

Deare
Sister



Chris Wind

DEARE SISTER

chris wind

Magenta

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The logo for Magenta, featuring the word "Magenta" in a stylized, handwritten script font with a horizontal line underneath.

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Particivision and other stories
Paintings and Sculptures
Excerpts
dreaming of kaleidoscopes

“Deare Sister” is available in print as part of chris wind’s *Satellites Out of Orbit* (2nd edition), titled “Letters”.

* *Satellites Out of Orbit* contains the four books listed above it as well as this book.

A performance version of “The Portrait” (a Mozartean piano score with vocalise to accompany delivery of the text as a monologue) is available from the author (chriswind3@gmail.com).

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This is fiction catalyzed by fact. It is not fiction supported by fact. What I mean by that is that the fiction is totally mine—I didn't conjecture a reasonable fiction based on the facts: although the characters 'writing' the letters are real people, in no case did I uncover information implying that such a letter was written; in some cases, the person being written to wasn't even known by the person writing (this is the case in "The Patent"—Catherine Greene and Catherine II existed at the same time but that's it as far as I know); and in other cases, the person being written to doesn't even exist (I made up Benetta, Properzia's confidante in "The Stone" and Gawaina, Godiva's confidante and sister in "The Ride"). In fact, I chose women who, for whatever reasons, *probably didn't* write such a letter, or any letter, or anything at all for that matter. Or if they did, it hasn't survived (at least, not in the easily accessible pre-internet mainstream). In this way then, I did not presume to speak for anyone who could and did speak for herself. These pieces are not so much what the characters really would've said but what *I* think they *should've* said. So in light of historical evidence, I may have misrepresented some of the characters. To those who are offended by perceived misrepresentation, my apologies. But since history is, in these cases, scanty, suspect of bias, and sometimes contradictory (see especially the notes for "The Dialogue"), it's hard to know the extent of any misrepresentation. These women *might've* said what I want them to have said!

That said, even though the letters and sometimes the epistolary relationships are fiction, in all cases *the event giving rise to the letter and most of the events mentioned therein* are real.

There is an appendix at the end of the book containing brief notes about the women who 'write' the letters and the various people mentioned by her, followed by a list of references that I used. This serves to provide background information which sometimes enhances appreciation and might, therefore, be better read before the piece; it also enables readers to realize just what's fact and what's fiction.

The Portrait

My dearest Nannerl,

Of course you have a right to be upset about the portrait. After all, you performed right alongside your brother; in fact, your father had the bills printed to read “Two World Wonders.” *Two*, not one. You were with Wolfgang on the 1762 tour through Passau and Linz to Munich and Vienna; I remember Count Zinzendorf called you (not Wolfgang) “a little master”. And you went again through Germany, in 1763, this time to Augsburg and Ludwigsburg as well as Munich, on to Paris, and then to London where the two of you performed that sonata for the Queen of England. And in 1765 you performed in Holland. No, do not doubt yourself, Nannerl: you were quite correct in calling Carmontelle’s portrait inaccurate because it shows Wolfgang at the keyboard, your father at the violin, and you merely holding the music for them. And he said *you* insulted *him*! I do know how you feel about the matter and I am completely on your side. Nevertheless, I must ask you to apologize.

And I know that your father’s recent decision to leave you at home and take only Wolfgang on this next tour doesn’t make it any easier. Though I admit to being glad not to be left at home by myself for once, I know it is terribly unfair. And I am writing this letter not to excuse or justify your father, but to explain. Nannerl, you are not to take his decision personally. It is not, as you first thought, that you are not good enough. Recall the Elector of Munich insisted on hearing *you* play the clavier, not Wolfgang; and there are many who share his high regard for your abilities. Nannerl, you are an excellent musician, a great performer. Nor is it that you have fallen out of favour with your father; he loves you as much as he ever did. (Which is, unfortunately, not as much as he loves Wolfgang. He is a man of his times. Didn’t you ever wonder why he started Wolfgang on lessons at a younger age than he started you? Surely you noticed he spent more time with Wolfgang? And it wasn’t until Wolfgang was ready to appear in public that he let you perform. You were young then, and perhaps did not notice... All the better. But I know Wolfgang had a head start right from birth and—but enough, I am getting ahead of myself.) Nor is the reason for your father’s decision, as you also suggested, that he considers you too frail to withstand life on the road. Wolfgang too came down with typhus in Holland.

Then *why*, you must be crying out! Let me try to explain. There is a time in every girl’s life when, suddenly, people stop treating her as a person—and start treating her, instead, as a mere woman. All of the doors that until that time were open are suddenly shut. All except one. It happens to every one of us, some time between twelve and twenty. It is happening now to you. (And later, when that door has been passed through, it too will close, and there will be nothing left: nothing left open to go back to, and nothing open yet to go forward to. As soon as I gave birth to a boy, your father’s attention rapidly shifted: I was of no more importance and Wolfgang was everything—but again I digress.)

This time of life is particularly difficult for someone like you, someone for whom the open doors promised such glory and richness. Why, when still a youth you were performing in all the great centers of Europe, you received excellent reviews and return engagements, you were meeting with all the important musicians of the day, you had a knowledge and experience of the outside world forbidden to others of your sex and age. And you were beautiful too, I know enough of the world to know this is an asset. Oh Nannerl, you had it all! Not even your brother had your beauty! But he had something more important: the right sex.

It's a betrayal, I know it. It dashes to the ground all of the things you thought mattered: ability, dedication, desire. I had a talent for singing. I found it hard too, when I realized that I was not destined to become a famous singer. But, alas, I loved your father and wanted a family, so I accepted that loss for another gain. But you, Nannerl, I suspect it will be a long time before you marry, if at all, and perhaps you will not have any children. So it must be particularly frustrating and painful to have the only door you ever wanted open, suddenly closed.

I know this is little consolation, and indeed in a less generous heart, it would be salt to the wound, but remember, without you, Wolfgang would not be where he is today. You helped him become what he is. Much as your father likes to take all the credit for Wolfgang, it is simply not true. He had a family to support, a job to do, and while he was away playing in the consort, and directing the choir, it was you Wolfgang learned from. Remember in London, when Wolfgang was introduced to Johann Christoph Bach and the two of them, taking turns, with Wolfgang seated between Bach's legs, the two of them played a sonata together and afterwards improvised. What a delight that was to everyone! Of course I knew it was with you he learned how to do that. I remember you, as a mere girl of ten, taking your little brother, then six, and 'babysitting' him just like that. And there was so much more. All the musical games you made up, and the time you spent helping his little hand form the notes on the staff when he could not yet write the letters of the alphabet. When I saw how much more valuable it was to have you spend time with your music and with your brother, well, I did not force upon you all the domestic duties it is common for daughters to bear. Besides, how many women get to do the washing and cooking to the music of such artistic genius!

And all of that makes this last bit even harder to tell you. You suggested that I ask Carmontelle to re-do the portrait. That is an excellent idea, but it cannot be done. You see, the one you saw was already a second version, done at my insistence. Nannerl, in the first one, you were not there at all. The man had excluded you completely, left you out altogether. (And the portrait you see now is his idea of atonement.)

Love,

Mother

[Appendix entry for "The Portrait"](#)

* * * * *

The Protest

Dear Dr. Agnodice:

We are appalled at the charges which have recently been laid against you by your colleagues. The Athenian Association of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists has absolutely no grounds for their claim that you are ‘corrupting’ your patients.

We recognize the dilemma this unfortunate turn of events puts you in: if you do not reveal your sex, thus proving your incapability of the alleged action, you will very likely be found guilty as charged; however, if you do reveal your sex, you will be charged with a different crime, that of contravening Section 1(c) of the Athenian Code of Laws (which states, as you must surely know, that no woman is allowed to practice medicine), and you will most certainly be found guilty.

To protest this action of the AAOG, we, the undersigned, are embarking on an intensive lobbying effort on your behalf. Several of us are married to men of influence, some of us are married to men of wealth, and the rest of us are simply married—which enables us to withhold a certain service, with the result that *no* obstetrician will have work until our demands are met.

We have considered the possibility that our action will bring on the risk of rape. However, we are fairly certain that this will be rare since (1) in such an event, we would momentarily forego our loyalty to you and seek the services of another gynaecologist, a man who knows the husband in question, in order to force upon the transgressor the humiliation of having it known that he must rape, that his wife is unwilling and does not desire (or at least obey) him; and (2) rape would make the husband in question as guilty as you supposedly are.

—If indeed it is rape you have been accused of. To be truthful, we cannot quite figure out what ‘corrupting’ means. If it means you are raping us, then why would any of us keep returning to you? And if it does not mean rape—that is, if it means we are consenting—then what is ‘corrupting’ about it? (We are not children.)

We believe therefore that the members of the AAOG who initiated and who support this charge are merely jealous: professionally, because your clientele indicates that you provide better service, and personally, because if there is any sexual interaction occurring, it is not with them.

Our demands are reasonable:

- 1) that the charges against you be dropped;
- 2) that compensation be paid for personal injury and suffering and for damages to your professional reputation;
- 3) that Section 1(c) of the Act be repealed.

And we intend to continue our efforts until our demands are met. Never again will a woman be penalized for practising medicine!

Sincerely,

Alethea, Philotima, Lamo, Senia, Terione, Melia, Phryria, Isthnote, Elyclea, Lyspasia, Mycurnice, Iasthia, Chlete, Diomice, Hyaphale, Thetrisis, Eurgenia, Persilea, Dionene

[Appendix entry for “The Protest”](#)

* * * * *

The Ride

The Tenth of July, 1042
from Coventry

Deare Sister—

Though it is not long since our last visit, I find once again great need to speak with you! (Would that you lived nearer to Coventry!) You remember the discussion we had upon my arrival, prompted by my journey through Mercia?

Fast upon my return, I spoke to Leofric about the absolute necessity—moral and economic—of lowering the taxes. I described to him all I had seen, as I described it to you: the bordars and cottars living in poverty on their little piece of land, in their thatched wooden huts without any comforts; their meagre clothing, that we are a country of wool producers and traders, boasting the finest weavers' guild, and yet the people of the land are so poorly clothed; and their food, only vegetables, many can not even have meat for a Sunday feast (feast! they do not know the word), not even a piece of wheatbread.

And Leofric said well why do they not come and ask if they want their taxes lowered? If the tax is too high, they would say something—and they have not. But I said, the bondmen can not leave the farms; and the freemen too can hardly leave their work, and their families alone against the wild beasts of the forest. And even if they could, they have no way of getting here. And they can not send a letter, you know they can not read or write, so how are they to 'come and ask'?

But he was deaf to my pleas. He likes being rich—he likes his meat and wheatbread, and his very fine mead, his furs, and his embroidered robes set with jewels. Leofric, I said, have you no charity? You speak of founding a Benedictine monastery, are you not a Christian? Are you not bound by mercy, compassion, generosity—justice, for God's sake, Leofric! You are the Lord of Coventry, the Earl of Mercia—you are responsible for these people! They are our kinsmen!

I swear sister, I would leave, but for the children. I can not think of them left to his ways, but if I were to take them with me—you know I would barely survive myself alone—with the children too, what could I do? I can not read or write well, women receive so little schooling, even in the monasteries. I am dependent on him, it is true: I am no different from the peasants I speak for.

Though some are. Do you remember Ethelfled? Seven years she gave Mercia good and conscientious governance, she built cities, she planned battles, and captured from the Danes, Derby, Leicester, and York. But it is true, she was regent and queen, not an earl's wife. And an earl's wife is not listened to. At least not in *this* court. I have heard that some consult their wives about public policy, but not Leofric—he simply will not or can not heed to reason.

Nor to emotion. I told him of the woman with seven children, you remember, three still little and another one on the way, and her husband lame from an attack by wolves, and her two brothers killed in the last battle, there have been so many lately—so she must work in the fields herself if her children are to be fed, she is almost dead with exhaustion, her neighbours try to help but they are overburdened themselves. I cried, I pleaded, Gawaina, I begged! But no. Leofric ordered me out of his room. I felt so—so weak!

So then I went to those who had strength. I know his advisors, I know which nobles he listens to. I spoke with them plainly and directly—but they paid no attention. (Except one—and you would be surprised which—he said he would speak to Leofric on condition—I refused of course!)

Next I went to their wives. But those with influence did not want to risk losing it for mere peasants, and those without did not want to anger their husbands.

Gawaina, I had to do something! So I dressed like a proper little wench and snuck into the mead-hall one night. I thought if I could explain when they were drunk, maybe they would— But I am not as young and fair as I once was, and I was quickly discovered. Leofric was enraged! There he was, shining in his power, and glory, with two or three child-playthings (where do these women come from?), and suddenly his fat old wife is hoisted onto the table in front of him. I felt such shame! But I explained my presence, and asked him again to please lower the taxes. Well, all those merry red-faced drunkards thought it quite delightful—coarse rude brutes! When the laughter died, Leofric said with great solemnity, “I will.” Oh, Gawaina! I was so gladdened! But then he added “*If* you ride naked through the marketplace at noon.” Well again the hall broke into laughter and there was much toasting to that. To save what dignity I had left, I looked at my husband straight when the laughter stopped and said “I will.” In silence then, I clambered off the table (not a one would help—and they think themselves such gentlemen!) and I walked out.

When I got to my chamber, I full realized what I had said! Ride through the town naked! How could I? I am a God-fearing Christian, I can not show myself in public! Only a pagan whore could do that! But if the taxes would be lowered—I prayed to God—maybe I could...

But no, I could not. I know why he made that—that challenge: he does not like his fat old wife. Gawaina, I can not go naked through the town. He is right. With all the children I have had, since marriage at fifteen—though ‘tis to provide him with heirs!—I am indeed a frightful sight. It is good, these fashions, no one need know how ugly I have become. But he knows. And he wants to make a fool of me. And if I ride, he will. (Especially if he does not live to his word. It could be he was too drunk to even know what he said. And I will be twice the fool to take him seriously.)

As I was in my chamber, mother heard me weeping and praying, and she asked what was troubling me. Well, I told her, and she said the most wondrous thing. She said ‘Godgifu, your body *is* beautiful if you can use it in that way, to ease the burden of all of Mercia. To give the people a good life—to use your body for such a noble purpose is to *make* that body beautiful, my child.’ She then said, with a smile, that Leofric would never have the strength. The men, she said, they speak of courage and glory, but there is not a one among them who would not feel naked without his *armour*, can you think of him in public without his *clothes*? And God will *bless* your body, Godgifu, it is the temple of the Holy Spirit.

And I saw she is right. She is very wise, our mother. (She offered to ride along with me, naked too!) I know he is trying to trick me, to force me to use my body as women have always had to, never to use their minds. But it is good to use my body in this way. In this way I use my body to serve my mind.

When I first decided to ride, I hoped no one would look. But now I have changed my mind. Sister, I hope everyone looks and sees this beautiful noble body! I may even put up my hair! A body is not ugly that has borne children, a body is not ugly that displays for justice—no matter how it looks!

So, deare sister, ask God’s forgiveness for me, wish me luck, and pray the brute lives to his word. Tomorrow, I ride!

Godiva

[Appendix entry for “The Ride”](#)

* * * * *

The Experiment

January 12, 1796
Bristol, England

Dear Mrs. Phipps:

You don't know me and I don't know you 'cept it's the talk that Mr. Jenner is going to use your boy James for an 'experiment'. Mrs. Phipps, you mustn't let 'im!

I saw Mr. Jenner, back in '66 I think 'twas, when he was still an apprentice at the surgery in Sodbury. I can't remember what was ailing me but I do remember a chat we had about the pox. I'd told 'im that I couldn't catch the smallpox because I'd had the cowpox. My mother'd packed me off one day to a cowparty—whenever a cow on one of the farms had the pox, all the chil'ren in the village went to milk it. We'd stay past tea, play a bit o' tag or King's Statue—we'd have our cowparty. Then soon enough all of us would get the cowpox—which is nothing, a few warts is all—and because of that we'd never get the smallpox. Which as you know can be fatal.

Now I recall Mr. Jenner was quite int'rested in my belief. I told 'im 'twas not jus' my belief—everyone knew't, 'twas common knowledge, I told 'im. He insisted that it was perhaps, at best, a common belief. That irked me, it did. So I asked 'im, what's the diff'rence 'tween belief and knowledge? He ever so kindly explained that when you *knew* something, it was true, but if you just *believed* it, well it could be nonsense. So I told 'im again that all the chil'ren who went to cowparties and got the cowpox did not get the smallpox—so 'twas true, wasn't it! He muttered something about old wives' tales, and I assured 'im the men knew't as well as the women. He stood up in frustration then and said, not without a touch of anger, 'But has it been *proved*? You haven't got *proof*!' 'What proof?' I asked. He stomped around the room then said, 'Proof, my dear, comes from intelligent observation and logical deduction. That's *science*!' Well it seemed to me my belief had as much as proof as any, and was therefore knowledge, even science. But as Mr. Jenner seemed to getting a little hysterical, I wasn't about to stay and tell 'im so.

Now I hear he's going to do an 'experiment', to *prove* that getting the cowpox stops you from getting the smallpox. Well at first I laughed! If he only wants to find out *that* it's true and not *why* it's true, well he's not doing anything of int'rest, is he? And an 'experiment'? Why what's an experiment but observation? The only diff'rence I can see 'tween what he's going to do and what we've been doing is he's going to observe something *he rigs up*, not something that's already happ'ning in the normal course of things. And perhaps what with his lists of figures and notes—what does he call it, his 'data'—maybe he thinks *his* observations will be better. But of course that's nonsense, isn't it? Writing down what I see doesn't make what I see any diff'rent, better or worse. I could still see it wrong, or miss something altogether, couldn't I? I could even write it down wrong!

Today I heard one of the lads say that if his experiment works, he'll surely be famous for discovering the smallpox vaccination. I asked what a vaccination was, and then he told me exactly what the experiment was into. Well I laughed, the man's absurd isn't he to say he's going to *discover* a vaccination, since we've been 'vaccinating' against the smallpox for years. After I thought a bit, I got angry. I should like to know if Mr. Jenner is going to give his vaccinations away. Not bloody likely! I'll bet he's going to try to *sell* them, and make a pretty penny out of it! Doesn't seem proper, does it?

But then the horror hit me! If Mr. Jenner knows for certain that a cowpox vaccination will stop the smallpox, then why is he doing the experiment? And if he doesn't know for certain, then he's risking your boy's life! Mrs. Phipps, you must stop 'im! Ask 'im why he's not doing the experiment on 'imself! Go on, ask 'im!

Sincerely,

Ellen (the milkmaid)

[Appendix entry for "The Experiment"](#)

* * * * *

The Patent

C. Greene
Savannah, Georgia
July 20th, 1792

My dearest Catherine—

How I would love to send you a magnolia tree! The fragrance of a magnolia is so sweet, Catherine, you can forget just about anything. Some like a camellia, and some prefer sweetgum, but I tell my folks, bury me under a big magnolia and I'll rest just fine.

Not that I'm thinking about dying—but when you're past sixty, you know as well as I do, some things have a way of reminding you that you won't live forever.

But enough of that, let me tell you right away about my new invention! I'm calling it a cotton gin, though it might work for other fibers as well. (Do you grow cotton in Russia?) It's a machine to separate the fibers from the seeds, and this is how it works: you put rows of teeth onto a roller, and line it up with a comb; as you turn the roller (there's a handle on the end), the teeth fit through the ribs of the comb; so when you feed cotton through the machine, the teeth catch the fibers and pass them through, but the comb catches the seeds and they're left behind! It's simple really. The idea came to me while I was combing Charlotte's hair after her little dance, when it was sprinkled through with sequins. (She's started sassing her old grandmother these days, but I reckon she's just growing some southern spirit. The rest of them are doing fine—what news of yours?)

A young man who has been boarding here at the plantation for a while has just made a model of my machine for me, and it really works! (I have enclosed my design sheets so you can manufacture it too, though perhaps you will need to change the measurements for whatever fiber you'll be putting through it.) I'm absolutely delighted because the women have had to work so hard at separation—it's such a slow and tedious job. But now, we can make a machine for each of them, the work will go much quicker, and they'll have more time to tend their houses, play with their children, sing, dance, whatever—

Mr. Whitney (the young man) is excited about the idea too. Actually he seems a bit overly excited. He's talking about revolutionizing American industry—he sees cotton fields stretching from one end of the country to the other! I told him I didn't think the country needed that much cotton. He said we could export it. I said other countries, as far as I know, generally have no problem providing themselves with fabric for clothing. But he thinks the whole world should wear cotton now! It was awful to hear him talk on and on: he had plans for a giant cotton gin, one to fill a whole room, then hundreds of them in a huge single building. I told him I didn't think the women would like to work in a building with a hundred giant cotton gins whirring and clanking. He laughed and said "Oh no ma'am, not the women, we'll need *men* to operate these machines." I asked "Then what will the women do for work?" He didn't seem to think they needed to work. Rather than pursue that ridiculous line of thought, I simply told him I didn't think the men would want to work in that kind of environment either. "Oh they will," he said smugly. When I raised my eyebrows, he explained—"If they haven't got anything else to do". Catherine, to hear him talk—heavens alive!

I must warn you by the way, that the gin tends to damage the fiber a bit, especially the long breeds. I haven't yet figured out how to avoid that, and until I do (you're welcome to give it some

thought!), I won't use it on the finer blends. But since some of the women will prefer to work by hand anyway (especially the older ones and those not blessed with any great co-ordination), I will simply put the finer blends in their charge.

Phineas (you remember Phineas Miller, my manager) has spoken to me about getting a patent for the gin. Do you have patents in Russia? Apparently they're a bit new here, the U.S. Patent Act was made law only two years ago. As I understand it, a patent gives the inventor (they're only for inventions, of "new and useful" things) the exclusive right to make, use, and sell a specific device, for a specific time period. Why, it seems to me it defeats the whole purpose of my cotton gin if I'm the only one who'll be allowed to use it! And it seems incredibly selfish, doesn't it? I told Phineas what I thought and he merely laughed, and said I didn't understand. "Well I beg your pardon," I said, "then explain it to me." So he pulled out a copy of the Act: "Patents," he read, "are to promote the progress of science and useful arts by securing for a limited time to authors and inventors the exclusive rights to their respective writings and discoveries." That's nonsense, I said. You don't promote the progress of science by *coveting* your ideas and inventions, but by *sharing* them—as you and I do. When I suggested that this was indeed what we filled our letters with, he turned white as a bleached potato sack. "Oh my" was all he said. Then he left the room. You can understand that I was quite confused.

I still don't like the idea. I don't believe for a minute that no one else has thought of a gin, for cotton or any other fiber. Why, many ideas and inventions have been 'discovered' simultaneously or consecutively by people ignorant of others' work. So why should *one* person get an exclusive privilege to it? Furthermore, I don't believe for a minute that all the credit should be mine: I am indebted to my past, to whatever education I received, for the prerequisite knowledge I must've needed; and I owe my present circumstances for, what shall I call it, for the right timing, for the opportunity? No one exists alone, in a vacuum, so no one can own an idea.

And I'm suspect of the reasons one would *want* to claim ownership. It seems to me it's all ego and personal profit. I can perhaps forgive such immature and irresponsible motives for something frivolous, but for something as useful as the cotton gin, for something that would eliminate so much tedious work and free so many people for other more pleasurable pursuits, why the thought just sickens my heart.

And yet, when I recalled Mr. Whitney's nightmarish vision and Phineas' anger at my response to patenting, it occurred to me that perhaps I *should* apply for a patent—if only to protect my gin from such gross misuse. So I decided to inquire into the matter after all, and I was told that women aren't allowed to apply for patents! Can you believe it? I don't rightly know what I'll do yet, but I will certainly keep you in touch. (Are women in Russia allowed to apply for patents?) (And are you thinking what I'm thinking?)

Before I close, Catherine, I do want to thank you for the idea of crop rotation. It makes *perfect* sense. What we need now is more exact knowledge about which crops use which nutrients from the earth; if we can figure that out, perhaps no one need go hungry again. Do let me know how it works out for your farmers. I am going to see if the idea can be applied with benefit to the kind of soil we have here.

Catherine

[Appendix entry for "The Patent"](#)

* * * * *

The Model

Helen,

Don't do it. I beg you. Marry him if you like, but when he asks you to pose for his paintings (as he surely will—he is fifty-three and you are sixteen, do you think he's marrying you for your mind?), when he asks you to sit, to lie still—say No.

He will make of you a prostitute. You see, Peter Paul Rubens is a very good pimp: he knows well how to make money from other people's bodies. Oh, he will say he will make something of you—but instead, he will make something *off* of you. He will merely copy you.

And you will get no credit. Though you will fill the canvas, though *you* will be the reason people will want to buy his work, you will remain anonymous: *his* name will be written on the canvas. And on the cheque.

He will glorify you: he will make your skin glow, it will be translucent, like the thinnest petal of a lily lit by the sun; your cheeks will be rosy, your lips, ripe; your flesh will hang like succulent fruit, plump and heavy with promise; he will paint you as saint, angel, goddess—myth! He will falsify you!

Helen, you must not allow yourself to be idealized! Don't you see? You will make peasant women ashamed of their tan, it will seem dirty and disgusting, and then they will throw away their money on creams to whiten their skin. Women will begin to stuff themselves to look beautiful, to look like you. They will go on eating binges till they throw up, and then they will eat again, taking pills to keep it down. Unless their bodies have the metabolism yours has, they will be trying to do the impossible! And not all women have frames to support your weight. You have no idea of the extremes they will go to: I have seen some women strap themselves into braces to support their newly acquired excess!

And they believe they are beautiful!

No, they don't believe it. They will never look like me in the paintings (not even I look like me)—so they will never believe they are beautiful.

Yes, you know who I am now. I am your sister, I am the one in *The Rape of the Daughters of Leucippus*. So please, attend to this letter, I know what I am talking about. See the consequences *before* you take the action! If you allow yourself to be idealized, you will become an ideal—you will become a *model*. Men will want that body, they will expect that body. And women will kill themselves trying to get it.

Suzanne

[Appendix entry for "The Model"](#)

* * * * *

The Stone

February, 1510

Benetta—

So you really did it! I saw your marble come from the quarry today. It is a very big piece! Where will you put it? It won't fit in your apron pocket like your peach stones— But I guess you're no longer going to hide your work. I envy you that. People will know now, they will be saying 'Benetta, the sculptor'!

And 'Properzia, the notary's daughter'. If I am lucky, 'Properzia, Raphael's friend'. No—if I am lucky, 'Properzia, Benetta's friend'!

No, if *you're* lucky. Benetta, do you really think that by doing something big you will become famous? You know quantity has nothing to do with quality! The size is irrelevant. Not to mention impractical. You won't be able to hide it—and I don't mean from your husband now—well, you hear the talk of invasion as much as I do. And you won't be able to carry your work with you wherever you go—around the house, around town, around the country. What if your husband gets posted somewhere else, again? You will even have to build a separate room to work in (I do wonder where the money is coming from), and then you will be able to work only there—what of the summer days we spent in the meadows with our tiny stones?

Benetta, it seems like such a risk. To do something so big. I mean, well it had better be good, because it may be the last piece you do—it will take you so long! Yesterday you had ideas for ten different pieces. You won't have time for them all now—are you sure you really want to spend five years on one piece? (And that is with assistants—who will want to be paid. Tell me, do you honestly look forward to collaboration or do you now, like Michelangelo, just want to give orders to other people?)

But all right, you have made your choice. Big it is. But why marble? Why not wood? (I'll use the peach *pits* and you can use the peach *trees*!) There's lots of it and it's far cheaper. Is that it? Do you believe that the rarer it is, the more valuable it is? But that's silly! I need only go to the orchard and the ceramic artists simply go down to the river—but so what! How will having to order your material from far away make your piece any better? And why should something expensive be more valuable? Air is free, but I consider it valuable indeed. Just because you have to pay dearly for your marble— And again, consider the risk—I mean, suppose it isn't great—all that money—

And listen, there's more to it than all of that: don't you see, by using marble, by using *material* that's rare and expensive, you're helping to make *art* rare and expensive—its production *and* its acquisition.

And in our society, who is it who has the money? Not us! Our husbands, our fathers, our *men*! So it's not only elitist, it's also sexist! Benetta, as it is, only men are 'allowed' the *desire* to be an artist (of all Marcantonio's students, we two are the only women—and if it weren't for the fact that we also had to audition, we'd never be able to withstand the comments, you know that). Don't give them a monopoly to the *means* as well!

Either way, size, or rarity, or expense, it's *form* you're focussing on. Pretence, not substance—not *essence*! Tell me, which is of greater value: an inconsequential, meaningless figure done of an eighteen cube feet of solid gold, or a piece so strong in emotion you weep or so

disturbing to the mind it shakes some fundamental belief—made out of a handful of clay?

Benetta, you're breaking with tradition—women have a long line of work in miniatures: Anastasie with her paintings, continuing what Laya did as far back as 100 B.C., and the jewelry artisans, the petite-pointistes— And yes, sometimes it's good to break out of the mold, but you're merely taking up a fad! This obsession with bigness, it's only the result of the current fusion of sculpture with architecture—and certain male egos. Are you trying to outdo Michelangelo's *David*? Is *your* marble *nineteen* feet high? I'm not saying I don't admire his work. It is good. Just not necessarily better.

Yet if we *must* compare, I do think 'ladies' art' wins out. It requires a far greater sensitivity of touch, such fine motor control, exacting precision skills— Could your Michelangelo do a crucifix on an apricot stone? On a cherry stone? Could he have done the set I just finished—eleven stones with Apostles on one side, saints on the other? We don't need science to tell us that women's fingertips are more sensitive: we *know* men's touch is coarse, and clumsy—fit only to handle rock.

with great affection,

Properzia

[Appendix entry for "The Stone"](#)

* * * * *

The Ring

Vienna, Austria
December 1, 1925

Dear Lou Salomé—

I have put off writing this letter for so long, perhaps I'd better deal with the procrastination before I deal with what has finally nudged me to put pen to paper—which is, of course, this business about the ring. Why have I not wanted to write to you before this? The reasons are as unclear to me as those which answer the converse question, why have I wanted to write to you now?

I suppose jealousy needs to be mentioned. Sigmund would like that, believing as he does that it is one of the dominant motivating emotions of the female psyche. But contrary to his theories, it is not a case of female jealous of male, but female jealous of another female. (Yet, since what I am jealous of is a male's attention, I suppose it's really the same thing.) I can't understand it: I mean, my husband has been close to women (closer to other women than to me, I mean) in some ways (in ways that matter to me) many times before. I know that my own sister, Minna, and he are very close. So for someone else to figure brightly in his life, even at this late stage, is nothing new to me. Then why is it so upsetting? I guess because part of me was, all that time, through all the others, seeking comfort in the belief that though he may be close to one or another at various times throughout his life, in the beginning and in the end, it is I who occupy the prime spot. But here we are, in our 60s, and though he and you met more than ten years ago, you are still important in his life. And he is spending his last years close not to me, but to another: it is to you he writes his letters, to you he opens his heart and mind; it is your occasional visits, your presence, he looks forward to, not mine.

Oh you will say, but Martha, everyone knows he loves you in a way he loves no other. This is true, I don't deny that. But it is not a way that matters to me. To be cherished for one's nurturance, gentleness, sweetness, efficiency—to be loved for the mother and housewife I am—that is not important to me, that is not enough for me. That is not me.

Oh yes, I know, that is what I have become. Why? Well, certainly these were the expectations of Sigmund—of the man I loved, of the single most significant person in my life. And everyone else I knew, my mother, my brother, seemed to agree. (How did you escape this, this is one thing I want to ask—) So I accepted the role, thinking the one, motherhood, only temporary, and the other, housewifery, only part-time. How wrong I was. And how difficult it has been to live in that wrong.

(No, that is only partly true. I did not exactly 'accept' the role—I had little choice: I was pregnant three months after our marriage, so short of killing the child or giving it away, I had to become a mother; and since Sigmund had outside work and I didn't, it made sense that I take on the household management.)

But you see, I wasn't always like this. Before our marriage, Sigmund and I used to talk a great deal—like he does now with Minna, and Anna (you know our daughter, of course), and you. And letters? Oh we wrote, at length, discussing, analyzing—like he still does, I assume, now with you. I remember Sigmund once confessed—yes for him it would be like that, a confession—that because I wrote “so intelligently and to the point” he was just a little afraid of me—he couldn't

bear to have “his sweetheart” smarter than him. Our interchange was warm, intense, sensitive, challenging. But near the end of our courtship, I felt all of that change. I felt more like a passive receptacle for his—his chronicles of existence: he’d write on and on about what he did and what he thought, responding less and less to what I did and thought. With our marriage, the letters of course stopped. But so did that kind of interchange. You see, after a while *all* he wanted to talk about was himself. (I often wonder if his earlier interest in me was insincere, a mere strategy to acquire a mother for his children and a keeper for his house—a strategy abandoned as soon as the end was achieved.) He expected our intelligent conversation to center always around his interests, not mine, his work, not mine. What work, you ask. Well, motherhood and housewifery, since those were my only remaining spheres of activity. Don’t be silly, I hear you say, surely you can’t think that *that* is as important as Sigmund’s work. Well yes, yes I do.

You see, the other reason we stopped talking is because I simply wasn’t interested in his work. People thought I couldn’t understand it. But oh, I could. I didn’t have the chance to attend university, but I was well-educated as a young woman, the Bernays were a distinguished family; I studied literature and music, why Bertha (Pappenheim) was a good friend of mine (she was the one who translated Wollstonecraft’s *Vindication* into German), and we would often converse for hours. I did understand Sigmund’s work. That’s why it didn’t interest me. And in fact, I suppose that’s another reason for my writing to you: curiosity. I can’t understand how an intelligent woman like you, an older woman, a woman who has experienced much—and this, this is another reason—I am jealous not only of a male’s attention, I’m jealous of *you* too, of what you have been, what you have done in your life: at seventeen, you were reading Kant, Schiller, Pascal, Descartes, Kierkegaard; you studied at the University of Zurich, theology, philosophy, the history of art; you knew Rée, personally, and Nietzsche, and Rilke; you’re the author of novels, stories, essays (I especially enjoyed the analysis of Ibsen); men knew you as an intellectual; you walked the streets at night unchaperoned. So I can’t understand—how can you be sincerely interested in Sigmund’s ridiculous theories? Yes, ridiculous! I do think conversation about motherhood and housewifery would have proven far more fruitful in explaining, analyzing, women’s feelings, thoughts, fears, motivations.

But of course Sigmund would discredit such talk. I’m not sure if it’s because he discredits all women’s testimonies or just mine. (You may rightly remind me that the very process of psychoanalysis starts with listening to what the patient says: starts, yes, but ends, no—Sigmund interprets what he chooses to hear, I know that too well.) You’d think he didn’t have a wife, what with his ridiculous theories about female sexuality. How different all his ideas about vaginal orgasm, and clitoral orgasm, and masochistic tendencies, and so on, would’ve been if he’d just once asked me, ‘Martha, what do you like, does this give you pleasure, how does this feel, what do you want’—but no, of course not. That would be out of the question.

Not only because it would be asking for *my* truth, a woman’s truth, but because, you see, sex for him meant reproduction; sex for pleasure was considered perverse. So there was no need to inquire about my pleasure or my opinion because given his belief, his opinion was fixed: he had to say that vaginal orgasm was mature and clitoral orgasm immature, since the former involved reproduction, the latter, mere pleasure; he also had to say, therefore, that penile penetration and ejaculation were the main events of sex: a very neat theory since in the male, then, reproductive activity *entails* pleasurable activity; women fare less fortunately, of course, having to choose *between* sexual pleasure and maturity. To go further, Sigmund believed sexual intercourse to be essential to his health: not to ejaculate (in my vagina—masturbation, as it is non-reproductive, would indicate fixation at the infantile level) would result in a build-up of ‘sexual toxins’. In fact,

he believed something similar about women, and every time he thought I was ‘anxiety-ridden’ (which was often since I had six children within eight years), he’d administer the ‘solution’ to my problems—sex. (That is, he’d rape me).[\[1\]\[2\]](#)

At first I believed his analysis. No one else had ever spoken to me about sex with such authority. If someone else—my mother, a friend, another ‘expert’, *anyone* else—had spoken of the same topic, I’d have had alternatives; but as it was, there was only his view (the words of someone vested with credibility by many others) against my own experience (unvalidated by corroboration with others). Well, it was easy to dismiss my individual and conflicting evidence as abnormal. Years later I realized how childish it was of me to accept his ideas. (I also realized how many of his views were mere wish-fulfillment!) But then, he had made me feel like such a child, such a subordinate. It wasn’t until I had Mathilde, my first, that I felt mature again, equal again, having then a subordinate of my own.

Which leads me to another reason for writing. What on earth did you use for contraception? I know the answer is, in practice, irrelevant now, but of course I assume you were sexual, and, rumour has it, with a great number of men—your serial polyandric lifestyle has not escaped my interest. But as far as I know, you have no children. And that stirs again my jealousy. You see, another reason Minna, and you, and the others have been more attracting, more interesting to my husband, is because you haven’t had children to be responsible for. When I was still young, in the early part of our marriage, I had an infant of eight months, a two year old, a three year old, a five year old, and one seven or eight months on the way. How in God’s name was I to have the energy and desire left over to discuss his theories?

Theories which were not worth discussing anyway. For instance, the whole idea of penis envy is preposterous. It’s a kind of sour grapes projection. That’s really all it is. Our wedding night was disappointing to Sigmund. He had been looking forward to the much promised ‘endless night of marital bliss’. When he realized that that was for the woman, that I could carry on much longer than he could, that women had a much greater capacity for sexual pleasure than men, well he was almost enraged.[\[3\]\[4\]](#) Furthermore, the fact that his penis was not under voluntary control bothered him; to have such an obvious display of powerlessness in the presence of another—what a blow to his male pride! And it was so vulnerable, so exposed—surely an oversight of biological evolution, since if it was so important, as he saw it, to individual psychological survival and collective physical survival, you’d think it would be more protected.

No, Sigmund envied the clitoris: it was much more capable, as it could give long periods of sexual pleasure; it was more efficient in that such intense sensation was concentrated in such a small area; and it was evidence of greater development in that it was the only thing specialized solely for sexual response in the human species. And the other sexual parts were hidden away, safe, protected.[\[5\]](#) To cope with his problem then, he projected his envy of the other’s sexual equipment onto the other. And so we have the theory of ‘penis envy’.

Consider also his theory of the incest taboo and the accompanying desire to violate it. It’s just another instance of him spending his life constructing elaborate theories to account for his own individual feelings and actions. This one supposedly explains why he slept with Minna: it was his way of violating the incest taboo, because he saw Minna as a fantasy mother. Nonsense. I have a much better explanation: she wasn’t in the advanced stages of pregnancy like I was, so she was more sexually attractive. Simple and sensible. (I might point out, too, that not only does his time with Minna violate the incest taboo, it also violates his own theory of sex for reproduction: afterwards, he arranged for her to have an abortion, so he must’ve done it for the pleasure only—by his own standards, an act of perversity, as well as immaturity.)

The interesting thing is that his theories about women turned me, through his expectations and demands, into a housewife (concerned mainly with household maintenance and management), and his theories about sex turned me into a mother (pregnant, tired, occupied with the responsibility of six little human beings). But when, then, therefore, I was no longer a suitable comrade, colleague, or lover, he rejected me—not his theories.

No doubt you are wondering, at this point, why I married Sigmund. More, why did I stay married to him? Well, first, let me tell you, our marriage was not without conflict. In fact, Sigmund associates with women like Minna, and you, not, or not only, because you offer intellectual discussion which I do not, but because in your discussion you offer total agreement and admiration. Which I do not. Of course people think otherwise: Sigmund would not have it known that his wife argues with him. Better they believe me to be a contented little hausfrau. But even our engagement was stormy, and I thought many times of calling it off.^[6] We quarreled over religion (I remember I cried the first Friday night after our wedding when he refused to let me light the candles), over money (for a while, due to an inheritance and an uncle's gift, I was the financial supporter),^[7] over the apartment (he signed the lease without even consulting me), over the children's names (he chose them all, from men he admired), and on and on. His mother adored him and catered to his every wish (she got rid of the piano when his sister's practising disturbed his precious study), and he expected me to do the same. He wanted to own me. I insisted on autonomy.

So why did I say yes to a man who told me even before our marriage that he adhered to the old ways, that he thought a wife must be obedient and attentive, that he thought women were incapable of ethical thought and behaviour, that he thought Mill couldn't be taken seriously? How can I respond? I can only answer that I was young when I accepted his proposal, and then it became too late to retract, too costly to rebel: I had six children. But, I can also ask, how is it a woman like you, now in the full maturity of intelligence and experience, how can you be so interested in such a man?

Don't you see that the same criticisms you made years ago of Nietzsche apply now, still, to Sigmund? Nietzsche believed that women are by design closer to nature, that "Everything in a woman hath one answer—its name is childbearing." To this claim that women are no more than their sex, you said "No, you are merely incapable of seeing anything more." Yet you accept Sigmund's analyses which are based on the same premise: he claims women's nature is largely determined by their sexual function.^[8] Nietzsche declared that women are "weak" and "chronically sick"—don't you see Sigmund believes the same? (For we all suffer from penis envy or a castration complex or an Oedipal complex or hysteria or neuroses...) Nietzsche said that "When a woman has scholarly inclinations, there is generally something wrong with her sexual nature"—a clear case of Sigmund's masculinity complex, such women are "regressive", cases of "arrested development". Nietzsche declared women to be "recreation for the warrior"; Sigmund wants a wife who provides a soothing, safe retreat from the world, he wants a "ministering angel" to tend to his needs and comforts. Need I go on?

No, I need not go on. I have written my letter now, and can add it to those my husband and daughter have been writing to you for years: you are like a wife to him, a mother to her. I know you call her "Daughter Anna"—you must know how that hurts. You have all I haven't and take what little I have too. But then, I am glad Anna has you to look to; it would be sad if I were her only example. This way she has known someone who will be remembered. For I have no doubt that your name will be entered in the history books: you were one of the first women to fight for and gain entrance into universities; your stories, novels, and numerous essays, and certainly *A Struggle for God* (written when you were only twenty-four!) will surely be on library shelves; and if all that

is not enough, your mere association with people like Rée, Nietzsche, Rilke, and Sigmund, will have you remembered.

I too have been so associated. Almost all of my life, and on terms you'll never know. But that will not be a reason for me to be remembered. Wives are peculiarly exempt from that kind of notice.

Before I close, Lou, there is one last thing I'd like to mention: the ring, of course. Another reason for jealousy, you might be thinking, since Sigmund has just bestowed upon you this symbol of his trust, this token of acceptance into his charmed circle—a circle from which, though it includes even wives of friends, I have been excluded. But no, not jealousy. Not this time. It is, rather, pride that I feel. And this is the last thing that I want you to know: in spite of everything else, I am proud *not* to be a minister of psychoanalysis, not to be a disciple of Freud—not to wear his ring.

Martha Bernays

[1] Even though after the first few, we couldn't afford more children.

[2] In view of this practice, it is understandable how he came to believe that coitus for the female was (a) passive—for which of us would actively assist in a rape? and (b) painful—no need to comment here. But it is puzzling how he came to believe women desire that pain—unless it's pure rationalization, to justify his actions, to absolve his guilt.

[3] This might be the catalyst too for his moralistic theory about sex properly being for reproduction: he knew that that would effectively (and spitefully) classify my pleasure, deriving obviously *not* from penile penetration/ejaculation, as perverse.

[4] Given this, it's odd then that he believes women have a weaker sex drive—probably he repressed the knowledge of that night, preferring to measure by subsequent sex (during which I *did* demonstrate a relative disinterest since it involved only penetration) (I never again touched myself in his presence); too, I was pregnant most of the time and that does odd things to my desire.

[5] I sometimes think that this partly fuelled his obsession with penetration: he wants to get at the womb. Not only does he envy us because we have one and can therefore carry and give birth to another human being (the reproductive task, that task of supreme importance to the species—and to him—has been entrusted to us), he also envies its invulnerability—if he could only get at it, pierce it, pummel it, he could render it vulnerable (as vulnerable as his penis perhaps).

[6] Still now I wonder—if I had chosen Fritz (Wahle, the painter) or Max (Meyer, the composer)—

[7] This upset him, he likes to control the money, and so he has not yet told me that he has been sending money to you for years—but it's not something I mind much—I mean, if you need it—

[8] Though he does “not overlook the fact that an individual woman may be a human being in other respects as well”!

[Appendix entry for “The Ring”](#)

* * * * *

The Grapes

Dearest Deborah,

Please reconsider! You know you can come here too—there's room for three! He who presumes to justify the ways of God to man, cannot ever hope to justify his own ways to his daughters!

For a man so very interested in education, he was quite disinterested in ours. Oh he was willing to spend a great deal for the education of his nephew, but for his daughters? Nothing. He took care to teach us only what we'd need to know to be his servants. Don't you remember Deb, the hours of drill in Greek, Latin, Hebrew, Syrian, Italian, Spanish, French? Don't you remember the boredom, the frustration, reading pages and pages we didn't understand? But that was fine—he understood it. And make no mistake, we were to read *for him*, not for ourselves. He used to joke, don't you remember, “one tongue is enough for a woman”. He insisted that our minds were “infantile”—minds that at ten and twelve years of age could be taught to read aloud in seven languages.

Then when our ‘whining’ finally got too disturbing, he sent us here to learn gold and silver embroidery. This is our education! But of course, it isn't us he is thinking about at all: it is well known what a luxury gold and silvering is considered to be, and therefore what status it confers on the father who is able to send his daughters for such training.

Well, *two* of his daughters—Deb, come join us! Does he still call you in the middle of the night to take down his precious verses, complaining that he “wants to be milked”? (How apt for such a cow, such a stupid beast!) I remember that whenever we grumbled about it, rubbing our eyes, stumbling with the candle, he would make *such* a fuss, be *so* appalled, and insist that *that* was when Inspiration chanced to light upon him, and it *must* be obeyed. Inspiration, hell! That man never had an inspired thought in all his life. He *chose* to think about his work at that hour—then *he* needed to be obeyed. That whole routine made him feel like God's chosen messenger.

Deborah, why *do* you stay? Do you think for your pains you will get gratitude? Recognition? You should know by now, you won't—not from him or from anyone else. Why, you too have heard his comments: “I looked that my vineyard should bring forth grapes, and it brought forth wild grapes.” And he's not the only one: just the other day I read that “Milton's daughters chose to reject the fair repute that simple fulfillment of evident duty would've brought them.” “Evident duty”? What of his to us? “Simple fulfillment”? Let them live with him for but a day! Why, we are “damned to everlasting fame... as embittering his existence”! Is that recognition? Gratitude? I wouldn't be surprised if historians refuse to even name you as his amanuensis. And don't count on his will for recompense.

Don't you see that by not providing us with a real education, he has silenced us, withheld from us a voice? (And this from a man who writes so strongly *against* censorship!) Or at least he crippled what voice we had—poor Anne, she still cannot speak easily. Do you know why she has that impediment? It's not from birth: it's because every time she opened her mouth to say something, he insulted her, mocked her, sneered at her—or if she was lucky, just ignored her. It's no wonder she couldn't even write her name for the longest time—without a voice, one has little identity.

Deb, you should come too. Let him know what it's really like to be blind, to be handicapped, disadvantaged, to be denied certain opportunities, certain possibilities, to be dependent, to have to have others speak for you, unable to speak for oneself— We know, because we are uneducated, because we are women in his world.

love,

Mary

[Appendix entry for "The Grapes"](#)

* * * * *

The Dialogue

Lasthenia, your beard is slipping.

Why thank you.

Did you get the mathematics done?

No. And I tried so hard, Axio, after you left last night. I worked at it for another *two hours*. It's just not clear at all. Can you help me again tonight?

All right—I should be able to get away.

Wonderful!!

Lasthenia, *please* be more discreet passing these notes back and forth. People will begin to notice us.

Well maybe it's time they did. I get so angry! None of the other students have to pass notes, they murmur freely to each other whenever they have something to say. (Which is all the time.)

None of the other students have soprano voices.

None that we know of. Haven't you wondered about that new student? The one who sits in the back—never says a word— Also has a beard.

Stop now, Plato has come in.

See that's the problem with this disguise. Not only does it cut us off from the men, it cuts us off from each other too.

But otherwise we couldn't be here, and we'd be even more cut off. Now *please!* If Plato sees us, he'll think we aren't paying attention, and I'd hate to offend him so!

Do you think he's going to continue with the concept of justice? I was thinking about that on my way here this morning. And I think the problem is that we associate justice with goodness. Look what happens if we *don't* do that: something can be just without necessarily being good.

That's an interesting idea. So the person to whom the guns were entrusted gives them back when the owner, though no longer in his right mind, requests them—the action can indeed be just, but not good.

Yes, and it can be *just* to charge everyone the same amount (or to charge anything at all) for medical services, but not *good*.

But that doesn't get us any closer to defining justice, to deciding what is and is not just.

Well to me, it's a lot like mathematics.

Meaning you don't understand it?

Very funny. No, meaning it's a matter of equations, of strict equivalences.

Go on.

Well that's all very fine with numerical relations, but it's impossible in human relations—unless we treat people like numbers. An example: for one child, taking away a toy is punishment, for another, the mere suggestion of it is enough.

Because the children are different emotionally, the impact will be the same even the action needs to be different.

Exactly, because numbers just have quantity, but people have quality as well—emotional quality, physiological quality, situational quality.

Hm. So are we saying justice has no place in human relations?

Oh shit, Aristotle's getting up to speak. If he rants and raves about women again like he did yesterday, I swear I won't be silent this time.

No, Lasthenia, you mustn't! If you speak out, all will be lost!

If I *don't*, all will be lost. If he's allowed to continue, uncontested, he will soon persuade the others—you know how he can talk. And he's rich too.

So?

Well, don't you see? Plato is getting old. Unless he names a successor, the Academy will close, then Aristotle will open his own school. He knows Plato will never ask him to carry on the Academy, his ideas are too different. And as far as I know, he hasn't named anyone. Has he sent any word to you about it?

To me?

Well why not? You heard what Speusippus said he said about you, "Axiotheo alone has the mind bright enough to grasp my ideas."

Yes but that doesn't mean he's going to name me his successor. Sometimes I think he knows I'm really Axiothea. And he knows as well as I that if the next director were a woman, the state would stop its funding. And unlike Aristotle, my father is not physician to the King—I have no private backing to keep a school going.

What about Samothea? She was head of the Hyperborean University in Cornwall.

True enough. I don't know how she managed. I would think enrolment as well as funding would decrease. But she's a Briton, things must be different there. No, Plato would be wise to name Lycurgus or Demosthenes.

Those airheads? Maybe they speak well, but they say nothing.

How would you know? You never listen! You're always too busy distracting me with these notes!

I listen when there's something worth listening to. And Aristotle is not worth listening to. Give him a chance.

A chance? Did you *hear* what he just said? Axio, I have to speak out!

No, Lasthenia, be careful of winning a battle only to lose a war! The time isn't right!

The time is never right!

That's not true. Wait until this mess with the Macedonians has passed. Everything's at loose ends now, our voice will get lost.

But when everything's tight, there's no room for our voice.

No, listen, we have to wait until the men feel secure. If we rise now, we're just one more threat. Their response will be irrational, flung out of fear. When things are settled, when they are sure of their own position, then they can listen to the arguments about ours.

No! They were 'secure' last century. And look what happened. Already Aspasia and Diotima are unacknowledged, forgotten. We hear only of Socrates, not of the women who taught him. And yet Diotima's social philosophy and her theories on nature have never been surpassed. And Elpinice and Aglaonice—what has happened to them, to their work? The surer the men get of their 'position', the surer they are to 'put us in ours'! Perictyone alone is remembered, her papers are still read, but only because she's Plato's mother; you watch, as soon as he's dead, she'll be buried too!

No, that won't happen, I don't believe it!

It will! Axio, it has! Who is credited with the golden mean concept? Pythagoras, not Theano! She was brilliant! Mathematics, medicine, physics, psychology, named successor to his Institute at Croton—but is her name ever mentioned? And Theoclea, and Myla, Arignote, Damo— Axio, it's gone on long enough! We *have* to do something, we *have* to speak out!

We?

No—you're quite right—you!

Me?! You're crazy! Why me?

Well no one knows me from a hole in the ground. But if *Axio*—if *Axio* stands up as a *woman*— Plato will *have* to acknowledge you! You're his favourite—he'll have to *support* you! And so will all the other students: either that or retract their past judgements, admit error. And you know how unlikely that is.

Oh Lasthenia, I don't know. You don't know what you're asking. As I said, I think Plato knows. And if I expose myself, I expose him. I'd be putting him in a very awkward position. You're right, he *is* old, and what with the way things are, he may lose the Academy altogether if I— No. I *owe* him, he's let me attend his classes, even though I *am* a woman.

You'd be putting *him* in an awkward position? Look at us! Plato has given you *less* than you deserve! That's no cause for gratitude! You owe him nothing!

But Lasthenia, you're exaggerating about Aristotle. His system of formal logic, remember his seminar last week? You must admit that what he proposes is an excellent way of thinking.

Does he think *we're* capable of it?

His three types of soul, vegetative, sensitive, rational—

Ask him which type women have.

Happiness as the aim of all human action—

Whose happiness?

Lasthenia, he's *not* that bad!

Axio *listen* to him! "For the female is, as it were, a mutilated male"—not that bad??

Axio, I beg you—think of Arete. She's eleven now. In a few years, she'll be ready to come to the Academy, she can't learn everything from her father. She's very bright, you know that. I gave her Perictyone's paper *On Wisdom* to read a fortnight ago. Do you know, she understood it? And questioned very well! Do you want her to bind her breasts too, paste on a beard and learn to swagger—do you condemn her as well to silence in school?

All right. All right. Maybe it *is* time. But Lasthenia, I can't stand up to Aristotle.

What do you mean you can't stand up to Aristotle! For a man interested in empirical data, he seems positively blind to the reality of women. Just tell him the facts, tell him what we can do, what we are. And his logic—it's so weak, even *I* could make it collapse.

But look at who's here—they'll laugh— I can't speak. I'll squeak.

Axio, I've heard you speak. You're intelligent, you're articulate—you *can* so speak. Just pretend you're speaking to me *Axio*, as you do every evening—go, you can do it!

[Appendix entry for "The Dialogue"](#)

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APPENDIX

The Dialogue

There seems to be some controversy over the status of women in 4th century BCE Athens. French (p. 144), footnoting Chicago (p. 123), describes women on a par with slaves, a state of affairs which required women to disguise themselves as men in order to attend school. An item in Lefkowitz—"two of Plato's women disciples were said to have worn men's clothing" (Diog. Laert. 3.46)—seems to support this, and many other fragments in Lefkowitz seem to me to reveal an attitude of misogyny and a reality of women as second class citizens. But Davis (p. 186-194) and Boulding (p. 258-265) say this view is inaccurate, and they describe classical Greece as a free state: women could and did hold property, have the right to unilateral divorce, contest and succeed in courts, carry on a business, and attend schools (undisguised).

I wrote "The Dialogue" to take place in 359 BCE—Plato would be around 68, Aristotle 25, Arete 11. Also, some kind of upheaval involving Macedonia was imminent at that time.

The opening discussion between Axiothea and Lasthenia concerning justice stems from *Book I* of Plato's *Republic* in which he posits the following situation: "Suppose that a friend when in his right mind has deposited arms with me and he asks for them when he is not in his right mind, ought I to give them back to him?"

Of interest: after I had finished the piece, I read (in Carroll) that Axiothea had become a teacher of philosophy and that "her reputation has suffered from the association of her name with that of Lasthenia" (p. 312) who, he goes on to suggest, became 'promiscuous' with the male students (including Speusippus), but 'nevertheless' "possessed some reputation as a philosopher" (p. 312).

~

Axiothea (4th Century BCE)—a Philasian, student of Plato; Plato did indeed praise Axiothea as described (French p. 144, footnoting Chicago p. 123), but as indicated below, it's unclear whether or not he knew she was a woman (even if she was disguised, he might've known)

Lasthenia (4th Century BCE)—a Mantinean from Arcadia, student of Plato

Aglaonice (5th Century BCE)—astronomer, astrologer

Arete (370-340 BCE)—head of a school in Cyrene with many distinguished students, a prolific writer (40 works attributed to her include pieces on philosophy, agriculture, and history), daughter and disciple of Aristippus of Cyrene

Arignote (6th-5th Century BCE)—daughter of Theano and Pythagoras

Aristoclea a.k.a. Theoclea a.k.a. Themistoclea (6th Century BCE)—head of priesthood at Delphi, Pythagoras' sister, taught Pythagoras

Aristotle (384-322 BCE)—studied at Plato’s Academy from 367 to its closing (Plato’s death) in 347; in 334 he opened his own school, the Lyceum. The line ascribed to Aristotle in “The Dialogue” (“the female is, as it were, a mutilated male”) is from his *De Generatione Animalium*. The other ideas ascribed to him (formal logic, the three types of soul, happiness as the aim of all human action, the emphasis on empirical data) are indeed his.

Aspasia (470-410 BCE)—taught Socrates rhetoric and philosophy

Damo (6th-5th Century BCE)—daughter of Pythagoras

Demosthenes (4th Century BCE)—student of Plato, orator

Diotima (5th Century BCE)—taught Socrates social philosophy and philosophy of love

Elpinice (5th Century BCE)—intellectual

Lycurgus (4th Century BCE)—student of Plato, orator; I chose to have Axiothea suggest Lycurgus as Plato’s successor only because I was sure he was one of Plato’s students at the time, but my choice became ironic as I later read that Lycurgus “wanted to bring the women under his laws”—they resisted and he gave up (Lefkowitz); however, another item (in Lefkowitz) placed Lycurgus in the 7th Century BCE, so since there was probably more than one person by that name, the one quoted above is perhaps not Plato’s student; and after all of that, I later read that Speusippus was Plato’s successor (Carroll, p.311)

Myia (6th-5th Century BCE)—daughter of Theano and Pythagoras

Perictyone (5th Century BCE)—philosopher, writer (works include *On Wisdom* and *On the Harmony of Women*, which deals with the relationship between body and spirit, thought and action), mother or sister of Plato

Plato (427-347 BCE)—directed a school called The Academy in Athens, which opened in 387 BCE; philosophy, physics, mathematics, and natural sciences were studied there

Pythagoras (582-500 BCE)—philosopher, known for the concept of the golden mean, directed a school in Croton (around 530 BCE)

Samothea—a Briton, invented letters, astronomy, science, and was head of the Hyperborean University at Cornwall where Pythagoras is supposed to have studied

Socrates (470-399 BCE)—Plato’s predecessor, immortalized in Plato’s *Dialogues*

Speusippus (4th Century BCE)—student of Plato, and his successor

Theano (540-510 BCE)—brilliant mathematician, and expert in early psychology, physics, and medicine, Pythagoras’ successor as head of the Institute, supposed originator of the ‘golden mean’ concept, wife of Pythagoras

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- Boulding, Elise. *The Underside of History: A View of Women through Time*. Colorado: Westview Press, 1976
- Carroll, Mitchell. *Women in All Ages and All Countries—Greek Women*. Philadelphia: The Rittenhouse Press, 1907.
- Chicago, Judy. *The Dinner Party*. New York: Anchor Press, 1979.
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- French, Marilyn. *On Power*. New York: Doubleday, 1979.
- Lefkowitz, Mary R. and Maureen B. Fant. *Women's Life in Greece and Rome: A Sourcebook in Translation*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982. 123-124.
- Menage, Gilles. tr. Beatrice H. Zedlar. *The History of Women Philosophers*. Lanham: University Press of America, 1984.
- Pomeroy, Sarah B. *Goddesses, Whores, Wives, and Slaves*. New York: Schocken Books, 1975.

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The Experiment

Dr. Edward Jenner (b.1749) is credited with discovering the small-pox vaccination; he did so by experimenting as described in “The Experiment” (injecting cowpox into the arm of a boy, James Phipps, then injecting smallpox to see if immunity had been achieved). First told by Jenner’s biographer and generally accepted, there is a record of a conversation with a milkmaid, several years earlier (1766 in Sodbury, England, where he was an apprentice), which catalyzed his experimentation/discovery: she had told him that she couldn’t possibly get small-pox because she had had cowpox. (The cowparties were my idea.)

After I had written “The Experiment”, I read in Boulding (p. 597, footnoting Stenton p. 261) that Lady Montagu introduced the practice of vaccinating against smallpox into England from Turkey, where she observed its use while her husband was ambassador there.

Boulding, Elise. *The Underside of History: A View of Women through Time*. Colorado: Westview Press, 1976

Stenton, Doris M. *English Society in the Early Middle Ages*. New York: Penguin Books.

Sutcliffe, A. and A.P.D. Sutcliffe. *Stories from Science III*. Cambridge: University Press, 1965. 33-39.

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The Grapes

John Milton had three daughters: Anne (b. 1646), remembered for her deformity and speech disability, said to be unable even to write her name (Mary's explanation of this in "The Grapes" is conjecture); Mary (b. 1648), remembered for being an undutiful daughter; Deborah (b. 1652), remembered for being the most devoted of the three and becoming his amanuensis.

The bit about the languages they learned to read, without understanding, is true, according to my research. Milton paid a lot to educate his nephew (that is, at an educational institution), but he spent nothing at all on his daughters' education.

After he became blind (1652), he often called his daughters in the middle of the night to take down verses. When they 'rebelled', he sent them to learn gold and silver embroidery (a luxury trade to which the apprenticeship was onerous). But who the 'them' was is debatable, as are the dates of the daughters' departure from home. There is speculation that only the eldest two, Anne and Mary, were sent away to learn embroidery, and apparently 1669 was the last year Deborah read for her father (she then left for Ireland with a woman named Meriam), so I have set the story in about 1668, with Mary (20 years old) writing from 'away' to Deborah (16 years old) still at 'home' (presumably by choice).

The words attributed to Milton are indeed his. The words Mary read 'just the other day' are Garnett's.

And indeed his will left little 'recompense': he allotted a mere one hundred pounds to each of his "unkind daughters".

Of interest, Milton's first wife left him after one month.

Bush, Douglas. *John Milton: A Sketch of his Life and Writings*. New York: MacMillan, 1964.

Garnett, Richard. *Life and Writings of John Milton*. Pennsylvania: Folcroft, 1980.

Keightley, Thomas. *An Account of the Life, Opinions, and Writings of John Milton*. London: Chapman and Hall, 1855.

Saillens, Emile. *John Milton: Man—Poet—Polemicist*. New York: Oxford, 1964.

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The Model

The Helen and Suzanne of "The Model" are the Fourment sisters. Helen married Rubens in 1630 when she was 16 (Rubens was then 53). She modelled for him throughout their marriage—overtly for *Helen Fourment and two of her children* and for *The Little Fur*, but, as one author said, "She could be found in one guise or another in virtually every major painting" (Avermaete); indeed, Edwards states that "In the romantic *Garden of Love*, all ten of the young women in the painting were based on the artist's wife and her many sisters" (p. 196).

Suzanne, it is speculated, had a brief affair with Rubens some time in 1627. She was the model for his painting *Le Chapeau de Paille* which was done in 1620, and apparently she sat for him on

several other occasions. I have no proof that some of these occasions were for *The Rape of the Daughters of Leucippus*: although the body type (luscious!) is right, the year (1617) makes it questionable—but I couldn't resist using that title in this piece.

Rubens (1577-1640) is a Flemish painter, perhaps known most for his portraits and his nudes. To be honest, I don't know if he signed his paintings (this in reference to a comment in "The Model").

Avermaete, Roger. *Rubens and his Times*. London: Allen and Unwin, 1968.

Edwards, Samuel. *Peter Paul Rubens: A Biography of a Giant*. New York: David McKay Co., 1973.

Wedgewood, C. V. et al. *The World of Rubens*. New York: Time Life Books, 1967.

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The Patent

According to *Funk and Wagnalls*, Eli Whitney designed and built the cotton gin in 1792, while a guest at Catherine Greene's plantation. More recent accounts identify Greene (1731-1814) as the inventor, accounting for the historical inaccuracy partly with the fact that women were not allowed to take out a patent at the time.

Catherine II (1726-1796) was a czarina; among her many accomplishments is the introduction of crop rotation to Russia.

The relationship between Catherine Greene and Catherine II is, as far as I know, fictional. Charlotte is also fictional, and 'the grandchildren' are mentioned without supporting fact.

I cheated on the mention of a "bleached potato bag": bleaching powder didn't come into use until 1799 and bleaching liquid even later than that (and I have no idea if potatoes were grown in Georgia in the late 18th century). I also may have cheated on the mention of sequins—I don't know when they were 'invented' and haven't been able to find out!

Of interest, Whitney and Miller (who married Greene in 1796) became partners and began to manufacture cotton gins, but because of a disastrous factory fire, they couldn't make enough to meet the market demands. Added to the fact that though the patent was issued in 1794, the decision needed to protect the patent wasn't made until 1807, and in 1812 renewal of the patent was denied to Whitney, very little money was made. In 1798, Whitney turned instead to the manufacture of firearms, and signed a contract to supply the Federal government with 10,000 military muskets. In 1900, he was one of the original 29 Americans chosen for the Hall of Fame.

Chicago, Judy. *The Dinner Party*. New York: Anchor Press, 1979.

Morse, Joseph Laffan et al. *Funk and Wagnalls New Encyclopedia*. New York: Funk and Wagnalls, Inc., 1972. vol. 25: 109-110; vol. 18: 354-355.

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The Portrait

The biographical aspects implied or referred to in “The Portrait” are factual (Leopold teaching Wolfgang at an earlier age than Nannerl; Nannerl playing with Wolfgang at the piano, teaching him; Nannerl allowed to perform in public only when Wolfgang was ready to do so; the typhus in Holland; the episode with J.C.Bach and Wolfgang; Leopold’s decision to leave Nannerl at home when he went to Italy with Wolfgang). So are the tours mentioned, the advertisements, and the reviews. And, of course, factual too are the portraits by Carmontelle: the alleged original and the revision.

The fiction is Nannerl’s response and, of course, her mother’s letter to her about it.

Levey, Michael. *Life and Death of Mozart*. London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1971.

Seroff, Victor. *Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart*. New York: MacMillan, 1965.

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The Protest

Agnodice established her obstetric practice in Athens, in 4th century BCE, but because it was illegal for a woman or a slave to practise medicine, she did so disguised as a man. Her business thrived, many women preferring to be examined by a woman (she revealed her true gender to her patients). When her male colleagues charged ‘him’ with ‘corrupting’ patients, she was faced with the dilemma described in the second paragraph of “The Protest”. Fortunately, some of her influential friends lobbied their husbands (Jack suggests with a ‘sexual boycott’); the law was repealed and Agnodice pardoned.

I made up the ‘AAOG’, the ‘Athenian Code of Laws’, and the patients’ names.

Regarding the last line of “The Protest”—during the witch hunt era, thousands (?) of women were killed for practising medicine.

Jack, Donald. *Rogues, Rebels, and Geniuses*. Toronto: Doubleday, 1981.

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The Ride

It is fact that Godiva (or ‘Godgifu’) was the wife of Leofric, who was the earl of Mercia and lord of Coventry (around 1040-1085). And she did indeed ride naked through the town. And it was to secure his promise that he would lower the taxes, per her request, if she did so.

Other passing items of fact include the relative poverty of the peasants, the lack of education for women at the time, Ethelfled and her achievements (911-918), and the practice of consulting wives about public policy; and Leopold did establish a Benedictine monastery, in 1043. The rest, including Gawaina, is fiction.

Unfortunately, I neglected to note the books I used to research this one.

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The Ring

Martha Bernays was born in 1861 in Germany; at the age of 25 she married Sigmund Freud, and according to all the accounts I have read (there are few indeed that mention her*), she became ‘the perfect little housewife’. Minna, her sister, came to live with Sigmund and Martha after Anna’s birth (1895). There is controversy over the relationship between Sigmund and Minna; some speculate there was sexual involvement and a subsequent abortion (Isbister, p. 133).

Other biographical references in “The Ring” are factual: Martha’s childhood and family background; her courtship—the long discussions and letters as well as the conflicts and Martha’s other admirers; Sigmund’s ‘confession’ about Martha’s intelligent writing; her many pregnancies/children—six in eight years; the arguments about the candles and the children’s names; the incident with Sigmund’s sister’s piano. The bit about Sigmund belief that sexual intercourse remedies anxiety and his consequent regular rape of Martha is conjectured from his documented belief that *coitus interruptus* and prolonged sexual abstinence causes anxiety in women.

Freud (1856-1939) was a psychoanalyst remembered most for his views on sexuality; those presented in “The Ring” are, to the best of my abilities, accurately described (as are his views on women apart from their sexuality).

Lou Salomé, like Martha Bernays, was born in 1861, but in Russia. At 22, she became close friends with Rée and Nietzsche. At 36, she became close to Rainer Maria Rilke. And at 52, she attended one of Freud’s lectures and then became one of his closest friends until he died; his daughter, Anna, also became close to her. And she did indeed receive one of the rings as described in “The Ring”. (Other recipients include Marie Bonaparte, Helen Deutsch, Hilda Doolittle, and Anna Freud.) Although the books I read that mention Salomé mention first and foremost her relationships with men of note, she was a philosopher, writer, and psychoanalyst in her own right (Martha’s passing references to Lou’s life and accomplishments are not fictional): her stories, essays, and novels made her famous; she wrote the first feminist study of Ibsen’s women and a study of Nietzsche (neither is in print); she has left many unpublished manuscripts, letters, and diaries, as well as a published autobiography; and she was one of the first practising women psychoanalysts.

Nietzsche (1844-1900) was a philosopher remembered most perhaps for his theories of the superman and slave morality. His views on women which I have presented in “The Ring” are, to the best of my abilities, accurately described. (The phrases in quotation marks are either verbatim quotations or very close paraphrases.)

I have dated the letter to 1925: both women would be 64, Martha, well past the childcare phase of her life, and Lou, a practising psychoanalyst in Goltivgen, having exchanged letters with Sigmund for about 10 years. (Martha died in 1952 at 90, Lou in 1937 at 72.)

Of interest, I was particularly appalled reading Binion. Several accounts describe Nietzsche’s repeated desire to marry Lou and Lou’s repeated rejection of the idea. Nietzsche himself, in *My Sister and I*, says “had I married my slavish princess [Lou], I might have been happy ... how could she have resisted me?...” (10,20). But Binion says Lou’s “fiction and some of her later friendships represent repeated attempts to cope with her rejection by Nietzsche” (p. vi). He goes on to say that “her trouble in being a woman was at the source ... of her whole mental life” (p.ix) and that “her accounts of herself ... are really fanciful through and through...” (p. x).

~

*And so perhaps my presumed blatant misrepresentation of her personality is more acceptable when one recognizes that it is unwise to conclude anything, perhaps especially that she really was a good little hausfrau, based on such a small sample.

Binion, Rudolph. *Frau Lou—Nietzsche’s Wayward Disciple*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1968.

Clarke, Ronald W. *Freud—The Man and his Cause*. New York: Random House, 1980.

Freeman, Lucy. *Freud and Women*. New York: Frederick Unger Publishing Co., 1981.

Friedan, Betty Friedan. *The Feminine Mystique*. New York: Dell Publishing Co. Inc., 1963.

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Jones, Ernest. *Sigmund Freud: Life and Work*. London: Hogarth Press, 1953. vol. 1.

Kennedy, J. M. *Nietzsche*. New York: Haskell, 1974.

Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Beyond Good and Evil*. New York: Gordon Press, 1974.

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Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Thus Spake Zarathustra*. New York: Penguin, 1961.

Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Will to Power*. New York: Random House, 1968.

Peters, H.F. *Zarathustra’s Sister*. New York: Crown Publishers, Inc., 1977.

Peters, H. F. *My Sister, My Spouse*. New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 1962.

Salome, Lou. tr. Stanley A. Leary. *The Freud Journal of Lou Andreas-Salomé*. New York: Basic Books Inc., 1964.

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The Stone

Properzia de Rossi (1490-1530) was an Italian sculptor who worked with several media, but is most remembered (when she is remembered) for her peach stone pieces (as described in “The Stone” and currently in the Grassi Museum in Bologna). Her teacher was Marcantonio Raimondi, and one of her friends was Raphael. Benetta is a figment of my imagination—as far as I know. In addition to sculpting, Properzia could sing and play an instrument, and her skill in the sciences was envied by men.

Michelangelo (1475-1564) was also an Italian sculptor; his “David” is eighteen feet tall.

Anastasia (around 1404) is known for her miniature painting.

I have written the letter as it might have been in 1510. In the 1520s, Properzia began to work in portrait busts and bas-reliefs (according to Clement [p. 300], seeing the folly of belittling her talents by working in miniatures). When she asked for a share in decorating the three doors of the facade of S. Petronia (work in marble), the jury said they would consider her request only if she submitted marble work; she sculpted two angels for the church, but I’m not sure if that was the audition or the commission. She was (later?) commissioned to do the canopy of the high altar in the newly restored church of S. Maria del Baraccano.

However, Properzia “became so popular with the public that she roused the intense jealousy of her male colleagues” and “they began a crusade against her so that her commissioned work was not mounted on the public building it was prepared for, and she dies at forty of ‘mortification and grief’” (Clement, p. 300).

Boulding, Elise. *The Underside of History: A View of Women through Time*. Colorado: Westview Press, 1976

Clement, Clara Erskine. *Women in the Fine Arts*. Massachusetts: Houghton Mifflin, 1904.

Fine, Elsa Honig. *Women and Art*. New Jersey: Allanheld and Schram, 1978.

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