

Révolution à la Française: Women and 1789 Writings

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INTRODUCTION

5 October 1789. Frustrated by the rising cost of bread and the subsequent hunger their children were facing as a result, crowds of French women—mothers, wives, sisters, and daughters—marched from their homes to the *Hôtel de ville* of Paris. As their numbers increased, the National Guard stationed there had no choice but to heed their orders and trek alongside them to Versailles, where the women planned to demand that the King and National Assembly provide them with the bread that served as their everyday sustenance. The crowd at Versailles soon grew violent, killing some of the King's men and mounting their severed heads on pikes for the march. The King, sensing that he was no longer in control of the situation, agreed to permanently move the royal family to Paris, the newest prisoners of a revolution that had just begun in July of that same year. The National Assembly, France's new governing body at the time, grew fearful that they could no longer control the masses of people they themselves had incited weeks earlier. They too made the voyage to Paris. Frenchwomen's political and physical participation had coerced a country's monarchy and parliamentary body to move from their secluded Versailles to the heavily populated capital, Paris¹.

As these events illustrate, participation by women during the French Revolutionary era had a profound effect on the status of the revolution itself. Despite their exclusion from politics, French women participated in the riots, marches, and publications that continuously fueled the revolutionary cause.² Concerning this phenomenon, historians, Jack R. Censer and Lynn Hunt, rationalize this by stating that as a result "of their special role in feeding families, women most often took the lead in these efforts. Ironically, it was their private or domestic role that induced

¹ Harriet B. Applewhite and Darline Gay Levy, "A Political Revolution for Women? The Case of Paris," In *Becoming Visible Women in European History*, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1998): 271-273.

² *Ibid.*, 268.

them to take public action.”³ Near the end of the *ancien régime*, female representation grew in certain institutions of French society. These areas of representation included: the court, the theater, and the provincial political assemblies that would later elect deputies to the Estates General in 1789⁴. In the years leading up to the French Revolution, women also played important roles as mothers, wives, *salonnières*, fish sellers, and businesswomen.

The causes of the French Revolution were as diverse as the country’s inhabitants. Under the *ancien régime*, French society was divided into three broad class groups, or “estates”; the Clergy, Nobility, and everyone else, also known as the Third Estate. With the exception of the Clergy, Frenchmen were typically born into their respective estate, with members of the Nobility and Third Estate being able to join the religious order. High posts in both government and the Church were reserved for—and oftentimes bought by—the Nobility. The Third Estate was diverse and included within its ranks, peasants, farmers, labors, merchants, doctors, lawyers, and artisans, from both urban and rural communities. Their social status aside, what truly differentiated these three groups were the specific privileges granted to them by pre-revolutionary France. The Church was virtually exempt from any sort of tax and thus had accrued wealth over the years. The Nobility was subject to more taxes, but ultimately paid very little in comparison to the taxes that the Third Estate was forced to pay. These privileges became increasingly frustrating, especially for the newly formed and ever-growing bourgeoisie of the Third Estate.⁵

³ Jack R. Censer and Lynn Hunt, *Liberty, Equality, Fraternity Exploring The French Revolution*, (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2001): 75.

⁴ Carla Hesse, *The Other Enlightenment How French Women Became Modern*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001): 32.

⁵ Jeremy D. Popkin, *A Short History of the French Revolution*, (Hoboken: Pearson Education, Inc., 2015): 8-9.

An economic burden—which was a result of severe weather that destroyed crops, a growing population, and economic treaties that disadvantaged French merchants and manufacturers—had fallen upon the Third Estate and was exacerbated in the years leading up to the French Revolution. This, along with the Enlightenment ideas that circulated during the 18th century and the inspiration stemming from the American colonies' war of independence, greatly influenced the views that some Frenchmen had towards their own country.⁶ As France neared the last decade of the 18th century, it became clear to the French monarch, King Louis XVI, that reform was needed in order to ameliorate the economic situation of his country and reaffirm his power over the nation. After unsuccessful meetings with the Nobility, it was decided that he was to convoke a meeting of the Estates General in 1789, a meeting of all three estates that had not taken place since 1614.

In order to prepare, King Louis XVI ordered that rural communities and towns elect deputies to serve as their representatives to the Estates General. He also ordered that these assemblies draft *cahiers de doléances*, or lists of grievances, so that the Estates General could better understand the situation of their citizens. A total of about 60,000 lists of grievances were written leading up to the Estates General meeting. Barred from writing their own lists of grievances and electing representatives to the Estates General, Frenchwomen took matters into their hands, met, and drafted their own lists of grievances.⁷

The central objective of this study is to provide an analysis of a select handful of pamphlets written during the year 1789. The pamphlets were found on the online archives of a

⁶ Jack R. Censer and Lynn Hunt, *Liberty, Equality, Fraternity Exploring The French Revolution*, (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2001): 14-16.

⁷ Joan B. Landes, *Women and the Public Sphere in the Age of the French Revolution*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988): 107.

Chicago research center, the Newberry Library. Their French Revolution Collection consists of over 30,000 digitized pamphlets accessible to the public via their website.⁸ Below is a list of the pamphlets analyzed for the purpose of this study:

- 1) TRÈS-SÉRIEUSES REMONTRANCES/*Des Filles du Palais-Royal & lieux circonvoisins, à MM. de la Noblesse.*
- 2) CAHIER DES DOLÉANCES DES DEMOISELLES, AUX ÉTATS-GÉNÉRAUX DE FRANCE, DE 1789. Written by Mademoiselle P....
- 3) PÉTITION DES FEMMES DU TIERS-ETAT AU ROI
- 4) CAHIER DES REPRÉSENTATIONS ET DOLÉANCES DU BEAU-SEXE, *Adressé au Roi, au moment de la tenue des Etats-Généraux.*
- 5) RÉPONSE DES FEMMES DE PARIS/AU Cahier de l'Ordre le plus nombreux du Royaume.
- 6) RÉCLAMATIONS DES FEMMES DE PROVENCE, *POUR leur admission aux États-Généraux.*
- 7) DISCOURS AUX DAMES DE MARSEILLE, *Sur leur Contribution Patriotique. Par un Célibataire Patriote.*
- 8) DOLÉANCES/DES BLANCHISSEUSES ET LAVANDIÈRES, POUR être adressé à MM. LES DÉPUTÉS de Marseille aux États-Généraux, & être annexes aux autres Cahiers des Doléances des différentes Corporations.

Although rich in primary source information, it is difficult to establish the exact background of these pamphlets because of their anonymity. Unless explicitly stated, most pamphlets do not indicate where they were written or by whom, though they all have clearly printed the year, “1789,” to indicate their date of publication. However, three of the pamphlets (numbers 6,7, and 9 from the list above) can be traced to the south of France because of their titles and the content found in the pamphlets. The usage of feminine nouns in their titles indicate to the reader that every pamphlet was written, presented, or led by women. However, this is not always the case, as Paule-Marie Duhet, author of *Cahiers de doléances des femmes en 1789 et*

⁸ “French Pamphlets.” The Newberry Library. <https://www.newberry.org/french-pamphlets>.

autres textes, points out in her preface. According to the author, certain pamphlets written during this time have been verified to be have been written by men under the guise of women. She states, “*Toutefois, ce qui est remarquable, c’est de voir le nombre relativement élevé de textes écrits de toute évidence par des hommes et faussement attribués à des auteurs féminins. Ils se reconnaissent à une excessive naïveté d’expression, à la pauvreté des idées énoncées, parfois à une signature stéréotypée, et souvent à un amalgame de plaintes qui soulève aussitôt la suspicion du lecteur.*”⁹ As she notes, these pamphlets are identifiable by their lack of attention to arguments and ideas, which is in contrast to those of pamphlets with female authors. Of the list above, three pamphlets have been identified by the same author to have been written by men and falsely attributed to women. These are numbers are 1,4, and 5.¹⁰

These pamphlets provide us with an insight into the lives of women during this era, the rights they were fighting for, and the ideas they held. Women argued for more access to education, more equality within the sphere of domesticity, and protection from the government in order to partake in commerce. However, these different demands and the way in which they are articulated also reveal underlying concepts of gendered morality that the authors of these pamphlets had. Gendered morality—or the set of morals bestowed specifically upon women—required that they stay within their traditional roles of mothers and wives, even during their demand for more rights. Although women at the time had begun to explore new areas of society, such as education and commerce, they do so in a gendered context. As a result of this gendered morality, the writers of the pamphlets analyzed manifest this through the creation of a type of female duality of virtue and vice, oftentimes to the detriment of those women who fall in the

⁹ Paule-Marie Duhet, *Cahiers de doléances des femmes en 1789 et autres textes*, (Nancy: Berger-Levrault, 1981): 15.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

latter category. The following analysis is divided thematically—Education, Commerce, Sphere of Domesticity, Men and Pamphlets, and Morality—in order to illustrate this argument.

WOMEN AND ACCESS TO EDUCATION

Though not the explicit theme of any of the selected pamphlets, several authors express a desire for access to a better education. References to education allow one to understand the importance that education held in the minds of women, as well as its perceived benefits. In the pamphlet, *Cahier des doléances de demoiselles*, in which eight articles addressing the role of women and family are proposed, the topic of education appears explicitly in Article 4 and Article 6. The first article demands that and fathers provide an education to their sons *and* daughters: “*Il sera enjoint à tous les peres [sic] de famille de donner la même éducation à tous leurs enfans [sic], garçons & filles.*”¹¹ The usage of the words, “garçons & filles” is intentional and illustrates the sense of equality the author is attempting to instill through the medium of language. Rather than simply stating, “enfants,” which includes both boys and girls, the author specifies in order to make a point. The intention here is clear: the author is attempting to establish a sense of equality between the masculine and the feminine.

For the author, access to education is viewed as a right because of the belief that it will ameliorate the current situation in which women find themselves. An educated woman would have the knowledge needed to actively participate in the politics of government. However, the author highlights the importance of an accessible education for all vulnerable communities, which include children. In Article 6, the author proposes that married women be made to pay a

¹¹ Mlle P... *CAHIER DES DOLÉANCES DES DEMOISELLES, AUX ÉTATS-GÉNÉRAUX DE FRANCE, DE 1789*, 6.

special tax so that the money generated through this new mode of revenue can be funneled towards funding the education of poor or orphan children: “*Les femmes mariées qui n'auront pas d'enfants, donneront, chaque année, une somme qui sera versée dans une caisse établie pour fournir à l'entretien & à l'éducation des enfans [sic] pauvres & orephelins.*”¹² The drafting of this article in itself indicates that, through a woman’s perspective, poor and orphan children are at a disadvantage and thus must be cared for by the State; this is a budding form of “social security”, articulated by women.

Although this specific document demands access to education, it speaks very little to the type of education women in 1789 had access to. On the contrary, the pamphlet, *Pétition des femmes du Tiers-Etat au Roi*, goes more in depth on this issue. This pamphlet gives a stereotyped panorama of the condition of women at the time, stating that women born into the Third Estate are at particular risk of receiving an insufficient education: “*Les femmes du Tiers-Etat naissent presque toutes sans fortune; leur éducation est très-négligée ou très vicieuse: elle consiste à les envoyer à l'école, chez un Maître qui, lui-même, ne sait pas le premier mot de la langue qu'il enseigne; elles continuent d'y aller jusqu'à ce qu'elles sachent lire l'Office de la Messe en français, & les Vepres [sic] en latin.*”¹³ The author of this pamphlet states that lower class women receive a limited and basic education, enough to fulfill their religious duties during Mass. The author even goes on to criticize the unqualified teachers who educate women, stating that they do not even know the words of the language they are meant to teach. Once again, this type of criticism is evidence that women were aware of the restrictions placed upon them by society; they understand the limitations of their education and wish to break these boundaries.

¹² Ibid., 7.

¹³ *PÉTITION DES FEMMES DU TIERS-ETAT AU ROI*. 4.

According to the pamphlet, women are born with certain talents. Despite the hindrances of their education, they sometimes manage to thrive, especially in terms of commerce. Furthermore, in order to strengthen their case for better access to education, the author invokes the importance of family. She states that by improving the education of women, mothers will be able to properly educate the next generation to come, or in other words, the future of France. The author is fully aware of the importance that the value of family has in her society and is able to use it to her advantage.

The author goes on to ask that free schools be established so that women can learn about principles, religion, and most importantly, morality. The author states her desire for women to be taught the virtues of their sex: kindness, modesty, patience, charity. She rejects the idea of being taught the sciences as they do not see them fitting to their gender and roles as mothers. The writer is able to find a balance between her demands for better education for women, which would be viewed as bending the current social norms and compromising the type of education women would receive so as to align with the current social norms. To the author, receiving a virtuous education would lower the possibility of having to resort to prostitution to earn a living, a group of women she disdains because they are “*sans culture, sans principes, sans idée de morale,*”¹⁴ women who “*viennent à Paris [pour] ensevelir leur honte, [et] finissent par l'y perdre entièrement & meurent victimes du libertinage*”.¹⁵ The creation of this feminine duality is necessary in order for the model of gendered morality to work within the context of French society. Education, according to the author, is the key to obtaining culture, principles, and morals.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid., 5.

Another example where women demand a better education can be found in the pamphlet entitled, *Réclamations des femmes de Provence*, in which the author states her irritation with men and their actions against permitting this right. The author is quick to note the importance that women have in French society: “*Eh quoi ! Nous ferons mouvoir l’Eglise, nous animerons la Noblesse, nous déridons la Magistrature, nous affranchirons le Tiers-Etats; & quand il s’agira des intérêts de ces trois Corps réunis, on refusera de nous appeler !*”¹⁶ As the quote indicates, the author expresses her anger with the fact that women were not invited to attend and send representatives to the Third Estate, despite composing the majority of the population and contributing to the economy of France. She points out the shortcomings of women’s education and the perseverance they incarnate despite them.

This pamphlet serves as evidence to the fact that women were very much aware of the inequalities they faced within their own society. The author of this pamphlet puts the blame on men for the restrictions her sex must endure. She feels frustrated by restrictions placed on her education by men, but women’s preassigned role in society as well. She states that, “[t]oute notre étude, selon lui [l’homme], doit être de lui plaire; & nous sommes parfaites quand nous avons atteint ce but merveilleux.”¹⁷ These words show that, at the very least, some women during 1789 France yearned for more than just a traditional role in society, and these grievances provided them the means to voice it.

WOMEN AND COMMERCE

Although women in 1789 France were not always able to partake in all aspects of society, these pamphlets also highlight their role in commerce. This is exemplified in the pamphlet,

¹⁶ *RÉCLAMATIONS DES FEMMES DE PROVENCE, POUR leur admission aux États-Généraux*. 8.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 9.

Pétition des femmes du Tiers-Etat au Roi, in which the author demands for a specific form of government protection. Despite her generalization of women, the author of this pamphlet highlights the fact that many women during this time held positions that generated commerce for the country. Nevertheless, she understands the precarity of this privilege and thus asks the King for his help in the matter, advocating so that traditionally feminine positions in commerce be restricted only to women. These include seamstresses, embroiderers, fashion merchants, etc., trades that have been traditionally gendered throughout the years: “...*nous demandons: que les hommes ne puissent, sous aucun prétexte, exercer les métiers qui sont l'apanage des femmes, soit couturière, brodeuse, marchande de modes, &c. &c.*”¹⁸ Thus, we are able to see how French women at the time contributed to their country's economy and the uncertainty accompanied with it.

Furthermore, the author emphasizes the importance of protecting this right to conduct business. The author explains early on that women are always at odds with society. They are the unwanted sex; disdained by their parents for not being men and mistreated by their husbands for being women. In such a hostile situation, women become vulnerable to violence and poverty, thus fueling a never-ending cycle of suffering. However, by being able to conduct business and generate a profit, women are able to gain more independence and as a result, become less vulnerable to the society in which they live. The author points this out and implores the King to furnish these rights to French business women. This commercial right serves as way to improve the economic situation and privileges of women.

In another pamphlet, *Doléances des blanchisseuses et lavandieres*, the author points out a group of merchants tampering with the soap they use to conduct their businesses in order to take

¹⁸ *PÉTITION DES FEMMES DU TIERS-ETAT AU ROI*. 6.

advantage of them and make a higher profit. The author asks that they be investigated and brought to justice in order to put an end to their scheme. The author expresses her interest to join forces with those already battling against this injustice and states, “[e]n nous joignant à eux, nous donnerons sans doute plus de force à leurs justes réclamations: ces honnêtes Négociants gémissent comme nous de l’inconduite qui se pratique par quelques-uns de ceux qui font le même commerce”.¹⁹ This idea of engaging in the already existing contestation against tampered soap illustrates the author’s desire to participate in commerce and the issues related to it.

However, the author does not advocate in favor of all women. In order to strengthen and legitimize her argument, she states her willingness to submit to an investigation of her morals before being given the right to conduct commerce: “*Que vous nous assigniez des charges qui ne pourront être remplies que par nous, que nous n'occuperons qu'après avoir subi un examen sévère, après des informations sûres de la pureté de nos mœurs.*”²⁰ It is clear by the hostility shown towards sex workers mentioned earlier that the author does not consider their work as a form of commerce; in fact, she cannot because it would break the rigidity of the feminine moral duality model of virtue versus vice. Although the author wishes to extend women’s rights, she uses the current context of French morality at the time in order to legitimize her argument, once again to the detriment of those who engage in prostitution.

WOMEN AND THE SPHERE OF DOMESTICITY

It is made clear in several pamphlets that family is a value held in high esteem by French women. To a lesser extent, certain women writers also outline their desire to obtain more rights

¹⁹ *DOLÉANCES DES BLANCHISSEUSES ET LAVANDIÈRES*. 3.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 6.

in the area of marriage and they advocate for the value of family. In the pamphlet, *Cahier des doléances de demoiselles*, the author dedicates a proposed article to abolishing the dowry system currently in place: “*La raison & le bon sens exigent que, dans un Etat bien policé, les peres & les meres [sic] n'aient pas besoin de donner à leurs filles une constitution dotale; l'homme, au contraire, qui voudra se marier, sera obligé de faire la constitution de la femme qu'il prendra.*”²¹ Once again, this passage demonstrates women’s recognition of the restrictions placed upon them by society and their demands to be released from these chains.

However, another interesting point that surfaces in this pamphlet is the author’s suggested tax system. In order to remedy the country’s financial burden, she proposes that single people be taxed more than families, and that marriages with no children also be taxed more. Although she does not explicitly state her reasoning, one can deduce that this is done because of the importance of marrying and producing children. Since single people and childless couples are not abiding by social norms and have more spending power because of it, they are taxed in order to place them on the same economic level as their counterparts and to encourage them to marry.

The author of this pamphlet also demands “*qu'il soit fait une loi qui punisse le mari infidele [sic], comme l'on punit la femme convaincue d'infidélité,*”²² and that families be forbidden to name a sole heir because of the disadvantages it causes to “*leurs autres enfans, & sur-tout des filles.*”²³ At a time during which they were allowed limited participation in public affairs, the authors of these pamphlets attest to the fact that women were moving away from their traditional sphere and into new areas. Pre-revolutionary France and the French Revolution were marked by women’s active role. According to the author, Lynn Hunt, women “formed their own

²¹ Mlle P... *CAHIER DES DOLÉANCES DES DEMOISELLES, AUX ÉTATS-GÉNÉRAUX DE FRANCE, DE 1789*. 7.

²² *Ibid.*, 5-6.

²³ *Ibid.*, 6.

clubs and also agitated in print and in mixed-sex clubs for more rights not only in politics but also in inheritance and marriage laws".²⁴

MEN AND PAMPHLETS

During the same time that women authors were publishing these pamphlets, a certain number of pamphlets were published by men under the guise of women. Though it is unclear as to why certain authors chose to write as if they were women, one can certainly hypothesize. At the time, writing was a primarily masculine field because the "written word and its power to discipline speech was viewed as the masculine rhetorical domain," according to historian, Carla Hesse.²⁵ This lack of representation of female writing was accompanied by the fact that women were not allowed to draft list of grievances in the first place. Finally, the enticing and shocking titles, such as the girls of the Palais-Royal, would have sparked interest in the reader. This type of "marketing" would have made it easier for some men to diffuse their ideas in the sea of thousands and thousands of pamphlets printed during this time.

One can distinguish pamphlets written by women from their deceitful counterparts based on the ideas and issues discussed in each pamphlet's content. Men's pamphlets lack the same focus on the condition and rights of women. According to Paule-Marie Duhet, author of the book, *Cahier de doléances des femmes en 1789 et autres textes*, three of these pamphlets include: *Très-sérieuses remontrances des Filles du Palais-Royal*, *Cahier des représentations et doléances du beau-sexe*, and *Réponse des femmes de Paris au Cahier de l'Ordre le plus nombreux du Royaume*.

²⁴ Lynn Hunt, *The French Revolution and Human Rights A Brief Documentary History*, (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 1996): 29.

²⁵ Carla Hesse, *The Other Enlightenment How French Women Became Modern*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001): 30.

The first pamphlet, *Très-sérieuses remontrances*, is quite dense in terms of content. It is well written and full of euphemisms, rhetorical questions, intertextuality, and other rhetorical devices. The author of this text is well read, especially in regard to Greek and Roman mythology and current events, as is demonstrated by the pamphlet's opening line: "*Nous apprenons avec le plus vif chagrin, qu'au lieu de venir déposer vos offrandes dans les temples de Vénus, vous ne vous occupez qu'à faire la guerre à ceux que l'on nomme Tiers-Etat...*"²⁶ This literary talent undermines what previous pamphlets have stated regarding women's lack of access to a comprehensive education. The text captivates its reader through the usage of rhetorical devices, above all the prostitute-equality metaphor in which the author claims that men of all statuses are equally treated by the prostitutes of the Palais-Royal because ultimately, all men are equal, with the only difference being that some men choose to pay more for their services. The pamphlet invokes images of what is "natural" in the world, stating that men who stray away from the natural laws are consumed by ambition.

The pamphlet is also a critique of the Nobility and its stance vis-à-vis the Third Estate and the Estates General. The title exemplifies this argument with its usage of the words, "remonstrance" and "addressed to the men of the Nobility." Its primary argument is not to express these women's grievances. In fact, the only true grievance the author mentions is that due to the popularity of the Estates General, men no longer frequent the brothels in which they work. There is an obvious bias for the Third Estate that is shown in various places of the document, for example, in the author's comment about referring to the Third Estate as the "*Tiers entier*" because of its large population. The author reminds the Nobility that this group is greater

²⁶ TRÈS-SÉRIEUSES REMONTRANCES/*Des Filles du Palais-Royal & lieux circonvoisins, à MM. de la Noblesse*. 5.

in numbers, and reprimands them for acting on their own personal interests rather than the interests of the public.

Overall, this pamphlet does not discuss the specific conditions and demands of women. Instead, it chooses to focus on the Third Estate in general and overtly reproaches the Nobility for their actions, and lack thereof, regarding the country's financial burdens and political inequalities. A pamphlet written by female sex workers in which they reprimand the Nobility would spur interest in the 1789 French public, but its lack of focus on women's social and political conditions, as well as its overt disrespect for the Nobility, are evidence that this pamphlet was not written by the prostitutes of the Palais Royal.

Similarly, the pamphlet, *Cahier des représentations et doléances du beau-sexe*, does not go into detail about the issues solely concerning women. Rather, the author chooses to take a more holistic approach and addresses society as a whole. This pamphlet is conservative in that it does not wish to disturb the current social order, but rather, solidify it; in fact, some of the articles proposed in this pamphlet hinders women's position in society, such as Article V, which reinforces the social dichotomy of noblewomen and prostitutes: "*Il sera donc sagement établi par loi, que toute Duchesse ou autre femme de qualité, qui affectera le ton, le costume & le maintien d'une fille du monde, sera dégradée de noblesse; & que toute fille du monde qui se donnera des airs de Duchesse, sera condamnée à plusieurs années de séjour à l'Hôpital.*"²⁷

The pamphlet begins by essentializing the image of what a woman is: a being that is loving, caring, sensible, etc., pointing out that many female rulers have reigned successfully in the past. The author claims to be shocked and humiliated by the fact that women were not asked to attend the Estates General, yet does not go into much greater detail concerning this issue. The

²⁷ Ibid., 7.

author of this pamphlet also claims to have assembled women from all three Estates, even nuns and abbesses who have left their cloisters to partake in the conversation. Despite this, no class-specific issue is brought up or elaborated. The author states that they are not asking for the right to divorce their spouse, however, they do set forth articles pertaining to the changes they wish to see in their society. Four of the articles specifically address men with the end goal of making them accountable for their foul actions and even those of their families.

In general, the majority of these articles aim to restrict the liberties of women. They are not allowed to solicit a judge in their own name and they must wear specific clothing so that their social class is easily recognizable. The author of this pamphlet also seeks to limit the freedom of the press, claiming that the published works that have been allowed to circulate have corrupted the current generation. They also ask for more religious and educated teachers in schools so that the next generation can be properly educated. While one article demands that children not marry outside of their class, another article demands that they have the freedom to choose a spouse without the interference of a parent. These contradictions and lack of attention towards women's rights and their conditions are evidence of this pamphlet's falsely attributed authorship.

Finally, the third pamphlet, *Réponse des femmes de Paris au Cahier de l'Ordre le plus nombreux du Royaume*, is a response to a previously published pamphlet entitled, *Cahier de l'Ordre le plus nombreux du Royaume*. Printed in the latter were names of noblemen and critiques concerning their morals. Despite the fact that the title indicates that this pamphlet was a response made by "Parisian Women", the author uses the first person singular pronoun (*je*) throughout the document when discussing their arguments. The author is notably upset with the content of the original pamphlet and goes on to argue that these accusations, even if they are true, harm the honor of the Nobility, their wives, and their children. There is a strong emphasis

on the effects that this pamphlet could have on the family structure and the reputation of the people discussed. Not a single issue relating to women's position in society or their rights is discussed, and as Paule-Marie Duhet points out, it is a "*lecture tonique*"²⁸ through and through.

MORALITY

The issues addressed by women in their pamphlets cover various topics of their everyday lives, thus, it is not surprising that they would address the topic of immorality and prostitution as two of their many concerns. Addressed by men and women authors alike, the discussion surrounding immorality is almost always accompanied by some sort of dehumanization and general disdain towards the most immoral of society—prostitutes. The alleged disgrace of their sex, female sex workers are portrayed negatively throughout these pamphlets in order to illustrate the consequences of not following a strict moral regimen, as well as to establish a mode by which one can measure morality employing a strict dichotomy of virtuous women versus immoral ones. Women who broke out of this dichotomy suffered the consequences and as the Revolution developed, they grew even more stricter, as historian, Joan Landes highlights: "But as women began to speak and act on their own behalf for the rights of female citizens in the reformed nation, they touched off a virulent debate on representation, eliciting fears that independent, political women might be simply *femmes-hommes*—women masquerading as men, forsaking their feminine duty, and defying their natural female role."²⁹

In, *Pétition des femmes du Tiers-Etat au Roi*, the author provides a bleak generalization of the fate of women born within the Third Estate: if born ugly, they are destined to an unhappy

²⁸ Paule-Marie Duhet, *Cahiers de doléances des femmes en 1789 et autres textes*, (Nancy: Berger-Levrault, 1981): 15.

²⁹ Joan B. Landes, *Women and the Public Sphere in the Age of the French Revolution*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988): 146.

marriage; if born beautiful, they are destined to a life of low morality, ending their days prostituting in the streets of Paris. Though the author attributes the latter group's downfall to a lack of education, a shortcoming of a State institution, she nevertheless goes on to castigate them. In order to strengthen her case for the rights of women and to highlight the inequalities that virtuous women face, the author must establish a feminine dichotomy, in other words, she must create a tool to distinguish women who incarnate virtue, and those who incarnate vice. By establishing this dichotomy of virtue versus vice, the author is able to advocate for some women, to the detriment of those who earn a living through sex work.

In order to emphasize this dichotomy, the author expresses her desire to separate prostitutes from moral women so that both parties can be easily distinguished by society. They ask the King that women engaging in prostitution be forced to wear some sort of mark on their clothing, one that only they can carry. She asks: "*Nous désirerions que cette classe de femmes portât une marque distinctive. Aujourd'hui qu'elles empruntent jusqu'à la modestie de nos habits, qu'elles se mêlent par-tout, sous tous les costumes, nous nous trouvons souvent confondues avec elles...*"³⁰ This need to be physically distinguishable from another social group is evidence of several things. The first is that, at the time, the author viewed women according to their respective social position, groups more diverse than the encompassing Third Estate. The author begins her analysis by listing out the different types of women—virtuous, immoral, and religious—that exist within this estate. She also places a strong emphasis on morality and its direct effects on women. A virtuous woman has higher social prestige, which is why the author focuses on the definition and dehumanization of prostitutes. Finally, the pamphlet serves as a warning as to what can happen when women are oppressed and denied an education, i.e. when

³⁰ PÉTITION DES FEMMES DU TIERS-ETAT AU ROI. 7.

they are not bestowed the tools necessary to learn virtue and morals. The ever-present theme of family appears here as well: the author wishes to protect husbands and children, both sons and daughters, from the consequences of a lack of education and the presence of immorality.

The pamphlet, *Cahier des représentations et doléances du beau-sexe*, also addresses the issue of immorality and prostitution. Although written under the guise of women, it nevertheless serves as a primary source that allows us to address this theme from a male perspective. This pamphlet's lack of respect for prostitutes presents a paradox: despite the fact that the author/authors of this pamphlet are most likely male—the prostitute's clients—they refer to them with as much hatred as other female authors do. Several articles in this document make reference to sex workers and their alleged immorality.

This dehumanization is most striking in the seventh article of this pamphlet. The author recommends that families be given the right to confiscate the money spent by husbands and/or sons who have fallen prey to these women, effectively robbing prostitutes of their earnings. This right is also accompanied by a suggestion to have these women branded on their foreheads:

*“nous demandons que ses biens [those of the female sex workers] soient confisqués au profit de ceux qui en étoient les premiers & légitimes propriétaires; & que la spoliatrice soit marquée au front d'un fer chaud, portant ces deux lettres: P. P. Peste Publique.”*³¹ This recommendation

parallels that of the author's in *Pétition des femmes du Tiers-Etat au Roi*. Although one type of marking can be classified as crueler than the other, both aim to serve the same purpose, which is that of dehumanizing and segregating sex workers from the rest of society.

Sex workers' position in French society is ridiculed and exaggerated in another pamphlet, *Très-sérieuses remontrances*, also written under the guise of women. The presence of rhetorical

³¹ CAHIER DES REPRÉSENTATIONS ET DOLÉANCES DU BEAU-SEXE, *Adressé au Roi, au moment de la tenue des Etats-Généraux*. 7-8.

devices such as metaphors, allusions, and intertextual references, stand in stark contrast to the type of education a regular prostitute would possess. Nevertheless, this dissonance is what attracts its audience to read its contents; a pamphlet written by the *filles du Palais-Royal*—a euphemism for Parisian sex workers—captivates the reader first with its title, and then with its poetic critique of the French Nobility. In this case, the male authors have the privilege and power to not have their words or humanity dismissed by others.

Invoking the first pamphlet discussed in this section, *Pétition des femmes du Tiers-Etat au Roi*, women sought to better their position in society and their education, but in a limited degree. They wished to attain the education necessary to be viewed as moral and virtuous mothers and wives, thus adhering the social norms established by French society at the time. They seek to be “*éclairées, à posséder des emplois, non pour usurper l'autorité des hommes, mais pour en être plus estimées...*”³² They also outline the guidelines of their education: “*Nous vous supplions, SIRE, d'établir des Écoles gratuites où nous puissions apprendre notre langue par principes, la Religion & la morale... Les Sciences?... Elles ne servent qu'à nous inspirer un sot orgueil.*” The authors of these pamphlets do not seek to radically change the society in which they live, but rather, to stretch the limits of their privileges while still adhering to the norms regarding morality that exist in their era.

CONCLUSION

The eight analyzed pamphlets allow us to understand and visualize the lives of French women in the year 1789. They provide us insight in regard to their demands for improved rights in the areas of education, commerce, and the sphere of domesticity. However, the importance

³² Ibid., 7.

and influence of gendered morality comes into play in every single theme, serving as a common trend between them, and oftentimes used to strengthen the arguments of the women authors. In order to fixate their demands for rights, women of this time period had to place them in the already existing framework of female morality; this results in the creation of a dichotomy of virtuous women versus immoral women. Nevertheless, these pamphlets attest to the fact that women were fighting for their rights as early as 1789, a time period during which more political participation and power was bestowed upon men to the detriment of women. French women would have to wait several more centuries before being given the rights they demand in the lines of these pamphlets, but these writings document their efforts and struggles, leaving their marks on history forever:

"En conséquence, le sexe supérieur en beauté comme en courage, dans les souffrances maternelles, reconnaît et déclare, en présence et sous les auspices de l'Être suprême, les Droits suivans de la Femme et de la Citoyenne:

*Article Premier. **La Femme naît libre et demeure égale à l'homme en droits...***"

-Olympe de Gouges, Déclaration des droits de la femme et de la citoyenne

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