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Maria Eugenia Echenique, Josefina Pelliza de Sagasta, Translated by the Palouse Translation Project

Journal of Women's History, Volume 7, Number 3, Fall 1995, pp. 102-126
(Article)

Published by Johns Hopkins University Press

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/jowh.2010.0494>



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THE EMANCIPATION OF WOMEN:

Argentina 1876

Translated by the Palouse Translation Project¹

On May 7, 1876, a young writer of growing reputation, María Eugenia Echenique (1851-1878), published the essay "Brushstrokes" in *La Ondina del Plata*, the leading women's newspaper of the day. In this as in her other essays, Echenique presented arguments in favor of women's emancipation, particularly advocating that women receive a modern, scientific education and that they be trained for economic self-sufficiency. The essay caught the eye of Josefina Pelliza de Sagasta (1848-1888), also a well-known writer, who opposed emancipation. Her reply opened a debate between the two women that lasted several months and was widely read and commented on.

Echenique's views were pioneering in their understanding of women's role in the national economy. She also was a fervent believer in the sciences as the ultimate proof of religion and as a source of power for women. Pelliza, on the other hand, believed women to be divine creatures because of their ability to create life. For her, entry into higher education, business, or politics would be a step down into an immoral shabbiness fit only for men. Pelliza was also disturbed by scientific challenges to Christian belief. The two debaters could not help talking at cross purposes: one viewed women's emancipation as an economic and legal issue, whereas the other viewed it as a private matter threatening to traditional family structure. Today's readers will find many familiar topics here, such as child care, housework, egalitarian love, employment for unmarried women, the role of the family in nationhood, and the conflict between religion and science.

Both Echenique and Pelliza died young, the former probably of cancer and the latter of uremia. Pelliza wrote a very tender obituary for Echenique in *La Alborada del Plata* (February 3, 1878), and, ironically, incorporated many of Echenique's economic and legal arguments into her own book, *Conferencias* (1885), although she still opposed political emancipation.

A note about the translation: while we have tried to maintain each writer's style as much as possible, we have sometimes changed punctuation, the order of clauses, and paragraphing to make the meaning clearer in English. This is particularly true of Pelliza's essays; even for a century tolerant of individualistic punctuation and syntax, Pelliza's is eccentric to an extreme. The strings of clauses with vague antecedents are Pelliza's, not

ours. All essays were translated by the Palouse Translation Project. The debate has been edited for length.

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"Brushstrokes"

by María Eugenia Echenique (May 7, 1876)

I have held my pen in hand for five minutes, and I still do not know what I am going to write about. There are so many ideas and feelings overwhelming me at this moment that I remain in doubt about the choice of a specific point to serve as the topic for an article.

I could easily allow myself a pleasant moment of innocent entertainment that still would have a certain utility—surrendering to purely imaginative games, tracing with my pen beautiful images capable of stirring sweet emotions in the heart without compromising men's morality or dignity, writing a dream, a meditation, or a fantasy drawing all the soul's sensations into a world of poetry—that would satisfy the need that my spirit feels to communicate and open the gate to vast fields of thought.

But to write a fantasy when the women of this century have need of our meager education and of resources useful to them in the difficult circumstances through which they are passing; when they have need of the cooperation of Argentine women writers in the great work of their regeneration, begun recently in this part of America, that brings to each of us serious obligations to fulfill in the social and moral order; to waste time in futile games when the majority of our sex cries forgotten on the path of ignorance, being toys of charlatanism, waiting for a protecting hand to come take them out of inaction and put them in their rightful position—that would be an unpardonable failure that would injure the delicate susceptibility of our sensitive and thoughtful women.

Our heart rebels against the ideas of spirituality, sensibility, and poetry that, as cultivated by women, have callously contributed until now to women's delay on the road of progress and the improvement of their condition. That remains from those ancient times when women were slaves under the power of absolute masters, subject to the whims and rule of the "heads" of families or of tyrannical husbands, when women had no aspirations nor anything to think about, when they felt a profound emptiness in their hearts that they needed to fill with beautiful daydreams and gilded illusions; the reduced sphere of action to which they had been relegated and the absolute ostracism which surrounded them wherever they were, developed their melancholy feelings to a high degree, making

it necessary for them to seek solace for their moments of bitterness and disillusionment.

The ideas of freedom born in this century, by extending the circle of women's prerogatives, have infused them with new aspirations and unveiled great things to think about and occupy themselves with. The women of today are not the women of the past. The change that has taken place within them in these recent times is profound. Instead of poetry, today they need philosophy, practical philosophy that better idealizes life when it saves women from the critical circumstances of a dark and difficult existence, responding to the great interests of humanity.

How do women look when they spend days and years crying at the least disappointments and deceptions of life, exaggerating to themselves the pain of their existence, forging a world of sadness, at each step finding ominous specters in everything, living solely on illusions, feigning lovely ideals that vanish like smoke, in contrast with men who laugh at everything, who make a joke of themselves, who only think of filling their pockets and satisfying their own desires, who if they encounter an obstacle to the pursuit of any goal they set, become angry and trample over everything, men who live impatient to climb mountains of glory in the progress of science in all its manifestations?

In the materialistic century in which we live, it is necessary to make women a bit philosophical if we do not want them to become lost in their endeavors. Less sensibility and more reflection! With sentimentalism, women will not satisfy their needs in a century in which gold and the prosaic shine of possessions are king.

In the press, our mission is as interpreters of their affections and aspirations, a sacred mission from which we cannot exempt ourselves without compromising our own interests. To smooth the road of civilization and of culture, removing the barriers that oppose the achievement of the great thoughts and generous desires that stir women's hearts in the present century, contributing with our pen to the realization of their most beautiful hopes; to teach them to overcome the prejudices that diminish their rights, opposing the torrent of disorderly passions that destroy them; to show them the path that leads to happiness in the attainment of sacred duties and the cultivation of elevated passions, infusing in them love of the arts and sciences, of reading and working; in short, to teach them the way to take care of their physical needs more skillfully according to their social standing—such is the vast circle of obligations that our position as writers undertakes in a country where the regeneration of women has begun in such a splendid and brilliant way.

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**“Women: Dedicated to Miss Maria Eugenia Echenique”
by Judith [Josefina Pelliza de Sagasta] (June 4, 1876)**

You discuss improving the present condition of women, but in this question of such interest and such serious consequences for South American women, we encounter very grave drawbacks. The emancipation of women, treated with enthusiasm by Argentine and even Peruvian authors, is an unattainable feat in our humble opinion and, moreover, harmful if it were to be attained. Entirely free women, with as much independence as men, would lose their greatest charms and the poetic prestige of their weakness: the prestige which forms the most noble attribute of their sex, the prestige that later, when women are mothers, doubly beautifies them and places them on the sacred throne of the home, where women best belong.

Women, in our opinion, should never even in thought surpass the limits that God when making them—their souls with the softest breaths of divine light and their bodies with the purest of His celestial conceptions—gave them as their path on earth: He pointed out their mission, and gave them a physical and moral constitution different from men and in accordance with the sorrows and sufferings of their destiny as daughters, wives, and mothers. Woman, one celebrated writer has said, “is the poetry of God, and man is His prose.” There only remains to admire women’s delicate shapes (with some exceptions), their souls susceptible to tender emotions, always gentle and loving, their thoughts, in short their physical beauty, in order to exclaim: the destiny of women is not, as has mistakenly been said, equal to the destiny of men, because the former are weak and tender in their spirit and their bodies cannot endure the difficult hardships to which men are subjected; their dignity would be diminished if they were to attempt to liberate themselves from those sweet attributes of their nature, from those bonds that the propogandist writers of emancipation have been calling guardianship, without realizing that it is precisely that guardianship which makes women more beautiful, that elevates them to their true pedestal without aspirations of glory or applause, that binds them to their husbands, that binds them to the home, and that makes them into the guardian angel of the family. She is a slave! you emancipated women will exclaim—and I in turn will reply to you: not a slave but a companion, man’s other half, slave perhaps to her children, but how seductive and poetic is her beautiful sacrifice. Blessed be the woman who is a mother!

Woman is born to love, to be protected by the generous heart of man, guided by him and embodied in that powerful and noble soul like the purest breath of celestial light; sheltered by man, defended by him, always joined to him, and supported by him like the tender shoots that cling to the shade and protection of the stake that sustains them if they waver, that helps and reinforces them if they wilt, and that always defends them with solicitous care.

But let us hear the authoritative word of the sublime Spanish author María del Pilar Sinués de Marco.² She says: "There will never be a husband for an emancipated woman, whether her emancipation be a dream of sick fantasies or whether it be imposed upon society as law! What man would want to see his daughters educated to be teachers and his sons for uselessness? What man would thus decline the sacred rights of his nature? What honorable occupation would remain to men in their homes, if the wives managed the businesses and disposed of the assets? Bah! Bah! Is this nothing more than abolishing marriage? Thus emancipation is a monstrosity which few women would be party to; homes would remain without warmth and without light because there would be no wives nor mothers.

"Love would remain for women. Horror! What is love when it is not restrained and beautified by duty? To pretend that men only speak to the senses and never to the heart?

"No, no, God made man the natural head of the family. Work! He said to Adam. Love, He said to women in general through Eve. *Console man! Make my punishment more bearable! Follow him wherever he goes!* With science the heart petrifies and one lives without love! . . . Without love! the redemption, consolation, strength, and heaven on earth for women!"

So says the inspired author of *Angel of the House*. We will add: good women are virtuous, talented, with legitimate aspirations, with freedom of beliefs, educated, with mutual rights between them and their companions for life, energetic, capable of sacrifice, capable of the martyrdom of heroism, well-read, a writer, progressive, an initiator—in short everything but emancipated, less free in independence and rights than men.

Women should be educated; give them a solid education, based on wholesome principles, cemented with moral and sensible beliefs; they should have a general knowledge of everything that awakens ingenuity and determines ideas, but not for them are the calculation and egotism with which they instruct English women, not for them the ridiculous ideas of North American women who pretend in their pride to be equal to men, to be legislators and obtain a seat in Congress or be university professors, as if it were not enough to be a mother, a wife, a housewife, as if her rights as a woman were not enough to be happy and to make others happy, as if

it were not enough to carry out her sacred mission on earth: educating her family, cultivating the tender hearts of her children making them useful citizens, laborers of intelligence and progress, with her words and acts; cultivating love in her children and the sentiments that most enhance women: virtue, modesty and humility. Girls, women someday, be tender and loving wives, able to work for the happiness of your life's partner instead of bringing about his disgrace with dreams and aspirations beyond your sphere. We concede to women, if their ability is sufficient, that they be well-read; the woman who writes, when that woman is virtuous, is always useful to society; there are women, wives and mothers, who without forgetting their responsibilities are writers and are the glory of their sex. One only has to look to Europe to see distinguished against a backdrop of light the most passionate and gentle of the poetesses of our era and the most tender and kind of wives—the beautiful Staël,³ the divine author of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, Harriet Beecher Stowe, Madame Gay, her daughter Emilia de Girardin.⁴

I will conclude this already too-long article, beseeching Argentine women writers, and those who are not, to look over the pages of Severo Catalina's *Woman*⁵ and Marco's *Angel of the House*, and we are sure that your ideas will take another turn. Above all else, read *Love* by Mr. de Michelet.⁶ Ah! Then see if you have adopted with your thought and with your pen the emancipation of women; there woman as a divine work of idealism and perfection is lover and beloved, esteemed by men and respected by them, in short she is the woman of our dreams—pure, delicate, modest woman; the woman that only the great French writer's pen dipped in glory could draw with light and beauty, with tints and perfumes of inexpressible color and perfect naturalness; look there, in that chaste and sublime poem of *Love* for the real and most beautiful type of women, true daughters, wives, and mothers, and you will find them profiled with fragrance, with a magnetic attraction that will make you exclaim—blessed be the woman under the guardianship of man. And in concluding my article I will say to you: love women in their true form, exalted in their homes, absolute queens of the hearts of men, exercising their unequaled mastery, on their immovable diamond thrones, strong, colossal in the midst of their weakness.

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**"The Emancipation of Women: To Judith"
by María Eugenia Echenique (July 2, 1876)**

With pleasant surprise, reading the columns of *La Ondina*, I find a notable article that under the name "Women" has been gallantly dedicated to me, a present of inestimable value, that confers on me a high honor and engages my hearty gratitude toward its kind author: an article in which erudition and talent are abundant, with a seductive frankness in the exposition of the arguments that captures my attention, and reveals the illustration and literary knowledge that distinguish the person who wrote it.

Regarding the frankness and precision with which the opinions about emancipation are expressed, what can I say to Judith, but that I have the misfortune of not agreeing with all of them nor with her way of thinking? I—who have always had the misfortune of being born with the predispositions and tendencies of those beings who live only on ideas and sentimentalism and who deeply feel everything; who is expending my youth studying philosophy by conviction going against, perhaps, my first inclinations, because I believe it to be more useful; who awaits the emancipation of our sex like a new redemption of women that will take them out of misery and brutalization putting them in possession of what is conceded to them by nature; who sees it as a new lever to extend the sphere of their useful knowledge and as their empowerment to widen their talents and practice their great virtues; who weeps and feels the blood boiling inside my veins when, because of the inaction and nullity in which women exist, I often see trodden underfoot the sacred principles of humanity and sociability; who loves freedom in all its grandeur and facilitation of good works in all their multiple manifestations; who suffers a strange sensation of disgust upon hearing someone calling women "weak"; who makes a profession of these ideas and sentiments—I say, I cannot come to terms with the ideas poured out by the intelligent Judith in her article "Women."

I see the emancipation of women as a logical consequence of the level of progress to which the world has arrived in the nineteenth century; as a fact that inevitably must take place because it is the expression of the great and free institutions that are expanding in the old and new worlds, and as a phenomenon that has its cause in the beginnings of the history of nature and of philosophy; I do not find anything in it that is not just and natural or that would compromise the law of progress for the good of humanity.

Every day we see men with unscrewed-on heads who have no love for order nor true affection for their families, who spend their lives on

gambling and rambling around; coldbloodedly, they leave their children on the street, because their wives, whose sphere of action is reduced only to love and suffering, do not know how to oppose forcefully the squandering nor how to stop in time the abuses from their husbands nor save in this way the interests of their children.

Emancipation protects women from this catastrophe. A woman, educated in the management of business, even if she does not make a profession of it, knows how to prevent or remedy the problem once it has occurred. She does not go through the pain of seeing her children begging for bread from door to door, because she has a thousand resources to satisfy their needs honorably. She goes to work, and thus she raises her children without the need for others' support that could lead her to corruption and to spend a miserable and humiliating life.⁷ Love can dry tears and sweeten the bitterness of life, but it cannot satisfy hunger nor cover nakedness. Love cannot be developed on a sublime and heroic level unless one is prepared to work, to put sentiment into practice.

Emancipation, conceding to women great rights, instills in them a great heart that takes them closer to the true perfection to which men can aspire here on earth. A woman who, to her physical beauty and spirituality, adds education and the ability to act for good in her vast sphere, is the ideal type imagined by Christianity, and she is going to carry out progress in this century.

I cannot understand how Mrs. Sinués de Marco could put forward the idea cited by Judith that "with science the heart becomes petrified and one lives without love . . ." That science could petrify the heart of women . . . never! I read those words, and as soon as I read them Mrs. Marco lost all the authority that as a great writer she had over me. Science, by making things known, makes us love beauty wherever it is found, and for a wife and mother, is there anything else more beautiful than her husband and child?

A woman who has studied science, making an application of it by observing her little child, wouldn't she feel all the strength of love and maternal tenderness before the moral beauties that are enclosed in the frank innocence of a baby, before that soul of an angel that is reflected in the movement of those eyes and the purity of that unblemished forehead? Wouldn't she feel it when appreciating for their just value the lovely qualities that adorn her husband? Love is an innate feeling that, though it is susceptible to small modifications due to manners and education, never suffers a radical change or complete transformation. Science, far from extinguishing love, enlivens it in all hearts where virtue, the greatest beauty of all, reigns.

So we should not fear that if South American women are emancipated they will become indifferent and lose the charms of their spirituality. That coolness that is noticeable in the emotions of North American women is natural in them: it forms a part of the undemonstrative character of the inhabitants of that country, it is not their education's fault. Emancipation has enlightened their thinking without damaging their sentiments.

With the frankness shown in her article by the author of "Women," I have manifested in turn my opinions about the emancipation of women. To continue ahead with my reflections would be interminable, thus there is only left for me to express a second time to the intelligent and kind Judith my profound thanks for the honor she has conferred on me by dedicating her lovely composition to me, and to beg her to accept my sincere friendship and an expressive handshake that I send to her from here. (Translated by Francisco Manzo Robledo)

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"The Emancipation of Women: A Word To Miss María Eugenia Echenique"
by Judith (July 23, 1876)

After reading the fine article by the author of *Letters to Elena* we truly felt pleased—first, her delicate praises, the offering of her friendship and the handshake that she sent us later—not only have satisfied us but almost made us vain. That friendship honors us, and we accept it with grateful pleasure, and we grasp effusively that hand which extends from afar,⁸ and we shake it with the vigorous pressure of one who feels and admires. We salute this Argentine author, we revere her talent, and not having a lovely thought worthy of offering to her, we beg her not to reject the only thing that we are able to offer her: the humble flower of friendship adorned with the light of her ideas and perfumed with the freshness of her intelligence. We are going to continue the course of our ideas, attempting to demonstrate the incompatibility of emancipation with motherhood.

SKETCH

To seek the emancipation of women is to seek the breakdown of all social classes. We consider the emancipation founders' idea of giving a woman a profession or office an absurdity. How would she fulfill her lawyerly duties, established in her study, hearing or puzzling out questions in order to produce lawsuits, if that woman were a mother and wife? How would she neglect her children and her house in order to establish herself as a defender of others' causes (often evil) where if it is true that one

earns a lot of money, by the same token it corrupts good intentions, risking lies and tricks (the inseparable companions of lawsuits) due to imperious necessity.

What chaos the house would be if the wife, if the mother, were to be absent from it, leaving in her place a stranger always indifferent to the thrift and care of those domestic affairs and operations that only the mistress of the house is familiar with and knows how to foresee. What would it be! But no, this is distasteful, and the mere thought of this disastrous picture offends sensible and refined women. Banish, then, emancipation—banish the incarnation of this idea that can never take effect and that, as the writer S. Marco says, “is only the dream of sick imaginations.”

He who has sufficient experience knows the indispensable duties of women, he who understands women’s motherly love, we are sure he will not raise his voice to support the idea of emancipation because he knows that an unfathomable abyss intervenes between emancipation and motherhood. Because one and the other are incompatible: women either resolve to drown the voice of their hearts, or they listen to that voice and renounce emancipation. But no! Forgive us mothers, loving wives without absurd aspirations; we are certain that you could never play this role. Women of heart cannot be emancipated, their tender instincts prevent them from it; yes, because women capable of love, who bind their hearts in indissoluble union with another heart, are incapable of even contemplating the icy thought of emancipation.

What good would it do women to be wise or learned like men? What purpose would it serve to gaze into the mysteries of science, to acquire the vast knowledge that gives wisdom to great thinkers? What purpose? None, none we repeat, because women were not born to be theologians, astronomers, geometricians, geographers, physicists, philosophers, nor even pharmacists. Women were born to be mothers; their mission is well defined, and if they do not want to pervert the laws of nature, they should not invent impossible dreams.

In our opinion, women should be educated without wasting time on scientific calculations or mathematical permutations; we think it sufficient to complete their education by studying grammar, geography, history, some arithmetic, and one or more languages. The reading of good books would complete the nourishing of their intelligence and acquisition of enlightenment, as well as that seriousness and ability to judge facts and things that the majority of girls are ignorant of. Women whose only aspirations are to fulfill their magnificent mission on earth do not need to know more; but if there were one with such rich abundance of intelligence that she could satisfy her intellect and brighten her moments of leisure

with the cultivation of literature, then indeed she should.⁹ Women are poets by nature; let them listen to the hymn of their souls, let them make verses, let them write, and if their ability is such, then they can be women of letters—but without arrogance, not neglecting for that noble inclination their sewing, their housecleaning, the home's management and economy, and above all else, never forgetting their life's partner, the affection for their children, or the adornment of themselves.

Women should not be learned because it would serve them no use at all unless they were to resign themselves to eternal celibacy, renouncing the saintly emotions of motherhood, absolutely freeing themselves from the affections of the heart, removed from the home, living only for great enterprises and far from contact with other women. Only thus do we imagine emancipated women, as strange beings, without perfect definition of sex; only thus does the idea of feminine emancipation not cause us alarm, since it would deal with exceptions, with isolated beings, almost freakish, without stripping the majority of women of their halo of debility and poetic prestige which makes them queens of creation. We are sure that there would not be a single man, not even among the emancipation propagandists, who would accept her as a life companion, as the mother of his children, as the angel of the house, since instead of tenderness would be found only a heart virgin to affection—numbers and arithmetic calculations, with more inkblots and connecting lines than a map that is, if they were not metalized like the heart of Alicia W. . . , the perfect model of an emancipated woman depicted for us by the writer Marco in her *Angel of the House*.

The business-minded woman horrifies us without fail. Depicting that beautiful half of the human race as they depict an English merchant—undemonstrative due to selfishness, with her big book of accounts under her arm, with her gaze fixed on numbers, pale from sleepless nights, adding and jotting down sums with an expression of suspicion, pencil behind her ear, and the most sordid greed engraved upon her face—this is to dethrone her, to snatch from her temples that crown that God placed on her to distinguish her among living beings as the most perfect of his works: a crown that he dedicated to the first mother in the cradle of the world as reward for her labours and suffering on earth.

We want to prove fully the incompatibility of emancipation and motherhood, and although we fear being tiresome we want to extend ourselves a little further. Let us imagine an emancipated mother. What would become of the family if the mother were to leave the home and go forth to negotiate bills of exchange, dealing in merchandise and other forms of business? What would become of her children without maternal care and solicitude? What a nice role it would be for the husband! Rocking

the cradle of the smallest of his children, doing the family's cooking, pouring the tea, distributing the daily budget, going to the market, dealing with the servants—things that only women are not diminished by but that place a man in a very sad condition. What would become of that poor *man*, condemned by emancipationists to make a fool of himself, if the smallest one cried from hunger? In what an embarrassing situation the unfortunate soul would be! That is exaggerated, the indignant emancipationists will reply, men would never consent to such a ridiculous role. But then who will be in charge of a home without a mother? She is out looking for business—the husband leaves for his job—who will care for the home? the servants—poor children!

What do husbands obtain with the help of their other halves? Let's see—the husband, as is logical, desires to be loved, he requests a caress from his wife, a feeling of tenderness, and she in response becomes serious, opens a fat book of accounts, and shows him the expenses of her forays and the money that they saved during the month due to her contracts and activity. The poor man is bewildered, he sees in his wife a superior being; he believes himself a dwarf by her side. But there are times that the opposite occurs; the man sees in his wife an antagonist—"She knows more than I," he says; affection becomes ice, she becomes cold and, engrossed in her calculations, she does not light the lamp of the heart that wavers, she extinguishes it. The husband turns his eyes upon the home: the children are left in others' hands, an indifferent wet nurse nurses their children—when the benefitting mother carries in her breasts the beneficial nectar of lactation and twisting even the wise laws of nature with which her woman's body is endowed, she neglects the sustenance of their child. She becomes a calculator for business, in the meantime at home she spends double; everything is done with money, even the food for their children is bought—Horror!! The husband does not work, at most he helps—but he feels cold within the walls of a home without a mother, without the loving look of a wife who illuminates everything and brings life to her surroundings.

The husband numbly distances himself from his wife. Where will he seek refuge? God only knows! Most of the time in another heart—ignorant and simple, free of vanity and with more poetry than materialism. That is the kind of woman that men love, and we are sure that (with few exceptions) they would choose the latter and flee the former with disgust.

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"The Emancipation of Women: To Judith"
by **María Eugenia Echenique (August 13, 1876)**

Voluntarily placed in the arena of discussion, I come to sustain my place with honor in the tournament to which I have pledged, feeling the sweet satisfaction experienced by she who, full of faith, feels ready for battle, and does not fear the vacillation of her opinions, deeply embedded from long ago in her heart; she who, sustaining a sacred cause, acts in good conscience and according to her creed, and whose antagonist on the field is too benign for the contingencies and tribulations that could arise in the course of the contest. I imagine that if we were to contemplate each other face to face, a smile would come to our lips.

My previous article should be understood as an introduction to the theme, to the question that we are dealing with and that I will develop in this one. Any principle that undermines the basis of our laws is considered false and absurd here in free America, because, founded from the beginning on the principles of reason and justice, they do not admit new modifications that could change or destroy them in their fundamental nature.

When emancipation was given to men, it was also given to women in recognition of the equality of rights, consistent with the principles of nature on which they are founded, that proclaim the identity of soul between men and women. Thus, Argentine women have been emancipated by law for a long time. The code of law that governs us authorizes a widow to defend her rights in court, just as an educated woman can in North America, and like her, we can manage the interests of our children, these rights being the basis for emancipation. What we lack is sufficient education and instruction to make use of them, instruction that North American women have; it is not just recently that we have proclaimed our freedom. To try to question or to oppose women's emancipation is to oppose something that is almost a fact, it is to attack our laws and destroy the Republic.

So let the debate be there, on the true point where it should be: whether or not it is proper for women to make use of those granted rights, asking as a consequence the authorization to go to the university so as to practice those rights or make them effective. And this constitutes another right and duty in woman: a duty to accept the role that our own laws bestow on her when extending the circle of her jurisdiction and which makes her responsible before the members of her family.

This, assuming that the woman is a mother. But, are all women going to marry? Are all going to be relegated to a life of inaction during their youth or while they remain single? Is it so easy for all women to look for

a stranger to defend their offended dignity, their belittled honor, their stolen interests? Don't we see every day how the laws are trodden underfoot, and the victim, being a woman, is forced to bow her head because she does not know how to defend herself, exposed to *lies* and *tricks* because she does not know the way to clarify the truth?

Far from causing the breakdown of the social classes, the emancipation of women would establish morality and justice in them; men would have a brake that would halt the "imperious need" that they have made of the "lies and tricks" of litigations, and the science of jurisprudence, so sacred and magnificent in itself but degenerated today because of abuses, would return to its splendor and true objective once women take part in the forum. Generous and abnegated by nature, women would teach men humanitarian principles and would condemn the frenzy and insults that make a battlefield out of the courtroom.

"Women either resolve to drown the voice of their hearts, or they listen to that voice and renounce emancipation." If emancipation is opposed to the tender sentiments, to *the voice of the heart*, then men who are completely emancipated and study science are not capable of love. The beautiful and tender girl who gives her heart to a doctor or to a scientist, gives it, then, to a stony man, incapable of appreciating it or responding to her; women could not love emancipated men, because where women find love, men find it too; in both burns the same heart's flame. I have seen that those who do not practice science, who do not know their duties or the rights of women, who are *ignorant*, are the ones who abandon their wives, not the ones who, concentrated on their studies and duties, barely have time to give them a caress.

Men as much as women are victims of the indifference that ignorance, not science, produces. Men are more slaves of women who abuse the prestige of their weakness and become tyrants in their home, than of the schooled and scientific women who understand their duties and are capable of something. With the former the husband has to play the role of man and woman, because she ignores everything: she is not capable of consoling nor helping her husband, she is not capable of giving tenderness, because, preoccupied with herself, she becomes demanding, despotic, and vain, and she does not know how to make a happy home. For her there are no responsibilities to carry out, only whims to satisfy. This is typical, we see it happening every day.

The ignorant woman, the one who voluntarily closes her heart to the sublime principles that provoke sweet emotions in it and elevate the mind, revealing to men the deep secrets of the All-Powerful; the woman incapable of helping her husband in great enterprises for fear of losing the *prestige of her weakness and ignorance*; the woman who only aspires to get married

and reproduce, and understands maternity as the only mission of women on earth—she can be the wife of a *savage*, because in him she can satisfy all her aspirations and hopes, following that law of nature that operates even on beasts and inanimate beings.

I would renounce and disown my sex if the mission of women were reduced only to procreation, yes, I would renounce it; but the mission of women in the world is much more grandiose and sublime, it is more than the beasts', it is the one of teaching humankind, and in order to *teach* it is necessary to *know*. A mother should know science in order to inspire in her children great deeds and noble sentiments, making them feel superior to the other objects in the universe, teaching them from the cradle to become familiar with great scenes of nature where they should go to look for God and love Him. And nothing more sublime and ideal than the scientific mother who, while her husband goes to cafes or to the political club to talk about state interests, she goes to spend some of the evening at the astronomical observatory, with her children by the hand to show them Jupiter, Venus, preparing in that way their tender hearts for the most legitimate and sublime aspirations that could occupy men's minds. This sacred mission in the scientific mother who understands emancipation—the fulfillment of which, far from causing the abandonment of the home, causes it to unite more closely—instead of causing displeasure to her husband, she will cause his happiness.

The abilities of men are not so miserable that the carrying out of one responsibility would make it impossible to carry out others. There is enough time and competence for *cooking* and *mending*, and a great soul such as that of women, equal to that of their mates, born to embrace all the beauty that exists in Creation of divine origin and end, should not be wasted all on *seeing if the plates are clean* and *rocking the cradle*. (To be continued) (Translated by Francisco Manzo Robledo.)

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"The Emancipation of Women: To Judith"
 by María Eugenia Echenique (August 27, 1876; Continuation of
 her August 13 essay)

The sciences¹⁰—sacred patrimony of humankind that, along with freedom, have civilized the world—are a fountain of riches that women should exploit for their own needs. It is there that they should go to learn about how the rules work in order to practice and interpret them in the temple of the home.

Intelligent by nature and gifted with the brilliant disposition to embrace all great things, the American woman, born in a land with a heroic past, in the most brilliant century known to human history, in which she must accomplish great ambitions and fulfil her mission as is proper in nations that have spilled their blood and drunk from the chalice of sacrifice to the last drop in honor of progress and freedom; with an immense future full of mysteries and of precipices before her eyes that have to be penetrated and surpassed, of brilliant horizons in which she is owner of her own destiny, she should examine the grand scale of the sublime book of the sciences so she will not succumb to obstacles and exalted passions: she should acquire all types of knowledge, to see all objects susceptible of teaching something and being admired. She should go all the way to the end, she should study the existence of humankind and that of the splendid universe that surrounds us. The secret of happiness is in the secret of life, and not in the servile and miserable activities given to those beings with whom nature has unfortunately been stingy in bestowing gifts, who do not believe themselves to be capable of more, who have not been born with the disposition to comprehend the sublime, and who live resigned to their ignorance and humble condition.

Without the help of the sciences one cannot know society, much less know ourselves, nor know our loving mate with whom we unite for all the acts of life and in whom we trust our secret feelings and aspirations: without the sciences, we cannot go forward on the road of accomplished perfection and true progress; otherwise, the voluble spirit of this century would be excited in vain. The help of the sciences is needed for women to open a vast field to the aspirations of the newly born American countries and give vent to so many generous passions that boil in the bosom of our virgin republics; to oppose and to confront the destructive current of refined skepticism that could develop in America; to avoid the corrupting of customs, the consequence of ignorance and of the frivolous system that reigns in our education, of profound religious indifference and the lack of means of action.

The sciences serve women, so that they, the ones who shape customs and prepare the terrain where intelligence will be cultivated, can teach the young from an early age, to see in the sciences a haven against religious skepticism when the young are assailed by absurd and fraudulent sophisms; constructing, with science, a dike to protect their minds and hearts, since today the words *innovation* and *reform*, exercising a powerful influence on the uneducated masses and youth, have given absolute freedom for everyone to think and believe as they like. That is the purpose of science for a woman. She is the one who should take care of the faith of her elders and protect, with her influence, society from impiety.

Watching like that over her children, the more reason she should watch over her husband, their author; she should aspire more for her husband's happiness than for her own, and far from delighting in humiliating him by foisting on him the frivolous occupations that she herself disdains or puts on a secondary plane because they can be done by the most ignorant servant, she would delight in seeing her husband growing in presence, and would try, with all the means within her reach, to realize his greatest aspirations.

It is impossible for an educated woman to be happy with a man who does not aspire as she does, who does not think on the same level as she; thus the first aspiration of a scientific woman would be to instill in her husband her own aspirations, making uniform their conduct and mutual opinions, and not to reduce him in his sphere by placing him in the category of her servants. Men are in the same situation. We do not conceive that a man could be happy with a woman incapable of understanding him and enjoying, like him, the pleasures that science and talent furnish. The conformity of opinions and aspirations brings the conformity of wills. *Disobedience* is not possible in the woman who is equal to her husband, since there is no room for disagreement or the exercise of power. There is no need to "exchange roles" that in essence are equal.

Yes, it is a fact, the tendency of the much-feared scientific woman is not to emancipate herself from her husband but from the activities created by society that hinder the regeneration of the feminine gender, of progress: from those activities that stop women from rising to the ideal region and to the celestial sphere; that deprive her from scrutinizing the secrets of the Omnipotent in the hidden essence of nature, denying her the privilege of extending the wings of her imagination and talent up to where men extend theirs.

The need to limit myself to answering the ideas in Judith's "Sketch" and not stray from the subject has meant that in this article I do not deal with the question of emancipation except in one aspect: women as mothers, and in relation only to the sciences. The emancipation of women as single people and in other aspects presents material for a separate article. I will not write it though, not before Judith expresses her opinions in turn. Thus, it is necessary for me to end this article here, but before ending it I want to salute Judith and make a frank confession. The natural hesitance that arises in our mind when our contender writes under a pseudonym, while our own name appears in full at the foot of our writings, makes us weigh cautiously and proceed reservedly in the expression of our ideas for fear of taking a false step, often depriving ourselves of communicating them with all the convincing energy that we are able to give when we know our contender; this is why sometimes I seem *weak* or "vacillating"

in expressing my ideas. Nonetheless, my convictions run deep and it should not be believed for a moment that my *faith* could *waver*. (Translated by Francisco Manzo Robledo.)

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“The Emancipation of Women: To Miss María Eugenia Echenique”

by Josefina Pelliza de Sagasta (Sept. 10, 1876)

The doubts you expressed put me in the situation of withdrawing my pseudonym, putting at the foot of this last article my own name, perhaps not unknown to you and to the readers of *La Ondina del Plata*. I have found your doubts very reasonable and therefore I go against my inclinations and take off my mask. You say that if we were to meet face to face, a smile would appear on our lips; well, I say to you not only would we smile but we would grasp each other’s hands, and in spite of the differences in our ideas and principles, we would seal a friendship such as those that the soul idealizes and that rarely exist due to the difficulty of finding a twin soul that understands and is understood.

The outcome that you predict from equality of rights between men and women, appreciating the identicalness of their souls, seems to me a false one, one that proves nothing more than equality of destinies on earth. Reason and sentiment, to comprehend each other, join together and compose the great human family, since if the souls of these two beings, perfect works of creation, do not possess in themselves the attraction of equality, they are not twin in aspirations and heartbeats, one of the two would cease to be considered rational. The soul of woman is entirely similar to the soul of man, yes, but it is more sensitive, more innocent, it is not characterized by the ferocious traits that so frequently exist in man; it is soft, generous, almost supplicant (if you permit me), and sympathetic in everything. That is one of the reasons why we will always deny the absolute liberty of emancipated women to the most interesting half of humanity, precisely because of that soul that you believe is identical to man’s—and that we only accord vital similiarity, unrelated to the flesh. For this reason, we will always deny women the rights that you, thinking to raise her from a prostration that does not exist for South American women, seek so they can defend themselves from the *lies* and *tricks* that always makes them victim. Now I ask, why would a woman need those rights—that will do nothing more than embitter her life that is so precious for the formation of humanity—to defend herself if, when she is a minor, her parents, tutors, or guardian will represent her and know better how to defend her rights

and protect her wealth? If she is the wife of a good husband, he will take as much interest as she herself in questions of honor or interest, and if he is bad or foolish, she can retain what the law accords her, and ask for the division of property and the authorization to administer it due to the incapacity or malfeasance of the husband.¹¹

Regarding your citation based on our civil law about how the law authorizes a widow to defend the interests of her children in court, I will tell you that to do that there is no need to know as much as those North American women scholars referred to as the prototype of wisdom, nor is there any need to frequent university lecture halls in order to know one's own interests, nor is education required for it, since, in our judgement, it is enough that a woman during her married life learn to be a widow:¹² that she know the business of her husband, that she always be current in their accounts and initiated into all his secrets—but without intervening in them more than to give her husband opportune advice or, as we said above, to know how to be a widow.

As for the ignorant and foolish woman that you deign to offer me as if she were the object of my sympathies, I esteem her as much as any piece of furniture, since in spite of being anti-emancipationist, I want women to be strong and daring in their admissible ventures, in their outbursts of heroism, in their capacity to be wife, mother, and patriot. I love the woman of strong spirit, valiant in special circumstances, at the same time that I adore, I idealize, the sensitive and delicate woman who is like a pure flower. I reject the ignorant woman, in spite of your effort to present her as my favorite ideal, and I look with compassion on the woman who becomes a tyrant, and of course she is not the type that I have drawn in my previous articles. In them I have presented the mother, not merely ambitious to marry just anyone, even a *savage (as you say)*, with the sole desire to satisfy the law of nature. No, in my sketch, I have presented her with noble and pure ambitions, focusing on her mission as wife and mother, which is the true mission of women.

Erudition frightens me! One suffers so when one knows the truths that the sciences entail! Why unlock those secrets buried in the depths of bitter nothingness! Philosophy, chemistry—they do nothing more than dishearten the human spirit, uprooting beliefs and in their place sowing doubts that are not felt by those who know nothing; philosophy destroys for us hopes that we thought immortal, leaving tracks of a bitter and painful skepticism. Blessed is the one who does not know, who does not understand, principles other than those that merciful maternal faith teaches us! You say that a woman “should go all the way to the end, she should study the existence of humankind and that of the splendid universe that surrounds us.” And I say to you, that women should never, ever

try to raise the veil that covers the mystery of creation that, like a cloak of mourning, hides in its folds the nothingness of existence—thus is the miserable life of man, pride and vanity while he breathes, and then ashes and dust amidst the dust of the earth.

Your idea of inculcating in children the love of the sublime and the magnificent through scenes of nature is, I think, worthy of a superior mother, given that it awakens in the child interest in beauty and admiration for the perfect work of the great architect of the universe; but just as I accept this lovely idea, I reject your passing fancy that the mother should take her children to the astronomical observatory¹³ to show them Jupiter and Venus. How would the children benefit from such knowledge? What advantages would the *scientific* mother obtain from her astronomical observations when even scholars themselves find them obscure in spite of their profound studies? Neither the mother nor the child would benefit in the least, and they would find only doubts and mysteries that later, when reflexion reaches its apogee of maturity and profound sensibility, shatter faith and hope after sustaining in body and soul a life-and-death struggle about fundamental beliefs—after shaking all principles and disturbing all ideas; after finally having believed in *everything* and winding up believing in *nothing*; after having been an idolator, to turn disbeliever; after having been fanatical with the inculcation of the absurd principles of religious fanaticism that was our parents' legacy, to become irreligious, atheist, without faith, without innocent beliefs, without hope of an afterlife—horror! Women should not be learned if they want to be happy—the wise man suffers, the secrets of the sciences have unfathomable abysses of painful nothingness that would wound the heart of woman and would hinder the innocence of her childish pleasures. Happy, I repeat, is the one who is ignorant, the one who does not think, she who has not fixed her gaze on the dark page of the sciences, happy when she never, like you, Miss Echenique and like myself, plunges her thought into the dark night of the past trying to unveil mysteries and uproot the shadowy secrets that confuse and torture, without becoming clear, without ever finding a solution, ending up at the same point where they began, leaving us doubt and skepticism in the soul.

I agree with education for women; moreover, I hope that the realization of that great thought will be a fact for Argentine women, and I hope it will be given to me as a worker for progress to contribute to its regenerating work with my humble word: I then agree with education but reject and renounce absolute emancipation that you and other women writers have tried to give women, thinking to liberate them from an inferiority that in truth does not exist among our compatriots.

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**"The Emancipation of Women: To the Distinguished Mrs.
Josefina Pelliza de Sagasta"
by María Eugenia Echenique (October 8, 1876)**

I am grateful for the generosity with which you have satisfied the doubts that kept me from writing with freedom and independence in our polemic, putting your own name in place of a pseudonym at the end of your article.

I find myself in the situation of fulfilling the promise that I made in my last article of dealing with the emancipation of single women and subjects other than the sciences which we have not studied yet. The aversion that you have toward the sciences as cultivated by women is profound. My sensitive and in no way egotistical heart, that wants for others everything that it wants for itself, feels deeply wounded by these words that you wrote: "Blessed is the one who does not know, who does not understand!" and "Happy is the one who is ignorant, the one who does not think, she who has not fixed her gaze on the dark page of the sciences." Ah! . . . "Happy are those," says Virgil, "whose learning has penetrated the dark motives of nature, and that, free from the disquiet that always accompanies ignorance and wonder, has demolished underfoot the frightful objects that fill men with terror." Sublime words that encompass a world of hopes and life, and that form a contrast with your bitter ones that seem the result of desperation and true skepticism, that fill our hearts with gall because they reveal an unfathomable abyss of shadows and horror.

To oppose the cultivation of the sciences by women, it is necessary to not know the history of our country—or to have forgotten the blood of enlightened people spilled in torrents on our beautiful soil by barbaric tyrants, sons of *ignorance* who, having their cradle in brute nature, lacked a mother educated in *the social sciences* that would make them understand the theories of Rivadavia which were the great aspirations of those who were slaughtered like lambs.¹⁴ To renounce the work proposed by the nation's martyrs in their bloody sacrifice, it is necessary to not know our history, to not know that the brilliant flowers that currently figure in our social theater were watered with blood, tears, and unheard-of sorrows that demand due compensation on our part, matching that generous work if we do not want to attract the curses of our heroic ancestors who have left open for us the road of glory and progress.

If the sciences and emancipation, object of our aspirations and our regenerating crusade in this century, are an evil for women; if it is not

necessary to know more than one already knows to be happy in the Argentine Republic; if the guardianship that we believe in does not exist, then what? "To contribute," you say, "to progress's regenerating work with my humble word?" What is it that you are going to build if you applaud ignorance? Are you going to teach how to be a mother and good wife? Aren't Argentine women that already? What does *progress* mean when it is negated by the abolition of thought? Here I have one of the contradictions into which you have fallen without thinking. You want to build, but you begin by destroying. You say that you look with compassion on the ignorant woman, and then you exclaim "happy is the ignorant woman and she who does not think!" You say that you love a strong woman—can she be strong without having the self-confidence acquired through knowledge and understanding?

From whatever point of view that we study emancipation, we find it in accordance with the sacred principles of religion, of society, and of progress. Visiting the outskirts of the cities and the countryside, I find the corruption of ignorant women who have no means of working, who lack the means to earn their living at the same level as their aspirations; those who let themselves be carried along by only natural emotions without having modified them through the knowledge of the human heart and its responsibilities; in them I find sorrow, disgrace, desperate tears, absolute misery—not in those others who have a book in their hands; who go out to give lessons in hygiene or to cure as physician to the sick, exercising in them the generous sentiments natural to their sex; who stand up in court to defend the rights of she who weeps in a corner of the town; I do not find that disgrace, I say, in the young single woman who has sufficient time to do all this, more than a married woman, and who makes use of her liberty or emancipation to do good works. (To be continued)

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"The Emancipation of Women (Conclusion)"
by María Eugenia Echenique (October 15, 1876)

The advantages that, from the religious point of view, emancipation offers the young spinster are within reach of even those least able to reflect and study. The luxury and increasing aspirations that rapidly develop in every nascent society that opens its eyes to the light—feeling circulate through its vigorous veins all the energy of life from advanced and ancient peoples while it lacks the necessary organs to elaborate its development—have drawn from the proletariat class in all centuries many victims of immorality and the abandonment of responsibilities. A young woman of humble

condition has ambitions, and not having the means to satisfy her aspirations lawfully and honorably, she sets out on the unlawful path, she break the ties that subject her to family and society, and there is no rein that can hold her back from the ways of error. Emancipation liberates the young woman from the prejudices that hinder the seed of activity existing in her soul and that deprive her of working in a practical way with dignity and confidence, putting into use all her rights to extend the circle of her abilities to their limits; it gives her the means to satisfy those aspirations honorably, overcoming the obstacles placed in her way to acquire understanding of the material elements of life that can be exploited at all levels of industry and knowledge. Emancipation changes the girl into a worthy and virtuous woman from the moment that she has faith in herself and understands that she can become what she aspires to be, satisfying her needs for herself; from that instant, vice ceases to seem to her an element of necessity, and she sees, as she gains understanding of them, the false shine fade from the objects that dazzle her. In this way, emancipation guards against a young woman losing her way, instilling in her the attitude that by means of work she can satisfy the exigencies of life in such a way as to bring praise to her and to distinguish her.

Emancipate the young woman, that is, let her, once and for all, like a man, have the absolute liberty to work and to forge for herself her position in society, and far from demoralizing her, it will build a wall against corruption. Often men become corrupt because they find the opportunity in women who yield to their seductions, almost always, to have someone to feed them and because they are gripped by the love of luxury. It is necessary to equalize the position between one sex and the other for morality to exist and to avoid these monstrous situations.

In this ill-tempered time of the century in which we are living, the young American woman should not remain any longer in the sphere of actions with her hands tied. She should move, throw off the yoke of the ruinous prejudices that have cut the wings of her spirit, and rise in flight to where she belongs. Young Argentines should not be relegated to inaction and ignorance while a storm rages at their shoulder. We who by the physical conditions of the soil, political traditions, and the special relations of commerce that link us to other nations are destined to always live on a volcano, feeling its rumblings every minute, exposed to the caprice of men who differ in their means of expressing opinions, in religion, in politics, in ambitions. Since we comprise a small world burdened with rude experience in which the sun of tranquility rarely shines for long, the young of the beautiful sex should possess a solid education that would serve them as shield and rampart in its invasions, that protects her in the place of honor whatever may be the events awaiting South America in the coming years.

She needs to be educated and trained beforehand in all the social recourses that useful and practical skills offer in order to distinguish truth from error and to adopt the principles that are to serve as her guidelines for conduct on the harsh road of our turbulent life, to be able to discern, through the dust raised by the ruins of the ancient social edifice, those immovable principles of sacrosanct religion that the young woman should respect because they are her own interests.

The necessity to limit myself to the narrow columns of a newspaper does not permit me to develop my ideas on the emancipation of young, single women to the degree and breadth that I would like nor to demonstrate the advantages that it encompasses from that social point of view and in the arena of progress. Nonetheless, these notes are sufficient to understand what my opinions are in this sphere. Therefore, it can be seen that I have conducted myself with the loyalty that characterizes me, not making use of rather strong words, but rather expressing in all its integrity the truth of my thought. "In the reciprocal expression of ideas is a great source of enlightenment," a wise author has said; this being so, with all my heart I thank you, distinguished friend, for the opportunity you have given me in this polemic to educate myself.

NOTES

¹ The Palouse Translation Project was a graduate seminar on translation held in 1994 at Washington State University. Its members were Antonio Cruz, Rich Davies, Jeanette Luján de Molina, Francisco Manzo Robledo, Libardo Mitchell, Juan Carlos Molina Sanjinés, Jennifer Newby, Eugenio Pacelli Villarreal, and Valentine Zimnitsky. The seminar was led by Bonnie Frederick, who also served as final editor.

² María del Pilar Sinués de Marco (1835-1893) was an influential anti-emancipationist Spanish novelist. Her novel, *El ángel del hogar* (The Angel of the House) (1859) went through numerous editions and was widely read in Latin America. The passage that Pelliza quotes is representative of Sinués's beliefs.

³ Germaine Necker, Baronne de Staël (1766-1817), French writer whose novel *Corinne* (1807) was probably the most widely read woman-authored novel in Latin America. Apparently Pelliza was unaware that Necker was not an example of marital fidelity.

⁴ Sophie Gay (1776-1852) and her daughter Delphine (not Emilia) Gay de Girardin (1804-1855) were French writers who were well known and admired in their day. The daughter was indeed considered a model of marital fidelity and felicity.

⁵ Severo Catalina del Amo (1832-1871), a Spanish writer whose *La mujer* (Woman) (1858) went through repeated editions until the 1940s. He believed that modesty was more important in women than education.

⁶ Jules Michelet (1798-1874) French historian whose works on women and love, such as *L'Amour* (Love) (1858), outsold his history of the French Revolution. *L'Amour* praises women's moral superiority, but concludes that women are unable to work outside the home due to their physical inferiority.

⁷ A reference to the specter of prostitution, which was becoming a highly debated subject. See Donna Guy's *Sex and Danger in Buenos Aires* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1991).

⁸ Echenique lived in Córdoba, while Pelliza lived in Buenos Aires.

⁹ Pelliza developed this idea further in a bitter debate in the pages of *El Album del Hogar* (November 1878-January 1879).

¹⁰ In the nineteenth century, the word "sciences" meant all aspects of the secular, empirical study of nature and society. Echenique uses the word in this sense, but she is also using it in opposition to the education that women usually received at that time: religious instruction, sewing, music, a few foreign languages—in effect, the traditional, limited education that Pelliza had advocated in her previous essay. Echenique herself was fascinated by economics, geology, and astronomy, and even predicted space travel in her *Letters to Elena*, published in 1874 in Córdoba and reprinted in *La Ondina del Plata* in 1875.

¹¹ A decade later, in her book *Conferencias*, Pelliza will angrily demand women's right to manage their own economic affairs and to have legal custody of their children, rights that were not given to Argentine women until a century later. During the years between this debate and the publication of *Conferencias*, she came to believe that women had no more rights "than a dog."

¹² Under Argentine law, unmarried women and childless widows could manage their own finances, own property, and act as their own agents in legal matters. Married women, however, were considered wards of their husbands and could do none of these things. "To learn to be a widow" was to prepare for economic and legal autonomy—someday.

¹³ It is understood that this could only happen in Córdoba. (author's note) Argentina's first observatory was built in Córdoba in 1871, and the next one available to the public was not built until 1882, in La Plata. (translators' note)

¹⁴ Echenique is referring to the reign of terror under the anti-Enlightenment dictator Juan Manuel Rosas. The women in his family, particularly his mother and wife, were vilified for complicity in his bloody program. His defeat in 1852 symbolized, for Argentines of Echenique's and Pelliza's age, the rejection of Rosas's traditional, Hispanic culture and a fervent embracing of Anglo-French positivism. Bernardino Rivadavia, president of Argentina just prior to Rosas, was a proponent of Enlightenment ideals and the founder of an important women's organization, the Sociedad de Beneficencia. Thus, Echenique's dig at Pelliza is sharper than it looks. It must have had a personal sting as well (though Echenique probably did not know it): Pelliza's family was anti-Rosista, and she herself was born under a wagon as the family was moving out of his reach.