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*Women: An Inquiry*

WILLA MUIR



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**WOMEN : AN INQUIRY**

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# WOMEN: AN INQUIRY

BY

WILLA MUIR



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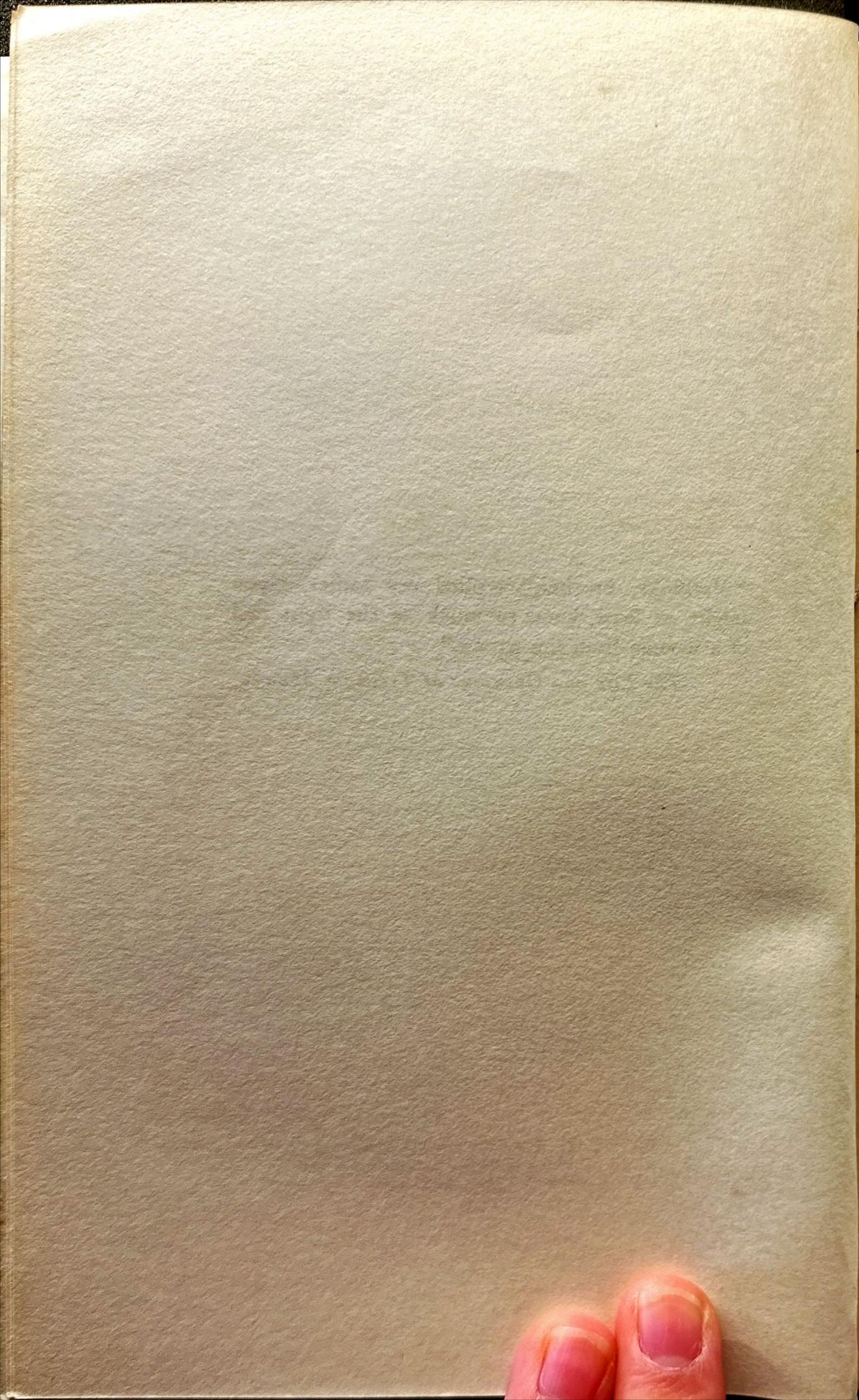
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TO  
VIOLET SCHIFF

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“Methinks, brother,” replied my father, “you might, at least, know so much as the right end of a woman from the wrong.”

*The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy.*



# WOMEN: AN INQUIRY

## INTRODUCTORY

MEN and women are latecomers to this planet, but they have existed for a very long time, judged by human standards. One might reasonably expect the difference between them, if it is an essential difference, to be now capable of formulation. An essential difference would be a difference distinctively human, that is, spiritual as well as physical, and at the same time distinctively sexual.

External differences, such as the presence or absence of beards and other secondary sexual characteristics, do not satisfy the first part of this definition, and are to be disregarded. Many so-called differences in social behaviour are also not essential differences. A valuable book written by the Vaertings<sup>1</sup> has made this clear. In a State where men are dominant, as in most of our civilised States for the past two thousand years, certain attributes are considered to be characteristic of women which are equally characteristic of men in a State where women are dominant, as it is said they were for some time in ancient Egypt. The subordinate sex in each case is excluded from complete development, and is considered to be less intelligent, less courageous, and more domesticated than the dominant sex. In fact, men and women share jointly in what is called human nature, and are alike

<sup>1</sup> *The Dominant Sex*, by Mathilde and Mathias Vaerting. Translated by Eden and Cedar Paul. (Geo. Allen & Unwin.)

## *WOMEN: AN INQUIRY*

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capable of courage, fear, cruelty, tenderness, intelligence, and stupidity. When exhilarated by power and responsibility they display the more dominating qualities, and in subordinate positions they manifest a "slave psychology." Therefore men and women are not to be differentiated as brave or timid, intelligent or stupid, strong or weak, because a classification of this kind is too broadly human and not distinctively sexual.

It is not asserted that secondary physiological differences between the sexes or social differences in behaviour have no significance. Possibly sexual differentiation is so fundamental that it modifies the least reactions of men and women ; but to begin an investigation of these would require exhaustive scientific information outside the scope of this essay, which is an attempt to discover if the division of the human race into men and women involves a division of spiritual as well as of sexual functions, so that the creative work of women is different in kind from the creative work of men. From this point of view the differences mentioned are significant as effects rather than causes, and a consideration of them must be dismissed as unfruitful. The aim of this essay, then, is to find a conception of womanhood as something essentially different from manhood. An essential difference would persist through all the variations of behaviour caused by the dominance of either sex : consequently the validity of this inquiry is not impaired by the restriction of its material to the activities of men and women in our present one-sided civilisation. The knowledge that it is one-sided, because men have for so long been dominant over women, is valuable in helping to distinguish what is essential from what is accidental. The subordination of women makes it difficult but not impossible to recognise the essential quality of womanhood. In a masculine civilisation the creative work of women may be belittled, misinterpreted, or denied : but if it is a reality, its

## *WOMEN: AN INQUIRY*

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existence will be proved at least by the emotional colour of the denial.

### I

It is therefore legitimate to consider the composite picture of woman presented to us by the beliefs and opinions recorded by men. These opinions are curiously contradictory and at the same time generalised. In spite of the intense interest felt in individual women, generalisations about women are common, whereas generalisations about men are made warily, if at all. Men are fellow-creatures of many different kinds : conclusions are drawn about classes of men, such as kings, statesmen, or warriors, angry men, foolish men, or strangers ; but nothing less than a universal attribute of humanity is attached to all men, such as that men are mortal, or subject to Fate, or inconstant. But it is seriously believed by Moslems that women have no souls. Thousands of Christians believe that women are not intelligent. Mystics believe that women are on a lower plane of spiritual development than men. Women have no sense of justice, no sense of honour : women cannot be trusted with political power : women are all the better for a good beating with a stick. These generalisations reflect man as the dominant sex, conscious of his superiority. But one comes at once upon contradictions. Every great man has been inspired by some woman. The hand that rocks the cradle indisputably rules the world. A woman was the first cause of original sin, but a woman was the Mother of God. What does this mean ? Half of the picture is tinged with vague contempt, and the other half with vague reverence. Apparently the average man sees woman alternately as an inferior being and as an angel.

One must conclude that he is looking at her through a distorting medium. His conception of her as an inferior being is natural, in a man-made State, and were

## *WOMEN: AN INQUIRY*

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she really inferior it would stop there. His vague reverence for her remains to prevent this conclusion: it is certainly a compensation for something, a distorted recognition of some half-guessed-at power in women. It looks as if man knows that the inferiority of woman is a fiction, that his domination of her and his refusal to admit her to his own level are not justified. In the background there lurks a fear of reprisals. The distorting medium contains fear as one of its elements.

In men's societies of a primitive or arrested type where the etiquette of conduct betrays its origin, one can see clearly man's fear of woman. Woman possesses some mysterious power which must be averted by elaborate taboos. A woman can ruin a man's chances of success in hunting or fishing by touching his gear. A woman's shadow can blight a religious ceremony. Women are particularly to be feared when they are menstruating or in childbed. The most terrible ghost is that of a woman who dies in childbed. In more developed societies men burn old crones as witches in possession of the evil eye. And even to-day, especially in politics, men find it difficult to rid themselves of the uneasy suspicion that women are dangerous.

This fear proves the artificiality of man's domination. One can be sceptical of any claim to superiority which throws such a shadow. Natural domination, that domination of skill and experience which is expected of a physician in a sick-room, or of a captain on his ship, establishes itself without arrogance and fear, and is exercised within its natural limits in particular directions. The physician does not interfere with navigation; the captain claims no divine right of authority over medical prescriptions. But the domination claimed by men over women has been a kind of magical quality, an absolute and divine right of authority, a mass domination, and, like all other mass dominations, rooted in fear.

## *WOMEN: AN INQUIRY*

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But men's fear of women proves only that women are not naturally inferior and subordinate. It does not prove that they are different from men. There remains the other side of the picture, however, with its sentimentalised ideal of women. A reverence for woman as a mother appears clearly: the mother is elevated to a place in heaven and worshipped as the Mother of God, or as the Mother of the Gods. Now motherhood is an undisputed function of women which they do not share with men. At the lowest estimate of their powers all women are potential mothers. Men are born of women, and of women only. It must be an important function, for men have tried to belittle it. The theology of the masculine world branded Eve as the first cause of evil, and explained the pains of child-birth as a just punishment from heaven. Still more significant, however, is the fact that Adam and Eve were created by a masculine God in a garden, and that the theologians could not leave them there. It was necessary to bring them from the plane of abstract art on to the plane of humanity. But only a woman can create human beings, and therefore it was the woman who had to bring them out of the mythical garden into reality—a confession of failure for the theologians, and they wreaked their revenge on Eve. Yet in spite of themselves they were driven to attribute to a woman the decisive action which transformed the figments of a male God into men and women.

But motherhood was smirched with original sin. Later on it was still further belittled. Women were regarded as mere receptacles, passive receptive bodies which created nothing. Men must have felt that motherhood was important, or they would not have tried to explain it away altogether. But the sentimental ideal of woman as the mother still persisted, especially among men, and could not be explained away: so, finally, motherhood was allowed by popular opinion to be a creative

## *WOMEN: AN INQUIRY*

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function, but of a purely physical nature, and it was further defined as the sole justifiable function of women. Mr. Rudyard Kipling expressed this very neatly when he said that blind Nature made man for several ends and woman for only one. In Oriental countries the still more logical conclusion is drawn that women justify their existence only by producing men-children. In a society committed to this point of view childless women are failures in life, and the unmarried woman is a ridiculous nuisance. If social remedies such as polygamy, suttee, infanticide, or euthanasia are not put into practice, the phrase "superfluous women" comes into existence, and the State is shaken by the problem of what to do with its superfluous women.

### II

Yet if motherhood can be defined, rightly or wrongly, as the sole function of women, it must be a function which in some degree expresses the quality of womanhood as distinct from manhood. Even in this artificially narrowed field of activity one should be able to find some clue to the essential nature of women. It is therefore advisable first of all to compare motherhood and fatherhood.

Fatherhood seems the more casual relationship of the two. It cannot be proved with the same certainty as motherhood. In a masculine State, where the father is the only legal parent, the institution of marriage is necessary to prevent fathers from successfully disclaiming their children. Maternity is not so easily denied, and in a feminine State it could be proved without the aid of a marriage contract. Where the mother is the sole legal parent civil marriage is unnecessary. Hence, as the Vaertings point out, bastardy is unknown in a feminine State. A mother's connection with her child is more obvious and immediate than a father's. A man can be a parent without knowing it: a woman cannot.

## *WOMEN: AN INQUIRY*

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Motherhood is also a greater tax on vital energy than fatherhood, even if we take motherhood merely as a physical function. The process of bearing a child culminates in a crisis which exhausts a woman's energy : to such an extent, indeed, that women often die of it. Moreover, it is a process which, once initiated, is not under conscious control, so that the reserve of energy drawn upon is not deliberately assigned to this purpose by its owner. It is not at her free disposal to grant or to withhold ; it cannot be exhausted by an act depending on conscious volition. The race in this respect is stronger than the individual.

It may be that here we are on the track of an essential difference between men and women in the distribution of energy. If fatherhood is a more casual relationship and uses up less time and energy than motherhood, it looks as if the specifically sexual life of men does not require such a jealously guarded reserve of energy as that of women. This would be true of all men and all women, for such a fundamental process as the propagation of the human race could not be left to a section of humanity. As far as the race is concerned, all women are potential mothers, and must have the necessary reserve of energy for this function whether they intend to become mothers or not. They cannot waste it even if they would. Thus men have more energy to waste on their own individual purposes than women : that is to say, men have more energy at their conscious disposal.

### III

The implications of this hypothesis must be considered. It is attractive because it establishes an essential difference between men and women which makes them complementary to each other. There can be no question of absolute domination of one sex by the other when the

## *WOMEN: AN INQUIRY*

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strength of each lies in a different direction. If man's energy is diverted more into conscious life, woman's energy is diverted more into unconscious life, and one is not more important than the other. It is a relative, not an absolute difference; both men and women are human beings, and all that concerns human beings is their joint affair. But it means, as will be seen, a difference in the kind of creative work done by each: they will tackle the same things from a different point of view, and with different results. On this basis men and women would each have an equal right, the right of the creative spirit to do its work without let or hindrance.

Conscious life implies rational thinking. In thinking about things we arrange them in patterns, we give them form and system. But we do not give them content; conscious life modifies or seizes upon things which it does not originate. Growth is a process which is already well advanced before it enters consciousness at all. Our patterns of thought, therefore, can never be final: they must from time to time be broken and re-formed to admit new factors pushed into consciousness. But the existence of thought-patterns makes it easier to recognise the significance of new factors, since a thought, once formulated, can be passed on, and becomes a permanent heritage for the human race, part of the body of knowledge established by the processes of consciousness. These processes are continuously at work extending the body of knowledge, systematising thought, and endeavouring to systematise life. Consciousness is thus the shaper of form, which is one aspect of life, and its work tends to a permanence beyond the vicissitudes of living. But its vitality depends upon its communion with the unconscious.

Obviously, unconscious life cannot be clearly defined. We can only guess at its nature from the angle at which its processes enter consciousness, from its disruptive action

## *WOMEN: AN INQUIRY*

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upon our systems of thought, and from what we can remember of its manifestations in dreams. We know that our emotions rise from it like bubbles through water, that it determines our motives and our interests, and that it is not homogeneous by conscious standards. Its interferences with our conscious life are always spontaneous and strongly charged with feeling. We can infer from such interferences that it has purposes. From its manifestations in dreams and trance states we know that it has access to knowledge by other than conscious means. This kind of knowledge, when it makes its way into consciousness, we sometimes recognise by its emotional force and unexpectedness, and call it intuition. But for the most part we serve the purposes of our unconscious without knowing that we do so, and admit its wisdom only through the indirect channels of conscious rationalisation.

The processes of the unconscious can, however, be roughly described by contrast with the conscious life. The unconscious is concerned with growth rather than form; it is essentially emotional, spontaneous, and irrational. As far as we know, it is concrete in its thinking and not abstract; it creates living agents and not systems of thought. Thus, while conscious processes supply form and permanence in our world, unconscious processes supply growing vitality and change. The creations of unconscious life are wrought in mortal substances, those of conscious life in enduring patterns which are one step removed from life. Unconscious life creates, for example, human beings: conscious life creates, for example, philosophy. If men are stronger in conscious life, and women in unconscious life, their creative powers must express their strength. Men should excel in translating life into conscious forms, women in fostering the growth of life itself. Men will create systems of philosophy or government, while women are creating individual human beings.

IV

The facts of human life tend to confirm this theory. Starting again from the fundamental relationship of a mother to her child, we can see that owing to the peculiar position of the human race, the physical act of motherhood is only the merest beginning of motherhood as a function. Man, because he is destined for a more complex life than the other animals, is born more helpless than any of them, and takes a longer time to come to maturity. His conscious life constructs itself slowly out of the perceptions of every day, establishing at every point in its development a working relationship with his unconscious life, a relationship which is permanently biassed by the experiences of his first years. He is terribly at the mercy of his mother. She can ruin or strengthen that harmony between the conscious and the unconscious which is a necessary condition of full human development. In short, she must create not only a human body, but a human being, if she is to fulfil her function as a mother. But if it is her business to foster growth in her children, it must be equally her business to foster growth in all the people with whom she is intimate. If she is a specialist in the needs of the growing human spirit, her peculiar knowledge must be of service to men and women of all ages who are still capable of growth. And what is true in this respect of mothers must be true for all women: a special equipment for motherhood does not descend suddenly by the grace of Heaven upon the individual. All girls are potential mothers, and whatever gifts of intuition are necessary for the creative work of motherhood must be accessible to all women. If the full content of motherhood is thus recognised, it must inevitably be recognised as a special application of the creative power of women. Therefore the concept "superfluous women" can only arise in a society which denies the real functions

## *WOMEN: AN INQUIRY*

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of motherhood, and which consequently prevents women from free expression and ignores the creative power of womanhood.

Creative power of any kind is, of course, the obverse of an equal power for destruction. No one can put an engine out of action so deftly as the man who designs engines. Woman's power of fostering growth in human life implies, therefore, an equal power of hindering it. We must accept both sides of the hypothesis, and in doing so we find fresh proof that it is true. If the average man sees woman alternately as an angel and a devil, it is because she exercises both a creative and a destructive influence upon his inner life. He would neither fear nor reverence her so intensely if she were merely an inferior counterpart of himself. Nor would he lay upon her such peculiar disabilities. These disabilities are not only of the kind that would suffice to keep an inferior class in subjection. Inferior classes, whether actually enslaved or not, are kept in their place by being excluded from the sources of external power, such as the possession of wealth, the command of armies, the exercise of political rights. Certain moral and religious sanctions always rise to reinforce the law on these points, for the springs of human conduct lie in the unconscious, and morality and religion deal directly with the emotions of unconscious life. The ruling class seeks therefore to impose a morality consonant with its own interests, and fears a new religion more than a revolution. But it is always conscious of the expediency of the conventional morality it imposes on inferiors, and attaches no ultimate value to it. The model subordinate, obedient and loyal, is not reverenced or idealised : he is not regarded by his superiors as a type of perfect manhood, but only as a perfect subordinate. He may be a bad man provided that he is a good servant. The position of women in a men's State does not correspond exactly to this. True, if we substitute the function of

## *WOMEN: AN INQUIRY*

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motherhood in its narrow interpretation for the function of servitude, the correspondence is exact up to a point. The wife and mother is excluded from independent access to the sources of external power : and she is expected to be obedient and loyal to her marriage contract. Moral and religious sanctions are called in to transform her marriage contract into a vow. The stock moral virtue required of her is chastity ; she must have sexual relationships only within the pale of marriage. All women, because they are potential wives, must copy her virtues and avoid what is forbidden to her. So far this is only another aspect of the fact that men restrict the function of women to physical motherhood, and define their own responsibilities by the institution of marriage. Women are treated exactly as an inferior class with a definite function, that of child-bearing. But the correspondence stops here. The disabilities imposed upon women by conventional morality cut deeper still. The sexually good woman must be not only good but ignorant : whole tracts of human experience are withheld from her knowledge. Moreover, her chastity and her ignorance are translated by men themselves into an abstraction of artificial purity and reverenced as their ideal of womanhood. An ideal of womanhood cherished in men's States, which has for its essential elements ignorance of life and a debased conception of sex, can be regarded with scepticism. It is noteworthy that intellectual ignorance does not have the same prestige, and therefore cannot be so important. Even an "educated" woman is conventionally more acceptable than a woman who is shocked at nothing. The conventionally pure good woman is shocked at a great many things : that is to say, she does not merely condemn certain phases of conduct, which would be at least a forthright attitude, she is uncomfortable and timid when they are brought to her notice. Now if man's reverence for women is an acknowledgment of her

## *WOMEN: AN INQUIRY*

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vaguely realised power, at the same time in that very reverence, conventionalised into an ideal, he obviously safeguards himself against her power. Apparently, women can be kept in a subordinate position if ignorance of human conduct is imposed upon them as a necessary condition of social approval. It can be inferred that a fearless attitude towards human life is the first essential quality of a free woman, and that conventional morality is imposed with such emphasis upon women because the creation of moral values is their own peculiar vocation. Men are more concerned to prevent women from having untrammelled judgment and action in affairs of morality than from having access to the possession of wealth. In other words, women are hindered not only from external power, but from the inward power of creating independent moral and religious values. It is precisely this power which is exercised by creative women in their treatment of others, and the conventionalised ideal of the ignorant good woman is the deepest disability laid upon women in a men's State. The conventionally good woman helps to perpetuate the formal traditions created by man, traditions which harden into empty shells unless they are continuously vitalised by the independent judgments of women. She accepts the masculine standpoint that human conduct is to be judged entirely by the values of consciously organised life, which are devised for the preservation of existing systems, and are not necessarily humane. She acquiesces in repression and punishment instead of seeking to understand and cherish. Men praise her for this subserviency and unconsciously despise her.

But in preventing her from aggression upon their forms and traditions men lose more than they gain. She is humbugged out of her womanhood, but she is still a woman, and does not cease to influence their inner life. The systems of society—such as marriage—are preserved,

## *WOMEN : AN INQUIRY*

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but the individual man suffers. He meets hardness where he looks for tolerance, and condemnation where he needs help. Worse still, for her conventionality is borrowed and therefore unintelligent, he finds himself imprisoned in traditions which he himself would destroy and create anew were it not for the timidity of the conventional women.

Thus in a typical men's State where the creative work of women is ignored, where women are prevented by legal and economic barriers from access to external sources of power and hampered by conventional ignorance of life, they have an insidious influence which evades all the means by which men try to keep it in check. The fabric of the State, the organised systems, remain apparently intact, but the private life of men becomes sour and stale. The more men deny the rights of women in public, the more they are delivered over to the obscure dissatisfactions of their women in private. The conventional women whom men evoke for their own protection have in the end a more fatal, because a thwarted, influence on human life than the fearless women. Among the Hindus, for example, where the social systems of men have hardened into cast-iron (perhaps because the women have been prevented from free expression), the negative power of women is very great. Women are not merely inferior imitations of men : they create men or destroy them.

The question may be put, If the whole of human experience is the natural concern of women, and if women are indeed endowed with the capacity to understand and foster the growth of the human spirit, how is it possible for women to accept a narrow conventional morality ? It is possible because unconscious life is remarkably suggestible, and in a society where womanly traditions are mainly negative the continuous pressure of conventional values is applied to girls almost from child-

## *WOMEN : AN INQUIRY*

hood. Only rare women with a genius for womanhood can resist the potency of such suggestions.

That it is a woman's destiny to create human beings, whether she fulfils it or not, is amply confirmed by the natural bias of her interests. In spite of convention her interest in human beings is stronger and more spontaneous than her interest in anything else. Almost from the cradle a girl studies the people around her more attentively than a boy does, and is quicker in imitating their tricks of speech and behaviour. A little later she turns naturally to dolls, not because of an absurdly precocious maternal instinct, but because dolls are substitutes for human beings, and her creative fancy can play upon them without restriction. A doll is not necessarily a son or daughter : it is by turns a confidant, a scapegoat, and a talisman. Later still her interest in other people becomes practically a ruling passion : and since she is not merely a potential wife and mother but a potential woman, she is interested not only in possible sweethearts but in everybody. She is inquisitive about human relationships of every kind. She is indifferent to things which have no human interest : she values things for their associations, or the power they give her over other people. The intimacy between an adolescent girl and her bosom friend for the time being is based on a mutual interest in human nature and a common standard of critical values which they apply to each other as well as to the world. They analyse motives, provoke moods, love and hate with such intensity that emotional explosions are inevitable. Their interest is not that of mere spectators at the human comedy : they are ready to play important parts in it ; and they test at every point their influence over others.

When fifteen-year-old girls write essays on "What I should like to be," the aspirations disclosed are rarely intellectual or material. Nearly every girl wants to be popular, to be an influence for good, to establish a reputa-

## *WOMEN: AN INQUIRY*

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tion for cheerfulness and kindness, in short, to be successful in handling human beings. When she leaves school the same bias continues. The average girl is more interested in the people around her than in her work, especially if her work has little direct human interest. If her daily work does not consist of personal relations to other people, her efficiency in it depends upon the approval of her employers rather than upon her pride in the work itself. She sees herself as the sunbeam in the office, or as the comforter of her employer's broken life, or as a moral influence—in other words, where no human interest exists in her surroundings she takes pains to invent it. It is this entirely womanly impulse which generates most of the sentiment and scandal among women.

In married life women display the same passionate interest in other people, even though husbands and families absorb a certain amount of it. Neighbours, servants, and children are their dearest topics. No woman is bored when she is discussing other people; and this is true of both educated and uneducated women. The things which primarily concern women as women are human affairs and experiences, material which helps them more capably to scrutinise, to interpret, and to meddle with the people they meet. The result is that they often meddle tediously with other people's lives. Like Hedda Gabler, they must have their fingers in somebody's destiny, destructively if not creatively. Destruction of this kind instead of creation is tragic, but it arises at least from a pre-occupation with humanity, and so, unlike war, it is womanly.

Thus the current of women's interests sets definitely towards actual human beings and concrete situations rather than abstract theories. There are other aspects of womanhood which confirm the hypothesis that women's strength lies in unconscious rather than in conscious life, and which can be briefly enumerated.

## *WOMEN: AN INQUIRY*

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The first of these is too obvious to require comment. By general consent of men, women are more irrational and impulsive than men are. Secondly, women have a strong, if inarticulate, affinity with what is called Nature ; a fact which is symbolised by the personification of Nature as a woman. Nature in this sense is the sum of that growing life which has not reached the conscious level of humanity. To this growing life, vegetable or animal, women are never indifferent : their reactions to it are strongly emotional, whether sympathetic or antipathetic. When because of some timidity they cannot exercise their creative power on human beings, they readily foster plants or animals instead, and there are women who can do so with the sureness of intuitive knowledge. They are more obviously affected by natural phenomena than men ; their sexual life, for example, is governed by the phases of the moon, and it is claimed that their fertility varies with the rainfall and the earth's magnetic currents. Thirdly, they have an immediate sense of the significance of life : they have the same vivid interest in even trivial affairs that one finds in dreams. Women have none of the detachment which is equally prepared to prove that life is significant or that it is meaningless. They assume without proof that life, especially human life, is significant ; they are so deeply immersed in life that it is not possible for them to question its value as men do. For this reason they are more tenacious of life than men. Fourthly, they come to maturity earlier than men do, although they live longer on the average. This does not mean that women remain in a state of arrested development as compared with men : the advent of puberty does not put a stop to mental and spiritual development. But it may be interpreted as a sign that the creative work of womanhood requires a less elaborate conscious equipment than that of men. The wisdom of conscious life is a structure slowly built by the individual, and needs a long apprentice-

## *WOMEN: AN INQUIRY*

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ship; it is possible that the wisdom of unconscious life exists independently of the individual and waits only for admission. Incidentally, the fact that women have a reasonable expectation of living for twenty-five years after they have ceased to bear children is another proof—if proof be needed—that maternity is not merely a physical function: women go on living as long as their children need them. Lastly, although their creative work consists in the handling of individuals, and although they are finely aware of their own individual reactions, women rarely achieve a conscious individuality. They are so largely unconscious of themselves that they need emotional support for their personalities: it is their danger that they tend to live in a state of perpetual reference to other people; and when they express themselves as individuals, they do so spontaneously and not deliberately. Thus women as a body show a timidity which easily relapses into conservatism, and can only be overcome by urgent necessity. Conservatism becomes the spiritual death of women, as of men: but in women it springs from a timidity of intellect, from a weakness in conscious life; in men from a timidity of emotion, from a fear of the unconscious. This difference between men and women is illustrated in dress, for example. As the consciously organised life of men develops, their clothing expresses less of the emotion, the temperament, the spontaneity of unconscious life: it becomes a uniform, symbolic of their status as rational members of an organised society. They are sure of themselves and of their traditions, consequently fashion is a convention which sits as easily upon them as other conventions, and changes as slowly. It is a reasonable law, deliberately accepted for the sake of convenience and orderliness. Women, on the other hand, are not afraid of temperament and colour in dress; they express in their clothing the spontaneous, vivid, and irrational qualities of unconscious life. But because they

## *WOMEN: AN INQUIRY*

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are unsure of themselves as members of a public body, they need the assurance of "being in the fashion" to give them the necessary confidence for wearing even the most daring creations. Fashion among women is thus not a law accepted for convenience; it is a kind of emotional support, and it fluctuates as often and as widely as emotions.

### V

In this weakness of women's conscious life we have the key to men's domination over them. It is the domination of the more articulate over the less articulate consciousness. Man is the intellectual organiser of life. He arranges life in patterns, or, as has been already suggested, translates it into conscious forms, and he is therefore more interested in the nature of his patterns than in the material out of which he composes them. He begins, where woman ends, with the individual human being and individual experiences; his aim is to lift these into a world of enduring and proved forms. The Platonic idea, for example, is a purely masculine conception. It is possible that man's world of ultimate abstractions is another aspect of the world from which woman works towards the individual, and that his consciously constructed philosophy, if it were perfected, would coincide with the content of her intuitive wisdom. Thus a circle would be completed in which woman seeks to express the infinite in terms of the individual life, while man seeks to express the individual in terms of the infinite. The difference between them remains, however, not merely a difference in aim but a difference in equipment. Woman is the gateway through which the wisdom of the unconscious comes to be translated by man into conscious form. Her wisdom, derived from unfathomable sources, must be expended upon life incarnate and narrowed into the practical details of everyday circumstance. Her intelligence is fettered, as

## *WOMEN: AN INQUIRY*

it were, to actual life, and is best stimulated by concrete situations. Man, on the other hand, moves away from human life : his intelligence ranges freely in a world of speculation and can create perfectly abstract universes of knowledge. His work consequently takes visible shape beneath his hand : it can be tested ; it can be destroyed and shaped again ; it can achieve completion. The work of woman has none of these attributes : she has no objective proof of success ; in the last resort she must depend upon her subjective valuations. Thus the more organised and objective certainties of men impose themselves easily upon women. Men can prove their theories even when they are wrong ; women cannot prove their intuitions even when they are right. In his world, that of organised form, man dominates woman naturally.

But woman should dominate man in her own field, the creation of free and harmonious individuals ; for the potential progress of humanity may be determined by man, but its actual progress is determined by woman. In a society which recognises the domination of men and denies that of women, the creative work of both is hampered. The danger for men lies in that very quality of detachment which gives their work its value. Left to themselves they become more and more detached, substituting for the fluctuations of life a stable and systematic perfection of theory which is rigidly imposed upon individual members of society. Religion becomes a creed, morality a code of law, government a party machine : even art, which is of all their activities the most accessible to the vitality of unconscious life, is intellectualised and engenders theories of æsthetics instead of works of art. Human beings become mere pegs on which to hang the theories, economic units, and man, the heir of all the ages, is in danger of being crushed under the weight of his own machines. The financial machine in our own day is an excellent example of masculine

## *WOMEN: AN INQUIRY*

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activity pushed to extremes: it has been successfully detached from human values so that it exists for the production of money and not for the production of goods and services to humanity. The mere individual has ceased to be of any importance, and even the inventions or discoveries of his intelligence are valued only in terms of money. It is a curious paradox that men who, as individuals, are surer of themselves than women, and who command their conscious energies more freely, should inevitably create systems to which the individual is subordinated. A system of this kind is not necessarily an evil, but when it makes no allowance for women's values, for their sense of the significance of human life and the individual human being, it moves to its extreme logical conclusion and becomes inhuman.

This over-emphasis of masculine activities was conceivably necessary at a point in history when civilisation was in its infancy and the need for organisation was greater than the need for individual freedom. Perhaps at such a point the domination of men over women began. But the discrepancy between human and institutional values is now so great that even men feel it acutely; it has disquieted women for some time and is forcing them into the open. It looks as if during the next few generations the really creative New Woman will emerge, for conventional morality is no longer so powerful among women, and they are gradually deserting the blind alleys into which they rushed in their first efforts at self-assertion.

It does not follow that women by themselves can save humanity. Men must face their own problems, and women are naturally ill-equipped to create new forms of society. But it is the business of women to create the creators of social forms, and they cannot escape a certain responsibility for the present tension in our organised life. Absolute domination by either sex is no longer necessary;

## *WOMEN: AN INQUIRY*

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the modern world needs the creative work of both. Woman by herself loses a sense of proportion, just as man by himself loses touch with reality. Man's intellectual conclusions must be checked by woman's intuitive knowledge of the human spirit, and woman's spontaneous wisdom must be helped by man's intellectual vision. Both are creative although they depend upon each other : there is no room on either side for false pride or humility.

### VI

It is now advisable to consider attentively the statement that creative women need new and independent moral values since conventional morality expresses a man's standpoint rather than a woman's. If the latter part of this statement can be proved, that conventional morality is necessarily masculine, then the first part must inevitably be accepted.

It has already been postulated that women derive their greatest strength from unconscious life and are concerned with growth. Their energies and interests turn spontaneously towards the living human beings upon whom their influence is exerted. This influence, because it is largely unconscious, is not rational but emotional ; when it is directed positively towards other people it is best described as love. Creative love is the fundamental attribute of womanhood, as perhaps creative thought is of manhood. Its aim is to foster harmony and strength in the individual.

Woman thus sees humanity as a collection of individuals of whom no two are identical, growing separately like trees in a common direction, expressing in visible forms, each of which is significant, a common unseen life. If one may use a rough symbolism, women see humanity in vertical lines, while men see it in horizontal strata. The perfection of each individual is women's business, and the

## *WOMEN: AN INQUIRY*

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combination of individuals into social systems is man's business. These two aspects of life are necessarily continuous and inseparable: the difference between them here, as throughout, is one of emphasis. Women emphasise the wholeness of the individual in himself; men, the relation of the individual to his neighbours. It follows that women cannot disregard or eliminate anything which manifests itself in the life of the individual. Man resembles a tree only by analogy; he cannot be lopped of his branches; he can achieve strength and harmony only by carrying everything with him. Nothing is accidental or superfluous in his behaviour; virtues and vices are alike significant. From this point of view whatever prevents the harmony of the complete individual is bad; but it cannot be cut off, it must be fused into the whole, if possible. Woman therefore cannot shirk any issue or turn from the investigation of any human impulse, whatever its nature. She believes in the significance and continuity of all that life which passes into human consciousness, and to her goodness and badness are relative terms, depending on the nature of the immediate problem. Thus she cannot believe in original sin, although she recognises mistakes. Man, on the other hand, believes in the significance of his systems which cut across life horizontally, and he desires to fit the individual into his patterns. Whatever disrupts his patterns is bad and must be cut off. This condition naturally is uniform in its operation, and therefore badness is a constant quantity, something definite which can be written down in a code of prohibitions. Nonconformity with the law is original sin, and arouses his indignation. But as there are many systems, each system has its own code of offences and penalties, and each casts out its own offenders. The Church excommunicates them, the State imprisons them, Society boycotts them, professional bodies expel them; they are dishonoured and ignored, thrust out of the

## *WOMEN: AN INQUIRY*

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system whose stability they threaten. We penetrate to the very heart of the difference between men and women when we observe that the outcast, whose individuality is formally denied by his fellows, remains none the less an individual to the women who love him. Obviously a morality which satisfies the one point of view does not satisfy the other.

The morality honoured by men is thus a morality designed to preserve the systems which men create. Because it upholds the values of consciously organised life it distrusts the impulses of unconscious life, which it calls original sin, or personifies as a devil. Less civilised and more impulsive races are easily suspected of being direct agents of the devil, as are also the adherents of rival or opposing systems. Women, because they are natural supporters of spontaneous action, are particularly to be distrusted, and masculine morality, as we have seen, imposes a still more stringent code on women than on men. So it happened that Eve, a creative woman vindicating the importance of individual moral values and of an individual conscience that should make each man the equal of God, was necessarily abhorrent to an organised theology. So in the United States it happens that the earnest business man regards negroes and Socialists as public dangers ; and in exactly the same way in Scotland the earnest Calvinist believes that Roman Catholics are damned. The follower of a systematic morality has always a black list. Each system produces its own code of offences for nonconformity, and its moral standards are therefore valid only for itself : they are not necessarily religious or universal.

In such a morality the individual is considered only as one who conforms or does not conform to the code required, never as an individual in himself. Further, because it distrusts the spontaneity of unconscious impulses, systematic morality believes that all individuals are

## *WOMEN: AN INQUIRY*

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bad in their hearts, that they are good only when they are afraid to be bad, and that penalties for badness must be sufficiently grievous to frighten them. Thus systematic morality depends upon fear of punishment. The kind of punishment imposed has only an arbitrary relation to the nature of the offence committed, and no relation at all to the psychological problems in which the offender is involved: it is designed merely to make him suffer, and, if he persists in offending, to remove him. The public school imposes its two hundred or its four hundred "lines" or so many strokes with the birch, or resorts to expulsion; the State fines varying sums, or imprisons for varying periods, or resorts to capital punishment; the business firm reprimands, or fines, or resorts to dismissal. In each case the system and the code which supports it are more important than the life of the individual. Morality of this kind, when it is perfectly developed, is quite impersonal; its abstract impersonality is revered by men as an ideal, which they call Justice.

This systematic morality with its impersonal judgments, its definite codes, its uniformly graded punishments, and its unquestioning repudiation of the offender is a logical pendant to the systems which men create. It is precisely what is usually called conventional morality, and it is essentially masculine in its attitude to the individual. Women, if they are to create free and harmonious individuals, cannot sacrifice an individual to a code; they cannot agree that goodness is only the fear of punishment; they cannot believe in the efficacy of external punishment, and they cannot permit the offender to be cut off. To the creative woman an offender is a question which she must try to answer. Her morality must be psychological rather than punitive, personal rather than impersonal, and fundamentally religious. It is clear that many actions which systematic morality considers bad must appear good to the creative woman, and inversely what she

## *WOMEN: AN INQUIRY*

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considers good must often be condemned by systematic morality.

Women must therefore create their own independent moral values. It may be objected that if each woman creates her own morality the result will be confusion. This objection, however, arises out of a misapprehension. It is not the business of women to condemn or to punish, or to exact conformity with any definite code of conduct : it is their business to understand the processes at work in the human soul and to help each individual to the fullest and most harmonious expression of his powers. There will always be enough men in the world to secure the existence of systematic morality ; any confusion produced by the action of women will be only the rich confusion of life itself. Besides, creative love is not mere sympathy or even affection ; if women cannot sacrifice an individual to a code they are equally unable to sacrifice their intuitions about the human race to an individual. Creative love demands a high discipline from those who would exercise it.

### VII

The first condition that is required from women is that they shall know themselves. A woman who is ignorant of her own weaknesses cannot help others, for she is incapable of correcting distortions caused by her own fear or anger. The conventional woman hangs conventional ideas between herself and her own nature, thus negating her deepest instincts. She despises and represses part of her own humanity ; consequently she has a repressive instead of a fostering effect on other people. Women must therefore be frankly sincere with themselves if they are to be creative, and must make allowances for their own faults in dealing with others. One can only mete out to others the measure one has already meted to oneself.

## *WOMEN: AN INQUIRY*

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But though the instrument is imperfect the possibilities are great. The second condition for the exercise of creative love is a boundless faith in the capacity of the human soul for growth. This is where women cannot let the doctrine of original sin stand between them and the individuals with whom they have to deal. The gospel for women is contained in the words, "the kingdom of Heaven is within you," qualified by the knowledge that Heaven is not a static condition of bliss but a vital harmony of body and spirit. Such a belief demands the fullest scientific knowledge of what promotes or hinders health of body and of mind ; and it is the business of the creative woman to get all the information she can.

Religion and morality for women thus resolve themselves into a belief that human life is significant, serving a destiny greater than itself, and the interpretation of that belief into terms of conduct. Because each individual is a unique problem the details of this conduct can never be codified ; therefore the morality of women is ultimately spontaneous and individual, depending for guidance upon their creative energies, expressed through love.

The whole world needs creative women, and seems to be unaware of its need. Women themselves do not know how necessary they are. The result is that many waste themselves in trying to be men, and many are content to justify their existence by simple drudgery. There still remain many who feel that a woman should be more to her husband than the keeper of his house, and some of these reserve themselves for men with obvious disabilities, because they think that the average man has no real need of them. But, although the desire is unformulated, nearly all women desire to have a creative influence on their husbands. If it were not so, the "best-sellers" which circulate among women would not resemble each other so strikingly in one respect : the hero is always at odds with the world and is rescued from a gloomy fate

## *WOMEN: AN INQUIRY*

by the great love of the heroine. If he is a reputed villain so much the better ; the field of action for the heroine is all the clearer. Only a courageous woman looking for really difficult work would marry an ordinary man instead of a villain with a heart of gold.

Women's creative work is implicitly recognised in many beliefs and customs. The difference between the morality of men and women, for example, is finely illustrated among the Syrian Arabs, where a prisoner on his way to execution is absolved from his sentence if he can lay hold of a woman's skirts. It is felt, though not understood, by those men of our own country who complain that women have no sense of justice. It is exploited by commercial firms who establish women welfare workers to humanise their business systems, within limits. And the tradition that woman's place is the home is possibly not entirely determined by the subordinate position of women, but may arise from a sound intuition about the nature of women and their functions. The home is a strategic centre for the creation of human beings. Moreover, a home does not imply a husband : marriage is a desirable but not a necessary condition for women's creative work. Nor is it bounded by the four walls of a house ; whatever affects the people within the home is a woman's proper business.

### VIII

This raises the question of public life for women. There is certainly room for creative womanhood in the public life of the State. The modern State is a highly organised system of government resting upon other systems, such as those of finance, law, and industry ; but these complicated organisations ramify downwards until they touch the lives of all the individuals who compose the nation. The point at which they do so is a fitting point for the public activities of women. Women have

## *WOMEN: AN INQUIRY*

already begun to mediate between the system of law and the individuals upon whom punishment by imprisonment is imposed ; they have called attention to the impossibility of reforming offenders in a prison which ignores individuality and the psychology of the individual. It is true that such mediation is at present usually subject to the veto of the controlling system, and is therefore limited ; a disability which is likely to hamper women until the value of women's work is recognised as equal to that of men. But the obscure dissatisfactions of our time, caused by the discrepancy between institutional and human values are, on the one hand, compelling women to penetrate into public life, and, on the other hand, threatening the stability of all institutions. If women are true to themselves their full co-operation with men is inevitable.

This means that women must carry their womanhood with them into all occupations, otherwise the advantage of their entry into public affairs will be entirely lost. Besides, a woman who tries to do a man's work in a man's way pays too high a price for the effort. A man can be formal and abstract without losing his human qualities or ceasing to be creative, since his energies are distributed in that way, but a woman cannot. She must expend more energy than he does to achieve the same formal outlook ; she must abandon the creative love for the individual which is essential for womanhood ; and, because she has killed herself spiritually, a formal woman is twice as formal as any man, and her work is necessarily barren. Most women are instinctively aware of this danger and protect themselves from the hardening of traditional routine by simple indifference to their work and an escape into marriage as soon as possible. But this is merely an evasion of the problem which women must solve in the next generation or two, the problem of leavening the organised systems of society with human

## *WOMEN: AN INQUIRY*

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values so that mechanical routine is reduced to a minimum. Meanwhile, women are obviously in their proper place in any occupation which deals directly with human beings.

### IX

The differences that have been indicated between the sexes in this essay do not form a hard-and-fast dividing line. Men are not all intellect and consciousness, nor are women all intuition and unconsciousness. It would be juster to say that some men are more intellectual than any woman, and some women more intuitive than any man: but even this statement does not adequately cover the case. The different determination of energy which hinders women from supreme intellectual detachment, and men from supreme human understanding, is subtly operative between these two extremes throughout the intervening space where men and women have a common field of action. It should therefore be traceable in their respective contributions to art.

It is perhaps unwise though interesting to attempt the drawing of distinctions between men's art and women's: so much depends upon one's idea of the nature of art. But it may be possible without becoming entangled in controversy to suggest tentatively some differences, and it seems worth while to see how far the argument will carry us.

From the point of view of this inquiry a work of art ranks as a supremely conscious creation. It has perfection of form and it is permanent: *ars longa, vita brevis*. But it is also directly and vitally connected with the forces of unconscious life; it depends upon, or rather it is characterised by an intensity of emotion which it transmits as if by magic to other people than its creator. Its form can be judged dispassionately, but not its content. It is detached from human life, and is at the same time a

## *WOMEN: AN INQUIRY*

revelation of it in a way which is more immediate and more moving than a mere explanation. Thus, although it is as deliberate a product of conscious processes as a mathematical theory or a philosophical idea, or an economic system, it is more intimately linked to unconscious life than any of these ; it is perhaps closer to unconscious life than any other kind of conscious creation. For this reason, because it belongs to both worlds, the esteem in which it is held varies according to the values of the people among whom it is practised. And in certain cases the place assigned to art seems to confirm the general theory of this essay, that women create unconscious more than conscious life, and that men associate the values of unconscious life with women. For in communities which are too rigidly organised, because entirely devoted to some system, and which therefore distrust the personal values of unconscious life, communities such as those of the business men here or in the United States, art is distrusted, the artist is considered to be effeminate, and the appreciation and culture of art are left half contemptuously, half respectfully to the women. On the other hand, in communities where the framework of conscious life has not hardened and unconscious values are not depreciated, the formal perfection of art arouses men's admiration, and the artist is looked upon as the best type of manhood. The artist must thus possess both masculine and feminine qualities ; that is to say, he has immediate access to the intuitions of unconscious life, as a woman has, and he creates conscious form, as a man does.

It has been already admitted that the difference between men and women is only a relative difference, that men have unconscious and women conscious powers ; the fact that art belongs to both worlds therefore allows both men and women to be artists, while at the same time it makes more difficult than ever the attempt to draw a

## *WOMEN: AN INQUIRY*

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distinction between men's art and women's. There are, however, one or two possibilities which suggest themselves. In the first place, if the energy of women is more absorbed by unconscious life than that of men, it can play less freely in the world of conscious form and is therefore less able to achieve that perfect fusion of form and content on a grand scale which is supreme art. Certainly the greatest artists of historical times have been men, and there is no reason to think that the domination of men is even partly responsible for the lack of great women artists. But if women are handicapped in those arts, such as literature, painting, and the composition of music, where the finished product takes a permanent form detached from the human personality of the artist, they should have an advantage in arts like dancing, singing, and acting, where the actual personality is the medium of expression. And as a matter of fact in arts of this kind women have attained supreme rank. It seems permissible to say that the nearer they are to concrete human life, the more freely and naturally they can create.

Again, it may be suggested that the tendency to elaborate form at the expense of content is a danger to which men are more susceptible in art than women. Women's greater vitality and comparative weakness in conscious life expose them rather to the opposite fault, a failure to achieve a strictness of form perfectly adequate to the intensity of the emotion expressed. This weakness would be more likely to occur in the rendering of a sustained than of a transient emotion or mood; consequently one would expect perfection of form from women artists in works of small compass and natural spontaneity, such as lyric poems, rather than in an epic or a long descriptive poem. The more elastic the form, the more shapeless it is, the more women are able to use it for sustained work. In literature, at least, this seems to be true. The loose bulk of the novel makes it attractive to

## *WOMEN: AN INQUIRY*

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women as a medium of expression ; and any long works of the first rank written by women are to be found in this form.

Further, since it is women's business to create individuals rather than systems of society, one would expect the art of women to be concerned largely with actual individual experience and concrete situations. In one sense, of course, all art must do this ; but individual experience can be transmuted into symbols and so generalised, or projected into future worlds, and that is precisely what women are unlikely to do. No woman has ever written a great myth or a Utopia.

Finally, if women are essentially creators of human life, we may surmise that they are more interested in the relation of art to life than in art for art's sake. But this supposition must be made with many qualifications. It is not suggested that in the act of creating or appreciating a work of art women pause to ask, "Of what use is this to life ?" If the emotion that they experience is authentic and vivid they will accept its significance simply, as they accept the significance of any vivid experience. But it is suggested that if they reflect upon art at all, this is precisely the question, formulated or not, which will decide their attitude to it. In estimating a work of art women are more likely to be influenced by its content than by its form, and they are capable of drawing practical conclusions from it which would hardly occur to men.

Among the different kinds of art, those which express themselves in a medium closely related to the normal activities of daily life seem to be the most favourable for women. There are more great women artists in literature than in sculpture or painting, and more in these than in music. Literature is expressed through language, which is a medium in constant use between individuals ; a paint brush in our civilisation is a less usual means of expression,

## *WOMEN: AN INQUIRY*

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and the making of music still less usual. One might also hazard a guess that in literature the vocabulary of women contains fewer unusual words than that of men. For the difference between spoken and written language is roughly analogous to the difference between women and men ; a correspondence which may influence the style of women both as speakers and writers and their preferences as readers.

### X

It may be affirmed, then, that women are more directly linked to concrete life than men, and that they naturally incline to utilitarian standards in judging the importance of things. Men create ideas, and women make use of them : women create human beings, and men make use of them : both men and women seize what they need for the service of their own purposes. Is this difference discernible in the intellectual work of educated women, in the subjects they deliberately choose for research, and in the contributions they make to knowledge ? This question, and many others, remain to be answered ; and, with them, the fundamental question whether the education of women, and especially their "higher education," is planned to secure the development of an enlightened womanhood, as distinct from manhood. The present inquiry pretends to be nothing more than a stimulus to the further investigation of essential differences between men and women ; but it is clear that if there is any truth in our conclusions, an honest re-statement of women's aims is necessary. The conception of womanhood which has been adumbrated here, if it is accepted, demands so many adjustments in the attitude of women towards themselves, towards morality, religion, sex, and education that it is impossible within the limits of this essay to give even a hint of them.