



Center for the History of Women Philosophers and Scientists
Paderborn University, Germany

Misogyny in Anne Sophie Swetchine (1782–1857)

John J. Conley
Loyola University Maryland

In her treatise on old age, Mme Swetchine criticizes society's mistreatment of older women as the symptom of a deeper misogyny. Whereas older men are often recognized for their accomplishments, older women are dismissed as useless. A certain contempt denies older women their dignity: "There is no sadder spectacle than that of an old woman stripped of the consideration and respect attached to the dignity of a serious life" (1875: 57). Older women are routinely ignored by poets, artists, and philosophers, even by the clergy. The only virtue considered proper for them is abnegation: "The only social virtue for the elderly woman, the only virtue corresponding to her true role on earth, is self-abnegation" (1875: 59). Older women are expected to die to themselves and to make no claims on the attention of others because society considers them as without value. Self-effacement is the logical destiny of the sex society reduces to silence.

Primary Sources:

Swetchine, Anne Sophie 1875. *Traité de la Vieillesse*, in *Madame Swetchine: sa vie et ses oeuvres*, Falloux, Alfred de (ed), 2 vols. Paris: Didier et Cie, II: 35-73. [A digital version of the text is available at the *Projet Gallica* page of the website of the Bibliothèque nationale de France.]

Swetchine, Anne Sophie 1868. *The Writings of Madame Swetchine*; Preston, Harriet W. (trans). Boston: Roberts.

Secondary Sources:

Drozdek, Adam 2011. Madame Swetchine and her Faith, in *Roczniki Historii Kosciola*, 3

(58), 39-57.

Martinoir, Francine de 2011. *Madame Swetchine ou Le ciel d'ici*. Paris: Cerf.

Keywords:

abnegation, aging, misogyny, virtue, women