

***Gender and Cultural Mediation in the Long Eighteenth Century***  
***Women Across Borders***

Mónica Bolufer, Laura Guinot-Ferri, Carolina Blutrach, eds

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ROCÍO QUISPE AGNOLI

Michigan State University

The examination of the centres established and regulated by official intellectual histories from Europe raises inquiries in historical, political, literary, and artistic studies. The question of what lies beyond the European and/or Eurocentric view of the world of letters, arts, and ideas is not merely a matter of intellectual curiosity or an interrogation of the status quo but instead calls for a necessary shift in perspective to understand the globalisation of the history of ideas in the eighteenth century. This shift in perspective, which considers the female perspective and the issue of gender in intellectual production and the circulation of knowledge, is evident in the contributions included in this volume.

The eighteenth century in Europe, characterised as the ‘Age of Enlightenment’ due to the convergence of intellectual currents based on reason, scientific methods, the spread of knowledge, and the modernisation of society, saw the emergence of thinkers, both men and women, who engaged in activities and reflections about their places and cultures. They engaged in activities and studied traditional social structures in relation to different aspects of knowledge across Europe and the Atlantic. In the philosophy of the Enlightenment, rationalism and empiricism were adopted as methods for acquiring scientific knowledge, leading to significant individual and social development. And yet, despite the Enlightenment’s relative openness compared to the history of ideas in Europe in previous centuries, the activities of social actors such as women, and the preconceived ideas about spaces such as the nation, the South, and the periphery still require much further study in historical, literary, and philosophical approaches to this period.

This is the critical context in which this volume edited by Bolufer, Guinot-Ferri, and Blutrach emerges, prompting us to reflect on at least three thematic areas: debates on gender beyond European national borders; the intense negotiation between languages and cultures led by female authors, intellectuals, and translators, among other women beyond those national borders; and the invitation to decentre the study of the Enlightenment by considering other centres, usually depicted as margins or peripheries, such as southern Europe, European territories beyond the Atlantic, and

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other spaces not regarded as European at the time, despite their relative geographical proximity.

Organised into four sections, this volume comprises thirteen essays and a critical introduction that address the issue of women's contributions during the Enlightenment, the role played by gendered expectations, and the observation of the new and the acquisition of knowledge that transcended national limits. In this sense, the book proposes observing transnational relations beyond European horizons. It thus aligns itself with the idea of globalisation processes, which, although initially viewed in global studies as a contemporary phenomenon, can be observed in the time periods preceding the twentieth century. The constant mobility that existed in Eurasia before the 1500s expanded significantly from that century onwards with the great transatlantic and transpacific voyages, thus ushering in an era of early globalisation. By the eighteenth century, transnational activities, as defined by the editors of this volume, were already present in Europe and its territories; however, they require further attention from the perspective of gender roles and expectations, as well as continuous interaction across geographical borders.

Thus, the three chapters of the first section, Part I, 'Discussing Gender in Transnational and Transatlantic Settings', deal with the transfer of ideas through the translation of works on the role of women in the enlightened societies of the eighteenth century. This is the case of the translation of *Defensa de las mujeres* (1726) by the Spanish thinker Benito Jerónimo Feijoo (Mónica Bolufer), followed by the discussion about the role of women as agents of civilization, progress, and commercial exchange in Scotland (Silvia Sebastiani), and on women's education in late colonial Spanish American newspapers (Mariselle Meléndez). These studies lay the intellectual groundwork for the three essays in Part II, 'Women of Letters Across Frontiers'. In this section, one reads about intellectual women from various European societies (France, Italy, Germany, Switzerland, and the Netherlands) who participated in projects led by men (Lieke van Deinsen), used writing as a tool for self-discovery through introspection (Anthony La Vopa), and created representations of themselves through writing letters in languages other than their own (Amélie Jaques and Beatrijs Vanacker). In this way, the practice of writing, conventionally common among their male counterparts before and after the eighteenth century, fulfils several functions in the development and expression of the European female subject: self-knowledge, knowledge of others, and negotiation with others and their spaces beyond the traditional gender restrictions at that time. The contributions in this section set the groundwork for one of the most striking examples of cultural mediation: translation.

The four essays in Part III, 'Rewriting Through Translation', approach language and cultural practice as a prime example of cultural mediation in the hands of women of the Enlightenment in Italy, Spain, and Turkey. The dynamics of translation as a commercial practice on the one hand and a political one on the other (travelling, translating, transferring) are manifested in cultural mediation through the writing of European female travellers to new worlds and cultures (Luisa Simonutti). The

translation of plays by Spanish writer María Rosa Gálvez in the early nineteenth century is examined in the following essay. Gálvez's translation involved the dissemination of plays that were, in turn, adapted to a new national context (Elizabeth Franklin Lewis). Disseminating and adapting to the relevant context of the cultural translator, such as Gálvez, is a widely discussed feature in contemporary globalisation studies vis-à-vis the role of mass media. The third essay explores the adaptation involved in the act of translation as an example of the domestication of difference in the hands of an English translator of works originally written in Italian (Mirella Agorni). This translator aimed to promote national identity in children's education. Finally, the study of the activities of a multilingual Greek-Venetian aristocratic woman reveals her own translation project of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu's *Turkish Embassy Letters* (1838) as an example of the invisible and unpublished works of Venetian women authors, whose writings deserved to be read and appreciated in their time—and today. The three essays in the last section of this volume, Part IV, 'Mediating Knowledge, Making Publics', focus on female reception based on the question: what did women read? It addresses women's cultural mediation with studies that address bibliographic collections, the circulation of literary texts, and the reception of these texts by women in the eighteenth century. The first essay examines women's participation in reading spaces, encompassing both their roles as listeners and readers in public settings, as well as their involvement in library ownership and their impact on the transnational dissemination of knowledge (Alicia C. Montoya). The following essay in this section examines the circulation and adaptation of printed works intended for female readers in New Spain (Laura Guinot-Ferri). This study demonstrates that the impact of the Enlightenment in Spanish America took on a life of its own, extending beyond the initial adaptations of European works. Finally, the development of literary genres such as the short story and the anti-philosophical novel in France paved the way for female readers to engage with works that transcended strictly religious themes and social moral rules. This female reader-character challenged the moralising control of the Catholic Church in Europe over new reading audiences: women, children, and the uneducated (Patrizia Delpiano).

It should be noted at this point that the female subjects addressed in this collection of essays are, as the editors point out in their critical introduction, women of letters, an identification that implies access to a level of education at the time and to the resources necessary to read, write, and submit their works to local, national, or transnational circulation in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Furthermore, these female figures were typically found in urban centres, where the discussion of Enlightenment ideas was concentrated. Finally, concerning Spanish America, the female subjects addressed in this volume were European travellers who had crossed the Atlantic or Creoles (*criollas*) who identified with the gender principles and expectations of European societies. One might then ask: was there an Enlightenment for women of social classes and ethnic identities beyond the aristocracy and the emerging European and Creole middle class? This is undoubtedly a topic that exceeds the scope of this book, but it opens the door to a little-studied area, a new project, and possibly other volumes.

To conclude this review, the spirit of didacticism, a characteristic of the European Enlightenment, the interest in disseminating new knowledge through encyclopaedias, translations, and adaptations beyond the original language in which a work had been written or published, meets with the European woman as author, reader, and promoter of universal knowledge for women of letters in Europe and across the Atlantic. Leonor de Almeida Portugal's and Josefa Amar y Borbón's quotations that open this volume's introductory essay suggestively illustrate the reflections of two eighteenth-century women authors who valued the diversity of the human experience beyond national and cultural borders. Such diversity ('the variety of people and mores', Almeida Portugal in 1780) and the curiosity and excitement of learning the new ('to know what is unusual', Amar y Borbón in 1790) highlight the close relationship between women's traveling, experiencing, learning, mediating, and creating knowledge while sharing it. They also clearly reflect both the editors' project and the contributions of the participating authors in this volume. It is one of the pieces of the grand puzzle awaiting further study, shedding light on the gendering of the eighteenth century and the Enlightenment in Europe and its territories.