

# THE WOMAN OF THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

---

Her Life, from birth to death, her Love and her  
Philosophy in the worlds of Salon, Shop and  
Street

Edmond & Jules De Goncourt

ROUTLEDGE LIBRARY EDITIONS:  
WOMEN'S HISTORY



# THE WOMAN OF THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

Her Life, from birth to death, her Love and her  
Philosophy in the worlds of Salon, Shop and  
Street

EDMOND & JULES DE GONCOURT

TRANSLATION BY  
JACQUES LE CLERCO & RALPH ROEDER

Volume 18

 **Routledge**  
Taylor & Francis Group  
LONDON AND NEW YORK

First published in 1928

This edition first published in 2013

by Routledge

2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxfordshire OX14 4RN

Simultaneously published in the USA and Canada

by Routledge

711 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10017

First issued in paperback 2014

*Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor and Francis Group, an informa company*

© 1928 George Allen & Unwin Ltd.

*Trademark notice:* Product or corporate names may be trademarks or registered trademarks, and are used only for identification and explanation without intent to infringe.

*British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data*

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN: 978-0-415-62681-1 (Volume 18)

ISBN: 978-0-415-75253-4 (pbk)

**Publisher's Note**

The publisher has gone to great lengths to ensure the quality of this reprint but points out that some imperfections in the original copies may be apparent.

**Disclaimer**

The publisher has made every effort to trace copyright holders and would welcome correspondence from those they have been unable to trace.

ROUTLEDGE LIBRARY EDITIONS:  
WOMEN'S HISTORY

---

THE WOMAN OF THE EIGHTEENTH  
CENTURY

---

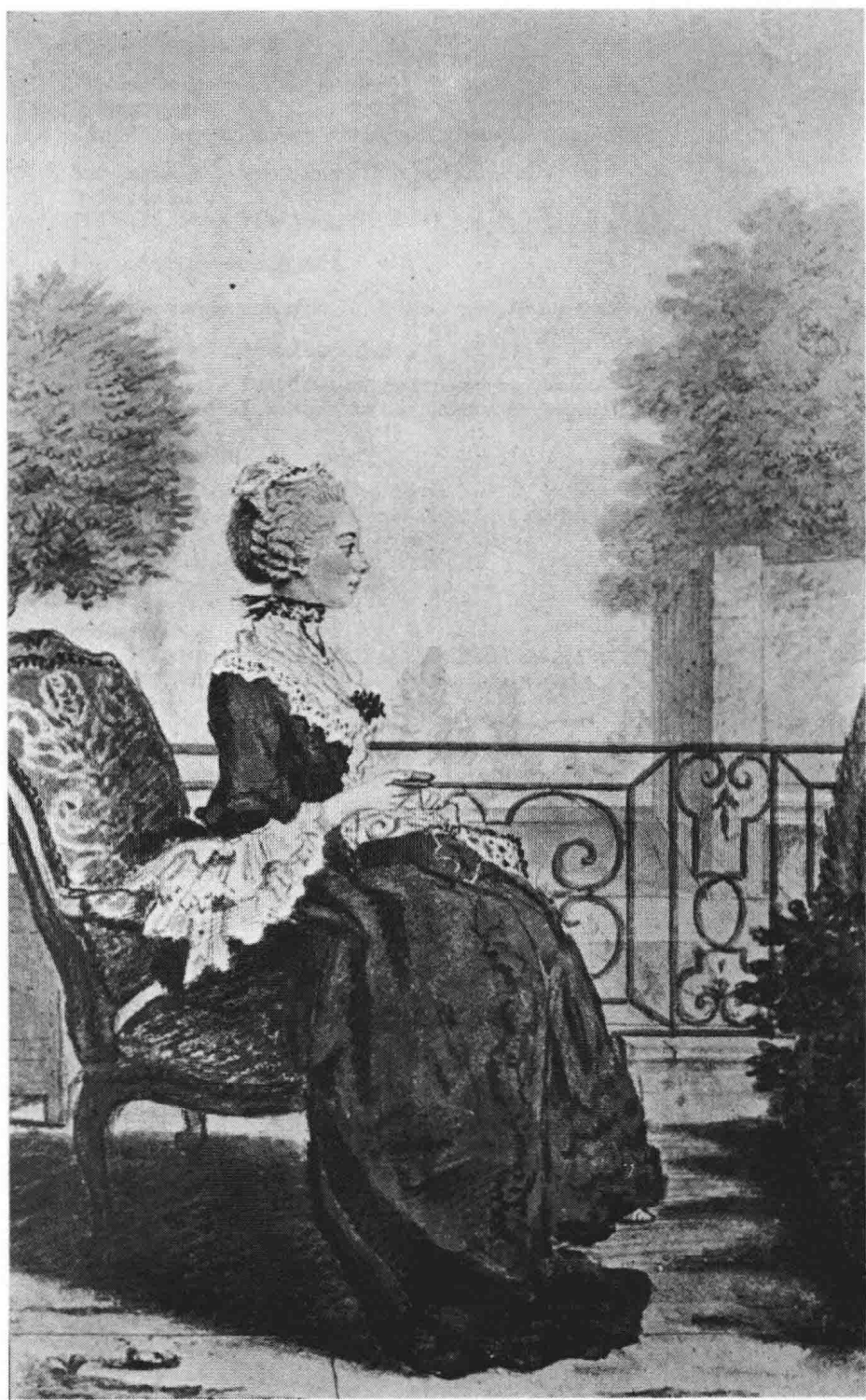


Photo Girardon

CARMONTELLE—*Mlle. de Lespinasse in 1760*

# THE WOMAN OF THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

*Her Life, from birth to death, her Love  
and her Philosophy in the worlds of  
Salon, Shop and Street*

BY

EDMOND & JULES DE GONCOURT

TRANSLATION BY

JACQUES LE CLERCQ & RALPH ROEDER



LONDON

GEORGE ALLEN & UNWIN LTD.

MUSEUM STREET

**FIRST PUBLISHED IN GREAT BRITAIN IN 1928**

**COPYRIGHT IN U. S. A.**

## CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. BIRTH—THE CONVENT—MARRIAGE . . .	3
II. SOCIETY—THE SALONS . . . . .	31
III. THE PLEASURES OF SOCIETY . . . . .	70
IV. LOVE . . . . .	97
V. MARRIED LIFE . . . . .	141
VI. THE WOMAN OF THE MIDDLE CLASSES . .	160
VII. THE WOMAN OF THE PEOPLE—THE FILLE GALANTE . . . . .	180
VIII. BEAUTY AND THE MODE . . . . .	204
IX. THE DOMINATION AND INTELLIGENCE OF WOMAN . . . . .	243
X. THE SOUL OF WOMAN . . . . .	267
XI. WOMAN IN HER OLD AGE . . . . .	297
XII. THE PHILOSOPHY AND DEATH OF WOMAN	341



## ILLUSTRATIONS

CARMONTELLE—Mlle. de Lespinasse in 1760 . . .	<i>Frontispiece</i>
	FACING PAGE
BAUDOUIN—Le Coucher de la Mariée . . . . .	22
SAINT-AUBIN—Le Bal paré . . . . .	32
OLIVIER—La Cour du Prince de Conti et Mozart . . . .	38
LAVREINCE—L'Assemblée au salon . . . . .	62
OLIVIER—Le Souper du Prince de Conti au Temple en 1766	110
JEATURAT—L'Exemple des Mères . . . . .	146
CHARDIN—Le Bénédicité . . . . .	164
VERNET—Marchande d'Eau de vie . . . . .	182
CARMONTELLE—Mesdames les Comtesses de Fitz-James et du Nolestin . . . . .	234
CARMONTELLE—Madame la Comtesse d'Egmont . . .	254
CARMONTELLE—Madame d'Esclavelles, niece of Madame d'Epinay, playing chess with M. de Linant, her nurse watching . . . . .	312

# THE WOMAN OF THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY



# THE WOMAN OF THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

## CHAPTER I

### BIRTH—THE CONVENT—MARRIAGE

THE BIRTH OF a girl in the eighteenth century is no welcome event for her family. The house holds no holiday at her coming; her parents know no rapture of triumph; she is a blessing accepted as a disappointment. For in a world, remember, ruled by the Salic law, she is not the answer to their prayers and their hopes; she is not the heir destined to prolong the name, the fortunes, and the honors of the family; no, the newcomer is merely a girl, and as such, before the cradle that contains nothing but a woman's future, the father stands unmoved and the mother grieves like a Queen who had looked for a Dauphin.

Presently a nurse comes and carries off the child; and not until Greuze and Aubry paint the day does her mother even visit her. When the little girl leaves her nurse and comes home, she is handed to a governess and lodged with her in an attic chamber. The governess sets to work to make a little lady of her charge, but gently, with no end of spoiling and flattery; for in her pupil, whom she never scolds and whom she indulges in well-nigh every fancy, she is already nursing a mistress who is to leave her, on the day of her marriage, a small fortune. She teaches her to read and write. She shows her the pictures in a Bible by Sacy. She gives her a notion of geography, peeping at the world

in a pretty optic glass, and the world, as you see, consists of the interior of Saint Peter's, the Fountain of Trevi, and the Cathedral of Milan with its myriads of little figures; the new church of Saint Genevieve, patroness of Paris; the church of Saint Paul; the new palace of Sans-Souci, and the Hermitage of the Empress of Russia. She slips in her hand some *Notions of a Father* or of a *Mother for a Daughter*, some *Treatise on the Nature of True Merit*. She recommends her to hold her head high, and to bob a bow right and left; and this is about all that the governess teaches the child.

In the pictures of the eighteenth century we see this little girl, this infant vanity, holding her head high, high and heavy, under a pad nodding with plumes or a bonnet trimmed with a ribbon, a flower idling over the ear. Little girls wear large aprons, of diaphanous *tulle*, with transparent embroidery, hinting at the pink or blue peek-a-boo of a silk skirt beneath. They have magnificent baubles, rattles of gold, of silver, of coral, of cut crystal; they stand sentinel over opulent playthings, dolls with hectically painted cheeks of wood, larger often than they are, and which they can hardly hold in their little arms.<sup>1</sup> Sometimes, in a formal garden, we see them wheeling each other on a pebbled alley in tiny chariots, modeled in rock-crystal on those sea-shells of Venus, which drift through the paintings of Boucher.<sup>2</sup> They are invariably beribboned and bedizened, laden with knots and nosegays and silver lace: their costume is a miniature of their mothers' in its pomp and splendor. The merest concession, in the morning, is that little morning-gown called an *habit de marmotte* (*sleepy-head's bib*) or *Savoyarde*, a pretty bodice of brown taffeta with a short skirt to match, trimmed with two or

<sup>1</sup>The *Mercure de France*, in its number of July, 1772, carries the announcement of a gift made by the Duchesse d'Orléans to the Infanta of a doll with assorted wardrobe and a toy toilette worth 22,000 pounds.

<sup>2</sup>See his portraits of children in the Museum of Versailles; also the engraving by Joulain after Coypel: O moments trop heureux où règne l'innocence.

three bands of pink ribbon, and a head-dress equally plain and pretty made of a knot of veiling tied under the chin; a really charming costume, in which the child is clearly at ease, her freshness well set off, her grace free and unhampered. But to this costume the parents are far from partial: they prefer their little ones prettified in the taste of the day, a taste which imposes on them, as soon as they walk, a corset of whalebone, a ceremonial costume, and gives them a master to move by, another to dance to. Turn to an engraving by Canot and see the little tot striking an attitude, demurely, like a lady, arching her arms and plucking her billowing dress, as the master repeats: "In step . . . Steady . . . Forward . . . Turn now . . . Too late . . . Arms free . . . Head high . . . Turn, I say, turn, Mademoiselle . . . The head a hint higher . . . A flowing pace . . . More assurance in the expression . . ."

To make the child play the lady—that, in a word, is the whole aim of the education of the eighteenth century. It is a system which frowns on all levity, on every natural impulse, on childhood itself: it stunts the character as it thwarts the body. It spurs the child unsparingly beyond her years. She goes, say, for her walk to the Tuileries; and (as if her bustle were not beadle enough) she is told not to frolic, not to romp, but to walk gravely. Or she is a godmother—lucky child! one of her great ambitions, her first appearance in public—and she enters her coach, like a lady, with plumes in her hair, pearls at her throat, and on her left shoulder a posy. A day will come, too, when she is danced off to her ball; for a woman must be formed from the cradle for the world she is to live in, the pleasures which are to be her life; and then on her head is set a huge cushion called a *toque*, built up with rats and pins into a monstrous *hérisson*, or *prickly-hog*, crowned with a top-heavy hat; she is harnessed with a new hoop, crammed with horsehair and looped with steel; she is saddled with a gown festooned with wreaths, and marched off to her ball with a "Mind now, not to rub off your *rouge* or muss your hair

or crease your gown, and be sure you enjoy yourself, my pet!"

Thus are formed those mannered little maids, who pass on a mode, decide on a dress, and flaunt a killing air: darlings so dainty, one whiff is caution they will never abide a lady unscented or minus her patch.

From the little rooms, where she lives with her governess, the little girl comes down to her mother for a moment only, in the morning, at eleven, when, in the vague light of the half-drawn blinds, dogs and dependents are admitted. "La! What a face!" mother meets daughter with, as she bids her good morning. "What ails the child? Go, put on some *rouge* . . . No . . . Let be . . . You shall not stir from the house to-day . . ." Then, to a visitor: "I dote on that child. Come, kiss me, my sweet. Ah, Lud, you are filthy. Go, brush your teeth. No, I'll not be plagued with questions to-day; no; you are a trial, child!"—"Ah, Madame, was ever a tenderer mother?" sighs the visitor. "I dare say, I dare say," sighs the mother. "But I dote on that child."

Other meeting, other communion there is none between mother and daughter than this banal and formal interview, opened and closed as a rule by a kiss, which the little girl tucks under her mother's chin, where it will not blur her *rouge*. We may look in vain, over a long period of years, for any trace of maternal training, of that first fond training, when lessons come by kisses and lisping questions are enlightened with a laugh and a *Whoops-my-dear* for answer. No. These little souls do not develop at their mothers' knees. These mothers know no endearing ties to knit the child anew to the flesh that is hers, and lay up for the years of decline a daughter's friendship. They have no tender spells with which to woo confidence and affection. No. Their brow is severe, hard, and fault-finding, and of that aspect they show themselves jealous; deeming it their duty to preserve, with the child, ever the dignity of a kind of indifference. Soon they take on, in their daugh-

ter's eyes, the semblance of an almost formidable power, a dread presence she dare not address. Fear comes, where only respect should be. She grows shy; her bruised affections shrink; her heart closes. And the symptoms of that fear become, as the child advances in years, so marked and so pertinent, that at last the parents observe it and are alarmed and dismayed by it. Then we find the mother and even the father, afflicted and bewildered by the harvest they have sown, enjoining their daughter to efface the *shrinking* she shows in her filial affection. The *shrinking*: I find this repulsive word in the letter of a father to his daughter.

The child has now learned what little her governess had to teach her. She can read, she can write; she knows her catechism. She has had dancing lessons. A singing master has taught her an air or two. At seven, her fingers have been plied to the clavichord. Her home training is over; and now she is sent to the convent.

The convent; we must not take this word too literally nor its usual connotations for granted, if we are to form a correct idea of the convent in the eighteenth century, if we are, that is, to conceive it historically. Let us attempt then, now that the young girl enters its portals, to trace a picture of this school and domicile of the young women of the time. Let us recall, if we may, its cloistered air, invaded incessantly by the winds of the world, by the breath of temporal concerns. Let us seek its spirit, as one seeks the spirit of a place, in its frowning walls, where windows have opened, balconies grown, fireplaces nestled, and ceilings spread to hide the stout beams; where cornices, copings, double doors and gilded panels are encroaching; where sculpture, gilding, and fine locksmith's work cast over the past the opulence and taste of the day; for such is the true picture of the convent, the symbol of all those religious retreats, which seem to have inherited from the Abbaye de Chelles the pleasures, music, modes and futile arts and the entire hubbub of pretty vanities, with which the good Abbess filled her convent.



The convent at this time is widely frequented. It meets all manner of social requirements. In many cases it safeguards the proprieties. It is not merely a house of grace: it offers innumerable advantages of a more human nature as well. Here a widow, like the Duchess de Choiseul, may retire to liquidate her husband's debts; or, like the Marquise de Créqui, a mother comes to economize and recoup her children's fortune. The convent is an institution of safe-keeping. In one of its cells sits Emilie, dainty jade, stolen from the Opera by her jealous lover, Fimarcon; in others the mistresses of princes, waiting to be married. Wives separated from their husbands come here to live. The convent welcomes women like Madame du Deffand or Madame Doublet, who are looking for large quarters, easy rates, and a quiet life. It offers lodgings for "retreats," for those devotional sojourns favored, at certain seasons of the year, by the great ladies reared within its walls: a mental reservation, as it were, from the world, a brooding return to the scenes, memories and God of their youth, which inspired Laclos with that fine scene of Madame de Tourvel's death in the room where her childhood had been lived.

Now all these worldings, all this mundane life, in invading the cloister had greatly affected the rigor of the rule. The rubric inscribed on the pediment of the *Nouvelles Catholiques*, *Vincit mundum fides nostra*, was no more than a dead letter: the world had set foot in the cloister. The guests, who were a kind of microcosm of that world and its ways, were lodged usually, it is true, in a wing apart from the convent itself. But between their quarters and the cloister the distance was short, far too short for echoes and communication not to pass to and fro. Then too, the lay sisters, charged with the functioning of the house indoors and out, relayed the hum of the world into that convent already attuned to temporal echoes and peeling blandly to the voice of Sophie Arnould singing vespers at the *Panthé-mont*. The frequent leaves of the inmates brought back a periodic forage of fashion. The world found its way in