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## The Cage of Custom

Roberta Sarfatt Borkat

If Queen Victoria had never lived, it would have been necessary to invent her. In fact, it would have been easy to invent her, for thousands of prototypes existed. Throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the values which she later embraced dominated middle-class thinking about women. Victoria's contribution was to give a name to a long-held system of values which restricted women to the narrowest of roles. For several hundred years women tacitly accepted and acted out these values, not so much to serve practical necessities as to conform to society's expectations. As the literature of the era shows, usually approvingly but sometimes satirically, most women allowed themselves to be trapped in the cage of custom.

Novels and plays abound in examples of insipid little girl-women who are cast as heroines if only they have the three qualities prescribed for the proto-Victorian ideal woman—beauty, chastity, and obedience. A characteristic damsel is Maria Thorowgood, daughter of a London merchant in George Lillo's cleverly-named play, *The London Merchant*. Maria makes her first entrance with a moral on her lips and a party to preside over. When her father delicately suggests that she ought to marry, she declares that she is all obedience. She seems to have no passions and even no preferences, looking on all her wealthy male visitors "with equal esteem but equal indifference. . . . (*The London Merchant*, I, i) Still, she is capable of love if it is consonant with her ideal of an impassionate, spiritualized love. Unmoved by "high birth and titles," she vows to give her affections only to a man of "merit" and never to marry without love. She immediately removes the possibility that a passionate love would ever conflict with her filial obedience. Trusting her father to respect so unthreatening a love, she intones, "[As] you will not compel me to marry where I cannot love, love shall never make me act contrary to my duty." (I, i) Having displayed beauty, chastity, obedience, and the capacity for disembodied love, Maria exits prettily.

Meanwhile, the "hero" of our story, George Barnwell, is being "wheedled . . . out of his virtue of obedience" by an overpowering sensual passion for Mrs. Millwood. She stands at the opposite extreme from Maria in Lillo's proto-Victorian view of women. Not being totally chaste, Mrs. Millwood must be totally lustful. By the logic of this system of values, if a woman has any sensual desires, she must be capable of all types of villainy. For Mrs. Millwood, lust is merely a prelude to total depravity. While she is no longer overcome by those fiery passions which once led to her "ruin," she uses her beauty and her willingness to be bedded as means to acquire the fortunes of flocks of susceptible young men. George Barnwell becomes the next victim immediately after he closes Act I with the stirring question, "Yet, for a moment's guilty

pleasure, shall I lose my innocence, my peace of mind, and hopes of solid happiness?" (I, ii)

Although chastity is valued in men, sexual offenses are not really held against them, according to this proto-Victorian double standard. When George's friendly employer, Mr. Thorowgood, guesses what kept George away all night, he comments to the audience that it was "some youthful folly which it were prudent not to enquire into." (II, i) Men are portrayed as having much stronger sexual desires than women; therefore, Thorowgood asks us to "pity" this "ingenuous" young man for having temporarily become "the slave of sense." Later, after meeting Mrs. Millwood, Thorowgood declares, "How should an inexperienced youth escape her snares? The powerful magic of her wit and form might betray the wisest to simple dotage, and fire the blood that age has froze long since." (IV, ii) No such lenience is allowed to Maria, however. Not only are actions forbidden; she may not even express her love in words. Until nearly the end of the play she keeps her love for George a secret, with the unfortunate result that the audience begins to wonder how Lillo's male characters can be so thick-headed about Maria's reasons for moping. Silent, secret, unrequited love is good, but heavenly acts of mercy and "exalted virtue" are better in this middle-class angel. She endeavors to rescue George by repaying the money which he embezzled from her father. Still, caution is required of a spotless maiden. She asks George's friend, Mr. Trueman, to conceal her good deeds, for "A virgin's fame is sullied by suspicion's lightest breath" (III, i).

Lillo goes to extraordinary lengths to drive home his lesson about the proper virtues for a woman. The "good woman" is incredibly good, arousing sentimental tears with her poetic soliloquy about the beloved George:

Thou dear, dear cause of all my grief and pain,  
Small were the loss, and infinite the gain,  
Though to the grave in secret love I pine,  
So life and fame and happiness were thine. (IV, i)

In contrast, the "villainess" is incredibly evil. Mrs. Millwood persuades George to murder his beloved uncle to get money for her. When he returns, after committing the murder but refusing to take money from his uncle's "sacred corpse," she turns him over to the police and declares herself innocent. Confounded by this duplicity in the woman he has loved, George is inspired to moralize in rather insipid poetry:

Be warn'd, ye youths, who see my sad despair,  
Avoid lewd women, false as they are fair;  
By reason guided, honest joys pursue;  
The fair, to honour and to virtue true,  
Just to herself, will ne'er be false to you. (IV, ii)

Lillo almost betrays himself when he gives Mrs. Millwood a chance to speak for herself and to explain her motives. When Thorowgood denounces her and delivers her to the police, she replies with spirit, intelligence, and an unusual awareness of



social and sexual injustices. She declares that she has been the victim of men who robbed her of her excellences of mind and body before she knew their worth. She has learned her villainies not from the dregs of society but from men "of all degrees and all professions." Although she is no atheist, she has seen "pretended piety" cause wars, plagues, and famine because of the "pride, contention, avarice, cruelty and revenge" of the clergy. From officers of justice she has learned deceit, bribery, and false witness. Men have shown such a "contempt of laws, both human and divine," that she concludes: "Thus you go on deceiving and being deceived, harassing, plaguing, and destroying one another; but women are your universal prey." (IV, ii)

Mrs. Millwood's denunciation of the hypocritical code which has been used to judge her shows her to be a woman of intelligence, courage, and individuality. Next to her, how pale and vapid does Maria look! Yet Lillo has cast Maria as his model for young women to follow, and he spends the rest of the play restoring her to a prominent place in the limelight. Weeping but beautiful, she visits George in his prison cell to confess her love and to comfort him before his execution. With that same spiritualized devotion which the widowed Victoria displayed by endlessly lamenting her departed Albert, Maria vows never to love another after George's death. George and Trueman surpass their usual level of hyperbole in extravagant praises of "the best and fairest part of the creation," and George begs for "the honour of a chaste embrace" (V, ii). Chastely, they embrace, and George goes off to be hanged.

How empty is this ideal! For the virtuous woman no real action is prescribed, and little satisfaction is offered. She may not display any sensual impulses; she may not even confess her love until the man she loves is doomed and unattainable. She may not criticize society. She may not even think ill of anyone. She must only be beautiful and obedient and chaste. Her real fulfillment seems to come from suffering well. When she has vowed her lifelong devotion to George in prison, he protests that such kindness is wasted on the dead, but Maria appears to relish rather than shrink from the prospect:

Yes, fruitless is my love, and unavailing all my sighs and tears. Can they save thee from approaching death—from such a death? Oh, terrible idea! What is her misery and distress, who sees the first, last object of her love, for whom alone she'd live—for whom she'd die a thousand, thousand deaths, if it were possible—expiring in her arms? Yet she is happy when compared to me. Were millions of worlds mine, I'd gladly give them in exchange for her condition. The most consummate woe is light to mine. The last of curses to other miserable maids is all I ask for my relief, and that's denied me. (V, ii)

Maria seems to wallow in misery as a luxury. For this ideal woman, suffering is the only action and frustration the only fulfillment.

The great eighteenth-century satirist, Jonathan Swift, recognized the narrowness

of an ideal which asked of women only a docile mind in a chaste and beautiful body. In his poems he repeatedly satirized the emptiness of the code which most women of his day followed, filling their time with trifles— cosmetics, clothes, and vacuous conversations with equally shallow men. Swift proposes another ideal for women. He asks that they develop an intellect and a moral character, courage, substance. He asks for virtuous activity, not merely picturesque suffering. And he sees his ideal fulfilled in a few real women. One, Esther Johnson, his “Stella,” earned his love through the qualities of mind and heart which he celebrates in “Stella’s Birthday, 1726/7”:

Say, *Stella*, feel you no Content,  
Reflecting on a Life well spent?  
Your skillful Hand employ’d to save  
Despairing Wretches from the Grave;  
And then supporting with your Store,  
Those whom you dragg’d from Death before:  
(So Providence on Mortals waits,  
Preserving what it first creates,)  
Your gen’rous Boldness to defend  
An innocent and absent Friend;  
That Courage which can make you just  
To Merit humbled in the Dust:  
The Detestation you express  
For Vice in all its glitt’ring Dress:  
That Patience under tort’ring Pain,  
Where stubborn Stoicks would complain. (11. 35-50)

Another woman who earned at least Swift’s respect and possibly his love was Esther Vanhomrigh. *Cadenus and Vanessa*, his long poem about their platonic relationship, is more pessimistic than his poems to Stella. In it Swift shows his awareness of two problems: how difficult it is for women to develop characteristics beyond society’s expectations, and how slight is the chance of happiness and fulfillment even for those few women who become human beings rather than pretty toy dolls.

In the poem, Venus, desiring to know why love has dwindled, decides to form a woman whose excellences of mind and character will stir enduring love in men. The goddess of love gives this infant girl “sweetness,” “decency of mind,” and “native beauty,” but Venus wants also the help of Athene, goddess of wisdom. Society’s expectations seem to have permeated the Olympian hierarchy, for Venus knows that Athene will not bestow her gifts on a mere female. Therefore, she plays a trick so that Athene

Mistakes *Vanessa* for a Boy;  
Then sows within her tender Mind  
Seeds long unknown to Womankind,  
For manly Bosoms chiefly fit,



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The Seeds of Knowledge, Judgment, Wit.  
Her Soul was suddenly endu'd  
With Justice, Truth and Fortitude;  
With Honour, which no Breath can Stain,  
Which Malice must attack in vain;  
With open Heart and bounteous Hand. . . . (*Cadenus and Vanessa*, 11. 201-210)

Here we see Swift's awareness of how difficult it is for a woman to grow into a full human being. Swift does not say that it is impossible for a woman to develop an intellect and a moral character; however, these qualities have been so "long unknown to womankind" that divine intervention and deception are necessary to overturn custom and bring them into existence.

Once this extraordinary girl has been created, however, difficulties are not over, for young Vanessa lives in a world still trapped by stereotypical expectations. Among her peers Vanessa can find no happiness. The men who try to woo her speak such "nonsense every second word" that she listens in "silent scorn." When she expresses her ideas about virtue and merit, the fops decide that she is a dull girl. Vanessa fares no better with the young women. They come to test her skill in gossiping, judging fabrics, choosing a fashionable gown, and putting on rouge. "Fill'd with disdain," Vanessa sits silently until they leave. The pretty puppets take their revenge by talking about Vanessa behind her back and joining with the foppish young men to ostracize her.

The plot takes an apparently happy turn when Vanessa falls in love with her tutor, Cadenus, a clergyman more than twice her age. Distinguished, learned, and good, he is well suited to appreciate her intellect and character. However, when Vanessa finally admits her love for him,

Cadenus felt within him rise  
Shame, Disappointment, Guilt, Surprise. (11. 624-25)

Flattered but bewildered, he offers "friendship in its greatest height, / A constant, rational delight" based on "gratitude, respect, esteem. . . ." Vanessa desires something warmer, and the story ends inconclusively with the humorous tableau of Vanessa trying to instruct her tutor in speaking more passionately about love.

For the extraordinary woman who develops into a mature human being, the world as Swift portrays it offers little chance of fulfillment. Being unusually perceptive, Swift condemns the code which frustrates Vanessa, and he blames the shallow men more than the women for its existence. The goddess Venus declares,

The *Fellows* had a wretched Taste;  
She needs must tell them to their Face,  
They were a stupid, senseless Race:  
And were she to begin agen,  
She'd study to reform the *Men*;  
Or add some Grains of Folly more

To Women than they had before,  
To put them on an equal Foot;  
And this, or nothing else, wou'd do't. (11. 869-877)

Still, the light touch with which Swift ends *Cadenus and Vanessa* does not totally disguise the fact that Vanessa has unwillingly come to resemble Lillo's frustrated, suffering Maria. Despite all her intelligence, virtue, and strength of character, Vanessa at the conclusion is primarily and involuntarily beautiful, obedient, and chaste.

Swift does not advocate this arid state of affairs, but he does forcefully show his awareness that, for the extraordinary woman who becomes a mature human being, pessimism is realism. Swift's friend and fellow-satirist, Alexander Pope, displays a more bitter and also a more humorous understanding of the trap which most women enter, the majority of them gladly. In one of his earliest poems, "To a Young Lady, With the Works of Voiture," Pope raises his young readers' consciousness of their dilemma: unmarried women are so wretchedly confined by severe rules and customs that they wish to escape the slavery, but marriage usually offers only an illusory freedom.

Marriage may all those petty Tyrants chace,  
But sets up One, a greater, in their Place. . . . (11. 37-38)

He draws a portrait of "Pamela," a typical young girl who attained society's and her own expectations of the highest goal to which women could aspire—catching a rich husband.

The Gods, to curse *Pamela* with her Pray'rs,  
Gave the gilt Coach and dappled *Flanders* Mares,  
The shining Robes, rich Jewels, Beds of State,  
And to compleat her Bliss, a Fool for Mate.  
She glares in *Balls*, *Front-boxes*, and the *Ring*,  
A vain, unquiet, glitt'ring, wretched Thing!  
Pride, Pomp, and State but reach her outward Part,  
She sighs, and is no *Dutchess* at her Heart. (11. 49-56)

It is a portrait at which we must laugh in order not to cry.

What solution does Pope offer? If maidenhood is always to be constrained by "custom, grown blind with age," and if marriage merely shows that "the last tyrant ever proves the worst," what is a woman to do? Like Swift, Pope at least partly asks that a woman develop strength of character, a substance. Unlike Swift, he suggests that she should marry and use these capacities to charm her husband as well as to please herself:

Trust not too much your now resistless Charms,  
Those, Age or Sickness, soon or late, disarms;  
*Good Humour* only teaches Charms to last,  
Still makes new Conquests, and maintains the past. . . . (11. 59-62)



The young lady has her answer, but it is a shaky one. She is to recognize but not try to change the irrational constraints imposed by society. She should marry and hope that her good temperament will win her husband's enduring respect. If he proves to be a tyrant, what should she do? Swift had shown that a woman of intelligence, virtue, and strong character could, like Stella, find her fulfillment in her own sense of worth although she never married. Swift's Vanessa becomes frustrated only when she seeks fulfillment outside herself, when her happiness depends on another person. Pope, however, offers no alternative to depending on another person for love, approval, and even the definition of the self. His ideal of "good humour" is much more vague than Swift's and does not much emphasize intelligence or moral strength. Pope's prescription seems to be a pinch of common sense and a pound of patience to get along in a world in which women are defined not by themselves but by their relationships with men.

Pope's funniest poem about women, *The Rape of the Lock*, gives a glimpse of the abyss which threatens women who do not find some approved definition of the self through marriage. His heroine, Belinda, is a young lady of the upper class. Her adherence to the proto-Victorian code shows that women were trapped not by practical necessities, which beset the middle class, but by social expectations which built the same cage of custom for the rich. If anything, Belinda's world is more constrained than Maria Thorowgood's. There is no need for an aristocratic young lady to be concerned with matters of business, as the merchant's daughter is. But society denies her the right to use her talents in any pursuits except the quest for a rich husband. Therefore, the aristocratic maiden has unlimited time to devote to her sole employment, being beautiful.

We must laugh at the trifles which engross Belinda and her friends. Yet Pope indicates that these trifles are not temporary aberrations of one group of silly girls, for each young lady in *The Rape* is guarded by vast legions of airy supernatural beings. "The light militia of the lower sky," the sylphs, gnomes, nymphs, and salamanders are the spirits of previous generations of foolish women. Thus the petty pursuits of cosmetics and card games, coaches and parties, are perpetuated endlessly. Coquettes long dead and turned to sylphs instruct new generations of girls like Belinda so that

With varying Vanities, from ev'ry Part,  
They shift the moving Toyshop of their Heart. . . .

(*The Rape of the Lock*, Canto I, 99-100)

The sylphs' first chore of the day is to arm the heroine for battle—that is, to dress Belinda for the next party. The long, important ceremony of beautification is performed religiously, as Pope suggests by his mock-heroic description of Belinda at her dressing table:

First, rob'd in White, the Nymph intent adores  
With Head uncover'd, the Cosmetic Pow'rs.  
A heav'nly Image in the Glass appears,



To that she bends, to that her Eyes she rears. . . . (I, 123-26)

Belinda's religion is her face. She is not wrong to have it so, for her society expects and rewards her values. Already she has won the heart of a handsome young baron. He has been charmed, not by her mind and character, but by her beautiful hair, especially the two long ringlets in back. Pope reveals the shallowness of the men as well as the women in this society; Belinda's superficiality is natural and necessary for success in her world.

The sylphs' next task of magnitude is to lead the heroine in procession to the battlefield—that is, to Hampton Court, where the party will be held. Belinda's special guardian sylph, Ariel, warns the legions of airy helpers that some dire misfortune awaits the damsel. Pope arranges the list of possible tragedies in such order that we realize they are all of equal importance to Belinda:

Whether the Nymph shall break *Diana's* Law,  
Or some frail *China* Jar receive a Flaw,  
Or stain her Honour, or her new Brocade,  
Forget her Pray'rs, or miss a Masquerade,  
Or lose her Heart, or Necklace, at a Ball. . . . (II, 105-09)

The awaited dire event is the rape of the lock. While coffee is being served at the party, the amorous baron cuts off one of Belinda's charming ringlets. He is able to succeed because Belinda has violated the code of the sylphs, the code of her society, "an inviolate preservation of chastity." For the sylphs, for the true coquette in this society, chastity means the total rejection of men until marriage. True, Belinda has not been physically raped, but she has trespassed in her thoughts. When Ariel looked into the virgin's mind,

Sudden he view'd, in spite of all her Art,  
An Earthly Lover lurking at her Heart. (III, 143-44)

Belinda is in love, presumably with the baron, for she flirted with him outrageously during the card game before coffee. To punish her for the high offense of caring for a man, Ariel abandons Belinda to the fate of being figuratively raped and then ostracized by her peers. Belinda's best friend laments the abyss which will surround Belinda now that a man's action has defined her as a fallen woman:

Methinks already I your Tears survey,  
Already hear the horrid things they say,  
Already see you a degraded Toast,  
And all your Honour in a Whisper lost!  
How shall I, then, your helpless Fame defend?  
'Twill then be Infamy to seem your Friend! (IV, 107-12)

No matter that Belinda has done nothing. In this superficial society, appearances are more important than underlying facts. By their code, which Belinda accepts, she has been more truly raped than by a sexual action. Indeed, she protests to the baron,

On hadst thou, Cruel! been content to seize  
Hairs less in sight, or any Hairs but these! (IV, 175-76)

The sexual suggestiveness of the lines indicates that a private deflowering would have been more acceptable than public embarrassment.

The code which has been violated by the rape demands beauty and strict chastity. It leads to a life of superficial values, petty actions, and sexual frustration until the hoped-for capture of a rich husband. By this code, Belinda is a humiliated outcast, doomed to continuing frustration. Now Pope, through "grave Clarissa," proposes a different code, which, if Belinda would accept it, would offer wider possibilities for satisfaction and a full, mature life:

But since, alas! frail Beauty must decay,  
Curl'd or uncurl'd, since Locks will turn to grey,  
Since painted, or not painted, all shall fade,  
And she who scorns a Man, must die a Maid;  
What then remains, but well our Pow'r to use,  
And keep good Humour still whate'er we lose?  
And trust me, Dear! good Humour can prevail,  
When Airs, and Flights, and Screams, and Scolding fail.  
Beauties in vain their pretty Eyes may roll;  
Charms strike the Sight, but Merit wins the Soul. (V, 25-34)

Good advice, since the lock is already gone, and with it Belinda's former power of capturing men's hearts in its "slender chains." Clarissa's code is pragmatic; it offers the chance of winning and keeping a man while maintaining one's composure. Pope's Clarissa, unlike Swift, does not ask that a woman cultivate her intelligence and her independent strength. It merely adds a fillip to the proto-Victorian code; a young lady should have a pleasant temperament as well as beauty and chastity while she waits for a man to define her by marriage so that she need not—horror of horrors—"die a Maid."

But the triumph of triviality produces comedy after this brief pause for common sense. Belinda has so willingly endorsed the values which now entrap her that she cannot modify them even to include Clarissa's ideas. No one applauds Clarissa's speech; "*Belinda frown'd, Thalestris call'd her Prude.*" (V, 36) Ignoring the call to avoid "Airs, and Flights, and Screams, and Scolding," all the belles fly to combat with the beaux. The result is a comic mock-epic battle in which "Fans clap, Silks rustle, and tough Whalebones crack" (V, 40). True to epic form, Jove decides the outcome with the golden scales, in which he weighs "the Men's Wits against the Lady's Hair" (V, 72). The lock of hair proves more weighty than the wits of all the men at the party, and Belinda is victorious. However, in Pope's final humorous twist, "The Lock, obtain'd with Guilt, and kept with Pain," is lost (V, 109).

*The Rape of the Lock* is even more effective when one realizes that Pope did not invent the triviality which he satirizes. His plot is taken from an actual feud between



two fashionable English families, that of Arabella Fermor, victim of the "rape," and Robert Lord Petre, cavalier with a scissors. So fully does Arabella, or "Belinda," accept the meager values of her society, with its petty women and even shallower men, that she inevitably becomes a bad-tempered version of Maria Thorowgood, beautiful, chaste, obedient to society, and frustrated.

More than almost any other eighteenth-century writer, Pope shows an understanding of and sympathy for the dilemma of women: the tyrannies of maidenhood and marriage, and the near-impossibility of a woman's defining a role for herself outside of these two forms of slavery. Some of his most poignant observations on the condition of women who spend their lives within the cage come at the end of a long poem which begins with the unlikely proposition that the characters of women "are yet more inconsistent and incomprehensible than those of Men. . . ." This hypothesis, Pope declares, comes directly from Martha Blount, the lady to whom he addresses *Moral Essay II: An Epistle to a Lady*. He opens the poem by agreeing with her that "Most Women have no Characters at all." There follows a series of word-portraits to display a vast range of female contrarities, some charming and some disgusting.

Not much sympathy is apparent until Pope explains the motives which he believes compel women to their inconsistent and self-defeating behavior. Women, he postulates, have only two ruling passions, the love of pleasure and the love of power. The first arises from both nature and social pressure, for "the Lesson taught / Is but to please. . . ." (*Moral Essay II*, 211-12). Instructed by society that their sole purpose is to give and seek pleasure, women are obliged to develop a love for power as a means of keeping pleasure: "by Man's Oppression curst, / They seek the second not to lose the first." (11. 213-14) Few writers of his time had understood as deeply as Pope the narrowness of woman's role as dictated by society, especially by "Man's Oppression."

Encouraged by society to pursue trivia, oppressively blocked from more worthwhile pastimes, women mold themselves to seek power and pleasure. Since beauty is the sole means of gaining either end, both the power and the pleasure are ephemeral and must die when the bloom of youth fades. Pope gives a sympathetic picture of the later lives of women who have grown old in the pursuit of power:

Beauties, like Tyrants, old and friendless grown,  
Yet hate Repose, and dread to be Alone,  
Worn out in publick, weary ev'ry eye,  
Nor leave one sigh behind them when they die. (11. 227-30)

Even more touching is his tragi-comic description of the plight of pleasure-seekers:

See how the World its Veterans rewards!  
A Youth of Frolicks, an old Age of Cards,  
Fair to no purpose, artful to no end,  
Young without Lovers, old without a Friend,  
A Fop their Passion, but their Prize a Sot,  
Alive, ridiculous, and dead, forgot! (11. 243-48)



Pope's alternative, which he describes in a footnote as "advice for their true Interest," is for women to attract people to them by means other than transitory beauty:

Ah Friend! to dazzle let the Vain design,  
To raise the Thought and touch the Heart, be thine! (11. 249-50)

Again, as earlier, Pope lists a pleasant disposition as woman's most valuable attribute:

Oh blest with *Temper!* whose unclouded ray  
Can make to morrow chearful as to day;  
She, who can love a Sister's charms, or hear  
Sighs for a Daughter with unwounded ear;  
She who ne'er answers till a Husband cools,  
Or, if she rules him, never shows she rules;  
Charms by accepting, by submitting sways,  
Yet has her humour most, when she obeys. . . . (11. 257-64)

How different is this advice from the proto-Victorian code which Pope satirizes? True, he asks slightly more than beauty and chastity, but the third member of the trinity of female virtues, obedience, is still woman's finest trait. Indeed, Pope turns obedience and good temperament into means for subtly manipulating a slightly dense husband. Again, the alternative is not something beyond the code but rather a recipe for being satisfied within a confined role. A woman's chief purpose is still to attract people to her; a good disposition makes the attraction more enduring. The purpose of having a mind and character is not to give a woman her own sense of worth; rather, the reward is that a woman gets what she wants from other people. With a serene temper, a woman can enjoy life within the cage.

Maria Thoroughgood's descendants dominate much of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century British literature. It seems unfortunate that so meager an ideal should capture the imaginations of writers and stir the emulation of readers for hundreds of years. More unfortunate, some of the most perceptive satirists who ever lived, men who knew and admired women of intelligence and strong character, could not seem to detach themselves from traditional expectations even when they wished to propose a new ideal. Swift revealed how difficult it would be for a woman to achieve satisfaction even if she developed the kind of character which he respected. Pope, despite his sensitive awareness of the paucity of significance in society's expectations, urged that women learn to sing within the cage.

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