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MARY WOLLSTONECRAFT

A VINDICATION OF THE
RIGHTS OF WOMAN

AN AUTHORITATIVE TEXT
BACKGROUND
CRITICISM

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nd others a little advanced in life, fre-
against delicacy. For, though convinced
l of union between the sexes, yet, how
indolence, or, to enjoy some trifling

petite which brings the sexes together,
ffect. Nature must ever be the standard
tite—yet how grossly is nature insulted
the refinements of love out of the ques-
he gratification of an appetite, in this
er, a natural and imperious law to pre-
e appetite, and mixes a little mind and
st.⁹ The feelings of a parent mingling
imal, give dignity; and the man and
account of the child, a mutual interest
r the exercise of a common sympathy.
ssarily some duty to fulfil, more noble
, would not contentedly be the slaves of
e situation of a very considerable number
standing dishes to which every glutton

it as this enormity is, it only affects a
evoted for the salvation of the rest. But,
it easily be proved, that recommends the
> produce a greater good; the mischief
moral character, and peace of mind, of
, is undermined by the conduct of the
allow no refuge from guilt: whom they
exercise of arts that lure their husbands
sons, and force them, let not modest
some degree, the same character them-
to assert, that all the causes of female
vity, which I have already enlarged on,
ise—want of chastity in men.

revalent, depraves the appetite to such a
ulus is necessary to rouse it; but the par-
orgotten, and the mere person, and that
ses the thoughts. So voluptuous, indeed,
wler, that he refines on female softness.
woman is then sought for; till, in Italy
he levees of equivocal beings, to sigh for

f men, women are made systematically

satisfies 1. The "levees" (parties) of "equivocal
beings" or homosexuals.

voluptuous, and though they may not all carry their libertinism to
the same height, yet this heartless intercourse with the sex, which
they allow themselves, depraves both sexes, because the taste of
men is vitiated; and women, of all classes, naturally square their
behaviour to gratify the taste by which they obtain pleasure and
power. Women becoming, consequently, weaker, in mind and body,
than they ought to be, were one of the grand ends of their being
taken into the account, that of bearing and nursing children, have
not sufficient strength to discharge the first duty of a mother; and
sacrificing to lasciviousness the parental affection, that ennobles
instinct, either destroy the embryo in the womb,² or cast it off
when born. Nature in every thing demands respect, and those who
violate her laws seldom violate them with impunity. The weak ener-
vated women who particularly catch the attention of libertines, are
unfit to be mothers, though they may conceive; so that the rich sen-
sualist, who has rioted among women, spreading depravity and
misery, when he wishes to perpetuate his name, receives from his
wife only an half-formed being that inherits both its father's and
mother's weakness.

Contrasting the humanity of the present age with the barbarism
of antiquity, great stress has been laid on the savage custom of
exposing the children whom their parents could not maintain;³
whilst the man of sensibility, who thus, perhaps, complains, by his
promiscuous amours produces a most destructive barrenness and
contagious flagitiousness⁴ of manners. Surely nature never intended
that women, by satisfying an appetite, should frustrate the very pur-
pose for which it was implanted?

I have before observed, that men ought to maintain the women
whom they have seduced; this would be one means of reforming
female manners; and stopping an abuse that has an equally fatal
effect on population and morals. Another, no less obvious, would be
to turn the attention of woman to the real virtue of chastity; for to
little respect has that woman a claim, on the score of modesty,
though her reputation may be white as the driven snow, who smiles
on the libertine whilst she spurns the victims of his lawless appe-
tites and their own folly.

Besides, she has a taint of the same folly, pure as she esteems her-
self, when she studiously adorns her person only to be seen by men,
to excite respectful sighs, and all the idle homage of what is called
innocent gallantry. Did women really respect virtue for its own sake,
they would not seek for a compensation in vanity, for the self-denial

2. The embryo could be either aborted
intentionally or, since she mentions "las-
civiousness" Wollstonecraft may mean
death resulting from syphilis, a highly
contagious and deadly disease.

3. It was not uncommon in Greece to
expose, and allow to die, those infants
who had deformities or who were for
other reasons, unwanted.

4. Corruption.