

Enlightenment and the Uses of Woman

Enlightenment views of women were strongly polarised. Barbara Taylor investigates the myths of Woman promulgated by Enlightenment intellectuals, in particular the Janus-faced doctrine of 'female influence' that dominated eighteenth-century writings on women, simultaneously portraying them as acquisitive hedonists and as paragons of self-sacrificial benevolence. The paper explores the cultural anxieties fuelling these antonymous myths, the feminist response to them, and their legacies to modern gender ideology.