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Letter 61

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*Rica to Usbek in ****

I think you want to spend your life in the country. At first I only lost you for two or three days at a time, and I have not seen you for a fortnight. It is true that you are in a charming house, find a company to your liking there, and that there you reason to your heart's content : it takes no more than that to make you forget the entire world.

As for me, I am leading more or less the same life you saw me leading. I circulate in society, and I seek to understand it. My mind is gradually losing everything that was still Asian about it, and I comply without effort with European ways. I am no longer so surprised to see five or six women in one house with five or six men, and I find that that is not such a bad idea.

I can say this : I have only known women since I have been here. I have learned more about them in a month than I would have in thirty years in a seraglio.

In Persia personas are all uniform, because they are forced ; you never see people as they are, but as they are obliged to be ; in that servitude of heart and mind, you hear only fear speaking, which has but one language, and not nature, which expresses herself so variously, and comes in so many forms.

Dissimulation, that art so practiced and so necessary to us, is unknown here : everyone speaks, everyone is seen, everyone is heard ; the heart is as exposed as the face ; in the behavior, in virtue, and even in vice you always notice something candid.

Being attractive to women takes a certain talent different from the one they like even better ; it consists in a sort of banter in the spirit that amuses them in that it seems to promise at every moment what one can deliver only at too-long intervals.

That banter naturally made for the dressing table [\[1\]](#) seems to have come to fashion the general persona of the nation. They banter in the Council, they banter at the head of the army, they banter with an ambassador. Professions only appear ridicule in proportion to the serious tone they use ; a physician would no longer be ridiculous if his clothing was less morose and if he killed his patients with banter.

Paris this 10th day of the moon of Rebiab II, 1714

[\[1\]](#) It was customary for aristocratic women to receive visitors at their dressing tables for light conversation.