions rather than engaging in any serious *debate* of the issues. One treatise claims to "respond" to another, but there is little real intellectual exchange, only an ongoing series of citations and explications. The texts we have examined in this chapter do advocate positions, but the *effect*, at any rate, is quite different than texts responding to Knox's *First Blast of the Trumpet against the Monstrous Regiment of Women*. Whatever his intentions—or his view of women—Boccaccio's *Famous Women* deconstructs itself, undermining its "famous women" even as it praises them, while Vives's constant references to Isabella of Castile as a model must surely have functioned in the same way, suggesting the potential for a powerful, active woman ruler even as he insists on describing a chaste, silent, and obedient Christian wife. Agrippa's declamation on woman's nobility and excellence raises question of intent; it may be read as a call for change, but it may be—and has been—read as a rhetorical exercise, at best, or, at worst, a mere "jest," an "intellectual joke," a work "intended to amuse rather than persuade."¹⁷⁷ Questions are also raised in humanist dialogues, like those of Castiglione and Elyot, where the form accommodates multiple perspectives, and it is not clear which speaker—if any—represents the view of the author. Even if neo-Aristotelians like Speroni and Tasso assume women are by nature good, if weak and imperfect, they present their views without the anger and vitriol so characteristic of Knox.

Whatever their position, their method, or their philosophical orientation, the wide variety of humanist texts debating the subject of female sovereignty reflect a period of profound social, religious, political, and economic change. These changes also allowed for different voices to

be heard in the ongoing debate about women—those of women themselves. Although their voices have been all but silenced for centuries, women did speak for themselves in the early modern discussion of women's worth and female sovereignty, and it is to their voices that we will now turn our attention.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Gynecocracy Debate: Women's Voices

. . . [I]f anyone wanted to claim that women are not intelligent enough to learn how to exercise power, experience manifestly proves the opposite. As we will see, there have been many women—and they are still to be found today—who were very wise and who were able to master many subjects far more difficult and more lofty than are the laws and statutes written by men. And for another thing, if anyone were to assert that women have no natural aptitude for politics and government, I will provide you the example of many illustrious women who have reigned in the past. And so you will better apprehend this truth, I will recall for you some of your own contemporaries who, after their husband's death, controlled their affairs so well that they provide irrefutable proofs that no task is too much for an intelligent woman.

—Christine de Pizan,
*The Book of the City of Ladies*¹

In their exploration of the nature and worth of women, in general, and of women's fitness to govern, which is our particular focus here, humanist writers wrote *about* women, addressed themselves *to* women, or created characters to speak *as* women. But there are other female voices to be heard in the ongoing debate about women: those *of* women. Although they have been all but silenced for centuries—ignored, overlooked, discounted, or forgotten—women writers participated actively and vigorously in the early modern debate about women, and their defenses of women were widely circulated and published. Only recently have these

works been rediscovered and republished, making it possible for us to hear today their long-unheard voices.



The earliest of these voices belongs to Christine de Pizan, whose *Book of the City of Ladies*, completed at the beginning of the fifteenth century, is quoted at the beginning of this chapter. Although Pizan was born in Venice around 1364, her family was from Pizzano. Her father, the physician and astrologer Thomas of Pizan, left Italy for employment at the court of the French king Charles V and took his family with him. There Pizan was educated by her father in spite of her mother's misgivings:

Your father [Pizan is being addressed here], a great astronomer and philosopher, did not believe that knowledge would corrupt women; rather, as you well know, he rejoiced to see your inclinations to learning. It was because of feminine prejudice that your mother tried to put obstacles in your way; it was hard for you to apply yourself and to learn because she wanted to keep you busy with your needle, the customary occupation of women.²

Married around 1379, Pizan gave birth to three children between 1381 and 1385. Following the deaths of Charles V in 1380, her father some time between 1384 and 1389, and her husband in 1389, Pizan undertook a literary career to support herself and her family. Between 1390 and her death, she produced an astonishing array of verse and prose works.³ It was Christine de Pizan who initiated the *querelle des femmes*, the debate about women that we examined in chapter three. The "opening volley" in this "quarrel" was the exchange of letters between Christine de Pizan and several prominent scholars, among them Jean de Montreuil, the royal secretary and provost of Lille, Pierre Col, the canon of Paris and Tournay, and Gontier Col, secretary and notary to the French king, about Jean de Meun's treatment of women in his contributions to *Le Roman de la rose*. Around 1400 Montreuil had circulated a treatise praising the allegorical work, and it was this praise that Pizan was objecting to. By 1402, more than twenty documents, including letters, sermons, and polemical treatises, had appeared. Pizan herself collected and presented copies of the letters that had been exchanged to Isabel of Bavaria, queen of France.⁴

Thus the project Pizan undertakes in *The Book of the City of Ladies* (*Le Livre de la cité des dames*) is ambitious: she will not only defend women

but refute the misogynist attacks on them. And the method she employs is unique. She revises Boccaccio's version of the history of women by rewriting it; three-quarters of the biographies she narrates are found in her source, Boccaccio's *Famous Women*.⁵ She is also writing back—to Boccaccio, certainly, but not to him alone. In the framing narrative into which she embeds her "corrected" history of women, Pizan challenges male authorities from Aristotle, Ovid, and Paul, through Augustine, the church fathers and Aquinas, to the poets and philosophers of her own day, including, frequently by implication but only rarely by name, Boccaccio himself. Pizan's *Book of the City of Ladies* provides, as well, a remedial education for women who are not as fortunate as she is and who are routinely denied an education; as she tells the stories of "famous women," she provides instruction and models for the women to whom she addresses her work.

But most important, Pizan's *Book of the City of Ladies* is not just a book about women, it is a book by a woman, and this fact is essential to Pizan. In contrast to all the books written by men, her book opens with the distinctive voice of a woman, Pizan herself, telling her own story: "One day I was seated in my study, as usual, surrounded by books on every subject—this was my daily routine, the untiring pursuit of knowledge."⁶ Not only is her voice distinctive, but her activities are also noteworthy—she is not at her "wool and flax," as so many of the humanist writers would have her (and as Pizan's own mother would have preferred); rather, she is engaged in study in a room of her own.⁷ To rest herself from her more serious study, she picks up a small book that has been left by someone in her room, the *Lamentations* of the writer Matheolus. Glancing through this volume, Pizan is suddenly "plunged" into the "most profound crisis" of her life. She is forced into recognizing that "all philosophers, poets, and moralists together speak with one voice and reach one conclusion": "that womankind is fundamentally evil and subject to every vice."

Thinking deeply about these matters, she considers her own character carefully—"I, who was born a woman"—and the character of all the other women whom she knows so intimately, the many princesses and great ladies of her acquaintance as well as the women of the middle and the lower classes, all of whom had shared with her their most private and intimate thoughts. She searches her soul and her conscience, even though she doubts whether so many "illustrious" men could be wrong.⁸

The narrator's anguish is profound. Born a woman, she examines her own experiences, which contradict the judgments of these men: "I could not see or realize how their claims could be true when compared

to the natural behavior and character of women," she writes. Even so—even knowing herself as a woman and even knowing, by reason of her own experience, the "natural behavior" of women—she struggles under the weight of male authority. How could so many authorities be so wrong? Even so,

. . . I still argued vehemently against women, saying that it would be impossible that so many famous men—such solemn scholars, possessed of such deep and great understanding, so clear-sighted in all things, as it seemed—could have spoken false on so many occasions that I could hardly find a book on morals where, even before I had read it in its entirety, I did not find several chapters or certain sections attacking women, no matter who the author was.⁹

Pizan is unable to reconcile what she has experienced with what she has read; a great number of authors "rising up like a fountain" into her mind force her to the conclusion that "God created a contemptible thing when He made woman." How could such a Creator have made such an abominable thing? Her disgust is intense, and she is forced to conclude that "the entire feminine sex" is loathsome, as if Nature herself had "given birth to a monster." Her despair and self-loathing lead her to a moment of existential crisis: "I lamented thus: ' . . . Alas, God! How can this be? How can I, without falling into error, believe that Your infinite wisdom and perfect good created something that is not entirely good? . . . ' Thus I spoke these lamentations to God, using these (and other) words, sorely afflicted because in my folly I despaired that God had given me life in the body of a woman."¹⁰ Lost in her reflections, her head bowed in shame, "Christine" suddenly sees a ray of light fall on her lap. She starts as if suddenly wakened from "a profound sleep," but unlike the narrators of so many medieval dream visions, the beginnings of which are echoed here, Pizan the narrator is not asleep. She is fully awake and fully aware.

The three women who appear to "Christine" at this moment have come to comfort and instruct her. Lady Reason, Lady Rectitude, and Lady Justice begin their process of reeducation by asking Pizan what has happened to her good sense—her *jugement*. Even the "greatest philosophers," those whose opinions about women have so overwhelmed "Christine," have never agreed about what is false and what is true. Moreover, they have all contradicted and criticized one another. Admonishing "Christine" to "come back" to herself—her "natural" self, as a woman—to "recover" her senses, and not to trouble herself over

such "brazen slanders and patent lies," the three ladies charge her with the task of defending those who have suffered because they have no defense.

This "defense" will be in the form of a city for ladies that Pizan is to build, guided and instructed by Reason, Rectitude ("rightness," or *droiture*), and Justice. It is most important to note that these three allegorical figures, who embody the three "natural" virtues of women around which Pizan's book is organized, represent a profound contrast to the three "virtues" that were conventionally associated with and demanded of women. To control their "natural" irrationality, imprudence, and weakness, women were enjoined to chastity, silence, and obedience. And since women themselves, in their physical and moral weakness, were incapable of achieving these particularly female "virtues" by themselves, male control of female conduct was essential.¹¹ In this sense, *The Book of the City of Ladies* and the allegorical figures of Reason, Rectitude, and Justice represent an implicit challenge to conventional notions of female virtue. Pizan uses these three authoritative figures of her own creation as a way of opposing the ancient "authorities" who had so denigrated women. It is equally important to note that, like several of the humanist texts we have already examined, Pizan, as writer, creates a fictional "Christine," a character who voices the questions, challenges, and responses that Pizan the writer chooses to address, and who, in turn, relays to us what she has learned.

Thus, although her book is not usually read or analyzed as a dialogue, like those of Castiglione or Elyot, for example, we can see the extent to which *The Book of the City of Ladies* does employ that form, as "Christine" questions and is instructed, in turn, by Lady Reason, Lady Rectitude, and Lady Justice. No men are seen, much less heard, in Pizan's book, except as "Christine" summarizes their misogynist arguments or ventriloquizes their voices. We must compare Pizan's use of dialogue to the way it is used when male-authored dialogues turn to a discussion of women: in Castiglione and Elyot, for example, although there are voices that speak in defense of women, we are left uncertain in the end, not clear which, if any, of the voices we hear represent the point-of-view we ought to embrace. And if a supporter of women prevails in the debate, we nevertheless have heard—at length—all the old evidence used to argue against women. In Pizan's multivoiced book, by contrast, the dissonant voices are silenced. We hear "Christine's" doubt and despair, but her fear that women are Nature's "monstrous" creation is quickly dismissed by Lady Reason, and the voices of all four women—Pizan and the three ladies who come to her aid—do not debate the topic of women's worth, they affirm it. There are many voices here, but they speak with one voice.

While Boccaccio's history of women proceeds more or less chronologically, Pizan works thematically. She organizes *The Book of the City of Ladies* around the construction of a city to be peopled only by women. In the first book, aided by Lady Reason, Christine the narrator constructs the foundations of the city while she is taught by Reason about women who have, for a variety of reasons, been impelled by circumstances to act beyond the usual roles natural for their sex. The second book, devoted to the building of the inns, mansions, and houses of the city, is supervised by Lady Rectitude, who narrates stories of women who have dutifully fulfilled their roles as mothers, wives, and daughters. In the final book, where "Christine" constructs the roofs and spires of her city, she is aided and instructed by Lady Justice, who tells stories of courageous women who have suffered and died for their faith. By means of this arrangement, Pizan defies convention; instead of defining women by their sexual status or their relationship to male authority—as virgins, wives, and widows—Pizan focuses instead on the range of women's activities and accomplishments.¹² Only at the end of her work does she acknowledge the conventional system of classifying women. As she draws her book to a close, she appends a call to wives, virgins, and widows to urge them, whatever their circumstances, to dedicate themselves to lives of virtue. No male control is necessary.

Throughout *The Book of the City of Ladies*, Christine de Pizan argues the equality of women and men, although she does suggest that, in the place and substance of her creation, woman might be man's superior, for "woman . . . was made by the Supreme Craftsman. And in what place was she created? In the Terrestrial Paradise. And from what substance? Was it vile matter? On the contrary, [woman was made] from the noblest substance which had ever been created. Because it was from the body of man that God made woman."¹³ But, at the same time, Pizan acknowledges, and even accepts, more conservative, traditional views of women's nature: questioning Lady Reason about why women have been created "to weep, to talk, and to spin," the narrator Pizan is taught that although these activities are viewed negatively by men, they are occupations determined by God and are, thus, both good in themselves and for others—and by means of these feminine "vocations," many men and women have been saved.¹⁴ Still not entirely satisfied with her understanding of woman's "natural" roles, "Christine" persists, asking why women do not plead law cases, for example. Lady Reason lays out an essentialist position:

Now, as to this particular question, my dear Christine, one might just as well ask why God didn't ordain that men do the jobs of

women, and women the jobs of men. I must answer this question by saying that just as a wise and clear-sighted master organizes his household by assigning one task to one servant and another task to another servant, that no one repeats what another has completed, so God wanted man and woman to serve Him in different ways; they aid and comfort one another, each in his or her ordained way. He has given each sex an appropriate nature and disposition to fulfill their tasks.¹⁵

Thus women do not perform the tasks ordinarily undertaken by men because some "tasks" belong to men while some belong to women. It is not because women are incapable of performing them, but because it is not ordinarily necessary for them to do so.

But, as Lady Reason makes immediately clear, women do have the ability to learn the law, they have "a natural aptitude for politics and government," and they can thus naturally fulfill such roles when circumstances require. To prove her point, as we saw in the quotation that is reproduced at the outset of this chapter, she tells "Christine," "I will provide you the example of many illustrious women who have reigned in the past. And so you will better apprehend this truth, I will recall for you some of your own contemporaries who, after their husband's death, controlled their affairs so well that they provide irrefutable proofs that no task is too much for an intelligent woman." In support of her assertion that women have "a natural aptitude for politics and government," Lady Reason takes up the subject that is of most interest to us here.

She begins her defense of women's ability to rule by naming a number of queens, first among them Fredegund of France. Here Pizan subtly refocuses Lady Reason's account of the queen's life. As her biography had been shaped by generations of male writers, Fredegund had gained a reputation for cruelty; indeed, the version of Fredegund's story related by Lady Reason is an unspoken reminder of her point that the reputation of women had always been in the hands of male authorities, whether theologians, philosophers, or historians. Lady Reason's acknowledgment of Fredegund's notoriety is quick and quickly overcome. "Despite a cruelty not characteristic of women," Reason begins, Fredegund governed France "very judiciously" after her husband's death. She subdued her rebellious subjects by promising that those who continued to be loyal to her young son would be rewarded generously. And so, Lady Reason concludes, Fredegund saved "the crown and honor of the kingdom." This would never have happened without Fredegund's "sagacity."¹⁶ Throughout her narration of Fredegund's story, Lady

Reason downplays the queen's reputation for cruelty (suggesting that, since such cruelty is "not characteristic" of women, Fredegund's reputation for cruelty may be just that, a "reputation" rather than a reality) and focuses, instead, on Fredegund's "natural" abilities that result in wise government.

Lady Reason quickly moves to more recent examples, recalling the "virtuous and noble" Blanche of Castile, the mother of Louis IX of France; Lady Reason reminds Pizan that, during the minority of Louis, his mother "governed the kingdom of France so prudently and with such skill that it was never better ruled by any man. She remained as head of his council even when her son reached his majority because everyone recognized her political skill, and nothing was done without her support."¹⁷ Lady Reason then offers the example of another woman, this one familiar to Pizan from her childhood, Jeanne d'Evreaux, the widow of King Charles IV. The "nobility of her court and the way she rendered justice" earned Jeanne much fame: "No prince has ever gained more renown," Lady Reason says. And Jeanne's daughter, Blanche of France, who "resembled [her mother] in this," also resembled her namesake Blanche of Castile. As a widow, the younger Blanche "administered [her husband's] lands and reigned with the greatest respect for both right and justice." No one could have reigned "more fairly." Yet another Blanche, Blanche of Navarre, "ruled and governed her land with great order of law and justice." The final example cited here by Lady Reason is Mary, "the valiant and wise" duchess of Anjou. As duchess, Mary held "her lands and domains under the firm sword of justice." She governed these lands in order to safeguard them "during the minority of her children"; shortly after her husband's death, as Reason tells the story, "nearly all of Provence rebelled against her and her noble children." But "this great lady worked and strove so hard and so well, mixing force with kindness, that she restored order and allegiance, reigning so well that no complaint or grievances were ever heard." Reason completes her history of "ladies who [have] governed wisely" with one final example, Catherine, the countess of La Marche, Vendôme, and Castres, "who is still alive." "Just and prudent," she works tirelessly to make sure justice is to be found throughout her lands.¹⁸

Beyond these examples, Lady Reason reminds "Christine" that she could name "a multitude of women" from every social class who governed themselves and their domains, whether kingdoms or households, with fairness and justice, "for there can be no doubt—no offense to men—that such women are numerous." Although there are, of course, some ignorant women, there are many "who have better minds, a more

active spirit, and more judgment than a great many men." And she adds, "if their husbands had confidence in them or had as much sense as their wives, it would be greatly to their advantage." But while women are thus clearly *able* to rule, it is Lady Reason's view that it is just as well for them that as a rule they do not: "All the same, if women are not ordinarily occupied in judging and in pronouncing sentences," it is no cause for regret or alarm, because without such tasks, "they face fewer physical or moral dangers."¹⁹

Thus reassured that "as far as women's intelligence" is concerned they are fit to rule, "Christine" persists, the source of her concern now shifting. Instead of worrying about their minds, she worries that women do not exercise authority because they have "weak bodies" and are "naturally fearful." She fears that their lack of physical strength is what diminishes women's "credit and authority" in men's eyes.²⁰ At this point Lady Reason launches into another series of biographies in order to illustrate both the physical strength and the courage of women who have exercised sovereignty, focusing on ancient examples. Where she begins her list is significant: the first woman she discusses here is Semiramis, who perhaps more than any other woman had come to represent the villainy and corruption of women.²¹ But rather than standing in for all that is despicable in womankind, Semiramis here is a "heroic queen, filled with courage and resolution," accomplished in war and as a warrior. "Some men have blamed her" for having married her own son after the death of her husband Ninus, Lady Reason does concede, but she defends the much-maligned queen—Semiramis did not want to cede her crown to another woman, there was no other man but her son worthy of her, and, besides, such a pairing wasn't forbidden long ago. Lady Reason tells "Christine" that Semiramis had a "very noble heart" and loved honor too well to have lost it by any unworthy act.²²

Pizan's treatment of the Amazons and their queens, Thamyras and Penthesilea among them, is similar. The land of the Amazons represents a lost "city of ladies" in Pizan's retelling of the story. Indeed, Lady Reason begins with a foundation narrative that is significant: "It happened one day that the ravages of war emptied this land of all its noble men," she begins. The devastated survivors, women who had "all lost their husbands, brothers, and male relatives," then "courageously assembled to deliberate. They decided finally that from that time on they would maintain their dominion by themselves without being subject to men." They "promulgated a law" to ensure that no man would be allowed to enter their land. Thus Amazonia was not an "unnatural" place where "unnatural" women rid themselves of men, but a place

where women were left alone as a result of male violence and bloodshed. They determined to “maintain a succession” by, in Lady Reason’s discreet euphemism, traveling “into neighboring lands during certain times of the year.” The Amazons perpetuated their gynecocracy not by killing their male children, as so many male authorities claimed, but by “send[ing] them to their fathers.”²³ “You surely know,” Lady Reason says, when she draws her narrative of the history of the Amazons to an end, that this “kingdom of women” flourished for “more than eight hundred years. . . . [A]mong all the known kingdoms of similar duration, you will never find one more noteworthy for its rulers or for their exploits, than are the queens and great ladies of this kingdom”²⁴

Lady Reason next introduces the story of Zenobia, and Pizan’s rewriting of Boccaccio is amply illustrated in her biography of the queen of Palmyra.²⁵ Rather than the problematic Zenobia of Boccaccio, Pizan’s Zenobia is an exemplar of women’s “natural” abilities. Women are not “naturally fearful”; they have a “natural aptitude for politics and government,” as Zenobia’s story will show. Boccaccio’s Zenobia was a woman who “scorns womanly exercise” and who “overcomes feminine softness”; Pizan’s Zenobia, by contrast, is a woman of “great bravery . . . and chivalric vocation.” A woman “who wished to keep her virginity for life,” Pizan’s Zenobia married at last only “under pressure from her family”; while Boccaccio had written that Zenobia “greatly valued virginity,” her easy decision to marry at the suggestion of friends implies that maybe she hadn’t valued virginity so “greatly” after all. Boccaccio had emphasized Zenobia’s great beauty, qualifying this praise by adding that she was dark complected; Pizan’s Zenobia, by contrast, “paid little attention” to her own beauty and “gave no thought to preserving the freshness of her complexion.” Instead, she “prepared herself to take up the hard life of battle, to arm herself, and to participate with her husband in all aspects of military life.” Zenobia’s husband relies on her in his wars, giving her command of one flank of his army; winning several battles “courageously and valiantly” and with “bravery,” she conquers Mesopotamia for him. After her husband’s assassination—carried out, as Pizan notes, by a member of his own family—Zenobia “nobly and courageously took up the regency of the empire on behalf of her minor children.” Pizan’s account of Zenobia’s coming to power is not shaded by the suggestions of envy and complicity that shade Boccaccio’s narrative. Her Zenobia is confident and justified:

She crowned herself empress, governing with skill and discernment. In brief, she reigned so wisely and supplied her military so

well that Gallienus, and after him Claudius, emperors of Rome and rulers of part of the Orient, never dared to undertake anything against her. The same was true for the Egyptians, the Arabians, and the Armenians, who so feared her power and her great determination that they were all happy to maintain the boundaries of their lands.²⁶

Still, despite Lady Reason's narrative tags as she tells Zenobia's story—"what more can be said," "the end of this affair, just as you can read in ancient chronicles," "in brief," "with all this having been said," and "finally"—Pizan does not tell the *whole* story, at least as the story had been told by male writers, for her account ends with Zenobia's success as queen and with an extended recital of her virtues and accomplishments, not with her defeat, imprisonment, and return to private life in Rome as a captive queen. Drawing her story of Zenobia to a close Lady Reason challenges "Christine"; "in all your reading," she asks, "have you ever seen any prince or knight in whom were more perfect virtue," a conclusion that subtly yet significantly challenges Boccaccio's conclusion that Zenobia had ruled "better than women are expected to."²⁷

While *The Book of the City of Ladies* is undoubtedly the most well-known of Christine de Pizan's texts today, she addresses the subject of women and rule elsewhere in her large body of work. In addition to what she has to say *about* the subject in the *City of Ladies*, she addresses herself directly to "all great queens, ladies and princesses" in *The Treasure of the City of Ladies* (*Le Livre du trésor de la cité des dames*), completed shortly after the *The Book of the City of Ladies* and dedicated to Margaret of Burgundy, whom she had praised in the earlier book. This second book for women is both a guide to etiquette and an instruction manual, offering advice for women at all levels of society.²⁸

The first book of the *The Treasure of the City of Ladies*, fully one third of the work, is dedicated to powerful women: "all princesses, empresses, queens, duchesses, and high-born ladies ruling over the Christian world."²⁹ The prescribed and proscribed dress, behavior, education, and occupation of these women again come once more from the ladies Reason, Rectitude, and Justice, but this time their instruction is not filtered through a narrative "Christine." Instead, the formidable teachers address themselves directly to their readers. In counseling elite women, Reason, Rectitude, and Justice indicate the varied responsibilities of a woman of rank, beyond her role as wife and mother. Thus she not only provides "diligent" care for the upbringing of her children, but a princess must also function as mediator "between the prince her husband (or her child if she is a widow)" and "her people," and she must stand as

an “advocate” for peace “between the prince and the barons” and between the prince and “any neighbouring or foreign prince” who “wishes for any reason to make war against her husband, or if her husband wishes to make war on someone else.” She must aid her husband by means of her discreet and calculated behavior “towards the relatives and friends of her husband,” just as she must be prudent in her conduct of her court.³⁰

A more direct role in government is also assumed in this handbook for princesses. As only one example, Lady Reason advises the princess on how to conduct herself with prudence when she participates in council meetings. “There she will have such a bearing, such a manner and such an expression when she is seated in her high seat that she will indeed seem to be the lady and mistress over all,” Reason indicates, “and everyone will hold her in great reverence as their wise mistress with great authority.” Further,

She will conscientiously hear the proposals that are put forward and listen to everyone’s opinion. She will be so attentive that she will grasp the principal points and conclusions of matters and will note carefully which of her counselors speak better and with the best deliberation and advice, and which seem to her the most prudent and intelligent. And she will also note, in the diversity of opinions, which causes and which reasons most stir the speakers.

And “in this way,” the princess “will attend to everything,” Lady Reason indicates.³¹

Having learned to govern themselves with prudence, “queens, ladies and princesses” will find that “their husbands and lords, who see them so well behaved and so self-disciplined, will be able to give them authority to act and govern on their behalf just as we have advised them and will advise them hereafter.” “Any man is extremely foolish,” in Lady Reason’s opinion, “if he sees that he has a good and wise wife, yet does not give her authority to govern in an emergency.”³² In such an emergency, a woman may not only rule on her husband’s behalf, but on her son’s: “if the princess remains a widow while her eldest son is still young and under age, and by chance war and strife break out among the barons, for the sake of good government she must use her prudence and her knowledge to establish and maintain peace among them.” She must “negotiate with them with kindness and skill,” devising “the most suitable strategy.” If, however, such measures are not enough, “it may be necessary to make and conduct war.” “Beyond a doubt,” she concludes,

the "wise lady and princess" can "do inestimable good in the kingdom and country."³³

More pointed than the general advice offered in *The Treasure of the City of Ladies* is Pizan's "Letter to the Queen of France, Isabel of Bavaria," written on 5 October 1405.³⁴ Intense rivalry between the dukes of Burgundy and Orléans threatened the peace and stability of France, and Pizan wrote to Isabel directly, urging her to intervene to preserve the peace. In addressing the queen and sometime regent of France, Pizan employs a critical image; rather than offering a threat to the realm, "at present sorely and piteously wounded," the queen's intervention "can be the medicine and sovereign remedy to cure this realm."³⁵ Thus the queen can assume a role outside the usual "office" of a woman—that is, a political role—even while staying within a woman's usual office—Isabel can act, since her actions are healing. The queen herself stands to gain in the process, Pizan notes. The first benefit "pertains to the soul": Isabel will acquire merit if she keeps blood from being shed. Second, while "instigating peace" she will be the "restorer of the welfare" of her children and "of their loyal subjects." Finally, she will acquire fame: the "third benefit, which is not to be despised, is that you would be perpetually remembered and praised in the chronicles and records of the noble deeds of France."³⁶

In support of her case, Pizan cites "the histories of [Isabel's] forebears who conducted themselves with discretion," in some ways constructing yet another version of Boccaccio's list of "famous women." Pizan recalls "the case of a very great princess in Rome" who appealed to her son to make peace with those who had banished and exiled him.³⁷ Pizan then urges the example of "the cases of the valiant ladies praised by Holy Scriptures," Esther, for example, while warning Isabel to take heed of those women who were "perverse, cruel, and enemies of human nature, such as the false queen Jezebel and others like her."³⁸ Finally, Pizan cites the example of Blanche of Castile: "When the barons were discordant because of the queen's regency, didn't she take her son, still an infant, into her arms and, holding him in the midst of the barons, say: 'Don't you see here your king? Do not do anything to make him displeased with you when he has reached the age of discretion.' And so by her good judgment she appeased them."³⁹

Pizan's final appeal to Isabel once more employs an image calculated to bring such political actions safely into the queen's traditional role as a woman: "And just as it is more charitable to give the poor a piece of bread in times of scarcity and famine than a whole loaf in times of fertility and abundance, be pleased to give your poor people in this time of

tribulation a measure of the word and effort of your might and power, which will be enough to reassure them and feed their hungry desire for peace."⁴⁰ The appeal here is not only to the Christian virtue of charity, but explicitly to Isabel's "natural" role as a woman; like a nursing mother, the queen can be a source of "food" for her hungry people.

Before leaving our discussion of the contributions of Christine de Pizan to the debate about women and government, we will pause to look briefly at what is widely regarded as her final work, "The Tale of Joan of Arc," a narrative poem of sixty-one stanzas.⁴¹ Pizan both claims and dates her poem quite carefully: "I, Christine," she begins, using the formula of self-assertion she employed in *The Book of the City of Ladies*. For eleven years, she writes, she has lived "in a closed abbey," ever since the *dauphin* Charles "fled . . . from Paris." And yet, embedded in her assertions of self and authorship are hesitations. Even after eleven years, she wonders about Charles's flight—"what a strange thing!"—and about whether she can speak the truth about what happened—"if I dare say it." And what is the relationship of her retreat to this event? She concludes the first stanza by saying, rather enigmatically, that she has been "enclosed here because of this treachery." Only now, after eleven years, can she begin to express her relief: "I begin now for the first time to laugh."⁴²

The "now" of her laughter is 1429, when, as she says, "the sun began to shine again." The events that have inspired her to take up her pen are, she says, "worthy of memory and of being written down—no matter who may be displeased—in chronicles and history books!" She does not specify who it is who might be "displeased" by her work, but she has no fear. This time she writes not under the protection of three ladies, however great, but of God himself, whom she asks for "guidance" so that she "won't omit anything." While Pizan praises Charles, now king, the "seventh of that noble name," her focus is on telling the story of the "blessed Maid," Joan, "born at a propitious hour," Joan "ordained by God," who has led her people "from evil," just as Moses "by a miracle led his people out of Egypt."⁴³

In the praise of Joan that follows, the "young maid" is compared not only to the Old Testament hero-warriors Joshua and Gideon, but also to biblical heroines we have met before, to Esther, Judith, and Deborah. Joan is depicted in her role of military champion, "sent by divine command, guided by God's angel," whose strength surpasses that of men, even the great heroes Hector and Achilles. And Joan's deeds "are not an illusion," Pizan asserts, but are, rather, the fulfillment of ancient prophecies of "Merlin, the Sibyl, and Bede."⁴⁴ "Oh, what an honor to the

female sex!" Pizan exclaims. She predicts not only the king's return to Paris but, with Joan at his side, a restoration of Christendom's "harmony" and, ultimately, the conquest of the Holy Land, ridding it of all heretics and unbelievers.

Just as she has carefully dated the opening of her "tale of Joan of Arc," Pizan closes the poem precisely: "This poem was finished by Christine in the above-mentioned year 1429, on the day that ends July."⁴⁵ The triumphal end of the poem and its joyful tone have led most critics to conclude that Pizan must have died rather soon after completing the "tale," certainly before Joan's unsuccessful attack on Paris in September of 1429, her capture in May 1430, and her death a year later, 30 May 1431. Renate Blumenfeld-Kosinski's comments are typical: "Christine probably died before Joan's fall from grace and could thus celebrate her success at the moment of her greatest triumph."⁴⁶ This is almost certainly correct—"Christine" had not only seen in the person of Joan one final exemplary woman to join her "city of ladies," but Christine the writer had finished one final tribute to women and their abilities before her own death. Even so, I am not *entirely* convinced. Christine de Pizan spent her life writing back to male authorities and rewriting their histories of women from a woman's perspective. In carrying her story of Joan's life only through the maid's victory, Pizan may also have been writing back. Just as she concluded her biography of Zenobia with the queen's triumphs, Pizan may well have decided to end her poem with Joan's glorious accomplishments rather than with the betrayal she had suffered at the hands of men. I am not arguing that Pizan lived to see Joan's defeat and condemnation—only noting that the poem's triumphant, rather than tragic, ending does not entirely convince me that Pizan did not live to see Joan's fall.⁴⁷

Though Christine de Pizan spent her last years in a kind of retirement, her works had wide currency while she lived. She was invited to England by Henry IV, for example, and to Milan by Giangaleazzo Visconti. But she remained in France, her works presented to and collected by important, powerful men, including John, duke of Berry, Philip, duke of Burgundy, King Charles V of France, and King Charles VI of France. And, speaking here out of my own experience, Pizan's work continues to impress today. Student readers are electrified by the opening scene of *The Book of the City of Ladies*, with its description of despair and self-loathing. In reading this book for the first time, a group of my students recently focused on a passage early on, where Lady Reason tells Pizan, "And of the three noble ladies whom you see here, we are one and the same, we could not exist without one another; and

what the first disposes, the second orders and initiates, and then I, the third, finish and terminate it.”⁴⁸ While I compared this passage to a description of the classical fates, one of whom spins the thread of life, one who measures it out, and one who cuts it, my students read it as an audacious proposal of a new Trinity, a reading they persisted in maintaining and which they supported by focusing on the building of the city of ladies as a new Creation story—“Now a New Kingdom of Femininity is begun,” Lady Rectitude confidently asserts.⁴⁹ And they pointed out Pizan’s remarkable response to her, a few pages on: “And I, Christine, replied to all of this, ‘Indeed, my lady, what you say is as true as the Lord’s Prayer.’”⁵⁰

As an argument, my students’ reading of *The Book of the City of Ladies*, though intriguing, is a little thin. But what it reinforces is the effect of reading Pizan’s book still has today. All the more interesting, then, is that while it was and remains an extraordinary book, it was not a book that inspired the kind of writing and rewriting that Boccaccio’s *Famous Women* did or, in its own way, Knox’s attack on the “monstrous regiment” of women did. There are no “cities of ladies” responding to Pizan’s *City of Ladies* in the way that Boccaccio’s catalogue of women was translated, adapted, and revised, for example, or answered by works like those produced by Arienti, Equicola, and Strozzi.⁵¹ But I would argue that, in its own unique way, we can see the production and reproduction of “cities of ladies” by the dissemination of Pizan’s book, especially among women.

Pizan herself presented copies of her book to a number of influential and powerful women.⁵² One contemporary manuscript of *The Book of the City of Ladies* is illustrated with a picture of Pizan herself, on her knees, presenting her book to the French queen, Isabel of Bavaria.⁵³ Other copies belonged to duke of Orléans and his wife, Valentina Visconti, and to Louis of Guyenne, dauphin of France, and his wife, Margaret of Burgundy. In succeeding generations, Anne of France, Anne of Brittany, Louise of Savoy, Margaret of Austria, and Marguerite of Navarre all had copies of *The Book of the City of Ladies* or of *The Treasure of the City of Ladies* or of both.⁵⁴ Anne of France’s copy of *The Book of the City of Ladies* illustrates particularly well the circulation of the book among generations of women, since Anne, who functioned as virtual king of France for eight years, inherited her copy from her mother, Charlotte of Savoy; in composing a series of lessons for her own daughter, Suzanne of Bourbon, Anne relied at least in part, on Pizan’s *The Treasure of the City of Ladies*.⁵⁵ As another example of the way women passed along Pizan’s work, Isabel of Portugal, duchess of

Burgundy, sent a copy of *The Treasure of the City of Ladies* to her niece, Isabel, the queen of Portugal; the younger Isabel commissioned the translation of the *Treasure* into Portuguese, while in 1518, another queen of Portugal, Eleanor, patronized the publication of the Portuguese text.⁵⁶ *The Book of the City of Ladies* was translated into English by Bryan Ashley and published in 1521. Was this the means by which Christine de Pizan made a brief appearance in the sixteenth-century gynecocracy debate? David Chambers cites her as an authority in his 1568 *Discourse on the Legitimate Succession of Women*.⁵⁷

But however significant Pizan's books were to the women who received them, had copies of them produced and reproduced for one another, or who were able to read them when they were eventually printed, Christine de Pizan and her defenses of women disappeared. The English translation of *The Book of the City of Ladies*, published in 1521, was, as Earl Jeffrey Richards notes, "the first (and last) English translation of this work."⁵⁸ It remained the "last" English translation of the book, in fact, until Richards's translation was published in 1982. Aside from manuscript copies, Pizan's *The Treasure of the City of Ladies* was printed in Paris alone in 1497, in 1503, and again in 1536, but as Sarah Lawson notes, "by the seventeenth century hardly anyone had heard of her." Lawson's translation of *The Treasure*, published in 1985, was the first English translation of the book.⁵⁹ There was no continuing tradition for women writers who followed Christine de Pizan—as Gerda Lerner noted in her two-volume *Women and History*, published in 1992, "deprived of knowledge of a female tradition, individual women had to think their way out of patriarchal gender definitions and their constraining impact as though each of them were a lonely Robinson Crusoe on a desert island, reinventing civilization."⁶⁰ Instead of the "systematic story of progress, the methodical building of thesis, antithesis and synthesis by which succeeding generations of male thinkers grew taller by standing 'on the shoulders of giants'" —the thesis, antithesis, and synthesis we saw in the catalogues of women who followed Boccaccio, for example, and the thesis and antithesis we saw in the texts taking up one side or another in the sixteenth-century gynecocracy debate—women struggled to stand alone.



A generation of educated women writers followed Christine de Pizan, but they were not able to stand on her shoulders. Among the earliest were Italian noblewomen like Battista da Montefeltro Malatesta of

Urbino and Ippolita Sforza of Milan, both of whom we have met before, praised by Giovanni Sabadino degli Arienti in his *Ginevra, Concerning Famous Women*, and Elisabetta Gonzaga, duchess of Urbino, immortalized if virtually silenced by Castiglione.⁶¹ A “second wave of women humanists” followed, including two writers whose work we will examine in some detail, Isotta Nogarola and Laura Cereta.⁶²

Isotta Nogarola was born in the northern Italian city of Verona in 1418, a little more than a decade after *The Book of the City of Ladies* and *The Treasure of the City of Ladies* were composed. As her recent editors inform us, Nogarola’s mother, Bianca Borromeo, made sure that not only her sons but her daughters were carefully educated; Isotta and her sister Ginevra were tutored by the humanist scholar Martino Rizzoni. But at the age when most women were either married or became nuns, Nogarola chose a different “career” for herself: she decided on a life of scholarship.⁶³ Her entry into the debate about women occurred in an exchange about the relative guilt of Adam and Eve for the Fall; whether the debate was originally epistolary or face-to-face, Nogarola composed a written version of it, employing the dialogue form we have seen so amply illustrated in the work of male humanist scholars. In *On the Equal of Unequal Sin of Adam and Eve*, Nogarola writes herself as “Isotta” and her “adversary,” Ludovico Foscarini, the friend and supporter she was debating, as “Ludovico.” Her work represents “the first work of its kind in European literature,” her editors note, one that moved beyond the relative sin of Adam and Eve to a larger discussion of gender; thus Nogarola’s dialogue “stands among the founding works of the controversy on gender and the nature of woman (the *querelle des femmes*) that persisted on the continent and in England until the end of the eighteenth century.”⁶⁴ But as noteworthy as this dialogue may be in the *querelle* itself, our focus here is in what Nogarola might add to our discussion of female sovereignty, and for that we will turn to her letters.

A decade before her debate with Foscarini about Adam and Eve, Nogarola entered into a correspondence with Damiano dal Borgo. Like Nogarola, dal Borgo was from Verona, but he was living in Venice, where Nogarola, too, lived for some time. Between 1438 and 1441, the two exchanged letters, and a series of eighteen letters to dal Borgo from Nogarola survives. One of these is of particular interest. Responding to a letter of dal Borgo’s which, she says “disturbed [her] a great deal,” Nogarola undertakes a brief history of women.⁶⁵ In his letter to her, dal Borgo had made a slighting remark about the talkativeness of women; as Nogarola writes to him in response, “I learned from [your letter] that you trust the words of our comic poet who claims a silent woman has

never been found in any age." Nogarola is "disturbed," as she says, for two reasons: first, "because you were writing to me when you surely knew I would take offense," and second, "because night and day you are reading about how many women surpass not only other women but also men in every kind of virtue and excellence and, we claim, in eloquence." To refute dal Borgo's slighting remark, Nogarola writes a brief history of women, including some of those mentioned by Boccaccio for their eloquence (Cornelia, Camilla, and Sappho, for instance), but also, and more particularly, women who had earned their reputation by means of their accomplishments in battle and in government. Here she mentions the Amazons, who "increase[d]" their republic without men. The Amazons had "subdue[d] the greater part of Europe" and "occup[ied] a number of cities in Asia," she reminds dal Borgo, and all "without men." These women were "powerful . . . in their knowledge and virtue in war."⁶⁶

But this is as far as Nogarola would go in her letter. As her editors note, she does not cite Boccaccio in her brief history of "famous women," although she does draw from his work.⁶⁷ She gives no indication at all of having known the work of Christine de Pizan. Perhaps because of her efforts to prove herself worthy of a place among her fellow humanists, Nogarola mentioned none of her contemporaries when she drew up her catalogue of women worthies; her "famous" women are all drawn from the mythological and historical past. And although she characterizes herself in a way that is remarkably similar to Pizan's opening scene in *The Book of the City of Ladies*—Nogarola receives her scholarly visitors in her *libraria cella*, her "little library"—she is not interested in constructing a republic for women.⁶⁸ Nogarola's interest is in finding a place for herself in the *res publica litterarum*, in the humanist republic of letters.

The humanist-trained Laura Cereta also belongs to this so-called second wave of Italian humanists. Diana Robin has recently edited Cereta's work, which includes autobiographical letters, letters on marriage and education, correspondence with her husband, exchanges with other women, texts prepared for public lecture, and a literary dialogue. Although her letters circulated in manuscript among humanist scholars in the late fifteenth century, they were not published for several centuries. Like Christine de Pizan, whose work she most probably did not know, Cereta argues against misogynistic attitudes even while she accepts women's traditional place in society. As Robin indicates, "Though . . . Cereta does see women as an oppressed class, she neither focuses her anger on ills within the culture as a whole that perpetuate

gender and class inequities nor calls for the overthrow of the patriarchal state.”⁶⁹

Like Pizan, as well, Cereta uses Boccaccio’s *Famous Women* even while rewriting his history of those women. In her letter to Bibolo Semproni, which takes the form of a “defense of liberal education for women,” she challenges the notion of the “exceptional woman.” Semproni has clearly praised Cereta as unique among women—like Boccaccio, singling out for praise an individual woman whose accomplishments distinguish her from other women. But Cereta rejects Semproni’s praise. The gifted and powerful woman is not extraordinary, she argues; rather, she comes from “a noble lineage . . . legitimate and sure.” She has descended from “an enduring race,” a “republic of women.”⁷⁰ Having dispensed with Semproni’s praise, Cereta then launches into her own “history of women” in her letter, including among them Semiramis. Although Christine de Pizan had dealt with the queen’s reputed cruelty and incest, Cereta suppresses these charges entirely by claiming that Semiramis is to be remembered because “she spoke her mind about the laws in a court of law and about kings in the senate.”⁷¹ In recalling the now-familiar Zenobia, however, Cereta focuses on Zenobia’s learning, not on her political role, although like Pizan before her, Cereta ignores Zenobia’s less-than-triumphant end.

Following her abbreviated history of women, Cereta returns to her point that all women have ability, not just an exceptional few: “Nature has granted to all enough of her bounty; she opens to all the gates. . . .” Cereta also suggests that, while men may occupy positions of power, women have their own abilities, which may challenge, perhaps even frighten, men:

I shall make a bold summary of the matter. Yours is the authority, ours is the inborn ability. But instead of manly strength, we women are naturally endowed with cunning; instead of a sense of security, we are suspicious. Down deep we women are content with our lot. But you, enraged and maddened . . . are like someone who has been frightened. . . . Look, do you tremble from fear alone of my name? I am savage neither in mind nor hand. What is it you fear?⁷²

Cereta’s question thus addresses explicitly the fear implicit in Boccaccio’s *Famous Women*. As Pamela Benson notes, Boccaccio’s text is “shadowed by fear”: “Writing praise of women for such actions might have real political consequences; it might lead a reader to the conclusion that the traditional powerless and inferior position of woman cannot be

reconciled with her capacity for political action and that, therefore, social and political institutions ought to be modified in order to accommodate this new woman."⁷³ Cereta moves that fear out of the shadows and onto the page.

Finally, we might read Cereta's correspondence *with* women as, in itself, a kind of history *of* women and an acknowledgment of their "regiment." Among her many letters are those addressed to Isabella of Castile, queen regnant of Spain; Beatrice of Aragon, queen consort of Hungary; Eleanor of Aragon, duchess and regent of Ferrara; and Beatrice d'Este, duchess of Bari and Milan.⁷⁴

After Nogarola and Cereta, most women writers in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries focused on the composition of devotional literature, the love lyric, or the personal letter. Yet even within the "conventions of women's writing," we can at times find some allusion to the themes we have examined thus far.⁷⁵ In the sixteenth century, for example, the French lyric poet Louise Labé seemed to struggle against the roles women had been traditionally assigned, even as she seemed to accept them. Labé dedicates her lyrics, written in 1555, "To M. C. D. B. L.," whom she addresses as *mademoiselle*. In this preface, Labé expresses her thankfulness that "men's harsh laws no longer prevent women from applying themselves to study and learning."⁷⁶ Nevertheless, she writes,

. . . I cannot carry out on my own the sincere wish I have for our sex, to see it surpass or equal men not only in physical beauty, but in knowledge and virtue. I can do no more than urge virtuous ladies to raise their minds a bit above their distaffs and spindles, and to dedicate themselves to making the world that understand that if we are not made to be in command, we nevertheless should not be scorned as partners, in domestic as in public affairs, by those who rule and demand obedience.⁷⁷

This is a particularly interesting statement, for Labé is writing just as John Knox is readying himself to blow his "first blast" against "the monstrous regiment of women." Although Labé writes that women "are not made to be in command," she is in fact writing when, as we have seen, women are ruling as queens regnant or as regents throughout Western Europe.⁷⁸ And, too, Labé not only knows but seems to have been particularly influenced by Cornelius Agrippa's *On the Nobility and Preeminence of the Female Sex* (*De nobilitate et praecellentia foeminei sexus*), although we see little evidence of that here.⁷⁹ In Labé's experience, it seems as if the worst fears of Castiglione's Lady Emilia Pia had come true—the minds

of the “virtuous ladies” of Labé’s day had been reduced to their “distaffs and spindles”—or, to use Lady Emilia’s words, women seem to “do naught else but look to the kitchen and spin.”⁸⁰



It is not until late in the sixteenth century that women’s writing returns to something of the scope and breadth of Christine de Pizan’s in the early fifteenth. In looking for what women had to say about the subject of female sovereignty, we will turn now to two small clusters of works: the first group of woman-authored texts emerged in turn-of-the-century Venice, when three remarkable writers responded to a vicious attack on women published in 1599, Giuseppe Passi’s *The Defects of Women* (*I donneschi difetti*); the second group was triggered just a decade later, in England, after the 1615 publication of *The Arraignment of Lewd, Idle, Froward, and Unconstant Women*.

Among the most interesting of these late sixteenth-century works, at least from our perspective here, is Moderata Fonte’s *The Worth of Women* (*Il merito delle donne*), written in 1592 and published in 1600, eight years after the writer’s death. “Moderata Fonte,” or “moderate fountain,” is the pseudonym of Modesta Pozzo, the wife of Filippo Zorzi, a lawyer and civil servant. As a “respectable woman who wrote,” she was, as her translator and editor Virginia Cox notes, “something of an anomaly in Venice”; “the anomalousness of her position may perhaps account in part for the anomalousness of her writing, which quite strikingly departs from the conventions of women’s writing in the period, especially with regard to genre.”⁸¹ What is immediately remarkable at first glance about Fonte’s work is that it is a literary dialogue, in form like Castiglione’s *The Book of the Courtier* and Elyot’s *The Defense of Good Women*, but one that, unlike those earlier humanist dialogues, records a conversation among women and about women written by a woman.

Fonte’s work begins with a paean to the “most noble city of Venice,” *la serenissima*, a city that “lies wondrously” on the sea that “surrounds her,” behind walls and fortresses that “guard her,” and within gates that “enclose her.” Venice, “as everyone knows,” is a unique city; she is “both adored and respected, both loved and feared.” We are not exactly sure who is speaking here—in praising the “uniqueness” of Venice, a republic, the unidentified narrator proclaims that “ours is a city as free as the sea itself,” a place where “incredible peace and justice reign” due entirely “to the careful foresight and skill of those who govern the city.” Venice, our narrator asserts, is a city notable for “the remarkable freedom

enjoyed by its inhabitants.”⁸² This opening praise of the city, always figured as female, and of its reputation for liberty will prove crucial not only to Fonte’s *The Worth of Women*, but also to the work of Lucrezia Marinella and Arcangela Tarabotti, as we will see.

The women who gather together in this “truly divine city, abode of all celestial graces and perfections,” seem to occupy a kind of once-and-future moment: “there was once not long ago (and indeed there still is) a group of noble and spirited women,” our narrator begins, as if to emphasize the fantasy of what follows. The seven women “often steal time together for a quiet conversation; and on these occasions, safe from any fear of being spied on by men or constrained by their presence, they would speak freely on whatever subject they pleased.”⁸³ Thus “stealing” a moment of freedom in a city that has just been described as “free as the sea itself,” the seven “noble and spirited” women we meet are emblematic of the very restricted status of women in the republic of Venice. As Wendy Heller notes, “Liberty may have been one of Venice’s most valued commodities,” but it was not a commodity on offer to women: “Venice’s absolute exclusion of women in public life was written into the organization of the Republic. . . .”⁸⁴

The Worth of Women begins as a reunion. “Despite their great differences in age and marital status,” the women who gather are “united by breeding and taste,” and to celebrate the return of the newly married Helena to the city, they gather in a walled garden at the home of Leonora.⁸⁵ The ensuing conversation ranges freely over every aspect of their lives and loves—they recite poetry, they praise Leonora’s garden, they speculate about the meaning of their dreams, they talk about birds, and they compare their doctors. But whatever the topic, the subject of men is rarely far from their minds. After so many texts like Castiglione’s and Elyot’s, in which women are largely silent while men argue freely about the nature of women, it is almost shocking to see these Venetian women talking so openly about the merits and the failings of men. And equally surprising is their decision to organize themselves into a debate on the subject of the worth of men. Thus Fonte turns the table on the usual debate about women in an unexpected way. Her characters turn the woman question, the *querelle des femmes*, into an extended *querelle des hommes*.

Adriana, “an elderly widow” (she is “past fifty”!), is appointed to chair the debate and to divide the remaining six women into two groups of three. Virginia, Adriana’s unmarried daughter, Helena, a young bride still “captivated by the charms of her new husband,” and Lucretia, “an older married woman,” are to defend men, while Corinna, also unmarried,

Cornelia, “a young married woman,” and Leonora, “a young widow” in “no hurry” to remarry, are to lay out in detail men’s failings. At the very outset of the debate, Virginia addresses a pointed question to the women who will be arguing men’s weaknesses and faults: “if men are as imperfect as you say they are,” she asks, “then why are they our superiors on every count?” To which the scholarly Corinna replies:

This pre-eminence is something they have unjustly arrogated to themselves. And when it’s said that women must be subject to men, the phrase should be understood in the same sense as when we say that we are subject to natural disasters, diseases, and all the accidents of this life: it’s not a case of being subject in the sense of obeying, but rather of suffering an imposition; not a case of serving them fearfully, but rather of tolerating them in a spirit of Christian charity. . . . But they . . . set themselves up as tyrants over us, arrogantly usurping that dominion over women that they claim is their right, but which is more properly ours.⁸⁶

Because men “go out to work” while women remain at home, men are “stronger and more robust” than women, who “remain at home . . . directing their work and enjoying the profit of their labors.” Thus Corinna challenges Aristotle’s *Politics* and the tradition of argument that developed from it, which maintained men’s “natural” physical superiority and women’s physical inferiority.

Corinna next tackles the biblical rationale for women’s inferiority, responding to Lucretia, who chastises Corinna for her ingratitude and contempt by reminding her that “men were created before us and . . . we stand in need of their help.” In an interpretation we have heard before, Corinna replies, “Men *were* created before women, . . . but that doesn’t prove their superiority—rather, it proves ours, for they were born out of the lifeless earth in order that we could then be born out of living flesh.” Her explanation introduces an interesting analogy: “And what’s so important about this priority in creation, anyway? When we are building, we lay foundations on the ground first, things of no intrinsic merit or beauty, before subsequently raising up sumptuous buildings and ornate palaces.”⁸⁷

The implications of men’s arrogation of authority are then made clear by Leonora, the newly independent young widow: “If men usurp our rights, should we not complain and declare that they have wronged us? For if we are their inferiors in status, but not in worth, this is an abuse that has been introduced into the world and that men have then, over

time, gradually translated into law and custom; and it has become so entrenched that they claim (and even actually believe) that the status they have gained through their bullying by right."⁸⁸

Leonora's observations about the way men of Venice have gained their power is, given the realities of women's lives in the city, critical. But having thus brought her women to the brink of challenging male authority—Leonora asks, "Does this seem a matter of such little interest to us that we should be quiet and let things pass in silence?"—Fonte suddenly shifts their conversation. Instead of following the implications of Leonora's questions to their conclusion, the women involved in the discussion turn, instead, to listing the way men abuse women.

Later that day, it is Leonora who "writes" a history of women, embedding in the conversation her own list of female worthies. She at once suggests that women can rule—naming, among others, Penthesilea, Semiramis, Judith, and the by-now familiar Zenobia, women who were "trained in military discipline" and who excelled "in valor and skill, aided by that peculiarly feminine talent of quick thinking, which has often led them to outshine men in the field"—even while she explains why more women do not do so: "if women do not bear arms, that isn't because of any deficiency on their part; rather, the fault lies with the way they were brought up."⁸⁹ It is Leonora, too, who notes the realities of women's particular situation in Venice, where they have been excluded from rule.

On the second day of their debate, responding to Lucretia's praise of the city and its leaders ("This city has always had the good fortune to be governed most wisely . . . and it has always found leaders of good sense and great integrity to regulate and guide its affairs"), Leonora explodes with exasperation:

Good Lord! . . . I can't believe what I'm hearing! I despair of you! How can you let me down like this? Are you really quite determined to spend the entire day talking about anything rather than the subject at hand? What on earth do magistrates, law courts, and all this other nonsense have to do with us women? Are not all these official functions exercised by men, against our interests? Do they not make claims on us, whether we are obliged to them or not? Do they not act in their own interests and against ours? Do they not treat us as though we were aliens? Do they not usurp our property?⁹⁰

Again, however, the challenge to male authority is quickly diverted. Leonora doubts the "power" of her "words" to effect any change; with

this mention of the “power of words,” the conversation quickly turns to a discussion of poetry.

As the second day’s discussion draws to a close, Cornelia’s impassioned series of questions leads us yet again more to the brink of a female challenge to men’s authority:

Wouldn’t it be possible for us just to banish these men from our lives, and escape their carping and jeering once and for all? Couldn’t we live without them? Couldn’t we earn our own living and manage our affairs without them? Come on, let’s wake up, and claim back our freedom, and the honor and dignity they have usurped from us for so long. Do you think that if we really put our minds to it, we would be lacking the courage to defend ourselves, the strength to fend for ourselves, or the talents to earn our own living? Let’s take our courage into our hands and do it, and then we can leave it up to them to mend their ways as much as they can: we shan’t really care what the outcome is, just as long as we are no longer subjugated to them.⁹¹

But Cornelia’s radical challenge of the status quo is diverted in favor of a discussion of women’s dress, the whole conversation brought quickly to a close with a long poem on love.⁹²

In many ways Fonte’s “Cornelia” suggests that women can find comfort, safety, and an element of freedom together. Her seven women, enclosing themselves for a brief two days into Leonora’s walled garden, represent a “city of ladies” much like Christine de Pizan’s allegorical City of Ladies. But Fonte’s women can build a city that is only temporary, and it is a city where only seven exceptional women can find a moment of liberty; Pizan’s City, by contrast, is a place for “all women who have loved and do love and will love virtue and morality, as well as all who have died or who are now living or who are to come.”⁹³

Just as Christine de Pizan refuses to categorize women according to the stereotypical “estates” defined by their sexual status—virgins, wives, widows—Fonte’s women resist these categories as well. The unmarried Virginia is dubious about marriage, although her widowed mother, Adriana, doubts whether her daughter will be able to avoid it: “your uncles have decided you must marry,” Adriana reminds Virginia, “you’ve inherited such a fortune and it needs to be in safe hands.”⁹⁴ The learned Corinna is also a virgin, and although there is some ambiguity about what is meant by her status—she is described as being a *dimessa*—she is determined never to marry. While Adriana may not be able to

resist social pressure to marry off her daughter ("I really don't know what else I can do with you"), Corinna impresses us with her ability to resist marriage no matter what.⁹⁵ Cornelia and Lucretia are both married women; Lucretia, the "older" wife, may represent the ideal, just as her Roman namesake Lucrece, but Cornelia, the "young married woman," wishes men would go away and leave women alone. Helena, as we have noted, is a newly married woman, and while she defends men, her happiness and naiveté are tested—and perhaps tempered—as the debate proceeds. In addition to the "elderly widow" Adriana is Leonora, a young and rich widow who is determined never to remarry: "I'd rather drown than submit again to a man! I have just escaped from servitude and suffering and you're asking me to go back again of my own free will and get tangled up in all that again? God preserve me!"⁹⁶ But these women are not separated by their differences in their status or by their varied attitudes to men; as women, they join together, without the presence of men. Freed, if momentarily, from male control and authority, they converse openly and even broach dangerous topics and assert dangerous positions, although they do back away from such topics once they have been raised. They find support in the company of women, even if their "city of ladies" is reduced to the confines of Leonora's home, surrounded by the walls of her Venetian *palazzo*.

Like Christine, too, Fonte uses the multiple voices of the dialogue form to explore women's varied positions in society; through her use of the dialogue, Fonte is able to explore traditional views of woman's nature and status. But Fonte does not write herself into her conversation, and given the multiple voices we hear, it is impossible to know which voice, if any, expresses Fonte's own views. As in the case of *The Book of the Courtier*, where we might wish to identify Castiglione with the voice of Giuliano de Medici, we may wish to identify Fonte with the spirited and independent-minded Corinna. But *The Worth of Women* is notable for what Virginia Cox calls its "exceptional 'openness' and its deftness in evading any univocal reading."⁹⁷ Like Castiglione, Fonte presents us with conflicting points-of-view rather than a single absolute position. And like Castiglione too, Fonte closes off the discussion of women by returning to the much safer topic of love.

In reading this text with students, I am impressed by their desire to hear Fonte's own voice despite her many evasive maneuvers. Although they may be convinced, ultimately and grudgingly, to resist identifying Fonte with Corinna, they refuse to give up on seeing Fonte's presence in that walled garden. In the "jaunty self-assertiveness" of the pseudonym she has chosen for herself—Modesta Pozzo, "the humble, unassuming

well," recreates herself as "Moderata Fonte," a "moderate, well-regulated, fountain"—they compare Fonte's act of self-creation to the way Christine the writer writes "Christine" the character into her work.⁹⁸ My students insist that the "lovely fountain" standing "in the middle of the garden, constructed with indescribably rare and meticulous workmanship" is "Moderata Fonte," placing herself in a central position in *The Worth of Women*. I can't blame them.

Fonte's impressive display of women's solidarity might have been lost to us if it were not for a vicious attack on women that was published in Venice in 1599, Giuseppi Passi's *The Defects of Women* (*I donneschi difetti*).⁹⁹ *The Worth of Women* was not composed in response to Passi, for Fonte's dialogue had been completed in 1592, probably just before her death. According to her daughter, Fonte finished the work "the very day before her death in childbirth," a circumstance that is reiterated in a brief biography of Fonte written in 1593: "One remarkable thing is that the very day before she died, she completed the second day of a prose dialogue she had been working on. . . ." ¹⁰⁰ Although not *written* in response to Passi's attack on women, then, *The Worth of Women* seems nevertheless to have been *published* as a response to it.¹⁰¹

Although Letizia Panizza describes *The Defects of Women* as "a repugnant diatribe, even by Renaissance standards," it is hard to see Passi's attack on women as anything more than a reiteration of all the disparagement and abuse heaped on women by the "authority" figures known to Christine de Pizan in the fifteenth century or as any "more repugnant" than John Knox's vile ranting in his 1558 *The First Blast of the Trumpet against the Monstrous Regiment of Women*. *The Defects of Women* is, however, an attack on women that is offensive in many ways, and it is voluminous in its treatment of women's defects, running to nearly four hundred printed pages. It is also a work that proved exceedingly popular, running through at least three editions between 1599 and 1618.¹⁰² To be sure, Passi does not present his work as an attack on women but, rather, as a book with an entirely worthy purpose, that of warning young men about women's faults: "young men, in reading this book and learning of the deceits of women," will be kept out of harm's way, and to this end, Passi says that he will "consider carefully and discuss the infinite events that have befallen men on account of women."¹⁰³ In support of his "warning" Pass cites nearly two hundred and fifty authorities listed alphabetically, from Accorso and Augustine to Virgil and Xenarchus, at the beginning of his book.¹⁰⁴

Having thus marshaled his authorities for the reader's immediate consumption, Passi then follows with a table of contents designed to

illustrate his assertion that women are “defective”—and, if unchecked, a danger to men.¹⁰⁵ This table summarizes the contents of the thirty-five chapters that follow. He begins with a chapter devoted to defining “woman,” then proceeds to a series of chapters, each devoted to a particular “defect”: “proud women,” “avaricious and traitorous women,” “lustful women” (with their inordinate appetites), “irascible women,” “gluttonous and drunken women,” “envious women,” “boastful women,” “ambitious women,” “ungrateful women”—all in the first ten chapters. Women are pitiless, adulterous and “roving”; women prey on men, selling their own sexuality—as prostitutes and whores—or selling other women, as bawds.¹⁰⁶ Women dabble in magic, they color their hair, they love to adorn their bodies with beautiful clothing and jewelry, and they are entirely untrustworthy, their beauty and their advice equally dangerous to men.¹⁰⁷ Chapter Twenty-One is devoted, simply enough, to jealous women, while Chapter Twenty-Two bristles with synonyms, devoted to women who are fickle, inconstant, unstable, frivolous, credulous, foolish, and stupid. Further chapters focus on women who are nosy, litigious, hypocritical, and vain; a single chapter is devoted to women who are “faint-hearted, cowardly, timid, and fearful,” while another treats women are “worthless, incompetent, and useless.”¹⁰⁸ Women are obstinate, indolent, thieving, tyrannical, fraudulent, and, “slandorous, talkative, feigning, biting, and lying.”¹⁰⁹ And, finally, they are unable to bear any of life’s adversities.¹¹⁰ As if this comprehensive enumeration of women’s weaknesses isn’t enough, Passi provides yet another extensive list, this one a detailed, eight-page table of all the “notable things contained in the work,” a more-or-less alphabetical hodgepodge of women’s faults (from their appetite for wine, for example, to their venery), of infamous women (from Agrippina the lustful, for example, to Xantippe, the quarrelsome wife of Socrates), and of praise for assorted worthy men (Alexander the Great, for example, noted for his continence) and their revelation of women’s failings (Virgil, for example, who is said to have given evidence of women’s rapacity).¹¹¹ The 1599 publication of *The Defects of Women* seems, in fact, to have precipitated the publication of *The Worth of Women* in 1600. As Stephen Kolsky argues, “Dogliani published the manuscript of *Il merito delle donne* as a counterblast to Passi’s assertions.”¹¹² Kolsky’s metaphor here is very interesting; in describing the publication of Fonte’s text as a “counterblast,” Kolsky reminds us of Knox whose attack on female sovereignty was presented to his readers as a “blast.”

Although *The Worth of Women* may have been rushed into print in order to counter Passi, *The Defects of Women* was followed quickly by the

publication of Lucrezia Marinella's *The Nobility and Excellence of Women and the Defects and Vices of Men* (*La nobilità et l'eccellenza delle donne, co' difetti et mancamenti de gli uomini*), also published in 1600.¹¹³ Like her younger contemporary Moderata Fonte, Marinella was a Venetian, but unlike Fonte, Marinella's career did not come to a quick end with her marriage, nor did she die young, in childbirth. Despite an absence of documentary material on her life, her 1645 will and a 1648 codicil to it indicate that she did marry and have at least three children. Both her father and brother were physicians (and Marinella ultimately married another physician), but it is not clear just how she received her education, though she was almost surely educated within her family, probably by her father. Marinella's "dazzling" and "blistering" work—a veritable "fireworks display" of her "stunning" mastery of philosophical, medical, historical, and literary authorities and arguments—was composed "at a furious rate" as a reply to the misogyny of Passi.¹¹⁴ Marinella's response to *The Defects of Women* is twofold, as indicated by her title: first, she will defend women's "nobility and excellence" against attacks like Passi's, and then she will herself go on the attack, enumerating the "defects and vices" of men.

In countering Passi's attacks, Marinella covers much the same ground as Christine de Pizan, though not quite in the same way. While Christine de Pizan had countered male authorities by constructing female authority in the persons of Lady Reason, Lady Rectitude, and Lady Justice, Marinella throws male authorities back at Passi—Homer, Plato, Aristotle, Plutarch, Petrarch, and Dante, to name only a few, are all used to defend woman's nature, her "essence," and even the very name, "woman," by which she is known. As Marinella reaches her fifth chapter, "Of Women's Noble Actions and Virtues, Which Greatly Surpass Men's, As Will Be Proved by Reasoning and Example," Marinella is ready to move from defending women to cataloguing their abilities. She has already shown that women possess nobility of soul; now she is ready to show "that their actions are more esteemed than men's."¹¹⁵

What follows is yet another version of the history of women as Marinella relates the stories of "learned women and those who are illustrious in many arts," of "temperate and continent women," and of "prudent women and those expert at giving advice." But notice how the scope of women's activities has been narrowed by Marinella: it is among the "temperate and continent" women that we find Zenobia. "It is a fact known to everyone," Marinella begins, that "we never see or read about [women] getting drunk or spending all day in taverns, as dissolute men do, nor do they give themselves unrestrainedly to other pleasure."

Women are "moderate and frugal in everything." Thus Zenobia is presented as a model of women's moderation and frugality, not as an example of military prowess and female sovereignty. Zenobia's military activity is duly noted—"[i]n war she showed herself to be a most noble and valiant captain and a brave warrior"—but it is not the focus of Marinella's biographical sketch. Rather, Zenobia is praised, above all, for her "constancy and firmness of spirit." She is beautiful, as a woman ought to be, and her beautiful exterior is a reflection of her inner beauty; she never "lower[s] herself to lasciviousness or vanity." Marinella does not simply omit the end of Zenobia's story, as Christine de Pizan did. Her version of Zenobia's "defeat" represents something quite different: "She waged many wars. Finally, when fighting with Aurelian, Zenobia was triumphant, in terms of human bravery. Aurelian's forces started to flee, but while they were fleeing a god appeared to them and put new heart into them, so that returning to battle they emerged victorious." Thus, as Marinella interprets the story, the emperor may have been victorious, but Zenobia was not defeated—or at least not defeated fairly. "It was not, then, because of their own valor that [the Romans] conquered this heroic woman," Marinella writes, "but with the help of the god."¹¹⁶

Marinella includes no female sovereigns in her defense of women's worth. As can be seen from the categories she uses for classifying her woman worthies, government is not one of the "noble actions" that women seem to perform. In this, despite her learning, Marinella seems to reflect the extraordinarily restricted lives of women in the Venetian Republic. Indeed, Marinella is quite explicit about this; "in our times," she says, "there are few women who apply themselves to study or the military arts, since men, fearing to lose their authority and become women's servants, often forbid them even to learn to read or write." Marinella wishes things could be different. "Oh, how many women there are, who with their greater prudence, justice, and experience of life, would govern empires better than men!" she exclaims, but "in our times," this is not "permitted." If women were allowed to be trained "at arms and letters," as Plato had "desired and ordered," they would "be the first to take up arms in defense of their country," thereby "maintaining and expanding kingdoms." Women are perfectly able, if only men would give them an education and an opportunity: "They would see how much sooner the girl would become expert than the boy and how she would surpass him completely."¹¹⁷

But even looking beyond Venice, Marinella does not seem to recognize female sovereignty as a reality. She cites no contemporary, or near-contemporary, women as evidence to support her argument, although

she clearly knows about women who have functioned successfully as rulers. Indeed, she includes two of them in her section dealing with “prudent women and those expert at giving advice,” where she refers to Margaret of Austria and to Catherine de’ Medici, both of whom we have met before, both of whom governed effectively as regents, Margaret of Austria in the Netherlands and Catherine de’ Medici in France.¹¹⁸ But their success in government is not in for praise here; rather, Margaret of Austria is commended for having “showed great prudence in forgiving those who had risen against her,” while Catherine de’ Medici is recognized for having been “most prudent in her counsel.”¹¹⁹

Having completed her argument that women are “far nobler and more excellent than men,” though with distinctly reduced prospects, Marinella then undertakes what none of her predecessors since Christine de Pizan has dared: she not only “corrects” men’s judgments about women, but she challenges specifically, and by name, a number of her male contemporaries, specifically those who have, motivated by the “arrogance” and “envy” of Aristotle, revived his “shameful and dishonorable” denigration of women.¹²⁰ Most interesting, from our perspective, is her “destruction” of Sperone Speroni, Torquato Tasso, and, ultimately, with a final coup de grâce, of Giovanni Boccaccio.

In “narrating and destroying” Sperone Speroni’s *On the Dignity of Woman*, Marinella begins by summarizing the purpose of his dialogue: Speroni’s aim is, she writes, to show that “women are imperfect and impotent, and he endeavors to prove that they are born to serve men and generated by nature for this purpose.”¹²¹ He does this, as Marinella notes, not only through the discussion between Michele Barrozzi and Daniele Barbaro but, most egregiously, by “attempt[ing] to show (oh what inventiveness!) that this is the verdict of women themselves.” Marinella seems particularly incensed by Speroni’s fictionalized version of Beatrice degli Obizzi and by her ventriloquized voice. “Observe what he has Signora Obiza say . . . in this dialogue of his,” she writes, quoting Beatrice’s “verdict”: “Woman is not woman unless she serves her husband, for it is woman’s natural condition to serve.” Marinella then delivers her own verdict of Beatrice’s “verdict”: she intends to “demolish this opinion” and proceeds to use Aristotle himself to contradict the neo-Aristotelian Speroni. After building her refutation by citing and glossing passages from Aristotle’s *Economics*, *Nicomachean Ethics*, and *Politics*, she turns the very words of the Master against his man: “What more manifest proof and clearer reasoning can be desired from Aristotle?” she asks, concluding, “Thus we see clearly that Sperone’s opinion lacks a true and solid basis.”¹²²

Marinella turns next to Speroni's student and fellow neo-Aristotelian, Torquato Tasso, again with the intention of "adduc[ing] and refut[ing]" his "discourse" on women's virtues.¹²³ She begins by summarizing his original argument: "Torquato Tasso believed that women are weak and imperfect in comparison to men, similar, in fact, to the left hand." She notes that he "goes on to say that strength does not suit them, nor do they seek fame in making their works known to the world, since their desire is for modesty and retirement." But what particularly incenses Marinella is the "distinction" Tasso draws between what is "feminine," and thus appropriate behavior for most women, and what is "ladylike," and thus appropriate for "queens, princesses, and those whom he calls heroic ladies." Here Marinella's refutation takes an interesting form. For Tasso's opinion to be valid, "he must support it with some good and solid grounding," which, according to Marinella, he does not. And even when he does have the support of "Aristotle's authority," Marinella responds by a flat-out refusal to accept it: "I say that we do not accept Aristotle's opinion as true, having produced a thousand examples of strong women, and not just of queens, in our book." Women have "practiced and exercised" themselves in "public affairs" as well as men, and thus "I do not admit this supposition of his."¹²⁴ As for "Tasso's new distinction between females and ladies," Marinella concludes with disdain, "I will spare myself the effort of demolishing and reviling it."¹²⁵

Marinella reserves a particular scorn for Boccaccio, whose opinions about women she reserves for the concluding section of her scorched-earth "destruction" of those men who have "reviled the female sex." In attacking Boccaccio, Marinella ignores his *Famous Women*, with its explicit if ambivalent "praise" of women, and concentrates instead on his *Il Corbaccio*, written in 1355 but published in Venice in 1563.¹²⁶ Boccaccio's tale, newly printed as *The Labyrinth of Love*, is a dream vision: a dead husband appears to the narrator-dreamer, who is the new lover of the dead man's widow. The departed husband warns the lover about the woman's deceitful character and evil nature. Even in the sixteenth century, the influence of the fourteenth-century *Corbaccio* was, as Panizza notes, "incalculable because of Boccaccio's literary stature."¹²⁷ Thus, although the *Corbaccio* was the earliest of the texts to which Marinella responds, she reserves her refutation of it for last.

Boccaccio, she says, has defamed women with "indecent words full of poison and envy rather than true or apparent reasoning, and thus presumed many things that required actual proof."¹²⁸ To "destroy this false opinion," Marinella works her way calmly and coolly through all of Boccaccio's insults before turning to a few insults of her own.

"Boccaccio intends to criticize women by saying that if they go to a mass they are able to talk on infinite matters relating to anything from state government to the subtleties of science," she writes, adding, "I truly believe this to be a proof of their subtlety of intellect and excellent memory. God grant that he, who after all his studies made himself out to be a great master, had been able in four years to give as detailed an account of them as any little girl could do in a quarter of an hour."¹²⁹ Poor Boccaccio is not only inept, but he contradicts himself. If women are so vile, then why has he languished for their love: "Boccaccio (may God have mercy on his soul) composed this book called *The Labyrinth*, as he himself relates, out of spite and a bitter affliction that ultimately led him to desire death." Mocked by a woman who "did not love him at all," this "poor man" was forced "to grieve and lament that he who was so learned and full of erudition should be so scorned and derided."¹³⁰ His act of writing *Il Corbaccio* was thus an act of revenge—and in Marinella's opinion, there is no reason to grant any credit to a work so unreasonable.

One final aspect of Marinella's writing back to Passi, Speroni, Tasso, and Boccaccio is the way she has constructed her work. She is not only responding to them, she is mirroring them. As Stephen Kolsky makes clear, *The Nobility and Excellence of Women* is Marinella's "systematic refutation" of Passi, "pitting quotation against quotation, example against example."¹³¹ I would argue that in shaping and presenting her rebuttal of Passi, Marinella is also using Tasso's image against him. He presents his text to the duchess as a mirror, or model, for her; Marinella's text presented as a mirror in which male writers will see their own weaknesses reflected back at them.

The Nobility and Excellence of Women and the Defects and Vices of Men, first published in 1600, was expanded and republished in 1601. A third edition appeared in 1621.¹³² While proclaimed by her contemporaries as "a woman of wondrous eloquence and learning," a woman so accomplished "it would be impossible to find anyone to equal let alone surpass her," Lucrezia Marinella was nevertheless an isolated figure.¹³³ She seems to have had no contact with her Venetian contemporary Arcangela Tarabotti, who admired Marinella and whose own work, protesting "paternal tyranny," addressed similar themes, nor does it appear that Marinella knew, or even knew about, Sara Copia Sullam, another of her Venetian contemporaries.¹³⁴ Marinella does refer to Moderata Fonte, but not to *The Worth of Women*, written in 1592 and published the same year as the first edition of Marinella's *The Nobility and Excellence of Women*.¹³⁵ While Marinella could have read Cornelius Agrippa's *On the Nobility and Preeminence of the Female Sex* in an Italian translation published

in 1549, it does not seem that she did, nor does she seem to have known Castiglione's defense of women in the third book of *The Book of the Courtier*.¹³⁶ She certainly did not know Christine de Pizan, whose arguments she repeats, whose history of women she reproduces, and whose writing back to Boccaccio she replicates. And like Christine de Pizan—and all of the other women writers whom we have discussed here—Lucrezia Marinella, renowned for her “eloquence and learning,” was rather quickly forgotten. As Panizza indicates, “after her own century, Marinella's name and *The Nobility and Excellence of Women* become items in catalogues,” and her “works all but disappeared from sight.”¹³⁷ Lucrezia Marinella is mentioned twice in the eighteenth century and once in the nineteenth; her works were not republished. Even as the twentieth century drew to an end, only one of Marinella's many and varied works, her 1605 *Arcadia felice*, finally appeared in a critical edition.¹³⁸ Anne Dunhill's 1999 translation of *The Nobility and Excellence of Women* is the first time any of Marinella's work has been available in English.

If Lucrezia Marinella is thus isolated in Venice, a city renowned for its marvelous liberty, her contemporary Arcangela Tarabotti, mentioned above, lived a life even more confined than Marinella. “Arcangela” was the name taken by Elena Cassandra Tarabotti when she became a nun at the age of sixteen; her own writing indicates that, like many of her contemporaries in Venice, she had been coerced into the monastic life by her father and enclosed in a convent when she was thirteen years old. In her *Paternal Tyranny*, Tarabotti describes her treatment, and the treatment of all the women who have, like her, been “involuntarily shut up” into “a living Hell”: “altogether innocent,” they have been treated “as if they were criminals sentenced to life imprisonment.”¹³⁹ Although Tarabotti was never able to leave the convent to which she had been “condemned,” she nevertheless protested her situation and wrote back to attacks on women, like that of Passi, through a series of letters and treatises circulated in manuscript.¹⁴⁰

Given her situation, Tarabotti's opening address “To the Most Serene Venetian Republic” is all the more poignant, although her tone is certainly not self-indulgent. “As far as the remotest corners of the known world, the wings of Fame bear aloft the news of how you, Most Serene Queen, grant unconditional liberty to the people dwelling in your beautiful city, whatever their nationality.” But the city had also given birth to “Paternal Tyranny,” an “infernal monster” that the “noble lords” who control the city “have gladly embraced.” And so Tarabotti presents her *Paternal Tyranny* as “a gift” to Paternal Tyranny, “a gift that

well suits a Republic that practices the abuse of forcing more young girls to take the veil than anywhere else in the world.”¹⁴¹

Tarabotti's primary aim in *Paternal Tyranny* is to protest the situation of women forced into convents, a fate described variously as perpetual imprisonment or being buried alive. Alluding to Dante, as only one example, she declares, “The place where these unfortunate women dwell—I refer always to unwilling nuns—can be likened to an inferno. . . . Only Hell itself bears a likeness to the suffering of these enforced slaves of Christ.”¹⁴² Although directly addressed to men—variously addressed as liars (“What liars you men are!”), as inhumane (“You cruel, inhuman men”), as deceivers (“you deceivers”), as hypocrites (“You wicked dissimulators in religious disguise”), as madmen (“Yes, indeed, you act like madmen,” “you madmen”), as blasphemers (“your obscene language, inane tittle-tattle, swearing, slander, and curses resound everywhere”), and even as slave masters who turn their “veiled and imprisoned daughters . . . into slaves”—Tarabotti's work is also a refutation of the male authorities that have been turned against women and against male-authored attacks on women, including Passi's *The Defects of Women*, which she characterizes as “indecent” and “obscene,” among other things.¹⁴³

But it is her treatment of the idea of female sovereignty that is of most interest to us here. In the three books of her work, she embeds several brief catalogues of female worthies, including one in the second book listing women with gifts for eloquence. In addition to the familiar figures of Sappho, she refers to both Moderata Fonte and Lucrezia Marinella.¹⁴⁴ Another brief catalogue occurs in the third book, where she examines women of courage, including Judith, Thamyras, and Penthesilea. “Feminine courage shines out,” she says, “documented in infinite histories; by it we have subordinated kings, emperors, and powerful armies.”¹⁴⁵ But all of this occurred in the past; like Fonte and Marinella, Tarabotti is particularly aware of the reduced opportunities for women in Venice, a situation that is not natural to women as women but is man-made:

You've taken leave of your senses in subjecting women! One sees your great folly carried out in our Italian cities rather than right reason or the commands of human and divine law. In how many other kingdoms do women enjoy truly great liberty? In how many other cities do women perform public roles that are here exercised only by men? In France, Germany, and many northern provinces . . . [t]hey enjoy liberty and make use of that free will granted by the Giver of all good things without the reservations and restrictions—or rather

constraints and insults—that we grow accustomed to in this city of ours.

If women were educated to exercise power, as judges or as lawyers, for example, “there would be greater justice.”¹⁴⁶ It is in this context—her discussion of the way women in Venice have been deprived of liberty and denied any opportunity to cultivate their minds and to demonstrate their good judgment—that Tarabotti introduces the figure of Isabella of Castile. “King Ferdinand of Aragon boasted that all his good deeds were the result of listening to his wife, Queen Isabella,” she asserts.¹⁴⁷

In her indictment of men's paternity and patriarchy, Tarabotti identifies men's primary motivation as greed, but she also suggests something else, men's fear of women, thus taking us back to Boccaccio's whose *Famous Women* is, as we have noted, “shadowed” by fear. But times are different now, Tarabotti jeers: “Admit it to yourselves since there is no reason for your authority to feel threatened. Women can't pretend to take away your kingdom, not even those legal rights you've usurped over them so presumptuously.” It is true that, “if all unwilling nuns had stayed in the world, their number would make up an army; but they wouldn't be concerned with coups d'état. They'd be happy to stay in their fathers' houses. . . .” But, in spite of their tyranny, men are weak. “Are you afraid of women in our world multiplying?” she asks. “What cowards! These are no longer the times of the brave Amazons. . . .”¹⁴⁸

These are no longer to times of the Amazons—nor, it seems, is it any longer the time of female sovereigns and regents. Before drawing this chapter to an end, we will examine one more cluster of texts, this one taking us back to where it all began, to England, where John Knox had issued his “first blast of the trumpet” against the “monstrous regiment of women.”

Given all the women's voices we have heard in this chapter—and seeing all the ways that women had engaged with men in the debate about women in general and female sovereignty in particular—it should strike us all the more forcibly that, throughout the sixteenth-century gynecocracy debate, no women entered into the argument. All of those who wrote back to Knox, either attacking or defending rule by women, were men—failing the discovery of some as yet undiscovered text written by a woman, we are left in an interesting position. In kingdoms that were ruled by women, where rule by women was being so hotly debated, no women wrote to defend rule by women.

We might look to *Jane Anger, Her Protection for Women* as one possible exception to this conclusion, but we would be disappointed.¹⁴⁹ Although

the publication date, 1589, indicates that the *Protection* appeared at the very height of the pamphlet war about female rulers, this brief defense of women is aimed not at those who have attacked the “monstrous regiment” of women, but at the “scandalous reports of a late surfeiting lover.” So it is women’s fidelity in love that motivates the pamphlet writer. A second complicating factor is that “Jane Anger,” identified on the book’s title page as “a gentlewoman,” is almost certainly a pseudonym. Although the pamphlet clearly was written to respond to an attack on women, there is nothing that corresponds directly to our focus here.

Instead we will turn our attention to a work published in 1615, not quite fifty years after *The First Blast of the Monstrous Regiment of Women* appeared. Although the publication of *The Arraignment* triggered an immediate and heated response, its attack on women and the defenses of women that it inspired show us how far the circumstances in women’s lives have changed in the intervening years.

This attack on women, a public “calling to account,” appeared anonymously in 1615. The writer’s “arraignment” of women is triggered, like Knox’s “blast,” by women’s assumption of male privilege. For Knox, it was a women’s assumption of the political power that belonged rightly to men; for the author of the “arraignment,” it is women’s assumption of the clothing that belongs rightly to men. In both instances, then, the texts reflect anxiety about female appropriation of male privilege. While we might conclude that wearing men’s clothing doesn’t seem to pose quite the challenge to gender hierarchy that wearing a man’s crown does, the author may be threatened by the numbers; surely more women wore men’s clothing than “their” crowns. And the infractions crossed social barriers; women from Queen Anne and the ladies of her court to the “roaring girls” of London’s underworld were cross-dressed.¹⁵⁰ In the same year that *The Arraignment* was published, one Thomas Adams decided that London had become Bedlam because he could no longer distinguish between men and women—he encountered “Amazons” everywhere he went on the streets of the city.¹⁵¹ The “woman question” that was raised by Knox was thus still being debated, but a dozen years after James I had followed Elizabeth Tudor onto the throne of England, the terms of the debate had been drastically reduced.

Like Knox, issuing his “first blast,” the writer of *The Arraignment* did not claim authorship; there is no name at all on the title page, but the preface is signed “Thomas Tel-troth.” The author has decided to remain “nameless,” he says, in order to keep himself “blameless.”¹⁵² And also like Knox, the teller-of-truth promises a “second book” to follow, but

that book never appears. As Barbara Kiefer Lewalski comments, *The Arraignment* “needed no second book: this one proved popular enough to go through ten editions by 1634.”¹⁵³

Three books answering *The Arraignment* appeared quickly in print, just two years after the *Arraignment* appeared. Two of this small cluster of books—*Esther Hath Hanged Haman* and *The Worming of a Mad Dog*—were, like *The Arraignment* itself, published pseudonymously.¹⁵⁴ Only the third was written by an author who claimed her work as her own and, in the words of her editor, “insisted on her authorial identity”: Rachel Speght’s *A Muzzle for Melastomus*.¹⁵⁵ And while naming herself as the author of her “muzzle,” Speght named the “truth-teller” of *The Arraignment* as well, one Joseph Swetnam.

Speght’s tone is light—she begins by identifying the “metamorphosed misogynist Joseph Swetnam” as the “veriest idiot that ever set pen to paper.” Noting that “the emptiest barrel makes the loudest sound,” Speght tells Swetnam that his “mingle mangle invective against women” is so badly argued that even a schoolboy would be able to do better. But since Swetnam, “the dunce,” has identified the “virulent foam” of *The Arraignment* as a kind of “bear-baiting of women,” Speght takes him and his metaphor at face value and thus prepares her “muzzle” for his “black mouth” (*melastomus*).¹⁵⁶

In her defense of women, Speght does not simply answer Swetnam’s attack; she structures her own response in her own particular way. She affirms “woman’s excellency,” defends Eve, “who was deceived,” against Adam, who was not deceived, tackles Paul’s views of women and marriage by arguing that they were addressed to the Corinthians (in the letter to the Galatians, Speght argues, Paul had erased gender hierarchy when he wrote “male and female are all one in Christ Jesus”), and unknotted the “enigmatical sentence” of Solomon, who “seems to speak against all of our sex” when he said that he found only one upright man among a thousand, and not one woman.¹⁵⁷

But the most important argument in both Swetnam and Speght is what is *not* in dispute. The question of female sovereignty is not raised, much less debated. The topic is not even discussed. A mere fifty years after the publication of *The First Blast of the Trumpet against the Monstrous Regiment of Women* and a dozen years into the reign of James I, the debate about female sovereignty has become a moot point.

CHAPTER FIVE

Queens and Controversy in Early Modern Europe: The End of an Era

The state of monarchy is the supremest thing upon earth, for kings are not only God's lieutenants upon earth and sit upon God's throne, but even by God himself they are called gods, . . . and so their power after a certain relation compared to the divine power. Kings are also compared to fathers of families, for a king is truly *parens patriae*, the politic father of his people.

—King James I of England, “A Speech to the Lords and Commons of the Parliament,” 1609¹

In spite of their generally profeminist positions, most of the humanist writers we examined were relatively cautious about incorporating contemporary references into their arguments, relying instead on historical “evidence” drawn from mythological or classical sources. The figure of Zenobia thus appears as the most useful—and frequently used—model of female sovereignty. From Boccaccio, in the late fourteenth century, through Lucrezia Marinella, at the turn of the seventeenth, those who argued women's worth and who constructed an alternative history for them wrote and rewrote the story of the third-century queen of Palmyra.

Certainly humanist writers did refer to examples of female rulers offered by more recent history, but their references are surprisingly limited. The earliest and most influential of the works we have examined, Boccaccio's *Famous Women*, included only one contemporary model, Joanna I of Naples; her biography reappears, variously interpreted, in many of the humanist treatises that follow, though by the sixteenth century, her example had lost its currency and immediate relevance.

Aside from Joanna of Naples, Isabella of Castile also figured frequently in humanist texts. Castiglione's dialogue form allows him to represent the queen in two contrasting versions, first as active ruler and then, in an alternate view, as passive ideal. In yet another representation, the Spanish humanist Vives employs Isabella as model wife and mother in *The Instruction of a Christian Woman*, ignoring altogether her position as queen regnant of Castile. Margaret of Austria is another favorite; Agrippa's declamation is addressed to her, for example, and fifty years after the regent's death, Tasso is still recommending her as a model to Barbara of Austria. Widely circulated, translated, and published, these works of influential humanist thinkers share a fairly narrow view of appropriate models of female rule and make only limited use of historical examples, especially recent examples.

By contrast—and perhaps not by accident—the work of those writers who refused to see only a limited number of capable women disappeared from view. Christine de Pizan refers to the many women she knows and with whom she is in correspondence, but her response to Boccaccio's widely read and imitated history of women has only recently regained something of the reputation and readership it had in her own lifetime. Similarly, Giovanni Sabadino degli Arienti, whose work was not published in his own day and remains untranslated even today, draws widely on examples of women known by and related to Ginevra Sforza, to whom he dedicates his "history." And while Tasso is well-known for his epic *Jerusalem Delivered*, his discourse offering contemporary women as models remains relatively obscure.

However cautious humanist scholars might be in their use of history as evidence, historical precedent is almost entirely absent from the arguments of the men who engaged in the heated and more focused gynecocracy debate that erupted in the mid-sixteenth century. They looked not to history but to the Bible. For Knox and those who followed him in his "blast" against the "monstrous regiment" of women, Jezebel provided a potent image of dangerous and destructive female rule. Indeed John Knox makes only one historical reference to a queen in *The First Blast of the Trumpet*, and that comes in a marginal notation. About women's "natural weakness and inordinate appetites," he exclaims, "would to God the examples were not so manifest":

some women . . . have died for sudden joy, some for impatience . . . have murdered themselves, some . . . have burned with such inordinate lust that, for the quenching of the same, they have betrayed to strangers their country and city, and some . . . have

been so desirous of dominion that for the obtaining of the same they have murdered the children of their own sons—yea, and some have killed with cruelty their own husbands and children.

While claiming he could cite many such “histories,” he does not do so in his text. Instead, he includes a single example of women “so desirous of dominion” that they have killed their own husbands: “[Joanna], queen of Naples, hanged her husband,” he notes in a marginal gloss.² Neither Anthony Gilby nor Christopher Goodman draws on historical example in his attack on female rule.

On the other side of the gynecocracy debate, historical references are also scarce. In his response to Knox, John Aylmer prefers Deborah and Judith to contemporary examples, but he does call to mind “Queen Ane,” that is, Anne Boleyn, whom he credits with “banishing the beast of Rome” from England. “Was there ever in England a greater feat wrought by any man than this was by woman?” he asks.³ Of all the examples he could have used, this precedent may seem curious, until we remember that by the time Aylmer took up the cause of female rulers, Anne Boleyn’s daughter, Elizabeth Tudor, had succeeded to the throne of England.

In his argument against those who have “refused all womanly government,” John Leslie notes that “women have from time to time born princely regiment in the most notable parts of the world,” citing biblical and classical models before he turns to examples drawn from history: “As for Europe, as it is better known to us, so therein have we with all greater store of examples of this kind of government.” As historical precedent he cites, among others, Theodora, the empress of Byzantium; Agnes of Poitou, regent of Germany for her son, Henry IV; Joanna, queen of Naples; and Margaret of Denmark, queen of Denmark, Norway, and Sweden. For good measure, he throws an allusion to the legendary Cordelia into this historical mix, but he cites no woman ruler more recent than Margaret of Denmark, who died in 1412.⁴ David Chambers also refers to the Scandinavian queen in his *Discourse on the Legitimate Succession of Women*. In addition, he includes one further fifteenth-century model, that of Isabel of Bavaria, regent for the French king Charles VI. Chambers’s work, dedicated to Catherine de’ Medici, is unique among the gynecocracy tracts incorporating not only such historical precedents but also more contemporary examples. In addition to these two fifteenth-century models, he includes Anne of France, Louise of Savoy, and Margaret of Austria in his argument in defense of the rights and abilities of female sovereigns.⁵

Historical precedent could provide both positive and negative examples for those who debated the subject of female sovereignty. Indeed, the *same* precedent—Joanna I of Naples—could be deployed both by those who argued in support of women rulers and by those who argued against them. But relatively few writers looked to history for models, and even fewer to the political realities of their day. Rather than historical or contemporary references, humanist texts and gynecocracy tracts alike turned more often to mythological, biblical, and classical models. If we had only the surviving texts to inform us, we might conclude, like Knox, that the sudden appearance of the “mischievous Marys” represented a break in the continuity of male rule.

But the “mischievous Marys” whose reign outraged John Knox died long before the gynecocracy debate exhausted itself. Mary Tudor died in 1558, just as *The First Blast of the Trumpet against the Monstrous Regiment of Women* appeared in print. Two years later, the regent Marie of Guise died, and in 1587 her daughter, Mary Stuart, queen regnant of Scotland, was executed. Catherine de’ Medici, regent of France, died in 1589. Elizabeth I, whose golden reign lasted through the turn of the century, died in 1603, but even before her passing, the political landscape had shifted dramatically. It seems significant that she named James VI of Scotland to succeed her on the English throne, ignoring not only the line of succession designated by her father and her brother but also the claims of her female cousins. Her decision paralleled—or perhaps reflected—the development of patriarchal political theory in the seventeenth century. The new theory changed the nature of the political debate by equating a king’s rule with God’s rule and kingship with fatherhood. In such an equation, there was no place for women to exercise sovereignty.

This formulation of political authority begins as the sixteenth century draws to a close. In his *Six Books of the Republic* (*Six livres de la République*), published in 1576, the French lawyer and political philosopher Jean Bodin draws an analogy between the family and the state, beginning with definitions.⁶ “A family is the right government of many subjects or persons . . . under the rule and command of one and the same head of the family,” he writes, while “the commonwealth is a lawful government of many families and of those things which unto them in common belongeth with a puissant sovereignty.” Thus “the manner of the government of a house or family” is the “true model for the government of the commonweal.”⁷ As the “right and power to command” the family is given by God to the father, so, by extension, the “right and power to command” the state is granted by God to the king. And the “law of

God" ordains that the woman should be "subject" to the man not only "in every particular man's house and family" but "in the government of kingdoms and empires."⁸

Yet the equation of God and king and the analogy of the family did not lead necessarily to the exclusion of women from rule. In his 1583 *De Republica Anglorum: The Manner of Government or Policy of the Realm of England*, for example, the Tudor politician Sir Thomas Smith identifies the family as "the first sort of beginning" of society. The husband and the wife together have "care of the family," but each has a particular role within the family, "either of them excelling [the] other in wit and wisdom to conduct those things which appertain to their office"; "the man," for example, is "to get, to travel abroad, to defend," while "the wife" is "to save that which is gotten, to tarry at home, to distribute that which commeth of the husband's labor."⁹

Since nature has "made" women "for the nurture of the children and family of them both" and to "keep all at home neat and clean," they are meant neither "to meddle with matters abroad, nor to bear office in a city of commonwealth, no more than children and infants." "[W]e do reject women" in such affairs, Smith asserts. But, while "rejecting" women from "meddling" in public affairs, he nevertheless allows for the exception in the larger commonwealth when "authority is annexed to the blood and progeny, as the crown, a duchy, or an earldom, for there the blood is respected, not the age nor the sex":

Whereby an absolute queen, an absolute duchess, or countess—those I call absolute which have the name, not by being married to a king, duke, or earl, but by being the true, right, and next successors in the dignity, and upon whom by right of the blood that title is descended—these I say have the same authority, although they be women or children in that kingdom, duchy, or earldom, as they should have had if they had been men of full age.

In such exceptional situations, Smith argues, the "right and honor of the blood" and the "quietness and surety of the realm" are more to be considered than "the tender age as yet impotent to rule" or the "sex not accustomed otherwise to intermeddle with public affairs." And besides, "such personages"—that is, children or women—"never do lack the counsel or such grave and discreet men as be able to supply all other defects."¹⁰

A similar argument was by the Oxford scholar John Case in his 1588 *Spheres of Government (Sphaera civitatis)*. He refutes the claim that women

are by nature imperfect, demonstrating that the “logic” that led to such a conclusion was faulty. “All that is imperfect by nature is monstrous,” he begins. He then continues the syllogism: “all women are imperfect by nature; therefore all women are monstrous.” But such a proof is obviously “ridiculous.”¹¹ Having demonstrated the folly of such an argument, Case turns to the question that is of interest to us: “Are women permitted to govern?” he asks.¹²

To answer this question, Case refers first to Aristotle. “Listen to the Philosopher,” he begins, continuing, “The male, compared with the female, is superior, and she is inferior; he indeed should rule, and she should obey his command.” But “beware,” Case warns, “lest you drink a poison from these words. For there are many women who are superior to men, who more fitly govern than obey.” Further, “The Philosopher says that, not every man, but a man is superior to a woman. He does not say every woman, but that woman is subordinate to a man.” “Therefore,” Case concludes, “they err and entirely fantasize who deny woman counsel and government . . . , they who drive women under the yoke of servitude and banish them all from every citadel of virtue and reward.” A male may be “fitter for holding first place than the female,” but even “the Philosopher” qualified his judgment by adding, “unless he [is] of such a constitution that he deviates from that nature.” While thus acknowledging that women in general are not suited to command, Case allows for the “command” of an exceptional woman: “I shall make the conclusion that nature often makes a woman intelligent, industry makes her literate, education makes her pious, experience makes her wise. [If] Nature gives birth to her as heir to a kingdom, why should she not reign?”¹³

But in citing examples of female sovereignty to illustrate his argument, Case is curiously silent about obvious historical examples. He refers to the queen of Sheba, Cornelia, Artemisia, Susanna, Thamyris, Esther, and Judith, most of whom are not even women rulers.¹⁴ He includes neither historical nor contemporary examples of female sovereignty, not even Elizabeth I, although the queen appears on the frontispiece of Case’s book. And while employing the analogy of the family in his discussion of the state later in his *Spheres of Government*, Case argues that such a comparison is limited, because the family is different from the state. A woman is to be subservient to her husband but not to all men, he points out, and further qualifies the family analogy by noting that a female sovereign is different than a married woman.¹⁵

But arguments like those of Smith and Case did not prevail. Bodin’s *Six Books of the Republic* was translated into English by Richard Knolles,

who published *The Six Books of a Commonweal* in 1606, three years after James I succeeded to the English throne. The new English king, whose views are quoted at the beginning of this chapter, cited the family analogy in his own statement of his regal authority. By mid-century the family analogy was carried even further by Sir Robert Filmer. In his aptly named *Patriarchia*, he argues that a king inherited legal and absolute authority from Adam.¹⁶ The power of kings is “paternal power” or “fatherly power,” and there is never *any* reason for a woman to assume a role in governing the state. “It may be demanded what becomes of the right of fatherhood, in case the crown does escheat for want of an heir,” he writes. If such a situation arises, what should happen? Filmer’s answer is clear: “The answer is, it is but the negligence or ignorance of the people to lose the knowledge of the true heir, for an heir there always is.”¹⁷ “Fatherly right” and “sovereign authority” cannot be turned over to just anyone, but only to “he that is so elected”; he who “claims his power” must do so “properly” from “God, from whom he receives his royal charter of an universal father.”¹⁸

This addition to the family analogy was, as Gordon Schochet explains, both something new and something that had far-reaching implications:

It was Filmer’s contention that kings were entitled to the absolute obedience of their subjects. Disobedience to one’s ruler was contrary to God’s law. That this was so, he reasoned, followed from the fact that all kings ruled as successors to the power God had given to Adam at the Creation. Sir Robert argued his case by explaining the political order in terms of familiar symbols, which meant that political authority was identical with the rule of a father or patriarch over his family.¹⁹

In identifying absolute royal power with “fatherly power,” in claiming that “all political authority” derived “from the power of Adam,” and in making “disobedience to one’s ruler” a crime against God Himself, Filmer “changed the character of patriarchal political thought.”²⁰ In France these ideas would find their fullest expression in Bishop Jacques Bossuet’s *Statecraft Drawn from the Very Words of Holy Scripture* (*Politique tirée des propres paroles de l’Écriture sainte*), written at about the time Filmer’s *Patriarchia* was published.²¹

Despite the emergence of such patriarchal and absolutist positions, a few voices were still raised in defense of women’s political abilities. In his *Dignity and Nobility of Women*, to name only one example, the humanist Christoforo Bronzini argues what Constance Jordan calls a

“radically feminist” position.²² Like so many of the texts we have examined, Bronzini’s takes the form of a Platonic dialogue in which two men debate the topic of women’s worth. Onorio, women’s advocate, not only asserts that women “have the same vigor, the same ability to commit themselves freely and willingly . . . to honorable enterprises,” but ultimately that “sexual difference does not exist except in the difference of bodily parts that generation requires.”²³ In the idealized “feminist society” Bronzini’s Onorio envisions, women do indeed govern, and do so not “by violence, by tyranny, or by wealth, but with the most gentle of customs, with piety. And with a thousand other excellent qualities, which were and are the arms by which they triumphed, victorious in a tranquil and loving peace. And now more than ever they continue to triumph.”²⁴ But the “gynecocracy” Bronzini produces as an example to support his claim is neither the Tuscany of his own day, then being governed by Maria Maddelena of Austria, the woman to whom he has dedicated his work, nor is it one he imagines can be or will be established in the future—it is, instead, an example drawn from the mythic past. The only evidence Bronzini offers for women’s “triumph” is the legendary Amazonia.²⁵

The issue of female sovereignty is also addressed in Gisbertus Voetius’s *Concerning Women*. Voetius devotes the second chapter of his treatise to “those things which pertain to the secular and political status of women.”²⁶ After raising and responding to four questions about women’s relationship to men, in general, and a wife’s relationship to her husband, in particular—“Whether women are inferior in dignity to men,” “Whether women are inferior to the extent that in the state of marriage they ought to be subordinated like servants,” “Whether the superiority of a man over his wife extends to beatings,” and “Whether a husband has the power of life and death over his wife”—Voetius turns to the question that is of interest to us here, “Whether women are to be engaged in public office and governance.”²⁷ His reply is very cautious and the scope he offers women very limited.

Voetius is clear that, ordinarily, women should not be involved in government; their exclusion from political power is “based on divine law (Genesis 2, 1 Corinthians 11, 1 Timothy 2).” And thus, “women are not ordinarily to be appointed to office in a polyarchic government; still less are they to be preferred over men.”²⁸ But on rare occasions, Voetius notes, a woman *may* be called upon to govern. In a case “of extreme necessity,” it may happen that “some woman is found who is superior to men of that place in prudence, courage, and a gift for counsel.” In such a situation, Voetius concedes, “I think such women are certainly to be

called in quite temporarily for consultation or direction.” As an example of such a “rare occasion” and of such “temporary direction,” he cites the case of Deborah, thus suggesting that such rare occasions are never to be found in the contemporary world and that no instances “of extreme necessity” have occurred since biblical times.²⁹ And “in a state where the monarch is chosen or elected,” Voetius continues, such cases of “extreme necessity” never arise: “it does not seem that the office should be diverted toward the female sex, since it cannot happen that in the entire realm or among the neighbors and allies men could not be found who are abundantly equipped with gifts and prerequisites for that office.”³⁰

But “where the monarchy is by succession,” Voetius allows, “particular arguments could recommend whether in any given state a law or statute should be written concerning succession of the next heir, and even of a woman, assuming that no masculine offspring from the departing king had been left.” This statement of his position, so filled with “coulds,” “shoulds,” and assumptions, is confusing, but Voetius clarifies his views by citing the examples of Mary and Elizabeth Tudor: “Nor do we think that England offended divine or natural law when Mary and Elizabeth ruled as queens,” he writes. So, failing a direct male heir, the laws of succession allow “even” the succession of a queen, but even in such a situation Voetius is not wildly supportive of female sovereignty. The best that can be said about it is that it does not “offend.” Similarly, he allows “widowed queens and princesses” to govern when they have been “constituted as governors by the will as much of the dead king or prince as of the nobility or the estates of the kingdom of principality.” He cites no particular examples of female regents, however.³¹

His sixth question, “whether women should bear arms and fight wars,” continues in much the same vein. Waging war may be necessary for the exceptional woman who is “ruling legitimately or governing temporarily by some chance and acting as a proxy.” Here Voetius cites the examples of Queen Elizabeth, as a queen regnant, and of Margaret of Parma and Maria Anna of Austria, as regents; “given their position,” he concedes, waging war is “necessary since by divine, natural, and human law they are obligated to defend the republic and to guard the subjects with just arms.”³² Such women find a precedent for their waging of war in the example of Deborah, and by “waging” war, Voetius is careful to say that he does not mean women ought to go to war themselves. It is, he writes, “not becoming nor is it suitable for preserving chastity and modesty if women pass their time within the eyesight of men,” though here too he does acknowledge that there may

be “rare occasions” when, “temporarily,” women might be forced to take up arms; “we do not disapprove if in a case of extreme necessity of the state and the lack of men they should repel and turn back an attacking enemy,” he concedes. Here he refers to the “year-long siege of Maastricht” when women “performed extraordinary military service,” as well as to the “warlike Amazons” and “the warlike girl Joan of Arc.”³³

Thus Voetius’s views of female sovereignty in *Concerning Women* are cautious and qualified, and nothing he offers in his limited defense of women rulers is either new or unique. Rather, as Joyce Irwin notes, “Voetius serves as an example of Dutch Calvinism in its sober but solid support of women’s spiritual and intellectual equality in spite of social inferiority.” And however tepid his support for female sovereignty, his views were never to be influential because his readership was so limited: “Outside Dutch Reformed circles . . . Voetius’s treatise on women probably had very little impact.”³⁴

But it is not only men’s voices that changed in the seventeenth century; women, too, began to modify their views of female potential. In *The Equality of Men and Women*, first published in 1622 and dedicated to Anne of Austria, Marie le Jars de Gournay argues that women have been denied their rightful place in society by men, who have reduced women by denying them an education.³⁵ But in defending women’s equality rather than arguing their superiority, de Gournay claims that she avoids the “arrogant preferences” that have at times been “asserted by men,” among them Cornelius Agrippa, whom we have met before.³⁶ She intends to “fly extremes” of this kind, just as she aims to avoid the arguments of “certain persons” who “confine women, by an absolute and obligatory rule, to the distaff—yea, to the distaff alone.” But in thus limiting her claims for women, de Gournay also reduces her expectations of them.

In arguing against women’s subservience and for their education, an education “of a kind equal to men’s,” de Gournay writes yet another history of women, citing a “vast number of . . . intellects, ancient and modern, of illustrious name” to support her view of women’s potential and accomplishments; she cites male authorities from Plato, Plutarch, and Virgil through Boccaccio, Agrippa, and Tasso.³⁷ She touches the subject of female sovereignty only briefly, however. She seems skeptical of the so-called Salic law, which she labels an “invention” that “deprives women of the crown . . . only in France,” but de Gournay produces no examples of queens to counter this “invention,” not even the queen regent to whom she dedicated her work. De Gournay implies women’s abilities in the realm of government when she acknowledges that “it has served the French well to develop the device of female regents as the

equivalent of kings during royal minorities,” but again she offers no examples.³⁸ Instead of citing the long list of women who successfully served France as regents, a list extending back to Blanche of Castile in the twelfth century and into her own lifetime, in the person of Anne of Austria, de Gournay instead refers to the practice of the German tribes described by Tacitus and to Virgil’s account of Dido, the queen of Carthage. “Could one wish for two more forceful refutations of the Salic law (if it can endure two refutations)?” she asks.³⁹ Her question is obviously rhetorical, and yet we most certainly *could* “wish for”—and indeed find—more “forceful refutations,” even though de Gournay herself does not.⁴⁰

The celebrated Anna Maria van Schurman, who in her lifetime was renowned as the “Tenth Muse” and who found a mentor in Gisbertus Voetius, knew the work of both de Gournay and Lucrezia Marinella, but she disapproved of both of them.⁴¹ In her correspondence with the theologian André Rivet on the subject of women’s education, van Schurman denies the arguments of those who have argued the “invidious and groundless assertion of the preeminence” of women. Van Schurman says that her “maidenly modesty” and “innate shyness” have been troubled by Marinella’s work, and while she “can by no means disapprove of the little dissertation of the most noble Gournay,” neither does she entirely approve of it. The virtues of women “ought to be proved rightly,” van Schurman asserts, but instead of undertaking the proof herself, she writes that she “very much desire[s] that role be handed over” to Rivet, “a sublime herald of the virtues.” Van Schurman has also read, at Rivet’s instruction, Juan Luis Vives’s *The Instruction of a Christian Woman*; she finds it an “excellent and neatly ordered scheme,” one she “would deem most worthy of being applied as closely as possible to the studies of women today.”⁴²

Even more painful is Lucrezia Marinella’s final view of her own defense of women, which she had published in 1600. Nearly half a century later, Marinella recanted the “bold polemics” of *The Nobility and Excellence of Women*. In what Letizia Panizza calls her “final addio” to the world, Marinella published her *Exhortations to Ladies and All Others* (*Essortazioni alle donne et Agli altri*), in which she “praises a life of seclusion, *retiratezza*, for women, as part of God’s and nature’s design. Contradicting what she had said earlier, Marinella here accepts a gender-based moral code. Women would do well to stick to traditional domestic tasks of spinning and weaving.”⁴³

While so many women’s voices were chastened, a few women still dreamed the dream first expressed by Christine de Pizan. Those dreamers

included Anne-Marie-Louise d'Orléans, duchesse de Montpensier, and Françoise Bertaut de Motteville, and it is with their brief exchange of letters that we will end our study of women, power, and politics in the early modern period.⁴⁴

Montpensier, known to her contemporaries as *la Grande Mademoiselle*, was a “larger-than-life” figure, a princess of the royal blood; in an exchange of letters with Motteville, she envisions establishing a “rural Republic” where she would reign as queen.⁴⁵ In her first letter to Motteville, Montpensier indicates that the idea of utopian retreat first began to take shape in her imagination after she overheard Motteville’s conversation with a friend. “Finding myself next to you the other day at the queen’s when you were speaking with one of your friends about the joys of the secluded life,” Montpensier writes, “I thought that your conversation had never been more charming and agreeable.” Since that time, she has “spent many hours thinking about it,” and she writes to Motteville to offer a few “principles” that will make such a life “both entertaining and beneficial.”⁴⁶ Thus begins the correspondence that takes place over the course of year, from May of 1660 to August of 1661. But theirs is to be no city of ladies, a point that is clear from the outset. Montpensier’s imaginary republic is to be peopled by those “of the highest rank of both sexes.” While thus admitting both men and women to her retreat, she does propose one condition: “I would rather there were no married people and that everyone would either be widowed or have renounced this sacrament, for it is said to be an unfortunate undertaking.”⁴⁷

In her response to Montpensier’s first letter, Motteville warms to the prospect of a secluded retreat, but she chides Montpensier—gently, to be sure—about her assumption that she will rule over it. “I see clearly how it is,” she writes,

you were born to rule and to wear a crown, and it is so logical for things to be this way that I am not surprised that, without even giving it a second thought, you have established yourself as our sovereign. This power, noble Princess, is rightly your due; other honors await you, and you could choose to rule any of the peoples of Europe, but if your philosophy induces you to choose our forest rather than an empire, I am sure that the bliss of your isolated subjects will be so great that all the kings in the world will have reason to envy them.

For her part, Montpensier only hopes that she is “worthy of being governed by the greatest princess in the world.”⁴⁸

However graceful and flattering Motteville's compliment, her characterization of Montpensier as a woman born to rule is no more than accurate, for the duchess was, as Joan DeJean explains, "the richest woman in France, wealthier than almost any French prince," and "probably the wealthiest woman in all Europe." In addition to this great wealth, she was "the most noble of any contemporary French princess," the granddaughter of Henry IV of France and the niece of Louis XIII, his son. From the moment of her birth, on 29 May 1627, the choice of her husband was "the foremost question on her contemporaries' minds." Among the many possibilities for a "suitable" husband were Philip IV of Spain, the Holy Roman Emperor Ferdinand III, and Charles Stuart, who would eventually become Charles II of England, but perhaps the most frequently discussed candidate was Montpensier's first cousin who in 1638 would succeed his father, becoming Louis XIV.⁴⁹

Despite her royal blood and her enormous wealth, Montpensier did not marry at the usual "marriageable" age for young women of her rank. Instead of the politics of marriage, she involved herself in politics more broadly defined. In 1648, when she was just twenty-one years old, she engaged herself in the series of French civil wars known collectively as the Fronde. During the second phase of the civil wars, the so-called Fronde of Princes, Montpensier took command of one of the armies on the rebels' side. Like Joan of Arc before her, she took the city of Orléans. In July of 1652 she was in Paris during the battle of the Faubourg Saint Antoine; commanding the Bastille and its adjoining walls, she opened the gates of Paris to Louis II de Bourbon, prince de Condé, and his army, then saved the rebel leader and his troops by turning the guns of the Bastille against royal forces. From a spot just outside the walls of Paris, Louis XIV and his Italian advisor, Cardinal Mazarin, watched *la Grande Mademoiselle*; Mazarin is reported to have remarked that when she "redirected the cannon, she 'killed' her husband—that is, any chance that might have remained for that much-discussed marriage with Louis XIV."⁵⁰ As armed hostilities drew to an end, Montpensier acted as a mediator between the king and the rebel parties, but in 1652, along with "all the rebel leaders," her father among them, she was exiled from court, allowed to return only in 1657.

By the time Montpensier rejoined the court, she was thirty years old. In 1660, when she and Motteville began their correspondence, Montpensier was thirty-three years old, still *la Grande Mademoiselle*. Like the legendary Amazons, to whom she and her fellow *frondeuses* had been compared, Montpensier had armed herself and gone to war; like the Amazons, too, she would establish her own state, at least in her

imagination.⁵¹ But there the similarities end. In her analysis of the republic where Montpensier intended to reign as “sovereign,” Joan DeJean argues that “she thereby appropriates for herself a measure of power that could have been hers in a state without Salic law, the legal code that prevented French princesses from succeeding to the throne and that was often invoked in France to explain cases in which female heirs were pushed aside in favor of their male counterparts.”⁵² But I would argue that Montpensier “appropriates for herself” no real power at all, not even in her imaginary republic. Totally free to dream any kind of republic she wanted, she envisions a pastoral idyll, where she occupies herself by painting, drawing, reading, listening to music, and herding sheep. She gives up the breastplate and lance she had worn during the Fronde for, in her own words, “shepherds’ staffs and wide-brimmed hats.”⁵³ The only question of substance she and Motteville debate is whether or not marriage should be allowed in their republic—Montpensier says no, while Motteville suggests that the duchess will, in the end, have to allow it. “I think that in the end you will be forced to allow the time-honored and legitimate custom called marriage,” she writes, since so few of the shepherds and shepherdesses would be able to achieve celibacy, even given the model of Montpensier’s “perfection.”⁵⁴

For her part, the duchess is certainly aware of the absolutist politics of her cousin Louis XIV, and she isn’t averse to a little absolutism of her own in her “rural Republic.” Surprised at Motteville’s defense, however weak, of marriage, Montpensier responds that “in this matter” she will “put to use the authority given to me by the blood of all the kings” from which she descends: “I will maintain with confidence that I think everyone should defer to my conviction, that my opinion should prevail. Lastly, as my fathers used to say, such is my pleasure and too bad for those who do not find it to be theirs.” “Nonetheless,” she adds, “to show that I do not act so absolutely, I will try to prove to you that it is not unprecedented to see people adapt their inclination to the taste and humor of those on whom they depend.”⁵⁵

Their focus on marriage is not frivolous, for both women recognized that marriage was an institution that destroyed women’s freedom and opportunity. It is a destiny that Montpensier herself had sedulously avoided, and as she draws this letter, the third in the series, to a close, she lifts the curtain on her imaginary world just a bit, allowing a brief glimpse at the real world of seventeenth-century women. Montpensier describes marriage as “this dependence to which custom subjects us, often against our will and because of family obligations of which we have been the victim.” Marriage “is what has caused us to be named the

weaker sex": "Let us at last deliver ourselves from this slavery; let there be a corner of the world in which it can be said that women are their own mistresses and do not have all the faults that are attributed to them; and let us celebrate ourselves for the centuries to come through a way of life that will immortalize us."⁵⁶

In her response to this letter, Motteville, hitherto the defender of marriage, pleads to be allowed "to be one of the soldiers" in Montpensier's army; she wants to face the "ranks" of their "enemies" so that she too can "inflict a small blow" against the tyranny of marriage. But even as she builds this fanciful image, Motteville, who as a teenager had been married off to a ninety-year-old man, reveals the harsh reality behind the metaphor:

I know that the laws that subject us to [men's] power are hard and unbearable; I know that men have made them unfair for us and too advantageous for themselves. They take away from us dominion over the sea and the earth, the sciences, merit, power—that of judging and being the master of human lives—and dignity in all situations, and with the exception of the distaff, I know of nothing under the sun that they have not appropriated; even though their tyranny has no just basis.⁵⁷

To illustrate her sense of loss, Motteville embeds a brief history of women in her letter, focusing in part on great female rulers. "The history books are full of women who have governed empires with singular wisdom, who have gained glory by commanding armies, and whose abilities have given rise to great admiration," she tells Montpensier, naming Isabella of Castile, Elizabeth Tudor, Margaret of Parma, and Catherine de' Medici. It seems significant, however, that when Motteville summons up the names of female rulers, she fails to include Anne of Austria, who had been regent for son, Louis XIV, and who had controlled the government of France for more than eight years. The dowager queen regent was still alive when Motteville and Montpensier were dreaming their dreams of a utopian retreat, and both women were on intimate terms with her: she was Montpensier's aunt, and Motteville was her attendant at court and had served her for more than twenty years.⁵⁸

But, in the end, even the debate about marriage is moot. The two women give up their dream of a "famous Republic." In her last letter to Motteville, dated 1 August 1661, Montpensier writes that she is living quietly and in seclusion. "I do almost exactly what I would do if we were already in our retreat," she tells Motteville, adding "I read and

I work at my needlework." Her "most agreeable hours," she writes, "are spent dreaming" about their plan.⁵⁹



With Montpensier's dream about a dream we can end our study of gynecocracy. Just a few months before the correspondence between Montpensier and Motteville drew to an end, on 10 March 1661, Louis XIV announced his intention to rule independently and absolutely: "I intend to rule my state alone," he reportedly said.⁶⁰ No more counselors or advisors, not even his mother, the formidable Anne of Austria.

And, as we have seen, political absolutism of the kind the French king embraced made rule by women—like the queens and regents recalled by Motteville—impossible. Just as Elizabeth Tudor's decision to name James her successor seems a sign of what was to come, so too does the abdication of Queen Christina of Sweden in 1654, after ten years of rule. England would have another queen named Mary, but when Mary II assumed the throne of England in 1689, she did so not as queen regnant, sole heir of her father James II, king of England, but as coruler with her husband, William of Orange.⁶¹ About the queen's role in the formulation of this "joint sovereignty," Margaret Sommerville notes "Mary's absolute refusal to countenance any settlement that involved her holding power independently of her husband."⁶² The queen was always the lesser of the two, the second half of the pair known as "William and Mary." Her own contemporaries saw the monarchs' joint sovereignty as "pageantry": "she in the mean time [is] a Queen of Clouts." Real power lay "solely" in the king.⁶³ And after her death in 1694, William ruled alone as king of England until after the turn of the eighteenth century; his "continued reign" meant "postponing and jostling out of its natural, lineal, and due place the right of the Princess of Denmark"—Anne, Mary's younger sister.⁶⁴

Women's slow yet nonetheless inexorable disappearance from the political stage—what Merry Wiesner has called the "contraction of women's public role, and their responses to it"—is but one aspect of their "growing powerlessness" as the period of "the Renaissance" drew to an end.⁶⁵ Whatever may have been "reborn" during this "golden age" in Western Europe, it wasn't women's political power.

Epilogue

As she ends her introduction to the letters of Montpensier and Motteville, Joan DeJean draws an interesting comparison between *la Grande Mademoiselle* and Virginia Woolf; “in the exalted cry with which Montpensier ends her third letter—‘let there be a corner of the world in which it can be said that women are their own mistresses . . . and let us celebrate ourselves for the centuries to come’—we hear precisely the kind of enabling voice that Woolf looked for in the long history of women’s writing.” From this insightful observation, DeJean draws the following conclusion: “In the end, both realized that spatial independence, the possibility of a place where ‘women are their own mistresses,’ was of the essence if women were to leave a permanent legacy.”¹

I’d like to extend that comparison, but I think it will lead us to somewhat different conclusions. In the Middle Ages, as we have seen, there existed many “cities of ladies,” independent ecclesiastical states like the abbey of Gandersheim, where the ruling abbess, a “princess of the empire,” kept her own court of law, raised her own army, coined her own money, and had a seat at the imperial diet. Throughout Western Europe there were provinces, duchies, and counties where women inherited titles and power, and kingdoms where they ruled as queens or as regents. And the “unprecedented” situation of the sixteenth century was not so unprecedented after all—the tenth and twelfth centuries had witnessed similar periods of the “monstrous regiment” of women.

At the turn of the fifteenth century, Christine de Pizan could imagine a great city of ladies that housed not just small numbers of elite women but women of all classes. This was a city built *by* women *for* women, a place where, in the company of other women, every citizen of the city would find herself supported and appreciated.

Some 250 years later, the duchess of Montpensier and her correspondent, Françoise Bertaut de Motteville, were still dreaming of a city, but

not of ladies; their horizons had diminished. We can't know whether they didn't dare ask for a city of their own, or whether their sense of entitlement had been so reduced that they couldn't think to ask for one. Even in their imagination, they didn't conceive of a city of their own.

And some 250 years later still, early in the twentieth century, Virginia Woolf's demands had narrowed still more. Rather than a great city, constructed by women, peopled by women, ruled by women for the benefit of women, where she could live and work in the company of women, Woolf was reduced to asking for a room, just a room, of her own.

NOTES

Introduction: An Age of Queens

1. See, for example, my *Dangerous Talk and Strange Behavior: Women and Popular Resistance to the Reforms of Henry VIII* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996) and *The Monstrous Regiment of Women: Female Rulers in Early Modern Europe* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002).

I have used the sixteenth-century “gynecocracy” here, rather than the variations that the *OED* identifies as later (“gynocracy”) or incorrect (“gyneocracy”).

2. The phrase “dynastic accidents” is Merry E. Wiesner’s, appearing in her “Gender and Political Power,” in *Women and Gender in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 241 and, more recently, in her “Women’s Authority in the State and Household in Early Modern Europe,” in *Women Who Ruled: Queens, Goddesses, Amazons in Renaissance and Baroque Art*, ed. Annette Dixon (London: Merrell Publishers in association with the University of Michigan Museum of Art, 2002), 30.
3. Perhaps the most well-known of these ecclesiastical territories is the abbey of Gandersheim, where, in the tenth century, Hrotsvitha lived and wrote; see Peter Dronke’s comments on the “small autonomous principedom” of Gandersheim in his *Women Writers of the Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 55–7. The category of “ecclesiastical territory” is also included, where appropriate, in the “Women Rulers throughout History” section of the *Women in Leadership* website, noted below (n. 4).
4. Among the more important foundational works on medieval queenship, see Pauline Stafford, *Queens, Concubines, and Dowagers: The King’s Wife in the Early Middle Ages* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1983); Mary Erler and Maryanne Kowaleski, eds., *Women and Power in the Middle Ages* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1988); Louise Olga Fradenburgh, ed., *Women and Sovereignty*, vol. 7, *Cosmos: The Yearbook of the Traditional Cosmology Society* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1992); John Carmi Parsons, ed., *Medieval Queenship* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1993); Theresa M. Vann, ed., *Queens, Regents and Potentates* (Dallas, TX: Academia Press, 1993); Anne J. Duggan, ed., *Queens and Queenship in Medieval Europe* (Woodbridge,

Suffolk [UK]: Boydell Press, 1997); and Dick Harrison, *The Age of Abbesses and Queens: Gender and Political Culture in Early Medieval Europe* (Lund, Sweden: Nordic Academic Press, 1998). In addition to these general studies of queenship, there are many new biographies and political histories of individual queens and regents as well as studies of medieval queenship in particular geographical locales, such as Theresa Earenfight's *Queenship and Political Power in Medieval and Early Modern Spain*, *Women and Gender in the Early Modern World* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2005), to cite only one example.

One of the most comprehensive (and readily accessible) sources for information about women rulers is "Women State Leaders and Women Rulers throughout History," *Worldwide Guide to Women in Leadership*, www.guide2womenleaders.com/.

5. Stafford, *Queens, Concubines, and Dowagers*, 141.
6. Æthelflæd of Mercia (c. 872–918), the daughter of Alfred the Great, ruled Mercia, "king in all but name," after the death of her husband Æthelred in 911. Elvira of León (c. 934–75), daughter of Ramiro II of León, was regent for her five-year-old nephew, Ramiro III, after her brother Sancho's death in 966; when Elvira died in 975, the role of regent was assumed by her sister-in-law Teresa, the younger Ramiro's mother. Theophanu of Byzantium (c. 958–91), wife of Otto II, was regent of the Holy Roman Empire for her son, Otto III, after her husband's death in 984; for the seven years of her regency, she held the title Imperator Augustus. After Theophanu's death, her mother-in-law Adelheid of Burgundy (931–99) served as regent for her grandson. Emma of Italy (m. c. 966–d. c. 990) was Adelheid's daughter by her first marriage; Emma married Lothar of France, playing a role in his government while he was king and acting as regent for their son, Louis V, after her husband's death. At the same time Emma was acting as regent in France, Beatrice of France (938–1005) was acting as regent in the duchy of Lorraine for her son.

For all of this see Stafford, *Queens, Concubines, and Dowagers*; Harrison, *The Age of Abbesses and Queens*; Anne Echols and Marty Williams, *An Annotated Index of Medieval Women* (New York: Markus Wiener Publishing, 1992); and Roger Collins, "Queens-Dowager and Queens-Regent in Tenth-Century León and Navarre," in Parsons, *Medieval Queenship*, 79–92. As if to emphasize the parallels between events in the tenth centuries and those of the sixteenth, Janet L. Nelson alludes to Knox and his *Monstrous Regiment* when she asks, "Women at the Court of Charlemagne: A Case of Monstrous Regiment?" Parsons, *Medieval Queenship*, 43–61, while Donald J. Kagay opens his "Countess Almodis of Barcelona: 'Illustrious and Distinguished Queen' or 'Woman of Sad, Unbridled Lewdness'" (Vann, *Queens, Regents and Potentates*, 37–47) with an epigraph from John Knox's 1558 polemic. For the use of Jezebel in the arguments of the sixteenth century, see chapter one, 12, 19.

7. Marjorie Chibnall, *The Empress Matilda: Queen Consort, Queen Mother and Lady of the English* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1991), 1.
8. Urraca of Castile and León (1080–1126) was queen regnant, inheriting her title from her father Alfonso VI. See Bernard F. Reilly, *The Kingdom of León-Castilla under Queen Urraca, 1109–1126* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982). The quotations are found on p. 47. On medieval queenship in Spain, see also Joseph F. O'Callaghan, "The Many Roles of the Medieval Queen: Some Examples from

Castile," in Earenfight, *Queenship and Political Power*, 21–32 and Theresa Earenfight, "Absent Kings: Queens as Political Partners in the Medieval Crown of Aragon," in Earenfight, *Queenship and Political Power*, 33–54. For a brief analysis of Urraca in terms of the sixteenth-century gynecocracy debates, see also Jansen, *The Monstrous Regiment of Women*, 9–10, 11, 225.

Melisende of Jerusalem (1105–60) was named to succeed her father, Baldwin II, in 1128; she ruled with him until his death in 1131, when she began to rule jointly with her husband, Fulk V of Anjou, who tried to wrest political power from her. After defeating her husband's forces, she continued to rule with Fulk until his death, after which she ruled as regent for her son, Baldwin III. In one form or another, she governed from 1131 to 1152. The advice of Bernard of Clairvaux is quoted by Chibnall, *The Empress Matilda*, 97. Melisende's sisters were also regents; Alice of Jerusalem (m. c. 1126) acted as regent of Antioch for her daughter, Constance, while Hodierna of Jerusalem (c. 1120s–50s) was regent of Tripoli. Melisende's niece, Constance (1126–60s), whose mother had functioned as regent of Antioch, herself governed Antioch as regent.

Matilda of England (1102–67) was designated heir to the English throne by her father Henry I, though she never managed to reign as queen. See Chibnall, *The Empress Matilda*, especially 64–87, for the arguments produced in support of and in opposition to her succession. For a brief analysis of Matilda in terms of the sixteenth-century gynecocracy debates, see also Jansen, *The Monstrous Regiment of Women*, 23–6. For the use of the daughters of Zelophehad in the arguments of the sixteenth century, see chapter one, 21–2.

Beyond queenship, women of diverse ranks continued to inherit and to exert power in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. In their introduction to *Aristocratic Women in Medieval France* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999), for example, Kimberly A. LoPrete and Theodore Evergates note, "As feudal lords, women settled disputes involving vassals, garrisoned and fortified castles, raised and commanded troops, and sometimes even rode into battle at the head of the host. . . . Neither the formation of territorial principalities nor the growing powers of the French kings prevented aristocratic women from exercising the same lordly powers as their male peers, even though they did so less frequently than men" (4–5). See also Charles Mistruzzi de Frisinga's "La Succession nobiliaire féminine en Italie dans le droit et dans l'histoire," published as an appendix to Ida Auda-Gioanet, *Une Randonnée à travers l'histoire d'Orient (Les Commènes et les Anges)* (Rome: F. Ferrari, 1953), 107–19.

9. Antonia Fraser, *The Warrior Queens* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1989), 5.
10. For a discussion of the regencies of Margaret Tudor (1489–1541), queen of Scotland, Catherine of Aragon (1485–1536), queen of England, and Katherine Parr (1512–48), queen of England, see Jansen, *The Monstrous Regiment of Women*, 118–19, 124–5, and 126–41.

Margaret of Austria (1480–1530) was regent of the Netherlands for her nephew Charles V (1507–15 and 1519–30). Mary of Austria (1505–58) was Charles V's sister; she married Louis of Hungary and Bohemia, and, after his death, followed Margaret of Austria as regent of the Netherlands (1531–55). See Jansen, *The Monstrous Regiment of Women*, 89–96 and 99–103.

11. For a discussion of Juana I of Castile and Aragon (1479–1555), see Jansen, *The Monstrous Regiment of Women*, 71–80 and 88–9. The unfortunate Juana has not only made a recent appearance in film—Vicente Aranda’s *Juana la Loca* (2001), released in the United States as *Mad Love*—but also in *two* historical novels that have appeared almost simultaneously in bookstores, Giaconda Belli’s *The Scroll of Seduction*, trans. Lisa Dillman (New York: HarperCollins, 2006) and C. W. Gortner’s *The Last Queen* (San Francisco, CA: Two Bridges Press, 2006).
12. Jeanne d’Albret (1528–72) was queen regnant of Navarre, inheriting both the crown and sovereign power, as had Blanche of Navarre (1386–1441), Eleanor of Navarre (1426–79), and Catherine of Foix (1468–1517) before her. See Jansen, *The Monstrous Regiment of Women*, 195–204. Jeanne d’Albret converted to Calvinism in 1560, making it the official religion of her realm.
13. Juana of Spain (1535–73) had married João of Portugal in 1552. When the king of Portugal died in 1554, just weeks after the birth of a son and heir, Sebastian, the widowed Juana returned to Spain; João’s mother Catalina, dowager queen of Portugal (1507–77), served as regent of Portugal for her grandson.
Margaret of Parma (1522–89), Charles V’s illegitimate daughter, succeeded Mary of Austria as regent of the Netherlands (1559–67). Catherine de’ Medici (1519–89) became regent of France for her son Charles IX in 1560 (she acted as regent until 1563) and for her son Henry III in 1574.
14. King’s novel, still in print, was published in a Bantam paperback in 1996. For Mortimer’s reference to Knox, see “Rumpole and the Angel of Death,” in *The Third Rumpole Omnibus* (New York: Penguin Books, 1998), 710. Pratchett’s *Monstrous Regiment* was published by Doubleday in 2003.
To give a personal anecdote, I received a hefty royalty check from Palgrave after the publication in 2002 of my own *Monstrous Regiment*. After considerable excitement, doubt set in, and I contacted my editor—I ultimately learned that I had received royalties from Laurie King’s “monstrous regiment,” not mine, and I needed to return the check.
15. *The Monstrous Regiment of Women*, prod. and dir. Gunn Brothers, Gunn Productions, 2007, videocassette. For information about the documentary, FAQs, trailers, and clips, see www.monstrousregiment.com.
16. Indypublish’s 116-page hardcover version was published in 2001, Kessinger Publishing’s 72-page paperback appeared in 2004; Echo Library’s 64-page paperback (ed. Edward Arber) was published in 2006, while Dodo Press’s 84-page paperback, also edited by Edward Arber, was published the same year.
17. Kate Langdon Forhan, *The Political Theory of Christine de Pizan*, *Women and Gender in the Early Modern World* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2002).

One Queens and Controversy: John Knox and *The Monstrous Regiment of Women*

1. John Knox, *The First Blast of the Trumpet against the Monstruous regiment of women* (Geneva, 1558), sig. 9; all references to Knox’s text are from this original edition,

though spelling and punctuation have been modernized. Although several editions of Knox's "blast" have appeared recently (see introduction, 176 n. 16), the standard edition remains David Laing, ed., *The Works of John Knox* (1855; rpt. New York: AMS Press, 1966), 4:363–420; for convenience, references to Laing's edition are included in parenthesis, following the reference to the original. The quotation cited here appears in Laing, *The Works of John Knox*, 4:373.

The sentence quoted here introduces the body of Knox's argument and serves as an outline for what follows. It is repeated, word for word, on sig. 17r (4:381), it appears with slight expansion and variation on sig. 26r (4:389), and it is woven into the argument once again on sig. 36v (4:399–400).

2. This despite the claims of Matilda (1102–67), daughter and heir of Henry I; see Marjorie Chibnall, *The Empress Matilda: Queen Consort, Queen Mother and Lady of the English* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1991).
3. Knox's preface occupies sigs. 2r–8v in the 1558 edition (Laing, *The Works of John Knox*, 4:365–71).
4. Jezebel (d. c. 843 BCE) was the wife of King Ahab and worshipper of the god Baal; her name becomes synonymous with wickedness in women. On Knox's use of Jezebel, see 19, below.
5. Although he doesn't explain his reason for publishing the *Blast* anonymously, Knox had not been altogether silent on the subject of female rule; he had raised questions about female sovereignty with his fellow reformers early in 1554, and he had counseled the regent Marie of Guise about the limits of her authority in a personal letter, which he had then published in 1556. Knox's admonition to Marie of Guise was printed as *The Copie of a letter sent to the ladye Mary Dowagire, Regent of Scotland . . .* (Geneva [?], 1556). Knox revised and expanded this letter, publishing *The Copie of a letter sent to the ladye Mary Dowagire, Regent of Scotland, and nowe augmented and explained by the Author . . . 1558* (Geneva, 1558). On his assessment of the regent in that "revised" letter, see 32, below.
6. For these views of Knox's *Blast*, see, respectively, Paula Louise Scalingi, "The Scepter or the Distaff: The Question of Female Sovereignty, 1516–1607," *The Historian* 41 (1978): 66; Richard L. Greaves, *Theology and Revolution in the Scottish Reformation: Studies in the Thought of John Knox* (Grand Rapids, MI: Christian University Press, 1980), 161; and Jasper Ridley, *John Knox* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968), 267.

On the other hand, Robert M. Healey, "Waiting for Deborah: John Knox and Four Ruling Queens," *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 25, no. 2 (1994): 371–86, calls the *Blast* "a systematic treatise" (376), while Susan M. Felch, "The Rhetoric of Biblical Authority: John Knox and the Question of Women," *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 26, no. 4 (1995): 805–22, has identified it as a "textbook example of a public classical oration" (806, 811–12). Such judgments are, of course, subjective, but in my own reading of the text I have found it both confused and confusing, repetitive rather than systematic, much more a long "tirade" than a "systematic treatise," though I have attempted to treat it systematically here.

Analysis of Knox's work and its place in the debate on gynecocracy has appeared regularly; in addition to the works cited above, see also James E. Phillips, Jr., "The Background of Spenser's Attitude toward Women Rulers," *The Huntington Library*

- Quarterly* 5, no. 1 (1941): 5–32; Mortimer Levine, “The Place of Women in Tudor Government,” in *Tudor Rule and Revolution: Essays for G. R. Elton from His American Friends*, ed. Delloyd J. Guth and John W. McKenna (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 109–23; Retha M. Warnicke, *Women of the English Renaissance and Reformation* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1983), especially Chapter Four: “Queens Regnant and the Royal Supremacy, 1525–1587”; Constance Jordan, “Woman’s Rule in Sixteenth-Century British Political Thought,” *Renaissance Quarterly* 40, no. 3 (1987): 421–51; Patricia-Ann Lee, “‘A Bodye Politique to Gouverne’: Aylmer, Knox and the Debate on Queenship,” *The Historian* 52 (1990): 242–61; Pamela Joseph Benson, *The Invention of the Renaissance Woman: The Challenge of Female Independence in the Literature and Thought of Italy and England* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1992), especially Chapter Nine: “The Defense of Female Regiment: Practical Politics”; and Judith M. Richards, “‘To Promote a Woman to Beare Rule’: Talking of Queens in Mid-Tudor England,” *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 28, no. 1 (1997): 101–21. The most extended analysis of the gynecocracy debate in England is Amanda Shephard, *Gender and Authority in Sixteenth-Century England: The Knox Debate* (Keele, Staffordshire [UK]: Ryburn Publishing, 1994). Although this is an informative book, it must be used with caution—there are numerous factual errors, and Shepherd’s citations are often incorrect.
7. On this see introduction, 6–7.
 8. The first part of his argument occupies sigs. 9r–13r (Laing, *The Works of John Knox*, 4:373–7).
 9. Knox refers here to the summary of Roman law, the *Digest*, known since medieval times. Knox’s misuse of the *Digest* will be dissected by, among others, Richard Bertie, David Chambers, John Leslie, and Henry Howard; see chapter two.
 10. The second part of Knox’s argument occupies sigs. 13r–29r (Laing, *The Works of John Knox*, 4:377–89).
 11. Quintus Septimius Florens Tertullianus, or Tertullian (c. 160–230), was a Latin father of the church; Origenes Adamantius, or Origen (c. 185–254), was the principal theologian of the of the early Greek church; Augustine (354–430), bishop of Hippo, was a Latin father of the church; Ambrose (c. 340–97), bishop of Milan, was Latin father of the church; John “Chrysostom,” or “golden mouth” (c. 347–407), bishop of Constantinople, was a Greek father of the church; Basilios the Great (c. 330–79), bishop of Caesarea, was a Greek doctor of the church.
 12. The third part of Knox’s argument occupies sigs. 29r–39r (Laing, *The Works of John Knox*, 4:389–402).
 13. Athalia is the daughter of Ahab and Jezebel (see n. 4, above) and the wife of Jeham, king of Judah. After the death of her son, she grabs power for herself after killing her own grandchildren, ruling Judah for seven years.
 14. Knox addresses the four arguments of his opponents on sigs. 39r–53v (Laing, *The Works of John Knox*, 4:402–17).
 15. Deborah is described (Judges 4:4) as a prophetess; the wife of Lapidoth, she rallied her people in their opposition to the Canaanites. Huldah is also described (2 Kings 22:14) as a prophetess living in Jerusalem; after the “the book of the law” is found, King Josiah sent the priest Hilkiah to Huldah to consult with her.

16. To “prove” how “odious” the “nation of the Spaniards” truly is, Knox claims, in a casual bit of anti-Semitism, that “Spaniards are Jews,” whose forefathers crucified Christ: “for Jews they are, as histories do witness, and they themselves confess”; quoted from Laing, *The Works of John Knox*, 4:411.
17. Knox brings his “blast” to a close on sigs. 53r–56v (Laing, *The Works of John Knox*, 4:417–20).
18. Knox refers here to those over whom Mary has triumphed: Sir Thomas Wyatt, executed in 1554 after a failed rebellion; Hugh Latimer, bishop of Worcester, executed in 1555; Thomas Cranmer, archbishop of Canterbury, executed in 1556; Nicholas Ridley, bishop of London, executed in 1555; and Lady Jane Grey (Dudley), proclaimed queen after Edward VI’s death in 1553, held in the Tower after Mary’s accession, and executed after Wyatt’s rebellion in 1554.
19. It is assumed by many commentators that Catherine de’ Medici is also a target of Knox’s *Blast*; see, for example, Greaves, *Theology and Revolution*, 167–8 and W. Stanford Reid, “John Knox’s Theology of Political Government,” *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 19, no. 4 (1988): 529–40. The chronology of events, however, makes it impossible to include her as one of the “monsters in nature” who impelled Knox to write. His *Blast* was published in 1558, a year before Catherine de’ Medici attempted to become regent for her son Francis II. Although the dowager queen was outmaneuvered in 1559, she succeeded a year later when Francis died and she assumed the regency for her second son, Charles IX.
20. For a detailed analysis of Knox’s views of the “legitimacy of resistance,” see Greaves, *Theology and Revolution*, especially Chapter Seven (“The Legitimacy of Resistance”). See also Roger A. Mason, “Knox, Resistance and the Royal Supremacy,” in *John Knox and the British Reformations*, ed. Roger A. Mason (Brookfields, VT: Ashgate, 1998), 154–75.

As Knox articulates his position of resistance, he does not move beyond his argument that an unfit sovereign must be deposed to an explanation for how a new sovereign ought to be chosen. As John R. Gray reminds us, Knox is not essentially a political thinker, but was “interested only in the sovereignty of God and was indifferent with regard to the servants He might use”; see “The Political Theory of John Knox,” *Church History* 8 (1939): 23. An excellent collection of Knox’s political writings is edited by Roger A. Mason, *John Knox: On Rebellion* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

It is also important to note that Knox never rejects monarchy per se. According to Greaves, “at no time does he conclude that monarchy itself must be abolished, or even that another form of government is preferable to monarchy. Nor does he advocate either an elective or a constitutional monarchy, either of which would have had obviously democratic implication” (*Theology and Revolution*, 171). For additional comment on Knox’s political views, see Ridley, *John Knox*; W. Stanford Reid, *Trumpeter of God: A Biography of John Knox* (New York: Scribner, 1974); and Richard G. Kyle, *The Mind of John Knox* (Lawrence, KS: Coronado Press, 1984).

21. Antonia Fraser, *Mary Queen of Scots* (New York: Delacorte Press, 1969), 15–16. Following Fraser, I have used the Anglo-French “Stuart” spelling for Mary Stuart

- and Darnley, and the older “Stewart” spelling for other members of the family. In addition to Arran’s personal “unfitted-ness,” there were questions about his legitimacy; his father, the first earl of Arran, may not have been divorced from his second wife before the second earl, child of his third marriage, was born.
22. On Arran, see Fraser, *Mary Queen of Scots*, 15–16; Arran would return to the Protestant cause in 1559.
 On the Lennox Stewarts, see Fraser, *Mary Queen of Scots*, 118, and Mortimer Levine, *The Early Elizabethan Succession Question, 1558–1568* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1966), 9.
 23. For rumors about a “conspiracy” between Moray and Knox, see Ridley, *John Knox*, 115.
 24. Stewart opposed Mary’s marriage to Darnley, however, and lost her support. Following her July 1565 marriage, he attempted to raise Edinburgh against her; he was forced to take refuge in England. He returned to Scotland in 1566 and was appointed regent for her son James when Mary fled to England in 1567. He was killed by James Hamilton in 1570. See Maurice Lee, *James Stewart, Earl of Moray: A Political Study of the Reformation in Scotland* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1953).
 25. On this, see Levine, *The Early Elizabethan Succession Question*, 10–29.
 On Henry’s provisions for the succession in his will, see J. J. Scarisbrick, *Henry VIII* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1968), 488–94. On the complicated status of Edward VI’s will, see David Loades, *Mary Tudor: A Life* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1992), 171–4.
 26. Levine, *The Early Elizabethan Succession Question*, 11–13; in 1561, Catherine Grey married Edward Seymour and, in Levine’s words, “committed herself to the religion and the mate of her choice.”
 27. Levine, *The Early Elizabethan Succession Question*, 9.
 Levine also suggests several other candidates with even more problematic claims to the English throne, including Henry Hastings, earl of Huntington, a Yorkist descendant, and Lady Margaret Strange, whose descent was from Eleanor, younger daughter of Mary Tudor and Charles Brandon, duke of Suffolk. Hastings was a Protestant; Margaret Strange was married to Henry Stanley and a Catholic. On this, see Levine, *The Early Elizabethan Succession Question*, 7.
 28. For the suggestion that Knox’s *Blast* was really targeted at the religion of the Scottish and English queens rather at their sex, see, for example, Ridley, *John Knox*; Greaves, *Theology and Revolution*; and Felch, “The Rhetoric of Biblical Authority.”
 29. The 1554 letters that develop his “theory of the justification of revolution,” which Ridley calls “Knox’s special contribution to theological and political thought” (171), include the *Letter to the Faithful in London, in Newcastle, and Berwick, An Epistle to His Afflicted Brethren in England, A Comfortable Epistle Sent to the Afflicted Church of Christ . . .*, and, most important, *A Faithful Admonition Made by John Knox unto the Professors of God’s Truth in England*; on these letters see Ridley, *John Knox*, 171–88. In the *Admonition*, Knox had gone so far as to conflate Mary the Queen with the Virgin Mary: “Let her be your virgin,” he said to the Catholic English, “a goddess” fit for “idolators” (on this, see Greaves, *Theology and Revolution*, 160–1).

- A year earlier, in 1553, David Lindsey had asserted that men had been granted authority by God over women in an extended narrative poem, *Ane Dialouge betuix Experience and ane Courteour, off the Miserabyll Estait of the Warld*. Like Knox, Lindsay was a Protestant reformer.
30. References here are to Becon's 1554 edition (spelling and punctuation have been modernized). The title page claims the book was published in Strasbourg, but the British Library catalogue says this is a "false imprint," and that the book was likely published by Josse Lamprecht at Wesel. Becon's *An humble supplicacion unto God for the restoringe of hys holye worde unto the churche of England, mooste mete to be sayde in these oure dayes, even with teares of every true & faithfull English harte* (hereafter referred to as *Supplicacion*) is available in a nineteenth-century reprint: John Ayre, ed., *Prayers and Other Pieces of Thomas Becon* . . . (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1844). References to Ayre's edition have been added here in parenthesis.
 31. Becon, *Supplicacion*, sigs. A6v–A7v (Ayre, *Prayers*, 227–8). In arguing that God is punishing England, Becon equates "the rule of a woman" with other unnatural phenomena; the "outrageous floods" that England has experienced, for example, are also cited as evidence of God's displeasure.
 32. For the body of Becon's *Supplicacion*, see Ayre, *Prayers*, 227–38.
 33. For the series of comparisons, see Ayre, *Prayers*, 238–44.
 34. For the appeal, see Ayre, *Prayers*, 244–50.
 35. Becon, *Supplicacion*, sig. E3r (Ayre, *Prayers*, 250).
 36. John Ponet, *A Shorte Treatise of politike power, and of the true Obedience which subjectes owe to kynges and other civile Governours, with an Exhortacion to all true naturall Englishemen* (n.p., 1556); for an examination of Ponet's *Treatise* as a response to "efforts by the crown in 1555 to remove the right of ownership of private property from . . . the Protestant exiles," see Barbara Peardon, "The Politics of Polemic: John Ponet's *Short Treatise of Politic Power* and Contemporary Circumstances, 1553–1556," *Journal of British Studies* 22 (1982): 35–49.
 37. Ponet, *A Shorte Treatise*, sig. A1v.
 38. Ponet, *A Shorte Treatise*, sigs. A2r–A2v.
 39. Ponet, *A Shorte Treatise*, sigs. A4r–C5v.
 40. Ponet, *A Shorte Treatise*, sigs. E2v–E3v.
 41. Ponet, *A Shorte Treatise*, sig. J6r.
 42. Ponet, *A Shorte Treatise*, sigs. G2r–G3r.
 43. Ponet, *A Shorte Treatise*, sigs. G3r–G6v.
 44. Ponet, *A Shorte Treatise*, sig. I3r.
 45. Bullinger's letter is printed by Hastings Robinson, trans. and ed., *Original Letters Relative to the English Reformation, Written during the Reigns of King Henry VIII, King Edward VI, and Queen Mary: Chiefly from the Archives of Zurich* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1847), 2:743–7 (Letter 352).
 46. Calvin's letter is printed by Jules Bonnet, trans. and ed., *Letters of John Calvin Compiled from the Original Manuscripts* . . . (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publications, 1853), 3:35–8 (Letter 348).
 47. Bonnet, *Letters of John Calvin*, 3:38.

48. Knox, *A Letter . . . Augmented and Explained*, reprinted by Laing, *The Works of John Knox*, 4:423–60; the quotations appear on pp. 452–4. Spelling and punctuation have been silently modernized.

Marie of Guise gave birth to a son and heir, named James, in May 1539; she was quickly pregnant again and had a second boy. In April 1541 both young princes died within a week of one another. James V died a week after Mary Stuart was born in 1542.

49. William Croft Dickinson, ed., *John Knox's History of the Reformation in Scotland* (London: T. Nelson, 1949), 1:116. Marie of Guise died in 1560, the year after Knox began his *History*; the work was finally published in 1587 (Knox had died in 1572).

It is difficult to correlate Knox's attitude, expressed here, with his close, personal relationships with women. Knox's relationship to women—and his view of womankind—is thus the subject of lively debate. For spirited defenses of Knox and his view of women, see Ridley, *John Knox* and Greaves, *Theology and Revolution*. See also Patrick Collinson, "John Knox, the Church of England and the Women of England," in Mason, *John Knox and the British Reformations*, 74–96, and Jenny Wormald, "Godly Reformer, Godless Monarch: John Knox and Mary Queen of Scots," in Mason, *John Knox and the British Reformations*, 220–41.

50. Gilby's *Admonition* is appended to Knox's *The Appellation of John Knox from the cruell and most unjust sentence pronounced against him . . .* (Geneva, 1558); the quotation is from fol. 59v. Gilby's *Admonition* is printed as an appendix in Laing, *The Works of John Knox*, 4:541–71.

Knox summarizes his proposed "second blast" at the end of Gilby's *Admonition*. Knox acknowledges that "many are offended" at his arguments and that he is looking forward to their "confutations" of them. While he grants that his opinions might be reformed, he writes that "for the discharge of [his] conscience," he is notifying his opponents of the "subsequent propositions" he intends to defend in his proposed *Second Blast*. These are four: that a lawful ruler inherits not through "birth only, nor propinquity of blood," but through God's ordinance; that "no manifest idolator, nor notorious transgressor of God's holy precepts ought to be promoted to any public regiment"; that neither oaths nor promises bind people "to obey and maintain tyrants against God"; and that if men "rashly" or "ignorantly" have "chosen such a one," they can justly "depose and punish" such a ruler. These propositions, directed so clearly and specifically to religion and tyranny, seem to indicate that these were *not* the issues to which Knox had directed himself in his *first* "blast," just as the 1554 letters, developing his theory of resistance to Catholic kings, can be used to judge his objections to the sex of female rulers in the *First Blast*.

51. Christopher Goodman, *How Superior Powers Ought to be Obeyd of Their subjectes . . .* (Geneva, 1558); a facsimile edition was published by the Facsimile Text Society (New York: Columbia University Press, 1931). On Goodman see Jane E. A. Dawson, "Trumpeting Resistance: Christopher Goodman and John Knox," in Mason, *John Knox and the British Reformations*, 131–53.
52. Goodman, *Superior Powers*, 31 and 42.

Two The Gynecocracy Debate

1. John Aylmer, *An Harborowe for Faithfull and Trewe Subjectes, against the late blowne Blaste, concerning the Government of Wemen, wherein be confuted all such reasons as a straunger of late made in that behalfe, with a brieft exhortation to Obedience* ([London], 1559), sigs. B2v–B3r.
2. The title page of Aylmer's *Harborowe* indicates that it was printed in "Strasborowe," but the British Library catalogue states that the *Harborowe* was printed by John Day in London. In the quotations from Aylmer's *Harborowe*, spelling and punctuation have been modernized.
3. Aylmer, *Harborowe*, sigs. B1r–B1v.
4. Aylmer, *Harborowe*, sig. B2r.
5. Aylmer's response to the first syllogism is found in *Harborowe*, sigs. C3v–G1r.
6. Aylmer, *Harborowe*, sigs. C3v and F4v.
7. Aylmer, *Harborowe*, sig. C4r.
8. Aylmer, *Harborowe*, G3r.
9. Edmund Plowden's *Commentaries or Reports* were collected during the reign of Elizabeth I; they present "the first clear elaboration of that mystical talk with which the English crown jurists enveloped and trimmed their definitions of kingship and royal capacities" (quoted by Ernst Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies: A Study in Mediaeval Political Theory* [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1959], 7). The legal theory is further explained by Dennis Moore, "Recorder Fleetwood and the Tudor Queenship Controversy," in *Ambiguous Realities: Women in the Middle Ages and Renaissance*, ed. Carole Levin and Jeanie Watson (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 1987), 235–51: "... the ruler has two bodies: first, the natural body that is born and dies, subject to the infirmities of infancy, sickness, old age; second, the political body, an abstract legal entity subject to no infirmity, not even death. When an individual becomes king, the natural body is subsumed by the body politic, the crown miraculously washing away any weakness" (247).
 The theory's expansion to include sex as well as age or infirmity is discussed by Marie Axton, *The Queen's Two Bodies: Drama and the Elizabethan Succession* (London: Royal Historical Society, 1977). At the beginning of her reign, Elizabeth alluded to the theory when she remarked that though she was "but one body naturally," she had been granted by God's "permission" a "body politic to govern" (quoted by Patricia-Ann Lee, "'A Bodeye Politique to Gouverne': Aylmer, Knox and the Debate on Queenship," *The Historian* 52 [1990]: 261). According to Dennis Moore, Plowden used the theory to justify the claim of Mary Stuart to the English throne (247).
10. Aylmer, *Harborowe*, sig. C4r.
11. Aylmer, *Harborowe*, sig. I2v.
12. Aylmer, *Harborowe*, sigs. G1v and G4v.
13. Aylmer, *Harborowe*, sig. L1r.
14. Aylmer, *Harborowe*, sigs. L2v–L3r and B3v.
15. Aylmer, *Harborowe*, sigs. M1r–M1v.

For the passage of Knox that Aylmer is echoing, see the quotation at the outset of chapter one, 11.

16. On the possible successors to Mary Stuart and Mary Tudor, see chapter one, 24–6.
17. Calvin's letter to Cecil is published by Hastings Robinson, ed. and trans., *The Zurich Letters, Comprising the Correspondence of Several English Bishops and Others with Some of the Helvetian Reformers, during the Reign of Queen Elizabeth*, 2nd series (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1845), 34–6 (Letter 15).
18. See chapter one, 31.
19. Robinson, *The Zurich Letters*, 35.
20. Robinson, *The Zurich Letters*, 35.
21. Robinson, *The Zurich Letters*, 35–6.
22. British Library MS Additional 48043 (Yelverton MS 48), fols. 1–9. The text is untitled in the manuscript, but attribution has been added to the flyleaf in a later hand: "These answers were made by Mr. Richard Bertie, husband to the lady Catherine Duchess of Suffolk against the book of John Knox, 1558."
The date of 1559 for Bertie's text is suggested by internal evidence, argued convincingly by Amanda Shephard, *Gender and Authority in Sixteenth-Century England: The Knox Debate* (Keele, Staffordshire [UK]: Ryburn Publishing, 1994), 26–8. Evelyn Read, in her *Catherine, Duchess of Suffolk: A Portrait* (London: Cape, 1962), assigns a date of 1568 to Bertie's brief "answers," but gives no reasons for this date. The best argument for the earlier date is that suggested by Bertie's own comments on the haste of his reply to Knox (see below, 42).
23. Catherine Willoughby (1519–80) was heiress of the eleventh Lord Willoughby. In 1526 Charles Brandon bought her wardship, intending to marry her to his son (then aged three). Instead, after the death of Mary Tudor, Brandon married the young heiress himself, in 1533. Brandon died in 1545, and Catherine Willoughby Brandon married Richard Bertie, a member of her household, in 1553. During Mary Tudor's reign, the two were exiles in Weisel and Lithuania.
24. See chapter one.
25. Bertie, "These answers," fol. 1r.
26. Bertie, "These answers," fol. 1r.
27. See chapter three.
28. Bertie's replies to Knox's two reasons are both found in "These answers," fol. 1r.
29. Bertie's legal responses are found in "These answers," fols. 1v–2v.
30. Bertie's comments are found in "These answers," fols. 3r, 4r, and 5v (for the last three), respectively.
31. For Knox's argument, see chapter one, 18.
32. Bertie, "These answers," fols. 6r–7v.

In her essay "Woman's Rule in Sixteenth-Century British Political Thought," *Renaissance Quarterly* 40, no. 3 (1987): 421–51, Constance Jordan notes a similar linguistic argument used by John Leslie in 1569, crediting him with introducing the examination of the word "brethren" into the gynocracy debate ("Leslie's contribution to this argument . . . lies in his focus on the most conventional of all human practices, communication in language," 444). While there is some dispute about the date of Bertie's "answers" (see n. 22, above), and while we do not know how widely his unpublished defense was circulated, it

seems he is the writer who should be credited with having made this contribution to the gynococracy debate.

For John Leslie, see below, 48–9.

33. For his 1554 correspondence with Bullinger and Calvin, see chapter one, 30–1.
34. Knox to Cecil, 10 April 1559, quoted by James E. Phillips, Jr., “The Background of Spenser’s Attitude toward Women Rulers,” *The Huntington Library Quarterly* 5, no. 1 (1941): 5–32 (the quotation appears on pp. 19–20). The spelling and punctuation of Knox’s letter have been silently modernized here.
35. Knox to Cecil, 28 June 1559, quoted by Phillips, “The Background of Spenser’s Attitude toward Women Rulers,” 20. The spelling and punctuation of Knox’s letter have been silently modernized here.
36. Knox to Cecil, 19 July 1559, quoted by Phillips, “The Background of Spenser’s Attitude toward Women Rulers,” 20. The spelling and punctuation of Knox’s letter have been silently modernized here.
37. Knox to Elizabeth Tudor, 20 July 1559, quoted by Phillips, “The Background of Spenser’s Attitude toward Women Rulers,” 20. The spelling and punctuation of Knox’s letter have been silently modernized here.
38. Quoted by Phillips, “The Background of Spenser’s Attitude toward Women Rulers,” 21 n. 54. The spelling and punctuation of Knox’s letter have been silently modernized here.
39. William Croft Dickinson, ed., *John Knox’s History of the Reformation in Scotland* (London: T. Nelson, 1949), 2:13–20. Knox began writing his *History* in 1559, though he continued to work on it until the time of his death; the *History* was first published in 1587. In the extended quotations that follow here, I have modernized Knox’s spelling and punctuation.
40. Knox, *History*, 2:46.
41. Knox, *History*, 2:71–2.
42. Knox, *History*, 2:81–4.

Knox’s self-serving and gendered characterizations of his meetings with Mary Stuart have long been accepted without much challenge; see, for example, Jasper Ridley, *John Knox* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968), 426 (“there is plenty of evidence from other sources of Mary’s habit of bursting into tears, and raging in a most undignified manner, in moments of crisis”), W. Stanford Reid, *Trumpeter of God: A Biography of John Knox* (New York: Scribner, 1974), 230 (“Apparently from sheer vexation and frustration, she broke into tears”), and even general sources like the *Encyclopedia Britannica* (“Mary . . . berated Knox with hysterical fury”), 15th ed., 6:920.

Mary’s reactions to criticisms of her marriage negotiations are “a fume,” “howling,” “raging,” “vexation,” and “hysterical.” Meanwhile, the marriage of the fifty-year-old Knox to the seventeen-year-old Margaret Stewart in the same year—which produced “surprise and indignation” among Knox’s own contemporaries—does not produce much surprise, indignation, or gendered language in biographers such as Ridley, *John Knox*, 432–4 or Reid, *Trumpeter of God*, 222–3, both of whom remind us that such a match was “not uncommon” in the sixteenth century (both Ridley and Reid use the same phrase, Ridley adding the rather chivalrous comment

that what was remarkable in the match was that a man of “humble birth” had “won the hand of a noble lady,” and assuming “Margaret’s affection for Knox,” while Reid implies that the match was more a matter of convenience and necessity for Knox, since his “involvement in public affairs and constant traveling” must have made it difficult for him to raise his two boys).

43. Quoted by Phillips, “Women Rulers,” 24.

On Knox’s relationship with the queen of Scotland and for a more critical view of Knox’s treatment of her, see Jenny Wormald, “Godly Reformer, Godless Monarch: John Knox and Mary Queen of Scots,” in *John Knox and the British Reformations*, ed. Roger A. Moore (Brookfield, VT: Ashgate, 1998), 220–41.

44. *A Defence of the honour of the right high, mightye, and noble Princesse Marie Quene of Scotlande and dowager of France, with a declaration as well of her right, title, and intereste to the succession of the crowne of Englande, as that the regiment of women ys conformable to the lawe of God and nature* ([Rheims?], 1569). Although the title page indicates that Leslie’s book was published in London in 1569, the British Library catalogue states that the date is spurious and that the book was published in Rheims and smuggled into England. In quotations from Leslie’s *Defence*, spelling and punctuation have been modernized.
45. Leslie, *Defence*, 2r–2v.
46. The third book of Leslie’s *Defence* begins on 119v.
47. Leslie, *Defence*, 120r–121r.
48. Leslie, *Defence*, 121v.
49. Leslie, *Defence*, 121v–123r.
50. Leslie, *Defence*, 129r–134v.

Cordelia, the youngest of King Lear’s daughters, is most familiar to us from Shakespeare’s *King Lear*, but she appears in traditional histories like Geoffrey of Monmouth’s *The History of the Kings of Britain*, written in the twelfth century. Margaret of Denmark (1353–1412) was regent of Denmark (from 1375) and of Norway (from 1380) for her son after the death of her husband, Haakon VI, in 1380. Her son died in 1387, and by 1389 she had defeated Albert of Mecklenburg to become queen of Sweden as well as of Denmark and Norway.

In addition to these examples, Leslie includes references to Theodora (989–1056), daughter of Constantine VIII, who ruled Byzantium for several different periods in her lifetime; Agnes of Aquitaine and Poitou (c. 1030–77), regent of the Holy Roman Empire for her son, Henry IV, from 1056 until 1070; and Joanna of Naples—Naples had two queen regnants, Joanna I (1326–82), who ruled from 1343 to 1382, and Joanna II (1371–1435), who ruled from 1414 to 1435 (Leslie doesn’t make it clear which Joanna he is referring to).

51. Leslie, *Defence*, 135r–140v.
52. Leslie, *Defence*, 140v–141v.
53. Constance Jordan (“Women’s Rule”) discusses Leslie’s *Defence*, 442–5. She remarks on the organizational problems of the work: “Leslie’s argument on the whole is very difficult to follow; I have rearranged the order in which he makes his points so that it makes more logical sense” (442 n. 28). As I note above, I think that the order of Leslie’s argument is important, since it shows what he thought was his most persuasive point.

54. David Chambers, *Discours de la Légitime Succession des Femmes aux Possessions de leurs parents: & du gouvernement des princesses aux Empires & Royaumes* (Paris, 1579). The translations here are my own.

In 1560 Catherine de' Medici became regent of France for her son Charles IX, who was declared of age in 1563. In 1574 the twenty-three-year-old king died, and Catherine again became regent until her son Henry, king of Poland, could return to France as Henry III. She remained active and influential until her death in 1589.

55. Chambers, *Discours*, 16. The analogy originates in Aristotle's *Politics*, though Plato also discussed the relationship of the family and the state in his *Republic*. For a history of the use of the analogy from Plato to the accession of James VI of Scotland to the English throne, see Gordon J. Schochet, *Patriarchalism in Political Thought: The Authoritarian Family and Political Speculation and Attitudes Especially in Seventeenth-Century England* (New York: Basic Books, 1975), 18–36.

For the way later political theorists use this analogy to exclude women from political roles, see chapter five.

56. Chambers, *Discours*, 24r–27v. Anne of France (1461–1522) acted as regent of France for her brother, Charles VIII (1482–91); Louise of Savoy (1476–1531) acted as regent of France for her son Francis I (1515–16 and 1525–9); Margaret of Austria (1480–1530) acted as regent of the Netherlands for her nephew Charles V (1507–15 and 1519–30).

In an interesting note, Chambers names Christine de Pizan as one of his sources for “les bonnes qualities de plusieurs femmes,” including their constancy, their faith, and their contributions in many fields (32). For Christine de Pizan and her defense of female sovereignty, see chapter four.

57. Among the defenders of women's rule in general and of Elizabeth Tudor in particular, see John Jewel, *The Defence of the Apology of the Church of England* (1567; in John Ayre, ed., *The Works of John Jewel* [1850; rpt. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968]); George Whetstone, *The English Myrror* (London, 1586); John Bridges, *A Defence of the Gouvernement . . .* (London, 1587); John Case, *Sphaera civitatis* (Oxford, 1588; discussed in further detail in chapter five); and Richard Bancroft, *Dangerous Positions* (London, 1593). Support of Elizabeth is also offered by Thomas Rogers as part of his *The Catholic Doctrine of the Church of England, an Exposition of the Thirty-Nine Articles*, ed. J. J. S. Perowne (1607; [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1854]), but while he condemns those who argue against women's rule and praises Aylmer, Rogers doesn't offer a general defense of rule by women. Carole Levin argues persuasively that John Foxe's *Acts and Monuments* also played “an influential role . . . in the ardent debate about women's capacities as rulers” and was intended as “a message to the reigning Queen”; see her “John Foxe and the Responsibilities of Queenship,” in *Women in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance: Literary and Historical Perspectives*, ed. Mary Beth Rose (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1986), 113–33.

A defense of rule by women published by Mary Stuart's supporters is Peter Frarin, *An Oration against the Unlawfull Insurrections of the Protestantes of our time, under Pretense to Reform Religion*, trans. John Fowler (Antwerp, 1566). On the other side, George Buchanan, a strong anti-Marian, condemned Mary Stuart's rule in his *Rerum scoticarum historia* (1582; the sections on women's rule and Mary Stuart are edited and

translated by W. A. Gatherer, published as *The Tyrannous Reign of Mary Stewart: George Buchanan's Account* [1958; rpt. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1978]). His condemnation of Mary was regarded as an attack on Elizabeth Tudor as well. Buchanan certainly does not have a high opinion of women: "Greatness of mind was never required in this sex. It is true, women have other proper virtues, but as for this, it was always reckoned amongst virile, and not female endowments; besides, by how much the more they are obnoxious to commotions, passions and other efforts of mind, by reason of imbecility of their nature" (George Buchanan, *The History of Scotland, Translated from the Latin: With Notes, and a Continuation to the Present*, ed. and trans. James Aikman [Edinburgh: Printed for T. Ireland, 1831], 285). In part Buchanan's *History of Scotland* was responsible for Henry Howard's "A dutifull defence of the lawfull regiment of women devided into three bookes . . .," BL MS Lansdowne 813.

The numerous tracts defending the rights of Mary Stuart or of other claimants to the English throne are, in themselves, a fascinating part of the gynecocracy controversy, but they add little new to the debate; this veritable "battle of succession tracts" is discussed at length by Mortimer Levine, *The Early Elizabethan Succession Question, 1558–1568* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1966).

Additional minor texts in the gynecocracy debates are noted by Phillips and Paula Louise Scalingi, "The Scepter or the Distaff: The Question of Female Sovereignty, 1516–1607," *The Historian* 41 (1978): 59–75.

58. Howard, "A dutifull defence of the lawfull regiment of women devided into three bookes, British Library MS Lansdowne 813 (dated 1590)." Howard's defense was not published, but circulated in manuscript and survives now in multiple copies. In order to facilitate reference to other discussions of Howard's "defense," I have used the Lansdowne manuscript, the copy cited by Shephard, *Gender and Authority*, Dennis Moore, "Dutifully Defending Elizabeth: Lord Henry Howard and the Question of Queenship," in *Political Rhetoric, Power, and Renaissance Women*, ed. Carole Levin and Patricia A. Sullivan (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1995), 113–36, and Anna Christine Caney, "'Let He Who Objects Produce Sound Evidence': Lord Henry Howard and the Sixteenth Century Gynecocracy Debate" (Master's Thesis, The Florida State University College of Arts and Sciences, 2005). For additional manuscript copies, see both Moore, "Dutifully Defending Elizabeth" and Peter Beal, *In Praise of Scribes: Manuscripts and Their Makers in Seventeenth-Century England* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 215.

In addition to the work of Shephard, Moore, and Caney, Howard's defense is also examined by Pamela Joseph Benson, *The Invention of the Renaissance Woman: The Challenge of Female Independence in the Literature and Thought of Italy and England* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1992), 237–40, 245–8.

59. Among the children of Thomas Howard, the second duke of Norfolk, were his namesake Thomas, who became the third duke of Norfolk (and who was Henry Howard's grandfather); Elizabeth, who married Thomas Boleyn and was Anne Boleyn's mother; and Edmund, whose daughter was Catherine Howard.
60. This Howard was not executed but remained in the Tower until his death in 1595. A Catholic convert, he was beatified in 1929.

61. For family and biographical information, see Shephard, *Gender and Authority*, 35–7 and Rosemary O'Day, *The Longman Companion to the Tudor Age* (New York: Longman, 1995).
62. Howard, "A dutifull defence," fol. 2r. Spelling and punctuation have been modernized.
63. Shephard reports that in 1569 Thomas Howard was reported to have said that his brother, our Henry, would make a better husband for Mary than himself.
64. Linda Levy Peck, *Northampton: Patronage and Policy at the Court of James I* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1982) suggests that Howard began "A dutifull defence" in the 1580s (p. 11).
65. Howard, "A dutifull defence," fol. 13v.
66. Howard, "A dutifull defence," fols. 2r–2v.
67. Howard, "A dutifull defence," fol. 20r.
68. Howard, "A dutifull defence," fols. 28r–28v.
69. In this arrangement, while addressing Knox's principal arguments, Howard rearranges them. Knox had discussed natural law, then divine law, and ended with civil law.
70. Howard, "A dutifull defence," fols. 28r–124r. The Lansdowne manuscript, one of two "handsomely bound copies" now in the British Library (Shephard, *Gender and Authority*, 35) consists of 231 folios (462 pages of text).
On Knox's argument, see chapter one, 14–16.
71. Howard, "A dutifull defence," fol. 28v.
72. Howard, "A dutifull defence," fol. 33r.
73. Howard, "A dutifull defence," fols. 33v–39r.
74. Howard, "A dutifull defence," fols. 40v–49r.
75. For the objections, see Howard, "A dutifull defence," fols. 55r–124v.
76. Howard, "A dutifull defence," fol. 55v.
77. Howard, "A dutifull defence," fols. 125r–155v.
For Knox's discussion of civil law, see chapter one, 17–19.
78. Howard, "A dutifull defence," fol. 156r–231r.
On Knox's argument see chapter one, 16–17.
79. Howard, "A dutifull defence," fol. 157r.
80. Howard, "A dutifull defence," fol. 205r.
81. Howard, "A dutifull defence," fols. 231r–231v.
82. About publication Howard commented, "I was never apt by nature to crave acquaintance with a private person without urgent cause, much less a random multitude" (qtd. by Peck, *Northampton*, 163).
83. Howard, "A dutifull defence," fol. 3r.
84. For the owners of various surviving manuscript copies, see Moore, "Dutifully Defending Elizabeth," 117 and Beal, *In Praise of Scribes*, 215. BL MS Lansdowne C 813 belonged to Sir George Carey, who spent his life in service to the queen. Carey's grandmother was Mary Boleyn, Anne Boleyn's sister, and thus a member of the extended Howard family. Mary Boleyn married William Carey, and their son, Henry Carey, was first cousin to Queen Elizabeth. George Carey was Henry Carey's son.

Other copies were presented to Robert Devereux, earl of Essex (another of Howard's cousins), and Elizabeth's chief advisor Cecil, lord Burleigh.

85. Although Howard was reconciled to Elizabeth in 1597 and awarded a yearly pension of £200, he didn't return to court. Under James I, Howard at last found the preference he had sought for so long, awarded the earldom of Northampton and a place in the privy council. What James I thought about Howard's defense of gynecocracy can be surmised by his own statement of political theory; on this see chapter five, 155.
86. For Knox's sources, see chapter one, n. 11.
Democritus (c. 460 BCE–c. 370 BCE) was a Greek philosopher; Herodotus (c. 484 BCE–d. 430–20 BCE) was a Greek historian; Plutarch (c. 46–d. after 119) was the author of the *Lives*; and Bede (673–735) was author of the *Ecclesiastical History of the English People* (731).
87. See, for example, Jasper Ridley, *John Knox* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968), especially Chapter Fourteen ("The First Blast of the Trumpet against the Monstrous Regiment of Women"), and Richard L. Greaves, *Theology and Revolution in the Scottish Reformation: Studies in the Thought of John Knox* (Grand Rapids, MI: Christian University Press, 1980), especially Chapter Eight ("The Gynecocracy Controversy").
88. Ridley, *John Knox*, 267 and Greaves, *Theology and Revolution*, 160.
For a particularly sensitive examination of Knox's attitudes to women, see Patrick Collinson, "John Knox, the Church of England and the Women of England," in *John Knox and the British Reformations*, ed. Roger A. Mason (Brookfields, VT: Ashgate, 1998), 74–96.
89. Aylmer, *Harborowe*, G3r.
90. Bullinger's letter is printed by Hastings Robinson, trans. and ed., *Original Letters Relative to the English Reformation, Written during the Reigns of King Henry VIII, King Edward VI, and Queen Mary: Chiefly from the Archives of Zurich* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1847), 2:745 (Letter 352); on Bullinger's letter, see chapter one, 30–1.
91. John Case, *Sphaerica civitatis*, 33, trans. Dana F. Sutton; Hutton's hypertext edition of both the Latin original and her English translation, *The Spheres of Government*, is available at www.philological.bham.ac.uk/sphaera/. For further discussion of Case, see chapter five.
92. Howard, "A dutifull defense," fol. 90.
93. Thomas Smith, *De Republica Anglorum: The maner of Governement or policie of the Realme of England . . .* (London, 1583), sig. D2r. Smith's defense is discussed in chapter five.
94. Thomas Becon, *An humble supplicacion unto God for the restoringe of hys holye worde unto the churche of England, mooste mete to be sayde in these our dayes, even with teares of every true & faithfull English harte* (Wesel, 1554), sigs. A7r–A7v; reprinted in John Ayre, ed., *Prayers and Other Pieces of Thomas Becon . . .* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1844), 227–8.
95. Calvin to Cecil; Robinson, *The Zurich Letters*, 3:35 (Letter 15).
96. Bullinger, *Original Letters*, 2:745.

97. Calvin's letter is printed by Jules Bonnet, trans. and ed., *Letters of John Calvin Compiled from the Original Manuscripts . . .* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publications, 1853), 3:35–8 (Letter 348); the quotation is from p. 38.
98. Calvin to Cecil; Robinson, *The Zurich Letters*, 3:35 (Letter 15).
99. Bertie, "These answers," fol. 7r.
100. Aylmer, *Harborowe*, sigs. B2v–B3r.
101. Howard, "A dutifull defence," fol. 82r.

Three The Gynecocracy Debate in Context: Humanism and History

1. *De institutione foeminae christianae* (Antwerp, 1523), trans. Richard Hyrde, *A very frutefull and pleasant boke called the Instruction of a Christen Woman* (London, 1541), sig. H2v. (The signatures begin over after Y4v—the reference here is to the second H2v: Book Two, Chapter Nine, "Of Walking Abroad.") Vives and his book—as well as the authenticity of this particular passage—are analyzed in detail below, 92–8.
2. "The Scepter or the Distaff: The Question of Female Sovereignty, 1516–1607," *The Historian*, 41 (1978): 59. Such a claim is also implied by James E. Phillips as he opens his discussion of the gynecocracy debate: "Long before the accession of Mary Tudor made the political issue a point of interest in the discussion of women, humanists had drawn the attention of the Renaissance to the status and education of the sex in general" ("The Background of Spenser's Attitude toward Women Rulers," *Huntington Library Quarterly*, 5, no. 1 [1941]: 5). Similar claims continue; see, for example, Constance Jordan, "Woman's Rule in Sixteenth-Century British Political Thought," *Renaissance Quarterly*, 40, no. 3 (1987): 422 ("The British writers who wrote for and against woman's rule drew on the growing numbers of treatises on the nature and status of women that were already in circulation in Italy and northern Europe") and Susan M. Felch, "The Rhetoric of Biblical Authority: John Knox and the Question of Women," *Sixteenth Century Journal*, 26, no. 4 (1995): 805–22, who regards *The First Blast of the Trumpet against the Monstrous Regiment of Women* as part of the "growing sixteenth-century literature in praise and blame of women" (805).
3. The "clash of humanists and scholastics" has been and continues to be much discussed. Essential to a serious exploration of the conflict is Paul O. Kristeller, *Renaissance Thought: The Classic, Scholastic, and Humanist Strains* (New York: Harper & Row, 1961). More recent scholarship includes James H. Overfield, *Humanism and Scholasticism in Late Medieval Germany* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984); Albert Rabil, Jr., ed., *Renaissance Humanism: Foundations, Forms, and Legacy*, 3 vols. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1988); Erika Rummel, *The Humanist-Scholastic Debate in the Renaissance and Reformation* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995); Ronald G. Witt, *In the Footsteps of the Ancients: The Origins of Humanism from Lovato to Bruni* (Boston: Brill, 2000); and James Hankins, ed., *Renaissance Civic Humanism: Reappraisals and Reflections* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

An excellent survey of the scholarship and the issues involved is Charles G. Nauert's "Humanism as Method: Roots of Conflict with the Scholastics," *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 29 (1998): 427–38. Nauert sees two issues as fundamental in the "increasingly hostile tone" taken by preachers and theologians in their "savage attacks" on humanists and humanism in the early sixteenth century: the defense of orthodox doctrine and of the traditional intellectual method of dialecticism. According to Nauert, "The scholastic conservatives flatly declared that only their own traditional method, based on dialectical argumentation and closely guided by the writings of earlier generations of scholastic theologians, could provide sure guarantees of orthodoxy in doctrine and catholicity in religious practice" (431). Humanists, for their part, ". . . insisted that the dialectical method of the academic theologians had produced a theological science that concentrated on trivial, abstruse questions of little or no real value to the needs of the church. Scholastic theology, they charged, neglected full and reflective study of what the Bible actually said. . . . It disingenuously extracted isolated passages from authors (including the Bible itself, the Church Fathers, and modern writers). It then ignorantly or maliciously twisted these passages into statements that had no relation to the intention of the author or the historical and textual context in which those statements had been made" (431).

For an excellent survey of the "old voice" of Scholasticism, the "new voice" of humanism (and the "other voices" that argued "questions of female equality and opportunity") see the editors' introduction prefacing each volume in the University of Chicago Press series *The Other Voice in Early Modern Europe*.

There is a large secondary literature on humanist views of and treatises about women. Among many excellent sources, see Conor Fahy, "Three Early Renaissance Treatises on Women," *Italian Studies: An Annual Review* 11 (1956): 30–55; Doris M. Stenton, "The Renaissance and Reformation and Their Consequences, 1400–1642," Chapter Five of her *The English Woman in History* (New York: Macmillan, 1957); Retha M. Warnicke, "Women and Humanism in Early Tudor England," Chapter Two of her *Women of the English Renaissance and Reformation* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1983); Anthony Grafton and Lisa Jardine, *From Humanism to the Humanities: Education and the Liberal Arts in Fifteenth- and Sixteenth-Century Europe* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986); Constance Jordan, *Renaissance Feminism: Literary Texts and Political Models* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1990); and Pamela Joseph Benson, *The Invention of the Renaissance Woman: The Challenge of Female Independence in Literature and Thought of Italy and England* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1992). See the bibliography for additional sources.

4. For further discussion of Christine de Pizan and the *querelle des femmes*, see chapter four.
5. The last question was asked—and answered in the negative—in an anonymously produced work that appeared in Germany in 1595 entitled *Mulieres homines non esse* (*Women Are Not Human Beings*). The unknown author offered fifty proofs that women were not human. A number of responses to the *Mulieres homines non esse* followed, presenting arguments in favor of and in opposition to the original text and its position. The original pamphlet, a response by Simon Gedik (*A Defense of the*

Female Sex), and an argument by Arcangela Tarabotti (*Women Are of the Human Species*) are reproduced in “*Women Are Not Human*”: *An Anonymous Treatise and Responses*, ed. and trans. Theresa M. Kenney (New York: Crossroad Publishing Co., 1998). On this see chapter four. An informative essay on this controversy is Manfred P. Fleischer, “‘Are Women Human?’—The Debate of 1595 between Valens Acidalius and Simon Gediccus,” *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 12, no. 2 (1981): 107–20.

6. Giovanni Boccaccio, *Famous Women*, trans. Virginia Brown, The I Tatti Renaissance Library (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), xi. I have used Brown’s translation here.

In compiling his biographies of famous women, Boccaccio was certainly familiar with classical sources as well as the work of Petrarch. He knew the *Facta et dicta memorabilia* of Valerius Maximus (fl. c. 20 CE), a collection of historical anecdotes that included a number of portraits of illustrious Roman women (like Antonia, the wife of Drusus Germanicus, for example), and a discussion of their roles. He also knew the *Lives* of Plutarch (c. 46–c. 119) as well as the discussion of the “Virtues of Women” (*Mulierum virtutes*) included in Plutarch’s *Moralia*.

Benson (*Invention of the Renaissance Woman*) claims that Boccaccio’s work is the “foundation text of Renaissance profeminism”; all later discussions “are directly or indirectly indebted to it because it establishes the issues and many of the rhetorical methods of defense, collects evidence useful for demonstrating the political, social, and personal virtue of women, offers the example of a man daring to speak out in favor of womankind, yet never directly advocates social change” (9).

In her “Boccaccio’s In-Famous Women: Gender and Civic Virtue in the *De mulieribus claris*” (in *Ambiguous Realities: Women in the Middle Ages and Renaissance*, ed. Carole Levin and Jeanie Watson [Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 1987], 25–47), Constance Jordan indicates that the *De mulieribus claris* was begun in 1361 and revised continuously until 1375 (45 n. 3). Boccaccio had spent some years in Naples in his youth (from at least 1328 to 1340). He was at the court of Joanna I of Naples from 1362 to 1363 and again from 1370 to 1371 (for more on Joanna I of Naples, see 69–71 and n. 17, below).

Although there are 104 chapters in Boccaccio’s *Famous Women*, Brown correctly notes that two of them contain biographies for two women, thus bringing the total number of women’s lives to 106.

7. Boccaccio, “Dedication,” *Famous Women*, 1–3.
8. Boccaccio, “Preface,” *Famous Women*, 4.
9. Boccaccio, “Preface,” *Famous Women*, 6.
10. Penthesilea was one of the queens of Amazonia. During the Trojan War, she led the Amazons and was killed by Achilles; in Virgil’s *Aeneid*, Dido, queen of Carthage, committed suicide after being abandoned by Aeneas; Cleopatra (68–30 BCE) was the queen of Egypt.

For Zenobia, see below, 68–9.

For Joanna I of Naples, see n. 6 above and below, n. 17.

11. Boccaccio, “Dedication,” *Famous Women*, 1–3.
12. Boccaccio, “Preface,” *Famous Women*, 4–6.
13. Jordan, “Boccaccio’s In-Famous Women,” 26–7.

A similar point is made by Benson, in her introduction to *The Invention of the Renaissance Woman*: “Enthusiastic as the author [Boccaccio] represents himself to be about his literary endeavor, however, the text is shadowed by fear” (1).

14. Boccaccio, *Famous Women*, 210–15.

Zenobia was queen of Palmyra (in present-day Syria) from 267 or 268 until 272 when she was conquered by Emperor Aurelian, captured, and taken to Rome. For an extended account of Zenobia, see Antonia Fraser, *The Warrior Queens* (New York: Knopf, 1989), 107–28.

15. Boccaccio, *Famous Women*, 212 (emphasis added).

16. Boccaccio, *Famous Women*, 215.

17. Boccaccio, *Famous Women*, 230–2.

Joanna I (1326–82) was countess of Provence and queen regnant of Naples (1343–82), succeeding her grandfather Robert to the throne. In an interesting note, although Boccaccio does not mention it, Robert of Naples had left his second wife, Sancia of Majorca, as regent for Joanna, but she was rather quickly pushed aside and entered a convent.

18. Boccaccio, *Famous Women*, 1.

About this, Benson writes, “The image of shining so brightly as to obscure suggests that masculine Giovanna [Joanna] would throw the feminine text back into the obscurity of privacy” (12). The queen “belongs where Boccaccio placed her, among the famous women celebrated in the text; there, she is firmly under the author’s control.” Further, “A living, independent woman like Giovanna endangers the virility of the author because she is fully masculine on her own.”

19. Boccaccio, *Famous Women*, 232. Joanna had four husbands.

20. Boccaccio, *Famous Women*, 256, Note a.

21. Boccaccio, *Famous Women*, 232–3.

22. Mariam (c. 57–29 BCE), popular in both Jewish and Christian tradition, married Herod the Great, who put her to death for adultery (Boccaccio, *Famous Women*, 175–8); Proba’s *Cento Vergilianus* (composed around 360) retold biblical stories from Creation to Christ’s Resurrection and was modeled on Virgil’s *Aeneid* (Boccaccio, *Famous Women*, 202–4); “Pope” Joan is a legendary figure, a female disguised as a male, whose pontificate was supposedly in the ninth century (Boccaccio, *Famous Women*, 215–17); Constance of Sicily (c. 1154–98), according to popular legend, was an old woman whom the pope ordered to leave her nunnery and marry Henry VI—the birth of her son was, according to this legend, a miracle (Boccaccio, *Famous Women*, 221–3); Camiola (fl. twelfth century) was a rich widow who rescued an imprisoned man and then, deceived by him, pledged that she would spend the rest of her life as a single woman (Boccaccio, *Famous Women*, 223–9).

23. Athalia was used as an admonitory figure by those who opposed rule by women, in particular John Knox (see chapter one, 19).

24. Boccaccio, *Famous Women*, 102–6.

25. Boccaccio’s direct warning to Andrea extends from p. 105 through p. 106.

26. Among the fifteenth-century biographical collections that followed Boccaccio’s are Martin le Franc’s *Le Champion des dames* (c. 1430–40), Alvaro de Luna’s *Libro de las claras e virtuosas mugeres* (1446), Antonio Cornazzano’s *De mulieribus admirandis*

(c. 1467), Vespanio da Bisticci's *Libro delle lode e commendazione delle donne* (c. 1480), and Jacomo Filippo Foresti's *De plurimis claris selectisque mulieribus* (1497).

27. I rely here on Corrado Ricci and Alberto Bacchi della Lega, eds., *Gynevera de le clare donne di Joanne Sabadino de li Arienti* (1888; rpt. Bologna: Libreria Editrice, 1969). Benson, who discusses the text (*The Invention of the Renaissance Woman*, 40–4), judges the Italian edition “inadequate” in its faithfulness to the original (6, n. 3), but no such criticism is noted by Carolyn James, *Giovanni Sabadino degli Arienti: A Literary Career* (Florence: Leo S. Olschki, 1996).

Arienti's work has been variously dated, but James provides compelling evidence that the compilation was probably begun in the late 1480s and completed about 1490. The death of Arienti's wife, described in the *Ginevra*, occurred in late 1486 or early 1487. Arienti first mentioned the work in a letter dated 1 July 1489, and a letter later in that year, “requesting information about Joan of Arc, indicates that the writing was well underway.” In May of 1490, he mentioned the work yet again, noting that he would finish it soon. This date, James notes, “accords roughly with his later comments to Isabella d'Este in his letter of 29 June 1492 that he had finished the work two years before.” One further reference indicates Arienti's continuing revision of the project: “The reference to the fall of Granada in the last pages of the *Gynevera*, news of which reached Bologna in February 1492, suggests that Arienti put finishing touches to the text shortly before he presented it to Ginevra Bentivoglio between February and June of 1492.” On all this, see James, *A Literary Career*, 73–4.

Ginevra Sforza (c. 1440–1507) was the illegitimate daughter of Alessandro Sforza of Pesaro. She was married to Sante Bentivoglio in 1452, although she was not yet of marriageable age. Their marriage was consummated two years later, in 1454. In 1464, after Sante's death, Giovanni II succeeded to power in Bologna, and he married Ginevra, his cousin's widow. On this, see Cecilia M. Ady, *The Bentivoglio of Bologna: A Study in Despotism* (1937; rpt. London: Oxford University Press, 1969), 44 (Ginevra's first marriage to Sante) and 136–42 (her second to Giovanni). About the 1454 arrival of Ginevra Sforza in Bologna, Ady writes: “So, on the appointed day, the child-bride entered Bologna, where for fifty years she reigned as the bright star of the court and, as many would say, the evil genius of the Bentivoglio.”

There is not a great deal of recent critical work on Arienti's history of women, but a very helpful essay is Stephen D. Kolsky's “Men Framing Women: Sabadino degli Arienti's *Gynevera de le clare donne* Reexamined,” in *Visions and Revisions: Women in Italian Culture*, ed. Mirna Cicioni and Nicole Prunster (Providence, RI: Berg Publishers, 1993), 27–40.

28. Arienti, *Ginevra*, 71–81. Except where noted, all translations are my own.
29. Caterina (m. 1380–c. 1410) married Giangaleazzo Visconti of Milan in 1380. During the time of her regency, she fell in love with Francesco Barbaro, losing much of her power to him. Arienti does not relate this part of Caterina's story, however.
30. Arienti, *Ginevra*, 81–92.

Joanna II (1371–1435) became queen of Naples following the death of her brother Ladislas in 1414. She was married first to William of Austria, who died in 1406. After succeeding to the throne, she appointed her lover, Pandolfello Alopò,

as her grand chamberlain. She was married a second time in 1415, to Jacques de Bourbon, and Alopo was executed. Jacques attempted to usurp Joanna's powers, but he was forced to leave Naples. A new lover, Giovanni Caracciolo, became grand seneschal; he was assassinated in 1432 after he, too, attempted to wrest power from Joanna.

31. Semiramis was a mythical queen; married to Ninus of Assyria, she conspired in his death so she could rule in his stead. Like Jezebel, Semiramis became a potent sign for all of women's corruption. In this reference to Semiramis, Arienti may be conflating the two Joannas of Naples; Joanna I was suspected of having her first husband assassinated.
32. Arienti, *Ginevra*, 114–32.
33. Ady includes a fascinating detail about Giovanna's defense of her brother. As he seizes control of the Palazzo del Comune, she passes out arms to the supporters of the Bentivogli. Among those armed by Giovanna Bentivoglio was Sabadino degli Arienti's father; see Ady, *The Bentivoglio of Bologna*, 13.
34. Arienti, *Ginevra*, 132–9.

Battista da Montefeltro Malatesta (1383–1450) was the daughter of Antonio, count of Urbino; in 1405 she married Galeazzo Malatesta, heir to the lord of Pesaro. In the passage describing Battista's rule of Pesaro, I have used Benson's translation (43) of Arienti's *Ginevra*.

35. Many of the biographical portraits in the *Ginevra* have connections to Ginevra Sforza herself. The biography of Giovanna Bentivoglio has obvious personal associations for Ginevra, who, in Ady's words, was "the ambitious and relentless woman who was to dominate the Bentivoglio palace in later years" (136). Like the prolific Giovanna, who had twelve children, Ginevra also fulfilled her "natural" role as woman, giving birth to two children during her first marriage to Sante and sixteen (eleven of whom survive) during her second to Giovanni II.

Several other Sforza women appear in Arienti's work. Battista Sforza da Montefeltro (288–312) was, according to Arienti, Ginevra's sister; more accurately she was Ginevra's half sister, daughter of Alessandro Sforza and his wife, Costanza Varano. Arienti also includes biographies of Elisa Sforza San Severino (320–6) and Ippolita Sforza, duchess of Calabria (336–51). The connection of other women to Ginevra are more remote. Margaret of Denmark, queen of Scotland, for example (288–312), may have been included because her father, Christian I, king of Denmark, Norway, and Sweden, had travelled to Bologna, meeting Ginevra's son, Annibale II.

36. The material on Equicola is drawn from Fahy, "Three Early Renaissance Treatises," 36–40.

Isabella d'Este (1474–1539) was the daughter of Eleanor of Aragon and Ercole d'Este of Ferrara; in 1490 she married Francesco Gonzaga, marquis of Mantua. On her role as regent of Mantua, see Sharon L. Jansen, *The Monstrous Regiment of Women: Female Rulers in Early Modern Europe* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 159–62. Margherita Cantelma (fl. 1490s) of Mantua spent "many years" in Ferrara, where she employed Equicola as a secretary; still in Margherita's employ, Equicola was dispatched to Mantua between 1498 and 1502 (Fahy, "Three Early Renaissance Treatises," 36).

Fahy's discussion of Italian treatises on women includes a very helpful appendix: "A List of Treatises on the Equality or Superiority of Women Written or Published in Italy during the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries," 47–55.

37. Fahy, "Three Early Renaissance Treatises," 38.
38. The passage is quoted by Fahy ("Three Early Renaissance Treatises," 38–9, n. 27) and translated by Albert Rabil; see his "Agrippa and the Feminist Tradition," in Henricus Cornelius Agrippa, *Declamation on the Nobility and Preeminence of the Female Sex*, ed. and trans. Albert Rabil, *The Other Voice in Early Modern Europe* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 24.
39. I rely here on the text of Strozzi published by Francesco Zambrini, ed., *La difesa della donna d'autore anonimo, scrittura inedita del sec. XV . . .* (Bologna: Gaetano Romagnoli, 1876). Strozzi's work consists of two books; the first answers a series of "calumnies" against women (8–91), while the second contains the portraits of famous women, organized by their areas of "excellence" in fields such as letters, prophecy, painting, and marriage (92–170). Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own.

On Strozzi, see Fahy, "Three Early Renaissance Treatises," 40–6 and Benson, *Renaissance Woman*, 47–56 (Benson judges Zambrini's translation "inadequate" [6, n. 3], but I have been unable to consult Strozzi's original). Benson links her analysis of Strozzi with a discussion of the nearly contemporary *De laudibus mulierum*, written in 1487 by Bartolomeo Goggio and dedicated to Eleanor of Aragon, Isabella d'Este's mother (56–64). Rather than arguing for the equality of the sexes, Goggio's treatise argues the superiority of women, according to Benson, with Book Four devoted to women who have "displayed military valor" or who have been "founders of nations." For an extended summary and thorough analysis of Goggio's arguments, see Werner L. Gundersheimer, "Bartolommeo [sic] Goggio: A Feminist in Renaissance Ferrara," *Renaissance Quarterly* 33, no. 2 (1980): 175–200. Fahy treats Goggio as well, "Three Renaissance Treatises," 32–6.

40. Strozzi, *La difesa* (translated by Benson, 50).
41. Strozzi, *La difesa*, 92–3.
42. Strozzi, *La difesa*, 100–108.

Matilda of Tuscany (1046–1115) was the daughter and heiress of Beatrice of Lorraine and Boniface II of Tuscany, who was murdered in 1052. She married Godfrey V of Lorraine in 1069, and after her husband's murder in 1076, she not only governed but extended her husband's territories. She was successful in her negotiations and her battles with Henry IV, but her armies were defeated by Henry V, and she was forced to name him her heir.

43. Strozzi, *La difesa*, 92–3 (translated by Benson, 50 and 53).
44. Benson, *The Invention of the Renaissance Woman*, 54.

Unlike Arienti, Strozzi is somewhat cautious about the damage of praising individual women, fearing that the "pestilential anger of envy" might damage their reputations (54).

45. Strozzi, *La difesa*, 92–3 (translated by Benson, 53).
46. Agrippa, *Declamation on the Nobility and Preeminence of the Female Sex*. The bibliography in Rabil's edition contains few works specifically on Agrippa's declamation;

additional secondary sources can be found in Barbara Newman, "Renaissance Feminism and Esoteric Theology: The Case of Cornelius Agrippa," *Viator: Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 24 (1993): 337–56.

47. Agrippa, *Preeminence of the Female Sex*, 39.

Agrippa was born in Cologne in 1486 and died in Grenoble in 1535. Trained at the University of Cologne, Agrippa served, at various times, as court secretary (to Charles V), physician, lecturer, military advisor (to the emperor Maximilian), orator, lawyer, and philosopher. He was a peripatetic gadfly, moving from Cologne to Paris, then on to Spain, back to France, and from there to the Low Countries, then to Italy, to Germany, back to France, on to Cologne, Antwerp, Louvain, and Grenoble. At the time he dedicated his lecture on women's superiority to Margaret of Austria, she was serving as regent of the Netherlands, a post she held from 1507 to 1515 and again from 1519 to 1530 (on Margaret of Austria, see chapter two, 50).

Margaret was not the only powerful woman with whom Agrippa was to be connected. Arriving at the French court in 1524, he served for four years as the personal physician to Louise of Savoy, and he dedicated his *Declamation on the Sacrament of Marriage* to Louise's daughter Marguerite, queen of Navarre, in 1526 (on Louise of Savoy and her daughter, see chapter two, 50 and chapter four, 130).

On Agrippa and his place in Renaissance humanist thought, see Charles G. Nauert, Jr., *Agrippa and the Crisis of Renaissance Thought* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1965); as an indication of shifts in scholarly interests, Nauert's book (over 300 pages) contains only two brief references to Agrippa's declamation on women, despite his recognition of it as "a startling little work, much reprinted and translated later in the century" (27). More recently, see Marc van der Poel, *Cornelius Agrippa: The Humanist Theologian and His Declamations* (1977; rpt. New York: E. J. Brill, 1997).

48. Agrippa, *Preeminence of the Female Sex*, 41.

49. Rabil discusses Agrippa's sources in detail in "Agrippa and the Feminist Tradition," 18–27.

50. Rabil, "Agrippa and the Feminist Tradition," 28.

51. Agrippa, *Preeminence of the Female Sex*, 43.

52. Agrippa, *Preeminence of the Female Sex*, 43–4.

53. Agrippa, *Preeminence of the Female Sex*, 50–4.

54. Agrippa, *Preeminence of the Female Sex*, 54–6.

55. Agrippa, *Preeminence of the Female Sex*, 57.

56. Agrippa, *Preeminence of the Female Sex*, 79.

57. Agrippa, *Preeminence of the Female Sex*, 87.

58. Agrippa, *Preeminence of the Female Sex*, 88.

On Agrippa's rewriting of the biographies of many of these woman worthies, see Newman, "Renaissance Feminism," 349–50.

59. Agrippa, *Preeminence of the Female Sex*, 89.

60. Agrippa, *Preeminence of the Female Sex*, 89–94.

61. Agrippa, *Preeminence of the Female Sex*, 94–5; both Fahy ("Three Early Renaissance Treatises," 38–9 n. 37) and Rabil ("Agrippa and the Feminist Tradition," 24) note the indebtedness of this passage to Equicola (see above, 75–6).

62. Agrippa, *Preeminence of the Female Sex*, 95.

63. Agrippa, *Preeminence of the Female Sex*, 96. Rabil indicates (n. 234) Agrippa alludes here to Romans 4:16 and 9:8 and Galatians 3:9. God's command to Abraham is Genesis 21:12.
64. Agrippa, *Preeminence of the Female Sex*, 94.
65. Attracting a great deal of attention after its publication in Latin, the *Dedamtion* was translated into French, English, Italian, German, and Polish. On the "*succès de scandale*" of Agrippa's declamation—and its early printing history—see Newman, "Renaissance Feminism," 38–9.
66. On the obscurity of *Preeminence of the Female Sex*, see Rabil, "Agrippa and the Feminist Tradition," 29; on Agrippa's reputation, see Nauert, *Agrippa*, 1. For the *Encyclopedia Britannica* entry, see 15th ed., s. v. "Agrippa."
67. *Joining the Conversation: Dialogues by Renaissance Women* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2005), 1.
68. *The Book of the Courtier* was one of the most widely published books of the sixteenth century; forty editions appeared in Italy alone, while the work was translated into English by Sir Thomas Hoby and published in 1561. That Castiglione's work is still so widely read may be due, at least in part, to the fact that Hoby's translation of Castiglione is anthologized in student-oriented works like *The Norton Anthology of English Literature* and *The Longman Anthology of British Literature*. Since Hoby's translation is the way most English speakers first encounter Castiglione, the references here are to his translation. I have relied on the Everyman edition of Hoby's *The Book of the Courtier* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1928), but I have taken the liberty of modernizing spelling and punctuation. For the publication history of Castiglione's book, see the bibliographical note by W. H. D. Rouse, x–xi.
69. Castiglione, *The Book of the Courtier*, 15–17.
 In her *The Lady Vanishes: Subjectivity and Representation in Castiglione and Ariosto* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1992), Valeria Finucci indicates that Castiglione may have begun the process of composing the *Book of the Courtier* as early as 1508 (3).
70. Elisabetta Gonzaga (1471–1526) was the daughter of Margaret of Bavaria and Federico Gonzaga, marquis of Mantua. Well-educated herself, she was also a great patron of poets and musicians.
71. "Seen But Not Heard: Women Speakers in Cinquecento Literary Dialogue," in *Women in Italian Renaissance Culture and Society*, ed. Letizia Panizza (Oxford: European Humanities Research Centre, 2000), 385–6.
72. Particularly useful on the strategies employed here ("how to be left out by staying in") is Finucci, *The Lady Vanishes*, 29–45.
 On women's silence in male-authored dialogues, Cox notes, "Where modern readers are struck by the silence of Castiglione's women speakers, his contemporaries would have been more likely to be struck by the fact that there were women present at all" (386).
73. Castiglione, *The Book of the Courtier*, 182–4.
74. Wisdom, courage, temperance, and strength are the classical virtues, associated, as the word "virtue" itself implies, with manliness.
75. Castiglione, *The Book of the Courtier*, 187–9.

76. Castiglione, *The Book of the Courtier*, 190–5.
77. Castiglione, *The Book of the Courtier*, 195–6.
78. Castiglione, *The Book of the Courtier*, 196–7.
79. Castiglione, *The Book of the Courtier*, 197–8.
80. Castiglione, *The Book of the Courtier*, 199–215.
81. Castiglione, *The Book of the Courtier*, 215.

Amalasuintha of Italy (c. 494–535) was the daughter of Theodoric the Great; for nine years after her father's death in 526, she acted as regent of Italy for her son, until she herself was assassinated. Theodolinda (fl. 580s and 590s) was a Frankish princess married, successively, to two Longobard kings; a Christian, she is noted for her religious contributions to her husbands' kingdoms. For more extensive biographical information on both of these women, see Dick Harrison, *The Age of Abbesses and Queens: Gender and Political Culture in Early Medieval Europe* (Lund, Sweden: Nordic Academic Press, 1998).

For the empress Theodora, see chapter two, n.50; for Matilda of Tuscany, see n. 42, above.

82. Castiglione, *The Book of the Courtier*, 216.

Anne of Brittany (1477–1514) was married first to Charles VIII of France, then, after his death, to his successor, Louis XII, but, in addition to being “twice queen” of France, she was duchess in her own right of Brittany. We have met Margaret of Austria before, chapter two, 50, and above, 78.

Isabella of Castile (1451–1504) was queen regnant of Castile; she married Ferdinand of Aragon. In an extended analysis of gender, sexuality, and Isabella's manipulation of her image, Barbara Weissberger notes the persistent use of the diminutive “Isabella” among contemporary historians and presents this usage as evidence of undercutting the queen's sovereignty and power; see her *Isabel Rules: Constructing Queenship, Wielding Power* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), xx. Weissberger's point is valid, and my use here of “Isabella” rather than “Isabel” is intended only to conform to twenty-first century usage and the usage in the sources I quote.

83. Castiglione, *The Book of the Courtier*, 216.
84. Castiglione, *The Book of the Courtier*, 216–17.
85. Castiglione, *The Book of the Courtier*, 218.

We have already met the two Joannas of Naples; see chapter two, n. 50. Isabella of Aragon (c. 1472–1524) was the daughter of Ippolita Sforza and Alfonso of Aragon, king of Naples; she married Giangaleazzo Sforza of Milan. Eleanor of Aragon (1455–93), duchess of Ferrara, was the mother of Isabella d'Este, whom we have met before (see 75), and of Beatrice d'Este (1475–97), who married Ludovico Sforza of Milan; Eleanor also acted as regent of Ferrara.

86. Castiglione, *The Book of the Courtier*, 219.
87. Castiglione, *The Book of the Courtier*, 219.
88. Castiglione, *The Book of the Courtier*, 220–1.
89. Castiglione, *The Book of the Courtier*, 221–34.
90. Castiglione, *The Book of the Courtier*, 234–5.
91. Castiglione, *The Book of the Courtier*, 234–5.

Constance Jordan's analysis of Castiglione's "conflicted" views of women in *The Book of the Courtier* ("Ostensibly devoted to constructing an image of the ideal court lady, the text actually reveals its author's analysis of his courtiers' strategies for controlling all the women of the court, particularly the most powerful of them, Elisabetta Gonzaga, Duchess of Urbino," 76) is excellent; see her *Renaissance Feminism*, 76–85.

Pamela Benson discusses Castiglione's book as well (*The Invention of the Renaissance Woman*, 73–90): "Whatever the participants may think," she writes, "*Il Cortegiano* is one of the main documents of the Italian Renaissance controversy about women" (73). As one of the techniques employed to "contain" the "autonomous woman," Benson notes that Castiglione "creates female personae who foster discussion without themselves being interested in exercising the power of speech that is rightly theirs" (75). She labels the discussion on queens a "digression" (75), however, despite the fact that it occupies a central and substantive place in the book.

In addition to Finucci, for a focused study on the third book of Castiglione's *The Book of the Courtier*, see Dain A. Trafton, "Politics and the Praise of Women: Political Doctrine in the *Courtier's* Third Book," in *Castiglione: The Ideal and the Real in Renaissance Culture*, ed. Robert W. Hanning and David Rosand (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1983), 29–44. Trafton calls the third book of the *Courtier* "the most truly political of the *Courtier's* four books" (31). See also Ramon Menéndez Pidal, "The Catholic Kings According to Machiavelli and Castiglione," in *Spain in the Fifteenth Century, 1369–1516*, ed. Roger Highfield and trans. Frances M. López-Morillas (New York: Harper & Row, 1972), 405–25; and Carla Freccero, "Politics and Aesthetics in Castiglione's *Il Cortegiano*: Book III and the Discourse on Women," in *Creative Imitation: New Essays on Renaissance Literature in Honor of Thomas M. Greene*, ed. David Quint, Margaret W. Ferguson, Wayne A. Rebhorn, and G. W. Pigman III (Binghamton, NY: Medieval & Renaissance Texts & Studies, 1992), 259–79.

92. Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince*, trans. George Bull (1961; rpt. New York: Penguin Books, 1995). All references are to this familiar and accessible edition. For Machiavelli's references to Ferdinand's activities in Italy, see Chapters Three, Seven, Twelve, Sixteen, Eighteen, and Twenty-Five.

Machiavelli refers to Ferdinand alone in his *Discourses on Livy* as well; see Niccolò Machiavelli, *Discourses on Livy*, trans. Harvey C. Mansfield and Nathan Tarcov (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), I.29.2, I.40.7, and III.62–3. See also Pidal, "The Catholic Kings According to Machiavelli and Castiglione."

93. On the Reconquest, see Rafael Altamira, *A History of Spain from the Beginnings to the Present Day*, trans. Muna Lee (1949; rpt. New York: Van Nostrand, 1958), 269–72, and J. N. Hillgarth, *The Spanish Kingdoms, 1250–1516* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978), 2:367–93.
94. On Isabella's role in the 1502 expulsion, see Altamira, *A History of Spain*, 272–3 and Hillgarth, *The Spanish Kingdoms*, 2:471–83, esp. 180–3; on her recognition of the importance of North Africa, see Altamira: "The queen's conviction on this point was so strong that in her last will and testament she expressly recommended that the

matter be not lost sight of" (272). On Ferdinand's Italian wars and later North African conquests, see Altamira, *A History of Spain*, 296–7 and Hillgarth, *The Spanish Kingdoms*, 2:543–75.

More recent assessments of Isabella's role can be found in David A. Boruchoff, ed., *Isabel la Católica, Queen of Castile: Critical Essays* (NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), especially Joseph Pérez, "Isabel la Católica and the Jews," 155–70 and Miguel Angel Ladero Quesada, "Isabel and the Moors," 171–94, and Weissberger, *Isabel Rules*.

95. Machiavelli, *The Prince*, Chapters Twelve and Twenty. We have discussed Joanna II of Naples before; see above, n. 30. Caterina Sforza (1462–1509) was regent of the strategically located cities of Imola and Forlì; Machiavelli also refers to Caterina Sforza in his *Discourses on Livy*.

On Machiavelli and the female sovereign, see Sharon L. Jansen, "The Princess and *The Prince*: Gender, Genre, and *Lessons for My Daughter*," in *Anne of France: Lessons for My Daughter* (Woodbridge, Suffolk [UK]: Boydell & Brewer, 2004), 79–90.

96. Perhaps Machiavelli's assumption reflects his own practical experiences; his first diplomatic mission was to Caterina Sforza, in 1499, during which he met with her on three occasions.

A similar conclusion about women and rule is reached by the Neapolitan Agostino Nifo (c. 1473–d. after 1538), whose *De regnande peritia* (*On Skill in Governing*) was published before 1523, when he became a professor at the University of Pisa. Since his work is a "plagiarized version of Niccolò Machiavelli's treatise on the ethics of ruling," such a position about female sovereignty reinforces Machiavelli's pragmatic approach (see *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 15th ed., s. v. "Nifo"). Ian Maclean also considers Nifo's *De his quae ab optimis principibus agenda sunt*, about which he writes: "A ruler is required to practice virtues which are in some sense contrary to those recommended to a woman in general . . . ; how then should queens, princesses and other women who by their social status form part of public life, behave?" Nifo's response is derived from "ancient declarations on this subject": ". . . ancient noblewomen were praised for chastity, conjugal fidelity, stoic apathy, patriotism, learning and eloquence, political activity and liberality." But the "virtues" of "women in general"—which include "moderation, modesty, chastity, temperance, abstinence, sobriety and silence"—do not make sovereignty impossible for the noblewoman. Rather, such virtues "concord quite well with those he has already established to be the virtues of a ruler: prudence, justice, modesty, mildness, piety, humanity." And so, Maclean concludes, "for [Nifo] there is no great problem in recommending the wives and daughters of rulers to behave like their husbands and fathers" (*The Renaissance Notion of Woman: A Study in the Fortunes of Scholasticism and Medical Science in European Intellectual Life* [1980; rpt. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988], 61–2).

97. The treatise was published in Antwerp in 1523. Like the declamation written by Agrippa, the treatise composed by Vives was widely translated; there were at least thirty-five editions and translations before the end of the sixteenth century. The Latin edition was printed again in Basle in 1538 and reprinted in 1540 and 1541. The treatise was translated into English by Richard Hyrde (d. 1528) and published

in 1540 as *A very frutefull and pleasant boke called the Instruction of a Christen Woman*; on Hyrde's translation, see below. Further English editions followed in 1541, 1557, and 1592. Castilian translations appeared in 1528, 1529, 1535, and 1539 and French versions in 1542 and 1579. German and Italian translations were printed in 1544 and 1546 respectively. On the printing history of the book, see Foster Watson, *Vives and the Renaissance Education of Women* (New York: Longmans, Green & Co., 1912), xiii–xv. Watson prints two other works by Vives on the education of women, *De ratione studii puerilis* (Louvain, 1524) and the third chapter (“De disciplina feminae”) of *De officio mariti* (Bruges, 1529). The last of these educational works was translated into English by Thomas Paynell, *The Office and Duetie of an Husband* (London, 1538).

All references here are to the British Library's copy of Hyrde's 1541 edition. No complete version of Vives's treatise in a modern English translation has been readily accessible until Charles Fantazzi's (trans. and ed.) new edition: *The Education of a Christian Woman: A Sixteenth-Century Manual*, *The Other Voice in Early Modern Europe* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000). I have included references to Fantazzi's version in parenthesis following the reference to Hyrde. Hyrde's spelling and punctuation have been silently modernized here.

On Vives's relationship with Catherine of Aragon, see Garrett Mattingly, *Catherine of Aragon* (1941; rpt. New York: Book-of-the-Month-Club, 1990), 186–90 and, more recently, David Loades, *Mary Tudor: A Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 31–3.

Two excellent essays on Vives are Valerie Wayne, “Some Sad Sentence: Vives's *Instruction of a Christian Woman*,” in *Silent But for the Word: Tudor Women as Patrons, Translators, and Writers of Religious Works*, ed. Margaret P. Hannay (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 1985), 15–29 and 258–60 (notes); and Timothy G. Elston, “Transformation or Continuity? Sixteenth-Century Education and the Legacy of Catherine of Aragon, Mary I, and Juan Luis Vives,” in “*High and Mighty Queens*” of *Early Modern England: Realities and Representations*, ed. Carole Levin, Jo Eldridge Carney, and Debra Barrett-Graves (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 11–26.

98. Fantazzi, *Education*, 8–13, 30–5.
99. Vives, *Instruction of a Christian Woman*, sigs. B1r–B1v (Fantazzi, *Education*, 45–6).
100. Vives, *Instruction of a Christian Woman*, sig. B1v (Fantazzi, *Education*, 46).
101. Vives, *Instruction of a Christian Woman*, sig. B2r (Fantazzi, *Education*, 47).
102. Vives, *Instruction of a Christian Woman*, sigs. B4r–B4v (Fantazzi, *Education*, 50).
103. For all this see Vives, *Instruction of a Christian Woman*, sigs. D2r–E1v (Fantazzi, *Education*, 63–70).

Isabella's daughters—Catherine of Aragon's sisters (and thus Mary Tudor's aunts)—were Isabel (1470–98), Juana (1479–1555), and Maria (1482–1517). Isabel was married first to Afonso of Portugal; after his death, she was married to Manuel I of Portugal. Following Isabel's death, Manuel was married to Isabel's younger sister, Maria. Juana married Philip of Austria; their children included the Holy Roman Emperors Charles V and Ferdinand I (their daughter Leonor [1498–1558] was married to Manuel I of Portugal after Maria's death). After Isabella's death in 1504, Juana was titular queen of Castile.

Sir Thomas More's daughters were Margaret, Elizabeth, and Cecilia. Margaret More Roper (1504–44), the eldest and most accomplished, translated Erasmus's *Devout Treatise on the Pater Noster*.

104. For all this see Vives, *Instruction of a Christian Woman*, sigs. E1v–E3r (Fantazzi, *Education*, 71–2).
105. Vives, *Instruction of a Christian Woman*, sig. E3r (Fantazzi, *Education*, 73).
106. Vives, *Instruction of a Christian Woman*, sigs. E2r–E2v (Fantazzi, *Education*, 71–2).
107. Vives, *Instruction of a Christian Woman*, sig. E2v (Fantazzi, *Education*, 73).

The phrase describing Vives's educational program is from Loades, *Mary Tudor*, 31. While noting Vives's recognition of women's intellectual capacity and his views about the "mutuality and companionship" of marriage, Fantazzi notes that, about the "nonintellectual qualities" of women, Vives "remains staunchly traditional, even fanatically so" (2).

108. Vives, *Instruction of a Christian Woman*, sig. C3v (Fantazzi, *Education*, 58); the particular image here may be Hyrde's rather than Vives's. The specific reference to a bridle does not appear in Fantazzi's translation, but that a woman must be rigorously controlled to keep her from rushing "headlong" into evil is clear. Such an image may say much about Hyrde's views of women; see below, 95–6.
109. Vives, *Instruction of a Christian Woman*, sigs. C3r–D1r (Fantazzi, *Education*, 58–9).
110. Vives, *Instruction of a Christian Woman*, sigs. U2v, X3v, Y2v–Y3r (Fantazzi, *Education*, 177, 186, 194).
111. Vives, *Instruction of a Christian Woman*, sigs. G3v–H2v (Fantazzi, *Education*, 243–8).
112. Vives, *Instruction of a Christian Woman*, sig. H2v (the signatures begin over after Y4v—the reference here is to the second H2v: Book Two, Chapter Nine, "Of Walking Abroad"; Fantazzi, *Education*, 248).
113. In Fantazzi's edition of Vives, Hyrde's insertion comes in the fifth line on p. 248, following the sentence that ends "husband's power" and the next sentence, which begins with "Thucydides." It is only with the effort to reclaim texts like Vives's that we can begin to see how they have been used and rewritten, even in the sixteenth century.
114. Benson, *Renaissance Woman*, 179 and 181.

A position very similar to Vives's is found in Giovanni Michele Bruto's educational treatise for young women, *La Institutione di una fanciulla nata nobilmente* (Anvers, 1555). For an extended discussion of this treatise, see Antonella Cagnolati, "Giovanni Michele Bruto e l'educazione femminile: *La Institutione di una fanciulla nata nobilmente* (1555)," *Discussion Papers [University of Ferrara]* 64 (2001); available at www.unife.it/castelli/monografie/monografie.html.

115. Henry Fitzroy was born in 1519; his name—"Fitzroy"—made his relationship to the king explicit. On this see J. J. Scarisbrick, *Henry VIII* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1970), 147–51.
116. Scarisbrick's extended analysis of the king's "great matter" occupies the core of his biography of Henry VIII (163–354) and remains an unsurpassed account.
117. Elyot's *The Defence of Good women, devised and made by Sir Thomas Elyot knyght* was published in London. I quote here from the British Library copy of the 1545 edition (spelling and punctuation have been modernized) since this is the edition

- published by Watson, *Vives*, 211–39. For convenience, I include here, in parentheses, page references to Watson's transcription.
118. In his *Boke named the Gouvemour*, Elyot wrote, "I purpose to make a book onely for ladies; wherein her laud shall be more amply expressed" (quoted by Watson, *Vives*, 211). Elyot's *Defence* was composed between the 1531 publication of the *Boke named the Gouvemour*, when he announced his intentions, and before Catherine of Aragon's death in 1536.
 119. Constance Jordan, "Feminism and the Humanists: The Case of Sir Thomas Elyot's *Defence of Good Women*," in *Rewriting the Renaissance: The Discourses of Sexual Difference in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Margaret W. Ferguson, Maureen Quilligan, and Nancy Vickers (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 246 (this essay was first published as "Feminism and the Humanists: The Case of Sir Thomas Elyot's *The Defence of Good Women*," *Renaissance Quarterly* 36, no. 2 [1983]: 181–201).
 120. On the relationship of the Elyot's *Defence* and Catherine of Aragon, see Watson, *Vives*, 212, Benson, *Rennaisance Woman*, 183–203, and, especially, Jordan, "Feminism and the Humanists," 242–58. On the many plots to place Catherine on the throne as regent for Mary, see Mattingly, *Catherine of Aragon*, 388–423.
 121. Elyot, *Defence*, sig. A1v (Watson, *Vives*, 213). In what follows, spelling and punctuation have been modernized.
 122. Elyot, *Defence*, sigs. A2r–A2v (Watson, *Vives*, 213–14).
 123. Jordan, "Feminism and the Humanists," 184.
 124. Elyot, *Defence*, sig. A1v (Watson, *Vives*, 213).
 125. Elyot, *Defence*, sigs. C7v (Watson, *Vives*, 232).
 126. Elyot, *Defence*, sigs. C5v–D1r (Watson, *Vives*, 230–3).
 127. Elyot, *Defence*, sigs. C8v–D1v (Watson, *Vives*, 233–4).
 128. Elyot, *Defence*, sigs. D2r–D3r (Watson, *Vives*, 235–6).
 129. Elyot, *Defence*, sig. D3v (Watson, *Vives*, 236).
 130. Elyot, *Defence*, sigs. D3v–D5r (Watson, *Vives*, 236–7).
 131. Elyot, *Defence*, sigs. D5v–D6v (Watson, *Vives*, 237–8).
 132. Elyot, *Defence*, sigs. D6v–D7r (Watson, *Vives*, 238–9).
 133. Fantazzi, *Education*, 33.
 134. Benson, *Rennaisance Woman*, 203. Benson does make the point that Elyot "argues the capacity of women to rule, but not their right," but she regards Elyot's work as much more pro-woman than I do.
- Valerie Wayne is also cautious in her reading of Elyot: "His treatment of her [Zenobia's] life only after she is defeated by the Emperor Aurelian is analogous to the defeat she suffers from her confinement to a domestic role in his account. Although he argues for woman's superiority, Elyot is the only writer who focuses primarily on Zenobia's life after that defeat"; see her "Zenobia in Medieval and Renaissance Literature," in *Ambiguous Realities*, 48–65 (the quotation is found on p. 59).
- See also Dennis J. O'Brien, "The Character of Zenobia According to Giovanni Boccaccio, Christine de Pizan, and Sir Thomas Elyot," *Medieval Perspectives* 8 (1993): 53–68.
135. On the "war panic" that resulted from Henry's fourth marriage, see Scarisbrick, *Henry VIII*, 535–73.

136. On the printing history of Vives's Latin original and its translations, see n. 97, above.
137. Sperone Speroni (1500–1588) was a noted philosopher at the University of Padua. His *Della dignità della donna* was first published in 1542, and then included in his collected *Dialoghi* (Venice, 1596). His dialogue is included in *Trattatisti del Cinquecento*, ed. Mario Pozzi (Milan-Naples, Riccardo Ricciardi, 1996), 2:565–84. All translations are my own.
 For critical comment on Speroni's use of the dialogue form and for the influence of Castiglione on Speroni, see Olga Zorzi Pugliese, "Sperone Speroni and the Labyrinthine Discourse of Renaissance Dialogue," in *Imagining Culture: Essays in Early Modern History and Literature*, ed. Jonathan Hart (New York: Garland Publishing, 1996), 57–72.
138. For biographical information on Michele Barozzi, Daniele Barbaro, and Speroni, see Pozzi, *Trattatisti*, 2:565 n. 1. Speroni's work resembles Castiglione's in the characters he creates: unlike Elyot's fictional Candidus and Caninius, Speroni constructs fictional versions of his friends and contemporaries in his *On the Dignity of Woman*.
139. Beatrice degli Obizzi, the wife of Gasparo Obizzi, was originally from Ferrara; her house was a gathering place for scholars and poets, including Speroni, who composed his *Dialogo delle laudi del Catai* in her honor (Pozzi, *Trattatisti*, 2:566 n. 1). Barbaro's reference to her as a "paragon" is found at 2:567.
140. Speroni, *On the Dignity of Women*, 2:568 n. 2.
141. Speroni, *On the Dignity of Women*, 2:568–9.
142. Speroni, *On the Dignity of Women*, 2:567–79.
 The specific question about woman's role in government is raised briefly on 2:575. On the scope of the debate, see also Jordan, *Renaissance Feminism*, 152–4, though she attributes the embedded conversation to Barbaro and Barozzo.
143. Speroni, *On the Dignity of Women*, 2:569–70.
144. Speroni, *On the Dignity of Women*, 2:270–1.
 Valeria Finucci notes a fascinating detail about Speroni's treatise: his comments about marriage in *On the Dignity of Women* were "brought to the attention of the Inquisition because of some assertions about marriage that the church found unacceptable (namely, that men created it to better disempower women)," *The Lady Vanishes*, 267 n. 14.
145. Jordan makes no mention of Beatrice's presence or her views.
146. Speroni, *On the Dignity of Women*, 2:279.
147. Speroni, *On the Dignity of Women*, 2:579–83.
148. Torquato Tasso (1544–95) was born in Naples. His father, Bernardo Tasso, was both courtier and poet. Tasso followed his father into exile in 1552, traveling with him to Rome and then to the court of Urbino. In 1560 he was at the University of Padua, to study law. He met Sperone Speroni there and studied Aristotle under him. From 1565 he was at the court of Alfonso II of Ferrara, where he enjoyed the patronage of the duke's sisters Lucrezia and Leonora. He left Ferrara after Lucrezia d'Este's marriage in 1570, traveled to Paris, returning to Ferrara in 1571. His most famous literary work, *Jerusalem Delivered* (*Gerusalemme liberata*), was published in 1575.

149. His *Discorso della virtù femminile et donnesca* (Venice, 1582) is very short, just eight folios in its printed form. For a modern critical edition, see Maria Luisa Doglio (Palermo: Sellerio Editore, 1997). An e-text is available at www.liberliber.it/biblioteca/t/tasso. I quote here from the 1582 edition; all translations are my own.
150. Tasso, *Discorso*, 2r–2v.
 Alfonso II d'Este of Ferraro was married three times: in 1560, he was married to Lucrezia de Medici; in 1564, to Barbara of Austria; in 1579, to Margherita Gonzaga. Tasso does not name the duchess for whom he intended his oration, but he does refer to Mary of Austria, whom he identifies as the “sister of Charles V and of Ferdinand, *your father*” thus providing us the key to identifying Barbara of Austria as the “most serene highness” Tasso was addressing (*italics added*). Although his discourse was published in 1582, it must have been composed before 1572, the year of Barbara of Austria’s death, and likely before 1570, when Lucrezia d’Este left Ferrara to be married. On the references to Lucrezia in the “discourse,” see n. 157, below.
151. Tasso, *Discorso*, 3r.
152. Tasso, *Discorso*, 3r–4r.
153. Tasso, *Discorso*, 4r–4v.
154. For an excellent discussion of this “sexual ethics,” see Maclean, *The Renaissance Notion of Woman*, 62.
155. Tasso, *Discorso*, 5v–6v.
 Artemisia (d. c. 350 BCE) ruled Caria for three years after her husband Mausolus died. We have met Zenobia, Semiramis (above, n. 31), and Cleopatra (above, n. 10) before.
156. Tasso, *Discorso*, 7r.
157. Tasso, *Discorso*, 7v.
 In this passage Tasso also addresses Barbara’s three sisters-in-law, Anna, Lucrezia, and Leonora d’Este; since Lucrezia d’Este left Ferrara for marriage in 1570, this reference suggests that Tasso may have been composing his “discourse” before 1570 (see above, n. 150; although Lucrezia returned to Ferrara two years after her marriage, Barbara—Alfonso’s second duchess—died in 1572).
158. Together these three Habsburg women governed the Netherlands for most of the sixteenth century. The renowned Margaret of Austria (1480–1530) was married, successively, to Charles VIII of France, Juan of Castile (heir to Ferdinand and Isabella), and Philibert of Savoy; aunt of Charles V and Ferdinand (Barbara’s father), she served as regent of the Netherlands from 1507 to 1515 and 1519 to 1530. Mary of Austria (1505–58) was Barbara’s aunt, Charles and Ferdinand’s sister; she married Louis of Hungary and Bohemia, and, after his death, followed Margaret of Austria as regent of the Netherlands (1531–55). Margaret of Parma, Charles V’s illegitimate daughter (and Barbara’s cousin), succeeded Mary of Austria as regent of the Netherlands (1559–67).
159. Lucrezia Borgia (1480–1519) was married to Alfonso I d’Este. Isabella d’Este (see above, 75) was Alfonso I’s sister; she married Francesco Gonzaga of Mantua and served as regent of Mantua for him during his absences.
160. See chapter one, 24.

161. Among those Protestants to whom Renée offered refuge was John Calvin. He visited her in 1536; under his influence, she was converted in 1540. Despite her support for the Protestant reformer (and despite his protestations of support for female sovereigns), he offered her no support in return when she was imprisoned by her husband.
 Olympia Morata (1526–55), a classical scholar, was born at Ferrara. Her father tutored the Este princes, while she herself was both companion and tutor for Anna, Renée’s youngest daughter. Like the duchess Renée, Olympia was a convert to Protestantism. She left Ferrara when she married Andrew Grunthler of Schweinfurt in 1550. For her writing, see Olympia Morata, *The Complete Writings of an Italian Heretic*, ed. and trans. Holt N. Parker, *The Other Voice in Early Modern Europe* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003).
- Vittoria Colonna (1490–1547) was an Italian poet, born in Rome. She, too, favored religious reform, but did not convert. This may be why, later in his discourse, Tasso includes her among the models he provides for Barbara. For Ellen Moody’s translations of Colonna’s poetry, see www.jimandellen.org/vcpoetry/vctitle.htm.
162. Renée had inherited the duchy of Brittany from her mother, Anne of Brittany (see n. 82, above). The French king, Francis I, was her brother-in-law, married to her older sister Claude.
163. Jordan notes that Tasso makes no reference to *la donna donesca* in his *Il padre della famiglia* (1580), which “does, however, suggest that a woman of noble birth may have a public and political authority over a husband of lesser rank.” Despite this, however, the woman of rank “must think that no distinction of rank can be as great as that difference which nature has made between men and women, and by which women are naturally made the subordinates of men” (Jordan, *Renaissance Feminism*, 148 n. 17).
164. An excellent reference here is Rayna Kalas, “The Technology of Reflection: Renaissance Mirrors of Steel and Glass,” *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 32, no. 3 (2002): 519–42 (her notes provide further reading on the subject).
165. See chapter one, 18.
166. Valeria Finucci, *The Lady Vanishes: Subjectivity and Representation in Castiglione and Ariosto* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1992), 39.
167. Justus Lipsius (1547–1606) was a renowned philosopher, a neo-Stoic; among other universities, he had positions at the Catholic University of Louvain and the Calvinist University of Leiden. His *Politica* was published late in the sixteenth century (Leiden, 1589), then republished in his collected works, *Opera omnia* (Lyon, 1613). The *Politica* was translated into English by William Jones, *Sixe Bookes of Politickes or Civil Doctrine, written in Latine by Justus Lipsius: which doe especially concerne Principallitie* (London, 1594); I rely here on Jones’s 1594 translation (spelling and punctuation have been modernized).
 On Lipsius, see Maclean, *The Renaissance Notion of Woman*, 55, 85, and 110 n. 66, and the entry in the *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy* [online]; available at www.utm.edu/research/iep/1/lipsius/htm. See also the excellent analysis offered by Ann Moss, “The *Politica* of Justus Lipsius and the Commonplace-Book,” *The Journal of the History of Ideas* 59, no. 3 (1998): 421–36.

168. The description of Tasso's work as "contentious" comes from Maclean, *The Renaissance Notion of Woman*, 62.
169. Lipsius, *Sixte Bookes of Politickes*, sigs. A5v–A6r. Of these sources, Lipsius proclaims that "Cornelia Tacitus hath the preeminence." Aside from Tacitus, Lipsius has "two ranks" of sources, those whom he uses "most often," and those "whose authority [he uses] more sparingly."
170. Moss, *The Politica of Justus Lipsius*, 423–5.
171. Moss, *The Politica of Justus Lipsius*, 428.
172. Lipsius, *Sixte Bookes of Politickes*, D2r.
173. Lipsius, *Sixte Bookes of Politickes*, D2r.
174. Lipsius, *Sixte Bookes of Politickes*, D2r–D2v.
175. On Howard, see chapter two.
176. For an extended and thoughtful analysis of the "survival of a coherent scholastic notion of woman" in the early modern period and of the point that "there is less change in the notion of woman throughout the Renaissance than intellectual ferment and empirical enquiry of various kinds might lead one to expect," see Maclean. In spite of the "intellectual and spiritual" influence of neoplatonism, the development of textual scholarship, and historicism, Maclean concludes: "... the scholastic infrastructure of the Renaissance notion of woman remains intact. This is due in no small part to the strong synthetic nature of the scholastic notion; no other system is evolved which is able to offer as comprehensive an explanation for the biblical commonplaces about woman. It is striking that there is no deep rift of opinion about woman between those writing in the early Renaissance and those writing at its end, nor between Catholic and reformed theologians. . . . It emerges from this study that the scholastic notion of woman is modified only slightly by Renaissance theologians and commentators" (25–7).
177. For these readings and on the many possible interpretations of the declamation, which perhaps "represent a strategy of discourse which is subversive in intention," see Maclean, *The Renaissance Notion of Woman*, 91; Newman, "Renaissance Feminism," 338–9; and Rabil, *Declamation on the Nobility*, 30. (Rabil discusses the tone of the declamation, 10–12 and 29–32.)

Four The Gynecocracy Debate: Women's Voices

1. All references are from Christine de Pizan, *Le Livre de la cité des dames*, ed. Eric Hicks and Thérèse Moreau (Paris: Editions Stock, 1992), 62–3; the quotation is on pp. 62–3, but the translation is my own. De Pizan's book is readily accessible in English translation. I am particularly fond of Earl Jeffrey Richards's *The Book of the City of Ladies* (New York: Persea Books, 1982); for ease of reference, I have included citations from his modern English translation in parenthesis; the quotation here is found on p. 32.
2. Pizan, *Le Livre de la cité des dames*, 180 (Richards, *The Book of the City of Ladies*, 154–5).

3. A bibliography is printed in Pizan, *Le Livre de la cité des dames*, 29–34 and in Richards, *The Book of the City of Ladies*, xxii–xxvi.

The secondary literature on Christine de Pizan is large and growing. For an excellent introduction, see Charity Cannon Willard, *Christine de Pizan: Her Life and Works* (New York: Persea Books, 1984). More to our purpose here, see Sarah Hanley, “Identity Politics and Rulership in France: Female Political Place and the Fraudulent Salic Law in Christine de Pizan and Jean de Montreuil,” in *Changing Identities in Early Modern France*, ed. Michael Wolfe (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1977), 78–94, and, more recently, Rosalind Brown-Grant, *Christine de Pizan and the Moral Defence of Women: Reading Beyond Gender* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

4. For a brief survey of medieval views about women and the *querelle des femmes*, see the “Editors’ Introduction to the Series,” in every volume of The Other Voice in Early Modern Europe series; the description of the letters between Christine and several male scholars as the “opening volley” in the *querelle* comes from the introduction as printed in Henricus Cornelius Agrippa, *Declamation on the Nobility and Preeminence of the Female Sex*, trans. and ed. Albert Rabil Jr. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), xix.

See also Gisela Bock, “*Querelle des femmes*: A European Gender Dispute,” Chapter One of *Women in European History* (New York: Blackwell Publishers, 2002) and Androniki Dialetti, “‘Defenders’ and ‘Enemies’ of Women in Early Modern Italian *Querelle des Femmes*. Social and Cultural Categories or Empty Rhetoric?” (paper presented at Gender and Power in the New Europe, the Fifth European Feminist Research Conference, Lund University, Sweden, August 2003); available at www.5thfeminist.lu.se/filer/paper_248.pdf.

5. For Boccaccio’s *Famous Women*, see chapter three, 65–72.
6. Pizan, *Le Livre de la cité des dames*, 35 (Richards, *The Book of the City of Ladies*, 3).
7. In their edition of *Le Livre de la cité des dames*, Hicks and Moreau allude explicitly to Virginia Woolf’s *A Room of One’s Own* by naming Pizan “a sister for Shakespeare,” 16.
8. Pizan, *Le Livre de la cité des dames*, 35–6 (Richards, *The Book of the City of Ladies*, 4).
9. Pizan, *Le Livre de la cité des dames*, 36 (Richards, *The Book of the City of Ladies*, 4).
10. Pizan, *Le Livre de la cité des dames*, 37–8 (Richards, *The Book of the City of Ladies*, 5).
11. Among the texts we have examined in detail, Juan Luis Vives’s conduct book, *The Instruction of a Christian Woman* (*De institutione feminae christianae*), is most apropos—in outlining the appropriate educational program for women, he addresses himself not to women themselves but to the men responsible for them. On this, see chapter three, 92–7.

Especially helpful here is Carla Casagrande, “The Protected Woman,” trans. Clarissa Botsford, in *Silences of the Middle Ages*, ed. Christiane Klapisch-Zuber, vol. 2 of *A History of Women* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992), 70–104, in particular the section headed “Women’s Vices and Virtues,” 84–104.

12. The three estates of women—virginity, marriage, and widowhood—provide the organizing principle for many medieval and early modern works, including, most notably here, Juan Luis Vives’s *Instruction of a Christian Woman*, divided into three parts, “instructing” women in the proper behavior for unmarried girls, wives, and widows; see chapter three, 92–7.

13. Pizan, *Le Livre de la cité des dames*, 55 (Richards, *The Book of the City of Ladies*, 23–4).
14. Pizan, *Le Livre de la cité des dames*, 58 (Richards, *The Book of the City of Ladies*, 27).
15. Pizan, *Le Livre de la cité des dames*, 62–3 (Richards, *The Book of the City of Ladies*, 32).
16. Pizan, *Le Livre de la cité des dames*, 64 (Richards, *The Book of the City of Ladies*, 33–4).

Fredegund (fl. 560s–c. 597) was queen consort of Chilperic; after his death in 584, she was regent for her son, Lothair. Pizan comes back to the example of Fredegund later in this book, telling her story in some detail (*Le Livre de la cité des dames*, 87–8 [Richards, *The Book of the City of Ladies*, 59–60]). As an indication of her rewriting of history from a woman's perspective, contrast Pizan's positive biography of Fredegund to the brief but extremely negative entry in the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 15th ed., s. v. "Fredegund." For a detailed examination of Fredegund's life and reputation, see the nuanced analysis of Dick Harrison in his *The Age of Abbesses and Queens: Gender and Political Culture in Early Medieval Europe* (Lund, Sweden: Nordic Academic Press, 1998), 105–30.

17. Pizan, *Le Livre de la cité des dames*, 64–5 (Richards, *The Book of the City of Ladies*, 34).
Blanche of Castile (1188–1252), was the wife of Louis VIII and queen of France; her son Louis IX is also known as Saint Louis.
18. Pizan, *Le Livre de la cité des dames*, 65–6 (Richards, *The Book of the City of Ladies*, 34–5).

Jeanne d'Evreaux (m. 1326–d. 1370) was the third wife of Charles IV, king of France; when her husband died, Jeanne was pregnant. Her daughter, Blanche of France (1328–92), was Charles IV's posthumously born child; she married Philip of Orléans. Blanche of Navarre (1335–98) was married first to John, king of Navarre and then, after his death, to Philip VI of France. Mary of France (d. 1404), duchess of Anjou, was married to Louis of Anjou, king of Naples and Sicily. Catherine of Vendôme (m. 1364–d. 1411) was the daughter of Jean VI, duke of Vendôme; after her brother's death, in 1375, she inherited Vendôme and Castres. After her husband's death in 1393, she governed all his lands as well as her own.

In Book 2 Pizan includes additional contemporary examples of powerful women, this time among those "loved for their virtues," including Isabel of Bavaria (1370–1435), queen of France, to whom Pizan presented her work; Jeanne, the duchess of Berry (1375–c. 1410); Valentina Visconti (m. c. 1388–d. 1408), duchess of Orléans; Margaret of Bavaria (1392–1442), duchess of Burgundy; Mary of Berry (1373–1434), duchess of Bourbon; and Margaret (fl. 1370s–1410s), duchess of Holland and countess of Hainault.

On the references to historical women in Pizan's *Le Livre de la cité des dames*, see Glynnis M. Cropp, "Les Personnages féminins tirés de l'histoire de la France dans le *Livre de la cité des dames*," in *Une Femme de lettres au Moyen Age: Études autour de Christine de Pizan*, ed. L. Dulac and B. Ribémont (Orléans [France]: Paradigme, 1995), 195–208.

19. Pizan, *Le Livre de la cité des dames*, 66 (Richards, *The Book of the City of Ladies*, 35–6).
20. Pizan, *Le Livre de la cité des dames*, 67 (Richards, *The Book of the City of Ladies*, 36).
21. On Semiramis as she appears in male-authored texts, see chapter three, 74 and n. 31.
22. Pizan, *Le Livre de la cité des dames*, 69–70 (Richards, *The Book of the City of Ladies*, 38–40).

23. Pizan, *Le Livre de la cité des dames*, 71–2 (Richards, *The Book of the City of Ladies*, 40–1).

24. Pizan, *Le Livre de la cité des dames*, 80 (Richards, *The Book of the City of Ladies*, 51).

25. For Boccaccio's treatment of Zenobia, see chapter three, 68–9.

For Pizan's biography of Zenobia, see *Le Livre de la cité des dames*, 81–3 (Richards, *The Book of the City of Ladies*, 52–5).

26. Pizan, *Le Livre de la cité des dames*, 82 (Richards, *The Book of the City of Ladies*, 53).

27. Pizan, *Le Livre de la cité des dames*, 83 (Richards, *The Book of the City of Ladies*, 55).

A substantial body of criticism explores Pizan's rewriting of Boccaccio. See, for example, Patricia A. Phillippy, "Establishing Authority: Boccaccio's *De Claris Mulieribus* and Christine de Pizan's *Le Livre de la cité des dames*," in *The Selected Writings of Christine de Pizan*, ed. Renate Blumenfeld-Kosinski (New York: Norton, 1997), 329–61 (reprinted from *Romanic Review* 77, no. 3 [1986]: 167–94); Judith Kellogg, "Christine de Pizan and Boccaccio: Rewriting Classical Mythic Tradition," in *Comparative Literature East and West: Traditions and Trends*, ed. Cornelia N. Moore and Raymond A. Moody, vol. 1, *Literary Studies: East and West* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1989), 124–31; Giovannina Angeli, "Encore sur Boccaccio et Christine de Pizan: Remarques sur le *De Mulieribus claris* et *Le Livre de la cité des dames*," *Moyen Français* 50 (2002): 115–25.

On various treatments of Zenobia, see Valerie Wayne, "Zenobia in Medieval and Renaissance Literature," in *Ambiguous Realities: Women in the Middle Ages and Renaissance*, ed. Carole Levin and Jeanie Watson (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 1987), 48–65; and Dennis J. O'Brien, "The Character of Zenobia According to Giovanni Boccaccio, Christine de Pizan, and Sir Thomas Elyot," *Medieval Perspectives* 8 (1993): 53–68.

28. For Margaret of Burgundy, see above, n. 18.

There are two excellent and accessible English translations available: *A Medieval Woman's Mirror of Honor: The Treasury of the City of Ladies*, trans. Charity Cannon Willard and ed. Madeleine Pelner Cosman (New York: Persea Books, 1989), and *The Treasure of the City of Ladies; Or the Book of the Three Virtues*, trans. Sarah Lawson (New York: Penguin Books, 1985); all citations here are from Lawson's edition.

For a critical edition of *The Treasure of the City of Ladies*, see Charity Cannon Willard, ed., in collaboration with Eric Hicks, *Le Livre des trois vertus: Edition critique* (Paris: Librairie Honoré Champion, 1989).

Pizan's *The Book of the Body Politic*, written between late 1404 and 1407 for the fourteen-year-old Louis of Guyenne, heir to the French throne, is a parallel to *The Treasure of the City of Ladies*. This "mirror for princes" had an instructive and advisory purpose, its goal preparing a prince to be a model king. See *The Book of the Body Politic*, trans. and ed. Kate Langdon Forham (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994). On this and Pizan's *Mirror for Princes*, her views on kingship, justice, law, peace, and just war, see Kate Langdon Forham, *The Political Theory of Christine de Pizan, Women and Gender in the Early Modern World* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2002).

29. Pizan, *Treasure of the City of Ladies*, 35–104.

30. Pizan, *Treasure of the City of Ladies*, 66, 49–50, 65, 74–6.
31. Pizan, *Treasure of the City of Ladies*, 60.
32. Pizan, *Treasure of the City of Ladies*, 80.
33. Pizan, *Treasure of the City of Ladies*, 82–3.
34. Pizan, This letter is included in Charity Cannon Willard, *The Writings of Christine de Pizan* (NY: Persea Books, 1994), 269–74.
35. Pizan, “Letter to the Queen,” 270.
 Isabel of Bavaria married Charles VI of France in 1385. In 1393, Charles VI named his wife Isabel as guardian of their son, Charles. In the king’s absence, she was to govern in cooperation with an advisory council. When Charles VI began to suffer bouts of insanity, her role was expanded, and she functioned as regent of France. She has been routinely vilified, both by her contemporaries and by historians; see Rachel Gibbons, “Isabeau of Bavaria, Queen of France (1385–1422): The Creation of an Historical Villainess,” *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 6th series, 6 (1996): 51–73.
36. Pizan, “Letter to the Queen,” 270.
37. Pizan, “Letter to the Queen,” 271. The specific identity of this “very great princess in Rome” is not clear.
38. Esther (c. 2 BCE) was the Jewish queen of King Xerxes. Her story is told in the Old Testament Book of Esther. For Jezebel, see chapter one, 12.
39. Pizan, “Letter to the Queen,” 271. On Blanche of Castile, see above, 122.
40. Pizan, “Letter to the Queen,” 273.
41. I refer here to the prose translation in Blumenfeld-Kosinski, “The Tale of Joan of Arc,” 252–62. A verse translation appears under the title “The Poem of Joan of Arc,” in Willard, *The Writings of Christine de Pizan*, 352–63.
42. Pizan, “The Tale of Joan of Arc,” 253.
43. Pizan, “The Tale of Joan of Arc,” 254–5.
44. Pizan, “The Tale of Joan of Arc,” 256–9.
45. Pizan, “The Tale of Joan of Arc,” 262.
46. Pizan, “The Tale of Joan of Arc,” 252 (headnote). As another example, Willard writes, “One can only hope that [Pizan’s] life ended on this triumphant note, for nothing further is heard from her” (“Introduction” to “The Poem of Joan of Arc,” 350).
47. For a different reading of Pizan’s poem, see Christine McWebb, “Joan of Arc and Christine de Pizan: The Symbiosis of Two Warriors in the *Ditié de Jehanne d’Arc*,” in *Fresh Verdicts on Joan of Arc*, ed. Bonnie Wheeler and Charles T. Wood, *The New Middle Ages* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1996), 133–44; on the dating of the poem, see also Anne D. Lutkus and Julia M. Walker, “PR pas PC: Christine de Pizan’s Pro-Joan Propaganda,” 145–60.
48. Quoted here from Richards’s translation, 14.
49. Richards, *The Book of the City of Ladies*, 117.
50. Richards, *The Book of the City of Ladies*, 155.
51. For the early collections following Boccaccio’s lead and for the responses of Arienti, Equicola, and Strozzi, see chapter three, 72–8.
52. Some twenty-five manuscript copies of *The Book of the City of Ladies* survive, including several prepared under Pizan’s supervision.

- Nineteen manuscripts of the *The Treasure of the City of Ladies* survive from the fifteenth century. On its circulation, see Charity Cannon Willard, "The Manuscript Tradition of the *Livre des Trois Vertus* and Christine de Pizan's Audience," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 27, no. 3 (1966): 433–44.
53. Pizan, British Library MS Harley 4431, fol. 3.
 54. For Anne of France, Anne of Brittany, Louise of Savoy, and Margaret of Austria, see chapter two, 50 and chapter three, 78 and 87. Marguerite of Angoulême, queen of Navarre (1492–1540) was Louise of Savoy's daughter and the mother of Jeanne d'Albret, queen regnant of Navarre.
 55. I have discussed this passing on of books by mother and daughter elsewhere; see *Anne of France: Lessons for My Daughter*, trans. and ed. Sharon L. Jansen, The Library of Medieval Women (Woodbridge, Suffolk [UK]: Boydell and Brewer, 2004). See also Charity Cannon Willard, "Anne de France, Reader of Christine de Pizan," in *The Reception of Christine de Pizan* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 1991), 59–70.
 56. Isabel of Portugal (1397–1471), the daughter of Philippa of Lancaster and João of Portugal, was married to Philip of Burgundy in 1430. Her niece Isabel, married to Alfonso of Portugal, was queen of Portugal from 1447 to 1455. Eleanor of Austria (1498–1558), was married to Emmanuel of Portugal. See Robert B. Bernard, "The Intellectual Circle of Isabel of Portugal, Duchess of Burgundy, and the Portuguese Translation of *Le Livre des Trois Vertus* (*O Livro dos Tres Vertudes*)" in *The Reception of Christine de Pizan*, 44–58.
 57. For Chambers's reference, see chapter two, 187 n. 56 (Constance Jordan discusses the sixteenth-century English edition of Pizan's *City of Ladies* in her *Renaissance Feminism: Literary Texts and Political Models* [Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1990], 105–16).
 58. Richards, *The Book of the City of Ladies*, xix.
 59. The first edition in French since 1536 is Charity Cannon Willard and Eric Hicks's *Christine de Pizan: Le Livre des trois vertus*, published in 1989.
On the survival of Pizan's reputation, if not her work, see Glenda K. McLeod, ed., *The Reception of Christine de Pizan from the Fifteenth through the Nineteenth Centuries: Visitors to the City* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 1991).
 60. Gerda Lerner, *The Creation of Feminist Consciousness, from the Middle Ages to Eighteen-seventy*, vol. 2 of *Women and History* (1993; rpt. New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 220.
 61. Battista Montefeltro Malatesta (1383–1450) governed Pesaro for her son; Ippolita Sforza (1442–80) married Alfonso of Aragon, duke of Calabria and later king of Naples. Orations by these two women are found in *Her Immaculate Hand: Selected Works by and about the Women Humanists of Quattrocento Italy*, trans. and ed. Margaret L. King and Albert Rabil, Jr. (1982; rpt. Asheville, NC: Pegasus Press, 2000). For Arienti's reference to these women, see chapter three, 75 and 196 n. 35. Battista was also mentioned by Bartolomeo Goggio; see chapter three, 197 n. 89.
Elisabetta Gonzaga (1471–1526), besides being duchess of Urbino and one of the few women in Castiglione's *The Book of the Courtier*, was a scholar in her own right, a patron of writers rather than a writer herself (King and Rabil, *Her Immaculate Hand*, 21). For her role in Castiglione, see chapter three, 84.

On all three, see also Jane Stevenson's discussion on fifteenth-century Italian noblewomen as scholars in her *Women Latin Poets: Language, Gender, and Authority, from Antiquity to the Eighteenth Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 152–73.

According to Diana Robin (translator and editor of Laura Cereta, *Collected Letters of a Renaissance Feminist, The Other Voice in Early Modern Europe* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997]), “none of these [first Italian women humanists] . . . represented herself as separate from her family or wrote for causes unconnected to its interests” (7); Robin surveys women humanists after Christine de Pizan, 7–9.

62. The phrase “second wave of woman humanists” comes from Robin (7; King and Rabil also count *quattrocento* woman humanists by “wave,” but number the waves somewhat differently). In addition to Nogarola and Cereta are Antonia Pulci (1452–1501) who wrote religious plays (see *Florentine Drama for Convent and Festival: Seven Sacred Plays*, trans. James Wyatt Cook and ed. James Wyatt Cook and Barbara Collier Cook, *The Other Voice in Early Modern Europe* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996]); and Cassandra Fedele (1465–1558), who wrote orations and Latin letters (see *Letters and Orations*, trans. and ed. Diana Robin, *The Other Voice in Early Modern Europe* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000]).

63. On the life and “career” choice of Isotta Nogarola (1418–66), see *Complete Writings: Letterbook, Dialogue on Adam and Eve, Orations*, trans. and ed. Margaret L. King and Diana Robin, *The Other Voice in Early Modern Europe* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 2–9.

Nogarola's works were “published” in her lifetime by the circulation of copies; she herself “copied out and collected her letters to assemble them for publication in a bound manuscript volume” (10). Some of her works are also “embedded in humanist miscellanies.” Her collected works were not published until the nineteenth century (see also King and Robin, *Complete Writings*, 18–19).

64. King and Robin, *Complete Writings*, 13.

In her *Joining the Conversation: Dialogues by Renaissance Women* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2005), Janet Levarie Smarr reads the exchanges of letters by fifteenth-century women writers not only as “one of the acceptable forms of writing for women” (130), but as an experiment in and precursor to the literary dialogue: “the earliest efforts of women” to use dialogue as a method of persuasion (131).

65. The letter dated 18 April 1439 or 1440 appears in King and Robin, *Complete Writings*, 98–100.
66. King and Robin, *Complete Writings*, 99.
67. King and Robin, *Complete Writings*, 10 and 99 nn. 56–59.
68. Nogarola's “book-lined cell” is what her contemporary Matteo Borso called Nogarola's retreat (King and Rabil, *Her Immaculate Hand*, 102).
69. Robin, *Collected Letters*, 12.

Laura Cereta (1469–99) was sent to a convent when she was seven, where she seems to have received most of her education. On the circulation of Cereta's letters and her difficulties in finding a publisher, see Robin, *Collected Letters*, 3. On her lack of familiarity with Christine de Pizan, see 10 n. 26 and 17.

70. Robin, "To Bibolo Semproni," *Collected Letters*, 76 and 80. The phrase Laura Cereta uses is *muliebris respublica* (80 n. 62).

About "Bibolo" Robin notes, "Cereta's correspondent might be either a real acquaintance whom she is addressing with a comical nickname—Bibolo might be translated 'tippler'—or a fictional creation and vehicle for her polemic," *Collected Letters*, 74 n. 35.

71. Robin, "To Bibolo Semproni," *Collected Letters*, 77.
 72. Robin, "To Bibolo Semproni," *Collected Letters*, 79.
 73. Pamela Joseph Benson, *The Invention of the Renaissance Woman: The Challenge of Female Independence in the Literature and Thought of Italy and England* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1992), 1.
 74. The letters to women are printed by Robin, *Collected Letters*, 17–31. Isabella of Spain (1451–1504) married Ferdinand II of Aragon. Ferdinand was the nephew of Alfonso V and an uncle of Alfonso's son Ferrante; Ferrante was the father of both Eleanor of Aragon (1450–93) and of Beatrice of Aragon (1457–1508). Beatrice d'Este (1475–97) was Eleanor of Aragon's daughter.
 75. The phrase "conventions of women's writing" comes from the introduction to Moderata Fonte, *The Worth of Women; Wherein Is Clearly Revealed Their Nobility and Their Superiority to Men*, trans. and ed. Virginia Cox, *The Other Voice in Early Modern Europe* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 3.
 76. Louise Labé (1520–66), *Complete Poetry and Prose: A Bilingual Edition*, trans. and ed. Deborah Lesko Baker and Annie Finch, *The Other Voice in Early Modern Europe* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 43. Baker, who edits and translates the prose, identifies Labé's correspondent as Mademoiselle Clémence de Bourges, Lionnoize (224, n. 28).

As only one critical reading of this preface, see Cathy Yandell, "Louise Labé's Transgressions," in *High Anxiety: Masculinity in Crisis in Early Modern France*, ed. Kathleen P. Long (Kirksville, MO: Truman State University Press, 2002), 1–17.

77. Baker, "Dedicatory Letter," 43.
 78. On the number of women rulers at this historical moment, see chapter one, 11 and 24.
 79. On Agrippa's *Preeminence of the Female Sex* (see chapter three, 78–83). Diane S. Wood notes the influence of Agrippa's declamation on Labé; see her "In Praise of Woman's Superiority: Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa's *De nobilitate* (1529)," in *Sex and Gender in Medieval and Renaissance Texts: The Latin Tradition*, ed. Barbara K. Gold, Paul Allen Miller, and Charles Platter (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997), 189–206 (the references to Labé are on p. 201).
 80. For Lady Emilia's fears, see chapter three, 84.
 81. Moderata Fonte, *The Worth of Women: Wherein Is Clearly Revealed Their Nobility and Their Superiority to Men*, trans. and ed. Virginia Cox, *The Other Voice in Early Modern Europe* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 3.

Fonte (1555–92) was unconventionally educated: "Modesta scraped herself an education at second hand by waylaying her elder brother every day on his return from school and persuading him to repeat to her the lessons he had learned," Cox, trans. and ed., *The Worth of Women*, 4–5.

- Cox's edition contains an excellent bibliography. Especially useful studies are Patricia H. Labalme, "Venetian Women on Women: Three Early Modern Feminists," *Archivio veneto*, 5, no. 117 (1981): 81–109; Paola Malpezzi Price, "A Woman's Discourse in the Italian Renaissance: Moderata Fonte's *Il merito delle donne*," *Annali d'Italianistica* 7 (1989): 165–81; Margaret F. Rosenthal, "Venetian Women Writers and Their Discontents," in *Sexuality and Gender in Early Modern Europe*, ed. James Grantham Turner (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993): 107–32; Virginia Cox, "The Single Self: Feminist Thought and the Marriage Market in Early Modern Venice," *Renaissance Quarterly* 48, no. 3 (1995): 513–81; Constance Jordan, "Renaissance Women Defending Women: Arguments against Patriarchy," in *Italian Women Writers from the Renaissance to the Present: Revising the Canon*, ed. Maria Ornella Marotti (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996), 56–67; Stephen Kolsky, "Moderata Fonte, Lucrezia Marinella, Giuseppe Passi," *Modern Language Review* 96, no. 4 (2001): 973–89; Claire Lesage, "Femmes de lettres à Venise aux XVIe et XVIIe siècles: Moderata Fonte, Lucrezia Marinella, Arcangela Tarabotti," *CLIO: Histoire, femmes, et sociétés* 13 (2001): 135–44; and Smarr, *Joining the Conversation*, especially 215–30.
82. This lavish praise of the city's government and of the unique liberties of the last surviving republic in Italy is found in Fonte, *The Worth of Women*, 43–4.
 83. Fonte, *The Worth of Women*, 44–5.
 84. Wendy Heller, *Emblems of Eloquence: Opera and Women's Voices in Seventeenth-Century Venice* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2003), 2.
All of the works cited in n. 81, above, discuss the economic and social restrictions on women in Venice in the sixteenth century, but see Cox, "The Single Self: Feminist Thought and the Marriage Market in Early Modern Venice," especially.
 85. Fonte, *The Worth of Women*, 45.
 86. Fonte, *The Worth of Women*, 59.
 87. Fonte, *The Worth of Women*, 60.
 88. Fonte, *The Worth of Women*, 61.
 89. Fonte, *The Worth of Women*, 100–102.
Later in the first day's conversation, Corinna returns to the example of Zenobia, this time including her in a second brief "history" of women, this time women known for their chastity (112).
 90. Fonte, *The Worth of Women*, 204.
 91. Fonte, *The Worth of Women*, 237.
 92. Fonte, *The Worth of Women*, 241–60. (Cox includes the text of the poem in both Italian and an English translation.)
 93. Richards, *The Book of the City of Ladies*, 214.
 94. Fonte, *The Worth of Women*, 48.
 95. On the ambiguities of the term, see Cox, trans. and ed., *The Worth of Women*, 45 n. 5. Smarr focuses on one of the meanings Cox notes: Corinna is a "member of a new kind of post-Tridentine religious institution arising in the Veneto for women who wished to live a pious and celibate life without entering a convent" (216).
 96. Fonte, *The Worth of Women*, 53.

The number of speakers and the allusive meanings of their names are discussed by Cox, trans. and ed., *The Worth of Women*, 45 n. 4.

97. Cox, trans. and ed., *The Worth of Women*, 18.
98. The characterization of Fonte's pseudonym comes from Cox, trans. and ed., *The Worth of Women*, 5.
99. Giuseppe Passi, *I Donneschi Difetti, Nuovamente formati e posti in luce da Giuseppe Passi* (Venice, 1599; New Haven, CN: Research Publications, 1975), microfilm. Vol. 424, reel 65 of *History of Women*.
100. The dedicatory letter, from Cecilia de' Zorzi to Livia Feltria della Rovere, duchess of Urbino, is printed in Cox, trans. and ed., *The Worth of Women*, 27–8. In the edition of *The Worth of Women* published in 1600, this letter was followed by two poems written by Fonte's son, Pietro de' Zorzi (Cox, trans. and ed., *The Worth of Women*, 28–30), and a brief biography written by Giovanni Niccolò Doglione, her friend, one-time guardian, and uncle by marriage (Cox, trans. and ed., *The Worth of Women*, 31–40; the quotation from p. 38).
101. For the argument that *The Worth of Women* was published in 1600 as a response to Passi's misogynist attack, see Kolsky, "Moderata Fonte, Lucrezia Marinella, Giuseppe Passi."
102. For Letizia Panizza's comments, see her introduction to Lucrezia Marinelli's *The Nobility and Excellence of Women and the Defects and Vices of Men*, trans. and ed. Anne Dunhill, *The Other Voice in Early Modern Europe* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 15.

On the popularity of *The Defects of Women*, see Heller, who indicates that the prefatory "sonnets and letters from Passi's many admirers impl[ied] a broad support for his point of view" (32).

A WorldCat search reveals three editions: the 1599 edition, published in Venice by Jacobo Antonio Somascho; a 1601 "second impression," published in Venice by Giacom'Antonio Somascho; and a "fourth impression," published in Venice by Vicenzo Somascho in 1618 with the "addition" of "several very curious things" worthy of being revealed about the "deceptions of women." The titlepage's claim that the 1618 edition is a fourth impression suggests another between those of 1601 and 1618. Panizza, "Introduction" (15, n. 37) notes occasional references to an edition of 1595.

For what follows, I rely on the 1599 edition of *The Defects of Women*. Except where noted, the translations are my own.

103. Passi qtd. by Smarr, *Joining the Conversation*, 32.
104. Passi, *Defects*, "Table of Authors Cited in this Work," C1r–C3r.

Francisco Accorso (c. 1182–c. 1260) was a legal scholar whose *Glossa ordinaria* or "Great Gloss" on Roman law remained influential through the time of the nineteenth-century Code of Napoleon. For Augustine, see chapter one, n. 11. For the Roman poet Virgil and his *Aeneid*, see chapter three, nn. 10 and 22. Xenarchus was a Greek comic playwright of the fourth century BCE; his *Pentathlon* denounces young men who devote themselves to expensive prostitutes and to married women (see Margaret Johnson and Terry Ryan, *Sexuality in Greek and Roman Society and Literature: A Sourcebook* [New York: Routledge, 2005], 97–8).

Interestingly, Passi includes two women among the authors he cites. The first is Isabella Canali Andreini (1562–1604), a *commedia dell'arte* actress, stage manager, and writer. Her sonnets were published in anthologies by 1587, her pastoral play *Mirtilla* in 1588. Her *Rime*, a collection of 359 poems, was published in 1601. Her fictionalized letters were also circulated in manuscript; the collection of 148 epistles was published by her son after her death. For an accessible account of her life and work, see “Other Women’s Voices” at www.home.infionline.net/~ddisse/andreini.html.

Passi also cites Vittoria Colonna (1490–1547), whose first collection of poetry, *Rime de la Divina Vittoria Colonna Marchesa di Pescara*, was published in 1538, following the death of her husband. The 136 poems praised her husband and mourned his loss. Further editions expanded the initial collection. Her *Rime* ultimately came to include nearly four hundred poems. Today Colonna is perhaps best known for her correspondence with Michelangelo. See the entry in “Other Women’s Voices” at www.home.infionline.net/~ddisse/colonna.html.

105. Passi, *Defects*, C3v–C4r.
 106. Passi, *Defects*, Chapters Eleven–Fourteen.
 107. Passi, *Defects*, Chapters Fifteen–Twenty.
 108. Passi, *Defects*, Chapters Twenty–Three–Twenty–Eight.
 109. Passi, *Defects*, Chapters Twenty–Nine–Thirty–Four.
 110. Passi, *Defects*, Chapter Thirty–Five.
 111. Passi, *Defects*, D1r–D4v.
 112. Kolsky, “Moderata Fonte, Lucrezia Marinella, Giuseppe Passi,” 976.
 113. On Marinella’s life (1571–1653) and work, see Panizza’s “Introduction” to Anne Dunhill’s edition of *The Nobility and Excellence of Women and the Defects and Vices of Men*, 1–34. Dunhill’s edition is the first English translation of Marinella’s work. The bibliography in this edition is rather limited; a discussion of Marinella is also included in the critical works listed in n. 81, above.
 114. Panizza, “Introduction,” 2, 9.
 115. Marinella, *The Nobility and Excellence of Women*, 77.
 116. Marinella, *The Nobility and Excellence of Women*, 94–5.
 117. Marinella, *The Nobility and Excellence of Women*, 79–80.
- While citing Plato’s *Republic*, Marinella also notes that “our good friend Aristotle” decreed that “women must obey men everywhere and in everything and not search for anything that takes them outside their houses” (79); Dunhill cites (n. 6) Aristotle’s *Economics* as Marinella’s reference here. About Aristotle and his view of women, Marinella writes, “A foolish opinion and cruel, pedantic sentence from a fearful, tyrannical man. But we must excuse him, because, being a man, it is only natural he should desire the greatness and superiority of men and not of women” (79).
118. Margaret of Austria (1480–1530) governed the Netherlands as regent for nearly twenty years. Catherine de’ Medici (1519–89) was regent of France for her son, Charles IX. See chapter two, 49–50 and chapter three, 78.
 119. Marinella, *The Nobility and Excellence of Women*, 117.
 120. Marinella, *The Nobility and Excellence of Women*, 120.
 121. Marinella, *The Nobility and Excellence of Women*, 136.

- On Sperone Speroni (1500–1588) and his *On the Dignity of Woman* (1542), see chapter three, 104–6.
122. Marinella, *The Nobility and Excellence of Women*, 138.
123. Marinella, *The Nobility and Excellence of Women*, 139.
 On Torquato Tasso (1544–95) and his *Discorso della Virtù Feminile et Donnesca* (1572), see chapter three, 106–10.
124. Marinella, *The Nobility and Excellence of Women*, 139–40.
 In citing authorities to prove Tasso's (and Aristotle's) errors, Marinella points to Plato, Xenophon, Gorgias, and Plutarch (139–41).
 Marinella had begun her "rebuttal chapter" with a text by Torquato Tasso's cousin Ercole, *On Taking a Wife (Dello ammogliarsi, 1595)*, subtitled "An Amusing Debate between the Two Contemporary Tassos, Ercole and Torquato." Ercole composed his denunciation of marriage on the occasion of his own marriage (very "amusing," one is tempted to note), and he attributes the defense of marriage to the fictionalized "Torquato," like Torquato himself unmarried. About Ercole's debate, Panizza writes, "The debate was always conducted from the point of view of the husband-to-be and his future 'quality of life.' No one ever asked whether a woman should take a husband or whether she had any point of view at all on the subject" (26).
125. Marinella, *The Nobility and Excellence of Women*, 141.
126. Giovanni Boccaccio's *Famous Women* was composed between 1360 and 1375; see chapter three, 65–72. His *Il Corbaccio*, written before the *Famous Women*, was published in Venice as *The Labyrinth of Love (Laberinto d'amore o Il Corbaccio)*. For a modern translation, see Anthony Cassell, trans. and ed., *Corbaccio or The Labyrinth of Love* (Binghamton, NY: Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 1993).
127. Panizza, "Introduction," 29.
128. Marinella, *The Nobility and Excellence of Women*, 141.
129. Marinella, *The Nobility and Excellence of Women*, 144.
130. Marinella, *The Nobility and Excellence of Women*, 145.
131. Kolsky, "Moderata Fonte, Lucrezia Marinella, Giuseppe Passi," 974.
132. Panizza, "Introduction," 2.
 Marinella's book seems to have been republished at the same pace as Passi's original: the second edition of *The Defects of Women* was published in 1601, the next in 1618 (see n. 102, above).
133. The view of Francesco Agostino della Chiesa, Marinella's contemporary, is quoted by Panizza, "Introduction," 1.
134. Panizza, "Introduction," 5.
 On Arcangela Tarabotti, see below.
 Sara Copia (Coppio) Sullam (fl. 1560–1641) was a poet, educated by her father; her home in the Jewish Ghetto became a kind of literary salon. In 1621 one of those who had joined her salon, the priest Baldassar Bonifaccio, accused her in writing of having denied the immortality of the soul. Sullam defended herself in a manifesto, the only one of her works she published. For the most accessible account of her life and work, see the entry, s. v. Sullam, Sara Copia (Coppia), from "JewishEncyclopedia.com" at www.jewishencyclopedia.com/view_friendly.jsp?artid=1157&letter=S.

135. Marinella writes in *The Nobility and Excellence of Women*, (78–9), “Moderata Fonte . . . was aware to some extent of the excellence of our sex” and quotes a passage from her *Tredici canti di Floridoro* (“It has always been seen, and can still be seen provided that a woman has determined to set her mind to it, that more than one has enjoyed military success and stolen the praise and applause from many men. . .”).
136. On this see Panizza, “Introduction,” 19. Marinella did, however, use some early sixteenth-century defenses that we have not discussed here, including Tommaso Garzoni’s *Lives of Illustrious Women from Holy Scripture with a Discourse . . . on the Nobility of Women* (1588) and Ludovico Ariosto’s *Orlando Furioso* (Panizza, “Introduction,” 19).
137. Panizza, “Introduction,” 32–3.
138. On these references, see Panizza, “Introduction,” 32.
On Marinella’s large body of work, see Panizza, “Marinella’s Life and Works,” 3–15. Her pastoral drama *Happy Arcadia* is now available in a critical edition: *Arcadia felice*, ed. Françoise Lavocat (Florence: Accademia Toscana di scienze et lettere, 1998).
139. Arcangela Tarabotti (1604–52), *Paternal Tyranny*, trans. and ed. Letizia Panizza, *The Other Voice in Early Modern Europe* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 41. The exact date of composition of *Paternal Tyranny* is not clear, but Panizza indicates that it would have been before 1643 (6), when her first published work appeared; in the “Letter to the Reader,” published in *Convent Life as Paradise* (*Il Paradiso monacale* [Venice, 1643]), Tarabotti writes, “I have composed two other works, each divided into three parts, full of truthful and concrete opinions, which were abruptly snatched from my hands,” evidently referring to *Paternal Tyranny*, which would have circulated previously in manuscript (this letter is appended to *Paternal Tyranny*, 155–7).
140. Tarabotti, *Paternal Tyranny*, 7.
141. Tarabotti, *Paternal Tyranny*, 37.
142. Tarabotti, *Paternal Tyranny*, 65.
143. Tarabotti directly addresses Passi and *The Defects of Women*, 146–7.
144. Tarabotti, *Paternal Tyranny*, 104–6.
145. Tarabotti, *Paternal Tyranny*, 140–1.
146. Tarabotti, *Paternal Tyranny*, 100–101.
147. Tarabotti, *Paternal Tyranny*, 102.
148. Tarabotti, *Paternal Tyranny*, 94–5.

Before leaving Tarabotti, it must be noted that her final work was a response to the 1647 Italian publication of the 1595 Latin tract debating whether women were human (on this, see chapter three, 192 n. 5). Tarabotti’s *Women Do Belong to the Species Mankind: A Defense of Women* (*Che le donne siano della spezie degli uomini: Difesa delle donne*) was published in 1651, the year before her death (Panizza, “Introduction,” 11). Her work is available in “*Women Are Not Human*”: *An Anonymous Treatise and Responses*, trans. and ed. Theresa M. Kenney (New York: Crossroad Publishing Co., 1998), 89–159.

149. A selection from *Jane Anger, her Protection for Women To defend them against the Scandalous Reportes of a late Surfeiting Lover, and all other like Venerians that complaines*

- to bee overloyed with womens kindnesse (London, 1589) is in *Half Humankind: Contexts and Texts of the Controversy about Women in England, 1540–1640*, ed. Katherine Usher Henderson and Barbara F. McManus (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press), 173–88. The full text is available at www.pinn.net/~sunshine/book-sum/anger1.html.
150. Anne of Denmark became queen of England in 1603, when her husband James VI of Scotland (the son of Mary Stuart) became James I of England, succeeding Elizabeth Tudor to the throne.
- On the “roaring girl” Moll Cutpurse, see Thomas Dekker’s *The Roaring Girl*, which dates from 1611 (and is now included in the *Longman Anthology of English Literature*).
151. For the reference to Thomas Adams, whose *Mystical Bedlam. Or the World of Mad-Men* (London, 1615), see Barbara Kiefer Lewalski, *The Polemics and Poems of Rachel Speght*, *Women Writers in English, 1350–1850* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), xx.
152. An edited selection from *The Araignment of Lewde, idle, froward, and unconstant woman: Or the vanitie of them, choose you whether, With a Commendacion of wise, vetuous and honest women. Pleasant for married Men, profitable for young Men, and hurtfull to none* (London, 1615) is in Henderson and McManus, *Half Humankind*, 188–216.
153. Lewalski, *The Polemics*, xxi.
154. Lewalski, *The Polemics*, xv.
155. Lewalski provides what little biographical information there is about Speght, born about 1597, xi–xix.
156. Lewalski, *A Muzzle for Melastomous*, 13.
157. The text from Paul is Galatians 3:28. Solomon’s “sentence” is from Ecclesiastes 7:28.

Five Queens and Controversy in Early Modern Europe: The End of an Era

1. King James VI (of Scotland) and I (of England), “A Speech to the Lords and Commons of the Parliament at White-Hall, on Wednesday the xxi. of March, Anno 1609,” in *Political Writings*, ed. Johann P. Sommerville (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 181 (I have taken the liberty of modernizing spelling and punctuation here).
2. John Knox, *The First Blast of the Trumpet against the Monstruous regiment of women* (Geneva, 1558), sigs. 12r–12v. Knox was evidently referring to the fourteenth-century Joanna I, queen of Naples, rumored to have been complicit in the assassination of her first husband, Andrew of Hungary, in 1345.

In this marginal note Knox also warns his readers about other women desperate to retain political power: Romilda, Athalia, and Irene. Romilda (fl. 610) was the widow of Gisulf II, duke of Friuli, and was said to have surrendered the city to her husband’s conqueror in return for one night with him. Athalia (see chapter one, 19)

tried to retain power by killing her grandchildren. Irene (c. 752–803) attempted to retain imperial power by conspiring against her son, Constantine VI.

3. John Aylmer, *An Harborowe for Faithfull and Trewe Subjectes against the late blowne Blaste, concerning for Government of Wemen* . . . ([London], 1559), sig. B3v.
4. John Leslie, *A Defence of the honour of* . . . *Marie Quene of Scotlande* . . . ([Rheims?], 1569), 120v–30v. For these women rulers, see chapter two, n. 50.
5. David Chambers, *Discours de la Légitime Succession des Femmes* . . . (Paris, 1579).
On Anne of France, Louise of Savoy, and Margaret of Austria, see chapter two, 50, chapter three, 78 and 87, and chapter four, 130–146.
6. Jean Bodin, *Six livres de la République* (Paris, 1576). Bodin's book was translated into English by Richard Knolles, *The Sixe Bookes of a Commonweale, Written by J. Bodin* . . . *out of the Frenche and Latine copies, done into English, by Richard Knolles* (London, 1606); I have used the translation by Knolles here.
7. Knolles, *The Sixe Bookes of a Commonweale*, 8 and 12. Spelling and punctuation have been modernized.

Bodin's use of the analogy of the family was not a new formulation. As Gordon J. Schochet writes in his now-classic work on the development of patriarchal political theory, "The relationship between the family and society as a whole—and between familial and political authority—is one of the leit-motives of social and political theory," originating as early as Plato and Aristotle. Yet, as Schochet notes, "It was not until the seventeenth century that familial reasoning was used as a direct justification of political obligation." See his *Patriarchalism in Political Thought: The Authoritarian Family and Political Speculation and Attitudes Especially in Seventeenth-Century England* (New York: Basic Books, 1975), 18–19. Schochet traces the development of patriarchal political thought "From Plato to Bodin and Althusius," 18–36.

Similarly, Merry E. Wiesner identifies in Bodin's *Six Livres de la République* "what would become in the seventeenth century the most frequently cited reason against [female rule]": "that the state was like a household, and just as in a household the husband/father has authority and power over all others, so in the state a male monarch should always rule"; see her *Women and Gender in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 243.

Also very useful in tracing "the analogy of the family" that is "so marked a feature of the political debate of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries" is R.W.K. Hinton, "Husbands, Fathers and Conquerors," *Political Studies* 15 (1967): 291–300 and 16 (1968): 55–68. As Hinton explains, "As the Church was the bride of Christ and bishops were married to their sees, so kings were to be married to their commonwealths. As the father loved the son and the son honoured and obeyed the father, so kings and commonwealths were to be understood as comprising a single family" (*Political Studies* 15 [1967], 291).

8. Knolles, *The Sixe Bookes of a Commonweale*, 746.
9. Sir Thomas Smith, *De Republica Anglorum: The maner of Governement or policie of the Realme of England* . . . (London, 1583), sig. C2v. Despite its Latin title, the book is, as its subtitle suggests, written in English.
10. Smith, *De Republica Anglorum*, sig. D2r.

11. John Case, *Sphaera civitatis* (Oxford, 1588), 18–19 (my translation).
12. Case's *Sphaera civitatis* is now available in a hypertext edition with both the Latin original and an English translation: John Case, *Sphaera Civitatis (The Spheres of Government)*, trans. and ed. Dana F. Sutton, available at www.eee.uci.edu/~papyri/sphaera/1eng.html. The subject of female sovereignty is discussed in *Spheres of Government*, Book One, Chapter Three, Question 5.
13. *The Spheres of Government*, trans. Sutton; the original is found in Case, *Sphaera Civitatis*, 33.
14. We have met Artemisia, Esther, and Judith before (see chapter three and chapter four). The queen of Sheba, after hearing of Solomon, came to test him (1 Kings 10:1–13, 2 Chronicles 9:1–12). The Roman Cornelia (c. 189–110 BCE), the daughter of Scipio Africanus, was noted for her eloquence; after her husband's death, she devoted herself to managing her estates and to the education of her sons, but after their deaths, she devoted herself to her studies. Her story is mentioned by Agrippa in his "declamation" (see chapter three). The story of Susanna and the elders and "innocence vindicated" is from the apocryphal Book of Daniel and Susanna. Thamyris (fl. 6th c. BCE) was the queen of Scythia who defeated Cyrus the Great in battle. Her story is included in Boccaccio's *Famous Women* (see chapter three) and Moderata Fonte's *The Worth of Women* (chapter four).
15. Case, *Sphaera civitatis*, 85–9.
16. Robert Filmer, *Patriarchia: Or the Natural Power of Kings* (London, 1680). Filmer's work was probably written during 1648–53. According to Filmer, the king "claims not his power as a donative from the people," but from God, "from whom he receives his royal charter of an universal father" (22); the king's authority "is the only right and natural authority of a supreme father" (23).
17. Filmer, *Patriarchia*, 20.
18. Filmer, *Patriarchia*, 22.
19. Schochet, *Patriarchalism in Political Thought*, 7.
20. Schochet, *Patriarchalism in Political Thought*, 139.

It is interesting to note here that Knox and his followers who had opposed women's rule had not only allowed, but had argued for, removing an "unfit" ruler from power.
21. Jacques Bossuet, *Politique Tirée des Propres Paroles de l'Écriture-Sainte* (Paris, 1709); Bossuet's work was probably written about 1680.
22. Christoforo Bronzini, *Della dignità e nobiltà delle donne* (Florence, 1622). All references here are to Jordan's discussion of Bronzini in her *Renaissance Feminism: Literary Texts and Political Models* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1990), 266–9.
23. Jordan, *Renaissance Feminism*, 266, 267.
24. The phrase "feminized society" is Jordan's; Jordan, *Renaissance Feminism*, 268, 266.
25. Bronzini's dialogue is dedicated to Maria Maddalena of Austria (1589–1631), Grand Duchess of Tuscany; after the death of her husband, Grand Duke Cosimo II de' Medici in 1621, Maria Maddalena was regent for her son Fernando. In thus "envisioning" a state ruled by a woman, Bronzini had only to refer to Tuscany for a contemporary example of rule by women.

26. Gisbertus Voetius (1589–1676) was a Calvinist theologian and scholar. His *Concerning Women*, available for the first time in English, is included in Anna Maria van Schurman, *Whether a Christian Woman Should Be Educated and Other Writings from Her Intellectual Circle*, trans. and ed. Joyce L. Irwin, *The Other Voice in Early Modern Europe* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 97–137.
27. In responding to this question, Voetius notes that this question is debated by many contemporary political theorists, including Bodin.
28. Voetius, *Concerning Women*, 122. (“Polyarchic” is the government of many, contrasted with “monarchy,” the rule of one.)
29. Even more obscure is his other example, a wise woman who negotiated with Joab (2 Samuel 20:15–22).
30. Voetius, *Concerning Women*, 122–3.
31. Voetius, *Concerning Women*, 123.
32. Voetius, *Concerning Women*, 123–4.

We have met Margaret of Parma before; see chapter three, 109. Maria Anna of Austria (1635–96) married Philip II of Spain; she was regent of Spain from 1665 to 1675 for her son.

33. Voetius, *Concerning Women*, 124–5.
The siege of Maastricht was in 1579.
34. Voetius, “Introduction,” *Concerning Women*, 19. Voetius’s treatise was not circulated independently but published as part of his vast work of systematic theology, *Politica Ecclesiastica* (Amsterdam, 1663–76).

In addition to the works discussed in detail in this chapter, political theorists throughout the seventeenth century did continue to counter absolutist constructions of power and to argue that, while married women are subject to their husbands, a queen’s marital subjection did not necessitate her political subjection. Although my analysis here is necessarily limited, see also, among others, Francisco Suarez, whose *Tractatus de legibus ac deo legislatore* (1612; rpt. London, 1679) refuted patriarchal theories of government; Samuel Rutherford, whose *Lex, Rex, or the Law and the Prince* (1644) argued that although a queen regnant might be her husband’s inferior, she could still be head of the commonwealth; and Samuel von Pufendorf, whose *De Officio hominis et civis juxta legem naturalem libri duo* (1673; trans. as *The Two Books on the Duty of Man and Citizen According to the Natural Law* (London, 1682) indicated that, while in succession “males shall be preferred to females,” their sex did not preclude women from inheriting political power.

35. Marie le Jars de Gournay (1565–1645) was the “adopted daughter” of the famous essayist Michel de Montaigne. De Gournay continued to revise her *The Equality of Men and Women* throughout her writing career, with a final version published in 1641. The 1641 version is included in *Apology for the Woman Writing and Other Works*, trans. and ed. Richard Hillman and Colette Quesnel, *The Other Voice in Early Modern Europe* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press 2002), 73–95.

Anne of Austria (1601–66), to whom de Gournay dedicated her work, was the daughter of Philip III of Spain and Margaret of Austria (1584–1611). She married Louis XIII of France in 1615; after her husband’s death she was regent for her son, Louis XIV.

36. de Gournay, *The Equality of Men and Women*, 75.
For Agrippa, see chapter three, 78–83.
37. de Gournay, *The Equality of Men and Women*, 83.
In her introduction to Lucrezia Marinella's *The Nobility and Excellence of Women and the Defects and Vices of Men*, Letizia Panizza notes (10) that de Gournay did not seem to know any of the Italian women who wrote in defense of women (see chapter four, 136–51); de Gournay seems equally not to have known Christine de Pizan, much less the extensive history of women she had compiled in the fifteenth century in *The Book of the City of Ladies* (see chapter four, 116–25).
38. de Gournay, *The Equality of Men and Women*, 84–5.
39. de Gournay, *The Equality of Men and Women*, 86.
40. A few pages later de Gournay does cite Judith and Joan of Arc, both as examples of “an inspired favor and a gift of divine and special grace toward women,” and not of “a purely human and voluntary action,” *The Equality of Men and Women*, 92–3.
41. Anna Maria van Schurman (1607–78) lived in the Netherlands and was educated along with her brothers. Her reputation as a scholar dated from her teens. Her association with Voetius dates to 1636, when he enabled her to attend lectures at the University of Utrecht, where he was rector. On this see Joyce L. Irwin's introduction to *Whether a Christian Woman Should Be Educated*, especially pp. 4–7; this volume also includes an excellent bibliography noting critical studies of van Schurman.
42. Van Schurman corresponded with Rivet on the subject of “whether the study of letters is fitting for a Christian woman,” the topic of a brief dissertation she wrote for him in 1632 (Irwin, *A Christian Woman*, 27–35). The letters following this brief work were written between January 1632 and March 1638. Van Schurman's *Dissertatio logica* was published in Paris in 1638 and in Leiden, along with the complete correspondence, in 1641 (10).
On Juan Luis Vives and his book, see chapter three.
43. For Panizza's comments, see her introduction to Lucrezia Marinella's *The Nobility and Excellence of Women and the Defects and Vices of Men*, trans. and ed. Anne Dunhill, *The Other Voice in Early Modern Europe* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 15. Marinella's *Essortazioni* was published in Venice, 1645; she also joined the “vehement misogynist” Aprosio in criticizing Arcangela Tarabotti's argument against forcing young women into taking religious vows (Panizza, “Introduction,” 15 n. 34; for Tarabotti, see chapter four).
44. Anne-Marie-Louise d'Orléans (1627–93) was the daughter of Gaston d'Orléans and Marie of Bourbon (m. 1626), who was the heiress of Henri de Bourbon, duke of Montpensier.
Françoise Bertaut de Motteville (c. 1621–89), was an attendant at the court of Anne of Austria. Motteville's mother had been born in Spain, like the Habsburg Anne, and had accompanied her to France at the time of her marriage to Louis XIII.
Anne of Austria (1601–66) was, as we have seen (above, n. 35), the daughter of Philip III of Spain. She was married to Louis XIII in 1615; after the French king's death on 14 May 1643, she was regent of France for her son, Louis XIV. Her regency ended some eight years later, 5 September 1651, when Louis XIV reached

his thirteenth birthday, the age of majority for the French king. Motteville remained in Anne's service until the dowager queen's death.

45. Four letters exchanged between the two correspondents were published by Motteville as *Recueil de quelques pieces nouvelles et galantes, tant en prose qu'en vers* (Cologne, 1667). These four letters, as well as four additional letters, have been published under Montpensier's name: Anne-Marie-Louise d'Orléans, Duchesse de Montpensier, *Against Marriage: The Correspondence of La Grande Mademoiselle*, trans. and ed. Joan DeJean, *The Other Voice in Early Modern Europe* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002); the quotation is on p. 5. While a welcome publication, DeJean's attribution of authorship solely to Montpensier is somewhat misleading, and the title identifying the subject matter of the correspondence as "against marriage" is not entirely true to Motteville half of the correspondence.

Motteville was a prolific writer; for an account of her life and work, see "Other Women's Voices," at www.home.infionline.net/~ddisse/mottevil.html. Several extended excerpts from Motteville's various works are available at this site.

Motteville's five-volume memoir of her life at court were published in the nineteenth century as *Mémoires pour servir à l'histoire d'Anne d'Autriche, épouse de Louis XIII, roi de France*, ed. Claude Petitot (Paris: Foucault, 1824–5). An abridged translation of Motteville's memoirs was published as *Memoirs of Madame de Motteville on Anne of Austria and Her Court*, trans. and ed. Katharine P. Wormeley (Boston, Hardy, Pratt & Co., 1901).

46. Montpensier, *The Correspondence of La Grande Mademoiselle*, 27.
47. Montpensier, *The Correspondence of La Grande Mademoiselle*, 29.
48. Montpensier, *The Correspondence of La Grande Mademoiselle*, 37.
49. Montpensier, "Introduction," *The Correspondence of La Grande Mademoiselle*, 4–6.
50. Montpensier, "Introduction," *The Correspondence of La Grande Mademoiselle*, 7.

DeJean summarizes Montpensier's participation in the Fronde, 6–7.

51. Montpensier is not the only woman to have played a significant role in the Fronde; DeJean includes two others, the duchesse de Chevreuse and the duchesse de Longueville, as among the "most visible"; all three actually joined in the military battles and were, in DeJean's words, "referred to . . . as Amazons, as though they were the legendary women warriors come to life" (7). The *frondeuses* dressed in men's clothes on occasion, and Montpensier was painted in the ambiguous guise of a woman warrior, wearing a breastplate and carrying a shield and lance even while dressed in an elaborate, low-cut gown, bejeweled and befeathered (two such portraits are reproduced in DeJean's edition of Montpensier's correspondence, 8, 9).
52. Montpensier, "Introduction," *The Correspondence of La Grande Mademoiselle*, 17–18.
53. Montpensier, *The Correspondence of La Grande Mademoiselle*, 33.
54. Montpensier, *The Correspondence of La Grande Mademoiselle*, 39.
55. Montpensier, *The Correspondence of La Grande Mademoiselle*, 43.
56. Montpensier, *The Correspondence of La Grande Mademoiselle*, 49.
57. Montpensier, *The Correspondence of La Grande Mademoiselle*, 51.

58. Montpensier, *The Correspondence of La Grande Mademoiselle*, 51; on Motteville's relationship to Anne of Austria, see above, n. 44.

In her list of female rulers Motteville also fails to include Marie de' Medici (1573–1642), the wife of Henry IV of France and the mother of Louis XIII. After Henry IV's assassination in 1610, Marie assumed the regency for her son, relinquishing it only reluctantly when he reached his majority in 1614. Louis XIII named his mother regent again in 1627–8 when he went to war, and yet again in 1629. Mother and son ultimately fell out, however, and she was exiled from France, dying in Cologne in 1642, still unreconciled with her son. When Motteville accompanied Anne of Austria to France for her marriage to Marie de' Medici's son, the dowager queen was still very influential figure in her son's court.

59. Montpensier, *The Correspondence of La Grande Mademoiselle*, 69.
 60. See, for example, the account of his announcement to his council in Olivier Bernier, *Louis XIV: A Royal Life* (New York: Doubleday, 1987), 75.
 61. Mary II (1662–94) was the daughter and sole heir of James II of England. She was married in 1677.

On royal women and their political roles during the period after the Renaissance, see Clarissa Campbell Orr, ed., *Queenship in Europe, 1660–1815: The Role of the Consort* (Cambridge: University Press, 2004). The title of this edited collection of essays says much about the roles available to women after the mid-seventeenth century.

62. Margaret Sommerville, *Sex and Subjection: Attitudes to Women in Early-Modern Society* (New York: Arnold, 1995), 59–60.
 63. Sommerville, *Sex and Subjection*, 60. According to Sommerville's notes, a "Queen of Clouts" is "a doll in the form of a queen" (76).
 64. Sommerville, *Sex and Subjection*, 60.
 65. Merry E. Wiesner, "Women's Defense of Their Public Role," in *Women in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance: Literary and Historical Perspectives*, ed. Mary Beth Rose (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1986), 3. This essay also suggests the restrictions of the activities (economic, familial, religious, as well as political) of women in all levels of society from the late sixteenth through the eighteenth centuries.

It is not within the scope of this project to explore the growing constraints on their lives that women faced as the Renaissance "progressed" (roughly the period 1350–1600). The foundational essay is Joan Kelly-Gadol's "Did Women Have a Renaissance?" in *Becoming Visible: Women in European History*, ed. Renate Bridenthal and Claudia Koonz (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1977), 137–64. Additional beginning points are found in three essays in Renate Bridenthal, Susan Mosher Stuard, and Merry E. Wiesner, eds., *Becoming Visible: Women in European History*, 3rd ed. (New York: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1998): Carole Levin, "Women in the Renaissance," 153–73; Susan C. Karant-Nunn, "The Reformation of Women," 175–201; and Merry E. Wiesner, "Spinning Out Capital: Women's Work in Preindustrial Europe, 1350–1750," 203–31. Each of these essays contains extensive notes and suggestions for further reader.

For the phrase “growing powerlessness,” see Natalie Zemon Davis, “City Women and Religious Change,” in *Society and Culture in Early Modern France: Eight Essays* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1975), 94.

Epilogue

1. Joan DeJean, “Introduction,” *Against Marriage: The Correspondence of La Grande Mademoiselle*, *The Other Voice in Early Modern Europe* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 23.

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