

SENSATION & SENSIBILITY

Day 6: Reason vs. Sensibility

“And what is sensibility? ‘Quickness of sensation; quickness of perception; delicacy.’ Thus is it defined by Dr. Johnson; 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 sensation or matter . . . intellect dwells not there” (68 top).

A VINDICATION: CHP. 4

“The stamen of immortality, if I may be allowed the phrase, is the perfectibility of human reason; for, were man created perfect, or did a flood of knowledge break in upon him, when he arrived at maturity, that precluded error, I should doubt whether his existence would be continued after the dissolution of the body. But, in the present state of things, every difficulty in morals that escapes from human discussion, and equally baffles the investigation of profound thinking, and the lightning glance of genius, is an argument on which I build my belief of the immortality of the soul. Reason is, consequentially, the simple power of improvement; or, more properly speaking, of discerning truth” (57 top).

A VINDICATION: CHP. 4

- “Every individual is in this respect a world in itself. More or less may be conspicuous in one being than another; but the nature of reason must be the same in all, if it be an emanation of divinity, the tie that connects the creature with the Creator; for can that soul be stamped with the heavenly image, that is not perfected by the exercise of its own reason?” (57 top).
- “Yet outwardly ornamented with elaborate care, and so adorned to delight man, ‘that with honour he may love,’ the soul of woman is not allowed to have this distinction, and man, ever placed between her and reason, she is always represented as only created to see through a gross medium, and to take things on trust” (57 mid).

A VINDICATION: CHP. 4

- “Into this error men have, probably, been led by viewing education in a false light; not considering it as the first step to form a being advancing gradually towards perfection; but only as a preparation for life” (57 bot).
- “The power of generalizing ideas, of drawing comprehensive conclusions from individual observations, is the only acquirement, for an immortal being, that really deserves the name of knowledge. Merely to observe, without endeavouring to account for any thing, may (in a very incomplete manner) serve as the common sense of life; but where is the story laid up that is to clothe the soul when it leaves the body?” (58 mid).

A VINDICATION: CHP. 4

- “the history of woman . . . she has always been either a slave, or a despot . . . each of these situations equally retards the progress of reason” (59 top).
- “Women . . . have . . . chosen rather to be short-lived queens than labour to obtain the sober pleasures that arise from equality. Exalted by their inferiority . . . they constantly demand homage as women, though experience should teach them that the men who pride themselves upon paying this arbitrary insolent respect to the sex, with the most scrupulous exactness, are most inclined to tyrannize over, and despise, the very weakness they cherish” (59 bot).

A VINDICATION: CHP. 4

“Necessity has been proverbially termed the mother of invention--the aphorism may be extended to virtue. It is an acquirement, and an acquirement to which pleasure must be sacrificed . . . Happy is it when people have the cares of life to struggle with; for these struggles prevent their becoming a prey to enervating vices, merely from idleness! But, if from their birth men and women be placed in a torrid zone, with the meridian sun of pleasure darting directly upon them, how can they sufficiently brace their minds to discharge the duties of life . . .”? (59 mid).

A VINDICATION: CHP. 4

“Women, commonly called Ladies, are not to be contradicted in company, are not allowed to exert any manual strength; and from them the negative virtues only are expected, when any virtues are expected, patience, docility, good-humour, and flexibility; virtues incompatible with any vigorous exertion of intellect. Besides, by living more with each other, and being seldom absolutely alone, they are more under the influence of sentiments than passions. Solitude and reflection are necessary to give to wishes the force of passions, and to enable the imagination to enlarge the object, and make it the most desirable” (63 top).

A VINDICATION: CHP. 4

- “In short, women, in general, as well as the rich of both sexes, have acquired all the follies and vices of civilization, and missed the useful fruit ... Their senses are inflamed, and their understandings neglected, consequently they become the prey of their senses, delicately termed sensibility, and are blown about by every momentary gust of feeling ...” (65 mid).
- “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 excited ... 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 to others” (66 top).

A VINDICATION: CHP. 4

- “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” (67 mid).
- *question: is this still true? Does our culture foster fear in our females?*
- “This is the very point I aim at. I do not wish them to have power over men; but over themselves” (67 bot).

A VINDICATION: CHP. 4

“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 . . . Certainly the best works, and of greatest merit for the public, have proceeded from the unamrried or childless men.’ 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” (68 bot).

A VINDICATION: CHP. 4

- “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 . . .” (68 bot).
- “Yet women, whose minds are not enlarged by cultivation, or the natural selfishness of sensibility expanded by reflection, are very unfit to manage a family; for, by an undue stretch of power, they are always tyrannizing to support a superiority that only rests on the arbitrary distinction of fortune” (71 bot).
- “Mankind seem to agree that children should be left under the management of women during their childhood . . . women of sensibility are the most unfit for this task, because they will infallibly, carried away by their feelings, spoil a child’s temper” (73 mid).

A VINDICATION: CHP. 4

- “[W]hen a man seduces a woman, it should, I think, be termed a *left-handed* marriage, and the man should be *legally* obliged to maintain the woman and her children, unless adultery, a natural divorcement, abrogated the law. And this law should remain in force as long as the weakness of women caused the word seduction to be used as an excuse for their frailty ...” (76 top).
- [H]ighly as I respect marriage ... I cannot avoid feeling the most lively compassion for those unfortunate females who are broken off from society, and by one terror torn from all those affections and relationships that improve the heart and mind. It does not frequently even deserve the name of error; for many innocent girls become the dupes of a sincere, affectionate heart, and ... are ... *ruined* before they know the difference between virtue and vice ...” (76 bot).

A VINDICATION: CHP. 4

- “Asylums and Magdalenes are not the proper remedies for these abuses. It is justice, not charity, that is wanting in the world!” (76-77).
- “A woman who has lost her honour, imagines that she cannot fall lower, and as for recovering her former station, it is impossible; no exertion can wash this stain away. Losing thus every spur, and having no other means of support, prostitution becomes her only refuge ...” (77 mid).
- “the prevailing opinion, that with chastity all is lost that is respectable in woman. Her character depends on the observance of one virtue, though the only passion fostered in her heart--is love. Nay, the honour of a woman is not made even to depend on her will” (77 mid).

A VINDICATION: CHP. 4

- *question: is Wollstonecraft right to denigrate prostitution, or should she—like some recent feminists consider it a viable profession (“sex work,” in modern parlance).*
- *question: is a woman’s chastity (ie.virginity) still considered a valuable virtue/gift in western culture?*
- *question: does today’s female need to be warned against “romantic wavering feelings”—as opposed to “strong, persevering passions”—as much as the young woman of Wollstonecraft’s era (80 mid)?*

“KUBLA KHAN” (1797-98; 1816)

In Xanadu did Kubla Khan
A stately pleasure-dome decree:
Where Alph, the sacred river, ran
Through caverns measureless to man
Down to a sunless sea.

5

So twice five miles of fertile ground
With walls and towers were girdled round:
And there were gardens bright with sinuous rills,
Where blossomed many an incense-bearing tree;
And here were forests ancient as the hills,
Enfolding sunny spots of greenery.

10

“KUBLA KHAN” (1797-98; 1816)

But oh! that deep romantic chasm which slanted
Down the green hill athwart a cedarn cover!
A savage place! as holy and enchanted
As e'er beneath a waning moon was haunted 15
By woman wailing for her demon-lover!

“KUBLA KHAN” (1797-98; 1816)

The shadow of the dome of pleasure
Floated midway on the waves;
Where was heard the mingled measure
From the fountain and the caves.

It was a miracle of rare device,
A sunny pleasure-dome with caves of ice!

35

“KUBLA KHAN” (1797-98; 1816)

A damsel with a dulcimer
In a vision once I saw:
It was an Abyssinian maid,
And on her dulcimer she played, 40
Singing of Mount Abora.

“KUBLA KHAN” (1797-98; 1816)

Could I revive within me
Her symphony and song,
To such a deep delight 'twould win me,
That with music loud and long,
I would build that dome in air,
That sunny dome! those caves of ice!

45

“KUBLA KHAN” (1797-98; 1816)

And all who heard should see them there,
And all should cry, Beware! Beware!
His flashing eyes, his floating hair!
Weave a circle round him thrice,
And close your eyes with holy dread,
For he on honey-dew hath fed,
And drunk the milk of Paradise.

50

JOHN KEATS: LETTER TO BENJAMIN BAILEY (11-22-1817)

- “I am certain of nothing but of the holiness of the Heart's affections and the truth of the Imagination—**What the imagination seizes as Beauty must be truth**—whether it existed before or not—for I have the same Idea of all our Passions of Love they are all in the sublime, creative of essential Beauty”
- “The Imagination may be compared to Adam's dream—he awoke and found it truth. I am the more zealous in this affair, because **I have never yet been able to perceive how any thing can be known for truth by consequitive [sic] reasoning—and yet it must be—Can it be that even the greatest Philosopher ever arrived at his goal without putting aside numerous objections.**”

JOHN KEATS: LETTER TO BENJAMIN BAILEY (11-22-1817)

“However it may be, O for a Life of Sensations rather than of Thoughts! It is 'a Vision in the form of Youth' a Shadow of reality to come—and this consideration has further conv[i]nced me for it has come as auxiliary to another favorite Speculation of mine, that we shall enjoy ourselves here after by having what we called happiness on Earth repeated in a finer tone and so repeated— And yet such a fate can only befall those who delight in sensation rather than hunger as you do after Truth.”

JOHN KEATS: LETTER TO BENJAMIN BAILEY (11-22-1817)

“But as I was saying—the simple imaginative Mind may have its rewards in the repeti[ti]on of its own silent Working coming continually on the spirit with a fine suddenness—to compare great things with small—have you never by being surprised with an old Melody—in a delicious place—by a delicious voice, fe[l]t over again your very speculations and surmises at the time it first operated on your soul—do you not remember forming to yourself the singer's face more beautiful [than] it was possible and yet with the elevation of the Moment you did not think so—even then you were mounted on the Wings of Imagination so high—that the Prototype must be here after—that delicious face you will see—What a time!”

JOHN KEATS: LETTER TO BENJAMIN BAILEY (11-22-1817)

“I scarcely remember counting upon any Happiness—I look not for it if it be not in the present hour—nothing startles me beyond the Moment. The setting sun will always set me to rights—or if a Sparrow come before my Window I take part in its existince and pick about the Gravel. The first thing that strikes me on hea[r]ing a Misfortune having befallen [sic] another is this. 'Well it cannot be healed [sic].’”

THE ODE

- *ode*: a lyric poem of some length that deals with meditative or serious topics, and employs a formal stanzaic structure
- *Pindaric Ode*: contains a formal opening (*strophe*) of complex metrical structure, followed by a second stanza mirroring the opening (*antistrophe*), and a closing section of different length and metrical structure. Example: “Intimations of Immortality”
- *Horatian Ode*: employs a regular, recurring stanza pattern, is generally more contemplative and less formal than the Pindaric Ode. Examples: “Ode on a Grecian Urn,” “Ode to the West Wind,” “Ode to a Nightingale”
- *Irregular Ode*: allows for all kinds of stanzaic patterns. Examples: “Intimations of Immortality,” “Dejection: An Ode”