

Wollstonecraft
Outline

- I. Biography
 - A. Abused
 - B. Daughter Mary marries Percy B. Shelley poet
 - C. Mary Shelley writes *Frankenstein*
 - D. *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* 1792
- II. Introduction
 - A. The Conduct and manners of women prove that their minds are not in a healthy state (6)
 - a.) Fading flowers
 - b.) Due to improper educations: alluring mistresses rather than affectionate wives and mothers (reproductive rights?)
 - c.) Elegance is inferior to virtue; the first object is to obtain the character of a human being (regardless of distinction of sex) (8)
 - B. Chapter IV Observations on the state of degradation
 - a.) Reason is the power of improvement: of discerning truth (53)
 - b.) Reason the imprint of the divine
 - c.) Education has been misconstrued as preparation for life rather than advancing toward perfection
 - d.) Understanding is denied woman and replaced by instinct (animal?) (54)
 - e.) Knowledge: drawing comprehensive conclusions: lays up a store for the immortality of the soul / observation: common sense: sensual (dualism)
 - f.) Not common to men or women
 - g.) Women are discouraged from developing their understandings
 - h.) Men argue that understanding is inconsistent with their sexual character
 - i.) Women have been always either slave or despot either of which equally retards reason
 - j.) Source of female folly and vice: narrowness of mind and civil constitutions (cf. *Republic*)
 - k.) Similar education of the rich (54)
 - l.) Summary of an implicit argument
 - 1.) Men are superior to women b/c they are stronger but men are only stronger physically. Thus, men reassure themselves of their advantage by cultivating habits in them which weaken them.
 - m.) Hardship allows for opportunities for developing the virtues
 - n.) Too much pleasure makes it difficult to develop minds to discharge duties (55)
 - o.) Summary of dilemma
 - 1.) Beauty/pleasure regard, adoration, worship, short lived, dominance yet dominance through weakness and the ephemeral.
 - 2.) Intellectual abilities (equality), long-lived
 - p.) By choosing beauty women receive a degree of attention from strangers not seen in relations between men (55-6)
 - q.) Analogy with caged birds (56)

- r.) Natural resources versus diversification
- s.) Women are systematically degraded by receiving the trivial attentions which men pay to the sex: picking up handkerchiefs etc (57)
- t.) All have a need to be loved
 - 1.) The common mind sees the most certain and unequivocal means of respect through wealth and beauty
 - 2.) Abilities and virtues are absolutely necessary to raise men from the middle rank
 - 3.) Virtues and abilities are found at the middle rank
- u.) Women are like the rich in that they are born with [sexual] privileges
 - 1.) But while they are gratuitously granted few will ever think of supererogation
- v.) The rich and women are enervated by luxury/idleness (58)
- w.) Middle class men pursue professions (and are thus sharpened intellectually by the singleness of their goal); women pursue marriage (60)
- x.) Love of pleasure makes women anxious about secondary things instead of being occupied by duties (60)
 - 1.) Generalization
 - 2.) "Can dignity of mind exist with such trivial cares?"(61)
- y.) Given over to senses (61)

B. Consequences

- a.) The social costs: troublesome, worse for morals, instability, madness and folly
- b.) This analysis shouldn't be confined to the *fair sex* but for now is (61)
 - i. Novels, music, poetry, gallantry tend to make women creatures of sensation
 - ii. Prevents the cultivation of reason/understanding which can calm the passions (cf. Plato) (61)
- c.) Women are made slaves to their senses (a sort of damnation)
- d.) This is the condition of half the world
- e.) Cultivation of weakness actually makes women contemptible (62)
- f.) Sensibility is seen as the essence of women but this is merely material (63)
 - i. We don't see the image of God in either sensation or matter
 - ii. If women have an immortal soul then they must have the an understanding for self improvement
- g.) Bacon great achievements from unmarried or childless men
 - i. The welfare of society isn't built on extraordinary exertions
 - ii. If society were more reasonable organized there wouldn't be such a need for great abilities and heroic virtues (cf. Brecht: fortunate the country that doesn't need heroes quoted by Havel)
- h.) Understanding is required for rearing a family; Women are groomed for rearing a family but are denied the requisite means of accomplishing this goal
- i.) By Neglecting the intellect one is further removed from the domestic sphere (64)
- j.) Pleasure is the reward of labor

- k.) But pleasure is too accessible for the rich and women
- l.) Thus they languish and are enervated
- m.) Hereditary possessions: lack of virtue
- n.) Women will govern such men by the most direct means and the domestic sphere will suffer (65)

C. More arguments

- a. Sensibility is a woman's power
- b. Yet when this is cultivated to the detriment of reason, it produces fickleness
- c. A husband can't continue to excite lively emotions

D. Poor education of girls

- a. With the death of their parents become dependent on their brothers
- b. When brothers marry they become a burden on the new family (65)
- c. Humiliating: unable to work but ashamed to beg (66)
- d. The wife jealous of any kindness her husband shows to his relations
- e. Women without a broad education
 - i.) Unfit to manage a family

E. Polygamy

- a. If necessary this would seem to suggest that women were created for men (71)
- b. Polygamy is not necessary

F. Honor

- a. Woman's character depends on the observation of one virtue: chastity (72)
- b. Richardson: Clarissa to Lovelace: you have robbed me of my honor
- c. A strange notion of honor: miserable beyond all names of misery is the condition of a being who could be degraded without its own consent (73)
- d. The majority of the world desire pleasure or power
- e. Husbands with their inordinate love of pleasure can seduce their wives, making them licentious
- f. Friendship is based on principle
- g. In a great degree, love and friendship cannot subsist in the same bosom (74)

G. Thought

- a. The employment of thoughts shapes the character of the individual
- b. The thoughts of women hover around their persons
- c. Persons are reckoned most valuable
- d. Some degree of liberty of mind is necessary to form the person
- e. Thus this is why some gentle wives have so few attractions besides their sex (77)