

# Introduction

## *Women and the Enlightened Campaigns for Improvement*

At a time when Rousseauian ideas about women's natural domesticity were in vogue, enlightened politicians and high-ranking women in Spain debated the right of women to join one of the country's main scientific and political institutions: the Real Sociedad Económica Matritense de Amigos del País, or the Royal Madrid Economic Society of Friends of the Country (hereafter Madrid Economic Society).<sup>1</sup> Following passionate debates, women were allowed to set up a female branch of the society. On October 5, 1787, the Duchess of Benavente and nine distinguished gentlewomen solemnly inaugurated the Junta de Damas de Honor y Mérito—the Committee of Ladies of Honor and Merit. From then onward, the women would meet weekly in the Madrid City Hall, keeping to a tight agenda. Within ten years, the Junta had set up a network of over sixty members extending from Tenerife to Asturias and from Austria to Cuba.<sup>2</sup>

This book tells the unknown history of how the Duchess of Benavente, her peers in the Junta, and other high-ranking women actively participated in the new political configuration of the Spanish state, creating, applying, and disseminating “useful knowledge” to improve the conditions of other citizens. Reshaping ideas of feminine erudition and learning as instrumental to the improvement of the country, their vision spread beyond the capital

city, fostering other local female societies and inspiring other gentlewomen who sought to have an active role in their social communities.

The Madrid Economic Society was one of nearly five hundred patriotic societies that mushroomed in Europe and the Americas from the 1730s onward, founded on the idea that a better stewardship of natural and social resources could eventually lead to the national improvement—to “public happiness,” in the wording of the time. Knowledge, social order, morals, and material culture converged in the activities of the economic societies.<sup>3</sup> Depending on the region, these organizations could be more focused on agronomy, such as happened in the provincial societies of France and Spain; on mineralogy, as it occurred in the German lands and Scandinavia; or, in other places, on the textile industry, fisheries, and timber management.<sup>4</sup> Their members believed that making and disseminating “useful knowledge”—an elastic term that included anything from agriculture experiments to the meticulous observation of nature—would yield better countries and better citizens.<sup>5</sup> They conducted field trials, published journals, commissioned translations of practical manuals, organized prize contests to encourage technical developments, and actively corresponded with other societies. At the same time, within this intermingling of science, morals, and social order, they investigated how to profit from by-products (animal waste for fertilizing land, kitchen ashes and burnt oils for making soap, animal bones for cooking gelatin); decided the fate of communal pastures; set up schools for learning trades and institutions for poor people to be disciplined by labor; and funded orphanages and foundling houses to augment the work force.<sup>6</sup> Reflecting the scope of their aspirations, they called themselves improvers and friends of the country. Typically, they belonged to the ruling classes (the landed gentry, aristocrats, merchants and business men, clergymen, the military, and civil servants) but sometimes also gathered reputed craftsmen and yeomen. However, they included women only occasionally, and we do not know of female branches of economic societies before the Junta de Damas.

This book turns to the outlying case of the Junta de Damas to investigate how women during the Age of Enlightenment negotiated a new political role through rearticulating contemporaneous ideas about femininity in this context of social improvement. Political historians such as Linda Colley have shown how women appropriated Rousseauian ideas about a distinctive feminine nature, and of motherhood as women’s primordial social role, as a means to intervene in public spaces. Moreover, they took advantage of

Rousseau's new moral foundations of politics to legitimize their new civic roles, a subversion evident in late eighteenth-century female activism and feminist discourses.<sup>7</sup> Thus, according to Colley, British female activism during the Napoleonic Wars was socially accepted because it was grounded on the "female virtues of charity, nurture, and needlework."<sup>8</sup> In a similar vein, this book argues that in some enlightened Spanish quarters, producing, applying, and circulating useful knowledge in certain areas (mainly rural economy, textile trades, education, and children's welfare) was shaped as the feminine way to contribute to nation-building efforts. It further proposes that the legitimation of women as improvers occurred in a dynamic process of interaction with male reformers, in which ideals of progress and evolving gender identities were mobilized, rearticulated, and negotiated.

In Spain, as in Europe generally at this time, upper-class women played a key role in social imaginaries of progress.<sup>9</sup> Alleviating poverty, increasing population growth, articulating the relationship between households and industries, and regulating the trade of luxurious goods, to quote but a few examples, were issues that benefited from the active involvement of women.<sup>10</sup> Moreover, alongside men, women were responsible for the physical, moral, and emotional welfare of households, which were considered the basis of well-ordered states.<sup>11</sup> Male reformers thus aimed to educate women in the practical knowledge that they believed would make them better stewards of their households, better mothers, and better companions in marriage; at the same time, learned women participated in these educational efforts. This book, then, is a story of negotiations, of rearticulating discourses, of male reformers trying to construct a female collectivity essential to securing their agenda while maintaining their own hegemony, and of women stepping in to the mix on their own terms, with both parties dynamically reframing their respective gender identities.

Yet, while the Junta may be regarded a local phenomenon, the happy conjunction of particular political, social, and biographical circumstances, its members shared a broader Enlightenment spirit of public utility, specifically regarding how upper-class women could be of service to their community, their countries, and even to humanity. The Spanish gentlewomen, the French *femmes économistes*, and the generous patronesses of the Royal Institution in London, to name but a few, all joined the improvement campaign, with pursuits as disparate as inventing new ways of dyeing clothes, gathering statistics about children's diseases, engaging in geology, testing

cooking recipes that involved new kinds crops in order to make the latter profitable, and implementing physiocratic ideas in their own landholdings.<sup>12</sup> Thus, in addition to situating Spanish women in the history of knowledge and the Enlightenment, this book contributes to a thriving field that investigates gendered ways of making useful knowledge and constructing expertise and authority.<sup>13</sup>

To be sure, the aim of the Junta was not the intellectual improvement of their members, as it was in the case of the Protestant ladies of the Dutch city of Middelburg—whose *Natuurkundig Genootschap der Dames* (Women’s society for natural knowledge, 1785–1887) met regularly to study natural philosophy—or of the earlier Fair Intellectual Club (1717) in Edinburgh.<sup>14</sup> For the ladies of the *Natuurkundig Genootschap*, the pursuit of knowledge was a means of getting closer to God and of becoming better mothers and spouses. Around forty wealthy ladies came together biweekly to attend scientific lectures, exchange books on natural philosophy, and carry out experiments. The Fair Intellectual Club seemed to be inspired by contemporaneous male clubs that pursued an intellectual sociability. Their nine young members met regularly in the homes of one of them, presumably to discuss their readings and literary accomplishments.<sup>15</sup>

In contrast, the patriotic goals of the Junta were to be achieved less through their personal edification and more via direct interventions in their communities. Nor were its members public celebrities of erudition (with some exceptions, such as María Isidra Quintina de Guzmán y de la Cerda [1767–1803], whom we will discuss in chapter 1), as in the Italian context. There, in this same time period we find such luminaries as the natural philosophers Laura Bassi (1711–1778) and Cristina Roccati (1732–1797), mathematician Maria Gaetana Agnesi (1718–1799), anatomist Anna Morandi Manzolini (1714–1774), and physician Maria Dalle Donne (1778–1842), among many other celebrated female scientists.<sup>16</sup> Yet, the Junta gathered ladies not only of “honor” (morally upright and belonging to good families) but of “merit,” that is, worthy of membership because of their knowledge in the practical issues that the society dealt with.

Indeed, Josefa Amar (1749–1833), Rosario Cepeda (1756–1816), the Countess of Montijo (1754–1808), the Duchess of Benavente (1752–1834), the Marquise of Fuerte-Hijar (1761–1821), and many others women who populate this book were considered ladies of merit.<sup>17</sup> They translated philosophical works, such as Etienne Bonnet de Condillac’s *La langue des calculs* and the

biography of the political philosopher Count Rumford; they wrote and translated practical manuals (agriculture, education, childcare, medicine); hosted salons, patronized savants, and actively participated in scientific networks.<sup>18</sup> However, their role in the Spanish science have not yet attracted much attention. Apart from some important works on midwifery, nursing, and on the medical writer Josefa Amar, only recently have scholars begun to pay attention their role as circulators and mediators, as the historiographic attention has shifted to other spaces of making science than the traditional ones (universities, laboratories, or male scientific academies).<sup>19</sup>

In the following, I explain the intersections of the three threads of this book, namely, improvement and useful knowledge, gender, and political power.

## Improvers

The communality of the “large and motley crew” who enthusiastically sought to be of public utility was insightfully discussed by Lorraine Daston (1999). “Who were the enlightened and how did they get that way?” she asked.<sup>20</sup> As she pointed out, the tricky concept of public utility included, to be sure, securing power and profit for oneself and one’s circle. Dealers of natural collections, lecturers of popular scientific courses, the landed gentry of patriotic societies, the enlightened doctors who met weekly in their academies likely sought some kind of material advantages under the banner of utility.<sup>21</sup> Yet, material benefits were often coupled with moral benefits. Increasing agricultural production, for example, was rarely the primary goal of reformists in economic societies; it was always interwoven with the social and material stewardship of local resources and peoples. Scientific education was also meant to form the morals of students; the observation of nature was thought to be deeply edifying.<sup>22</sup> Moreover, the improvement of the unenlightened also presupposed the improvement of the reformer’s own self. In Daston’s words, to serve the public utility meant “to embark upon a program of improvement, first and foremost, self-improvement. To be educated and public-spirited did not suffice; one also has to learn to think, feel, read, and write in certain ways.”<sup>23</sup>

This physiological and spiritual transformation, this reshaping of one’s identity to embody a cultural category, was further elaborated by Daston and Otto Sibum in their influential article about the scientific persona, which they define as follows: a “cultural identity that simultaneously shapes

the individual in body and mind, and creates a collective with a shared and recognizable physiognomy.” They propose an apt image for visualizing how individuals imbued themselves into a persona, that of the mask (*persona* in Latin). Not in the contemporary meaning of *mask*, which hides and suppresses one’s “real” identity, but in the ancient Greek and Latin theater meaning, in which wearing a mask made it possible to reach one’s full potential.<sup>24</sup> Personae are hence different than stereotypes, social roles, or professions. They are deeply historically situated, being “creatures of historical circumstance,” which come and go depending on the times.<sup>25</sup> The scientific personae thus comprise the medieval scholar, the early modern instrument maker, the technocrat, and the naturalist, among many other examples. Personae are collective entities, and it is society that grants significance to this “new ways of being in the world,” to these patchy creations of old and new features, sometimes inspired in literary creations but always propitiating new behaviors and meanings in real people.

This book takes this invitation to explore further the relationship between the cultural and the individual identity and suggests considering the case of the eighteenth-century “woman improver.” It is unclear whether the woman improver would fully qualify as a scientific persona, but she is certainly intimately related to one of them, the “woman natural philosopher” sketched by Bernard le Bovier de Fontenelle (1657–1757). In Fontenelle’s best-seller, *Entretiens sur la pluralité des mondes* (1686), a flirtishly male natural philosopher instructs a marquise about Cartesian astronomy.<sup>26</sup> As Paula Findlen has brilliantly shown, this pair of characters was key in defining the features of both the new male natural philosopher persona (entertaining, witty, and master of “gallant conversation”) and the female philosopher—women who could become philosophers in conversation with the men. This literary creation, undoubtedly inspired in real personages, helped to cement further a social reality.<sup>27</sup>

Although the *Entretiens* was not translated to Spanish until late in the century, it was certainly well-known by the elites. One wonders about the extent to which the fictional marquise sparked the taste for astronomy in Spanish enlightened women, such as in the case of Teresa González (ca. 1778), “la pensadora del cielo” (the thinker of the sky); Rita Caveda y Solares (1760–?), who in her *Cartas de una señora a su sobrina* (1800) declared herself fascinated when she raised “a philosophical look to the sky”; or the Countess of Niebla, to whom the engineer Carlos LeMaur (1720–1785) dedicated his

astronomical treatise in 1762, because it was the result of “fruitful conversations” with her.<sup>28</sup>

Crucially, the “woman improver” was envisioned to be the opposite of the polite female philosopher. She was set up to defend a different way of researching and a different kind of knowledge worthy to be pursued. While Fontenelle argued in his *Entretiens* that the mission of the philosopher was to unveil the occult mechanisms that account for natural phenomena (famously expressed in his metaphor of the world as a theater in which philosophers were busy behind scenes discovering the pulleys, ropes, and weights that propelled characters and moved scenic elements in seventeenth-century performances), the proponents of the woman improver aimed to demonstrate that the job of philosophers was in fact very different. Namely, they should be less concerned with the “occult mechanisms” than with how to profit from the natural resources noted while attentively observing the theatrical spectacle.<sup>29</sup> This epistemic model was embodied by the Countess of Jonval, one of four characters in the dialogues featured in the hugely successful *Spectacle de la Nature* (1732–1750), authored by Antoine Noël Pluche and translated into Spanish with great success.<sup>30</sup> The Countess of Jonval could not be more different than the marquise in Fontenelle’s *Entretiens*. Rather than looking to the stars, she entertained herself in her gorgeous country house with earthly projects, including collecting shells, drawing detailed colored butterflies modeled in her dry collections, rearing silkworms, caring for her aviary, tending her greenhouse, and of course, enjoying enlightened conversation with her learned husband, a prior, and a young gentleman. The type of knowledge that the countess embodied was construed as a counterpoint to Fontenelle’s marquise, arguably one in which women could effectively make significant contributions to society.

Just like the marquise in the *Entretiens*, Pluche’s countess was a successful composite of real and fictional elements. She united in her person the cultural practices of fashionable society (collecting, gardening, drawing from nature) and a way of seeking knowledge that successfully negotiated gender boundaries. She might have sparked the imagination of men and women to the point of inspiring emulation, making the idea of a learned woman engaged in practical pursuits widely accepted. In fact, although women were not overtly recognized as capable of creating useful knowledge in all quarters, they certainly were in some. While they were not recognized by the reputed members of the French Royal Academy of Sciences, who

carefully distinguished their own pursuits of producing “useful knowledge” from those of polite society, in Sweden, women were accepted as knowledge makers in the context of enlightened state-building efforts and the promotion of the utilitarian science.<sup>31</sup> This was also the case among some Spanish reformers, who not only defended the admission of women to the Madrid Economic Society but also brandished the authority of Pluche as proof that this was not a preposterous idea, suggesting that the model of woman improver also worked in other national contexts or social circles.<sup>32</sup> The two models, Fontenelle’s and Pluche’s, were not mutually exclusive; rather, they offered women socially sanctioned alternative ways to push further the boundaries imposed on their intellectual and political pursuits.

Yet, gender hierarchies were complicated by other categories of difference, in this case, class.<sup>33</sup> While most of the women examined in this book belonged to the highest spheres and had influential salons in Madrid, Spanish reformers mostly belonged to the so-called lesser aristocracy (*hidalgúia*). They tended to have paid positions in the bureaucracy or in the judicial system and were often active men of letters who depended critically on patronage for their success. They belonged to economic societies and academies, and frequented other circles of sociability, in particular the salons and *tertulias* run by gentlewomen. Rather than being political radicals, most of them defended the necessity to ally with the monarchy and aristocracy.<sup>34</sup> Thus, as Londa Schiebinger has eloquently argued, although gender might situate women below male reformers within the patriarchal system, women’s rank, social influence, and political networks often placed them much higher, complicating the dynamics between the sexes.<sup>35</sup>

Finally, in addition to enlightened state-building efforts, another political circumstance was at play: the recognized utility of female learning for showing off the degree of development of the country. Learned women (in the appropriate measure and form) signaled that the country had overcome a primitive state that mistreated its women, and in the case of Spain, also a Moorish past that supposedly excluded women from society.<sup>36</sup> Let us now briefly examine this context.

## The Book in the Historiography of the Enlightenment in Spain

The historiography of the Enlightenment in Spain has been strongly marked by the political, intellectual, and social contexts to which scholars belonged,



since the Enlightenment was linked to a specific idea of modernity and its values. Asking whether there had been an enlightened movement in Spain meant asking about the intellectual and economic development of the country, its degree of Europeanization, and its national identity. The “discovery of the Enlightenment in Spain,” as Mónica Bolufer Peruga puts it, began in the 1960s, via the work of foreign Hispanists.<sup>37</sup> Jean Sarrailh, Richard Herr, Nigel Glendinning, François López, and others forcefully demonstrated how the state’s and Inquisition’s censorship mechanisms were never so impermeable as to block the entrance of enlightened ideas; indeed, they showed that new modes of sociability (salons, *tertulias*, coffee shops, academies, societies), of publishing and expressing opinions (the press, the essay, the sentimental novel), aesthetics and sensibilities also entered the country and were refashioned in original ways.<sup>38</sup> In each of the different reigns spanning the Enlightenment (Ferdinand VI, Charles III, and Charles IV), there were periods of greater or lesser openness, depending on international politics and alliances, with intellectual currents sometimes even approaching French revolutionary thinking.<sup>39</sup>

But it was during the 1980s that the research agenda on the Enlightenment intensified, coinciding with the transition to the monarchical democracy headed by the Bourbons following the death of Franco in 1975 (the eighteenth century in Spain was inaugurated by the Bourbons, who ruled the country after the Succession War [1700–1714] unseated the old Habsburg regime). In tune with the changes in the international historiography that understood the Enlightenment as a broader cultural movement not limited to the nucleus of French radical philosophers, scholars discussed the particularities of the Spanish Enlightenment, considered to be more oriented to the “practical” side of the *zeitgeist*.<sup>40</sup> A further important twist took place when feminist historians explored the role of gender in shaping eighteenth-century culture both in Spain and in Europe generally.<sup>41</sup> They showed, first, the active role of women as agents of change in literature, social customs, and consumer practices, as well as their role in the labor market.<sup>42</sup> Second, they showed how gender hierarchies destabilized supposed universal concepts, such as human nature and human rights.<sup>43</sup> Third, they demonstrated how crucial Enlightenment concepts, such as civilization and sensibility, were defined in relation to gender discourses. In Spain, scholars analyzed for instance the different strategies women used to legitimate themselves as authors and translators, and their importance as *salonnières*, theater spectators,

novel consumers, newspaper readers, and educators in the construction of new cultural schemes.<sup>44</sup>

The interdisciplinary research project “Feminist and Enlightenment 1650–1850: A Comparative History” by Barbara Taylor and Sara Knott (1998–2001) crystalized in the terrific *Women, Gender and the Enlightenment*, which with its broad geographical scope and time frame (from seventeenth-century Cartesian feminist to the early years of the nineteenth century) showed not only the deep roots of feminism but also how the differences between the sexes permeated the Enlightenment debates.<sup>45</sup> In this vein, *Eve’s Enlightenment: Women’s Experiences in Spain and Spanish America, 1726–1839* (2009), with its focus on Hispanic women, analyzed how women in a strong Catholic culture confronted the traditional stereotypes on women’s nature and social roles within the contemporaneous social and cultural transformations, in their words, “in the direction of secularism, empiricism and skepticism towards authority,” but also full with conflicts and contradictions.<sup>46</sup> In 2020, lastly, the volume on the Hispanic Enlightenment edited by Elizabeth Franklin, Mónica Bolufer Peruga, and Catherine Marie Jaffe highlighted particularly the original re-elaboration of ideas and practices in this context.<sup>47</sup>

To be sure, the rehabilitation of the Spanish Enlightenment occurred in parallel with another historiographic polemic that drove the agenda of historians of science, the so-called polemic of the science. As it well known by Hispanists, the black legend of Spain culminated in Nicolas Masson de Morvilliers’s polemical article “Espagne” in the *Encyclopédie méthodique* (Methodological encyclopedia, 1782), in which he infamously asked, “What did Europe owe Spain?”<sup>48</sup> Put simply, some historians of science worked toward demonstrating that, contrary to the international historiographical silence and dismissal, Spain in fact fully participated in European intellectual trends. A different historiographical approach that revealed itself particularly fruitful questioned the center/periphery approach (which focused on the economic circulation of novelties from certain developed countries, mostly in northern Europe, to southern ones). Instead of thinking in terms of processes of passive diffusion, this current understood the circulation of knowledge as a multifarious cultural process and its reception as an active process of appropriation.<sup>49</sup>

Moreover, in recent years, scholars (mostly from the Americas) have proposed that the so-called scientific revolution could not have been possible

without the Spanish Empire.<sup>50</sup> José Pardo-Tomás and Juan Pimentel have ironically summarized this latter development in a thought-provoking essay with the telling title “And Yet, We Were Modern: The Paradoxes of Iberian Science after the Grand Narratives.” In a nutshell, they write, “Spain reached modernity on the day before modernity was called into question.”<sup>51</sup> In addition to a lucid reflection on the role that the history of science played in overcoming the polemic regarding the supposed singularity of Spain, they propose to shift the focus from the Hispanic component and problematize instead modernity and global history. As Lissa Roberts writes, in order to construct a historical map that is extensive in scope and intensive in detail, it is necessary to connect the “specifically local character of individual encounters and the increasingly global networks that both afforded and attributed meaning to these encounters.”<sup>52</sup>

This book is situated in these historiographic crossroads. True, it does not tell global histories, one would say that rather the contrary. It looks closely at the material practices of a small group of men and women who considered themselves improvers, mainly in Madrid. In fact, two chapters are confined to the walls of the Madrid Foundling House, while the rest are set in the stuffy office of journal editors, or in the gardens of provincial manors. Yet, the international connections of the members of the Junta and other actors, their intimacy with ideas and materials often received from abroad, demonstrated the global networks they took part in. The wife of a diplomat, the Marquise of Casa Flores, traveled back from Havana and brought with her the roots from the tropical seed *nuevo sagú*, used there to feed the foundlings, with the hopes of alleviating the famines in the Madrid Foundling House. In their travels through Europe, the women examined in this book joined the polite vogue for scientific lectures and were able to learn languages for reading and translating foreign books, actively contributing to the circulation of knowledge. Marina Waldstein, marquise of Santa Cruz and fellow of the Royal Academy of Arts of San Fernando, attended anatomy lessons in Paris, while Catalina de Caso, daughter of a military man with whom she traveled extensively through France, Germany and England, engaged herself in the four-volume translation of Charles Rollin’s *Ettudes*.<sup>53</sup>

From the Canary Islands, María de Betancourt, the sister of the famous engineer Agustín de Betancourt, who ended his days employed by the czar of Russia, extracted dyes from the fruits of her orchard in Tenerife, as a way to boost the island’s bankrupt silk industry, which the British had hijacked.

María Ruíz de Luzuriaga, the sister of the secretary of the Madrid Royal Academy of Medicine, was urged by the academy to translate a medical treatise on yellow fevers written in Philadelphia, with the expectation of curbing ongoing epidemics in southern Spain, attributed to infected American commercial vessels.<sup>54</sup> Moreover, libraries, correspondence, and other “paper networks” connected the Spanish women who did not travel to the broader world.<sup>55</sup> With a clear focus on the local, this story still hinged on the connection between the local and the global. After all, the optimistic aims of improvers were local and global at the same time. They intended to bridge together the universal—the pursuit of a knowledge useful to humanity—with their motherlands, their regions.<sup>56</sup>

The structure of the book reflects the above considerations. Chapter 1 sets the scene, showing the contradictions that women’s education and their social role posed in the Spanish society. Three themes are interwoven here: how learned women were used as proof that Spain had left its Moorish past and entered modernity; how Pluche’s *Spectacle* was taken as a model of how high-ranking women could create useful knowledge; and finally, how the debate on the admission of women to the Madrid Economic Society contextualized a debate on the equality of the sexes and on their right to intervene in the public sphere.<sup>57</sup> We will encounter the young Isidra Quintina Guzmán y de la Cerda, the “exceptional woman” who was awarded the first Spanish female doctorate in 1785, and the erudite Josefa Amar y Borbón, who wrote a passionate defense of the intellectual equality of the sexes (1786) to argue in favor of women’s admission to the Madrid Economic Society. As already indicated, the debate ended in the creation of the Junta de damas de honor y mérito. Although some women may have wanted to join the male Madrid Economic Society on equal footing, the Junta was still a truly visible platform for developing their patriotic work. Certainly, not all the members engaged with the same enthusiasm and not all attended the weekly meetings; others, however, participated not only in the Junta and its different commissions but also in other societies such as the Ladies of the Jails (Señoras de las cárceles).<sup>58</sup> While some members defended the intellectual and physical equality of both sexes, others were more inclined to grant a different “sensibility” to men and women. Yet, all shared a common sentiment of belonging to a patriotic body of women, which had enormous visibility all around the Spanish world.

Chapters 2 and 3 deal with a harsh topic: the foundling house of Madrid. In 1799 the Junta replaced the former committee of clergymen and civil

servants in charge of that institution and assumed total authority over it. The house received three or four babies each day, which at the end of the year amounted to a quarter of the total births in Madrid. Mortality rates among these infants stood at over 95 percent. Along with other hygienic and medical measures, the Junta developed a panoptical paper system for monitoring the health of the foundlings. We will follow the traces that the babies left on paper—in the hefty accounting books, the small parchment slips that were tied to their waist with a code number to prevent their being lost, in the loose sheets of papers for compiling statistics—in order to see how the changes that the Junta introduced in the bureaucratic practices produced medical knowledge. Chapter 3 deals with the thorny issue of the trials in babies for finding a substitute for wet-nurses. The chapter frames the tests within the contemporaneous culture of testing medical treatments on human bodies, researching new diets for the poor, and supposed gender expertise in infant care. It analyzes the power negotiations of the Junta with the doctors of the Royal Academy of Medicine and those who worked in the foundling house, showing how both collectives needed each other in different ways. In chapters 4 and 5, we leave the quotidian urban misery of Madrid and move to the countryside. A key locus in Enlightenment imaginaries of progress was the carefully cultivated farm and—taking the land metaphor further—the careful cultivated person, and in these two chapters we explore the roles of women as improvers of their land and the minds of their children.<sup>59</sup> The book ends in the celebrated gardens of the Duchess of Benavente on the outskirts of Madrid, as an example of how the fictional and the real informed the identity of the woman improver.





Figure 1.1. Portrait of María Isidra Guzmán y de la Cerda. Distributed by the Memorial literario, instructivo y curioso. Copyright © Biblioteca Nacional de España.