

Contested cultural citizenship of a virtual transnational community

Structural impediments for women
to participate in the Republic of
Letters (1400–1800)¹

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Introduction

From the fifteenth century onwards, up until at least the end of the eighteenth century, scholars and scientists in Europe often used the phrase *Respublica literaria* ('Republic of Letters' or 'Commonwealth of Learning') to denote the world they inhabited: an intellectual world in which students, teachers, scholars, printers, and often patrons were tied together into huge correspondence networks, intense travelling patterns, and later on scholarly journals, constituting a pan-European multinodal social network (Bots 10–12). If there was a Republic (a state, not necessarily a republican state), there must have been Citizens. But how are we to conceptualize 'citizenship' of a virtual community such as the Republic of Letters? An access point is offered by contestations of people's rights to participate. It is then that implicitly held criteria for inclusion and exclusion can be most clearly read between the lines. Many of these criteria have already been made explicit in the literature about the Republic of Letters. This chapter does not merely aim to describe those dominant cultural patterns, but analyzes them by applying citizenship-theory. Theories of citizenship, in particular the notion of cultural citizenship, allow us to identify the structures that perpetuated dominant patterns and that made it difficult for minorities and less empowered groups to fully participate in this learned community. In his chapter, I focus on women as one such group. But before we proceed to review different notions of citizenship, it is first necessary to grasp what the Republic of Letters actually was.

The Republic of Letters as a virtual community

In many ways, the Republic of Letters was a discursive ideal. The discourse employed by early modern scholars when they mentioned the 'Republic of Letters' was one that stimulated the sharing of knowledge for a common good. They conceptualized this 'Republic' as a category that transgressed geographical boundaries. Although learned networks stretched beyond European space into

the colonized world, the silent assumption was that the Republic of Letters was confined to the 'civilized world' of Christendom. Since the learned world was in fact divided across religious, political, and linguistic fault lines, its members were forced to accept many differences in religion and politics and used Latin (no one's native language) to make the exchange of knowledge possible. The Republic of Letters has therefore often been seen as fostering 'tolerance.' The notion of 'tolerance' as constitutive for a successful process of ongoing communication of knowledge was implicit in the way in which Erasmus made the concept of the Republic of Letters popular throughout Europe: according to Erasmus, bonds of 'friendship' tied its members together, and he therefore complained about 'barbarians' who aimed to tyrannize the Republic of Learning. Those barbarians (who were Europeans, to be sure) were the ones who wanted to censure true learning and were hence enemies of free scientific and scholarly inquiry. Yet, it was only at the end of the seventeenth century that scholars came to think of 'tolerance' as a principle in the moral economy of the Republic of Letters. That principle was pragmatic rather than ethical: one had to tolerate people and opinions when these could not be improved without harming the common good, that is the development of arts and sciences (Charlier 31–64; Goldgar; Grafton).

The Republic of Letters was not only a discursive ideal, but also an experienced reality: scholars constantly appealed to the ideal of *commercium literarium* (exchange of learning) for their own benefit, and did in fact communicate books, manuscripts, notes, drawings, botanical specimens, observations, descriptions, and objects across Europe. An estimated one to two million extant letters kept in libraries and archives in primarily Europe testify to the vibrant practice of knowledge exchange (Bots and Waquet; Van Miert).

The Republic of Letters thought of itself as meritocratic: 'merit' appears to be the word most often used by early modern scholars in combination with the phrase 'Republic of Letters'. The assumption was that, regardless of birth, anyone could participate in the exchange of knowledge. In practice, this made the Republic of Letters very exclusive: only highly educated people could participate, because one had to be able to read and write in Latin (although the active use grew less important in the 18th century). Such people were usually white and male. Codes of conduct were increasingly made explicit from the second half of the seventeenth century onwards. These acted as touchstones: scholars who systematically ignored principles of reciprocity and constructive exchange ran the risk of being sidetracked. Acquiring the habitus of a proper member of the learned community was of course much easier for those who were born into families in which attendance of university was common. We do, however, find numerous examples of upward social mobility – with scholars from humble social backgrounds who managed to make a living as a scholar. The heroic story of talented men, and occasionally women, who prevailed against the social odds just through their application and commitment to study, were part and parcel of a rising industry of funeral addresses and published *Lives* of scholars. The language of meritocracy was therefore not merely an ideal.

Yet, it is a topos amongst modern historians of the Republic of Letters to play down the high-spirited ideals by pointing to the endemic polemics, gossip, and mud-slinging with which scholars were confronted through the book market or in which they took an active part themselves. Such invectives often had the aim (doomed to failure) to silence the opponent. Or, to stick to the metaphor, to contest the opponent's right to partake in the constructive 'commerce of letters' that made him or her a citizen of the Republic of Letters. But when exactly was citizenship of this community contested? There are several ways to approach this question: identifying who excluded participants or looking at the behavioral dynamics that led people to being 'exiled' from the Republic of Letters. In this chapter, I seek to identify the main structures that led to the contestation of the citizenship of women as a minority in the Republic of Letters. Why this gendered approach?

There is a case to be made for studying the position of other groups whose full participation in the Republic of Letters was contested, such as people of color, non-Christians, or people with deviant sexual orientations. When the Joseph Scaliger (1540–1609), one of the best regarded scholars of his time, complained that 'atheists, onanites and sodomites occupy the kingdom of letters; honest, chaste and learned men stand in the cold,' it was clear that Christian male heterosexuality was the norm for him, as it was for his interlocutors (Scaliger, 7: 245). From citizenship studies, however, it appears that 'gender continues to be the dominant means by which citizens are included in or excluded from the rights and obligations of citizens' (Faué 389). Moreover, citizenship theory can be used not only to better understand the dynamics of the Republic of Letters. It also shows us new ways to study the dynamics of in- and exclusion of women, since the Republic of Letters is such a unique phenomenon of a theoretically inclusive transnational community.

The Republic of Letters thus offers a rare opportunity to analyze transnational early modern cultural citizenship. The case of female citizenship of this virtual community is interesting also because the Republic of Letters declined at the end of the eighteenth century, when in the aftermath of the French Revolution citizenship was redefined so as to relegate women to the private sphere. In Europe (the space of the Republic of Letters), women had always been assigned their place in the household, but the rise of bourgeois family and the legal and political codification of citizenship raised an official barrier for women to act in the Republic (Landes). Pre-revolutionary, and more specifically, early modern citizenship is therefore different from modern citizenship. And while early modern citizenship is being studied today, a gender analysis of early modern citizenship is still wanting. More complex even is a gender analysis of early modern citizenship of a transnational virtual community.

Defining citizenship

Before we turn to the extent to which women were integrated into the Republic of Letters, we should first consider what 'citizenship' of the Republic of Letters can

mean. Modern historians sometimes style the learned members of the Republic of Letters as ‘citizens,’ thus extending the metaphor of a Republic of Letters to those who inhabited this virtual space. Early modern learned people themselves did reflect on the moral-political question of how to behave as a good subject and the ethical-religious question of how to be a good person. But however much they liked to refer to their community as a Republic of Letters, the term ‘citizen’ they used almost never, let alone with much theoretical underpinning. One rare example is the young and aspiring Swedish student Gustaf Rosenhane who in a letter to Hugo Grotius (de Groot), one of the best known-scholars in Europe at the time, inscribes himself as a ‘citizen’ into the Republic, under the tutelage of the great Grotius (Grotius 337).

Historians have reflected extensively on how scholars were supposed to behave in order to be accepted as a ‘member’ (Goldgar; Goodman; Bots; Brockliss). The precarious situation of women in the history of science and scholarship is also the object of quite a few studies focusing on female authors and scientists (Schiebinger, *The Mind*; Nativel; Waithe; Stevenson; Churchill et al.; Wyles and Hall). But historians of the Republic of Letters have had little to say on the theory of citizenship. It can do no harm therefore to turn to those historians who have written about historical citizenship, most of whom are political and social rather than intellectual historians. This is particularly instructive because ‘citizenship’ is a notoriously slippery concept.

According to Marilyn Friedman,

Citizenship is multiple and various. It can be an identity; a set of rights, privileges and duties; an elevated and exclusionary political status; a relationship between individuals and their states; a set of practices that can unify – or divide – the members of a political community; and an ideal of political agency.

(Friedman 3)

To disentangle these relations, I rely for my next paragraphs on the excellent overview of the debate on early modern citizenship, provided by Maarten Prak in his recent *Citizens without Nations*, but will also draw on views that consider the role of gender, a dimension Prak ignores.

We first have to confirm other historians’ objections that Thomas H. Marshall’s 1950 classic tripartite division of citizenship into civil, political, and social categories is reductionist in the way it ignores the role of gender and of culture (Marshall; Faue 386–387). Marshall focused on the nation state, but that is unhelpful for studying the Republic of Letters, which was transnational, not centralized, and had no legislative or executive bodies; there was no top-down enforcement. As far as scholars were under control, they were censored by their political and ecclesiastical patrons with limited jurisdictions (princes, churches), not by a body that claimed to represent the learned community. For that reason, we first of all have to exclude civil or legal definitions of citizenship: the Republic of Letters

was not an ‘officially sovereign political community’ (Smith 105). It was rather a virtual, an ‘imagined’ (but not imaginary) or at least an experienced community (Van Miert et al.).

A second way of defining citizenship is political (Smith). But since there were no ‘rights,’ the Republic of Letters could not have citizens in a political way either. Although scholars themselves, as a collection of networked individuals, participated in self-governance, no rights to guide this process were laid down, and there was again no official representative or institution to appeal to.

Rather, ‘citizenship’ of the Republic of Letters needs to be sought in a third interpretation of citizenship: the social understanding of belonging to an association of humans. Marshall interpreted this as having rights to social insurance and education. Women were in a precarious state. For they sought social insurance from their families or sometimes from charities of cities and churches. Since women were excluded from Latin grammar schools, academic gymnasia, and universities, their position in the Republic of Letters was undermined, because a Latinate education was a prerequisite to engage in learned conversation.

All these three aspects of citizenship (civil, political, and social) are regarded as essential to avoid being perceived as second-class citizens (Marshall). Yet, they apply almost exclusively to white heterosexual males and fail to explain why in practice many people who have all these rights are still marginalized (Beaman 850). This brings us to a fourth definition of citizenship: citizens can more broadly be described as adhering to ‘certain standards of proper conduct’ (Smith 106). People who contribute to the well-being of their political community are, contrary to free riders, accepted as true members. Beyond laws, ‘citizenship is based on socially agreed upon norms, practices, meanings, and identities’ (Beaman 851). This means that by the performance of certain practices one could become a citizen of the Republic of Letters: ‘citizenship practices can exist outside the rules covering formal citizenship, as the product of certain behavior’ (Prak 7). The correct behavior required social capital: skills and networks that helped scholars to choose and pursue a career path. A condition for the use of social capital is freedom: the freedom of religion, of speech, and of the press, as laid down in the First Amendment of the Constitution of the United States for example, is essential to citizenship. Likewise, in the Republic of Letters, the *libertas philosophandi* was highly regarded: the freedom to investigate the truth even if that truth was unwelcome to the State or the Church. As we saw earlier, Erasmus in his *Against the Barbarians* (1494) already complained of those who wanted to tyrannize the Republic of Letters. For every aspiring member of the Republic of Letters, liberty also included the freedom to fully develop one’s potential: that educational ideal was in fact the hallmark of the Renaissance humanism that gave birth to the Republic of Letters. Proper conduct thus existed in respect to the freedom to pursue a career by exploiting one’s intellectual and social talents. Women, of course, were less free than men to adopt this pattern of conduct: they were barred from the institutions that helped acquire those behavioral patterns, even if they qualified fully from the intellectual point of view. The successful adherence to proper

conduct can lead to a “sense of belonging” (Beaman 850). The proper conduct can be produced top-down as the result of disciplining, but it can also be negotiated in a bottom-up process. This brings us to a final dimension of citizenship.

A core idea in the theory of citizenship is the notion of collective action: ‘Citizenship . . . was created in an environment of collective action, rather than imposed from above’ (Prak 11). The Republic of Letters was indeed a bottom-up phenomenon, with no formal legal power to implement a top-down program. But that does not mean people could create the ideal behavior in complete freedom. They had to negotiate at least four social systems through which the process was channeled: the family, the market, the state, and the voluntary association.

Social systems channeling citizenship

From studies of urban and national citizenship it has become clear that the family played an important role in facilitating citizenship, and indeed, we know of plenty of ‘scholarly dynasties’ in which careers were planned and built. The Gronovius family, for instance, had three generations of professors in the United Provinces in the 17th and 18th centuries. So-called family universities run by oligarchies of professorial families were a frequent phenomenon in German territories (Baumgarten 21). Isaac Vossius (1618–1689) made part of his career by inheriting the social and intellectual capital of his father Gerardus, including his library and epistolary network. Students with as yet little accomplishments to be commended for had to rely not only on their potential (their zeal, perseverance, modesty, talent, and trustworthiness) but also on the reputation of their parents to be eligible as citizens of the Republic of Letters (Bots 118). Conversely, we regularly come across complaints by mothers and fathers about sons who misbehaved or decided to choose alternative career paths. Thus, the independent-minded Pieter de Groot (1615–1678), son of the great Grotius, insisted on training as a lawyer, against the will of his parents. When he had made himself impossible as a boarding student, his mother complained in a letter to him: ‘How much do parents suffer, which they wouldn’t if only their children were what people wished them to be’ (Reigersberch 220).

In public life, however, ‘the two most important [factors] are the market as the coordinator of economic activities, and the state as the coordinator of politics’ (Prak 12). As for the market: Joel Mokyr, in his theories about the conditions that made the Industrial Revolution possible, pointed to the Republic of Letters as a key prerequisite for the free circulation of knowledge. He in fact characterizes the Republic of Letters as a ‘market for ideas’ (Mokyr, *A Culture of Growth* 187, 190, 202). And if we speak about ideas, we should not forget that those ideas translated into money for Europe’s many printers in the highly developed print industry, with companies having dozens of employees and having to invest heavily for risky profits. The spectacular rise of the scholarly journal at the end of the seventeenth century would suggest that scholars became more dependent on an actual market economy.

The Republic of Letters was no real state, of course: there was no prince or army, there were no judges. But the State did play a role in controlling the behavior of those citizens of the Republic of Letters that happened to be its subjects: princes were seldomly acknowledged as scholars, but they could censure the press, intercept letters, and silence people who fell under their jurisdiction. Louis XV of France had his agents and spies keep detailed files about Parisian inhabitants of the *République des Lettres*, in particular those who had information detrimental to himself or members of the nobility, and he jailed philosophers who crossed his line (Darnton 145–189). But they crossed the line of French ‘subject-ship,’ rather than French or Parisian citizenship, let alone the citizenship of the Republic of Letters. The same applies for the Churches – in the plural, for it was not only the Catholic Church (Roman and in particular the Post-Tridentine Church), but also the various Protestant churches who enjoyed different grades of political backing: in 1553 the scholar and theologian John Calvin had the free-thinking polymath Michel Servet burnt at the stake, but Calvin did so as a leader of the clergy, not as a consul of the Republic of Letters.

After the market, the family, and the state, there was a fourth mechanism that coordinated actions of citizens: the voluntary association (Streeck and Schmitter). Surely, the scholars who participated in the Republic of Letters did so of their own free will, although opting out as a socialized scholar would have hardly been an option (see the following case of the learned Anna Maria van Schurman (1607–1678), who burnt most of her ships when she renounced her learning). The voluntary association, then, did require the adherence to certain patterns of conduct that were embodied and transmitted as social capital. Without these, it was difficult to come to a form of collective action. From the end of the seventeenth century onwards, the codes of how to behave as a scholar (not your regular *cortegiano* or *compleat gentleman*, although they shared much in their social dispositions) became articulated as the substance of teachings at university (Kivistö). Associating with the Republic of Letters required adopting such patterns.

The family, the market, the state, and the voluntary association were all relevant in coordinating citizens’ agency. To different extents, they also help to understand who qualified for citizenship in the Republic of Letters. There is, therefore, a case to be made to at least define the citizenship of the Republic of Letters as governed by the codes of conduct of a voluntary association of a bottom-up collective of free men who competed through a market for ideas for social and intellectual standing and hence for jobs in the services of universities, churches, and princes: *studium, sacerdotium, and regnum*.

The adherence to behavioral patterns leading to membership of a community can be labeled ‘cultural citizenship.’ Cultural citizenship ‘considers citizenship beyond its legislative status and acknowledges the relationship between culture and citizenship’ (Beaman 852). The notion of cultural citizenship is used as an analytical framework to understand why in modern societies people who have the full legal status of a citizen do not participate fully in society. They are marginalized because they are denied ‘cultural citizenship,’ that is, they do not adhere to

what is experienced as the dominant culture. Hence, cultural citizenship considers other social statuses, including gender (Beaman 854–855). Since this concept focuses on the ‘sense of belonging’ instead of on the State, we can apply it to a virtual community such as the Republic of Letters, which was never a real State in the first place.

Fulfilling the imperative of sharing knowledge was crucial for being accepted amongst the ranks of the people who made up the Republic of Letters. This culture of exchange was deemed possible because of the fundamental freedom that the Republic of Letters upheld: an exchange in a sphere of (affective and instrumental) ‘friendship,’ a *libertas philosophandi* was supposed to make the Republic of Letters into a refuge from censorship and tyranny. Censorship was condemned, knowledge had to flow, and libraries should be open to all scholars (Mokyr, “The Commons of Knowledge” 37; Goldgar 3; Grafton; Bots 55–57; Kivistö 24). It is exactly in this ideal of sharing knowledge that women were impeded by the family, the market, the State, religious authorities, and the norms of the voluntary association that was the Republic of Letters.

A women’s Republic of Letters?

It is a well-known and often repeated fact that women struggled to gain access to the world of learning. A number of conditions made it difficult for women to manifest themselves in the Republic of Letters. First, considering the State, women were barred from a formal education in Latin, whereas active knowledge of Latin was a prerequisite for participating in a debate that was largely carried out in Latin and that largely drew on Latin (and increasingly Greek) sources. Second, women had the disadvantage that their primary duty was not in the public ascertainment of learned agency, but in the roles of wife, mother, and manager of the household, roles stressed by the State and the Church and structured by the family. Taking part in arts and sciences was regarded as an inevitable distraction from these tasks (even if male scholars also had a share in running the household and looking after the children). A third obstacle was ‘scientific’: the argument that women were mentally, psychologically, and physically inferior to men and not created to carry out scholarly labor. These roles were supported by social, political, and religious arguments, familiar to any patriarchal society. The result is that the representation of women in the sources concerning the Republic of Letters is limited. Part of this is due to the structure of the archive itself, which was shaped by patriarchal concerns. Take for example the letters of the influential Huguenot scholar Isaac Casaubon (1559–1614). The posthumous edition of the correspondence of Casaubon, published in 1638, silently omits numerous references to his family life, apparently in an attempt to construct Casaubon’s posthumous identity as a more masculine and disembodied hero (Botley and Vince 65–66). There is enough evidence, however, that girls, even if they could not attend Latin grammar schools, did occasionally learn Latin when they sat at the family table shoulder to shoulder with their male siblings struggling with their homework. Girls from

well to do families sat in on the private lessons of their male siblings; that is the way in which the aforementioned scholar Anna Maria van Schurman learned her first Latin.

The constraints for women are known, but the problem today is women's visibility, rather than their agency. An estimated 14% of the astronomers in German territories between 1650 and 1710 were women, but their role has been largely written out of history, since their names were not printed on title pages and since they left the corresponding to their husbands (Schiebinger, "Women of natural" 200). Three women occupied professorial chairs at eighteenth-century universities in Italy, but there were many more women involved in observing, calculating, registering, and actual writing. Some actually published. In the period until the French Revolution, "Latin literacy actually includes far more women than have been recognized" (Churchill et al. 2). But few of them, as far as we currently know, kept a sustainable epistolary exchange going, and that was the prime pattern of conduct to gain full citizenship of the Republic of Letters.

The Republic of Letters was all about sharing, in particular through correspondence. The problem is not that women failed to share. Rather, they did the opposite: they shared without claiming ownership. With no written letters as evidence of their sharing practices, they struggled to engage in the recognizable reciprocal social relationships that structured the Republic of *litterati*. In short, women largely failed to participate in the market for ideas. This market for ideas is not merely a metaphor: the early modern book market was extremely large and competitive. But since female authorship was commercially risky, the learned production by women was often published anonymously or through male pseudonyms.

This does not mean that some women did not try to carve out a space for themselves within the Republic of Letters. Laura Cereta (1469–1499) in a letter of 1488 spoke about a *muliebris respublica*, a female republic (Cereta, *Epistolae* 195). Scholars have mistakenly taken this to be a variation of the *respublica litteraria* (Robin 11, 74). Apart from the fact that the 'Republic of Letters' was no household name yet by 1488 (we now know of only two earlier mentions on record, of 1417 and 1484, and these had not appeared in print by 1488), Cereta does not describe a contemporary networked world of learning and exchange but a catalogue of famous intelligent women, throughout the ages: a 'history' of learned women from the times of the Old Testament onwards up to Tullia Cicero and then suddenly jumping forward to her near-own time with the humanists Nicolosa Sanuti (d. 1505), Isotta Nogarola (1418–1466), and Cassandre Fedele (1465–1558). This list of famous women has been called a 'genealogy,' but Cereta does not hint at any transmission of learning from one generation to another. Carol Pal is certainly correct that this vision of a 'Republic of Women' was rooted in Christine de Pizan's *La Cité des Dames* from 1405 (which also reviews a long list of famous women, both real and fictional ones) (Pal 178–179). Thus, the idea of a 'Female Republic' actually *precedes* the 'Literary Republic' as a phrase. Yet, the concept had no further history of reception, although catalogues of famous women (including scholars) continued to appear throughout history. In fact, the

inventories of de Pizan and Cereta are contributions to the *querelle des femmes*, a centuries long discussion (which is still ongoing) running from Boccaccio's *Concerning Famous Women* (1365), via de Pizan, Henricus Cornelius Agrippa's *Declamation on the Nobility and Preeminence of the Female Sex* (1526), Lucrezia Marinella's *The Nobility and Excellence of Women* (1600), Marie Le Jar de Gournay's *Equality of Men and Women* (1622) (Gournay), Johan van Beverwijck's *On the Excellence of the Female Sex* (1639) (Beverwijck), Schurman's *Dissertation about the aptitude of women's nature for science and arts* (1641) (Schurman), Otto Sperling Jr.'s *On learned women* (unpublished, c. 1670–1710) (Sperling) and Gilles Ménage's *History of Women Philosophers* (1690) (Ménage) to Mary Astell's *A Serious Proposal to the Ladies, for the Advancement of Their True and Greatest Interest*, 2 vols. (1694 and 1697), the periodical *The Female Tatler* (1709–1710) and *The Ladies Library* (1714), as well as the anonymously published *Women not inferior to Men* (1739, presumably authored by Mary Wortley Montagu), and on to Wollstonecraft and later feminist authors (Findlen 108–109). To what extent these authors (both male and female) went beyond defending women's intellectual and social equality (or superiority) to men and argued for active participation in the *commercium literarium* of the Republic of Letters remains to be studied. But this *querelle* shows that the Republic of Letters was divided, and that female citizenship was in fact contested – the arguments against women as participants are cited at length before being demolished in the works listed earlier.

A women's Republic of Letters would mean a network of female scholars engaged in the exchanging of knowledge and acknowledged as a community by themselves. But although Cereta mentioned Cassandra Fedele as a famous scholar, she was disappointed that Fedele, indeed Europe's best-known female scholar at the end of the fifteenth century, neglected to write a response to her well-crafted letter of 1487 in which she presented herself to her colleague (Cereta, *Collected Letters* 141–144). According to Cereta, Fedele had violated the show of friendship by speaking low of Cereta's learning. Fedele ignored the trust that Cereta had offered (Cereta, *Collected Letters* 145–148). Cereta maintained intellectual contact with at least four nuns (Robin 6), but this hardly constituted a sub-network. And to be accepted as a member of the Republic of Letters, one did not want to create a minority network but participate in the dominant culture. To do so required more than being a polyglot. For a woman to be part of the scientific and scholarly discussion required active and sustained contact and the acknowledgement of such learned interaction.

There were always such women who crafted their networks through correspondences and in particular through the exchange of occasional poetry. Isotta Nogarola (1418–1466) addressed Latin letters to the best-known scholars of her time, and these letters circulated widely, soliciting praise and further contacts. But it proved a precarious business: the humanist scholars who were interested in these letters might have blamed the negligence of one of them to reply, but the burden was on Nogarola, who in the eyes of the scholars was rejected and thus humiliated. A subsequent allegation of sexual depravity was enough to force her

into religious retreat, which ‘resolved the anomaly of the learned woman in the minds of her critics’ (Parker 14).

Elisabeth Weston fared better. In exile from England, Weston ‘succeeded in publishing the only female-authored volume of neo-Latin verse known to exist’ (Hosington 222). She approached a number of scholars by sending them an edition of her Latin poems, usually not directly but through an intermediate so as to maintain an air of modesty. It forced celebrities such as Joseph Scaliger to write his only Latin letter to a woman on record (1602), praising Weston for her accomplishments. The letter is a string of compliments, admiring Weston, ‘miracle of virtues,’ for her ingenuity: it is ‘rare’ to write such good poetry at young age, and it is ‘unusual’ for a woman: it is wondrous rather than desirable. Scaliger praises Westons’ *linguarum commercium* (her linguistic fluency), ‘which seems not to be acquired, but innate’; her ‘virtue’ makes Scaliger wish for her friendship (Scaliger, 4: 451–452). Scaliger underplays Weston’s agency by suggesting she is a miracle of nature (the word ‘admiration’ appears four times within the space of four lines) who never worked for her talents. He also makes clear that it was a male scholar, in fact the nominal editor of the edition of Weston’s Latin poetry, who made him aware of Weston’s existence. Weston thus outsourced her advertising to a male colleague, obfuscating her own agency. In her answer, she assures that Scaliger was exaggerating:

I revere your judgement with a grateful mind, but you know the customs and the time we are living in. I strive, however, to do whatever is in my power to pursue, increase and maintain with piety, virtue and industry what you and your peers grant me.

(Scaliger, 4: 498)

With these obligatory phrases, the exchange seems to have ended. It is the only letter from Scaliger to a woman that has survived; there are 20 more letters, in French, in his correspondence of 1669 items that were addressed to him *by* women. Weston was not the only female poet to dedicate a Latin poem to Scaliger: in 1606, Scaliger compliments his correspondent Marquard Freher (1565–1614) with the poetical talent of his wife Margaretha Boxias (or ‘Bockin’) von Gutmannsdorff (fl. 1606), who had written a poem about her husband’s thirst for Scaliger’s books. Scaliger responded by a humorous poem in which he praises Margaretha and Marquard and devaluates his own importance (Scaliger, 6: 465–366). While Weston used the book market to build her career, she and her male correspondents played down her own agency: she voluntarily wanted to associate herself with the Republic of Letters, but it appeared that she was not *too* willing to do so.

Women routinely, like Weston, marshalled the help of male peers to pave the way for access to the epistolary networks and thus to citizenship of the Republic of Letters. Anna Maria van Schurman found *pères d’alliance*, for example in the doyen of Utrecht University, the professor of theology Gisbertus Voetius,

whose public lectures she famously attended from behind a curtain in a niche of the lecture hall, making her the first female university student in Europe. She also sought out the protection of another extremely authoritative theologian, who was connected to the princely court of the stadholder in The Hague, André Rivet. Schurman made sure to dismiss herself from societal obligations by not marrying – a resolution she ascribed not to herself but to a promise she made to her own father on his deathbed. Despite this deferment of responsibility for her unmarried state, Schurman did assert herself. She was looked up to by learned women as an example: they sought contact with her and followed her strategy of gaining male intellectual protégés. She maintained a lifelong friendship with philosopher Elizabeth of the Palts, acted as a patroness to Marie Moulin, gained the respect of the older Marie de Gournay (the publisher of Montaigne's *Essays*), and struck up correspondences with the philosophers Dorothy Moore and Lady Ranelagh and with the Hebraist Bathsua Makin. These female networks and the fact that they were imbedded into the wider Republic of Letters bely the idea that the Republic of Letters was an exclusively male affair (Pal). But Schurman spectacularly went her own way when she decided to break with the reformed orthodoxy she had endeared and decided to support the religious deviant Jean de Labadie, a Catholic turned Protestant turned Prophet. It is said she 'followed' Labadie, but she actually actively helped Labadie establish himself with the support of her own female network. This led to her exclusion from the Republic of Letters and to a 'smear campaign' (Van Beek, *The First Female* 222). The effects are noticeable in her surviving correspondence: from the 235 dated letters, 88% is from before the break, even if she lived another eight years (customarily the last decade in scholars' lives are most productive in terms of correspondence) (Sint Nicolaas). Maybe she continued to write many letters, but then they were not kept any longer, signifying posterity's bias against deviant behaviour. What has survived suggests that instead of corresponding with highly regarded citizens in the Republic of Letters she now sought out contact with lesser known figures. The spiritual leader Antoinette de Bourignon (1616–1680) fully exploited the dynamics of the epistolary genre by publishing her insights in the form of letters – most of which are actually likely to be not fictitious but really part of an epistolary conversation. The letters allowed her to expose her personality (essential for a mystical propheticess) and to rephrase her thoughts in different ways to different interlocutors in a direct way (Baar 216–224). No correspondence of the classical scholar Anne Dacier (1647–1720) has been published, but her contribution to scholarship was acknowledged by important male peers such as Gilles Ménage, Pierre-Daniel Huet, and later Voltaire (Wyles 66–67).

The rise of the scholarly and scientific journal in the second half of the 17th century ensured that women also gained access to learned knowledge, in particular since these journals often appeared in the vernacular. Anne-Marguerite Petit, Madame Dunoyer (1663–1719), ran a journal *Quintessence des Nouvelles historiques, critiques, politiques, morales et galantes* from 1711 to 1719 that appeared

no less frequently than twice a week. Marie Leprince de Beaumont (1711–1780) likewise reached an international audience by touching on gender-related issues (Bots 183).

Many learned women are only starting to be brought to light in the twenty first century. A string of scholars who all were styled ‘a second Schurman’ by their contemporaries has now been identified: Francina Christina Roscam (fl. 1730), Hyleke Gockinga (1723–1793), Anna Elisabeth Buma (1750–1825), Elizabeth Carter (1717–1806), and Jacoba (Coosje) Busken (1759–1841) (Capitein xv; Everard 87; Van Beek, “Een vrouwenrepubliek”; Van Beek “Huet”). Schurman was for female scholars what Erasmus was for male scholars: the benchmark for excellence. But a second Erasmus fully partook in the learned economy of the Republic of Letters – most of the time, a ‘second Schurman’ did not. Their citizenship of learned women was successfully contested. Being erudite was not enough to be accepted as a citizen of the Republic of Letters: one needed, like Schurman, regular learned interaction. Roscam and Buma left no correspondences at all, and they were never acknowledged in the learned world.

Gockinga, a woman from a family of high social standing and author of a hefty commentary on Genesis, wrote at least a dozen letters to the professor of theology Paullus Chevalier (1722–1796), rector of Groningen University. Chevallier was closely tied into the Republic of Letters: he exchanged letters with hundreds of people (there are over 600 letters unpublished letters written by him) (CEN). Gockinga apparently sought him out as a *père d’alliance*, marshalling through him the support of the theological faculty of the University of Groningen for the approbation of her books. As a result, her work was taken seriously by scholarly journals that published positive reviews of her commentaries and translations. The polyglot Buma, on the other hand, evidently felt that her citizenship of the Republic of Letters was contested: she led a sad and secluded life in Leeuwarden, seeking relief in composing poems and keeping a chronical of cultural, political, and scientific events. To a friend she is recorded to have said ‘Oh, don’t mention that I read all those languages, because a learned woman is shunned. The women usually fear her and the men, even the learned, don’t bear well that a woman has more than ordinary knowledge’ (Van Beek, “Anna Elisabeth Buma” 29).

Another example of a learned woman whose position was precarious, despite her important contributions to the history of scholarship, was the English scholar Elizabeth Elstob (1683–1756). One of the founding parents of the study of Anglo-Saxon, she earned her money as small-time school teacher. She had been introduced to a group of scholars known as the ‘Oxford Saxonists’ by her brother William, who studied in Oxford. Although she was acquainted with Mary Astell and her circle of learned women, she proved unable to survive economically after the death of her brother and went into hiding to escape her creditors. She took on a new name and barely made it as a school teacher, until she finally landed a job as a governess in an aristocratic family, and she struck up a correspondence with George Ballard. But she remained ‘on the margins of scholarship’ (Hollis).

Exemplary is the letter that Mary Wortley Montague addressed around 1742 to the long-dead Schurman (in a humanist fashion like Petrarch's fictitious letters to authors from Roman antiquity). In it, Montague expressed the wish to be admitted into Schurman's coterie of women (Pal xiv).

Women in positions of power fared better. The German Henriette Catherina Von Gersdorf-von Friesen (1648–1726) or Frisius, read the Bible in Hebrew and Greek, corresponded with learned men, and composed Latin poems (Langer; Von Rantzau 2). A patron of leaders of the Lutheran pietist movement, she was also a talented painter and musician and engaged in a critical epistolary conversation with Leibniz (Zinzendorf xiii). It was to her and to the learned Margarethe Sibylla Lösser that the German student of philosophy Johannes Sauerbrei at the University of Leipzig in 1671 dedicated his disputation *About the erudition of women (part 1)*. In theses of this disputation, he counters, step by step, the argument that nature and history demonstrate the inferiority of women's intellectual capacities. In his prologue he cites with approval the opinion of Erycius Puteanus, Flanders' most popular seventeenth-century professor, that 'it is human and divine law that women are ascribed to the Republic of Letters, are trained in the cultivation of the finest arts, and are not excluded from gaining fame and immortality' (Sauerbrei A4^r). Sauerbrei's two-part *Diatribes* inscribes itself in the *querelle des femmes*, cataloguing famous women but also arguing from all sorts of perspectives for intellectual equality of men and women. The interesting aspect is that he fights the contestation of women's citizenship of the Republic of Letters explicitly, and that he does so in an educational context: as a student defending theses, not as an outsider with a programme demanding access.

Successful in winning acknowledgement was also Anne Dacier-Lefèvre. Although we have no published correspondence of her, her family connections gave her a good start: she was the daughter of a well-connected classical scholar and first married a publisher and then another classical scholar (Bury). Although stories about illegitimate relations were not from the air once she had made her name through numerous editions and translations of classical texts, she was the dedicatee of Gilles Ménage's catalogue of women philosophers from antiquity. Incidentally, Schurman herself is also mentioned in Ménage's work, where he discusses the famous philosopher Hypatia (d. 415) and corrects the polymath Claudius Salmasius, who in 1645 praised Schurman calling her 'our Hippia' (Ménage 63; Salmasius b6^v).

In short, citizenship for women in the Republic of Letters remained precarious. A counter-Republic of Letters for women never took shape, at least not as an actor's category. Women very often sought the patronage of male peers. Male early career scholars did the same of course, but they outgrew such strategic alliances once they had established themselves. Women who maintained themselves in the Republic of Letters were either of noble descent, such as Gersdorff-von Friesen, or they were single or without children. Only very occasionally did the daughter of an established classical scholar like Anne Dacier, born Lefèvre, carve out a reputation of her own for her scholarly work.

Conclusions

If citizenship is coordinated by the family, the market, the state, and the voluntary association, it should be concluded that the family heavily impacted women's citizenship: it was Schurman's relation with her father (he made her promise not to marry), that fulfilled one condition for her to partake in the scholarly economy of the Republic of Letters. Cassandra Fedele's success as a scholar diminished after she married. It was her elevated social position that allowed the Palatine princess Elisabeth of Bohemia to engage in long term epistolary contacts. Henriette Catharina von Gerdsdorff-von Friesen was the daughter of a social climber who gained the noble title of *Freiherr* in 1653 and who resided at a large estate where she patronized leading pietists (Langer 47). Anne Dacier was the daughter of a well connected classical scholar, and first married a published and then another classical scholar (Bury). In the case of women, family appears to have had much more impact than in the case of men on being accepted as citizen of the Republic of Letters.

The market likewise worked against women: books by women or defenses of female qualities were often printed only anonymously or by little known publishers, as is the case with Gockinga's biblical commentary, today available only in four copies (one in Groningen, where she lived herself, one in the Hague, and two in the United States). Instead of the State, we should consider the Church as a power controlling women's citizenship of the Republic of Letters. It is no coincidence that women, from Schurman to Gockinga, targeted religious leaders as *pères d'alliance*: the best protector a woman could have was an authority on proper Christian conduct, or a princess. Dacier converted, together with her husband, to Catholicism in 1685, a month before the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes, apparently to prevent jeopardising the continuity of their philological activities. The example of Weston, who used a male proxy to contact Scaliger, indicates that women had fewer opportunities to strike up a line of contact than men. When women participated in scholarly debate, their sex was always an issue that needed to be addressed. This asymmetry (masculinity was never in need of defense) means that women's citizenship of the Republic of Letters remained contested. Nevertheless, throughout the history of this virtual community, they permanently managed to have themselves represented.

In short, acceptance of citizenship was not predicated solely on being a polyglot, on being able to read and publish in Latin, and on publishing learned books. It was as much conditional on sustained learned interaction and exchange, through writing letters or teaching at an academic institute. Even if women adhered to required patterns of conduct such as engaging in the economy of occasional poetry, they still struggled to gain social recognition as a scholar. For women, the essential practice of *commercium literarium* was restricted through the family, the market, the State, the Church, and the social rejection of female scholarly agency. That agency was obscured due to the masculinization of the type of authorship that was accepted in the Republic of Letters. Female authorship was also made

invisible because of the marginalization of alternative types of authorship, such as ‘writing by women cited in male-authored texts; anonymous voices in . . . marginalia, and mortuary rolls; and, perhaps most complex of all, women who collaborated with scribes’ (Churchill et al. 3). The Republic of Letters was structured by asserting authorship through self-presentation, in particular through letter writing (Van Houdt et al.). The Latinate culture of the West raised ‘barriers that restricted women’s full participation in Latin culture – prohibitions against receiving a formal education, teaching outside the home or convent, and speaking or preaching in public,’ which women had to circumvent in one way or the other (Churchill et al., 3). One option was to write letters and sometimes to construct female sub-networks within the Republic of Letters – ‘provinces’ so to say, which the historian with hindsight is tempted to label as a ‘Women’s Republic of Letters’ – such as the networks in which Anna Maria van Schurman, Elisabeth of Bohemia, and Christina of Sweden played a central role. However, the egalitarian and meritocratic self-image of the Republic of Letters was an ideal that only men could seek to realize with some hope of success. ‘Traditional conceptions of citizenship are based on a common culture that makes some citizens more or less accepted than others. By culture, I am referring to the norms, values, practices, and behaviors that are seen as normative’ (Beaman 852). Beyond the State, in the Republic of Letters, such normative patterns were in place, and we have demonstrated how they were structured through the family, the market, and the State, and that voluntary association with the Republic of Letters confirmed such normative patterns. This rendered a woman’s career in learning different and caused women’s citizenship of the Republic of Letters to be contested.

Note

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