



Some Reflections Upon Marriage (Women in Print)

Mary Astell

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"If all Men are born Free, how is it that all Women are born Slaves?" For many parts of the world such a bold protest resonates as tellingly today as it did three hundred years ago in England when Mary Astell (1666-1731) confronted the appalling moral and legal subordination of women, rich and poor alike, who entered into matrimony with the cards stacked heavily in the husband's favor. It is Astell's unstinting recognition of the arbitrary restraints imposed on women and her vigorous writing on their behalf that make her one of the earliest English feminists in history. Although prominent in her lifetime as the author of a number of treatises on women's education as well as on theological, philosophical, and political subjects, Astell was nearly forgotten by the nineteenth century. However, since the appearance of Bridget Hill's comprehensive study of Astell (1956) and Ruth Perry's definitive biography (1986), various scholars have helped restore this original thinker and polemicist to her proper intellectual, religious, political, and social contexts.



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