



THE PHILOSOPHICAL TRANSACTIONS
of

Maria van Leuwenhoek
Antonis Dochter

(1668-1696)

Including accounts of novel discoveries made in Delft that bear upon the oft vexing mysteries of sexual generation, particularly as they apply to the fate and purpose of women

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In which Maria introduces us to her father, Antoni van Leeuwenhoek, at the height of his fame; we learn how he was introduced to the microscope and through it to amazing wonders of Creation heretofore invisible; in which we also learn how Maria herself when a girl of fourteen discovered through illness and the paintings of Johannes Vermeer that there is a world of difference between the eyes of men, a truth that will shape her own philosophy as completely as her father's belief in the powers of observation shapes his.

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In which Louis XIV invades Holland, the Dutch murder and devour their own Grand Pensionary and reinstate William III of Orange as Stadtholder; in which the widower Antoni van Leeuwenhoek, to the consternation of his daughter, remarries, observes the actual circulation of the blood and the structure of the globules in it, and with the help of his friend Dr. Regnier de Graaf begins his lifelong correspondence with the foremost practitioners of the New Philosophy, the learned gentlemen of the Royal Society in England; and in which Maria begins to understand what, in this time of terrible turmoil, binds mother, child, father, and country—and what her father's practice of his newfound art might mean for those who live with him.

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In which Antoni van Leeuwenhoek makes the amazing discovery of animalcules smaller than the hair of a mite in rain water, well water, steeped pepper, vinegar, the spit in our mouths, and the semen of dogs and of men; in which Leeuwenhoek insists—over the doubt of Regnier de Graaf (who has himself discovered within women a nest of eggs that he believes is the source of human generation) and to the consternation of his wife Cornelia and his daughter—that it is from animalcules in the semen of men that human life begins; and in which Maria, as a woman of marriageable age, begins to ponder the implications of her father's discoveries and his theories of generation to her personally.

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In which Antoni van Leeuwenhoek, already troubled by the doubts of the Gentlemen Amateurs about his discoveries, becomes more troubled by the inexplicable pregnancy of his wife Cornelia while away from him, which she insists is explained by the sufficiency of De Graaf's eggs, not her husband's animalcules, and is even more troubled by the loss of the child, whatever his origin; in which Leeuwenhoek turns his investigations to skin, bark, feathers, scales, and the scurf of the fish girl exhibited in the traveling fair to better understand the scurf that now covers most of his own body, which, if leprosy, will cause his banishment and that of his wife and daughter to the Leper House in Haarlem; and in which Maria seeks to hide from her father the truth about his newborn son and reluctantly refuses her first serious suitor in order to hide from all the truth about her father's disease.

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In which Antoni van Leeuwenhoek continues his observations on generation, investigating the movement of male animalcules through the wombs of dogs and the copulation of the eel, louse, and flea; entertains many distinguished visitors including Kings and Learned and Distinguished Gentlemen; and persists in his obsession with the source of life while his wife Cornelia sickens and dies; and in which Maria, with the assistance of the burgomaster Cornelis Vallensis, takes in a rebellious young orphan girl, Grietje, to assist her and, through her own intimacy with Mr. Vallensis, comes to realize that deep within her body she holds mysteries of generation hidden from her father.

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In which Antoni van Leeuwenhoek makes a discovery concerning the lice that devour the peaches in his orchard that threatens his theories of generation; in which Maria, understanding the implications of her father's newest discovery, questions how her belief in her father's discoveries and theories of generation has distorted her own choices as well as how her beliefs and choices have in turn distorted the choices of her beloved and brazen servant and ward, Grietje, for whom she is now trying to find a suitable husband; and in which Maria invites another young orphan, Aaltje, to take Grietje's place, warning her that she will, as have all the women who lived in that house, find herself ravished by the truths that her father's glasses have revealed—and by the truths that they cannot.

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