

## DO'S AND DONT'S: A SET OF RULES FOR THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY FEMALE

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Es mi Filis instruida  
Tanto, que aun sabe callar,  
Su hermosura es singular  
Y en todo es cumplida  
Siempre ha solido tener  
Entre todos gran concepto  
¡Ay! pero tiene un defecto  
Grandisimo... que es mujer. (1)

The epigram above written by Pablo de Jérica at the beginning of the nineteenth century summarizes some eighteenth century feelings about women. A woman was expected to be educated although few options were available for her instruction. She was expected to learn polite conversation although her greatest asset was silence. She was expected to be beautiful but modest, lest the fruit of her loveliness taint her, and thus her family's reputation. From the courtly poets who extolled the virtues of their *Filis* or *Lauras*, to the erudite essayists who praised or condemned them, virtually all literary figures during the Bourbon century became involved in the polemic surrounding the appraisal of women. As time passed, women became the subject of ridicule and criticism, the subject of defense and acclaim, the subject, of scientific study; in short, the subject of much controversy.

The Economic Societies which flourished in Spain in the second half of the century initiated plans for public instruction and the society in Madrid through its women's organization developed rules for female education. (2) In an age of reason and regulation, the thought prevailed that through the education of women most of society's evils would be conquered. In Zaragoza, Josefa Amar y Borbón published *Dyscurso sobre le educación física y moral de las mugeres*, in 1790. (3) Josefa's program of education was rigid and demanding; however, according to her, the well-being of society in general depended on the enlightenment of women:

porque el orden o desorden de las familias privadas  
trasciende y se comunica a la felicidad y quietud  
pública. En estas familias privadas tienen las mugeres su

particular empleo. Este es la dirección y gobierno de la casa, el cuidado y crianza de los hijos, y sobretudo la íntima y perfecta sociedad con el marido (xii).

It is my purpose to take Josefa Amar's work as a guideline for a review of those traits which the eighteenth-century woman was to have, develop or acquire, as well as those characteristics (*vicios*) which she was to avoid, abhor, and battle.

The birth of a female child was an unwelcomed occurrence in eighteenth-century homes. Since most of the hopes and aspirations for the family traditions remained with the male, the most a family could expect was a greater responsibility and wealth of problems with the girl. (4) Parents were at times too strict for fear that leniency in discipline would bring about a decrease in virtue. Josefa warns that when punishment is too severe, parents achieve the wrong kind of respect; that is, fear: «es un temor que está muy distante de aquel respeto tierno y cariñoso que los hijos deben tener a los padres... El dominio de los padres sobre los hijos ha de ser un dominio suave» (111-117). Also concerned with harsh treatment of girls was Leandro Fernandez de Moratín who blames a daughter's dishonesty on her father's striving for her perfection:

Cuando era niña mostraba  
Candor, excelentes prendas,  
Pero tu, queriendo ver  
Mayor perfección en ella,  
Duro, inflexible, emprendiste  
Corregir las más ligeras  
Faltas; gritadas... (5)

One cannot set rules for respect and obedience, said Josefa, the important thing to remember is that all individuals are different, «por esto... es preciso que los padres mezclen el agrado con la seriedad, para hacerse estimar y obedecer (122).

As the girl grew, some traits had to be developed as early as possible. The most important was shame. «La vergüenza es prenda tan recomendable en las mujeres, que conviene fomentarla y mantenerla a cualquiera precio.» said Josefa (115). At the beginning of the century Feijoo had called shame the one characteristic which separated virtue from vice: «Es la vergüenza una valla, que entre la virtud y el vicio puso la naturaleza.» With such clear separation between vice and virtue, a girl had to be taught those elements which comprised true virtue. Josefa considered modesty the basis of all worth: «Es de todos los estados, de soltera, de casada y de viuda; de todas clases, y aun hablando en rigor, se hace más precisa cuanto más distinguida es la condición de los sujetos» (241). She cautioned against hypocrisy in modesty: «La modestia no consiste precisamente en bajar los ojos y en poner un semblante hipócrita, sino en desviarse de todas las ocasiones que puedan exponerla; consiste en la inocencia del corazón...» (242).

Together with modesty should be the quality of discretion. According to Juan de Iriarte:

La beldad más superior,  
Si de discreción carece

¿No sabes lo que parece?  
Flor vistosa sin olor. (7)

Once the girl had successfully learned to be shameful, modest, and descrete, Nicolas Fernández de Moratín believed she should acquire humility:

Cláudio, en toda la tierra  
No hay cosa más sublime  
Ni de valor más grande  
Que la mujer humilde. (8)

At this point in her life the girl had the positive traits which prepared her for the greatest decision of her life — «La elección de estado» (9). To be sure the literature is very critical of parental placement of girls and forced marriages. The young girl had only two options — the convent or marriage. According to Josefa: «aunque hablando en rigor no tienen más los hombres, ... hay notable diferencia de que un soltero usa de su libertad y no le impide para ninguna carrera; y una soltera es un cero, que comunmente sirve de embarazo hasta en su misma casa» (265). Since girls did not have the freedom to remain single and be respected, many sought the liberty provided by marriage. Jovellanos expressed is best in his *Sátira primera a Arnesto*:

y sin que invoquen la razón, ni pese  
su corazón los méritos de novio,  
el sí pronuncian y la mano alargan  
al primero que llega! Qué de males  
esta maldita coquedad no aborta! (10)

One eighteenth century journalist cautions men against being trapped by a woman looking for her freedom:

Las doncellas que en acecho del matrimonio...  
aparecen a quien se llega a ellas, por lo regular, un pais  
ameno, circundando de vegas hermosas y floridas, rodeados  
de puertos en la apariencia seguros y favorecidos  
de todos aquellos hechiceros halagos que son unos verdaderos  
engañabobos. Es necesario caminar tierra adentro para  
conocerlas y no dejarse seducir a primera vista. (11)

On the other, Josefa warns women of the dangers of rushing into marriage since: «Es perpetuo; se forma el nudo en un instante; y solo se desata con la muerte» (270). (12).

If a desire for marriage existed on the part of the girls an even greater wish was seen in her family. Forced marriages were common. Indeed many times arrangements of convenience were made without regard to feelings. In his *Cartas marruecas*, Cadalso explores the theme in exaggerated form: «Todo esto se hubiera remediado si yo me hubiera casado una vez a mi gusto, en lugar de sujetarlo seis veces al de mi padre caprichoso que cree la voluntad de una hija es una cosa que no se debe entrar en cuenta para el casamiento.» (13). In *El sí de las niñas*, Leandro Fernandez de Moratín defended the freedom of choice: «En estas materias tan delicadas los padres que tienen juicio no mandan. Insinúan, proponen, aconsejan: eso sí, todos eso sí. Pero mandar...» (14).

Some girls opted for the convent which Josefa called «el estado más perfec-

to» (265). However, true religious devotion was rare and the girls' motives should be carefully studied; for this decision was also perpetual and should not be taken lightly. The result of a wrong decision would be just as fatal. «Lo que conviene a la Religión y a las mismas que entran en clausura, no es el ser muchas, sino el ser perfectas» (170), stated Josefa. She then, advised, that if a girl was educated in a convent and decided to be a nun, she should be taken home to experience life outside the cloister before making a final resolution (169). The same subject is approached by Leandro Fernández de Moratín: «Mire usted que juicio de niña ese! Que porque ha vivido un poco de tiempo entre monjas, ya se la puso en la cabeza de ser ella monja también... Ni qué entiendo ella de eso ni qué...» (15).

The fact remained, through the century that a woman had little if any freedom to make her own decision on important matters concerning her life. Therefore, she began spending her time and effort dealing with matters which had no intrinsic value. Indeedm her capricious waste of time was her greatest vice. All of her other wrongdoings were usually involved with her idle time.

Not only was a woman supposed to nurture those characteristics which were compatible with virtue, she was also to rid herself of the most common vices connected with her sex. The more liberal writers were not willing to exonerate men from blame in female vices. Feijoo, for example, said: «Quien quisiere hacer buenas a todas las mujeres, convierta a todos los hombres.» (16). Jovellanos added,

Nosotros fuimos los que contra el designio de la  
Providencia, las hicimos déviles y delicadas. Acostumbrados  
a mirlas coma nacidas solamente para nuestro placer,  
las hemos separado con estudio de todas la profesiones  
activas... las hemos hecho ociosas... (17)

On the other hand Juan de Iriarte considered vice part of the human element in the female:

Mujer hermosa no espero  
Encontrar sin tachã humana  
Eva tuvo su manzana  
Las demás tiene su **pero**. (18)

Female *vicios* are clearly defined in the literature. First, the lady had to curb her love for adornment and luxury. Josefa stated that:

No es reprehensible el adorno, quando está arreglado a  
la decencia, a la clase de las personas, y a las  
circunstancias en que se hallan? Pero que conexión  
tienen estas reglas prudentes con el desorden de  
variar todos los días de modas, y de querer seguir las  
todas, hay o no para ello? (224).

Such was the abuse of adornment and luxury that Ramón de la Cruz used the opic as a frequent theme in many of his *sainetes*. The *Patimetra*, her love of clothing, her many hours in front of the mirror and concern with trivia were described in minute details by the playwright. For example, as a hairdresser prepared to go serve a lady, he checked the list of «cosas necesarias que se deben tener prontas para peinar:»

Cuatro papeles de polvos,  
y tres botes de pomadas  
Grandes, de olor de Paris.

.....  
Un gran pañuelo  
Y cuatro varas de grasa  
rayada... ocho de cinta  
Con esterilla muy ancha  
A listas, y tres de angosta;  
Vara y media de bordada  
De piedras menudas negras  
y lentejuelas de plata:  
Cuatro papeles de horquillas  
Grandes chicas y medianas  
Y otros tantos alfileres... (19)

Although Cruz's list may be exaggerated for satirical effect, it is evident from eighteenth century female portraits that at least some of these items were necessary. If hours were spent on hairdressing, even longer was spent on clothing, visiting, and shopping. Conservatives, like Cruz, longed for the days when women were content with home, family and children.

Some authors blamed women's love for adornment and luxury on their insecurity about personal worth. The most common criticism was that the time spent before a mirror may be better used in other endeavors because exterior beauty was so fragile:

Aunque en el espejo se miran  
Las mugeres con frecuencia  
En el vidrio nunca ven  
Que es de vidrio su belleza. (20)

Jovellanos added that there is no true virtue in seeking artificiality:

A falta de prendas u mérito real, busca la superioridad y la gloria en la vana ostentación de galas y trenes, ricas preseas y muebles exquisitos... Corrompe sus costumbres consume su miseria y la ruina del Estado (Ed. Pub. 163).

The ruin of the state was directly related to the breakdown of the family by women's constant visitation, false piety (21) and neglect of children. «Se están ociosas pasan el dia en la calle. ¡Fatal abuso, origen de varios disgustos en las familias!» cried Josefa (155).

Eighteenth century authors went into great details about what women did wrong. For example, Bourdon era females were criticized for not nursing their children, Clavijo y Fajardo said, «lo que me hace gemir es ver tantas madres fuertes, rollizas, con salud para todo, para exceso de la comida, para sufrir el calor y el frio en la comedia, en el balcón y en el paseo;... para pasar la noche entera en el ejercicio violento del baile, que quieren luego hacernos creer que les falta salud para crear sus hijos.» (22). Josefa noted that, «el mismo Creador que por su sabia providencia ha dispuesto que la mujer concibiese y pariese, les ha dado los medios... para alimentar a su prole, sin que en este punto se advierta la menor diferencia entre una mujer de baja esfera, y la señora más ilustre» (23). Cadalso is bitter in his description of the careless mother in *Noches Lugu-bres*... nos engendran también pos su gusto... nos niegan el alimento de la

leche que la naturaleza les dio para este único y sagrado fin; nos vician con su mal ejemplo, nos sacrifican a sus intereses; nos hurtan las caricias que nos deben y las depositan en un perro...» (23).

Women were also censured for idle gossip, curiosity, and a wish to enter the male dominated societies. (24). Manuals of conduct, such as Josefa's were written to regulate female behavior. Goya's *caprichos* provided graphic representations of the deterioration of customs. Nonetheless, the moral decadence of the end of the century was rampant. Isla has said that society would improve through the means of, «enamorar de la virtud, representando su hermosura y conveniencias... o infundir el horror al vicio, pintando con viveza su deformidad y las desdichas aun em temporales que arrastra...» Later Josefa agreed, «¡Ojalá se pudiese pintar a una muchacha con tan vivos colores los efectos del vicio y de una mala conducta que cobrase aborrecimiento para siempre» (255).

Josefa's plan was to rectify as much as possible that which was established (xxxii). Rectify, she added, by the good example given by ladies of distinction (27). «Es preciso que todos den buen ejemplo y en particular los nobles, cuyas acciones son más notadas» (131). Isla had said that everywhere there were virtuous people who should set examples to others. (26).

The eighteenth century female was justifiably the cause of much controversy. She was taught to be shameful, modest, moderate, discrete, religious and humble. She was condemned for her love of luxury example of the nobles, the people of distinction. It is at this point that the education of women breaks down, for the decadent examples from the court of Charles IV were plentiful. To be sure, some women were virtuous and worked for the well-being of the country, but these were in the minority. (27). Most women were led in their behavior by the queen herself, Maria Luisa, whose amorous relations with Godoy were known to all. The queen displayed a taste for the exquisite in fashion and set many trends in dress. Women of the court studied styles and imitated each other. Indeed the examples from the ladies of distinction were painted with vivid colors for the 18th century woman. However, the picture which she perceived, far from frightening her, pointed to an escape from daily boredom.

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#### NOTES

(1) Pablo de Jérica, «Epigramas,» in *Poetas líricos*, Vol.3 of *Biblioteca de autores españoles* (Madrid: Atlas, 1953), 714. Hereafter cited as 3, BAE.

(2) Carmem Martín Gaité, *Usos amorosos del dieciocho en España* (Madrid: Siglo XXI de España editores, S. A., 1972), pp. 217-218.

(3) Josefa Amar y Bordón, *Discurso sobre le educación física y moral de las mugeres* (Madrid: Cano, 1790). Hereafter in-text citations will come from this edition.

(4) Edmond et Jules de Goncourt, *La femme au dix-huitieme siecle* (Paris: Fermin-Didot et Cie., 1887), p. 1.

(5) Leandro Fernández de Moratín, «La mojigata,» in **Obras de Don Nicolas y Don Leandro Fernández de Moratín**, Vol 2 of **Biblioteca de autores españoles** (Madrid: Atlas, 1944), p. Hereafter cited as 2, **BAE**. Goya explored the theme of discipline in **Capricho 24**, «Si quebró el cántaro.» In the sketch, a mother is shown mercilessly beating a child for what could have been an accident. The manuscript descriptions of this sketch emphasize the discrepancy between the punishment and the crime. See Edith Hellman, **Trasmundo de Goya** (Madrid: Revista de Occidente, 1963), p. 226.

(6) Benito Jerónimo Feijoo y Montenegro, «Defesa de las mujeres,» in **Obras escogidas del Padre Fray Benito Jerónimo Feijoo**, Vol. 56 of **Biblioteca de autores españoles** (Madrid: Atlas, 1952), p. 52.

(7) Juan de Iriarte, «Epigramas,» 3, **BAE**, p. 495.

(8) Nicolas Fernández de Moratín, «Poesias,» 2, **BAE**, p. 6.

(9) Josefa felt so strongly about this topic that she devoted an entire chapter of her book to the subject, capítulo XIII, pp. 263-280.

(10) Gaspar Melchor de Jovellanos, «Sátira primera a Arnesto,» in **Poesía del siglo XVIII**, ed. John H. RZ. Polt (Madrid: Clásicos Castalia, 1975), p. 176. Goya's **Capricho 2**, «El sí pronuncian y la mano alargan. Al primero que llega,» illustrates the idea of women striving for liberty through marriage. In a satirical way, Goya is also admonishing the use of «masks» worn before marriage. See Hellman, 219.

(11) Nipho, **Cajón de sastre**, as quoted in Martín Gaité, p. 112.

(12) Goya's **Capricho 75**, «No hay quien nos desate?» presents a pessimistic view of the perpetuity of marriage. The sketch illustrates a young couple striving to gain freedom from the entanglements of matrimony. Above them is a monster-like figure which is further increasing their predicament. See Hellman, 240.

(13) José Cadalso, **Cartas marruecas**, ed. Juan Tamayo y Rubio (Madrid: Espasa Galpe, S. S., 1975), p. 185.

(14) Leandro Fernández de Moratín, «El sí de las niñas,» 2, **BAE**, p. 212. In **Capricho 14**, «Que sacrificio,» Goya presents the theme of a forced marriage between a lovely young lady and a grotesque looking older man. Obviously this was a marriage of convenience. See Hellman, p. 223.

(15) *Idid.*, p. 209.

(16) Benito Jerónimo Feijoo, «Defensa,» p. 50.

(17) Gaspar Melchor de Jovellanos, «Informe dado a la junta general de comercio y moneda sobre el libre ejercicio de las artes,» in **Obras de D. Gaspar Melchor de Jovellanos**, Vol. 50 of **Biblioteca de autores españoles**, p. 33.

(18) Juan de Iriarte, «Epigramas,» p. 499.

(19) Ramón de la Cruz, «Los novios espantados,» in **Sainetes**, Vol. 23 of **Nueva Biblioteca de autores españoles**, p. 106.

(20) Juan de Iriarte, «Epigramas,» pp. 495-96.

(21) Many authors were concerned about women using religious piety as an excuse to leave the house; they used the Church as a daily social outing, according to the eighteenth century literature. See Ramon de la Cruz, **Sainetes** for several examples of this criticism.

(22) Clavijo y Fajardo, **El pensador**, as quoted in Martín Gaité, p. 244.

(23) José Cadalso, **Noches Lúgubres**, ed. Nigel Glendinning (Madrid: Espasa-Galpe, S.A., 1969), p. 28.

(24) The controversy involving the admission of women into the economic societies involved many literary and political figures and took ten years to settle. See Paula de Demerson, **María Francisca de Sales Portocarrero, Condesa del Montijo. Una figura de la ilustración** (Madrid: Editora Nacional, 1975), pp. 127-139.

(25) José Francisco de Isla, **Fray Gerundio de Campazas**, ed. Russell P. Sebold (Madrid: Espasa Galpe, S. S., 1970), 2, 184.

(26) *Ibid.*

(27) The **Junta de damas** was comprised of some noble women worked for education, prison reform, and better conditions for handicapped children.