

HER MASCULINE STRENGTH OF MIND:
THE INFLUENCE OF DESIDERIUS ERASMUS UPON THE EDUCATION OF WOMEN IN
RENAISSANCE WOMEN

A Senior Thesis

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Erasmus Upon the Education of Women in Renaissance England

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“Her Masculine Strength of Mind”: The Influence of Desiderius Erasmus Upon the Education of the English Renaissance Woman. Jennifer L. Ahlfors (Donald R. Dickson), English, Texas A&M University.

This research discusses the transition in the thinking of the sixteenth-century monk Desiderius Erasmus on the education of women. At first he regarded women as intellectual inferiors, but eventually he recognized that women could be fit companions to men as well as intellectual equals. By studying his works, especially his New Testament paraphrases on the role of women, this paper discusses why his thinking changed and how it led him to write his controversial colloquies (i.e., dialogues used as educational texts, that were banned in many parts of Europe).

In the beginning of the sixteenth century, England was experiencing one of the greatest periods of change in its history, the Renaissance. Jacob Burckhardt's explanation of the fundamental shifts in consciousness, in his Civilisation of the Renaissance in Italy, remains definitive:

In the Middle Ages both sides of human consciousness—that which was turned within and that which was turned without—lay as though dreaming or half awake beneath a common veil. The veil was woven of faith illusion, and childish prepossession, through which the world and history were clad in strange hues. Man was conscious of himself only as a member of a race, people, party, family, or corporation—only through some general category. It is in Italy that this dissolves first; there arose an *objective* treatment and consideration of the State and of all the things of this world, and at the same time the *subjective* side asserted itself with corresponding emphasis. Man became a spiritual *individual* and recognized himself as such. In the same way the Greek had once distinguished himself from the barbarian, and the Arab had felt himself an individual at a time when other Asiatics knew themselves only as a member of a race (Burckhardt 121).

Encompassing all of Europe, though not occurring everywhere at the same time, the civilized world as humankind knew it underwent a “spiritual liberation from a medieval past that was asserted to have been backward, benighted, clerical, and Catholic” (Brady xiii-xiv). Amidst the swirling transitions, a controversial monk, Desiderius Erasmus, emerged as a powerful voice. Spanning the transition (living half of his life before the

Renaissance reached England) and spanning the Continent (born in Amsterdam, but never claiming one country as his own) Erasmus perhaps would best be labeled as the man of transition. His collected writings—some seventy volumes in all—are a treasure trove for historians and a window to his contemporary society, and more importantly, how he believed the society ought to be. He endured criticism that he found painful, as well as enjoyed high acclaim for his works. As a true Renaissance man, a citizen of the European republic of letters, his opinions were formed by a culture of a particular time and not by any one place. He was influenced most by friendships and a God he experienced in a way unfamiliar to the clerical order he served.

One of the areas that Erasmus held greatest influence was in the education of women. It is interesting that this leading figure in support of the educated women had little contact with the opposite sex, being orphaned by his mother at the age of nine, and taking a vow of chastity before entering the clerical order. However, through the span of his life, he was influenced to change his opinions from the traditional role of women to the enlightenment of the potential capabilities women held. The focus of this paper is to explore how his views on the role of women in society changed and why.

Almost all education has a social, rather than individual purpose. The end of the education is to produce a member of society who will play a certain desired role. The refusal until recent times to provide women with an education to the same caliber as men's has always come from the belief that women are inferior to the male sex. In any great epoch, such as the Renaissance, it is necessary to discover the type of woman considered ideal in the particular period, in order to understand the education given to

her. What roles could the woman play with the education entitled her? How was it related to the role implied for the male in her society?

I.

There is no special faculty of administration in a state which a woman has because she is a woman, or which a man has by virtue of his sex, but the gifts of nature are alike diffused in both; all the pursuits of men are the pursuits of women also, but in all of them, a woman is inferior to a man. -Plato, *The Republic*

A. The Medieval Woman

To understand the changes in the roles of women that evolved in the Renaissance, it is important to first understand where the Renaissance woman came. The ideal medieval woman was a contradiction. The Church taught that she was evil, the image of Eve, but also encouraged revering Mary the Holy mother and the female saints. Devotion to Mary grew as Europe grew. With the knightly code in which ladies were identified with purity, women often found themselves balancing between a deep pit of sexuality and a high pedestal of saintlihood. The Church on the one hand governed the social and religious aspects of life, determining what was acceptable and what was not. Husbands, fathers, and families governed her work, relationships, and future. The Middle Ages, once referred to as the “Dark Ages,” was a difficult time to live as a woman. Struggling between the conflicting roles as wife and the church’s demands of purity, the Medieval woman had for the most part a lowly existence. Her life was her husband’s and family’s.

The nuclear family averaged about five members per household. This is a fairly small number in comparison to future generations, but considering the circumstances, it is not surprising. Mortality for mothers was high with the unsanitary conditions, poor hygiene and nutrition that infiltrated every town and city. The small number of children was not a strategic form of birth control. With infant mortality reaching fifty percent in some areas, a family was successful if three children reached adulthood.

Howard Wilcox Haggard observed that the method of caring for the pregnant woman in the medieval period may have been its lowest than in any other time in history. Even the neglect of primitive people was better treatment of the Medieval Christians who believed that since childbirth was a result of lustful sin, it had to be redeemed through pain and sorrow. Uncaring of the health and well-being of the expectant mother, those in charge of caring for difficult deliveries sometimes tried to create intrauterine baptismal tubes to administer the sacrament to the unborn children. They also were known to perform Caesarian sections with surgical procedures that could only result in the death of the mother. Many women also died in normal child birth because of the ignorance of how to care for women in labor. The Church also had its influence in the child bearing process. New mothers had to go through a religious cleansing ceremony after giving birth to their children, usually between thirty and forty days after labor. Until that time, they were considered unclean and could not make bread, prepare food, or touch holy water (Warnicke 10).

The marriage union itself held one main purpose: procreation. Most of the marriages (two thirds) were prearranged and most occurred between two members of the

same community. Only one third of marriages on record consisted of marriage partners from neighboring villages. Marriage was a partnership in the sense that there came a mingling of property (the wife's becomes the husband's), the wife contributed to the household's economy, and both husband and wife had an impact in the raising of children. The ideal family contained a wife that would obey her husband, a husband who would show affection toward his wife, and take care of her, and a union that would produce many healthy children. As Margaret King has succinctly put it, in marriages of the medieval society, man and woman did indeed become one person "and that person was the husband" (King 50).

This statement is quite true, at least in the context of law and the church-- the two governing heads in all aspects of society. The husband was not only the head of the household, he was also responsible for all major decisions, such as who the children should marry, how they should be educated, and what their occupations should be. Other relations may have been asked about the suitability of such decisions, but ultimately it was within the father or husband's power.

In the late fourteenth century, Giovanni Dominici (a Dominican) advised women to allow their husbands to arrange "your ornaments, your food, your talk, and your earnings, and your prayers...." "Go out of the house or stay in it as he commands, and if he forbids it, do not visit even your father or mother or any of your kin" (King 40).

Preachers restricted women to the home, to silence, to plainness; they demanded a total removal of her expressive will, her body, her voice, even her ornament. The material

adornments of a woman were the expression of the status of her husband or related male: her clothing and jewelry were signs of social rank (King 53).

In one French code of 1404, the right of the husband to beat his wife was acknowledged. “Every master and head of a household may chastise his wife and family without anyone placing any impediment in his way” (King 40). Eighty years later, when William Caxton published in English translation the *Book of the Knight of La Tour Landry*, which he recommended as proper reading for all young girls, women who were not quietly obedient to their husbands were said to deserve “bloody and devastating beatings” (Warnicke 11).

Education reflects the social and power relationships between men and women in society. Men and women were viewed as two totally different beings-- presumably women were the intellectually inferior sex.. It was not a new concept. The great Aristotle wrote in his *Generation of Animals*, “We should look upon the female state of being as it were a deformity, though one which occurs in the ordinary course of nature.”

Formal education in this time period was meager for women. That which existed was intended for the noble lady. It consisted of practical lessons on how to manage the household and servants, and how to conduct herself in a chaste, modest and sober manner (Stock 31). This focus blocked the goals of accomplishments and learning techniques. In a society in which men dominate, as in fifteenth-century England, women’s education was determined by men, at least to the extent that it did not run contradictory to the interests of society. Men concentrated on the aspects of education which they themselves preferred for the ladies, and ignored the others. Men desired

wives who were chaste and moral, quiet and reserved in action and speech; and for them, virtue meant more than accomplishments. Nicholas Orme suggests, however, that “in fact, a noble lady whether a married woman or a nun shared much of the knowledge and many of the accomplishments of her husband or brothers” (Orme 212).

The medieval nobility acknowledged the idea that women could be schooled in letters, and accomplish a standard of scholarship that equaled that of men. However, just because an idea existed did not mean it was put into practice. The learning of women was simply a lower priority in society than the learning of men.

B. The Renaissance Woman

In Margaret King’s *Women of the Renaissance* she addresses a profound question: Did women have a Renaissance? Her answer (at least initially) was no, they did not. There certainly is support for that theory. Thomas Salter was far from subtle in his *Mirror of Modestie*, when he claimed:

I would therefore advise that training in the liberal arts is unsuitable for a maiden in whom a virtuous demeanor and chaste behavior would be more seemly than the vanity of learning. In the study of the liberal arts there are two things intended: recreation and professional gain. But such is not to be expected of her who ought to be wholly devoted to the government of her household. And those studies that yield recreation will endanger the beauty and brightness of her mind. Therefore, inasmuch as women are to be neither magistrate nor professors of law and philosophy, and inasmuch as pleasurable studies may as easily make them artful lovers as clever writers of verse, women should be restricted to the care of their families....Those who

compare the small rewards of learning with its great dangers will soon perceive that needlework with good repute is far preferable to erudition with dishonor (Salter 44).

Despite such opinions, progress was made though not universally. The first signs of change began in Italy in the fifteenth century. It was at this time that the movement known as Humanism began to sweep the intellectual culture of Italy. The movement was based upon a revival of the works of the classical world. During this time a small, select group of Italian women enjoyed educational advantages. It was only the women who could claim noble birth, or were married to scholars who enjoyed the fruits of this new education. As in England, the ideal for the Italian woman was virtue. If she enjoyed a “renaissance”, it was within the limits of her household.

In 1433 Lionardo Bruni wrote the first Italian humanist work devoted completely to the education of women. It was entitled *De Studios et Literio*, and written in the form of a letter to Baptista di Montrefelto. In it he stressed that intellectual education was designed only for the noble lady, so that she might further develop her character (Bartlett 32). The subject for women, according to Bruni, which was entirely her own was the “whole field of religion and morals” (Bartlett 33). Suitable reading for women according to Giovanni Michele Brido was the Scriptures, the lives of famous women and the lives of female saints. Unsuitable reading consisted of Boccaccio and love stories. Religion, and the meditation upon it led to the true religion and piety, which in turn would lead to obedience and humility.

The Italian Renaissance also introduced the concept of companionate marriage between husband and wife. Marriage was to be a state of “unanimity” wrote the Italian humanist Francesco Barbaro, where both partners shared one will. Sexual love was to be a “pattern of perfect friendship,” where all problems yield to a discussion between husband and wife. “Let them openly discuss whatever is bothering them....and let them feign nothing, dissemble nothing, and conceal nothing. Very often sorrow and trouble of mind are relieved by means of discussion and counsel that ought to be carried out in a friendly fashion with the husband” (King 35). The humanist author Alberti agreed in his *On the Family*. “If pleasure generates benevolence, marriage gives an abundance of all sorts of pleasure and delight: if intimacy increases good will, no one has so close and continued a familiarity with anyone as with his wife....”(King 35).

These concepts must have been refreshing to the Renaissance woman, yet she had to deal now with conflicting roles. For the Renaissance lady, life was directed by the male figure in her life. Her roles were defined by her sexual and economic relationships to men. Finding her identity in either her husband or her God, the Renaissance woman’s main concern was to maintain her chastity (King 29). Most women married, and did so by their early twenties, unless they were of the noble class, and then ages often dropped into the adolescence. A popular picture of the Renaissance was of the Virgin Mary holding her blessed child Jesus with an expression of love and compassion. This picture became the ideal model for the Renaissance woman in relationship to her children. Producing many children was the goal, to ensure the continuation of the blood line. A woman gave birth, nursed, and then gave birth again. As Martin Luther so eloquently put

it: “Even if they (women) bear themselves weary, or bear themselves out...this is the purpose for which they exist” (King, 3).

Contrary to Luther’s opinion, women did exist for other purposes. Women worked on a daily basis. Most commonly, their role was within domestic management, but women also replaced their husbands in their jobs while they were off at war. Whether it be on the farm or the butcher shop, women played a role in the economics of the household, but it usually only occurred because the husband was not there to do so. The ideal woman was the perfect mother as well as the quiet and submissive wife. The wife who married, whether she wanted to or not, had to develop a relationship with her husband juggling between contradicting notions. On one hand, she was to be a companion and friend to her husband, and on the other, she was to submit and be the object of restrictions and rules levied by her husband and other male authorities.

The Renaissance came late to England—approximately a century after it occurred in Italy. It was within this time period and place that the humanist education of women began to truly develop. Under the leadership of Sir Thomas More, many men within the scholastic circles began to see the potential of educating women.

From the beginning, girls received the same primary education as boys. It was acknowledged that women played a crucial role in the socialization of their children, and for that purpose they received the basic skills. The education branched away however by the time they learned to read. The majority of women then went on to study moral qualities considered necessary for female innocence—qualities such as humility,

simplicity, modesty, piety, patience, and obedience. The education was very similar to the recommended education of the fifteenth-century bourgeoisie.

As earlier mentioned, the education style of the period reflected the social role the women were to play. Education in the new circles began to change for women, as their role began to change in the views of their men. Suddenly, the ideal among the new Humanist reformers was to have a wife that was a companion. To achieve this, it was necessary to have her intellectually educated in the same manners as her male counterparts. It was still stressed that women were to focus on their virtue instead of their learning, and they still were not considered equal to men despite some surprising success.

An important aspect of the Renaissance to keep in mind is that most of the leaders within the movement were members of clerical orders. It is particularly interesting that it was this group of men that cracked open the first door in England towards education for women. It was also the clergy who held the power in determining social roles. Sir Thomas More, who perhaps had the greatest impact on women's education in the Sixteenth century was one of the few who was not a cleric.

More was a lawyer and a judge who served Cardinal Wolsey and King Henry VIII. It is difficult to say what he is most famous for- either his book *Utopia*, or his martyr death (for which now he is declared a saint). For both he has received fame, but perhaps his greatest contribution was in education of the field of women and his achievements of enlarging the functions of the wife and mother. His experiments with his daughters gained world wide renown. His prize pupil was his daughter Margaret Roper. In a letter to her in 1518 when Margaret was 13 years old, he wrote: "tell me

about the progress you are all making in your studies. For I assure you that, rather than allow my children to be idle and slothful, I would make a sacrifice of wealth, and bid adieu to other cares and business, to attend to my children and my family, amongst whom none is more dear to me than yourself, my beloved daughter” (Selected Letters 109).

As far as we know More never systemized his ideas or wrote a manual about how to raise children, or how to educate them. The closest thing to a formal statement on the education of a girl and the young woman is his letters to the girls’ tutor, William Gonnell. Mainly, his accomplishments can be found through the comments and compliments of other humanists (like Juan Luis Vives and Erasmus), the preface to Margaret’s translation of Erasmus’ commentary by Richard Hyrde, and obviously, the talent of Margaret’s own writing. In his preface, Hyrde writes that “many men have questioned the new learning of for women, while some think it downright dangerous. They call women a ‘frayle kynde’, ‘enclyned of their own corage unto vice’ and they claim that Latin and Greek books would ‘enflame their stomakes a great deale the more to that vice’ and teach them to be more cunning” (McCutcheon 201).

Although Margaret Roper may have worked mainly for the approval of her father, she must have been an ambitious lady. She was still quite young (early twenties) when she was published. Demonstrating her humility and virtue, her translation of Erasmus’ *Pater Noster* was published for the most part (as Hyrde suggests in the preface) so that the learning of women might be encouraged, and to dispel the negative connotations of their capabilities and natural tendencies for learning. At the time, she was unknown to the world at large, and her connections were neither with the court nor the church, but the

humanist movement of which her father was a key player. More displayed extreme pride in his daughter, leaving no room for doubt that he believed women to be intellectually equal to men.

Vives, the private tutor for Henry VIII's daughter Mary was one of the leading humanists of the time. He was a major advocate for the education of women. In the span of one year he wrote three books on the education of Renaissance women. In contrast, throughout the vast span of the Middle Ages, only seven books dealing with the education of women had been printed in England. Of those three, two were written in Latin, and therefore unattainable to the public (Blade 51). Vives emphasized everything that had to do with chastity. His view that women were inferior to men must have been a common belief because in a work dedicated to Queen Elizabeth he expressed this opinion in a way that indicated it was widely accepted (Stock 53).

Elizabeth herself exemplified the potential of the humanist movement when women were afforded the opportunity of education. One of the most successful leaders in English history, she was not above the conflicting roles of being a subordinate woman and a world ruler. She shared an uneasy relationship with her preachers-- an important relationship to this study. As men, the preachers saw Elizabeth as subordinate by nature to themselves. They enforced this traditional belief through their sermons and their courts, reminding the public of Elizabeth's responsibilities to the Church.

She was very successful in military tactics, an accomplishment most definitely associated with the male sex. The preachers' ways of dealing with this was to portray Elizabeth as a "hapless victim who depended on God for success in any military

enterprise she reluctantly undertook” (Christian 561). By so portraying her, the preachers could protect their privilege as God’s spokesman by stressing Elizabeth’s dependence upon God, and then of course upon them. They would compare her to Biblical men in her accomplishments, but always the men she was compared to were men in less heroic circumstances, such as Peter in the prison, or Daniel in the Lion’s Den (Christian 573). Always, they stressed her dependence.

It was not just queens or daughters of humanist leaders who received higher levels of education. Though records of education were not kept as clearly for women as they were for men, there is record of some accomplishments, such as that of Elizabeth Withypoll. Withypoll was from a wealthy, though not noble family in London. Born in 1510, she was known to have been well educated because of a list of her accomplishments her husband had written on her tombstone. She was able to read and write in Latin, Spanish, and Italian and was excellent in subjects such as accounting and arithmetic, subjects few women were taught.

The fact that accounts of women such as Withypoll exist suggest that the concept of educating women spread beyond the initial small circles it began in. The impact of the Humanists at least reached urban life outside of nobility. With the invention of the printing press occurring in England, many of the works of leading humanists began to spread rapidly across the country, and especially in London lifting the veil which had covered the intellectual world for so long and spurring new concepts to be debated, discussed, praised, and condemned. Our focus will now turn to the contribution of Erasmus to this reawakening.

II.

A. Personal Background of Erasmus

Dom David Knowles, the eminent historian of the monastic and religious orders in England, characterizes Desiderius Erasmus as a “revolution in himself.” He wrote: “Erasmus is one of those men of genius whose complex minds present so many facets that any summary judgment stands self-condemned, and any precise label can at once be criticized.” Perhaps this quote best describes the man Erasmus, a man of transition and change, influenced by the new Renaissance taking place. Because he was Dutch, not Italian, and had lived nearly half of his years by 1500, he was not solely a product of the Renaissance, but was influenced and formed by the education style and culture of the medieval time period. For this reason, it can be suggested that he himself influenced the Renaissance.

Erasmus was born in Rotterdam most likely on 27-28 October 1469 (Hyma 9). He was born to a Catholic Priest and his housekeeper and his shameful illegitimate birth was an issue that greatly disturbed Erasmus. For this reason, we know very little of his birth. His father was apparently a learned man, for Erasmus wrote that in Rome he “diligently applied himself to the study of Latin and Greek” (Hyma 11). He wanted his son to have the best education possible and searched for the proper place to send him.

First he was sent to live with the Brethren of the Common Life, where Erasmus claimed he received a “barbarous” education (Nichols p. 25). After his parents died of the plague in 1483, leaving both him and his older brother Peter orphans, Erasmus

remained with the Brethren until 1486, when he joined the monastery at Steyn and became a member of the Chapter of Sion. It is here in 1497 that Erasmus edits and publishes a compilation of eighteen poems by his close friend William Herman. (Hyma, 22). By this time he is already an accomplished Latinist and polished in prose.

Erasmus believed his purpose was to advance the classical learning and Christian religion. He would fulfill his call as a man of letters, by offering his writings to the service of God and man. He constantly wrote, producing dozens of volumes ranging from the serious to the light hearted, the acclaimed to the forbidden. He was a thinker and a persuader whose influence rested in his amazing capabilities with the pen. Not only was he a great intellectual mind, at times he was humorous and even sarcastic.

B. Friendship with Colet

Erasmus was like a homeless vagabond, living on the little subsistence donated to him from friends and admirers, tutoring when desperate (though he despised tutoring) and receiving a small pension from the sales of his books. Though poor, he was blessed with great friends. Two of his greatest were John Colet and Sir Thomas More. His relationship with both of these men had a great impact on his life and his way of thinking, and the three together are known in our modern day as three of the greatest leaders of the Renaissance. Erasmus met both More and Colet at the turn of the century during one of his first visits to England, a visit instigated by one of his earlier pupils, Lord Mountjoy. In his first letter to John Colet in 1498, Erasmus wrote the following to describe himself.

You will find in me a man of slender fortune, or rather of none; a stranger to ambition, but for friendship most ready; one whose

acquaintance with literature is but scanty, but his admiration of it most ardent; one who worships integrity in others, but counts his own as none; yielding readily to all learning, but to none in loyalty; a man of a simple, open, frank disposition, ignorant alike of pretence and disguise; of a timid but upright spirit; a man of few words; in short, one from whom you would expect nothing but qualities of heart (Lupton 97-98).

By the time Erasmus wrote this letter, he was already internationally known as a man of great intellect. His career coincided with the age of print, which made possible for the first time a distribution of texts in multiple copies. In Colet's first letter to Erasmus he speaks of hearing Erasmus' name in circles while in Paris. These first pieces of correspondence mark the beginning of a long and fruitful friendship. As their contemporary Marquard von Hatstein noted, it was difficult to determine between the two who was indebted the most to the other as far as influence was concerned (Lupton 99). Colet shared the same passions as Erasmus. Both believed education was of the greatest importance, and both were leaders in the rebirth of classical education. The two also shared a passion for the Scripture and took clerical orders. Theirs was a close friendship, but as Bernard O'Kelley observed in his introduction to Colet's paraphrases, it was not "in every respect a harmony of singing birds"(O'Kelley 14). Their areas of divergence are of importance to this study, but will be discussed in later paragraphs.

In 1510 Colet gave his large inherited estate from his father for the formation of a school at the east end of St. Paul's Cathedral in London. It was a new type of school, free to all that entered. Together with Erasmus and William Lily, the first high master of the school, Colet organized the course of study, renewing the study of the classical languages

and literatures, and at the same time recreating the classical education system (Clark 4).

It was mainly the educational theories of Erasmus that formed Colet's school. The school encouraged learning through a system of rewards, with the top student of each level receiving a special desk of his own to sit in (Clark 59). The curriculum emphasized the Christian poets, as Colet earlier had received threats of heresy because he focused too much on the classics.

Colet wished that Erasmus would be one of his tutors at the school because of his eloquent and smooth style of Latin. However, Erasmus held a disdain for tutoring, preferring the pen. He did write his colloquies as exercises for the classroom at a later time, but he never did teach at the school.

As mentioned before, there were areas in which Colet and Erasmus were in disagreement. First, Colet believed that it was a delusion or perhaps a self-deception that the reading of pagan books could help a man understand sacred Scripture. He wrote: "All that belongs to the truth is contained in the splendid, the plentiful table of Holy Scripture. The mind craving for something to feed on beyond the truth is surely far from healthy and a Christless mind" (Colet, 211). He seemed concerned that Erasmus was diverging a bit too far down this path, for in a letter to Erasmus he wrote:

Erasmus, there is no end to books or to knowledge. But our lives are brief, and there is nothing we can do with them better than to live them in innocence and holiness, and daily spend our efforts to the end that we may be purified, and enlightened, and made perfect. Now these Pythagorean and Cabalistic matters of yours that Reuchlin writes about promise such results as these; but in my judgment there is one way only

by which we shall attain them: by an intense love for Jesus, and imitation of him....(Colet 15).

Erasmus disagreed. He believed that a classical education could teach people “to behave morally and ethically within traditional Christian guidelines” (Warnicke 82). He admired some of the theologians and their writings of ages past, while Colet urged the focus of returning purely to the Scriptural texts. In one instance that we have record of, Colet heavily criticized Erasmus for praising the works of Thomas Aquinas, who developed scholasticism by harmonizing Aristotelianism with the doctrine of the church (Hogrefe 13). It is this difference in belief that caused them, I believe, to split in opinion on the topic pertinent to this paper: the role of marriage and women in society.

It is first important to realize that his difference in opinion developed gradually. Probably, Erasmus and Colet’s views of marriage and of women were initially the same. Adhering to the culture of their times and of the church, both probably believed women were the inferior sex and needed firm male guidance. Also, the Church held a long standing bias against marriage and the female sex. Since most early humanists, with the exception of Thomas More, were in clerical orders, that bias, whether intentional or not, was carried into the first stages of the humanist movement.

Colet felt very strongly against marriage, as his paraphrase of I Corinthians reveals. He gives little to no guidance to women in his paraphrases, except when dealing with the issue of sex. He describes sex as literally a dirty act, or a “disease,” and

marriage as a necessary evil for those weak Christians who allowed the fire of passion to consume them. He had an abhorrence for physical lust and urged his readers to deny their physical desires and to refuse to settle for less than the best, meaning the passion and love for Christ. He believed that there was no reason for Christians to procreate, but that they should allow only the heathens to do so. The Christian's goal now was to produce a spiritual procreation, converting the heathens to eternal life, until the human race died out. In this Colet shows his medieval heritage with his prevailing other-worldliness and his ranking of spiritual power over physical power. The human race was created midway between angels and the beasts, possessing attributes of both. Man's challenge was to overcome the beastly desires and rise toward the angelic level. (Colet, 318-319).

It is difficult to say exactly what Erasmus' initial views of women and marriage were, but perhaps the silence he leaves on the issue speaks more clearly than any bit of writing he could have left behind. When Erasmus helped Colet form St. Paul's, he never once mentioned the education of young girls. The focus was intently on the molding of future men. If women were not an issue, he of course would not have written about their education at the time he helped form St. Paul's. I think it is safe to assume he maintained the traditional view of women.

C. Friendship with More

There are many different theories as to how the humanist education of women came about. Most facts lead to the conclusion that Sir Thomas More, another good friend of Erasmus, was the leader in this movement. Between 1518

and 1540, seven important treatises dealing with the subject of education and women were written by various leading humanists such as Richard Hyrde, Sir Thomas Ellyot, and Juan Luis Vives. Five years before any of these treatises were published, we have a copy of a letter More wrote to his daughters' tutor William Gonnell, laying out explicitly the guidelines of his daughters' humanist education. Erasmus made a contribution to the movement through his Colloquies, explaining that he developed a favorable attitude toward the education of women because of More and his school.

These views began to develop sometime after 1510. It was at this time that More began the famous school in his household where he designed a humanist education. The school was created to educate More's four children, three of them being daughters. He also brought in students from outside the household (Hogrefe 144).

Thomas More created an education that was to be a bold experiment. He opened the door of educated women in both theory and practice that many humanists, including Erasmus, followed. It contradicted the Church's bias against women, and the notions that learning would corrupt a woman or woman-to-be. He acknowledged the fact that girls, like boys, had intellectual potential. This potential was to be brought out through the humanist ideals of nurture and education. He preferred encouragement, praise and love to fear and pain. From his biographies and letters we know that More created a setting of happiness in his school, and used kindness and gentleness whenever it was deserved. We know

that Erasmus agreed with this belief. He mentioned the spare-the-rod-spoil-the-child theory quoted from Scripture only to refute its truth for the Christians of his day (Hogrefe 199).

The actual curriculum of the school as far as we know (from what little written record remains) was a difficult one. Designed to exercise and grow the mind, it was a much more challenging model than the fellow humanist Vives later designed for the girl and young woman. It stressed rhetoric, a topic that before had been denied the female student. It also stressed the learning of Greek and Latin. More had his daughters translate texts into Latin from Greek, and then back to Latin to help their fluency, a practice that was well received amongst other humanists. His system encompassed all the liberal arts: grammar, rhetoric, poetry, logic, mathematics, philosophy, and astronomy-- as well as theology and medicine (McCutcheon 199).

The results of the school were shocking. Many men were uneasy with the success of the school. Richard Hyrde, who wrote a biography on More said:

Many men have questioned the value of the new learning for women, while some think it downright dangerous. They call women a “frayle kinde,” enclyned of their own corage vnto vice/and mutable at eury newelty,’ and they claim that Latin and Greek books would “enflame their stomakes a great deale the more/ to that vice” and teach them to be cunning.

In a letter, More defended the education.

Since erudition in women is a new thing and a reproach to the sloth of men, many will gladly assail it, and impute to literature what is

really the fault of nature, thinking from the vices of the learned to get their own ignorance esteemed as virtue. On the other hand, if a woman to eminent virtue should add an outwork of even moderate skill in literature, I think she will have more real profit than if she obtained the riches of Croesus and the beauty of Helen (Hogrefe 217).

He also compares the capabilities of men and women.

Nor do I think that the harvest is much affected whether it is a man or a woman who does the sowing. They both have the same name of human being whose nature reason differentiates from that of beasts; both I say, are equally suited for the knowledge of learning by which reason is cultivated, and, like plowed land, germinates a crop when the seeds of good precepts have been sown. But if the soil of a woman be naturally bad, and apter to bear fern than grain, by which saying many keep women from study, I think on the contrary, that a woman's wit is the more diligently to be cultivated so that nature's defect may be redressed by industry (Selected Letters 198).

The purpose of More's experimental education introduced another new concept that came with the turn of the century: the idea of a companionate marriage. Unlike the typical marriages of the time, More strove to develop a model of marriage in which the woman was more than just the bearer of children and keeper of the house, but also a dear friend and companion to her husband. He believed that by educating the woman, she would be able to carry on intellectual conversations with her husband, bringing him great joy. The educated woman would also be better prepared to raise her children to be educated from the very beginning. He was developing his daughters so that they would

produce happy marriages and provide children with the proper environment for education in the early years.

More stressed the fact that above all else, he wanted his daughters to live in chastity and in purity. He acknowledged that women in particular should show what he called a “modesty of character,” and he wrote: “Renown for learning, if you take away moral probity, brings nothing else but notorious and noteworthy infamy, especially in a woman” (Letter 103, 197). Fame is not the object of the education, he said, though fame tends to follow virtue as the shadow follows the substance (Hogrefe 217).

In his epigram “To Candidus: How to Choose a Wife” he offers his friend (as Hogrefe suggests, an imaginary friend) an essay on the ideal marriage. He urges his friend to observe the parents of the prospective wife, and make certain that she had “the best of characters for tender infant to acquire-- along with mother’s milk--and to imitate.” She must be chaste, modest, and agreeable. “Let her be either be educated, or capable of being educated,” so that she may learn “from the best of ancient works the principles which confer a blessing on life.” As a result, she will not become haughty in success, not be overcome with grief in distress or misfortune. If she is well educated herself, “then some day she will teach your little grandsons, at an early age, to read.” The husband of this type of woman will enjoy leaving the associations with men for her company and embraces, for her “pleasant and intelligent conversation,” for her comments in success or sorrow. “When she speaks, it will be difficult to judge between her extraordinary ability to say what she thinks and her thoughtful understanding of all kinds of affairs” (Hogrefe 216).

Erasmus would have found More's design for the chaste, educated woman agreeable since it coincided with his belief that a classical education will bring one closer to God. The humanist girls would be better Christians by being better educated. On the other hand Colet, would have disagreed with this concept, sticking with the more traditional view that education, though important, does not serve the purpose of bringing one closer to God. Many passages of Erasmus' writing (post 1510) reveal that he was an advanced thinker for his time on the subject of the education of women. He was not particularly daring, never straying far from the Pauline doctrines about women, yet questioning and sensible, as is evidenced from Erasmus's Scriptural paraphrases.

D. Erasmus's Scriptural Paraphrases

Erasmus's paraphrases of the New Testament reveal the transformations he went through at the turn of the century. This study will focus on two of them. He first became interested in interpreting scripture while in England in 1499 after hearing Colet lecture on Paul. Colet at this time urged Erasmus to lecture on the Old Testament, but Erasmus declined, claiming he did not know the biblical languages well enough to do so. (Erasmus vol. 42, xiii). Yet as soon as he returned to Paris, he began writing a commentary on Paul, and spent three years studying Greek to further his knowledge of the texts.

In his early translations from Greek to Latin, Erasmus was conservative. At the time he did not approve of the example of Cicero's translations and the freedom he displayed in his interpretations. Erasmus preferred to "err in seeming to keep too close

rather than to be too free” (Erasmus vol. 42, xii). He also believed that paraphrasing was a method of translation that was “conducive to hiding the ignorance of a translator who cannot otherwise make a text clear”(Erasmus vol. 42, xii). These statements were written in 1506 when Erasmus had just begun translating Greek to Latin. In 1507 a change in his opinions can be detected in his Latin translation of Euripides’ *Iphigenia*. He claimed this play was translated a little more freely and expansively, “but again in such a way as in no degree to fall short of a translator’s duty to convey the meaning”(Erasmus vol. 42, xiii). Here Erasmus introduces a dictum which is one of the cornerstones of his paraphrases of the Scripture: the form is intended to serve the meaning. The meaning is of primary importance; the form can be changed to serve that end.

His first transformation, the purpose of paraphrasing, is important for two reasons. First, it reveals a fundamental change in his way of thinking - the meaning of the text is more important than the actual text. Second, it allows the reader to see the interpretation of Scripture exactly how Erasmus perceived them. The paraphrases are more like a commentary than a translation. His paraphrases are of far more value to this particular study than mere translations, as Erasmus interprets vital scripture pertaining to the role of women in society and in relation to men. This point brings us to the second transformation revealed in his paraphrases: his changing opinions of the purpose and role of women.

During the preliminary writings of the paraphrases, Erasmus frequently visited the More household, often staying for long periods of time. One can only conjecture as to what kind of influence that environment had upon his writing. Obviously he was well

aware of the school at the More household, interacting firsthand with the More daughters. He may have even given brief informal help, despite his disdain for tutoring. In a letter from Margaret, More's eldest daughter, she once referred to Erasmus as her dear tutor. In 1523, just as he was wrapping up the paraphrases, he dedicated one of his pieces to Margaret (More) Roper. In 1524 she in return translated his *Pater Noster* into English, and had it published (Warnicke 24).

Certainly the paraphrases must reflect his personal opinions of the roles women should play. First we will look at his opinion that women were not of the same character as men, but could attain that character to some level through training. In his paraphrase of 1 Timothy chapter 2, Erasmus describes the strength of the male mind.

How does it make sense that she who was once her husband's teacher in transgression should lay claim to the leading role in the teaching of godliness? Let her acknowledge instead that ancient weakness of her sex. Its traces have not been altogether eliminated even if her offence has been forgiven through baptism. Let her recognize both the **dignity** and the **strength** of the male mind and be satisfied that she who was in the past the leader to ungodliness is now the companion on the way to godliness and that she who in the past took the first step towards destruction is now the follower on the way to salvation. (Erasmus vol. 42, 17)

Women in Erasmus' view (and the view of his contemporary society) were lesser creatures. As I interpret these paraphrases from a modern view, it is hard not to recognize the bias against women. The sins of men within the texts are dealt with in a less derogatory way than the sins of women. This helps to express that Erasmus did not

intend to treat women as equals to men. Erasmus was striving to develop women as companions and helpmeets. Women's sins are "vices" and "diseases" typical to women; men strive to "fight corruption." In his paraphrase of Titus, Erasmus writes that older women should not tell malicious stories about other people's lives, "a disease that is especially typical of that sex and time of life" (Erasmus vol. 42, 62). Older men on the other hand are advised to "overcome the sluggishness of their years by the alacrity of their faith" (Erasmus vol. 42, 61).

In his I Peter paraphrases, Erasmus writes of the feelings "women are prone to have." Because of these feelings, women are urged:

...to arouse men by their moral adornments and to make them fall in love with their minds and invisible souls, once they see that their minds are clean and unmarred by the warts of any vice, once they see that, quite unlike the common pattern, there is in them not trace of those feelings women are prone to have—no intemperateness, no angry temper, no jealousy, no vanity, no haughtiness, no sauciness—but instead a mild, peaceful, tractable, and gentle spirit. This is a magnificent and splendid style of dress in the eyes of God. This is the adornment that gratifies a husband's mind most of all. (Erasmus, vol. 44, 94)

This is of interest to the study, as the description is Erasmus's own of I Peter 3: 3-4, and not found directly in the scripture. Erasmus attributes to women the qualities which he found admirable. I Peter 3: 3-4 states:

" And let not your adornment be merely external—braiding of the hair and wearing

gold jewelry, or putting on dresses; but let it be the hidden person of the heart, with the imperishable quality of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is precious in the sight of God.”

Erasmus steps out of his contemporary mold concerning the role of women later in this passage. He offers women a way to overcome their naturally weak nature. The concept that women were not of the same character was not a new one, but the possibility of women being able to achieve the male character was.

Moreover, as those who imitate the faith of Abraham are his true-born and genuine sons, so are you daughters of Sarah who reproduce that heroic woman’s behavior and **masculine** strength of mind when you adorn yourselves with good works and place all your trust in God. When you rely on God’s help, there is no reason for you to let the weakness of your sex make you afraid of anything. (Erasmus vol. 44, 95)

This concept was revolutionary to the sixteenth century audience Erasmus was addressing. He is suggesting through this interpretation that women are capable of achieving “masculine” qualities such as strength of mind. Erasmus by this time had seen how Margaret More and her sisters had acquired the “masculine” capability of achieving high intellect. His interpretation of this particular passage adheres to this new revelation and his belief in companionate marriage. In I Peter, chapter three, he writes:

They (wives) are your partners in all your fortunes and affairs. Let them perceive you as agreeable persons to live with; make your wisdom be a support to the weakness of the female sex. You have the greater strength of mind and body and, therefore, should give more assistance to the women’s lack of strength in order to improve them through your instruction and guidance and to have them, so to speak,

put aside their female sex and become males in the practice of evangelical godliness. (Erasmus vol. 44, 95)

Here again, Erasmus is describing through his interpretation the concept of companionate marriage and is not using direct translation. He urges the men to train their wives (as the example of More) and make them more equal, or companionate.

We know that his interpretations of essential topics made a strong impression on many of his readers by giving them a new point of view of Christianity and the Church. We also know that his work received many outcries and much criticism from theological circles. To some, it seemed rebellious, dangerous and even heretical (Thompson xx). He began writing the paraphrases in November of 1517 and completed them in February of 1524, continuing to revise them until 1535. Not only did Erasmus write paraphrases, he made translations of the New Testament as well. He may have thought that writing paraphrases of Scripture was not only easier, but more acceptable to the general public--especially to his skeptical critics. After receiving many outcries of rage and even heresy for his translations, he viewed the reception of his paraphrases was much more welcoming. Two months after its first publication, he wrote: "I am especially pleased those who are so well thought of should think well of my paraphrase; I only wish I had always labored in that sort of field. I would rather construct a thousand paraphrases than one critical edition (Thompson xv)."

Two months later, he wrote: "My paraphrase is praised throughout by everyone. It is something to have produced even one small book that can find favor with critics so

prejudiced and hard to please. I only wish I had confined myself to the sort of fields in which there was not a little more fame to be had, and far less work.” (Thompson xv).

D. The Colloquies

Erasmus' colloquies were not so openly embraced. In many instances, he met flat out opposition. Perhaps the most upsetting antagonist was at the Sorbonne, the most well known and influential body of academic theologians of the time. In May of 1526, the faculty censured the colloquies denouncing sixty-nine passages as “erroneous, scandalous, or impious” and described Erasmus as a “pagan who mocks at the Christian religion and its sacred rites and customs.” The faculty stated that the book should be banned to all, especially to youth, lest under the pretext of educating them, it corrupt them (Thompson xxx).

The opposition the works received may have been due by some extent to the manner as well as the meaning of his pieces. He had a style of turning the tables neatly on his critics and of resorting to sarcastic humor when in a corner (Thompson xx). Many of his pieces belittle men of the clergy, and make them out to be gluttonous, stupid and lazy men. Whether or not this was an accurate description, the clergy of the Church and theologians were not appreciative of the unasked for depiction.

He also got into trouble with his emphasis on ethics instead of doctrinal theology, moderation, and toleration (within the Christian standards). The ardor and depth of his religion, and ultimately its worth has often, according to Thompson, been questioned (Thompson xxi). He protested that his critics lost sight of the fact that statements uttered

by characters in dialogue are those the author finds suitable to fit the dramatic situation, and not necessarily his own opinions. This was a reasonable defense, and perhaps to some extent sincere, but his enemies regarded it merely as a way to dodge the attacks.

The colloquies are of importance to this study, because many of them, including some of the best, contain provocative opinions on topics relating to women, their education, and marriage. “A Lover and Maiden,” “The Uneasy Wife,” “The Abbot and the Learned Woman,” “The Epithalamium of Petrus Aegidius,” “The Lying-In Woman,” “The Unequal Marriage,” and “The Parliament of Women” all deal in some way, whether humorously or seriously with the character, wisdom, status, and education of women (Hogrefe, 205). They have been referred to as the “marriage group” of colloquies written by Erasmus.

Written with the intention of being used in the classroom as Latin grammar exercises for the lower forms, the colloquies convey Erasmus’s thoughts in a simple style. They were used in the classrooms, including Colet’s school at St. Paul’s Cathedral despite the protests of the critics for several centuries. In spite of the fact that the colloquies were very popular and received much attention, they probably did not mean as much to Erasmus as his other pieces of works. They are light hearted in style, and most likely written to relieve stress or as a distraction while ill (he suffered from a “disease of the liver”). There is a more formal review of the opinion of Erasmus on this topic, in *Encomium matrimonii* (1518), *Institutio christiani matrimonii* (1526), and *Vidua Christiana* (1526). It is interesting to note that most of his writings, both formal and informal occurred between the years of 1523 and 1526, shortly after the success of the

More School. Of all the treatises on women written during this time period, the Colloquies are perhaps the most “user friendly” for the modern day reader.

Though written in a light style and containing simple language, the Colloquies had some major recurring themes that pertain to education of women and the role of marriage, and most clearly reveal the change in Erasmus’s concept of woman. It is obvious that to Erasmus, the sensible and practical mode of Christian life was marriage. It is the only way to cohabit without sin (I Corinthians 7:9). In 1498, even before his changed views of women, he wrote: “True celibacy and virginity is beyond question highly laudable yet extremely demanding ideals; precious if preserved for authentically spiritual reasons but otherwise not preferable to marriage” (*Encomium matrimonii*). He also added in his *Institutio Christiani matrimonii* that marriage is a spiritually beneficial institution. This is a far cry from the opinion of his dear friend Colet, who agreed with the traditional idea that the strong and mature Christian should shun marriage, or remain celibate within an already existing marriage. Erasmus’ reasoning was that marriage kept men (and women) from sexual immorality and thus, closer to God. And unlike Colet, Erasmus believed that priestly and monastic celibacy is not in itself productive of a higher spirituality than a Christian marriage. He believed that it could in fact be a hindrance (Thompson xv).

Issues that will be addressed are the concept of the companionate marriage, the importance for a woman to be educated, equality of man and woman in the sight of God and what that entails.

The first colloquy to be looked at in detail is “The Abbot and the Learned Lady” first published in 1524. The Abbot is appalled that the lady Magdalia is reading Latin and

Greek. Though it cannot be proved beyond a shadow of a doubt, the two characters in this colloquy were most likely modeled after individuals Erasmus encountered in his life. The original Abbot most likely was William Lowthe of Walsingham Abbey, whose ignorance and incompetence was so outstanding that in 1514, a month after Erasmus visited Walsingham, he was removed from his office (Thompson 218). Magdalia can confidently be identified as Margaret More Roper. There was no other educated woman Erasmus knew as well. She fits the description of Magdalia to a tee. She was educated in the classical languages, she married a man who appreciated her knowledge, and the colloquy appeared only two years after Erasmus had written on the success of More's education of women.

In this colloquy Erasmus introduces the belief that women are just as capable as men of learning, and that it was neither morally dangerous, nor in any way a hindrance to domestic accord. Magdalia is compared to the middle class court lady, not royalty, suggesting that Erasmus believed education was not just for the ruling woman, but for all women. Though light hearted, this colloquy addresses some controversial issues. Most blatantly, Erasmus belittles the male clergy, and magnifies his ignorance. He also elevates the capabilities and graces of the lady through the whole liberal education she possesses. All this occurs in one setting and one conversation.

Antonius the Abbot states that it is unbecoming and unfit for women to read Greek and Latin. Magdalia wisely answers his criticisms in the classical way, through Socratic questioning. She points out quite clearly the foolishness of Antonius (his name is a play on "ass"). She mocks him for stating that living well amounts to having a good

time and is achieved through external circumstances. Anyone who reads the Bible or learns its lessons (as this culture did) would know that Christ teaches that living well and being content is an internal feature, not one based on circumstances. Magdalia points this fact out to Antonius in an educated and intellectual manner though she is the woman and he the clergyman. So taken aback by Magdalia's reasoning, Antonius describes her as a "sophistress" for so keenly knowing her dispute (Thompson 221).

Erasmus also defines the role of woman, using Magdalia as his spokeswoman. Her role is to manage the household and rear the children. Magdalia also points out that she cannot manage such a big job without wisdom-- a wisdom she earlier describes as a classical education. When Antonius retorts that by being educated she is going against the custom, she replies that custom is the "mistress of every vice."

The idea of companionate marriage is introduced in this colloquy as well. Magdalia exclaims, "But I congratulate myself on having a husband different from you. For learning renders him dearer to me, and me dearer to him" (Thompson 232). Here is a marriage built on something new-- the intellect, and companionship. Within this one colloquy, Erasmus tackles the concepts of marriage built on intellect, the positive aspects of a lady educated in the classics, the corruption and vice of the clergy who so often guided and directed the role of women within society, and the fact that a woman can win a debate with a man.

In the "Epithalamium of Peter Giles" (published in 1524), Erasmus congratulates his friend Peter Giles (the famous character from Utopia) on his marriage. He writes of how the muses and the gods rejoice over the most blessed and ideal marriage. Erasmus

describes the marriage as a desirable and permanent affair, not a “blind” love, but one based on deeper qualities than lust.

Erasmus here is describing the ideal marriage as a companionate marriage. There is no mention of dowry, or the quality of family genealogy. Rather the wife’s qualities that are proclaimed are first and foremost her mind, and then her grace and charm-- qualities that would be pleasing to a man seeking a deep friendship with his bride. Erasmus called their love a love that would “increase with age and time” and a “union of heart, soul, and mind.” This colloquy is not light hearted in prose. Its purpose was a kind gesture of praise to a dear friend; there is no hiding of opinion behind characters’ masks.

One of Erasmus’s most controversial pieces is “A Lover and a Maiden” or “Courtship” first published in 1523. It is a conversation between the bright and witty Maria, a heroine comparable to one of Shakespeare’s Viola or Portia who gives a sophist dialogue, a process that seems to be typical to the women in Erasmus’ colloquies, and Pamphilus, the young man trying to woo her into a marriage commitment. This piece came under attack because of Pamphilus’ freedom of language and the insinuation that marriage is better than virginity. On this topic Erasmus had to face the Sorbonne. Instead of hiding behind the word’s of his characters, Erasmus defends his views of marriage and reiterates them in other pieces of writing, rejecting the more traditional views of marriage common to the time.

Pamphilus addresses Maria’s doubts of resigning her virginity by comparing her giving birth to children to an orchard not just of blossoms, but of trees heavy with ripe fruit (Thompson 95). He goes on to say:

In my opinion the rose that withers in a man's hand, delighting his eyes and nostrils the while, is luckier than one that grows old on a bush. For that one too would wither sooner or later. In the same way, wine is better if drunk before it sours. But a girl's flower doesn't fade the instant she marries. On the contrary, I see many girls who before marriage were pale, run-down, and as good as gone. The sexual side of marriage brightened them so much that they began to bloom at last. (Thompson 95)

Maria argues that Christ loves the chaste the best. To that argument, Pamphilus responds that their marriage in time will be chaste, for it will not be a marriage of lust and physical pleasures, but rather a marriage of the minds. The best definition of the ideal love the marriage will hold comes earlier in the colloquy, when Pamphilus is explaining to Maria why he has carefully chosen her to be insanely in love with-- why that is, they would make such a wonderful match.

The integrity of your parents has been known to me for years now. In the first place, good birth is far from a bad sign. Nor am I unaware of the wholesome instruction and godly examples by which you've been reared; and good education is better than good birth. That's another sign. In addition, between my family--not an altogether contemptible one, I believe-- and yours there has long been intimate friendship...and our temperaments are pretty much the same. We're nearly equal in age, our parents, in wealth and reputation, and rank. Finally-- and this is the special mark of friendship, since excellence by itself is not guarantee of compatibility-- your tastes seem to fit my temperament not at all badly. (Thompson 94).

Pamphilus suggests that the most important aspects of a successful marriage are not rank or wealth, but mind and compatibility. He tells Maria that he loves her mind more than any other part of her being. "A Lover and a Maiden" is an excellent display of education and companionate marriage. One can't help but wonder after reading it, why Erasmus did not marry, or (as far as we know) partake in the sexual pleasures. He describes sex as being so much more wonderful than chastity, using words like "fruitful" and "natural" and "reproducing for Christ" (again, a concept that defies Colet's beliefs).

In the end, Maria gives the advice to Pamphilus that he should not let passion rule him, since it is only temporary, but love based on reason will last forever. Pamphilus admits Maria gives good advice, and agrees to take it. In this colloquy it is interesting to note that Pamphilus, in conversing with an educated and wise lady, is not made foolish as some of the male characters in other colloquies are portrayed. He focuses on the proper virtues of a woman, instead of selling her short, and for it receives the hope in the end of her hand in marriage.

In his colloquy entitled "Marriage" or "The Uneasy Wife" published in 1523, Erasmus deals with what the actions of a woman after she is already in the binding contract of marriage. It is a conversation between the wise Eulalia and the younger Xanthippe. Xanthippe is extremely displeased with her husband whom she has only been married to for seven months. She complains without shame to Eulalia of his horrific actions and abuses, being almost vile in description. "When he comes home drunk in the middle of the night, after being long awaited, he snores all night and sometimes vomits in bed- to say no worse" (Thompson 116). Eulalia severely scolds Xanthippe for speaking

in such a way, reminding her that she brings reproach on herself when she brings reproach on her husband.

She then gives advice to Xanthippe on how to be the proper wife, and how to “train” her husband to be more proper to her. She tells Xanthippe that no matter how vile he is, she is bound to him for life, so she had better make due with what she has. The first step towards a better marriage Eulalia suggests is to act as a mirror to her husband’s moods, reflecting them by not being gay when he is sad, or merry when he is upset (Thompson 120).

Erasmus uses in this colloquy another example from the More family (recall the first was in the “Abbot and the Learned Lady”). This time he uses Thomas More himself as an ideal husband. Eulalia describes how More was patient and gentle with his untrained wife while training her in literature and music. When she grew bored with the learning her husband was giving and became balky and tearful, he did not beat her, but rather deferred his rights and took her to her father’s house, and (hiding his vexation) respectfully asked him to deal with her disobedience, knowing it would have more of an impact than any beating or harsh word from him would. After her encounter with her father, More’s wife begged for forgiveness, and her husband never had to deal with her childishness again-- theirs was a wonderful and happy marriage until her death. When Xanthippe hears of More’s actions toward his first wife, she comments that such husbands are as “scarce as white crows”(Thompson 121).

Eulalia reminds Xanthippe that regardless of her husband’s actions, it is the woman’s highest praise and glory to be obedient to her husband, as it is the order of

Nature, and the will of God, that woman be entirely dependent on man. Here, Erasmus reveals the other side to his perceived role of marriage and the place of women within it. Women still are under the rule of man, as God has accorded it, and it is His will that she submit to him and bring him honor in all circumstances, even when he does not deserve it. Eulalia praises a particular woman, who upon finding out that her husband was having an affair with a poor peasant girl, sends the girl money to spend on him, so that his stays with her might be more comfortable.

After these virtues were praised, Erasmus again stresses the importance of the lady being educated, reminding Xanthippe that love based on beauty is only temporary. Eulalia states that it is better to find love by ear than by the eye. The woman who chooses her husband by eye sees nothing but good looks. The one who chooses by ear considers his reputation carefully.

“The New Mother” or “The Lying-In Woman” contains another woman of intellect. This colloquy is a conversation between the new mother Fabulla and a visiting friend of the family, Eutrapelus. Fabulla debates with Eutrapelus the place of a woman in context to her role with man. She accuses Eutrapelus of believing that men are stronger and therefore more excellent than women. She points out the fact that men do not live longer, are no more resistant to diseases, and are not better than women because they are stronger. Even the small-brained camel is stronger than man, but that does not make him the better.

When Eutrapelus brings up the point that Adam was created first, Fabula retorts back that since Christ followed Adam, order of creation has nothing to do with

superiority. She has an interesting point to make when discussing whether or not women should submit to men.

A ruler's not better merely because he is a ruler. And it is the wife, not the female, who is subject. Again, the subjection of the wife is such that, though each has power over the other, nevertheless the woman is to obey the man not as a superior but a more aggressive person" (Thompson 271).

It is interesting to point out here that in every colloquy of Erasmus' dealing with the submission of women, it is only within the marriage context that it is stressed. Before marriage, as in "The Courting" the woman stands up to her male counterpart. Married women stand up to other men besides their husband, as in "The Abbot and the Learned Lady" and in this particular colloquy. The woman has the right to stand up to the man, and speak her mind clearly, even if it means, as in the case of "The Abbot and the Learned Lady", that the woman belittles the man boldly. Only within marriage is it improper to speak against the male, as in "The Uneasy Wife".

Fabula goes on to say that if people are made in the image of God (both male and female) then it must be the mind that is in the image of God, not the bodies. Eutrapelus concedes that Fabula has proven her point well. The conversation however, takes a different twist when Eutrapelus asks to see Fabula's new son. When he learns that the child is with his wet nurse, he is appalled that Fabula would trust the care of her son to another. He claims that nursing is the duty of the "intelligent" woman. Development of the body, he reminded her is crucial to the development of the mind, and her child's health should be trusted to no other woman's care. The concept of a healthy body

producing a healthy mind seems to be a recurring theme for Erasmus, as will be seen in the next colloquy. In the end, Eutrapelus wins the argument by joining the principles of general education and the duty of a wise and intelligent woman to her children.

Erasmus expresses indignation in “The Unequal Marriage” which was first published in 1529. In this account, Gabriel is distressed because he just witnessed a most unhappy marriage take place. It was the marriage of the beautiful Iphigenia (meaning “sacrificed”) to a disease ridden, gambling, indebted man. Her parents married her off to him because he held a royal title, though he had absolutely nothing else to offer. Gabriel cannot believe that the girl’s parents would do this to their supposed most prized possession. He points out that they treat their horses with more care and breed dogs more properly (Thompson, 408). Here Erasmus again reveals his opinions on the meaning of the marriage bond and his sympathy for the doomed bride. The marriage is a disgrace because it is not and cannot be a companionate marriage. The main focus of this colloquy however, is the importance of a healthy body for the production of a healthy mind. A ruler, Gabriel states, with wisdom and integrity is a better ruler if he has a good body to go with it. “Virtue is more pleasing that comes of a fair body” (Thompson 408).

For the first time, Erasmus also introduces the taboo subject of divorce within this colloquy. He leaves the question hanging as to whether or not a marriage “made by a wicked fraud (lying) is not contracted lawfully” and can thus be annulled. He presents two opposing views to this debate, so it is difficult to say beyond doubt what his opinions were on this matter from the colloquies, but the fact that he even introduced the subject is of interest.

The last colloquy to be looked at is perhaps the most light hearted and far-fetched. “The Parliament of Women,” published in 1529 is as Thompson suggests, a “gentleman’s joke” making fun of the vanity of women (Thompson 441). In it, Erasmus allows women themselves to regulate fashion through the formation of a women’s council. Sumptuary legislation, though not easily or practically enforced, was nonetheless legally enforceable during the fifteenth and sixteenth century. It established strict dress codes for the male and female alike. Undoubtedly, the codes were formed in all seriousness. In this piece, Erasmus is a bit mocking and jesting in his absurdity, but he introduces and reintroduces the idea that women, just as men, must have a place to speak. It is to be a council of women, for women only. To be a member, one must be either married or widowed, and there is a definite hierarchy of who ranks over who. Here, Erasmus allows even the otherwise submissive wife a place of ruling and equality. The women are educated, or at least refined, and have a dignity that depends (not surprisingly) on their husbands.

Perhaps Erasmus is suggesting (at least Cornelia, the leader suggests) that the world is in a sad state under the leadership of men, and there is a need for other groups to discuss the problems occurring. Perhaps with society being in such a sorry state, women could do a better job with it.

The women begin with trivial issues, such as how dress should represent rank and honor, and why women are more suited to rule (they don’t have to fight in wars, support families, and are not punished as severely for breaking the rules). The discussion takes a more serious turn. They discuss the fact that women are excluded from all honorable jobs, left only to be cooks and laundresses, while men rule according to pleasure. They

also complain of the fact that women have no say as to who their children marry, but under law it is the man's decision. One woman comments, "Men think they know everything" (Thompson 442).

Throughout the colloquy Erasmus observes the difference between men's and women's place. What is it that causes him to question the way that society is? It is interesting to observe that he describes inequalities between the sexes as "inequalities" and not just the law of Nature, or society, or God. He raises some very interesting points in this colloquy on a vast array of topics. His role here is to be philosopher, to stimulate thought. He probably is not equally serious about all these problems. Yet again, it is important that he even introduces them.

It is easy to see why the Colloquies caused such a commotion. Erasmus has been called by some a weak man-a man who refused to stand up for his beliefs because of outside pressure. The fact that he defended these colloquies, which were intended for the pliable mind of the student suggests that he was a bit more daring than some gave him credit for.

"I dreamed of a golden age and the fortunate islands: and then, as Aristophanes said, I awoke." Erasmus, 1515

There are still many questions that remain about Erasmus. One thing, however, is clear. He was a man receptive to change, and because of that, optimistic to the possibility of improvement occurring within the roles of women. His paraphrases reveal these beliefs during the time period in which he was seeing firsthand the success of educating

women and the excitement it was causing throughout the humanist circles. The colloquies clearly outline the support of these changes. His dreams of a golden society of refined education for both sexes was becoming a reality.

The dream ended however after the age of Erasmus. With the reign of James I in the beginning of the seventeenth century and after the tumultuous reshaping of society with the introduction of Protestantism, the flicker of hope for the educated woman was quickly distinguished. Women quietly returned to their traditional roles, with only a faint shout here and there for a return to the opportunities that once existed. The impact was made however, in the eternal writings of Erasmus, and other humanists, as well as the physical evidence of such ladies as Margaret Roper. At least now, it was known women were capable of intellectual equality, whether or not it was something that society applauded. Unlike the forgetfulness that occurred during the Middle Ages, society did not forget the impact of Erasmus and his fellow humanists upon its culture.

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