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Humanism, Female Education, and Myth: Erasmus, Vives, and More's *To Candidus*

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When considering pleasure and chance as aspects of human experience, Thomas More sometimes gendered them female; that is to say, at times he represented them by drawing from the mythographies of Venus and of Fortune. But what did he suggest that actual women, as distinct from goddesses, were or should be or might become: what were his notions of being a woman, of femaleness? Further, what did he suggest that women might contribute to the common weal? A useful way to start answering that question is to look at what More seems to have thought about educating women: in particular, women who were entering adult life—entering into what was agreed to be the major female role—by marrying for the first time and therefore newly taking upon themselves the management of a household. In one of his most ambitious Latin poems, as nowhere else, More wrote elaborately, concisely and problematically on the education of women who were in just those circumstances. My discussion attempts a repositioning of that poem, *To Candidus: How to Choose A Wife A Poem in Iambic Dimeter Brachycatalectic (Versus Iambici Dimetri Brachycatalectici ad Candidvm, Qvalis Vxor Deligenda)*. To make the attempt involves examining More's other Latin poems on women, as would be anticipated; however, I am mainly concerned here with affinities between *To Candidus*—then, to a lesser extent, some of More's associated Latin poems—and notions about female education that were or were to become part of the already long, and mostly male, debate about the nature of femaleness.¹ To be

This essay was completed while I was a Friends of The Library Fellow and an Honorary Fellow at the Institute for Research in the Humanities at the University of Wisconsin, Madison.

¹ Reference to the Latin verse is from *Latin Poems*, eds C. H. Miller, et al., *The Yale Edition of The Complete Works of St. Thomas More* (New Haven, Conn., 1984), III, 2. That edition is hereafter cited as *CW* III, 2. In connection with the early modern debate about women, and their

specific, I am chiefly concerned with affinities between More's poem and writings by Erasmus and by Vives on the education of prospective or of recent brides.

Because the primary concern in my discussion is to clarify the relations between More's *To Candidus* and humanist notions on female education, especially notions put forward by two of More's humanist friends about young brides, I want initially to revisit the early modern debate on educating women, of course an important element of the wider debate about femaleness itself. One medieval and thence early modern idea on female education was that, in addition to what their mothers taught them, most women needed merely to receive religious and ethical instruction from their husbands, who would likewise instruct them in how to govern a household.² After all, it was often pointed out, the household was women's natural domain: since, therefore, they would not normally engage with the world at large as would men—since, for example, they would not normally be educators, or writers, or politicians—women did not usually need the broad education appropriate to men.³ Assertion to the contrary was variously argued—and differences between or among those contrary assertions did not always depend on whether an author was male or female. In *The Book of the City of Ladies* (1405), a response to Boccaccio's *De Mulieribus Claris* and, perhaps unknowingly, also to Plutarch's *The Virtues of Women*, Christine de Pizan attempted to construct at once a refuge and a resource for

education, see (among many commentaries, others of which are cited in the notes below): I. Maclean, *The Renaissance Notion of Woman: A Study in the Fortunes of Scholasticism and Medical Science in European Intellectual Life* (Cambridge, 1980); L. Woodbridge, *Women and the English Renaissance: Literature and the Nature of Womankind, 1540-1620* (Urbana, Ill., 1984), especially at 18-48; A. Blamires (ed.), *Woman Defamed and Defended An Anthology of Medieval Texts* (Oxford, 1992); O. Hufton, *The Prospect Before Her: A History of Women in Western Europe Volume One 1500-1800* (New York, 1995); P. J. P. Goldberg, "Women," in R. Horrox (ed.), *Fifteenth-Century Attitudes Perceptions of Society in Late Medieval England* (Cambridge, 1996), 112-31; A. Laurence, *Women in England 1500-1700* (1994; rpt. London, 1996). The best reading that I know of More's *To Candidus* is P. J. Benson's, in her *The Invention of the Renaissance Woman: The Challenge of Female Independence in the Literature and Thought of Italy and England* (University Park, Penn., 1992), 158-66. Subsequently I cite her book as Benson. In my discussion I have especially taken into account M. Bevir's *The Logic of the History of Ideas* (Cambridge, 1999), 174-220 and Q. Skinner's *Visions of Politics* (3 vols., Cambridge, 2002), I, *Regarding Method*, 57-89.

² See S. Vecchio, "The Good Wife," trans. C. Botsford, in *A History of Women*, gen. eds. G. Duby and M. Perrot, II: *Silences of the Middle Ages*, ed. C. Klapisch-Zuber (Cambridge, Mass., 1992), 105-35, at 118-21. The idea had a classical lineage, of course. For example, in [Aristotle's] *Economics* and in Xenophon's *Oeconomicus* it is proposed that a husband educate his wife as household manager.

³ For example, see Giovanni Michele Bruto, quoted at some length from *La istituzione di una fanciulla nata nobilmente* (1555), in Thomas Salter's translation (1579), by R. Kelso in her *Doctrine for the Lady of the Renaissance* (Urbana, Ill., 1956), 59-60. Her book is hereafter cited as Kelso.

women, whom she recognized as having been misrepresented to themselves no less than to men throughout generations of misogynistic male fictions, ranging from satire to epic, from fable to history.⁴ Her City, in so far as it is a revisionist history of women, forms a textual space which does indeed offer a refuge as well as a resource, for Christine advocates that women, fulfilling their capabilities as women, aim at “cultivat[ing] virtue” and thereby gaining inclusion in the true, illustrious record of female achievement: membership of a textual community within which they will see themselves reflected and which is at one with the City of God.⁵ Inseparable from their seeking to do so, she emphasizes, will be their receiving education.⁶ Despite that emphasis—and despite her emphasizing that women are men’s intellectual equals or, not infrequently, superiors—Christine nevertheless defends the concept that the domestic sphere and not the public is in general that “appropriate” to women.⁷ Crucial to her case is the explanation that she proffers for the absence of women lawyers or judges. Carefully and apparently with some reluctance opposing the intellectual talents possessed by women to the physical limitations imposed by their biology, she proposes that the latter naturally constrain the former and so justify women’s conventionally accepted set of roles in society.⁸

It is interesting that another notable female proponent of women’s education, Anna Maria van Schurman, does not merely affirm the household to be women’s proper domain but also tempers her praise of women’s intellectual capacities with denigration of them. Writing some two centuries after Christine de Pizan, van Schurman asserts that women have the same intellectual capacities as men and that “[T]he whole circle of liberal arts, as it is called, is entirely fitting to a Christian woman.”⁹ Yet she asserts, too, that women rather than men

⁴ Reference is to Christian de Pizan, *The Book of the City of Ladies*, trans. E. Richards (New York, 1982). Hereafter that edition will be cited as *City of Ladies*. For an instance of explicit correction of Boccaccio, see 1.39.2-1.39.3. There is a thoughtful discussion of the work’s relation to Boccaccio’s *De Mulieribus Claris* in Richards’s Introduction, at xxxiv-xxxviii. On the City as refuge and resource, see 3.19.1. On the subject of misogynistic male fictions, see 1.1.1-1.2.2, 1.8.3-1.8.10 and especially 1.9.1-1.9.2.

⁵ Christine acknowledges, in effect, her City to be a textual space when she has Reason command that the City be built in “the Field of Letters” (1.8.1). On women’s fulfilling their capabilities as women see, for example, 3. 19. *passim*, and on the feminist significance of Christine’s advocating that, see Richards’s Introduction, xxx. On women’s “cultivat[ing] virtue” and gaining inclusion in the City, see 3.19.6; cf. 3.19.1 on the City as a mirror to virtuous women. Christine implicitly links her City with Augustine’s at 3.18.9.

⁶ *City of Ladies*, 1.37.1-1.43.1 and 2.36 *passim*. Elsewhere, in a book primarily about male political power, Christine alludes to the education of aristocratic female children as well as of their male counterparts destined to rule. See her *The Book of the Body Politic*, trans. K. L. Forhan (Cambridge, 1994), at 7.

⁷ *City of Ladies*, 1.11.1; cf. 1.43.2.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 1.11.1.

⁹ Reference is from Anna Maria van Schurman, *Whether a Christian Woman should be Educated and Other Writings from Her Intellectual Circle*, ed. and trans. J. L. Irwin (Chicago, 1998), here at 27 and 26 respectively. Subsequently that text is cited as van Schurman.

possess “weakness or inconstancy of intellect or temperament” and that the “more excellent” men exceed women in intellectual ability.¹⁰ In identifying the household as women’s proper domain van Schurman relies on the authority of (Pauline) Scripture, not on biology as did de Pizan.¹¹ Now my point here is not that two learned, vigorous female advocates of women’s receiving education seem to have been driven, either by the force of personal belief or by the need to reassure male readers that conferring education on women will not be socially disruptive—or maybe, of course, by both things—to affirm women’s confinement to the domestic sphere. Nor do I wish to dwell on the fact that whereas, say, Gisbertus Voetius agrees with van Schurman’s arguments about women’s education and, to an extent, intensifies her denigration of her own sex (likewise stressing women’s domestic role), another male and more distinguished advocate of education for women, Cornelius Agrippa, had earlier written quite otherwise.¹² In brief, writing more or less chronologically between de Pizan and van Schurman, Agrippa proposed that “Women ... invented all the liberal arts,” that they are pre-eminently pious and learned, that they are the first and best educators, that their learning is exercised not only in the domestic domain and, further, that women are improperly educated in so far as they are prepared for a life of unjust, domestic confinement.¹³ (It is worth adding that, like de Pizan but unlike van Schurman, Agrippa denied the inconstancy of women.¹⁴) I should like to focus instead on how Erasmus, Vives, and More relate female education to female domestic confinement because there one sees—for a start—interaction between the two rendered in terms of myth, turned, whether unwittingly or deliberately, into a tale of moralized transformation.

By way of clarifying what I mean, let me outline what I wish to propose. As has been indicated above, humanist advocates of women’s education engaged with, rather than ignored, the conventional idea that to be a woman was all but invariably to become *mulier economica*—confined to the domestic. As has also been indicated, although the results of their doing so were divergent, those advocates tended to affirm the idea. I want to suggest, however, that what seems of greater interest than their affirmations themselves is when they give mythic expression to their accounts of female education and, implicitly as well,

¹⁰ See van Schurman, 28 and 33 respectively.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 30.

¹² See Gisbertus Voetius, *Concerning Women*, in van Schurman, 97-137. Reference here is to 126-28 and 117-18 respectively.

¹³ See *Declamation on the Nobility and Pre-eminence of the Female Sex*, ed. and trans. Albert Rabil, Jr. (Chicago, 1996), respectively at 76, 79-82, 83, 84-85, and 95. That edition is cited hereafter as Agrippa. Cf. Moderata Fonte, *The Worth of Women wherein is Clearly Revealed their Nobility and their Superiority to Men*, ed. and trans. V. Cox (Chicago, 1997), 100-101. Cf. also Giovanni Battista Gelli, *Circe*, trans. T. Brown and R. Adams (Ithaca, N.Y., 1963), Dialogue 5, 85-88 where the domestic confinement of women is mocked.

¹⁴ Agrippa, 77; *City of Ladies*, 2.47 *passim*.

to their affirmations of female domestic confinement: when, with whatever degrees of knowingness and emphasis, they voice both in terms of a particular myth and thereby impose mythic identities on at once the provider and the receiver of education.

When Erasmus wrote on the education of young women newly taking on the role of household manager—and it is clear that he viewed female education as confirming such a woman's commitment to and performance of household management—he evoked the myth of Pygmalion. Indirectly he identified the husband as a type of Pygmalion, the bride with the marble about to be given pleasing form. Erasmus notably made those identifications in his colloquy, *Marriage (Coniugium)*, published in 1523. Then he iterated them in his formal treatise on the subject of marriage, *The Institution of Christian Matrimony (Institutio Christiani Matrimonii)*, published in 1526 but begun around 1524.¹⁵ The latter work, since it deals with women's major social role, can reasonably be seen as at once a discourse on marriage and a contribution to the current debate about the nature of femaleness. The two Erasmian texts refigure the process of female transformation as moral education, yet of course not solely as that. Further, they allude to the process in very similar words—in fact, through language akin, not to that of Ovid in his *Metamorphoses* but rather to that of Boccaccio in his *Genealogie Deorum Gentilium Libri*. In addition, when *Marriage* alludes to the Pygmalion myth it simultaneously gestures towards the attempts by More to educate his first wife, Jane Colt.

Vives, for his part, when writing of female education and confinement accorded with Erasmus—and with More—yet in some respects markedly differed from each. In his *The Education of a Christian Woman (De Institutione Feminae Christianae)*, completed in 1523 and published in 1524) Vives, like Erasmus and More, linked female education with private, male happiness—and he started from an assumption which, as he voiced it, implies that the education of a prospective bride is a Pygmalion-like transformation: naturally a process akin to that in the myth. At one specific and important point, his language is identical to Erasmus's and to that of Boccaccio. If, however, like Erasmus he strongly connected women's education with their domestic confinement, in his account of such containment he seems to have incorporated

¹⁵ See *Colloquies*, trans. and annot. C. R. Thompson, *Collected Works of Erasmus* (Toronto, 1997), XXXIX, 306-27; *The Institution of Christian Matrimony (Institutio christiani matrimonii)*, trans. and annot. M. J. Heath, in *Spiritualia and Pastoralia*, eds. J. W. O'Malley and L. A. Perraud, *ibid.* (Toronto, 1999), LXIX, 203-438. Reference to the English translations is from those editions. Reference to the Latin originals is from Desiderii Erasmi, *Opera Omnia* (10 vols., Lugduni, 1704), in vols I and V respectively. The texts are severally cited as Thompson, Heath, and *Opera*. On the dating of Erasmus's two works, see Thompson at 306 and Heath at 204. As regards the treatise on matrimony, see also C. A. Fantazzi's edition and translation of Vives's treatise, cited below, at 15.

Augustine's concept of *quies* into a vision of the multi-faceted, almost unrelenting incarceration of the married woman.

More's *To Candidus*, where he presented what is effectively his version of the Pygmalion myth, was written between 1500 and 1518—maybe between 1515 and 1518—before the letter but much in the spirit of his friends.¹⁶ Certainly Erasmus and almost certainly Vives would have read the poem; similarity of thought—affinity of mind—is however at issue rather than any question of indebtedness, as one would want to suggest when relating the texts by Erasmus to Vives's *The Education of a Christian Woman*. In any event, More's poem on choosing a wife seems to present, clearly although not by design, a recreation of the Pygmalion myth specific beyond the evocations of it by Erasmus. Connections between the myths of Pygmalion and of Narcissus consequently become apparent in *To Candidus* whereas they remain latent in the writings by More's friend.¹⁷ Another consequence is that the association between female education and women's domestic confinement was confirmed by More with an emphasis quite distinct from that by either Erasmus or by Vives—and one suggesting that the allegedly ideal woman's contribution to the common weal will in most cases be of very private significance: the female humanist, in fact, as perfect *mulier economica*. His poem can therefore be seen to harmonize with, no less than to differ from, those of his Latin poems that are openly misogynistic.

In discussing the texts by those three humanist scholars and friends I want to proceed in the authorial sequence just now followed, not in chronological order since that does not affect my argument. Doing so allows the writings by More's colleagues to be viewed initially in relation to the evolving humanist debate about femaleness—and especially about female education—as well as in relation to one another. Then More's poem (and some of his other poems) can be viewed in relation to that humanist debate at the same time as it is viewed in connection particularly with Erasmus's colloquy, his treatise, and with the treatise by Vives. That being the case I shall begin with Erasmus's *Marriage*, where evocation of the Pygmalion myth is, for my purposes, paradigmatic. There, in the exchange between Eulalia and Xantippe, the former counsels her companion that managing a household may well involve transforming one's husband. Yet his metamorphosis, she says, will be achieved by the wife's self-transformation. Speaking from personal experience, she tells of having “adapt[ed

¹⁶ *CW* III, 2 at 10. See also *An Anthology of Neo-Latin Poetry*, ed. and trans. F. J. Nichols (New Haven, Conn., 1979), 697 where he cites conclusions by L. Bradner and C. A. Lynch, presented in their *The Latin Epigrams of Thomas More* (Chicago, 1953).

¹⁷ In *The Romance of the Rose* Pygmalion compares and contrasts himself with Narcissus. See Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meun, *The Romance of the Rose*, trans. C. Dahlberg (1971; rpt. Hanover, 1986), 20817-21195. J. H. Miller alludes to a link between Pygmalion and Narcissus in his *Versions of Pygmalion* (Cambridge, Mass., 1990), 4-5.

herself] to [her husband]” and having “tak[en] care to avoid any unpleasantness,” notably in her “management of household affairs, the special province of wives.”¹⁸ Thus, Eulalia explains, in changing herself she strategically exercised a wifely submissiveness concordant with natural and divine law. “A woman’s highest praise,” as she observes to Xantippe, “is to be obedient to her husband. It’s the order of nature, the will of God, that woman be entirely dependent on man.”¹⁹ To transform a husband in such a way is for a wife to be transformed simultaneously into a mirror of her husband, into the type of a benevolent *Venus Mechanitis* (one of chaste, married love) and into a sanctified type of Circe.²⁰

While elaborating on the process of unevenly mutual, marital change, however, Eulalia cites an example of wifely transformation that evokes another myth and further issues. Recounting a story illustrative of “husbands who improved their wives by courtesy,” she says:

I’m well acquainted with a certain nobleman, a learned and remarkably clever man. He married a girl of seventeen who had been reared wholly in her parents’ country home (since nobles generally like to live in the country, for the sake of hunting and hawking). Her lack of sophistication recommended her, because he would fashion her to his tastes the more readily. He undertook to teach her literature and music and gradually to accustom her to repeating what she had heard in a sermon, and by other devices to train her in what would be of later use.²¹

Eulalia’s mention of training is possibly an allusion to Xenophon’s *Oeconomicus*, where the education of a wife by her husband is compared to the training of a horse; be that as it may, Eulalia elsewhere likens the transforming of a husband by a wife to the training of various animals including “horses,” so Erasmus applied the analogy to both marital partners.²² Yet before that, and of greater

¹⁸ Thompson, 313.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 319.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 318, as regards *Venus Mechanitis* and Circe. On the wife as a reflection of her husband, see Eulalia’s advice: “As a mirror, if it’s a good one, always gives back the image of the person looking at it, so should a wife reflect her husband’s mood” (Thompson, 313).

²¹ *Ibid.*, 314. After mentioning improvement of wives through courtesy, Eulalia says: “How much more fitting for us to do the same for our husbands!” The mutuality of marital transformation is not at issue; the point is, of course, that the wife’s bringing about change in her husband depends on her willing submission to him.

²² Thompson, 312. As regards Xenophon, see *Oeconomicus A Social and Historical Commentary*, trans. S. B. Pomeroy (Oxford, 1994), 3.11. That edition is hereafter cited as Pomeroy. Almost needless to say, Xenophon’s text envisages an equality between marital partners that is not to be found in Erasmus’s colloquy or, for that matter, his treatise on matrimony. Assuming that Erasmus was associating Xenophon’s horse-training trope with More’s education of his first wife, then her surname may have something to do with the association.

importance, is what seems an allusion simultaneously to Thomas More and to the myth of Pygmalion. Because of the circumstances described, an apparent pun on More's name (as will be seen presently) and for other reasons, the *exemplum* is usually accepted as referring to More and to his first wife, Jane Colt.²³ In the most pertinent moment of the anecdote, Erasmus's Latin is, "*Rudem volebat ille* [namely, the 'certain nobleman'], *quo facilius illam ad suos mores fingeret.*"²⁴ Now as far as putative links between the nobleman and his bride with More and Colt are concerned, there does seem a likelihood that, given its context, "*mores*" puns on "More" as Craig R. Thompson has suggested. Both Erasmus and More himself, after all, liked to pun on More's surname, as the former's Prefatory Letter to his *Praise of Folly* and the latter's Tower correspondence famously attest. That aside, the apparent pun is part of a trope: an *audacia* of life transformed, of an impressionable life's sculptural reshaping through education—education with a moral inflection. The metamorphosis is, too, a process whereby the female is shaped according not merely to the husband's "tastes" but in fact according to his way of viewing the world, his principles, his way of behaving, all of which "*mores*" suggests. Eulalia's *exemplum* seems to be, then, the story of More as a type of Pygmalion. Certainly, it is by implication the story—the approvingly told story—of a man's choice to become another Pygmalion: the man in question selects as his wife a girl who is, from his perspective, virtually unformed ("*rudem*") material and therefore able to be shaped by him into a form expressing his desire, that is to say, educated by him into the likeness of his ideal *mulier economica*.

Erasmus's deliberate—as I take it—allusion to the Pygmalion myth is interesting not simply in its own right, because it weaves the problematic classical narrative (along, inescapably, with its mythographic associations) into the early modern debate about female education, but also because it raises interesting issues.²⁵ To begin with, it is clear in Eulalia's narrative that the purpose of the young bride's reshaping by education is her intellectual and moral development for the sake, first, of her husband's happiness and thence of her own. That is to say, when he becomes happy so ultimately does she; but it is not subse-

²³ A useful summary of major reasons for the identification can be seen in Thompson at 324, in notes 31, 32, and 35.

²⁴ *Opera*, I, col. 704.

²⁵ With reference to *The Romance of the Rose*, D. W. Robertson, Jr. discusses medieval interpretations of the Pygmalion myth as a study in idolatry. See his *A Preface to Chaucer Studies in Medieval Perspectives* (Princeton, 1963), 99-103. J. M. Miller mentions education as part of the mythography of Pygmalion in her "Some Versions of Pygmalion," in C. Martindale (ed.), *Ovid Renewed: Ovidian Influences on Literature and Art from the Middle Ages to the Twentieth Century* (1988; rpt. Cambridge, 1990), 205-14, at 208 (with reference to Besuire). E. Joshua does as well, likewise with reference to Besuire, in his *Pygmalion and Galatea: The History of a Narrative in English Literature* (Aldershot, 2001), at 8. On 10 he mentions the Pygmalion/education link with reference to Caxton.

quently indicated that her transformation itself has made her happier than she originally was. She is rather indicated to be happy because, beyond all else, she has been fortunate to have found so kindly, forbearing, and generous a husband.²⁶ He is happy, Eulalia's anecdote implies, since he comes to possess a wife embodying his intellectual preferences and priorities: Erasmus's version of the Pygmalion myth draws attention to links between it and the myth of Narcissus. Finally here, the bride's education has everything to do with her role as *mulier economica* and so with her life at home. It is designed to make her husband's and thereafter her domestic experience enjoyable—it has nothing to do with life outside the walls of their house.

Virtually an identical account of the education and confinement of young brides occurs in Erasmus's *The Institution of Christian Matrimony*. There he wrote:

It is up to the individual to decide whether it is more advisable to marry an untutored virgin or a widow with experience. I know that some people concur with what appears to be the opinion of Xenophon's Ischomachus that it is better to marry an inexperienced girl who brings the bridegroom nothing from her parents' home except chastity, modesty, and a willingness to be guided in all things. Differences of temperament mean that there can be no single educational method and that the same education will not suit everyone; it is not uncommon to see two entirely virtuous individuals who would be completely unsuited to lifelong companionship. Thus a man who chooses a well-favoured but untutored bride will try, if he is a good craftsman, to fashion himself a wife to suit his own temper, and will succeed, with God's aid, so long as his own character reflects the moral code. Conversely, a man who wants to escape the drudgery of educating her, which is a long and not always successful job, may prefer a widow who is already broken in and formed.²⁷

Affinities between what might be called the Morean episode in *Marriage* and the passage quoted above are not hard to see. In the episode from the colloquy Erasmus alluded to (or, at the least, wrote in accordance with) Xenophon's metaphor of horse-taming; in the passage quoted from the treatise, he cites Xenophon early and, at its end, seems distinctly to echo his horse-taming trope.²⁸

²⁶ Thompson, 315, lines 30-36.

²⁷ Heath, 312-13.

²⁸ He uses the trope later in relation to both husband and wife, the idea being none the less that "the wife should obey her husband rather than the opposite" (Heath, 340). Soon after he uses the trope of the wife as a mirror to her husband (*ibid.*, 341). Continuities between *Marriage* and *The Institution* are quite clear.

Further, he again presents a version of the Pygmalion myth, perhaps more directly than he did in his colloquy, as his Latin suggests: “*Proinde qui felicem quidem naturam, sed rudem elegit, si bonus artifex est, fingit ad suos mores conjugem.*”²⁹ Degrees of directness aside, resemblances between the evocation of Pygmalion in *Marriage* and its counterpart in the treatise are obvious. If, however, one were to look for similarities between Erasmus’s implicitly mythical writing and someone else’s direct dealings with the Pygmalion narrative, that would not be hard to do. As I have already suggested, the search would take one beyond Ovid to Boccaccio. In *Genealogie Deorum Gentilium Libri* 2.49, where the Pygmalion narrative is recounted then interpreted, Boccaccio’s concern was evidently female innocence rather than female education. Describing Pygmalion himself as “strongly talented” and as a sculptor with “ingenious hands,” he then interpreted the making of the statue using these words, which are virtually those used subsequently by Erasmus: “[*Q*]uam cum suis aptam fecisset moribus.”³⁰ The affinity between Boccaccio’s language and that of Erasmus, the writers’ shared idea that the male marital partner shapes his female companion according to his “tastes” and the like, leaves little doubt that Erasmus did indeed perceive as a type of Pygmalion the husband who educates his bride.

Since Erasmus’s evocation of the Pygmalion myth in his treatise closely recalls its predecessor in *Marriage* both versions are of course therefore connected to the version of the myth in Boccaccio’s text. For all that, Erasmus’s two versions are linked to each other and to Boccaccio’s moralized narrative by more than linguistic affinity and the commonality of an emphasized idea. As in the colloquy, so in the treatise and in *Genealogie*: transformation of the female is seen from the perspective of—is associated primarily with—male self-gratification. Boccaccio’s text does not, in that respect, matter much to my argument; more important is the fact that, through evocation of the Pygmalion myth in the Erasmian texts, female education, male self-gratification and female confinement are brought together. The young bride is to be educated by her husband for chiefly his own benefit: she is to be shaped as far as is possible into an embodiment of his preferences and priorities for his domestic pleasure. She may find her transformation personally advantageous (in one way or another) but his benefit will precede, will take precedence over, hers. It is worth recalling, should there be any hesitancy about the extent to which Erasmus seems to have believed in a wife’s domestic confinement, how he chose to interpret the statue that “[t]he famous sculptor Phidias made for the people of Elis ... of

²⁹ *Opera*, V, col. 659. There, it should be added, Erasmus uses the words “*domitam ac formatam*” when adopting Xenophon’s metaphor of horse-training.

³⁰ Boccaccio, *Genealogie Deorum Gentilium Libri*, ed. V. Romano (2 vols., Bari, 1951), I, 100—and so for the preceding quotations. The Latin words relevant to the first two quotations are, “*valebat ingenio, et artificiosas haberet manus.*”

Venus standing on a tortoise.”³¹ The statue’s symbolic meaning was, according to Erasmus, this: “[A] wife should move slowly through the house, carrying the house with her, as it were. If she looks out, it should be no farther than the yard, the playground, or the garden next to the house; these are the boundaries of the housewife’s realm.”

Erasmus’s mythopoeic dealings in *Marriage* and in *The Institution* with the topic of female education—more specifically, with the topic of educating a woman about to manage a household—at times agree but at other times strongly disagree with how the writers discussed before him seem to have considered the education of women, whether married or in general. For example, de Pizan, van Schurman, and Voetius in their respective texts accept the idea that domestic confinement is appropriate to women (though the idea is not equally accepted) yet also suggest that education benefits women because they, no less than men, are able to receive and to benefit from education. Erasmus associates, as has been seen, both the education of a young bride and her domestic confinement with primarily the husband’s gratification, with his rather than his wife’s advantage. Erasmus was writing, of course, about female education in the context of marriage; nevertheless, in his colloquy and in his treatise he did not identify the education of women as good for them apart from its capacity to keep them virtuously and pleasantly occupied within the domestic sphere.³² Agrippa’s declamation indicates, by way of contrast with the Erasmian texts as well as with those by the other writers, that female education should be independent of matrimonial bonds or constraint within the household. Vives’s *The Education of a Christian Woman* presents, however, what seems an intensification of Erasmus’s thoughts on the education and confinement of women.

There, by way of initially justifying female education, Vives in effect proposed that women should be educated because it is essential to a husband’s well-being that his wife has received education (within certain limits and morally above all else), an idea in keeping with Erasmus’s views on female education in *Marriage* and in *The Institution*. “For what is so necessary as the spiritual formation of those who are our inseparable companions in every condition of life?” Vives asks at almost the very start of the Preface to his treatise, in fact directly after his opening address to Catherine of Aragon.³³ His emphasis on a potential or actual wife’s being fashioned in accordance with a husband’s priorities likewise harmonizes, moreover, with Erasmus’s evocation of the Pygmalion myth. Vives’s Latin text uses the same word for sculptural shaping

³¹ Heath, 382.

³² See Heath, 319-20. Note the domestic emphasis introducing and running through the assertion that education is good for girls. In *The Abbot and the Learned Lady*, Erasmus put forward the argument that reading confers wisdom and so (among other related things) helps women to fulfill the role of household manager.

³³ *Education*, 45.

(“*ingere*,” though in its passive form) that Erasmus and Boccaccio use. I don’t want to dwell on the point but I do want to observe that, in revealing what is effectively his initial assumption, Vives used a mythically resonant word that implies the moulding, the sculpting of women by men and for male benefit. Women cannot be allowed, as Vives soon stresses, to shape themselves. They must be transformed if self-perfection is to be, at all, their goal. In other words, the assumption unconsciously revealed at the start of his treatise is that women must be subjected to a Pygmalion-like process of educative change. It is in fact generic change—moral transformation—subsequently indicated to have individuating nuances.

Moving adroitly if fairly predictably from the domestic to the civic, he then asserts: “With good reason Aristotle says that those states that do not provide for the proper education of women deprive themselves of a great part of their prosperity” (*ibid.*). His concern lies however with the domestic not the civic since, as he makes plain, a woman’s domain is usually the household.³⁴ To be exact, it lies with a husband’s possession of a wife whom education has made not merely the more agreeable but irreproachably and all but immaculately chaste. As Vives wrote: “A woman’s only care is chastity; therefore when this has been thoroughly elucidated, she may be considered to have received sufficient instruction.” Thus, “we do not wish the young girl to be as learned as she is chaste and virtuous.” Finally, “a woman has no need of [eloquence]; she needs rectitude and wisdom. [...] [I]n the education of a woman the principal and, I might almost say, the only concern should be the preservation of chastity.”³⁵ The problem is, according to Vives, that women are mentally inconstant and prone to vice, “more inclined to pleasure [than are men] by ... natural disposition”—and girls are restrained from wrongdoing primarily through fear.³⁶

Vives’s solution to the problem is to propose female education as, in effect, a component of domestic surveillance and incarceration. “A woman should live in seclusion and not be known to many,” he wrote, adding that “[i]t is a sign of imperfect chastity and of uncertain reputation [for a woman] to be known by a great number of people.”³⁷ Pursuing the topic by question and reply, he proceeded:

Should [a good woman] never set foot outside her own house? Evidently that would be a great crime. Must she always hide herself at home, which certain vain women, anxious to see or be seen, interpret to mean in prison for a life sentence?

³⁴ *Education*, 1.11, especially at 126.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 46, 54, and 71.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, respectively at 113, 55, and 58.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 1.11, 126.

She should go out at times, if circumstances demand it or a parent orders it. But before she steps over the threshold, let her prepare her mind as if she were entering a combat. (*ibid.*)

Vives implies clearly that a woman's confinement to the home is not imprisonment—only a wrong-minded woman could think so. A various, domestic surveillance and virtual incarceration are none the less what he proposed. Writing of pubescent girls and then of young women more generally, Vives asserts not just that they be kept mostly at home but that they be kept under watch, in particular by their mothers. As has been indicated above, under direction by their husbands married women will make their homes their worlds.³⁸ The bodies of young women and (or) wives can thus be watched and restrained—but what of their minds? Vives's way of dealing with the mental lives of women was to suggest that a woman's mind be formed by reading assigned to her, not chosen by her, and that therefore the appropriate education of women effect their interior surveillance. In short, a female mind morally shaped by allocated reading of Plato, Cicero, Seneca, and the Fathers (as well as Scripture), will be a directed and restrained female mind. Vives claimed: "The woman who has learned to make [morally sound judgments] either through instinctive virtue, innate intelligence, or through her reading will never bring herself to commit any vile act, for her mind will have been strengthened and imbued with holy counsels." Moreover, "if we wished to review past ages, we would not find any learned woman who was unchaste."³⁹ Therefore, although woman "is a weak creature and of uncertain judgment and is easily deceived," she can be watched, educated, and restrained—overseen and almost literally imprisoned—into a life of chastity.⁴⁰ Vives posits, along with confinement, what is more or less a hierarchy of individuated surveillance enacted chiefly by God, the education-developed conscience, a husband, a mother (or other responsible woman). The ultimate result will be, Vives imagined, that from such enclosure a woman will gain an harmonious and serene life. In his words, her life will be one of "Christian tranquillity," specifically, a "*quietem Christianam*": *quies* within self and home in anticipation of *quies* throughout eternity.⁴¹ Vives's rigorously restrained, ideal *mulier economica* notionally becomes the embodiment of an Augustinian happiness.

Vives's fierce though apparently unknowing affirmation of Erasmus's thinking on female education and confinement indicates how close in some respects on that topic (and of course not solely on that one) he is to his friend and how

³⁸ *Education*, 87, 110, and 126.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, respectively at 71, 77-78, 84-85, and 65.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 72.

⁴¹ Vives's Latin is quoted from his *Opera Omnia* (4 vols., Valentiae, 1782-83), here at IV (1783), 90. The relevant phrase runs: "[*Q*]uae pectus in quietem Christianam componant."

far both differ—again, in some respects—from those other writers on female education who were considered above. It also indicates, as will now be seen, how he and Erasmus resemble the Thomas More who authored *To Candidus* and a number of associated Latin poems. Among the latter, “*In Amicam Foedifragam Iocosvm, Versvm e Cantione Anglica*” (“A Jesting Poem to a Faithless Mistress, Translated from an English Song”), has its speaker ironically recount a supposed dream of the apocalypse in order to stress that the inconstancy of women is part of the natural order. That More’s poem restates the topos of women’s innate inconstancy puts his speaker in agreement, certainly, with a multitude of writers from Aristotle through Vives and van Schurman but in disagreement with de Pizan as likewise with Agrippa. Further, in his “*In Virginem Moribvs, havd Virgineis*” (“On a Maid with Unmaidenly Habits”), an “unmaidenly” woman is imaged with such iterative contempt—but evident fascination—that one is reminded of how Vives wrote in *The Education of a Christian Woman* about transgressive female sexuality.⁴² More’s other Latin poems mocking women (to whatever degree they do so) are in general no less simply misogynistic, except for the poem *To Candidus*.

There More’s speaker counsels his supposed addressee—whose name connotes uprightness, openness—with something of a deliberative formality. His address begins by putting forward a proposition amidst admonition, exhortation and brief narrative, then follows with a division, a confutation made part of an elaborate confirmation, and a paradoxical conclusion. That stylised advice urges Candidus to marry by setting before his eyes an image of the woman most likely to become an ideal wife, in other words, of a woman who can become the perfect *mulier economica*. She who can fulfill that ideal is defined against the woman who cannot. She who cannot, as is hardly a surprise, closely resembles the “maid with unmaidenly habits” portrayed in the epigram discussed a little earlier:

But let her modesty bring blushes to her cheeks; let her glance not be provocative. Let her be mild-mannered, not throwing her slender arms wantonly around men’s necks. Let her glances be restrained; let her have no roving eye. (lines 87-96)⁴³

Analogues to those lines in Erasmus or, especially, in Vives would be easy to find; of greater interest, however, are the affinities between their writings and More’s poem when his speaker moves on to the topic of the prospectively ideal bride’s education and life in the household.

⁴² See for example *Education*, 80-84, 87, 91-93 (which include castigation of several things), 104-6 but, especially, 111-13.

⁴³ “*At rursus ut tamen ... Vagis ocellulis.*”

“Let her be either just finishing her education or ready to begin it immediately,” says More’s speaker (“*Sit illa uel modo / Instructa literis, / Vel talis ut modo / Sit apta literis, [...]*” lines 102-5). His words faintly anticipate Erasmus’s remark, in *The Institution*, about one advantage in marrying a widow—namely, that she is already trained whereas a young woman about to marry will have to be put through a process of education by her husband. Stronger affinities between More and Erasmus can nevertheless be discerned here, for this question necessarily arises: “If the prospective bride is on the verge of education, who will provide it and what will be made available?” The answer to the initial part of the question would seem to be that, of course, the man deciding to marry such a woman would see thereafter to her education, conferring it himself, by way of others, or in conjunction with others. The first and third of those possibilities concur with More’s own practice in educating Jane Colt, as Erasmus attested using the words “*illam ad suos mores fingere*.”⁴⁴ Answering the subsequent part of the question suggests, however, further likenesses between More and Erasmus as well as between More and Vives. What will be made available to the chosen partner may be fairly described as a humanist education. More’s speaker says:

Happy is the woman whose education permits her to derive from the best of ancient works the principles which confer a blessing on life. Armed with this learning, she would not yield to pride in prosperity, nor to grief in distress—even though misfortune strike her down. For this reason your lifetime companion will be ever agreeable, never a trouble or a burden. If she is well instructed herself, then some day she will teach your little grandsons, at an early age, to read.

You will be glad to leave the company of men and to seek repose in the bosom of your accomplished wife, the while she attends to your comfort, and while under her dexterous touch the plucked strings resound, while in a sweet voice (as sweet, Procne, as your sister’s) she sings delightful songs such as Apollo would be glad to hear. Then you will be glad to spend days and nights in pleasant and intelligent conversation, listening to the sweet words which ever most charmingly flow from her honeyed mouth. By her comments she would restrain you if ever vain success should exalt you and would comfort you if grievous sorrow should cast you down. When she speaks, it will be

⁴⁴ *Opvs Epistolarvm*, ed. P. S. Allen (Oxford, 1922), IV, To Ulrich Hutten, Antwerp 23 July 1519. See 18, lines 169-70: “[R]udem adhuc, utpote ruri inter parentes ac sorores semper habitam, quo magis illi liceret illam ad suos mores fingere. Hanc et literis instituendam curavit et omni musices genere doctam reddidit.”

difficult to choose between her perfect power of expression and her thoughtful understanding of all kinds of affairs. (lines 106-156)⁴⁵

More's image of the female humanist as perfect *mulier economica* is not simple and neither are its relations with those images of the ideal household manager fashioned respectively by Erasmus and by Vives.

The words introducing that image, "Happy is the woman," sound a counterpart to the *beatus ille* motif: unlike Erasmus or Vives (akin rather to de Pizan, Agrippa, van Schurman, and Voetius), More emphasizes that the woman herself will primarily benefit from education. Yet the difference is deceptive. For a start, More's speaker portrays a woman transformed by a humanist education into an embodiment of evidently his and certainly More's own priorities and preferences (the *mores* of each, as it were). She becomes, as female humanist, a mirror to the poem's male humanist speaker and his maker. Erasmus's Eulalia counsels that a wife transform herself into a mirror of her spouse; here, no self-transformation is envisaged. In terms of the poem's argument, either the prospective female partner has already been fashioned into desirable form by some more or less kindred spirit to the prospective (humanist) husband or he, perhaps with assistance, will so fashion her. Thus the poem's image of the female humanist as ideal household manager accords with the subsequent, Erasmian evocations of Pygmalion in *Marriage* and in *The Institution*; further, in its mirror-like specificity that image suggests the Narcissism of the Morean speaker. He unwittingly reveals himself as, *de facto*, a type of Pygmalion. The image of the female humanist begins with emphasis on female education's benefit to its recipient; that emphasis is countered, however, by what might be called the egocentric shaping of the image itself.

That the image of the ideal, prospective bride is, in effect, a tale of moralized transformation echoing after its fashion the tales of Pygmalion and of Narcissus can be perceived yet more clearly when one considers the notional consequences of the transformation: what it will allegedly bring about. Some of those things are quite simple. For example, such a wife won't be annoying; she will be qualified to teach the grandchildren that she will have helped provide; she will make Candidus, her husband, glad to stay at home, away from other men and the public sphere, because she looks after and entertains him so well (lines 117-46). The last alleged consequence is not quite as simple as it might seem, for it indicates that, through the knowledge and skills born of her transformation, Candidus's prospective bride will in turn transform his home into a

⁴⁵ "*Felix, quibus bene ... Rerum scientia.*" Cf. More's letter to William Gonell, 22 May <1518?> in E. F. Rogers (ed.), *Selected Letters* (New Haven, Conn., 1961), 103-6, where More presents the view that education consolidates female virtue, especially if the right reading is allocated. His underlying view of why women should be educated seems to accord with Plato's in *The Republic*.

microcosmic eutopia, a private “good place” distinct from the outer social world. (More’s descendant, John Donne, will offer a variation on that idea in his “The Sun Rising.”⁴⁶) Further consequences are in keeping with and no less sophisticated than that utopian vision—and not least among them is this. Early in his image of the woman who will become the ideal *mulier economica*, More’s speaker implies that from her transformation she will gain a philosophic calm (lines 106-16). He proceeds to suggest that she will communicate that calm to Candidus through counsel or consolation, depending on his circumstances (lines 147-52). She will therefore act as her husband’s personal humanist adviser, her education advancing not the common weal but the domestic, not the public but the private good. Uniting, as female humanist, “*Summa elo-quentia*” with “*omnium graui / Rerum scientia*” (lines 154-56), she will bring to her husband that *quies*, to borrow Vives’s word, which she herself possesses.⁴⁷ The benefits of her transformation, that is to say, will ultimately return to him.

It could be added, with regard once again to Venus and to Fortune, that More’s speaker implies such a woman will be a source of lasting pleasure to Candidus and will enable him to increase his power over life’s uncertainties (cf. lines 227-34). Yet to make that additional point leads one back to the persistent issue of identifying how far, whether in theory or in practice, early modern women were advantaged by education—especially, a humanist education. Kate Aughterson has written that “one of the modern myths about humanism, which has been difficult to dispel, is that Renaissance English women during the sixteenth century benefited from humanist educational theories and revolutions.”⁴⁸ It is both interesting and relevant here that she uses as a case study Margaret Roper, More’s first daughter, of whom Elizabeth Frances Rogers wrote: “She was one of the most learned women of her day in Europe.”⁴⁹ Although my concern in this discussion has been with problems of theory and representation in, not with the social outcomes of early modern female education, Aughterson’s view harmonizes with my own. Some defenses of female education that have been considered above do indeed urge the education of women as a matter of

⁴⁶ See my “Donne and the Resources of Kind,” in A. D. Cousins and D. Grace (eds.), *Donne and the Resources of Kind* (Madison, N.J., 2002), 12-14.

⁴⁷ The translation of “*omnium graui / Rerum scientia*” as given in *CW III*, 2 could be otherwise, namely, “deep (or, thoughtful) knowledge of all things.” *Scientia* was of course a term with various meanings, especially in relation to *prudentia* and to *sapientia*. In any event, the term forms part of a hyperbole, since it is implicitly clear that the ideal household manager does not have an active life in the public sphere—nor do I see the poem’s *exempla* as suggesting the opposite. Vives had written, of course, that women don’t need eloquence because of their domesticity. See also, *Renaissance Humanism Foundations, Forms, and Legacy*, ed. A. Rabil, Jr. (3 vols., Philadelphia, 1988), I, 434-53 and II, 39-54.

⁴⁸ See her *Renaissance Woman: A Sourcebook. Constructions of Femininity in England* (London, 1995), 166 (and ff.). As might be expected, she and Benson read Hyrde quite differently in some respects (see Benson at 179-81).

⁴⁹ See her *The Correspondence of Sir Thomas More* (Princeton, 1947), 96.

what might now be called social justice and for women's own well being. Others, of course, variously do not. Reading More's *To Candidus* in relation to the early modern debate about female education and, in particular, writings by Erasmus, seems to me to suggest that humanists could effectively generate their own myths about why and how women should be educated—myths which contributed to the advocacy of female education but did so ambiguously at best.

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