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## Review of Marta V Vicente, Debating Sex and Gender in Eighteenth-Century Spain

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**Vicente, Marta V. *Debating Sex and Gender in Eighteenth-Century Spain*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017. 216 pp.**

Marta V. Vicente's new book about the eighteenth-century scientific turn on sex and gender is an elegant narrative that places the Spanish Enlightenment in its larger European context. This is a thorough analysis of how gender distinctions proved essential to articulate the nature/ society relationship. Vicente demonstrates how for eighteenth century thinkers the essence of things resided in their utility, and reproduction constituted the most important function for human survival. Through reproduction, women and men's bodies remained crucial in the perpetuation of the species and the social order. Hence the formulation of an "objective" justification of social roles based on biological distinctions was born. Biology became destiny so that what was once only considered sin also turned into a medical aberration and threat to social stability and peace. Bodies outside the new normative outlook were regarded as sick and/or criminalized.

Divided in five chapters, the book is based on extensive archival research. Vicente examines criminal and inquisitorial records which deal with individuals accused of sexual crimes; medical reports dealing with hermaphrodites or crossdressers as well as descriptions of "improper" anatomical traits. A number of illustrations by Spanish artists such as Diego Ribera's painting of "Magdalena Ventura with her husband;" engravings by Crisóstomo Martínez or Matía Iralia for anatomical studies; portraits of the period's key scientists like Martín Martínez, Benito Jerónimo Feijoo, or Manuel de Porras; and historical figures such as actress María Ladvenant add visual depth to this indispensable study of the history of scientific discourses in eighteenth century Spain. Three concepts run through the narrative of the five chapters: nature, utility and social order. These three concepts articulate the arguments proposed by scientist (more specifically anatomists), lawyers, philosophers and theologians as well as educators when formulating the closed correlation between nature's universal laws and the stable social order they aspired to establish. In their attempt to create a "brave new world" the Enlightenment thinkers forged an iron-clad isomorphism between the human body and social order. In so doing, scientific discourse had to bridge the difference between the theory of what was considered normal and practice as the medical profession confronted bodies that did not fit the new norm.

The main case studied is that of Sebastián Leiredo López, a twenty-four-year old inn keeper also identified as a Madrid actress named María Teresa Garrido whom he had served at the age of fourteen. Leiredo was arrested in Madrid in November 1769 and his trial ran for four months. Vicente examines Leiredo's story in two chapters. In Chapter 2, when explaining the scientific discourse and relation between theory and practice, Vicente's narrates the medical reports describing Leiredo's male genitalia and the trouble authorities had in making sense of his

feminine appearance as he lacked facial hair and spoke with a female voice. Because his body confirmed he was a man, his social behavior as a woman made him a threat to society. In Chapter 4, Vicente tells us about legal aspects of Leiredo's case to illustrate the concept of social utility mentioned above. She shows, through the analysis of sodomy, how the Spanish legal system had trouble moving towards the separation of crime and sin in the case of Leiredo. The judges condemned him to ten years in prison at the Castillo de la Plaza in Pamplona, Navarra and labeled him a sinner. His lover was sentenced to four years of service in the Spanish Navy. While the Inquisition had sentenced to death sodomites in the past the new courts regarded sodomy rather as a social transgression. Sodomy transgressed the social expectation for reproduction as the ultimate utilitarian function of sex/gender differentiation hence constituting a crime against social prosperity.

Leiredo's is not the only story Vicente tells us about ambiguous bodies Enlightenment thinkers and law makers encountered. In chapter 3, "Nature, Nurture, and Early Modern Sexuality," she explores the debate among philosophers and educators resulting from new anatomical discoveries and how they influenced the cultural milieu. They trusted that education would guide individuals in their quest for proper sexual behavior to fulfill the reproductive utility. In this chapter Vicente tells us about the case of Antonio Lozano a breastfeeding father from Cumaná (Venezuela) a peasant who out of necessity had been able to breastfeed his son making it proof of how nature would be accommodating to habit and obligation.

The final chapter in the book focuses on the legacy of the eighteenth century and its impact on feminist discourses in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Some of the feminist theorists discussed throughout the book include Simone de Beauvoir, Judith Butler, Monique Wittig, and Iris Marion Young, to mention a few. The debate between sameness and difference sparked in the 1980s has produced fertile intellectual discussions on the binary nature/nurture inherited from the Enlightenment and informing identity politics to this day. In the final analysis, as Marta Vicente points out, feminist have demonstrated that the promise of progress, happiness and stability put forward by eighteenth century thinkers has not been fulfilled. The question remains, stability, progress, and happiness for whom? Reading Marta V. Vicente's book helps us get closer to be able to answer this question.

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