Chapter 5

"Qualities which many think most unlikely to be found in women": Genderfluid Textualities in Samuel Torshell's *The Womans Glorie* (1650)

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[1]The seventeenth-century Church of England clergyman Samuel Torshell (1605–1650), Puritan preacher at Bunbury in Cheshire by the London Haberdashers' Company and an obscure figure who has hardly elicited any scholarly interest outside church historians, may appear to be an unlikely candidate for a firm defence of women's learning.[2] His nearly forty printed works are concerned with biblical commentary and theological instruction. The manifold church factions and Puritan sects in Britain were fertile ground for divines, preachers and theologians who promoted in their sermons a role model of obedient femininity with scant ability and inclination towards learning. The narrow scope of women's education was meant to sustain their social and intellectual subordinate position to men. In particular, the creation account and the Fall of Man in Genesis 3:1 provided the Biblical foundation on which women's access to knowledge was regulated. While sermons often relied on Paul to stop the fiercest misogynistic attacks on women's nature, quoting Galatians 3:28 on the spiritual indistinctness of male and female,[3] or even in Romans 16:1 where Paul defined Priscilla as a co-worker in Christ-Jesus, he was also

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[2] Jacqueline Eales, "Torshell, Samuel (1605-1650)", in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford University Press, 2004). doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/27570; Dorothy W. Whitney, "London Puritanism: The Haberdashers' Company", *Church History*, vol 32:3 (1964): 298-321; John F Wilson, *Pulpit in Parliament* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969), 99-101; Paul S. Seaver, *The Puritan Lectureships: the Politics of Religious Dissent, 1560-1662* (Redwood CA: Stanford University Press, 1970).
[3] Galatians 3:28: "Nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus". *The Holy Bible,* New International Version (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2011). All Biblical citations in this chapter are taken from NIV.

frequently invoked to justify that "the head of a woman is her husband" and present a more moderate but likewise restricted version of women's existence.[4]

Most factions of episcopacy appealed to women as upholders of Christian values at home and tried to make them feel at ease in their own congregations and communities of faith. Indulging in hateful indictments against them, such as Joseph Swetnam's *The Arraignment of Women* (1615) and so many others that had been the staple diet in the long tradition of the *Querelle des Femmes* ('The Woman Question'), could not possibly be the best way to attract genuine female believers.[5] Preachers were keen on assigning a dignifying role to women in their sermons while, implicitly, holding back any form of public expression and education for them. Puritan election narratives printed at the time also bestowed equal spiritual status in men and women. The believer could discern in them the state of his or her own soul, its 'election' or 'depravity', as well as the workings of God's grace on it. Under the influence of Saint Augustine, according to whom "two exist in one mind" or spirit,[6] men and women are equals in their spiritual dimension, which allowed Descartes to defend a lack of sexual differentiation of the mind and François Poullain de la Barre, a Catholic priest and one of the main interpreters of Cartesianism, to assert in *De l'Égalité des deux sexes* (1673) that "the mind has no sex", even though he shows a greater interest in the mind-body union than in the metaphysical nature of the relationship between the two.[7]

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[4] 1 Cor. 11:3.

[5] For a global assessment of anti-misogynistic tracts of the 1610s-1640s in Britain and primary sources, see Katherine U. Henderson and Barbara F. McManus, *Half Humankind: Contexts and Texts of the Controversy about Women in England, 1540-1640* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1985); Mary Prior (ed.), *Women in English Society* (London & New York: Routledge, 1985), 172-176; Megan Matchinske, "Channeling the Gender Debate: Legitimation and Agency in Seventeenth-Century Tracts and Women's Poetry", in *The History of British Women's Writing 1610*-1690, ed. Mihoko Suzuki (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 48-63; Barbara K. Lewalski (ed.), *The Polemics and Poems of Rachel Speght* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996); Cristina Malcolmson and Mihoko Suzuki (eds.), *Debating Gender in Early Modern England, 1500*-1700 (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002); Constance Jordan, *Renaissance Feminism: Literary Texts and Political* Models (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1990); Sarah G. Ross, *The Birth of Feminism: Women as Intellect in Renaissance Italy and England* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009); Constantia Munda, *The Worming of a Mad Dog* (London: printed for Lavrence Hayes, 1617); Marie le Jars de Gournay, ed. Richard Hillman and Colette Quesnel, *Apology for the Woman Writing* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2002); Rachel Speght, *A Mouzell for Melastomus* (London: printed for Nicholas Ohes, 1617); Jane Anger, *Jane Anger her Protection for Women* (London: printed for Richard Jones, 1589).

[6] St. Augustine, McKenna, Stephen (tr.)., *De Trinitate*, XII, chapter 3 (Washington: The Catholic University of America Press, 2002), 345.

[7] For a debate on the nuances of Poullain de la Barre's position on the metaphysical dimension of Cartesian dualism, see Martina Reuter, "François Poulain de la Barre", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2019 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), accessed on 25 August 2020 <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2019/entries/francois-barre/>.

After preaching a sermon in December 1644 for the ninth birthday of princess Elizabeth, Charles I's daughter, Torshell enlarged his original speech and published it a few months later under the title *The Womans Glorie a Treatise, Asserting the Due Honour of that Sexe*. It presents a synthesis of theology and Cartesian metaphysics that reconstructs the notion of glory, an exalted state of perfection of the soul, to defend women's right to education and its employment. Torshell added for the second and slightly expanded edition of *The Womans Glorie* in 1650 a letter by Anna Maria van Schurman addressed to the French Huguenot theologian André Rivet, translated by himself for the first time into English well before the full text of Van Schurman's *The Learned Maid* was published in 1659.[8] He also includes, at the end of the treatise, a report on Queen Christina of Sweden from the French Gazette, published in Paris on the 10th of December 1648. Torshell considered that her manner of life and studies was a fine example of what he intended to show. The newspaper excerpt extols the figure of the sage and Amazonian Queen of Sweden, a wise and learned ruler who is a champion of peace, an astute negotiator, and a scholar at the University of Uppsala.

This chapter examines *The Womans Glorie* as a text that has gone unnoticed as a defence of women for its seeming conventional presentation. On closer inspection, though, both its author and the narrative structure of the essay reveal their mildly subversive thinking about learning. While the sophisticated biblical and political rhetoric of the wealth of seventeenth-century sermonic literature has drawn much attention from literary historians, especially that stemming from major poetic exponents such as John Donne or George Herbert, or from Puritan and non-conformist congregations, its ability to engage in non-doctrinal debates of common concern has hardly been registered.[9] This essay investigates how the recurrent question of woman's spiritual and civic status found an original platform in *The Womans Glorie*. We shall see how Torshell is informed by Cartesian thought and *Querelle* literature to suggest an epistemology of female learning on the theological grounds that gender equality is a "sanctifying spirit" that should be

[8] Anna Maria van Schurman. *The Learned Maid, or whether a Maid can be a Scholar?* (London: printed by John Redmayne, 1659); Anna Maria van Schurman, *Dissertatio, de ingenii muliebris ad doctrinam, & meliores litteras aptitudine* (Paris, 1639. Leiden, 1641).

[9] For seventeenth-century sermon literature in Britain and women, see Jeanne Shami, "Women and Sermons", in *The Early Modern Sermon,* ed. Peter McCullough, Hugh Adlington, Emma Rhatigan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 155-177; Diane Willen, "Godly Women in Early Modern England: Puritanism and Gender", *Journal of Ecclesiastical History,* vol. 43(4), October 1992, 561-580; Femke Molekamp, *Women & the Bible in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013); Victoria Brownlee, Laura Gallagher (eds.), *Biblical Women in Early Modern Literary Culture* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2015).

reflected upon its material sexual manifestation. His concept of equality can be realized through learning and an active participation in "civill or publicke offices". Interestingly, Torshell does not rely on Humanist models of teaching by example and he does not fall into a general misogynist or patronizing attitude towards women. His two-hundred pages-long dissertation, printed in octavo, connects the display of women's virtue with a love and practice for learning that goes beyond the curriculum of Bible reading and traditional female occupations. Featuring on the title page that "women are capable of the highest improvements" and commenting upon the achievements of several of them who do not usually feature in catalogues of women worthies, such as the nun and poet Lorenza Strozzi (1514-1591) and the scholar Olympia Fulvia Morata (1526-1555), Torshell upheld the spiritual equality of souls transcending any male/female duality, as sexual differentiation is by divine imperative the result of "necessitie because of corruption and change by mortalitie".[10]

The narrative structure of the whole tract also warrants special attention in this essay, as it enables Van Schurman's voice to dominate over Torshell's discourse in a genderfluid textual tapestry of diverse genres –from essay to letters and commentary– and construct a notion of womanhood away from confrontation or a superficial exemplary image of the 'illustrious'. Essentially, this chapter is concerned about how a doctrinal approach to the dualism of soul-mind and body, and Van Schurman's critical stance towards Cartesianism, creates a seamless narrative in which Torshell assimilates and discusses Van Schurman's ideas, modifying even his religious prerogatives, for the sake of reaching a gender-neuter definition of soul-glory manifested in three aspects of true eminence for humankind: spiritual discernment, learning, and public service.

Epistemic Equality

The debate about women's nature, character and function in society in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries rested on two opposite positions: those claiming the inferior intellectual status of women with regard to men, most surprisingly by Erasmus (1467-1536) who in his *Praise of Folly* situates women on the fringes of rational thinking, even though in several of his *Colloquia* (1518) he advocated for women's education and their dignity in all areas of social life; and those arguing in favour of women's superior standards, as it was the early case with the German polymath Cornelius Agrippa in the

[10] Samuel Torshell, *The Womans Glorie: a Treatise, first, Asserting the due Honour of that Sexe* (London: printed for John Bellamy, 1650), 12.

Declamation on the Nobility and Pre-eminence of the Female Sex.[11] Conceived as an inaugural lecture for the University of Dôle in Burgundy in 1509, when Agrippa was a young man, the lecture was then rewritten in imitation of a "declamation", a genre of ancient classical rhetoric that Agrippa dedicated to Margaret of Savoy, princess of Austria and Burgundy. As a declamation, the text is more intent on dramatizing the defense of the female sex, often by means of hyperbole, than on presenting a balanced and well-argued essay. Barbara Newman questions the seriousness of Agrippa's treatise for its "straightforward eulogy of women and bold inversion of misogynist topoi"[12] without attempting to refute antifeminist attacks in the tradition of the *Querelle.* However, the treatise enjoyed a widespread reception in Europe, with almost immediate translations into French, Italian, Dutch and also English in 1652 under the title *The Glory of Women* with two editions: one translated into verse,[13] and another in the original essay form by Edward Fleetwood.[14] In his impassioned speech, Agrippa asserted that, as far as the nature of the soul is concerned there is no pre-eminence of one sex over the other, but that women were superior to men in the physical life.

As a clergyman of Puritan leanings, Torshell would not accept Agrippa's postulates as an antecedent, even if conceived as a rhetorical exercise. *The Womans Glorie* gravitates instead towards an early assimilation of Cartesian thought in British church circles before Poullain de la Barre's *De l'Egalité des deux Sexes* and, in particular, *De l'Éducation des dames* (1674) hit English audiences with his emphasis on reinstating public utility to women's learning. For Poullain de la Barre, the ancestral custom of division of labour and protection of women led men to a monopoly of knowledge and women to interiorizing a submissive social role, only to be redeemed by proper education. The fact that there exists at least one woman that has excelled in learning is evidence enough that women as a sex are capable of lofty achievements in equal terms as those of men. It is also proof that education can foster women's mental faculties. Although Poullain de la Barre did not indulge in a commentary of illustrious women, he was

[11] Cornelius Henricus Agrippa, and Albert Rabil (ed.). *Declamation on the Nobility and Pre-eminence of the Female Sex* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, [1529] 1996).
[12] Barbara Newman, *From Virile Woman to Woman Christ* (Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009), 225.
[13] Cornelius Agrippa, H. C. (trans.), *The Glory of Women: or a Looking-Glasse for Ladies* (London: printed for T.H. for Frances Coles, 1652). George Watson in *The New Cambridge Bibliography of English Literature: Volume 1, 600-1660* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974), 843, attributes the translation either to the political writer Henry Care or the poet Hugh Crompton.
[14] Cornelius Agrippa, Edward Fleetwood (trans.), *The Glory of Women: A Treatise Declaring the Excellency and Preheminence of Women above Men* (London: printed for Robert Ibbitson, 1651-1652).

convinced that historians, who have contributed to the transmission of prejudice against them, can also be the solution if they show inspiring examples of women who have excelled in occupations typically associated with men.[15] Torshell already anticipates this view in his willingness to explicate 'soul glory' to the general reader. Learning is what gives eminence to men in all aspects of life, and in this, he insists, "women have a full share".[16]

In the 1650 edition of *The Womans Glorie*, Torshell added a preface in which he qualified some of Agrippa's assertions. He acknowledges his authority in justifying women's excellence, but believes that Agrippa was "too light and profane" and forced his Biblical arguments too much, probably to please his dedicatee Margaret of Austria, by judging that women are more perfect because they were created after Adam in Paradise. In order to provide living examples of true 'soul glory' and spiritual perfection, Torshell showcases "women learned writers" who impart philosophy and theology, including the Virgin Mary. Margaret of Austria emerges as a mantic historian acquainted with the chronicle and prophecy of her own life story and that of her nation, a bridge between the Old and the New Testament, the protagonist of her own story about the annunciation and immaculate conception as told by herself in her hymn of praise (Magnificat) "in the first book of Luke" (Luke 1:46).[17]

By tracing a direct line of argument from Agrippa's text to one of the main exponents of Cartesianism in Poullain de la Barre, Torshell's work is subtly located between theology and philosophy. Torn at times between a doctrinal prerogative to justify women's social submission and his attempt to efface it, Torshell's direct contact with Van Schurman's work impinges on his defence of epistemic equality between the sexes and serves as an apt reminder of how women's variety and sophistication of responses to Cartesian dualism partakes in the evolution in *Querelle* texts and arguments authored by men. Such a doctrinal instability reveals a willingness to elucidate how and why the premise of women's spiritual perfection is compatible with a state of civil equality with men. Torshell's sermon is resourceful in defending the right of young girls to pursue advanced learning, as opposed to seminal works on education in the mid-seventeenth century by John Milton's *On Education* (1644), focused primarily on the education of

[15] François Poullain de la Barre, Marcelle Maistre Welch (ed.), Vivien Bosley (tr.). *Three Cartesian Feminist Treatises* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 44.
[16] Torshell, *Womans Glorie,* 29.
[17] *Womans Glorie*, 259.

young men, and John Dury's *The Reformed School* (1649) or *Concerning the Education of Nobles and Gentlemen* (1646), more oriented towards discussing the appropriate curriculum according to social class. Through the influence of Van Schurman's letter inscribed in *The Womans Glorie* and the translated report of Christina of Sweden's profile of learning, Torshell equips himself with direct sources, not just examples, of how women's learning can contribute to social change. He "does not intend to write an Institution",[18] in allusion to the seminal Humanist treatise *Instruction of a Christian Woman* (1529) by Juan Luis Vives, and tries to avoid drawing a succession of empty names. He opts for including less women and explaining in a succinct manner their actual road to eminence. His personalized approach is reminiscent of but also distinct from a long inventory of treatises on women –Ruth Kelso counted nearly 900 extant–,[19] some of them claiming to be "defences" while others were little more than lists of heroines for admiration.

Beginning with collections of women inspired by a classical tradition of catalogues of illustrious females –such as Boccaccio's *De Mulieribus Claris* (*Concerning Famous Women*), one of the sources Christine de Pizan used for composing her *Book of the City of Ladies*– to Humanists treatises concerned with women's education and governance, catalogues of women worthies abounded in seventeenth-century Britain: Thomas Heywood *The Exemplary lives and memorable acts of nine the most worthy women in the world* (1641), Charles Gerbier's *The Praise of Worthy Women* (1651), or even the essay *Haec Homo* (1639) written by the barrister William Austin where he emphasizes the duality between mind and body to advocate for women's legal and public liberties –"in the sexe, is all the difference, which is but onely in the body".[20] All of these coexisted with later and more personalized responses to openly misogynistic texts which were influenced by Cartesian debates: letters of moral conduct and advice, such as George Savile's, 1st Marquess of Halifax, *Advice to a Daughter* (1692) in which he defends that "religion is exalted reason"[21]; or James Norris' *The Acomplish'd Lady* (1684) and his correspondence with Mary Astell (1695) asserting that women were not only made to the image of God, but that the spiritual perfection of their souls is capable of expressing itself

[18] *Womans Glorie*, 218.
[19] Ruth Kelso, *Doctrine for the Lady of the Renaissance* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1978), 328.
[20] William Austin, *Haec Homo, Wherein the Excellency of the Creation of Woman is described, By way of an Essay* (London: printed by R.O., 1639), b3.
[21] George Savile, 1st Marquess of Halifax, *The Lady's New Year Gift or Advice to a Daughter* (London: printed for M.G., 1692), 16.

"in all matters of Government and Religion".[22] In turn, Astell's response to Norris' letters shows a moderate assimilation of Cartesian thought through Nicolas Malebranche, for example, in her insistence of the mind's ability to find truth, regardless of a formal lack of education, and in overcoming the influence of the passions in the search for this truth.[23] Astell considers that Norris "is not so narrow-Soul'd as to confine Learning to his own Sex, or to envy it in ours", and admits that "thinking is a stock that no rational creature can want, if they know but how to use it".[24] However, as Jacqueline Broad notes, Astell's concern seems to be in the direction of arguing for the immortality of the soul rather than its interaction with her body. In her letters to Norris, she insists that she has "no clear idea of what is properly myself, nor do I well know how to distinguish its powers and operations".[25] In this regard she is further away from an orthodox Cartesian position and closer to Locke's theory of the continuity of consciousness between souls and selves, casting a shadow on the virtues of a sexless soul if we don't know how to deal with its physical counterpart. Other women writers in Astell's circle adopted similar but more nuanced stances against marriage and all forms of social submission sanctioned by the Bible, mentioning in their arguments both the reality and limitations of the premise on the separation between soul and body. Lady Mary Chudleigh begins her *Ladies Defence* (1701) with a direct address to all fellow women who have been "used" and "insulted" in their minds and bodies, and regards love of truth and knowledge as the only way forward for women to free themselves from any form of female subjection, including marriage which "ought to be a true union of minds as well as of persons and fortunes".[26] In her essay entitled "Of Knowledge", she complains about the disproportion there is as to

[22] John Norris, *The Accomplish'd Lady* (London: printed for James Norris, 1684), 134.
[23] For an extended discussion on Nicholas Malebranche's influence in British Cartesianism, particularly in women philosophers, see Jacqueline Broad, "Impressions in the Brain: Malebranche on Women, and Women on Malebranche", *Intellectual History Review* 22(3) September 2012: 373–389; Katherine J. Hamerton, "Malebranche, Taste, and Sensibility: The Origins of Sensitive Taste and a Reconsideration of Cartesianism's Feminist Potential," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 69, no. 4 (October 2008): 533–58; Nicolas Malebranche, *The Search After Truth*, ed. Thomas M. Lennon and Paul J. Olscamp (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 17.
[24] Mary Astell to John Norris, 21 September 1693, *Letters Concerning the Love of God, Between the Author of the Proposal to the Ladies and Mr. John Norris* (London: J. Norris for Samuel Manship and Richard Wilkin, 1695), 3. See also Mary Astell and John Norris, Melvyn New and Derek Taylor (eds.) *Letters Concerning the Love of God* (London: Routledge, 2005).
[25] Jacqueline Broad, *The Philosophy of Mary Astell: An Early Modern Theory of Virtue* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 65. See also Christine Mason Sutherland, *The Eloquence of Mary Astell* (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2005), 48; Jacqueline Broad, "Mary Astell's Malebranchean Concept of the Self", in *Early Modern Women on Metaphysics,* ed. Emily Thomas (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 211-226.
[26] Chudleigh, Lady Mary; Margaret Ezell (ed.). *The Poems and Prose of Mary, Lady Chudleigh* (New York, London: Oxford University Press, 1993), 249.

intellectual endowments between men and women, and contends that the only true and lasting learning for women, one that would prove a real accomplishment to the mind for both sexes is the knowledge of God and of oneself. This would entail the understanding of creation, of causes and effects so as to be able to form "clear ideas" through contemplation and training of the mind, of which women are perfectly capable if they do not get distracted by lesser pursuits. Judith Drake in her *Essay in Defense of the Female Sex* (1696), originally attributed to Astell, relies on rationalism and experience to report that physicians do not see any physical difference in the bodies of men and women that would support the idea that women's minds are feeble. Elizabeth Elstob (1683-1756), a scholar of Anglo-Saxon studies and educator, friend of Mary Astell, published a preface to her translation of the homily on the birthday of St. Gregory (1709), by Aelfric, abbot of Eynsham. Elstob justifies thus her learning, mentioning also Van Schurman's letter to Rivet as one of the best texts in support of women's erudition: "This I have known urged some by me, with an envy unbecoming that greatness of soul, which is said to dignify their sex. For if women may be said to have souls, and that their souls are their better part, then where is the fault in women seeking after learning?"[27]

Torshell would not disagree with these feminists renderings of Cartesian thinking, as they basically embrace the notion that true excellence comes from wisdom of God's ways, of attaining a perfection of the soul which requires both spiritual discernment and the ability to put minds to rational use. These seem to be concerned with a pressing issue that Erica Harth identified in her study of women and Cartesian thought: if the premise that "the mind has no sex" was in many respects liberating for women's minds, as it identifies their spiritual essence as equal to men in the realm of the spirit coinciding with theological postulates, then, what happens to the body? Sermons and doctrinal literature may be vague at best as to how the irrelevance of sexual differentiation in the soul reflects upon civil and physical rights. Descartes' dualism, as Harth aptly reminds us, does not address this issue as far as women's condition is concerned, and in fact it may act as a "discursive trap" for women as it does not take into account embodied difference.[28] Some of the Cartesiennes' strategy of ignoring or minimizing sexual bodily difference was counterproductive for women writers and ideas, according to Harth, as women became simultaneously absorbed and excluded from a "universalizing sex-neutral rational

[27] Elstob, Elizabeth (ed.). *An English-Saxon Homily on the Birthday of St. Gregory* (London: printed by W. Bowyer, 1709), iii.
[28] Erica Harth, *Cartesian Women* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992), 9.

discourse".[29] This would amount to saying that women thinkers who assimilated and qualified ramifications of Cartesian dualism did not or could not effectively contribute to a change of perception in women's mental capacity, which is obviously not the case.

As a member of the clergy, Samuel Torshell would not liberate the female body from its sacred hierarchical bond with God and men. However, *The Womans Glorie* does not avoid either the potential contradictions of asserting the spiritual equality of the sexes while dignifying women's role in social life. He considers that the body of the woman "is made organical, in that there is nothing that puts a barre to the soul's operations".[30] The soul is a diamond that sparkles within the body.[31] Torshell is aware of the fact that presenting a dull catalogue of female worthies will not pay justice to the active eminence he wants to convey as proof that women have, as well as men, the moral responsibility of living according to their exalted soul status and put it to good public use. His historical commentary to the women he features in his essay seeks to show how they have been subject to prejudice because of laws that have treated them as slaves in some societies or diminished their moral and intellectual status. For every male example of wisdom and eminence, Torshell finds a woman equal or superior in skills and learning: Minerva being "the inventresse and patronesse of learning" or "Anna Maria à Schurman and her learned writings' challenging intellectuals and politicians".[32] For Torshell, the only sure way to true equality and eminence is learning, as it fosters knowledge of the soul and the soul registers no subordination on account of sex.

The Mind and the "Organicall" Body

Torshell features in the title page of *The Womans Glorie* nine types of eminent behaviour which women are capable of manifesting, which include wisdom, 'policie' (meaning social ability), deliberation, secrecy, learning, constancy, courage, ability to govern, piety and religion. His notion of glory is thus intent on exploring the real meaning of these qualities as they potentially manifest in men and women. While treatises on women's worthies often sought to offer an illustrative catalogue dodging any debate about the superiority or inferiority of women –such as Pierre Le Moyne *The Gallery of Heroick Women*[33], translated in 1652 by the marchioness of Winchester, or Madeleine de Scudéry

[29] Harth, *Cartesian Women,* 12.
[30] Torshell, *Womans Glorie*, 13.
[31] *Womans Glorie*, 201.
[32] *Womans Glorie,* 56.
[33] Pierre Le Moyne, *La Gallerie des Femmes Fortes* (Paris: Antoine de Sommaville, 1647).

Les Femmes Illustres (1642),[34] published in English translation in 1683 and 1691– Torshell is keen on exploring the true manifestation of eminency in women's character and deeds, while allowing himself to be instructed by those examples of female excellency. His approach is also atypical in that he does not remark upon the social or moral qualities of those women, but privileges the image of the *savante* over the *illustrious.*

Torshell's publication of one of Van Schurman's letters to André Rivet reveals his intention to allow his living example to explain herself. The letter, written and addressed to a man, acts as an embedded subtext with which Torshell the author can interact. In a way, he puts himself in the narrative position of Rivet the addressee, where he can negotiate and basically accept Van Schurman's opinions. Torshell's example is not, therefore, passively illustrious, but actively eminent to the extent that it allows an intellectual exchange between both.

His translation of excerpts of Van Schurman's *Dissertatio De Ingenii Muliebris ad Doctrinam* in 1645 from her authoritative version of 1641, revised by herself after she learned that an unauthorized edition of an earlier version of her tract was published in 1638 in Paris. This predated the complete translation of Van Schurman's texts as *The Learned Maid* in 1659 by the vicar Clement Barksdale, who had shown a keen interest in the education of girls and wrote *A Letter touching the Colledge* [sic] *of Maids* (1675). Most probably, Torshell got Van Schurman's authorized version of her texts in Latin from Batshua Makin, who was a friend of Van Schurman and mentor of Elizabeth Stuart around the same time when Torshell was chaplain to the young princess.[35] Makin appears mentioned in Van Schurman' *The Learned Maid* as a fine example of how women can achieve glory through learning, an argument that Makin expounds in her *Essay to Revive the Ancient Education of Gentlewomen* (1673).

Whether Torshell was aware of it or not, Van Schurman's letter stays away from the question of the body as the locus where women's subjection takes place on account of Biblical injunctions and civil subjection. Her general detachment from Cartesian philosophy does not mean she was immune to contemporary debates on the duality soul-

[34] George [and Madeleine de Scudéry], *Les femmes illustres, ou les harangues heroiques de Monsieur de Scudéry, avec les veritables portraits de ces heroïnes, tirez des medailles antiques* (Paris: Antoine de Sommaville & A. Coubé, 1642).
[35] Frances Teague, *Bathsua Makin, Woman of Learning* (London: Associated University Presses, 1998), 61; Anne R. Larsen, *Anna Maria van Schurman, The Star of Utrecht* (London: Routledge, 2016), 186. Carol Pal. *Republic of Women.* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 181.

body or that she –like Torshell– could not be absorbed by them. Van Schurman's reluctance to accept a sexless mind as the solution to women's problems of access and use of knowledge has its roots in her early network of collaborators and mentors who preferred the ancient classical authority of the scholastic model. In particular, the Dutch Calvinist theologian and anti-Cartesian Gisbertus Voetius, professor of theology at Utrecht university in 1636, when Van Schurman attended lessons there. By that time, in Leiden, she also met Elizabeth of Bohemia (1618-1680), the celebrated princess philosopher who corresponded with Descartes offering her critique to his works until his death.[36] Jacqueline Broad has defined the early relationship between Van Schurman and Elizabeth of Bohemia as "a microcosm of the 'ancient *versus* modern'.[37] With regard to how knowledge is formed, princess Elizabeth by virtue of her whole-hearted Cartesian stance believed that the shaping and maturing of clear ideas could only occur thanks to reason, whereas Van Schurman would argue this could only be attained through one's dedication to study. Both women engaged in some correspondence in 1639 and, despite their ideological distance, their interest in the interconnections between soul-mind and the body are obvious.

Princess Elizabeth would ask Descartes insistently about how the mind and the body can intermingle if these are two distinct substances even if the "unextended" and immaterial soul exists apart from the "extended" and material body.[38] Neither Van Schurman nor Elizabeth of Bohemia would elaborate on this specific issue or its derivatives, such as women's natural rights of liberty. In particular, Van Schurman felt the spiritual equality of the sexes was the starting point on which to begin to address women's status in civic life, and not the end of the discussion. In spite of their early differences, both women evolved towards a deeper interest in religious mysticism, and in 1670 Elizabeth offered asylum to Van Schurman and a group of accompanying Labadist

[36] Nancy Kendrick and Jessica Gordon-Roth present in Chapter 2 of this volume an illuminating view of how scholarship on Elizabeth of Bohemia, as with most other women philosophers, has failed to analyse her work due to an ingrained bias on women's epistemic authority. Current interdisciplinary approaches that combine analytic philosophy with literary and historical context –and, I would add, theology– are beginning to remedy the apparent paucity of women's intellectual contributions.

[37] Jacqueline Broad, *Women Philosophers of the Seventeenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 17.

[38] For a discussion about the epistolary exchange between Descartes and Elizabeth of Bohemia about the relationship soul-body, see Erik-Jan Bos, "Princess Elizabeth of Bohemia and Descartes' Letters", *Historia Mathematica* 37 (2010): 485-502; Lisa Shapiro, "Princess Elizabeth and Descartes: The Union of Soul and Body and the Practice of Philosophy", *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 7(3) 1999: 503-520; Harth, *Cartesian Women*, 64-70; Eileen O'Neill, "Early Modern Women Philosophers and the History of Philosophy"*, Hypatia*, vol. 20, nº3 (Summer 2005): 185-197.

associates at Herford Abbey, a religious house in the Duchy of Saxony of which Elizabeth was princess-abbess.[39]

Along similar lines, Gabrielle Suchon in *Traité de la morale et de la politique* ("Treatise on Ethics and Politics", 1693) maintained that no-one can impose on women any system of learning without allowing them an inherent right to God-given freedom of choice and of the mind, a feature that differentiates animals from humans and, as such, delegitimizes the prescription of phallocentric rules on the education of women.[40] Suchon contends that lack of freedom brings constraint, which in turn hinders the development of a person's natural faculties of the mind and impedes the exercise of one's epistemic authority, fostering ignorance and dependence. The consequences of this lack of freedom affects "persons of the female sex" in particular[41]. Earlier on, Marie de Gournay, a friend and correspondent of Van Schurman who was forty years her senior, had argued for equality of the sexes in *Égalité des hommes et des femmes* (1622; *The Equality of the Sexes,* 1641) and also resorted to natural rights to express her distaste for an alleged superiority of women over men. "Nature is also as opposed to superiority as to inferiority in this respect" as sexes were created by god in *secundum quid*, that is, for reproductive purposes.[42] Gournay, who uses Biblical referents to debunk women's submission, realized that arguments in favour of women's excellence as being superior to that of men could easily lead to opposite positions to justify female submission.

Samuel Torshell does not fall into this trap, either. While it might look as if he is only providing examples of women's excellence, he is more concerned with the reasons why these women are eminent both in some aspect of public life and, of course in virtue. Virtue might bring about learning, and the other way round, but it is not a necessary condition. His views on that chime with what Gournay also defended. The former adopts a syllogistic structure in her justification and, as at least some women have proved to be as capable as men, it follows that the inferiority of the female sex cannot possibly argued for.[43]

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[39] Sabina Ebbersmeyer, "An Inventory of the Extant Correspondence of Elizabeth of Bohemia, Princess Palatine*", Journal of the History of Philosophy*, vol. 58, nº2 (2020): 331.
[40] Rebecca Wilkin, "Feminism and Natural Right in François Poullain de la Barre and Gabrielle Suchon". *Journal of the History of Ideas*, vol. 80:2 (2019): 239.
[41] Gabrielle Suchon, *A Woman Who Defends All the Persons of her Sex: Selected Philosophical and Moral Writings*, ed. Donna Stanton and Rebecca Wilkin (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010).
[42] Marie le Jars de Gournay, Richard Hillman, Colette Quesnel (eds). *Apology for the Woman Writing.* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2002), 55.
[43] Torshell, *Womans Glorie*, 54.

Men are more advanced in the pursuit of knowledge, and there are comparatively more men than women in a state of glory, but only because bias in the interpretation of the Bible has distorted the true meaning of excellence as a mirror of God's image. "I know that many of the antients have spoken much to the lessening and reproach of the whole sexe […] but notwithstanding all this prejudice, the point that I have propounded remains good upon those scriptures that I have alleaged: *what is, may be.* If some of the sexe have been so [accomplished] the proposition is firme that the sexe is capable and may be so".[44] An excellent and glorious woman is not just "a comely feature, or a graceful deportment, as a qualification of the mind and a right frame of spirit".[45] Torshell does not have any qualms in admitting women's equal standard to men in excellence, provided women accept their hierarchical position of submission to them. "As excellent as the woman-sexe is", writes Torshell, yet it is in subjection to man".[46] His assurance in this regard makes any modern reader uncomfortable, as on the one hand Torshell seeks to reinstate women as creators and practitioners of the highest forms of knowledge while, as a clergyman, women are second to men in the organization of social life, as Eve was created in the image of God but second to Adam.

In the translated letter embedded in *The Womans Glorie,* Van Schurman contests women's hierarchical and structural submission by calling on a deeper understanding of what true equality for men and women entails. No "equitie of common right" can take place, according to Van Schurman, if women's opinion on matters of science and knowledge can hardly be regarded as worthier than that of men. Since we are all in a state of fallen grace, she says, learning brings light and truth.[47] Van Schurman defends women's role as creators of science and knowledge because it is consistent with natural philosophy –namely, the philosophical study of nature and the universe– in asserting that there is harmony in knowledge and that it is "troubling" that "some shut up this studie into so narrow a roome, thinking it does not much concern us".[48] Van Schurman takes this opportunity to comment on the correspondence between the highest and the lowest, the abstract sphere of knowledge and the physicality of earthly existence, and wonders why, as far as the pursuit of learning is concerned, the male body "enjoys a heavenly

[44] *Womans Glorie,* p.15.
[45] *Womans Glorie,* p.100.
[46] *Womans Glorie,* p.154.
[47] *Womans Glorie*, p. 52.
[48] *Womans Glorie*, p. 54.

nature", when "the desire of knowing" is planted in "all men" as in all women.[49] The risk of excluding women from epistemological practice is that they become "strangers, not inhabitants in this world".[50] Van Schurman's vehement argument concludes with a theological remark that Torshell might have nodded at when he was translating this letter: "We should be stocks, and not of humane kind […] if we could not bring our mind raised, and as it were inflamed with divine love, to so beautiful, so glorious things, in which the Majestie of the eternall God-head shines forth".[51]

For both Van Schurman and Torshell, then, true equality between the sexes is not only a recognition of spiritual parity, or an egalitarianism that, in practice, does not recognize women's potential intellectual eminence over men. If wisdom is "so great an ornament" of humankind, it should also be fit for a maiden. Besides, the state should promote the pursuit of knowledge for both sexes as it enforces compliance with the law. The structural submission of women's intellectual faculties and authority is not a reflection of spiritual inequality –as that espoused by the fierce proponents of openly misogynistic texts from the *Querelle*– as men and women are equal as souls. But it is neither a reflection of a condescending view that holds women only equal partners in the realm of the spirit, but not in every other aspect of public and private life, including intellectual authority. "For by what right, I pray, are these things fallen to our lot? By a divine right or humane?" asks Van Schurman in her letter.[52]

Torshell seems to follow on Van Schurman's thread along the same lines by suggesting, as she does, that "greater matters do no only become us in everyday existence, but also in this manner of life are expected from us".[53] Women cannot expect to conduct themselves wisely in life without learning arts, sciences, history and languages. Sadly, if many women did not take the path of learning, it was not "because they lacked wit or judgement, or because they would not apply their minds to them". They have not done so because they have been made to devote themselves to "other lower affaires", meaning essentially domestic chores and duties that often leave no room for higher pursuits.[54] He wonders whether women who manage to free themselves from spending too much time on mundane occupations, and occupy their free time wisely to learning, should be

[49] *Womans Glorie*, p. 55.
[50] *Womans Glorie*, p. 57.
[51] *Womans Glorie*, p. 57.
[52] *Womans Glorie*, p. 46.
[53] *Womans Glorie*, p. 48.
[54] *Womans Glorie*, p. 37.

accepted to "publicke offices". He quotes the Roman jurist Ulpian in passing, who believed that "women are not to meddle with civill offices". But immediately after he casts a shadow of a doubt over such a statement, in particular "with what equitie this law was made", as both men and women should employ their learning to "something that is good", otherwise, it may lead to softness of the mind.[55] So taking one's learning to public use would be the natural consequence of activating the powers of the mind and another dimension to the physical counterpart of the sexless nature of the soul. He also mentions the typological referent of *Deborah*, the judge of Israel, as a token of "public management".

However, Torshell is aware that the widespread acceptance of women in public offices clashes with ingrained prejudice against females because many "think it is sufficient studie for women to handle the needle". Van Schurman, like Gournay, criticized those who stated that "pulling the needle and distaff is an ample enough school for women".[56] Christianity imposes the same moral code upon men and women and offers to each the same promise of grace and salvation, but the pervasive assumption that women's weaker nature makes them more prone than men to vices justifies the implementation of what were seen as pre-eminently feminine virtues: in particular, obedience and submissiveness. Torshell supports obedience to spiritual hierarchy, but not on account of women's alleged inferior position. Van Schurman shares a similar perspective here: eminence implies a new concept of time in which women "do not seeke leisure from duty or employment" but improve leisure in them. If the female mind is trained to engage itself in fruitful activities, these will be conducive to higher degrees of mental sophistication and self-empowerment. Neither Van Schurman nor Torshell, however, are too specific on the kinds of activities women could exert in their new-acquired expertise, as the "usefulness of wisdom is no less than the excellencie of it". She considers that learning per se fulfils a public function as women become more capable citizens, and this is why women should be admitted to universities.

In order to make a practical and public use of this knowledge, Torshell does not explicitly address women's admission to universities, but accepts it as a normalized practice for any learned individual –as he shows in the case of queen Christina. He is vocal, though, about readings that are not feeding the intellect and the inner disposition

[55] *Womans Glorie*, p. 44.
[56] Anna Maria van Schurman, Joyce Irwin (trans.). *Whether a Christian Woman Should Be Educated and Other Writings from Her Intellectual Circle* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1998), 43.

to glory: “Away with Amadis de Gaula, with the tragedies, the comedies and the pastorals”, since these soften the spirit, “Away with your Spenser, your Ariosto and Arcadia because these steale away your hearts and time from your scripture study and meditation”.[57] Note that he is not saying “scripture reading” and “praying”, but “study” and “meditation”, which is a systematic and more theologically engaged manner of reading. In so far as what we indulge in reading fashions who we are, the mind is trained in studying and reasoning. Still, “where is wisdom to be found in men and women”? Torshell wonders. To be infused with glory is, for both of them, to “learn to converse holily in the world”.[58]

Since the soul knows no subordination on account of sex, and the “organic” body is a reflection of the soul, there are no actual impediments for the male and female bodies to equally express the excellence of their souls. But if both individuals are “gifted by the same sanctifying spirit”, why is it that they are seen as binary opposite? According to Torshell, prejudices against the female sex and her intrinsic inability to perform in glory have a social and a spiritual cause. It is the responsibility of each man and woman to be receptive to this sanctifying spirit, to lead a life inspired by grace. When an individual fails to do so, his behaviour is prone to abuse and prejudice, which in the case of the relationship between the sexes has always played against women. Torshell is suggesting, in fact, not a return to piety and mysticism, but a Calvinistic notion of election in which the body can be prepared to receive the infusions of the soul, whose essence is the love of God.

For Torshell, as for most seventeenth-century Anglicans, Puritans, Calvinists and non-conformists of all persuasions, reason must be assimilated into an intuitive understanding of God’s will that requires a highest type of knowledge or wisdom. This is exactly the kind of understanding that Torshell is proposing for both women and men: by cultivating the life of the spirit, our “organic bodies” become soul-infused and, as a result, wiser. From this wisdom, prejudice against women can only disappear. Any sexual revolution must be based on a spiritual discipline for men and women. The laws of the recent and distant past, like the edicts forbidding women to participate in “government life” and laws that “appointed to them tutors and guardians even at a grown age” are “gross prejudices”. The most eminent men, he says, have displayed qualities such as “wisdom, discretion, and policie” (meaning social ability), and the same should pertain

[57] Torshell, *Womans Glorie*, p. 124.
[58] *Womans Glorie*, p. 126.

to women. He includes "the policie of stratagem as reckoned to the family of wisdom" and includes "design and engine".[59]

Torshell also minimizes a common criticism against women, which is their vanity in matters of attire. He defines himself as a person who is "not too strict about fashions as to condemne all that are new, as I thinke there is a necessity to speake the language of the time".[60] He describes fashion as a vehicle for self-expression, and he "knows no rule that binds us to the observation of habits of all times"; if it were so, he says ironically, "we would clothe ourselves with Adam's skinnes". His only rule for attire is that men and women do not invest disproportionate amounts of time to it, since time is a much more precious resource. This time could be applied to learning or to giving a specific use to their acquired knowledge.

Neither Torshell nor Van Schurman address the social problematics that prevent new acquired learning and spiritual equality from translating into an effective dignity for the female sex. Poullain de la Barre would develop this particular aspect of the interaction between mind and body from a Cartesian perspective. Since the mind and the body are two distinct dimensions, and the constraints on the female body should not be an impediment to acquire knowledge, these constraints should be taken as temporal and man-made, not as spiritual laws. Social custom, forged out of a consistent usurpation of knowledge on the part of men to impose over women on aspects that affect their everyday life (such as property laws, marriage, money, access to education), has bolstered up the prejudices against women stemming from their alleged inferiority to men. And it is precisely in the sphere of social custom where men must correct their behaviour on behalf of women.

The notion of Soul glory bypasses the conceptual problem of having to articulate the rudiments of the interaction between mind and body, which Descartes left largely unexplained by offering a mechanistic picture of the body and the brain.[61] But if the mind and the soul are immaterial and ontologically similar, how does sexual difference affect the mind, as pointed out by a long tradition of misogynistic literature? This is what Poullain de la Barre seeks to solve in his reading of Cartesianism by attributing to custom and habit the long list of abuses against women.[62] Habit is a mechanical attitude, thinking

[59] *Womans Glorie*, p. 24.
[60] *Womans Glorie*, p. 131.
[61] La Vopa, Anthony J. "Sexless Minds at Work and at Play: Poulain de la Barre and the Origins of Early Modern Feminism", *Representations*, 109 (2010): 68.
[62] Desmond M. Clarke, *The Equality of the Sexes* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 10-13.

is not. Therefore, learning and knowledge have a potential for bringing in true sexual equality in the life of the body –something that Suchon would also support provided this learning can effectively change the customs created by men.

Torshell tackles the pitfalls in the interactions between mind and body by drawing a distinction between education, learning and knowledge. Women are perfectly capable of achieving the highest forms of knowledge as souls and minds are sexless. Hence, the fruits of this knowledge can be put to public use and women may gain recognition as a result. How this attainment and employment of women's wisdom is compatible with a subordinate position of women to men, Torshell does not explain, other than accepting it by theological imperative. He insists on acquiring and practicing the kind of knowledge that leads to the understanding of God's ways and creates, therefore, eminence in aspects of life from which women have traditionally being barred. As bodies, women can activate the powers of the mind which will lead them to knowledge of the soul, soul glory, and excellence (eminence). For Van Schurman, however, knowledge can never attain a true understanding of God, but learning and education are important for men and women in order not to fall prey to the wrong preachers or distorted interpretations of theology. She would maintain this position throughout her life, even when she decided to embrace Labadism in the late 1660s.

In none of these Cartesian readings of the interactions of mind and body can we possibly find a solution of how a sexless mind and soul can effectively change the social submissive position of women. Both Torshell and Van Schurman are aware of such limitations, while at the same time they defend the need to institute a practice of acquiring knowledge in women that would make them self-realized individuals, but not necessarily citizens who would inhabit a more equitable society, as we would understand it in today's parlance. Torshell, like Van Schurman, tackles equality from a spiritual dimension, one that dignifies the life of the body, but does not necessarily transform social processes. However, Torshell wishes to give a chance to how true eminence is capable of transforming women's life and society. He finishes his written sermon with another translated letter, from the French Gazette, concerning the life and studies of queen Christina of Sweden, which illustrates this combination of getting into the habit of reading and learning to apply it to a public function. She combined her office with regular visits to the university of Uppsala where she studied and acted as an example for other women to follow suit. He does not comment on the most sensationalist aspects of Christina's life that the French gazettes were so fond to report on, such as her trips, her lavish lifestyle,

her manly manners or turn to Catholicism around exactly that time or her relationship with Descartes.[63] He prefers instead to focus on her education and public function, regardless of her character. If women do not have the time or the means to attend university, then more "publicke schools" should be opened for the "benefit and reputation of all subjects".[64] We can see Christina's Cartesian influence in some of her maxims, such as number 28 and 30, when she asserts that "it is true that the soul is of no sex and that temperament and education explain all the differences".[65]

Torshell finishes with a more personal note that concerns his profession of faith: the fact that there are women preachers and commentators of the Bible, which he considers the highest type of intellectual activity. It should not be assumed that women cannot become theologians because of the complexity of interpreting Scripture. Many men do not understand it, either. He mentions as an example of eminence the case of the Catholic Charlotte des Ursins, viscomtesse d'Auchy, who published her homilies on "an obscure epistle" of the Bible (Saint Paul's Letter to the Hebrews) with "the approval of the doctors and the publicke privilege of the French king".[66] He appears to be surprised that there was a Jesuit college of female preachers in Freiburg, bearing in mind that some have been "ready to blemish our Protestant profession by reason of some bold and indecent offers of this nature here with us of late" referring, obliquely, to the active participation of women as preachers in dissenting conventicles.[67] He also mentions the case of the Italian poetess Margherita Sarrocchi (1560-1617), whose epic poem *Scanderbeide* is the only known work that has come down to us, in the context of her role as moderator of the seventeenth-century learned society Academy of the Humourists (Accademia degli Umoristi), especially in disputations of philosophy and theology.[68]

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[63] For a closer examination of Christina of Sweden's life and correspondence, see Georgina Masson, *Queen Christina* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1968); Michael Roberts (ed.), *Sweden's Age of Greatness* (London: Macmillan, 1973); Oskar von Wertheimer, *Christine von Schweden: Abschied vom Thron* (Munich: Moewig, 1981); Susanna Ackerman, *Queen Christina of Sweden and her Circle: The Transformation of a Seventeenth-Century Philosophical Libertine* (Leiden, New York: Brill, 1991). For another positive portrayal of the Queen, see Séverine Genieys-Kirk's contribution in this volume, chapter 12.
[64] Torshell, *Womans Glorie,* p. 254.
[65] Christina of Sweden, *The Works of Christina, Queen of Sweden, Containing Maxims and Sentences, in Twelve Centuries* (London: printed for D. Wilson and T. Durham, 1753), 64.
[66] Torshell, *Womans Glorie,* p. 260.
[67] *Womans Glorie*, p.261.
[68] Margherita Sarrocchi, Rinaldina Russell (ed.). *Scanderbeide. The Heroic Deeds of George Scanderbeg, King of Epirus* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006).

Acting Beyond 'His' Sex

In spite of its anodyne and innocuous appearance as one among many sermons extolling women's virtue, a more attentive reading of *The Womans Glorie* reveals a conscientious defence of women's learning. Torshell's translation of Van Schurman's letter to André Rivet into English for the first time, embedded in the narrative structure of the essay, demonstrates his ability to absorb and engage constructively with arguments in favour of women's education. Far from providing an educational scheme suited for ladies or a catalogue of female household names following on the scholastic tradition of exemplarity, Torshell stretches his theological views to enter a dialectical exchange with Van Schurman that integrates Cartesian rhetoric on the sexless nature of the soul as well as postulates from *Querelle*'s authors, such as Agrippa or Gournay. Torshell shows his critical streak with exaggerated defences of women, on the grounds that these do not really pay justice to them as full individuals. His particular concern is 'soul glory', the ability to live in true wisdom or 'eminence'. Women of all social backgrounds are therefore capable of attaining wisdom by training the mind in the formation of God-given ideas. Although Van Schurman considers that the mind is not capable of discerning 'God's ways' and that learning itself fulfils a public service, Torshell follows on her thread to endorse the public use of women's learning, thus creating an effect of dialectical fluidity devoid of gender bias between his and Van Schurman's views.

But Torshell's treatise is also interesting for its timeframe. Printed before the blooming of late seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century defences of women's education penned by Chudleigh, Astell, Drake, Suchon, or even by interpreters of Cartesian thinking like Poullain de la Barre, it anticipates the debate for a reassessment of the epistemology of women's access and use of knowledge, such as Sarah Hutton suggests in her analysis of anti-intellectualism in the reception of Émilie Du Châtelet.[69] Likewise, Torshell's advice to keep away from any excessive emphasis on personal circumstances when judging women's achievements strikes a similar note to Kendrick's and Gordon-Roth's appeal in Chapter 2 of this volume to reconsider female intellectual's legacies from an epistemological perspective: both point at the ingrained essentialist bias that places women's life before their work.

Torshell's reception of Van Schurman's work is sincere –although necessarily incomplete– in his attempt to normalize women's scholarship by considering that highly

[69] See Chapter six in this volume.

learned women are not acting beyond their sex. Torshell might be acting beyond his, though. His call to integrate as common practice women's access to knowledge –which often advances through channels different to those of men–does not address social rights for women but promotes, in equal terms and opportunities with men, the attainment of soul glory.

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