

Woman in Common with Man

sober pleasures that arise
- Mary Wollstonecraft

1

Woman, in common with man, was placed upon earth to unfold their faculties; their primary ambition: to obtain a character as a human being. The perfection of our nature and happiness depend upon the degree of reason, virtue and knowledge in individuals and society.

Yet women are told from their infancy and taught by their mothers' example that a woman's beauty is her sceptre, that knowledge of human weakness (justly named *cunning*), softness of temper, outward obedience and scrupulous attention to a puerile kind of propriety will obtain the protection of a man — and should they be beautiful, anything else is needless for at least twenty years.

So, in order to protect their innocence as ignorance is courteously termed, truth is hidden from them and they are made to assume an artificial character before their faculties have developed any strength; the growing mind shapes itself to the body.

Man tries to render woman alluring for a moment and woman, intoxicated by the adoration, sacrifices strength of body and mind to libertine notions of beauty and desire for marriage — the only way woman has to rise in the world, a passion that makes mere animals of them. It is time to effect a revolution in female manners, time to restore to them their dignity, to make them by reforming themselves reform the world, contend not for empire but equality.

2

Since love from its very nature must she said
be transitory, inevitably succeeded
by friendship or indifference, and this seems to harmonize perfectly with the system

of government which prevails in the moral world;
given *reason imagination and passion*
in an age of enlightenment and revolution
with which to honor matrimony marriage
monogamy motherhood love and freedom —
the most holy bond in society
the most sublime of all affections is friendship.

Feasts delight the heart of man she said
though death and disease lurk in the cup and dainty.
So the heated imagination draws
the image of love from rainbows, panting after
unattainable perfection, giving
apparent existence to insubstantial forms,
stability to the shadowy reveries
the mind naturally falls into when
realities are found vapid: it can
she said depict love with celestial charms,
imagine a degree of mutual affection
that refines the soul, picture lovers
in each other's arms as in a temple.

Ineffable delight, exquisite pleasure
arise from unison of affection and desire
when soul and senses are abandoned to lively
imagination that renders every
emotion delicate and rapturous but
emotions over which satiety has no power
do not exist without self-denial.

When the loved one ceases to be her lover
(a role the husband cannot long retain)
will she whose whole life was pleasing him
have sufficient resources to look into herself
for comfort and cultivate dormant faculties there
or isn't it more rational to think
that though she would shrink from an intrigue she would yet wish
to be convinced by the homage of gallantry
that she is cruelly neglected by spouse and so,
by exciting in other men the emotions
raised by new conquests, try to forget
the mortifications her love and pride have suffered?
I never wanted but your heart she said —
that gone, you have nothing left to give.