

Contents

| | |
|---|------|
| Acknowledgments | xvii |
| Introduction | |
| The Other Voice | 1 |
| Who Was Jacques Du Bosc? | 4 |
| <i>L'Honnête femme: The Respectable Woman in Society</i> | 5 |
| <i>New Collection of Letters and Responses</i> | |
| <i>by Contemporary Women</i> | 25 |
| The Afterlife of <i>L'Honnête femme: The Respectable</i> | |
| <i>Woman in Society</i> and the <i>New Collection of</i> | |
| <i>Letters and Responses by Contemporary Women</i> | 34 |
| Note on the Translation | 37 |
| | |
| <i>L'Honnête femme: The Respectable Woman in Society.</i> | |
| Selected Essays (1632–36) | |
| Part One | |
| To Madame de Combalet (1632) | 41 |
| To the Reader (1632) | 42 |
| To Madame la Duchesse d'Aiguillon (1633) | 44 |
| To Women (1658) | 45 |
| On Reading and a Few Remarks about How to Read | |
| this Book | 47 |
| On Conversation | 63 |
| On Having a Cheerful and a Melancholic Temperament | 73 |
| On Chastity and Complaisance | 83 |
| On Courage | 90 |
| On Learned Women | 96 |
| On Friendship, Love due to Inclination, and Love due | |
| to Choice | 101 |
| Part Two | |
| To Madame de Combalet (1634) | 112 |
| Notice (1634) | 114 |
| On Having a Complaisant Temperament | 114 |

| | |
|--|-----|
| On Birth and Education | 134 |
| On Marriage and Celibacy | 150 |
| On the Contempt for and Fear of Death | 159 |
| Part Three | |
| To Her Royal Highness Madame Christine of France, Princes of Piedmont, Duchess of Savoy, and Queen of Cyprus (1636) | 163 |
| Notice (1636) | 166 |
| On the True Science of an <i>Honnête femme</i> | 169 |
| <i>New Collection of Letters and Responses from Contemporary Women (1635)</i> | |
| To Madame de Pisieux (1635) | 195 |
| From the Bookseller to Women (1642) | 196 |
| Notice to the Reader of this Collection (1642) | 196 |
| Letter 1. She begs her to return to Paris and tries to convince her to dislike the country. | 198 |
| Response 1. She answers that, not only has she lost the con- versation of her women friends, but also she is per- secuted by that of the country folk; and that she will never make a vow of solitude while she can hope for the honor of their company. | 199 |
| Letter 2. She tells her about a certain very stupid man, who is only happy because he is ignorant. | 201 |
| Response 2. She wants to prove that those who have the least intelligence have the fewest worries. | 202 |
| Letter 3. She complains that men sometimes love women who deserve it the least and that ugly women are often more fortunate than beautiful women. | 204 |
| Response 3. She argues that this marriage will be happier than one might think, and sends her friend news simi- lar to that which she had received from her. | 205 |
| Letter 4. She has been ridiculed because she had said, "I love you" to a woman of higher rank than herself. In this letter, she wants to prove that this way of speaking is appropriate. | 207 |

| | |
|---|-----|
| Response 4. She demonstrates that we must not say to those who are of higher rank than ourselves that we love them, but that we honor them. | 208 |
| Letter 5. She reveals that she fears displeasing her friend and says that she is afraid of being ungrateful if she writes to her rarely, or of being importunate if she writes often. | 211 |
| Response 5. She replies to her that she is wrong to fear displeasing her, whether she writes or does not write. | 212 |
| Letter 6. She acknowledges that it is sufficient to suffer her letters, without doing her the honor of desiring them. | 213 |
| Response 6. She assures her that she could not receive letters from her too often. | 214 |
| Letter 7. She says that provincial society is intolerable to her and that she fears less the danger of its contempt than that of its importunity. | 214 |
| Response 7. She counsels her to restrain herself a little to suffer the least agreeable company and not to betray her disdain for them lest she be disdained in return. | 216 |
| Letter 8. She pities her to be in the turmoil of Paris; she prefers the diversions of the country to those of the court. | 217 |
| Response 8. She replies that the diversions of the country are not more solid but more vulgar, and that they are not more innocent but more uncivilized. | 218 |
| Letter 9. She complains about the inconstancy of a certain man and says that it is common to those of his sex. | 219 |
| Response 9. She shows that inconstancy is no more natural to men than to women and scolds her for being so gullible. | 220 |
| Letter 10. She tells her what the common people believe about freethinkers. | 222 |
| Response 10. She defends freethinkers, provided they are not impious. | 224 |
| Letter 11. She rejoices in their reconciliation and freely confesses the pain she endured during their estrangement. | 228 |
| Response 11. She shows her how wrong she was to be upset based on false reports and advises her not to believe others so easily anymore. | 229 |

| | |
|---|-----|
| Letter 12. She demonstrates that people are wrong to blame women who study and write. | 231 |
| Response 12. She expresses her feelings against learned women. | 232 |
| Letter 13. She admits that the gentleman that was recommended to her deserves the title of good friend and promises to assist him in his affairs. | 234 |
| Response 13. She responds to her that even if the favor requested of her does not succeed, she will always be obliged to her for the effort she made. | 235 |
| Letter 14. She says that the greatest nobles consider themselves fortunate to carry her letters because of the woman who receives them. | 236 |
| Response 14. She says that even if great nobles bring her letters, it is because of the woman who sends them and not because of the one who receives them. | 237 |
| Letter 15. She tells her that one of her friends wants to become a nun, and that she is resolved to follow her. | 238 |
| Response 15. She replies that this news surprises her much less than it delights her and that she wants to join these two women who are leaving society for the convent. | 240 |
| Letter 16. She complains of the ignorance of people in the country and says that they do not know how to judge good books. | 241 |
| Response 16. She replies that even in Paris there are not many people who judge good books soundly, and praises the author of the one that she had sent. | 242 |
| Letter 17. She thanks her for her approval and laments that her letters are too short. | 244 |
| Letter 18. She assures her that she has always been melancholy since her departure, and that she will not be happy until her return. | 244 |
| Response 18. She thanks her for her praise and thinking of her; she wishes her even less happiness than what she found in the provinces, so that she may come find it in Paris. | 245 |

- Letter 19. She laments not having received news from her as often as she would have wished, and that all her audacity in asking for it comes from her affection for her. 247
- Response 19. She responds that she was wrong to call her miserly with letters, since in order to serve her, she would willingly give her blood and her life. 248
- Letter 20. She calls her her goddess; she asks her to penetrate deep into her heart to see there the affection that she cannot express. 249
- Response 20. She says she possesses more love than knowledge; and, after seeing the effect her friendship has on her, she is wrong to express it in words. 249
- Letter 21. She has misgivings about writing her, fearing that if her letters please her, she will be less anxious to see her again. 250
- Response 21. She responds that the letters she receives increase her joy without lessening her desire to see her. 251
- Letter 22. She tells her that nothing can keep her from writing her, not even fever, no matter how severe her illness. 252
- Response 22. She fears that for having gained a slight satisfaction, she will lose a greater one; and that having forced herself to write, she made her illness worse. 252
- Letter 23. She recommends the cause of one of her friends to him. 253
- Letter 24. She writes that her sadness is extreme during her absence. 254
- Response 24. She answers that she is not worthy enough to cause the joy that one feels, nor the sadness when the joy leaves. 254
- Letter 25. She wishes to enter into religion and asks her friend to help her do so. 255
- Response 25. She entreats her to call upon her for assistance more confidently; she approves of her plan to enter into religion and offers her help. 256
- Letter 26. She asks her to believe that if she does not write, it is for lack of opportunity and not lack of desire. 257

- Response 26. She answers that it is easy to wish for the honor of being in her thoughts, since she possesses the honor of being in her affections, and that she can count on her friendship no matter what. 258
- Letter 27. She laments her absence; she dares not hope for her news; she cannot remember her without regret nor forget her without ingratitude. 259
- Response 27. She responds that if her friend does not have enough confidence in her, she does not have an honest opinion of her friendship; that is, she believes her friend lacks the ability to serve her and the merit to be worthy of her choice. 260
- Letter 28. She promises to tell everyone about the excellence of her courteousness. 261
- Response 28. She responds that instead of providing deeds, she can only offer good intentions and wishes. 262
- Letter 29. She consoles her on the death of M. and explains that tears are useless for the deceased and dangerous for the living. 262
- Letter 30. She rejoices in the news of her return and expresses no less affection for her than even for her own sister. 264
- Response 30. She reassures her that she remembers her and will return. 265
- Letter 31. She expresses the opinion that the court displeases her, and that she cannot imagine what people find agreeable about it. 266
- Response 31. She answers that the aversion she has for the court is blind; and that all she needs to do is conquer her prejudice, so that she can find amusement there as others do. 268
- Letter 32. She wishes her friend were rich, and tells her that she is wealthy in possessions given by nature, even if she is poor in those given by fortune. 269
- Response 32. She admits that she is not offended that her friend wishes her more wealth than she has. 270
- Letter 33. She begs to be introduced to a witty lady by her friend. 272

| | |
|---|-----|
| Response 33. She says that both her friends will thank her for introducing them to each other; and demonstrates afterwards that she is genuine, as one should be. | 273 |
| Letter 34. She rejoices that she is not forgotten but fears that her many letters are importunate. | 274 |
| Response 34. She reassures her that her letters will never be importunate and expresses disappointment that she did not receive all of her letters. | 275 |
| Letter 35. She requests that she assist one of her friends with some business. | 276 |
| Letter 36. She compliments her on the praise she had received. | 276 |
| Letter 37. She confesses her fear of thunder and expresses her regret that her friend is not there. | 277 |
| Letter 38. She complains of the deceitfulness of the woman to whom she is writing. | 278 |
| Letter 39. She asks a foreign lady to assist one of her friends who is leaving the kingdom. | 279 |
| Letter 40. She begs her to help the person who is delivering her letter, if he is in need. | 280 |
| Letter 41. She writes to an abbess to recommend her daughter who has entered the convent. | 280 |
| Letter 42. She implores her to continue her friendship for her. | 281 |
| Letter 43. She writes her about the absence of her husband and the retreat to a cloister of one of her children. | 282 |
| Letter 44. She expresses her displeasure because there is almost no hope of seeing her again, and she would prefer to speak rather than write to her. | 283 |
| Letter 45. She expresses her aversion for compliments and makes new offers to serve her. | 284 |
| Letter 46. She complains that she has not received her letters; and expresses her fear that she is no longer in her good graces. | 285 |
| Letter 47. She complains that her friend has forgotten her, and assures her friend that she would think of her, even if she told her not to. | 286 |

| | |
|---|-----|
| Letter 48. She thanks her for her approval, and says that if she had more merit, she would have fewer friends, as well as fewer equals, in the countryside. | 287 |
| Letter 49. She says that if she praises her, it is without flattery. | 288 |
| Letter 50. She accuses him of silence and complains that no one knows where he is to write to him. | 289 |
| Letter 51. She complains of the inconstancy of a lady who had at first expressed an extraordinary inclination for her and abandoned her soon afterwards. | 290 |
| Letter 52. She writes that she had assisted with a certain gentleman's affairs even before he had been recommended to her, and that his merit alone had obliged her to do so. | 291 |
| Letter 53. She praises her manner of writing and condemns that of many others who do not possess a uniform style, and who only know a small number of studied <i>bons mots</i> , but that is all. | 292 |
| Letter 54. She says that her letters serve as models for writing, and that she wished she were wittier so that she could better imitate her. | 293 |
| Letter 55. She says that her letters serve as an antidote to her persecution by certain men whose nobility is doubtful and who importune her, and she promises to see her soon. | 294 |
| Letter 56. She consoles her on the death of one of her relatives. | 295 |
| Letter 57. She scolds her for being angry when she is informed of the deceit of those who pretend to love her, but speak ill of her. | 296 |
| Letter 58. She says that his inconstancy does not anger her, nor is she hurt by it. | 298 |
| Letter 59. She tells him that she is incapable of loving him and that she does not want to lose her freedom. | 298 |
| Letter 60. She accuses her of having thought well of a gentleman who was unworthy. | 299 |
| Letter 61. She mocks his infidelity and insists on imitating it. | 300 |
| Letter 62. She informs her of the illness of her admirer and begs her to save him. | 301 |
| Letter 63. She consoles her on the death of one of her relatives. | 302 |

| | |
|---|-----|
| Letter 64. She mocks his plan to offend her and declares her indifference to him. | 302 |
| Letter 65. She converses with her about the fact her wealth comes not from fortune but from nature: she pities and praises her. | 303 |
| Appendix: Complete Tables of Contents of Selected Editions of <i>L'Honnête femme</i> | 305 |
| Bibliography | 311 |
| Index | 323 |