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A NORTON CRITICAL EDITION

Jane Austen  
SENSE AND SENSIBILITY



AUTHORITATIVE TEXT  
CONTEXTS  
CRITICISM

*Edited by*

CLAUDIA L. JOHNSON

PRINCETON UNIVERSITY



W • W • NORTON & COMPANY • New York • London

The rest are begotten to be devoured. They are thrown to the cannibal for prey, and the natural parent prepares the unnatural repast.

As every thing which is out of nature in man, affects, more or less, the interest of society, so does this. All the children which the aristocracy disowns (which are all, except the eldest) are, in general, cast like orphans on a parish, to be provided for by the public, but at a greater charge.—Unnecessary offices and places in governments and courts are created at the expence of the public, to maintain them.

With what kind of parental reflections can the father or mother contemplate their younger offspring. By nature they are children, and by marriage they are heirs; but by aristocracy they are bastards and orphans. They are the flesh and blood of their parents in one line, and nothing akin to them in the other. To restore, therefore, parents to their children, and children to their parents—relations to each other, and man to society—and to exterminate the monster Aristocracy, root and branch—the French constitution has destroyed the law of PRIMOGENITURESHIP. Here then lies the monster; and Mr. Burke, if he pleases, may write its epitaph.

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## MARY WOLLSTONECRAFT

From *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792)†

From *Chapter IV. Observations on the State of Degradation to which Woman Is Reduced by Various Causes*

\* \* \*

Novels, music, poetry, and gallantry, all tend to make women the creatures of sensation, and their character is thus formed in the mould of folly during the time they are acquiring accomplishments, the only improvement they are excited, by their station in society, to acquire. This overstretched sensibility naturally relaxes the other powers of the mind, and prevents intellect from attaining that sovereignty which it ought to attain to render a rational creature useful

† Mary Wollstonecraft (1759–1797) was a novelist and polemicist on behalf of radical causes. Her most famous work, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), was among other things a tract on the education of women, and before Wollstonecraft became a popularly anathematized figure—with the increasing reaction against the Revolution in France, and with disclosures about her unconventional personal life—it was well received, expressing views about the duties of rationality, sobriety, and self-control with which many writers agreed. The selections presented here denounce the fad of female sensibility and address the vulnerability of unprovisioned widows and daughters. The text and notes are reprinted from the Norton Critical Edition of *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, 2nd ed., Carol Poston, editor.

to others, and content with its own station: for the exercise of the understanding, as life advances, is the only method pointed out by nature to calm the passions.

Satiety has a very different effect, and I have often been forcibly struck by an emphatical description of damnation:—when the spirit is represented as continually hovering with abortive eagerness round the defiled body, unable to enjoy any thing without the organs of sense. Yet, to their senses, are women made slaves, because it is by their sensibility that they obtain present power.

And will moralists pretend to assert, that this is the condition in which one half of the human race should be encouraged to remain with listless inactivity and stupid acquiescence? Kind instructors! what were we created for? To remain, it may be said, innocent; they mean in a state of childhood.—We might as well never have been born, unless it were necessary that we should be created to enable man to acquire the noble privilege of reason, the power of discerning good from evil, whilst we lie down in the dust from whence we were taken, never to rise again.—

It would be an endless task to trace the variety of meannesses, cares, and sorrows, into which women are plunged by the prevailing opinion, that they were created rather to feel than reason, and that all the power they obtain, must be obtained by their charms and weakness:—

*power → end of existence*  
‘Fine by defect, and amiably weak!’<sup>1</sup>

And, made by this amiable weakness entirely dependent, excepting what they gain by illicit sway, on man, not only for protection, but advice, is it surprising that, neglecting the duties that reason alone points out, and shrinking from trials calculated to strengthen their minds, they only exert themselves to give their defects a graceful covering, which may serve to heighten their charms in the eye of the voluptuary, though it sink them below the scale of moral excellence?

Fragile in every sense of the word, they are obliged to look up to man for every comfort. In the most trifling dangers they cling to their support, with parasitical tenacity, piteously demanding succour; and their natural protector extends his arm, or lifts up his voice, to guard the lovely trembler—from what? Perhaps the frown of an old cow, or the jump of a mouse; a rat, would be a serious danger. In the name of reason, and even common sense, what can save such beings from contempt; even though they be soft and fat?

These fears, when not affected, may produce some pretty attitudes; but they shew a degree of imbecility which degrades a ra-

1. A misquotation of Pope, *Moral Essays* II.44: “Fine by defect, and delicately weak.”

ational creature in a way women are not aware of—for love and esteem are very distinct things.

I am fully persuaded that we should hear of none of these infantine airs, if girls were allowed to take sufficient exercise, and not confined in close rooms till their muscles are relaxed, and their powers of digestion destroyed. To carry the remark still further, if fear in girls, instead of being cherished, perhaps, created, were treated in the same manner as cowardice in boys, we should quickly see women with more dignified aspects. It is true, they could not then with equal propriety be termed the sweet flowers that smile in the walk of man; but they would be more respectable members of society, and discharge the important duties of life by the light of their own reason. 'Educate women like men,' says Rousseau, 'and the more they resemble our sex the less power will they have over us.'<sup>2</sup> This is the very point I aim at. I do not wish them to have power over men; but over themselves.

In the same strain have I heard men argue against instructing the poor; for many are the forms that aristocracy assumes. 'Teach them to read and write,' say they, 'and you take them out of the station assigned them by nature.' An eloquent Frenchman has answered them, I will borrow his sentiments. But they know not, when they make man a brute, that they may expect every instant to see him transformed into a ferocious beast.<sup>3</sup> Without knowledge there can be no mortality!

Ignorance is a frail base for virtue! Yet, that it is the condition for which woman was organized, has been insisted upon by the writers who have most vehemently argued in favour of the superiority of man; a superiority not in degree, but essence; though, to soften the argument, they have laboured to prove, with chivalrous generosity, that the sexes ought not to be compared; man was made to reason, woman to feel: and that together, flesh and spirit, they make the most perfect whole, by blending happily reason and sensibility into one character.

And what is sensibility? 'Quickness of sensation; quickness of perception; delicacy.' Thus is it defined by Dr. Johnson;<sup>4</sup> and the definition gives me no other idea than of the most exquisitely polished instinct. I discern not a trace of the image of God in either

2. *Emile*. Rousseau, of course, is not advocating equal education: he has made the point that women have sexual power over men. If women were educated, they would lose their sway, presumably an undesirable state of affairs for them.
3. Since Wollstonecraft was deeply absorbed in the French political cause at this time, she could possibly be referring to the great French statesman Mirabeau's remark to Abbé Siéyès, who had just met with discourtesy on the floor of the Constituent Assembly in 1790. Mirabeau is supposed to have chided him by saying, "My dear abbé, you have loosed the bull: do you expect he is not to make use of his horns?"
4. Samuel Johnson's *Dictionary* of 1755, the first of its kind in English, was the arbiter of linguistic correctness.

sensation or matter. Refined seventy times seven,<sup>5</sup> they are still material; intellect dwells not there; nor will fire ever make lead gold.

I come round to my old argument; if woman be allowed to have an immortal soul, she must have, as the employment of life, an understanding to improve. And when, to render the present state more complete, though every thing proves it to be but a fraction of a mighty sum, she is incited by present gratification to forget her grand destination, nature is counteracted, or she was born only to procreate and rot. Or, granting brutes, of every description, a soul, though not a reasonable one, the exercise of instinct and sensibility may be the step, which they are to take, in this life, towards the attainment of reason in the next; so that through all eternity they will lag behind man, who, why we cannot tell, had the power given him of attaining reason in his first mode of existence.

When I treat of the peculiar duties of women, as I should treat of the peculiar duties of a citizen or father, it will be found that I do not mean to insinuate that they should be taken out of their families, speaking of the majority. 'He that hath wife and children,' says Lord Bacon, 'hath given hostages to fortune; for they are impediments to great enterprises, either of virtue or mischief. Certainly the best works, and of greatest merit for the public, have proceeded from the unmarried or childless men.'<sup>6</sup> I say the same of women. But, the welfare of society is not built on extraordinary exertions; and were it more reasonably organized, there would be still less need of great abilities, or heroic virtues.

In the regulation of a family, in the education of children, understanding, in an unsophisticated sense, is particularly required: strength both of body and mind; yet the men who, by their writings, have most earnestly laboured to domesticate women, have endeavoured, by arguments dictated by a gross appetite, which satiety had rendered fastidious, to weaken their bodies and cramp their minds. But, if even by these sinister methods they really persuaded women, by working on their feelings, to stay at home, and fulfil the duties of a mother and mistress of a family, I should cautiously oppose opinions that led women to right conduct, by prevailing on them to make the discharge of such important duties the main business of life, though reason were insulted. Yet, and I appeal to experience, if by neglecting the understanding they be as much, may, more detached from these domestic employments, than they could be by the most serious intellectual pursuit, though it may be observed, that the mass of mankind will never vigorously pursue an

5. Matthew 18.22: "Jesus saith unto him, I say not unto thee, Until seven times: but, Until seventy times seven."
6. Francis Bacon, Essay VIII, "Of Marriage and the Single Life."



intellectual object,<sup>7</sup> I may be allowed to infer that reason is absolutely necessary to enable a woman to perform any duty properly, and I must again repeat, that sensibility is not reason.

The comparison with the rich still occurs to me; for, when men neglect the duties of humanity, women will follow their example; a common stream hurries them both along with thoughtless celerity. Riches and honours prevent a man from enlarging his understanding, and enervate all his powers by reversing the order of nature, which has ever made true pleasure the reward of labour. Pleasure—enervating pleasure is, likewise, within women's reach without earning it. But, till hereditary possessions are spread abroad, how can we expect men to be proud of virtue? And, till they are, women will govern them by the most direct means, neglecting their dull domestic duties to catch the pleasure that sits lightly on the wing of time.

'The power of the woman,' says some author, 'is her sensibility;<sup>8</sup> and men, not aware of the consequence, do all they can to make this power swallow up every other. Those who constantly employ their sensibility will have most: for example; poets, painters, and composers.<sup>9</sup> Yet, when the sensibility is thus increased at the expense of reason, and even the imagination, why do philosophical men complain of their fickleness? The sexual attention of man particularly acts on female sensibility, and this sympathy has been exercised from their youth up. A husband cannot long pay those attentions with the passion necessary to excite lively emotions, and the heart, accustomed to lively emotions, turns to a new lover, or pines in secret, the prey of virtue or prudence. I mean when the heart has really been rendered susceptible, and the taste formed; for I am apt to conclude, from what I have seen in fashionable life, that vanity is oftener fostered than sensibility by the mode of education, and the intercourse between the sexes, which I have reprobated; and that coquetry more frequently proceeds from vanity than from that inconstancy, which overstrained sensibility naturally produces.'

Another argument that has had great weight with me, must, I think, have some force with every considerate benevolent heart. Girls who have been thus weakly educated, are often cruelly left by

7. The mass of mankind are rather the slaves of their appetites than of their passions [Wollstonecraft's note].

8. The sentiment is a commonplace, but Wollstonecraft may be referring to Edmund Burke's phrase: "The beauty of women is considerably owing to their weakness, or delicacy . . ." (Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* [London, 1759 (repr. The Scolar Press, 1970)], p. 219).

9. Men of these descriptions pour it into their compositions, to amalgamate the gross materials; and, moulding them with passion, give to the inert body a soul; but, in woman's imagination, love alone concentrates these ethereal beams [Wollstonecraft's note].

their parents without any provision; and, of course, are dependent on, not only the reason, but the bounty of their brothers. These brothers are, to view the fairest side of the question, good sort of men, and give as a favour, what children of the same parents had an equal right to. In this equivocal humiliating situation, a docile female may remain some time, with a tolerable degree of comfort. But, when the brother marries, a probable circumstance, from being considered as the mistress of the family, she is viewed with averted looks as an intruder, an unnecessary burden on the benevolence of the master of the house, and his new partner.<sup>1</sup>

Who can recount the misery, which many unfortunate beings, whose minds and bodies are equally weak, suffer in such situations—unable to work, and ashamed to beg? The wife, a cold-hearted, narrow-minded, woman, and this is not an unfair supposition; for the present mode of education does not tend to enlarge the heart any more than the understanding, is jealous of the little kindness which her husband shews to his relations; and her sensibility not rising to humanity, she is displeas'd at seeing the property of her children lavished on an helpless sister.

These are matters of fact, which have come under my eye again and again. The consequence is obvious, the wife has recourse to cunning to undermine the habitual affection, which she is afraid openly to oppose; and neither tears nor caresses are spared till the spy is worked out of her home, and thrown on the world, unprepared for its difficulties; or sent, as a great effort of generosity, or from some regard to propriety, with a small stipend, and an uncultivated mind, into joyless solitude.

These two women may be much upon a par, with respect to reason and humanity; and changing situations, might have acted just the same selfish part; but had they been differently educated, the case would also have been very different. The wife would not have had that sensibility, of which self is the centre, and reason might have taught her not to expect, and not even to be flattered by, the affection of her husband, if it led him to violate prior duties. She would wish not to love him, merely because he loved her, but on account of his virtues; and the sister might have been able to struggle for herself instead of eating the bitter bread of dependence.

\* \* \*

1. Wollstonecraft may have in mind the situation of her sister Everina, who, before Mary Wollstonecraft helped to make her independent, had been living off their brother Edward.

From Chapter XIII. *Some Instances of the Folly which the Ignorance of Women Generates*

SECT. IV

Women are supposed to possess more sensibility, and even humanity, than men, and their strong attachments and instantaneous emotions of compassion are given as proofs; but the clinging affection of ignorance has seldom any thing noble in it, and may mostly be resolved into selfishness, as well as the affection of children and brutes. I have known many weak women whose sensibility was entirely engrossed by their husbands; and as for their humanity, it was very faint indeed, or rather it was only a transient emotion of compassion. Humanity does not consist 'in a squeamish ear,' says an eminent orator. It belongs to the mind as well as the nerves.

But this kind of exclusive affection, though it degrades the individual, should not be brought forward as a proof of the inferiority of the sex, because it is the natural consequence of confined views: for even women of superior sense, having their attention turned to little employments, and private plans, rarely rise to heroism, unless when spurred on by love! and love, as an heroic passion, like genius, appears but once in an age. I therefore agree with the moralist who asserts, 'that women have seldom so much generosity as men;'<sup>2</sup> and that their narrow affections, to which justice and humanity are often sacrificed, render the sex apparently inferior, especially, as they are commonly inspired by men; but I contend that the heart would expand as the understanding gained strength, if women were not depressed from their cradles.

I know that a little sensibility, and great weakness, will produce a strong sexual attachment, and that reason must cement friendship; consequently, I allow that more friendship is to be found in the male than the female world, and that men have a higher sense of justice. The exclusive affections of women seem indeed to resemble Cato's most unjust love for his country.<sup>3</sup> He wished to crush Carthage, not to save Rome, but to promote its vain-glory; and, in general, it is to similar principles that humanity is sacrificed, for genuine duties support each other.

Besides, how can women be just or generous, when they are the slaves of injustice?

2. Adam Smith, *Theory of Moral Sentiments*: "Humanity is the virtue of a woman, generosity of a man. The fair sex, who have commonly much more tenderness than ours, have seldom so much generosity."
3. Marcus Porcius Cato (234–149 B.C.E.), once he learned of the civilization of Carthage, felt it must be razed if Rome were to survive. His unceasing message was "Delenda est Carthago"—"Carthage must be destroyed."

HANNAH MORE

From *Sensibility: An Epistle to the Honourable Mrs. Boscawen* (1782)†

\* \* \*

Let not the vulgar read this pensive strain,  
 Their jests the tender anguish wou'd prophane. 130  
 Yet these some deem the happiest of their kind,  
 Whose low enjoyments never reach'd the mind,  
 Who ne'er a pain but for themselves have known,  
 Who ne'er have felt a sorrow but their own:  
 Who deem romantic ev'ry finer thought  
 Conceived by pity, or by friendship wrought;  
 Whose insulated souls ne'er feel the pow'r  
 Of gen'rous sympathy's extatic hour;  
 Whose disconnected hearts ne'er taste the bliss  
 Extracted from another's happiness; 140  
 Who ne'er the high heroic duty know,  
 For public good the private to forego.

Then wherefore happy? Where's the kindred mind?  
 Where the large soul which takes in human kind?  
 Yes—'tis the untold sorrow to explain,  
 To mitigate the but suspected pain;  
 The rule of holy sympathy to keep,  
 Joy for the joyful, tears for them that weep  
 To these the virtuous half their pleasures owe,  
 Pleasures, the selfish are not born to know; 150  
 They never know, in all their coarser bliss,  
 The sacred rapture of a pain like this.  
 Then take ye happy vulgar, take your part  
 Of sordid joy which never touch'd the heart.

Benevolence, which seldom stays to chuse,  
 Lest pausing prudence tempt her to refuse;  
 Friendship, which once determin'd never swerves,  
 Weighs ere it trusts, but weighs not ere it serves;  
 And soft ey'd pity, and forgiveness bland,

† Hannah More (1745–1833), an eminent bluestocking, was a poet, playwright, novelist, and author of religious and political tracts of a conservative, counterrevolutionary tendency. Because it was a hotly contested term, writers of the period typically broke "sensibility" down into "true" and "false" sorts. The 1782 poem printed here exemplifies the positive case commonly made on behalf of the virtues and charms of true sensibility, although More is careful to denounce the dangers of affected, irreligious, and sensual sorts as well. The text here is printed from *The Works of Hannah More*, 8 vols. (London, 1801), vol. 1.

\* morally & benevolence deg. in reason



## HANNAH MORE

From *Strictures on the Modern System of Female Education* (1799)†

## Chapter XVI.

## ON THE DANGER OF AN ILL-DIRECTED SENSIBILITY.

\* \* \*

In forming the female character, it is of importance that those on whom the task devolves should possess so much penetration as accurately to discern the degree of sensibility, and so much judgment as to accommodate the treatment to the individual character. By constantly stimulating and extolling feelings naturally quick, those feelings will be rendered too acute and irritable. On the other hand, a calm and equable temper will become obtuse by the total want of excitement: the former treatment converts the feelings into a source of error, agitation, and calamity; the latter starves their native energy, deadens the affections, and produces a cold, dull, selfish spirit; for the human mind is an instrument which will lose its sweetness if strained too high, and will be deprived of its tone and strength if not sufficiently raised.

It is cruel to chill the precious sensibility of an ingenuous soul, by treating with supercilious coldness and unfeeling ridicule every indication of a warm, tender, disinterested, and enthusiastic spirit, as if it exhibited symptoms of a deficiency in understanding or in prudence. How many are apt to intimate, with a smile of mingled pity and contempt, in considering such a character, that when she knows the world, that is, in other words, when she shall be grown cunning, selfish, and suspicious, she will be ashamed of her present glow of honest warmth, and of her lovely susceptibility of heart. May she never know the world, if the knowledge of it must be acquired at such an expense! But to sensible hearts, every indication of genuine feeling will be dear, for they well know, that it is this temper which, by the guidance of the divine Spirit, may make her one day become more enamored of the beauty of holiness; which, with the cooperation of principle, and under its direction, will ren-

† Hannah More's *Strictures on the Modern System of Female Education* (1799) was a phenomenal commercial success, going through thirteen editions and selling nine thousand copies. Although acknowledging some of the charms of sensibility, the *Strictures* severely exhorts parents to cultivate sober and dutiful dispositions in their daughters. The chapter excerpted here demonstrates the prominence of female sensibility as a subject for public debate. The text here is printed from *The Works of Hannah More*, 8 vols. (London, 1801).

der her the lively agent of Providence in diminishing the misery that is in the world; into which misery this temper will give her a quicker intuition than colder characters possess. It is this temper which, when it is touched and purified by a "live coal from the altar,"<sup>1</sup> will give her a keener taste for the spirit of religion, and a quicker zeal in discharging its duties. But let it be remembered likewise, that as there is no quality in the female character which more raises its tone, so there is none which will be so likely to endanger the peace, and to expose the virtue, of the possessor; none which requires to have its luxuriances more carefully watched, and its wild shoots more closely lopped.

For young women of affections naturally warm, but not carefully disciplined, are in danger of incurring an unnatural irritability; and while their happiness falls a victim to the excess of uncontrolled feelings, they are liable at the same time to indulge a vanity of all others the most preposterous, that of being vain of their very defect. They have heard sensibility highly commended, without having heard any thing of those bounds and fences which were intended to confine it, and without having been imbued with that principle which would have given it a beneficial direction. Conscious that they possess the quality itself in the extreme, and not aware that they want all that makes that quality safe and delightful, they plunge headlong into those sins and miseries from which they conceitedly and ignorantly imagine, that not principle, but coldness, has preserved the more sober-minded and well-instructed of their sex.

\* \* \*

Women of this cast of mind are less careful to avoid the charge of unbounded extremes, than to escape at all events the imputation of insensibility. They are little alarmed at the danger of exceeding, though terrified at the suspicion of coming short, of what they take to be the extreme point of feeling. They will even resolve to prove the warmth of their sensibility, though at the expense of their judgment, and sometimes also of their justice. Even when they earnestly desire to be and to do good, they are apt to employ the wrong instrument to accomplish the right end. They employ the passions to do the work of the judgment; forgetting, or not knowing, that the passions were not given us to be used in the search and discovery of truth, which is the office of a cooler and more discriminating faculty, but to animate to warmer zeal in the pursuit and practice of truth, when the judgment shall have pointed out what is truth.

1. Isaiah vi.6 [More's note].

need & danger of  
feeling

On passion (diff from MW)

Through this natural warmth, which they have been justly told is so pleasing, but which, perhaps, they have not been told will be continually exposing them to peril and to suffering, their joys and sorrows are excessive. Of this extreme irritability, as was before remarked, the ill-educated learn to boast, as if it were a decided indication of superiority of soul, instead of laboring to restrain it, as the excess of a temper which ceases to be amiable when it is no longer under the control of the governing faculty. It is misfortune enough to be born more liable to suffer and to sin, from this conformation of mind; it is too much to nourish the evil by unrestrained indulgence; it is still worse to be proud of so misleading a quality.

Flippancy, impetuosity, resentment, and violence of spirit, grow out of this disposition, which will be rather promoted than corrected by the system of education on which we have been animadverting; in which system, emotions are too early and too much excited, and tastes and feelings are considered as too exclusively making up the whole of the female character; in which the judgment is little exercised, the reasoning powers are seldom brought into action, and self-knowledge and self-denial scarcely included.

\* \* \*

On such a mind as we have been describing, novelty also will operate with peculiar force, and in nothing more than in the article of charity. Old established institutions, whose continued existence must depend on the continued bounty of that affluence to which they owed their origin, will be sometimes neglected, as presenting no variety to the imagination, as having by their uniformity ceased to be interesting: there is now a total failure of those springs of mere sensitive feeling which set the charity a-going, and those sudden emotions of tenderness and gusts of pity, which once were felt, must now be excited by newer forms of distress. As age comes on, that charity which has been the effect of mere feeling, grows cold and rigid; this hardness is also increased by the frequent disappointments charity has experienced in its too high expectations of the gratitude and subsequent merit of those it has relieved; and by withdrawing its bounty, because some of its objects have been undeserving, it gives clear proof that what it bestowed was for its own gratification; and now finding that self-complacency at an end, it bestows no longer. Probably, too, the cause of so much disappointment may have been, that ill choice of the objects to which feeling, rather than a discriminating judgment, has led. The summer showers of mere sensibility soon dry up, while the living spring of Christian charity flows alike in all seasons.

\* \* \*

Those young women in whom feeling is indulged to the exclusion of reason and examination, are peculiarly liable to be the dupes of prejudice, rash decisions, and false judgment. The understanding having but little power over the will, their affections are not well poised, and their minds are kept in a state ready to be acted upon by the fluctuations of alternate impulses, by sudden and varying impressions, by casual and contradictory circumstances, and by emotions excited by every accident. Instead of being guided by the broad views of general truth—instead of having one fixed principle—they are driven on by the impetuosity of the moment. And this impetuosity blinds the judgment as much as it misleads the conduct; so that, for want of a habit of cool investigation and inquiry, they meet every want without any previously-formed opinion or settled rule of action. And as they do not accustom themselves to appreciate the real value of things, their attention is as likely to be led away by the under parts of a subject, as to seize on the leading feature. The same eagerness of mind which hinders the operation of the discriminating faculty, leads also to the error of determining on the rectitude of an action by its success, and to that of making the event of an undertaking decide on its justice or propriety: it also leads to that superficial and erroneous way of judging, which fastens on exceptions, if they make in our own favor, as grounds of reasoning, while they lead us to overlook received and general rules which tend to establish a doctrine contrary to our wishes.

\* \* \*

## THE LADY'S MAGAZINE

### The Enthusiasm of Sentiment; a Fragment (1798)†

—“Yes,” said Maria, kneeling with fervent ardour, “I will indulge in the enthusiasm of my heart,—I will cherish the sensibility of my nature. Retired within myself, I hear not the confused noise of the jarring world, I heed not its follies, I escape the contagion of its vices. I cultivate that benevolence, that charity which endureth and pardoneth all things. My heart was once fixed on the gay, but, I fear, the deluding Florio. If all that rumour alleges be true, that heart must be torn from him, though it bleed to death at the

† *The Lady's Magazine* was a prominent sixpenny monthly periodical for women that ran from 1770 to 1832. In addition to giving away sheet music and embroidery patterns, *The Lady's Magazine* published poetry and stories by women, and book reviews. The “Fragment,” which ran in December 1798 and is printed here in its entirety, indicates how commonly the hyperbole of female sensibility was parodied.

separation. Yet amidst the pangs of my sufferings I shall feel a consoling sentiment arising from conscious integrity, which deceit and vice cannot know. Time may perhaps heal my wound; I may at length become capable of reflecting with calmness on the worthlessness of the object of which I was enamoured. The face of nature again shall smile as it was wont, and my mind resume its former cheerfulness and emotions of delight. Yet, should the worst be true, I will cherish that sensibility to which I owe my pain: exquisite has been the delight it has afforded, and I cannot consent to purchase even exemption from misery at the price of becoming torpid and unfeeling."

A shower of tears here relieved the swelling heart of the fair enthusiast; but she was soon after more effectually relieved by learning that all that rumour had insinuated against her lover had been merely the invention of venemous slander; and her melancholy and fears were succeeded by the liveliest emotions of rapturous joy.