



## NISIA FLORESTA:WOMAN

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"La Donna", um de cinco ensaios de Nísia Floresta publicado em *Scintille d'un anima brasiliana* em 1859, foi traduzido por sua filha, Livia Faria, como "Woman" e publicado em Londres em 1865. Desconhecido pela crítica em geral, "Woman" revela interesses específicos que remontam a um momento incipiente de uma "política maternalista" especificamente brasileira em meados do século XIX. Como documento literário, o ensaio desvenda certas tensões de uma época em que a representação da mulher no imaginário e o signo da maternidade se transformavam em um novo local de resistência na luta para a elaboração de uma consciência política feminina emergente. Daí a importância de reconhecer o valor do ensaio de Floresta como primeira contribuição brasileira ao debate sobre a necessidade de maior participação feminina na elaboração de uma política de bem-estar social.

The development of a maternalist politics in Brazilian literature has been advanced through a project where feminist scholars recover specific texts and trace this tradition. As a result, revisionist readings of nineteenth and early twentieth-century contributions to women's narrative reveal the existence of an on-going debate in Brazil that developed concurrently with the maternalist debates in other Latin-American, North-American and European countries. Within the context of the present discussion "maternalism" does not refer to a specific historical movement, nor is it interchangeable with "feminist"; rather, as a discourse, maternalism "operates in relation to other discourses – about citizenship, class relations, gender difference, and national identity, and in relation to a wide array of concrete social and political practices" (Koven and Michel 4-5).<sup>1</sup>

Nísia Floresta, whose interest in and analyses of women's roles in society are not limited to one genre, one continent or one language, is the pivotal figure in any discussion on maternalist discourse in Brazilian letters. Recent research on Floresta's literary production has resulted in the publication of several critical editions of her earlier essays and has led feminist critics to cast her as the first, and perhaps the most passionate, writer to question the status of women in Brazil.<sup>2</sup>

Between 1832 and 1849, Floresta produced numerous treatises on the female condition in which she set forth the philosophical framework for the moral and social restructuring of Brazilian society. Her proposals demanded sweeping national reforms particularly within the Brazilian educational system, which she saw as an institution capable of sponsoring the kind of social change that would ultimately empower women inside the home as well as in the public sphere. In 1849, Floresta traveled

to Europe for the first time and, although she returned to Brazil for several lengthy visits over the next twenty-eight years, she resided in Europe in a self-imposed exile becoming well-known in select literary circles as the European representative of Brazilian culture. Although Floresta's later works were published in Europe and focused principally on her lived experience on the continent, the unfaltering presence of her hopes and dreams for Brazilian women permeated even the pages of her most biting criticism of the country that she honored with the pseudonym, Nísia Floresta Brasileira Augusta.

*Scintille d'un anima brasiliana* is a collection of five essays, published in 1859, including: "Il Brasile", "L'abisso sotto i fiori della civiltà", "La Donna", "Viaggio magnetico", and "Una passeggiata al giardino di Lussemburgo".<sup>3</sup> Of the five original pieces in this collection, only two were translated into other languages. Floresta published "Il Brasile" in French in 1871 and Floresta's only daughter, Lívia Augusta de Faria Rocha, published the English translation of "La Donna", *Woman*, in 1865.<sup>4</sup> According to Lívia Faria, the translation served both as a linguistic exercise and as a tribute to her mother on the date of her birth, October 12th. A contemporary Portuguese translation of *Scintille*, by Michele A. Vertuli, including "A Mulher", appears in Duarte's "Nísia Floresta: Vida e Obra".<sup>5</sup>

Within the framework of a tradition of maternalist discourse, this essay is important for two reasons. First, its commentary on the specific cultural practices regarding women and child care in France – and, by extension, in Brazil – establishes a dialogue between Floresta and other European reformers whose concerns regarding state policy on issues of maternalism and child welfare influenced the ideological development of a new nineteenth-century identity politics for women. Second, Floresta's participation in this debate links her to a generation of later Brazilian writers whose contributions to the *questão da mulher* span the next seventy years, throughout the fight for suffragism and well into the 1930s. This link establishes Floresta's work in general, and this essay in particular, as the cornerstone of maternalist debate in Brazilian literature.

Floresta constructs a critique of women's condition that establishes the lack of moral education as the causal factor for women's oppression. Although there is continuity between

*Woman* and the rest of Floresta's work, this essay, unlike the others, discredits the elitist French cultural practices regarding childbirth and the nurturing of infants.<sup>6</sup> The narrator recounts the descriptions of two educated women on their way to a Parisian suburb where one of the women's grandsons has been sent to be suckled. The horrifying conditions in the village cause the French grandmother to return to Paris to intervene on behalf of the child while the second woman, soon identified as Floresta herself, decides to remain in the village for several days. The narrator's purpose is to carry out the new spirit of science which, in the nineteenth century, consisted of a testable way of establishing knowledge and the regular connections among phenomena and which, in the late twentieth century, certain feminist critics would condemn as an unethical attempt on Floresta's part to represent the subaltern's voice.<sup>7</sup>

Whereas in her earlier writings Floresta openly deplores the conditions surrounding the domestic education of Brazilian children in a slave society, *Woman* reveals specific social atrocities committed by the French elite that were unknown even in Brazil. Floresta's aim however is not to blame the poor, rural wet nurses for taking in too many children but to "revive the sense of a sacred duty in the hearts of the French mothers, who entrust their children to strange and hireling hands" (17) and to question the conventions of a society that is often "at variance with the temper, wants, welfare and happiness of men!" (17)

However, when read in light of the dialectical relationship the essay establishes between the cultural practices of maternity in Brazil and those of France during the decades that preceded the declaration of the French and, subsequently, the Brazilian Republic, *Woman* forces us to reconsider the utopian images of the maternal ideal to which Floresta subscribes as a universal cure to society's lack of moral education. While Rousseauian philosophy spread the notion that maternal, not paternal, love was the universal law of human nature upon which the modern family should be modeled, the principle theory that guides Floresta's work is the Comteian notion that art serve as a vehicle to sentiment and ultimately to reason:

[A] imaginação artística deve ter por inspiração o sentimento, por base a razão, e por fim a ação.

Significa que ela não poderia afastar-se da realidade definida pela ciência, ao mesmo tempo em que devia buscar afetar a política, mediante a idealização dos valores e das pessoas consideradas modelos para a humanidade. . . Trata-se de uma estética naturalista, em que o belo se subordina a uma noção de verdade e se põe a serviço do bem (Carvalho 131-32).

The oppositions between sentimentality and reason in Comteian philosophy established the foundation of the roles prescribed to both men and women. Together with other races and social classes, women's emotional constitution represented the affective and altruistic side of human nature. To achieve a more perfect society, Comte would "elevate" women's roles to include biological reproduction, spiritual nurturing of the family and moral education of the future citizens of the world. Men, on the other hand, constituted the work force that would transform the environment into an industrial utopia. Comte's substitute for the concept of Catholic community – altruism – would lead to the reorganization of society in accordance with these newly prescribed functions and ultimately to the establishment of three hierarchically recognized institutions of human solidarity: the family, the nation and finally mankind (Carvalho 129-132).

The idea of transforming women's role in society through the newly gained status and power bestowed upon them by the acknowledgment of the maternal function has often been conceptualized as an obstacle to the greater gains for women brought about by reforms in the twentieth century.<sup>8</sup> This attitude, which hovers over most nineteenth-century discussions of women's identity, has been addressed in recent critical debates as the ghost of essentialism.<sup>9</sup> Diana Fuss, for example, has shown us how, by employing the Lockean distinction between the idea of real and nominal essence and then linking these two concepts to the broader oppositional categories of essentialism and constructionism, we can work with the category of "women" as a *linguistic* rather than a natural kind (4-6). This critical perspective allows us to resolve the tensions in Floresta's proposal to construct a maternal ideal that has the ability to improve the moral quality of society, at the same time that it

transforms women's condition. We must now begin to ask, as do Floresta and Fuss, whether "essences can change and whether constructions can be normative" (6).

During the decades that followed the publication of *Woman*, the maternal ideal that, for Floresta, was only a utopian fiction, was slowly transformed into a normative prescription in European, as well as in Brazilian, society. Feminist research traces the link between the changing identity for women and the maternalist debate that focused on reform of public policy to meet the changing needs of women and children. Floresta's essay, with its challenge to women to redefine their needs and design institutions and programs to address those needs, represents a significant contribution to the on-going maternalist discourse that is still in the process of transforming what was once considered a private responsibility into an issue of public policy.

## NOTAS

<sup>1</sup> *Mothers of a New World* offers excellent background studies on the development of maternalism as a political debate in the industrialized countries of Europe and the US during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. For a more complete study of the history of the suffrage movement in Brazil and the related political debate at the turn-of-the-century, see Hahner, *Emancipating the Female Sex*.

<sup>2</sup> Dionísia Pinto Lisboa (1809/10?-1885) was born in Papará (since renamed Nísia Floresta), Rio Grande do Norte, and later lived in Recife, Porto Alegre and Rio de Janeiro where she became a well-known journalist and essayist in nineteenth-century Brazilian letters. Floresta established a private school for girls in Rio de Janeiro, the *Colégio Augusto*, and her career as director of this school earned her both acclaim as a progressive thinker and criticism as a radical who opposed the social conventions of Brazilian society. The most complete critical commentary on Floresta's life and work is Constância Lima Duarte's recent Ph.D. dissertation, entitled *Nísia Floresta: Vida e Obra*, 3 vols. and the recent book-length publication entitled *Nísia Floresta: Vida e Obra*. Natal, Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Norte, 1995. See also the "Prefácio" by Sharpe-Valadares in *Opúsculo humanitário*, 2. ed, and Duarte's "Posfácio" in *Direitos das mulheres e injustiça dos homens*, 4. ed.

<sup>3</sup> Floresta Augusta Brasileira, *Scintille d'un anima brasiliana*, Firenze, Tipografia Barbera, Bianchi e C., 1859.

<sup>4</sup> Mme Brasileira Augusta, "Le Brésil", Paris: Librairie André Sagnier, 1871, 49 pages; F. Brasileira Augusta, *Woman*, translated from the Italian by Lúvia A. de Faria, London: G. Parker, Little St. Andrew Street, Upper St. Martin's Lane, 1865, 32 pages. I am indebted to Constância Lima Duarte for agreeing in 1990 to exchange a manuscript with me so that each of us would have access to

Floresta's complete works for our research. As a result of this agreement, Duarte furnished me with the microfilm copy of the English translation of this essay.

<sup>5</sup>*Cintilações de uma alma brasileira*. Trans. Michele A. Vertuli. In Duarte, *Nísia Floresta: Vida e Obra*, III, 130-239.

<sup>6</sup>For more information on the history of maternalist practices in colonial Brazilian society and the role of the Black female slave, see Magalhães and Giacomini, "A Escrava ama-de-leite; anjo ou demônio?" in *Mulher. Mulheres*, 73-88 and Giacomini, *Mulher e Escrava*.

<sup>7</sup>See for instance "U.S. Academics and Third World Women: Is Ethical Research Possible?" In *Women's Words: the Feminist Practice of Oral History*. 137-52.

<sup>8</sup>See Elisabeth Badinter, *The Myth of Motherhood*, as well as Duarte's discussion of the problem of the feminine mystique in Floresta's work in *Nísia Floresta: Vida e Obra*, II, 396-397.

<sup>9</sup>The best discussion of the overly zealous accusations of essentialism by constructionists is found in Diana Fuss, *Essentially Speaking*. Fuss' discussion of the essentialist nature of constructionism is important to an understanding of Floresta's critique in that all too often feminist constructionists often ignore that essentialism "subtends the very idea of constructionism" (5). And yet, as Fuss points out, the strength of the constructionist position, which is "its rigorous insistence on the production of social categories like 'the body' and its attention to systems of representation. . . is not built on the ground of essentialism's demise, rather it works its power by strategically deferring the encounter with essence, displacing it, in this case, onto the concept of sociality" (6). As a result, Fuss observes that "constructionists presume that the category of the social automatically escapes essentialism, in contradistinction to the way the category of the natural is presupposed to be inevitably entrapped within it. But there is no compelling reason to assume that the natural is, in essence, essentialist and that the social is, in essence, constructionist" (6). Fuss' discussion of this issue helps to clarify the tensions in Floresta's work that have been discussed in Sharpe's introduction in *Opúsculo humanitário*, 2. ed., and in Duarte's *Vida e Obra*.

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APPENDIX  
with notes by Peggy Sharpe

WOMAN

BY

F. BRASILEIRA AUGUSTA

*Translated from the Italian*

BY

LIVIA A. DE FARIA

LONDON

1865

## DEDICATION

DEAREST MOTHER,

To you I offer this small labour of mine. Choosing among your writings the paper upon a matter I know you prefer, I felt sure it would please you.

For the third time do I hail the dawning of your birthday in England, and what could I offer you, more acceptable and suited to our present life, than this translation, which afforded me both the pleasure of doing something for you, and of studying the English language, I am so fond of? Accept it, then, and may its perusal procure you some sweet pleasure – you who formerly, on this day, had so much – you who were the centre of many loving devoted hearts, when in our native land! There, with a shower of sweet flowers, I was wont to awaken you; there, a ceaseless bright sunshine, wreaths of roses and jasmines, beautiful and friendly verses, merry and happy faces, and, more than all, tender hearts linked to you by the ties of blood and love, greeted the twelfth of October.

Now, away from them, severed from all those sweet joys, you have but me, and in me the warmest, and the most devoted daughter's heart.

May the Lord bestow upon you all His blessings, and spare you for many many years to

Your loving Daughter,

LIVIA A. DE FARIA

London, *12th October*, 1865.

## W O M A N

August was drawing to a close, with a temperature of 30 degrees of Reaumur,<sup>1</sup> all but stifling the inhabitants of Paris, when, on the stroke of noon, two ladies took their seats in a carriage of the Strasburg railway for a village some twenty leagues from Paris. Two hours after they had left the railway, and were driving through pleasant hills in search of a poor hamlet, hidden amongst the trees of a road unknown to them.

What were they seeking? Why were their hearts touched on seeing the village steeple, and, a little farther on, the smoke rising from the roofs of the dark hovels? . . . because friendship and blood spoke in their hearts; for there lives the poor little angel abandoned to mercenary hands.

At first the two ladies sought in vain for the cottage on which their thoughts turned; they knew not even the name of the village it was in. At last, by dint of seeking, they succeeded, and the carriage stopped before a poor cottage. They alighted, and entered without any one observing them. What a sight, at once disgusting and painful, presented itself!

A damp and close room, a floor of broken stones, covered with mud; a window, or rather a hole, cast a glimmering light over the dirty old furniture, which encumbered this human den, where the porridge-pot was boiling at the smoky hearth. The garden-bed, heaped with rotten dung, equally with the room adjoining, smelt almost beyond endurance. . . . The two ladies looked at one another without being able to speak a word. The master and mistress of the hut were out in the fields; a daughter only was in the cottage, and of her the two ladies asked for the child from Paris, entrusted to her mother, and put a world of questions. Surprised by so strange and unexpected a visit, the girl was confused, and, without knowing what she was about, went upstairs to the granary, where there was no bed, and brought the child down without changing his clothes.

Heartless mothers! who, neglecting Nature's holiest duty, thrust your own children from your bosom, and send them to strange nurses in some out-of-the-way village where you never go yourselves, to you alone I would tell what I have seen, to your eyes unfold the sad picture of what has touched me to the

heart, and will arraign your unnatural conduct before generations to come!<sup>2</sup>

One of those ladies (it was myself) was standing leaning at an old table, gazing sadly on her companion, who exclaimed, with frenzied accent, "I dare not go farther".

The girl came down with a weakly child in her arms, whose limbs and dirty clothes would, but for regard to the poor little thing, have disgusted any one not accustomed to so unwholesome an atmosphere.

The poor girl, through our eagerness to see the child at once, was obliged to produce him as he was.

The grandmother (such was my companion, whom I tried to console), sobbing, and in tears, took him in her arms before giving him to me. "My poor child", said she with a voice that pierced the heart, "in what a state have I found thee!"

"If the dead could rise from their graves, thy good mother would have returned to it again on seeing you thus!" And she smothered the little angel with kisses. The emaciated little creature, that had never been cheered by kindness, remained there listless and insensible to caresses, which were lavished upon him for the first time. With his head bent, eyes of heavenly sweetness, but heavy and sad, he was like a young lily drooping on its stem early nipped by the wind. Getting over the strangeness of caresses so new to him, a sad smile came to his bloodless lips, and in that angelic face I read a silent and just reproof of those who, if not from harshness, certainly through unpardonable carelessness, had condemned him to vegetate thus away from the paternal roof, and prematurely perhaps to die.

The grandmother asked the girl where the child slept, and wanted by all means to see the place. The simple girl, urged by so just a request, and conscious of her parents' misconduct, hesitated, stammered some words, and after having confessed there was no bed, and that the child slept on the floor in the granary, added, correcting herself, that he slept with her mother and father in the same bed there. She thought, by that last answer, to have mitigated in our eyes the wretched sleeping accommodation of the poor child!

Nearly three years old, this unhappy child could scarcely walk. His feeble legs could scarcely support his languid and sickly body, showing he had never experienced the care that

such tender age requires. His walking was rather a struggling of his whole frame, his smile the expression of a long and resigned suffering, and not the impulsive joy that belongs to childhood. One would say he knew he had been forsaken and got used to it without a struggle. Not understanding, or not being used to caresses from those about him, he did not dare to express a single wish; bore every want, hunger, sickness, without complaint or disturbance! Probably the poor child had eaten nothing that day, except some unripe fruit, for he ate with greediness.

The nurse, who had then returned from the fields, wishing to remove the bad impression we received at our arrival, took the child in her lap, and gave him a great deal to eat and drink, certainly more than he was used to.

The meal over, the dear little thing suddenly came out in such a perspiration that we were alarmed. I took him in my arms; he was burning like fire. All the nurse's children were gone to bed, and she did not take the least care of the poor little thing, who neither cried, nor uttered a word, to show how he suffered! They were so used to let him alone in a corner, that, although anxious to behave well before us, she took not the slightest notice of him. We had to tell her the child wanted rest before they thought of laying him in the bed of that repulsive pair.

Unwilling to stay in that house, but wishing to spend some days in the village in order to better the condition of that unhappy child, I had a bed prepared for me in the cottage of a shepherd's wife, whom I thought good-natured and cleanly.

"I shall profit by my stay here", said I, "studying these customs better, which, though repulsive, interest me".<sup>3</sup>

The grandmother went back to Paris to ask the father to take the child out of that horrid life. She was touched to the heart, but I was more than touched – I was horrified! Accustomed as she was to see those scenes, her heart suffered only from seeing her grandchild; but scenes like those being quite strange to me, I was surprised as well as shocked, and wanted to draw thence matter for meditation, which should not be altogether useless.

Approaching the fatal anniversary of the death of a beloved mother, who died nearly at the same time as the mother of that child, whose sight had moved me so much, I could not spend those few days there better than in giving my care to the

little orphan, and attentively examining, in all those villages and hamlets, that innocent part of mankind, forsaken by the self-styled progress of civilization amidst the misfortune which my good mother, like me, would have deplored, could she have witnessed it! But she had never left her own country, where such horrors are hitherto unknown.<sup>4</sup>

In the solitude of the woods and plains which surround these villages, I could better, than in town, think of her who, while she was able, cherished and assisted all those who were in suffering about her.

The fate of that child, whose tender mother I had known and loved, awakened my philanthropy more than ever. I began to wander about the villages and hamlets, to see if he were the only stance of such barbarity, and if, by using the means the occasion required, and by kind and simple words, I could gain admittance to every cottage, and hear the gossip of all the nurses and country girls of the neighbourhood.

It was my intention to see for myself what I had been told, and I succeeded easily; because country-people are still ignorant of certain cunning ways, which the inhabitants of great towns employ to conceal the naked truth.<sup>5</sup>

Listen, mothers, listen to what I happened to see more. In those many walks of mine, sometimes I stopped before a group of children who were playing at the door of a cottage, sometimes before a woman, who, returning from the fields with her burden of hay, greeted me kindly in her rough language.

Among a group of stout and healthy children, who were playing cheerfully, was a spare little creature carried in the arms of a girl of eight years old. I noticed her, and asked the little innocent if it was her little brother. "No", she answered; "it is a nurse-child from Paris".

Another country-woman, throwing down her burden of grass, took on her lap a little girl, to whom she gave the breast, while another little and sickly child kept aloof, and sat on a heap of straw looking fixedly at her. "Is that other, too, your child, my good woman?" said I. - "O dear no; it is a nurse-child".

There meeting another, she displayed before me seven lively and strong children, telling me their names to satisfy my curiosity. "And that one?" said I, looking at a little, thin girl, who could scarcely stand. - "It is one of my two foster children

from Paris". – "How can you manage to nurse three children at a time?" – "What can I do" answered she; "living is so hard here, and one must work in some way". And she told me in her dialect how hard she must work for the support of her family. There another country-woman was doing her washing in her hole of a hut, where the dirty clothes and the children's cradles were in one room. I asked if she had any fresh eggs to sell, and meanwhile I caressed a beautiful child, who was pulling her gown, asking for some bread. Seeing I had given him some money to buy it, she thanked me, and wanted me to sit down on a bench, asking me to excuse her for not having anything better to make me comfortable. – "I am quite comfortable, good woman", said I. – "Ah, madam, you are not at all proud, like many great ladies, who never enter the houses of poor people". Meanwhile a little cry, proceeding from the interior of the cottage, struck me. I interrupted the talk to tell her some one had fallen. – "It is only a child that I nurse, who has been ill some time". Hearing the word *nurse*, my heart was moved, and I looked attentively at that dark room whence came the scream.

A child, or rather a dying thing, yellow as saffron, was lying there in filthy clothes. He was pining away pitifully amidst that good country air, which I heard so often praised by Parisian mothers, their usual pretence for sending their children away from them, not knowing that the air the mother breathes is the one that agrees best with the children! "Good woman", said I, restraining my feelings, "that child looks very ill. How long have you had him?" – "For these two years. At first he was well enough, afterwards it began to go wrong with him, and he gives me a deal of trouble". – "Do not the parents know of it?" – "Oh, yes, indeed, but they do not take any notice; they send twenty francs every month, and by no chance do they send clothes, boots, or anything else to the child. And what can I do, a poor woman, with six children to feed?" – "You are quite right; but if the child dies?" – "Holy Paradise! When we get a nursling they give us the certificate of baptism too, and if the child dies we send for the curate". – "But", added I, interrupting her mildly, "the parents surely you ought to know". – "Yes, madam, to pay the expenses that have been incurred, if they have not removed without sending us the address, as it often happens". – "Is it possible?" cried I, horrified. "The parents, after having sent their

children so far to nurse, are not seen again?" – "Madam, are you not then from Paris?" I perceived in time that my excessive sensibility would have betrayed my purpose, therefore I said that I had been long away from that town, and had forgotten the custom, and, giving her some money to buy something for her children and the other child, I went away.

A little farther I met a country-woman, who was carrying a child in her arms, and another by the hand. "Are these children yours, my dear?" asked I, fondling the one she had in her arms, and who was clean. – "This delicate, he looked better than those I had hitherto seen, and praised her for it. "Thank God! I am not of those who get nurse children for mere gain", said she to me, pleased with my praises. – "Indeed, I see too well there are many nurslings here that are not blooming like yours". – "What would you, lady? Nearly all the nurses spend the whole day in the fields in summer, and leave those little things with one of their girls, who keep at home, or leave them to cry alone till the evening. Not long ago that one there", and she pointed to a country-woman who was passing not far from us, "left two nurse children to the care of a girl eight years old. The youngest was not four months old; hearing it cry, the girl, whom the mother had told to give it pap, did not fail to do her duty. She prepared the pap, but very thick, and gave too much of it to the little thing. Soon after there came a woman, a neighbour to whom the girl showed the child, who could scarcely breathe. They went to call the nurse, who came, and the unhappy little creature died of suffocation. He was buried, and they sent word to the parents in Paris that their child had died suddenly of fever".

Another told me of a little girl at nurse who broke her arm, having been left alone.

Here a country-woman began to talk about the harshness of some parents, who, never paying the allowance to the nurses, constrain them to take the child back to Paris, to the nursling-office, where they receive those unhappy forsaken children. There another told me the pitiful story of one, who, after waiting six or seven months for the allowance, and, having no longer the means of feeding the child with her large and poor family, was obliged at last, with great regret, to take the child back to the said office.



In a village, a little beyond, a child, left by the nurse in the yard of the cottage, was devoured by a pig!<sup>6</sup>

After four days of these painful walks, my heart felt so sick that I returned to Paris totally disgusted with men and things.

Nature had in vain spread her most enchanting scenes before me; the painful objects seen in their midst prevented my enjoying them as at other times.

That crowd of children, thrust from the mother's breast, and pining in want, stood out from the picture in dark and painful relief, like a general curse on the progress of an ill-organized society, that prides itself on its modern triumphs, while it is thus destroying the foundation of nature's holiest laws!

The impression on me was such that, on re-entering Paris, the sight of every woman I met with made me shudder, as thinking she might be the mother of one of those poor forsaken things. The gaiety of that haughty and noisy metropolis, its sumptuous palaces, the beautiful buildings, the splendid cafés – eternal abode of the idle – the fine shops, the many carriages driving through the Bois de Boulogne, those thousands of persons passing to and fro in the streets, some for business, some for recreation; all this stir, in short, which shows the activity of an intelligent people, struck me to the heart, so to say – disgusted me. For, to the thought of the many wretches dying of want in garrets, and in dark holes in the very midst of this great city, which boasts of its measureless luxury, was now added the thought of those unhappy creatures sent to nurse, or, to speak more correctly, kept out of the way in the country, while their parents mix in these gaieties.

"There are foundling-houses for children who cannot be brought up by parents; there are Crèches, lately established, for the children of those workmen who are obliged to go out to their work", said to me a father of a family, who heard me deploring the fate of those little things sent so far from Paris.<sup>7</sup> But the foundling-houses and the Crèches are for the poor, and the parents of those little creatures, sent to 20, 30, and 60 leagues from Paris, would resent any mention of those houses of charity.

And certain others, who have no heart to listen to the voice of nature, would blush at the thought of receiving any assistance of the sort. They are wanting in heart, but not in pride and vanity.

For certain mothers, who find time enough for gaieties and useless occupations, what matters it if their children pine away at a distance from them?

At the sight of this deplorable picture awoke in me, as from a long sleep, the desire of writing upon a subject which I had always much at heart.

Without naming the villages which furnished the matter, which all the rest of France would have offered me, my aim has been, not to blame the poor nurses, but solely to revive the sense of a sacred duty in the hearts of the mothers, who entrust their children to strange and hireling hands.

Reflecting on this horrible feature of our boasted civilization, I yielded to the considerations it suggested, and meditated on the thing that has been most neglected from the beginning of the world to our days. I like to examine into the causes of the effects that interest me.

It has been said, and repeated, that all is well in the harmony of nature, which nobody doubts; but it is not the same in society! The laws which rule it, instead of harmonizing, are often at variance with the temper, wants, welfare and happiness of men!

Modern discoveries and the human efforts to coordinate and apply to our time the inventions of antiquity have been much extolled, and almost worshipped.

Superior minds, sublime genius, and firm will have been able to smooth obstacles, previously thought insuperable, in the vast field of progress, opened to the various nations of the earth.

Everywhere new owners of art and industry astonish and delight us!

Ruins disappear, cities are beautified, the smaller towns vie with one another in making the best appearance; commerce, by land and by sea, flies on the wings of steam, which brings distances together, and fraternizes the nations; splendid feasts, scientific and literary congresses, spread on every side – on every side is heard the cry of progress, echoed from pole to pole.

But everywhere the watchful eye sees, in this so beautiful and luminous horizon, a distant cloud, which thickens and spreads. . . Amidst this haughty and noisy crowds of happy progressists, the attentive ear hears the groans of pain. Minds less dazzled by such imposing splendour meditate upon the fate

of the unhappy victims, of generous broken hearts, of innocent and wretched creatures, who are struggling behind all that pomp, created by art to honour the present civilization!

In spite of all these creations of genius and science, the human race still groans<sup>8</sup> under calamities, which have but changed aspect and name in six thousand years. And wherefore this? What is the source of the monstrosity we see produced in every place by barbarism, maintained by custom?

There is no need of looking long to find it, for it is manifest everywhere.

Incredulity!

And whence this destructive plague?

From education.

The moral education, of which I mean to speak, is, in general, everywhere defective; it is everywhere in outline, but finished nowhere. Thence the source, and the capital cause of all the moral evils which afflict, and will for a long time, continue to afflict mankind.<sup>9</sup>

Vainly will they open schools, academies and houses of charity, make laws, widen the horizon of science and art, encourage and increase trade and agriculture, and prepare formidable armies; never will they succeed in healing the cankered wounds of society, if they go on neglecting the moral education of the people.

This education arms will not achieve, nor the power of gold, the vile metal that buys everything but love and virtue!<sup>10</sup> Neither will it be achieved by the manifold and profound creations of human judgment we admire so constantly.

Man has rediscovered everything, improved everything to the benefit of some and the detriment of others; and genius is ever inventing, and fathoming, in all directions. Force of intellect, however, knows not, nor will it ever know, how to harmonize all the separate elements, despised or neglected from the earliest ages.

This work, attempted here and there, but always without result through the discrepancy in men's principles, can alone form the basis of the real progress of society, which we all know is no other than the prosperity of the people.

There is but one motive power to reconcile these elements, and make them cooperate in the cause of humanity. And, as

long as men, in their blindness or pride, spurn or neglect it, they will never reach perfection in their great endeavours.

This motive power is the sentiment of tenderness; and its prime seat is woman's heart.

Take everything from her, and with that usual egotism which you modern people have, with some modification, inherited from the ancients, deny her understanding, firmness of soul, correctness of judgment, courage, energy; but as to tenderness, you must acknowledge she has more of it than man.

He has, according to you, understanding, genius, force of will, and all their triumphs. We have heart, and all its most generous sentiments, with that noblest of virtues, self-denial. But it is not enough that nature has been so liberal to her of that great and inestimable treasure; it must be well directed by a cultivated education, strengthened by the practice of duty and right, to know how to apply it to the benefit of others.

Less proud; and more modest than men, intoxicated with the triumphs of their genius, we think not, as they do, of their discoveries and works, that sentiment alone is enough to produce the great reform which the nations have been expecting for so many centuries.

The heart requires a special education properly managed; which will happen when, controlling the mind and intelligence, it finds itself able to operate fully, and worthily, on the condition of men, bringing out, and harmonizing all that is great, beautiful, and noble in the human race.

Educate the heart of woman, enlighten her intellect with the study of useful things, and the practice of duty inspiring the pleasure experienced in its performance; heal her soul of the many mischievous and frivolous things that surround her as soon as she opens her eyes to the light.

Cease that silly talk with which you dazzle her reason, making her believe herself a queen where she is but the slave of your caprice. Do not make her the woman of the Bible; the woman of our time may succeed better than she; neither the woman of the middle ages: we are so far from both, who have to progress with the nineteenth century side by side with man towards the regeneration of nations.

Man must abstain from considering woman as his toy or his slave, he must regard her as the companion of his life, sharing

his good or bad future; consider her from his cradle to his death, as one who exercises a real influence over his fate, and consequently over the fate of nations. Give her, in fine, such an education as is required for the place she is called to fill in society with the helping influence of the heart, and woman will be what she ought to be, the affectionate daughter and sister, the tender and chaste wife, the good and provident mother.

Imbue the girl, not with the love of dress, and other like trifles, but with a taste for many little duties, which are suitable to that early age, so generally neglected in families. Children have a quicker understanding than you think. Watch them with attention, and you will see that they are all inclined to imitate those about them. At first they do it unconsciously, but, as their reason develops,<sup>11</sup> they follow the example which suits best with their disposition and life.

Then begin to appear in them those inclinations you call natural, and which are often but the result of tastes infused into their tender hearts, and examples they have imitated when you were not aware of it.

Parents, I have always said it, insist upon educating their children more for themselves than for the children, and generally have the pernicious custom of letting them see and hear what they ought not to know until a later age.

This is a great mistake and an unpardonable sin, which we cannot sufficiently decry. Everywhere they neglect to educate the heart, and only care for the mind, and personal appearance, to please the frivolous and silly world.

Look at that mother, who takes such trouble, like one who is endeavouring to solve a hard problem of mathematics, to set off to advantage the dress of her daughter, teaching her the rule of good taste, and how to adorn herself in order to surpass others.

Observe that father, though a good and clever man, going into raptures like a simpleton, on hearing the praises given to the nimbleness of feet, the agility of fingers, of his daughter when she is dancing or at the piano. They vaunt her gracefulness, her wit, her beauty, and above all her good taste in dress. The parents believe themselves free from all obligations for what is most essential and is wanting.

Often shall you hear them say: "I have spent so much for the education of my children; I gave them the first masters in art

and science". Truly they have taught them all but what was essential to learn: the good family example under the paternal roof.

The girl, returned from the country place, where she was nursed, sees her little brothers and sisters one by one leave the paternal home, to go and learn the first lesson of harshness and indifference given them in life; and she grows up in an atmosphere quite inimical to the development of correct ideas, and the sentiments that become the daughter, sister, wife, mother, the woman, in fine, worthy of understanding them, and of fulfilling her mission on the earth.

When herself a mother, she of course follows the example set her by her own mother, and so on.

Fathers often make a traffic of the dower and graces of their daughters, and claim a fortune equal to the former, or sufficient to purchase the latter.

Girls, in general (above all in France, where people look down on old maids), yield from obedience or from reflection; and thus the holy union of marriage is violated, and thus received in society.

The heart having no part in those unions, the families are soon at variance, and sorrow comes; and often dishonour and distress. But if husband and wife want to save appearances, and maintain themselves in public opinion, all is amicably arranged, they continue in the same house, and live each for themselves.

Among the common people things go on more freely, and with less disguise; but the effects are always fatal, fatal especially for the education of the children. The woman bound to daily work, devotes herself bravely to the care of her children, to her housekeeping, and those burdens which fall on her through a lazy husband. In this the woman of common life is superior to that of higher condition; and, just for that, has more heart.

If she has received no education (which is preferable to an imperfect one), at least she has not, like the latter, an opportunity of hearing the ceaseless and absurd flatteries, which corrupt instead of improving the mind, and make them false and shallow, to the destruction of the heart's best gifts.

Men, in their pursuit of every material pleasure, have that important portion of humanity, which they but too often think

of as gratifying their sense and caprice. Hitherto they have made her everything but the common centre that should be the source of all good inspirations, all the amiable and prudent counsels to aid them in the rough path of life towards the universal conquest of real progress.

Do or say what you will, we all know that women have always had great influence with men; but unfortunately these have been the less worthy of their sex, who have employed that influence to gratify their own personal tastes. With all his pride, that being who thinks himself the favourite of nature, the sole possessor of a plain and clear reason, is conquered rather by the arts than by the real merit of the companion he has chosen; and while inveighing against the weakness and moral capacity of our sex, he yields at times, without, however, perceiving it, to a disgraceful yoke, under which the vilest woman would be indignant. Who has not seen, from the monarch to the meanest subject, man, subdued by passion, lay his power, his future, often even the honour of the nation, at the feet of a beloved object? This, however, is not the wholesome influence woman ought to exercise over man, and which, not confined to the person, is calculated to lead him to the general welfare of his fellow-creatures.

If everywhere woman were educated as she ought to be, should we ever see the result of her influence, as it is too often rather detrimental than useful to the happiness of men? Should we hear it said by those ever immersed in passion and sensuality, that woman is inferior to man in understanding and constancy? They cry out against faults with which they have themselves inoculated that sex, silly enough to adorn itself with qualities that men, for their own pastime, like them to possess. After they have caught, flattered, and quite conquered them with tender and loving talk, they strip them of their innocence and dignity, and lay the burden on them of faults, nay, of the crimes, of which they are themselves, in the first place, guilty.

In contradiction with themselves, they reprove and scorn the woman who falls more than the seducer, while at the same time they proclaim, as an incontestable truth, that force and reason are their own share, weakness and volatility hers.

If a poor girl be betrayed by a love she thought sincere and pure, when the fact is known, the curse of society falls

upon her, already crushed by the ingratitude and desertion of the one she loves, while he is received with favour and honour.

Man profanes the most holy duties of nature and of good faith, abuses the trust of families where he is received, betrays the daughter, seduces the wives. Yet he is received with welcome everywhere, boasts of his conquests; and, if he be young, rich, or in the way to become so, finds easily fathers who have no scruple in giving him the hand of a daughter.

Woman, considered weaker than man, must yet bear her punishment alone if she falls. Educated amid elements ill suited to fortify the reason and enlighten the mind, and to enable her to avoid the numberless snares to which her sensibility and inexperience are exposed, she must bear alone the disgrace of shame when she is dragged down by her seducer.

Oh, how just and humane are these moral-makers! How strong and enlightened their reason! With what assurance, with what impartiality, do they condemn the partakers of their sins!

But let us leave these aberrations of the manly intellect, which would give matter for large volumes without being able to make right and truth triumph. Our intention is only to make known to woman, that, in spite of the false ideas, which constitute the circle hitherto surrounding her, in spite of the severe laws under which she has lived, more or less humbled in her own dignity, there still remain many compensations through which she can open a path for herself before the world – a path which will lead her worthily to the highest glory.

Show yourself generous, O woman, and, instead of inveighing against the faults and injustice of which you are the victim, endeavour with your own natural sweetness unalterable kindness, and gentle prudence, to win man from the wrong, and put him in the right path – the path of happiness. This will be your worthier revenge: the only noble way to prepare you a life suitable to your own dignity, and to your real mission in the world.

It is time for all true-hearted women to unite under the standard of universal good, bringing with them the treasure of tender and pious sentiments, with which nature has endowed them, and the firm resolution of trying to be useful to the family, and to all humanity. It is time to cease asking of others the



happiness they cannot procure for themselves, and to diffuse it around them. It is time, in short, that they dry the vain tears that oppression and sterile repentance have caused them, and take the heroic resolution to do their best in order to rise from their abasement in the best way they can and ought, guided and supported by the sole power of the heart, and ridding themselves of the foibles now laid to their charge, because, as before observed, these foibles originate in the wish to please their amiable rulers, who have tried from an early period to instill this into them.

There is no condition for a woman so wretched but she may rise from it worthily, if she have a firm faith and real kindness of heart. Religion, that holy and indissoluble tie, which links the soul to a superior power, is never so deeply felt, and usefully practiced, as by the soul and heart of woman. Let it be then the foundation of her every work; and her great aim the happiness of her family. I will not hazard words on the exterior form of worship which I think alone worthy of the Supreme Being. The inconvenience of various beliefs is a great question of which I will not speak, for it has not much to do with my subject.

Let the heart of woman be the seat of real charity and of all the human virtues; that is the important point, and with it she becomes worthy of universal admiration, whatever be the religion her parents have given her, and which she practises with her heart. Let us leave to men the theory, more or less eloquent, of explaining what belongs to mysticism; let us leave to them the scientific arguments, the lively and elegant discussions of every kind in their progress to the attainment of their vast designs and success in their<sup>12</sup> enterprises.

Women, unanimously united in the noble desire of bettering society, may, by the simple practice of their virtues obtain in twenty years a result more certainly useful to mankind than would be achieved in a century by intellectual power and the efforts of men. It would suffice that they willed it to see the result; for, amid the prejudices which swarm about them, amid the darkness in which their minds are left to struggle, they feel in their heart they can promise a happy success; the heart, the weapon which, rightly directed, will triumph over every obstacle, and shed on the world the only balm to heal its wounds.

In the moral idleness in which women find themselves without being aware, the undertaking will, perhaps, appear impracticable; but if they have the good sense and courage to rid themselves of the faults of their education, they will easily succeed. They must be aware that, the more their education has been neglected, and their merit unappreciated, so much the more their efforts to obtain their due place, and the glory of attaining it by daily performance of their native virtues, will stand out in relief in the great picture of the moral revival of nations. Away with all egotism, away with all pretension! for here lies concealed the gnawing worm that mars the works of human mind.

You were born women, and show yourselves as such; not in the meaning of the word in the mouths of your amiable and flattering antagonist, but by practice of the virtue, which so well becomes you – self-denial.

Daughter, wife, mother! That sublime triad you are, O woman, and you represent it in the world. Sanctify it in honouring each of those beautiful titles by the practice of the highest virtue, which makes us turn to the welfare of others all the good we do.

Daughter! Love and respect your parents, not as a form of common obedience, but as a sacred duty, sweet in performance towards the loving protectors of our childhood, the watchful guides of our first steps in life, for whom we cannot have care and affection enough to acquit us of the much they have done for us.

Wife! Keep unspotted your sworn faith to the man of your choice. Be it your delight to convince him, by gentleness and dignity, sweetened by tender care for all that is useful and pleasant to him, that you are not a toy, but a thoughtful and devoted friend, the inseparable and needful companion of his life through all its vicissitudes. Nor forget for a moment the well-known but ever fresh maxim, that woman's virtue is her family's honour, that in the mother it is part of her daughter's dower, and that it has been ever prized beyond all other beauty.

Establish order and harmony in your home, and, with constant forethought, see that economy reign there, and cleanliness, and quiet cheerfulness, and all the family graces, that have such power, that your husband may be pleased with it. Banish the seductive phrase of honeymoon, invented to show

the brief duration of conjugal happiness, banish the offensive phrase, and change it for that of the kindly water of Lethe,<sup>13</sup> which, according to the fable, made those who drank of it forget the troubles of life.

If marriage have but one honeymoon, the fault is yours who, dazzled by a passing splendour, neglect the essential to ensure you one of long and unchanging duration. Generally you begin with being like a capricious little girl, who ends by becoming tiresome in spite of her attractions. And then, man, this colossus of strength, whose heart includes every weakness and his mind every species of pride, satiate with the frivolous charms you had childishly supposed would always attract him, feels the void around him, and naturally looks about for other food for his weakness and pride, if he cannot find it for his happiness.

It is for you, women, you who possess all the treasure of tender and kindly feelings, and have besides that exquisite discernment, that refinement of penetration, of which nature has been more liberal to you than to man; it is for you to know how to take advantage of time and place to preserve dignity in submission and authority in obedience.

If the most of men did not look to a disgraceful bargaining in the holy union of marriage, or regard it merely as a means of legitimate offspring; if the woman did not too often look to it for position in the world, or as an ill understood emancipation from certain restraints; if both, indeed, before binding themselves for ever, had it at heart to know what they are about, to study and know and love one another, the sweet union of marriage, so calumniated and profaned, and often so unfortunate, would be the *ne plus ultra* of human felicity,<sup>14</sup> Mother! This, woman, is at once your sweetest, noblest and highest character. To be a mother, in the moral sense, is, not the having children, but the knowing how to educate them well, and endeavouring to open their hearts to the good, directing their worthy inclinations and bestowing all assiduity and care on those little saplings which the Supreme Being hath entrusted to you, and anxiously removing the weeds of ill growth around them. As soon as the noble duty has begun for you, would you fitly discharge it, leave off every frivolous pleasure of a world, which appears to delight in your charms and brilliant foolery, but which is incapable of

offering you a single moment of the sweet happiness to be had by the cradle of your child, the rosy little angel you have left at home, or sent to the country, exposed to the sad fate which I have sketched at the commencement of this. On which subject an illustrious Italian of the sixteenth century has justly said –

*“in tutto nega dunque d’esser madre  
Chi nega à figli il latte, e’n tutto nega  
D’esser donna colei che d’ogni fera  
E contra i propri figli assai più fiera.”<sup>15</sup>*

Reflect, ye mothers; reflect on the responsibility imposed on you by that high title, that some of you bear so lightly, and with so little thought! Consider seriously the painful consequences, sometimes fatal, of your carelessness in educating your children, or incapacity for the task; consider, too, the happy effects were you all to dedicate yourselves to the maternal duties and the exercise of virtue.

A child is the strongest and most lasting tie which binds man to woman. How many among you still retain their husband’s regard only because a child rivets the chain which binds them to you, when your own behaviour has failed in doing what you might have done from the first? How much more would you effect, if, a mother in the full meaning of the word, and keeping near you these tutelary angels of the domestic hearth, you presented daily to their father’s eye the eloquent picture of the tender assiduity and wisdom with which you watch over their moral and physical education? However the silly world may sneer, give not up to it a single maternal duty. Generous hearts and enlightened minds will prize you the more, and posterity will bless you in the works of your children, who will be under the influence of the good principle they have imbibed in your school.

Mothers, devote to the proper direction of your children all the precious time you waste in empty pleasures, which result but in weariness and often in repentance. Make the domestic hearth a real paradise, of which they will be the angels and you the divinity. And then, instead of the loneliness in which your husbands often leave you, disgusted with the frequent disputes bred of your jealous temper, or folly, or carelessness, you will

see them eager to return to you, after the business and fatigues of the day, for rest and satisfaction by your side. But it is your self-abnegation, for the sake of their happiness and credit, that you must employ; and, above all, the great work of the future that you ought to keep in view, sacrificing to it your own welfare even, and all your amusements. This sublime sacrifice is expected of your generous hearts – of you, who alone can make or impose it.

Woman is all-powerful with man when she knows how to take him; know how to take him, then, and you will make him better. Would you know how to succeed in it with more certainty? Listen. Be a good mother; begin by trusting your children to no one but yourself; train their hearts to be tender without weakness, with a solid understanding free from pride, and imbued with a sincere belief, fervent and enlightened. When society shall be well ordered, the mother will be the only guide and master of her own children up to the age when their own reason is formed. Meanwhile, until this slowly-forming order be established, exert yourselves with courage in the sanctuary of your family, where you will be the first and worthy priestess, with the heart for an altar, and morals for sacrifice.

Devote yourselves to the careful study of your children, repress all weakness you may feel for their graceful faults. Away with those theories which, instead of profiting, only annoy them. One example in the practice of any virtue will be more firmly impressed on their minds than a lengthy speech. No allusions, none of those narratives in which personal interest mingles to point the moral; none of those severe threatenings, out of place, which harden them, and, frightening them at first, end with their getting used to it, and abating in the respect they owe you. No flattering of any kind for exciting them to do well: nothing is more injurious to the end you aim at.

Speak always to their hearts; for the mind, forming under the wholesome influence of the good qualities you have bred and strengthened there, will no longer produce those ill growths, which start up here and there to vex noble hearts, and obstruct the real progress of society. Be always kind, simple, frank, and truthful, just and modest before your children. To be such, you well perceive that there is no need of having studied the great masters; if you have heart, you have open before you the most

important, most eloquent and useful of all books, every page of which will furnish you a lesson for those little creatures, far more useful than any to be found in print, or in the discourses of the ablest professors. Well, there is all you require for planting in the hearts and minds of your children the firm foundations of a structure which will fail but with life.

With the first sparkle of their reason, hasten, as a prudent and attentive guardian, to make them distinguish between the false and the true, the useful and the superfluous, the just and the unjust, and to prefer, by your example, the right, the useful and the just; for better is honour than riches, and honesty than apparent utility. Never praise before them things that have the stamp of beauty, if you be not sure that the beauty includes a real usefulness. You will thus accustom them not to be dazzled by the many fleeting splendours, after which a multitude of men are running all their lives in pursuit of objects, whose sweet illusions attract them.

Insinuate early into their minds the love of humanity, with a profound conviction that the real glory of man consists in having deserved well in the brief course of this mortal life. Deprive yourselves, without ostentation or an eye to praise, and as a natural duty, of some pleasure-excursion, or agreeable visit, in order to accompany them to the squalid homes of the poor, who may implore your charity. Do not hesitate between the poor man of worth and the haughty man of wealth, but give the first a warmer welcome than the latter, and thus show your children, who are attentively watching you, that real merit is not always in fine clothes, and that a man in an inferior rank socially may sometimes be more worthy to sit on a throne, than those who are born in gilded halls. Contrive by your example that order reign in your home, and labour, and economy, and so inspire your children with the taste for qualities so precious and useful in every condition of life.

Work must be shown to children as a source of all good, as a great and noble virtue, which overcomes every difficulty, and opens to man the only future worthy of him.

Banish the old methods entirely, and create a thoroughly new one, that will give your children a direction different from that adopted hitherto by custom, without any useful result. Inspire them with a profound respect for all that regards order,

and never represent honours and the world's estimation as the golden aureole, that is always awarded to real merit. Many have attained honours by unworthy doings, and remain there to be the plague of their fellow-creatures. Make your children understand that man is never great, but by self-denial for the good of others, and that true glory is working for the harmony and happiness of nations, and not in making one's self a sounding name by famous deeds, and clever calculation at the cost of the quiet of nations, and of the tears of families. Take care above all that egotism does<sup>16</sup> not nestle in their tender hearts; teach them, from the first, to appreciate woman, presenting her by your example as the source, and faithful depository of their own lasting happiness in this world.

The teaching of the equality, that ought to reign between man and woman, begins in them with their own little sisters in their childish games, and in the domestic habits through which transpire only too plainly the pride and pretension of the little boy, which are so amusing to you, but which, O women, constitute the germ of that presumptuous egotism, which oppresses you through life to the detriment of his own felicity. Your daughters, brought up with equal care, will not harbour in their minds that ridiculous love of admiration, which perverts their nature, and turns them from the worthy aim that woman should have in view, nor will their hearts house any of those unworthy feelings that, little by little, destroy the happiness of those for whom they are to live.

Let both parties be keenly sensible of the feelings and impartial regard which they are to bear to one another, and let the frivolous and despotic pretensions of either sex vanish thence, nor produce the bitter fruits, which too often poison the existence of both, although created for union and mutual progress.

Behold, O mothers, behold the glorious work you have to accomplish in order to present society with men and women able to better it. Some mothers have always known how to accomplish this, but that is not enough; for thousands who do wrong will mar the good that twenty or thirty can effect.

It requires then that all mothers should try, *con amore*, and in concert, to educate their children in the same good principles, in order that there be conformity in the sentiments and conduct of all, when the time is come for constituting a

new family. Only thus can the social organization<sup>17</sup> so generously and vainly commended, and called for by the writers on progress, be effected. Accustoming your children to the practice of real human principles, you will lay the solid foundations of the family better, and more easily, than with all the great and beautiful maxims that lie buried in their volumes. Establishing good families you will form an industrious, well-conducted, just and happy people. And the families and nations, of which mankind is composed, will bless you in their real progress and prosperity.

You, then, it concerns, O women, to bestow that progress on the nations

*"Che questo tempo chiameranno antico".<sup>18</sup>*

Prepare yourselves at once for the war that idle minds and heartless persons will wage against you. Shut your ears to the subtle speech, lightly sprinkled with poisoned flattery, or the ridicule of certain self-styled requirements of the pernicious world of fashion, which will be always there to turn you from your noble purpose.

Beware of listening to that deceptive language; walk with firm and secure step, with a loving and faithful heart and energetic mind, towards the beautiful dawning, which, by your noble endeavours, will rise on the horizon of humanity.

Think not of yourselves, ye mothers of every nation and rank! Think not of yourselves in the performance of your sublime office, and society, regenerated by you, will offer to the world, in your love and self-denial, the epitome of all the sweet virtues of woman, and be the archetype<sup>19</sup> of real and holy charity.

But all this, and more, that might be said on the subject, would not only make me exceed the limits of a short paper, prompted by my desire to give some account of what nurse-children are, but would demand a subtler examination and deeper discussion. To supplement, therefore, in part, what I have thus far handled rapidly, and without ornament, I will conclude with the beautiful and appropriate lines of Giacomo Leopardi, that admirable philosopher and poet, in whom, had his life been longer and less unhappy, Italy would have had her Tirtaeus.<sup>20</sup>

Read them, meditate on them, and imprint them on your memory, and hope:



*Donne, da voi non poco*

*La patria aspetta; e non in danno e scorno  
Dell'umana progenie, al dolce raggio  
Delle pupille vostre il ferro e il foco  
Domar fu dato. A senno vostro il saggio  
E il forte adopra e pensa; e quanto il giorno  
Col divo carro accerchia, a voi s'inchina.  
Ragion di nostra etate  
Io chieggo a voi. La santa  
Fiamma di gioventù dunque si spegne  
Per vostra mano? attenuata e franta  
Da voi nostra natura? e le assonnate  
Menti, e le voglie indegne,  
E di nervi e di polpe  
Scemo il valor natio, son vostre colpe?*

*Ad atti egregi è sprone*

*Amor, chi ben l'estima; e d'alto affetto  
Maestra è la beltà. D'amor digiuna  
Siede l'alma di quello, a cui nel petto  
Non si rallegra il cor quando a tenzone  
Scendono i venti, e quando nemi aduna  
L'Olimpo, e fiede le campagne il rombo  
Della procella. O spose,  
O verginette, a voi  
Chi de' perigli è schivo, e quei che indegno  
E della patria, e che sue brame o suoi  
Vulgari affetti in basso loco pose,  
Odio mova e disdegno;  
Se nel femminile core  
D'uomini ardea, non di fanciulle, amore.*

*Madri d'imbelle prole*

*V'incresca esser nomate. I danni e il pianto  
Della virtude a tollerar s'avvezzi  
La stirpe vostra; e quel che pregia e cole  
La vergognosa età, condanni e sprezzi:  
Cresca alla patria, e gli alti gesti, e quanto  
Agli avi suoi deggia la terra, impari.  
Qual de'vetusti eroi  
Tra le memorie e il grido  
Crescean di Sparta i figli al greco nome,*

*Finchè la sposa giovinetta il fido  
Brando cingeva al caro lato, e poi  
Spandea le negre chiome  
Sul corpo esangue e nudo,  
Quando e' reddia sul conservato scudo.*

*Virginia, a te le molle*

*Gota molcea con le celesti dita  
Beltade onnipossente; e degli alteri  
Disdegni tuoi si sconsolava il folle  
Signor di Roma. Eri pur vaga, ed eri  
Nella Stagion ch'ai dolci sogni invita,  
Quando il rozzo paterno acciar ti ruppe  
Il bianchissimo petto,  
E all'Erebo scendesti  
Volonterosa. – A me disfiori e scioglia  
Vecchiezza i membri, o padre: a me s'appresti  
(Dicea) la tomba, anzi che l'empio letto  
Del tiranno m'accoglia.  
E se pur vita e lena  
Roma avrà dal mio sangue, e tu mi svena. –*

*O generosa, ancora*

*Che più bello a'tuoi di splendesse il sole  
Ch'oggi non fa, pur consolate e paga  
E quella tomba cui di pianto onora  
L'alma terra nativa. Ecco alla vaga  
Tua spiglia intorno la romulea prole  
Di novo ira sfavilla. Ecco di polve  
Lorda il tiranno i crini;  
E libertade avvampa  
Gli obbliviosi petti: e nella doma  
Terra il marte latino arduo s'accampa  
Dal buio polo ai torridi confini.  
Così l'eterna Roma  
In duri ozi sepolta  
Femmineo fato avviva un'altra volta.<sup>21</sup>*

1857.

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Use of the Réaumur scale was once wide-spread but by the 1970s it had practically disappeared. The stifling temperature of Paris in August to which Floresta refers would be equivalent to approximately 87° Fahrenheit.

<sup>2</sup> Floresta refers to the "unnatural" customs of the past in juxtaposition to the new view of maternal duty in which women would take full responsibility for the nurturing and education of the young and would be dependent upon nursemaids only if the biological mother was unable to nurse for medical reasons. See Elisabeth Badinter's discussion of the issues surrounding maternal indifference in seventeenth and eighteenth century Europe in *The Myth of Motherhood*.

<sup>3</sup> Floresta's reference to her role as researcher suggests her enthusiastic acceptance of the rise of the new ideal of science that became popular in the nineteenth century. In this spirit, she seeks the causes of maternal indifference and infant mortality in a practical manner through the observation of social phenomena. Thus, her decision, as narrator, to remain in the village, interview the local inhabitants and expose the urgent need for moral and educational reform to address the living standards of "the future citizens of the world". Floresta, who was considered a Comteian disciple even by Comte himself, adopts a stylistic approach in this essay that parallels the general tendencies of her work – fiction, field research and reflection (Duarte 369 II *NF: Vida e Obra*). The initial atmosphere of fiction established in the essay turns into a description of the author's case studies and interviews and, finally, the moral prescriptions that make up the third part of the essay constitute Floresta's reflections on her observations and her platform for social and moral improvements in society.

<sup>4</sup> Although in earlier works Floresta had described the problems of domestic education in Brazil under slavery, she now adopts a more critical position as she considers the maternal customs of mid-nineteenth-century France. By comparison, the French customs appear even more abominable than the maternal atrocities of Brazilian society under slavery.

<sup>5</sup> The nineteenth-century dichotomy between the country/city, simplicity/sophistication, goodness/evil is part of a larger framework of binary opposites that forms the foundation of Floresta's critique of society.

<sup>6</sup> In Brazilian literature similar accounts of young children being attacked by animals can be found in José Pereira da Graça Aranha's *Canaã* (1902), in Machado de Assis, "O autor de si mesmo", *Obras Completas* III (ed. Aguilar, 1959. 677-679) where a chicken pecks a child to death; and, within the tradition of Brazilian women's narrative, see, Júlia Lopes de Almeida, "Les Porcs". *Extrait de la Revue de l'Amérique Latine*, Tome XVII, N. 87, Mars 1929. 1-7.

<sup>7</sup> The French instituted day care in *crèches* around 1840 for the benefit of children whose mothers worked outside the home or were otherwise prevented from providing proper care and the *Société des Crèches* was recognized by the French government in 1869. Júlia Lopes de Almeida refers to the establishment in France in 1794 of the first *Casa de Maternidade*, an institution that offered women from the lower socio-economic class an opportunity to learn proper hygiene in preparation for motherhood. For information on Brazilian institutions similar to the European foundling-houses and *crèches*, see Magalhães and Giacomini's description of the *Casa da Roda*, or, as it was also called, the *Casa dos Enfeitados*, created in 1738, to provide assistance to the abandoned children of slave laborers.

<sup>8</sup> In the original: groan.

<sup>9</sup> Floresta's rebuke of the lack of moral education in society is at the core of her work and this essay is no exception. Duarte contends that it is this characteristic of Floresta's critique that questions or goes beyond the limitations of Comteian dogma. However, Comte's insistence on the need for moral education is central to his philosophy and if Floresta's appropriation of his methods leads her to establish causality of social problems, she is not so different from other individual female reformers of her generation whose "moral vision, compassion and capacity to nurture came increasingly to be linked to motherliness" (Koven and Michel, 10). See Comte's *A General View of Positivism* as well as Ivan Lins, *História do Positivismo no Brasil* and *Sept Lettres inédites d'Auguste Comte à M<sup>me</sup>. Nísia Brasileira* for accounts of Floresta's intimate friendship with Comte during the last decade of his life and the extent to which his ideas influenced Floresta's writing.

<sup>10</sup> In 1924, Júlia Lopes de Almeida, in her essay *Maternidade*, expressed the same sentiments concerning society's use of money and arms instead of love and virtue to obtain power.

<sup>11</sup> In the original: desenvolves.

<sup>12</sup> In the original: ther.

<sup>13</sup> In Greek mythology, Lethe, the daughter of Eris (Strife) is also called Oblivion. In the ancient Greek mystical religious movement known as Orphism, a spring of memory (Mnemosyne) and a spring of oblivion (Lethe) were located near Lebadeia, at the oracle of Trophonius, the entrance to the lower world. Those who drank the water from the spring of Lethe forgot who they were and what they had done on earth.

<sup>14</sup> Floresta believes that the new morality she prescribes for women is capable of transforming marriage into a life-long friendship and union of love that would constitute a new basis of human happiness.

<sup>15</sup> The following English translation of the Italian was provided by Diane and Antonino Musumeci: "in every way she denies being a mother, who denies her children milk, and in everyway denies/being a woman she who is more pitiless, against her own children than any wild beast". Floresta's source is undocumented but the Italian Renaissance is rich in examples of narrative and lyric reflections on proper comportment for each gender both in public and in private life. Some examples are Baldesar Castiglione's *Il libro del Cortesiano*, Leo Battista Alberti's *Della famiglia* and the Golden Age poets such as Bernardo Tasso, Veronica Gambara, Vittoria Colonna, Barbara Torello, Michel Angelo, etc.

<sup>16</sup> In the original: do.

<sup>17</sup> In the original: organisation.

<sup>18</sup> Floresta speaks to the future generations of women "[W]ho will call the present time ancient".

<sup>19</sup> In the original: archetype.

<sup>20</sup> Giacomo Leopardi (June 29, 1798 - June 14, 1837) was one of the greatest poets, scholars and philosophers of nineteenth century Italy. Leopardi's tragic life began with an unhappy childhood in which health problems prohibited his leading a normal life and from marrying. As a result, he displaced many of his hopes and dreams onto the lives of his brother and sister. The poem that Floresta transcribes, "To his sister Paolina, on her approaching marriage", has been translated by Frederick Townsend. It consists of the poet's advice to his sister

and – by extension to all women – and is remarkably similar to Floresta's advice to her daughter – and to Brazilian women in general – in her written work and in her teaching as well. Townsend's translation of Leopardi's poem follows:

<sup>21</sup> Women, to you our country looks,  
For the redemption of her fame:  
Ah, not unto our injury and shame,  
On the soft lustre of your eyes  
A power far mightier was conferred  
Than that of fire or sword!  
The wise and strong, in thought and act, are by  
Your judgment led; nay all who live  
Beneath the sun, to you still bend the knee.  
On you I call, then; answer me!  
Have *you* youth's holy aspirations quenched?  
And are our natures broken, crushed by *you*?  
These sluggish minds, these low desires,  
These nerveless arms, these feeble knees.  
Say, say, are you to blame for these?

Love is the spur to noble deeds,  
To him its worth who knows;  
And beauty still to lofty love inspires.  
Love never in his spirit glows,  
Whose heart exults not in his breast,  
When angry winds in fight descend,  
And heaven gathers all its clouds,  
And mountain crests the lightnings rend.  
O wives, O maidens, he  
Who shrinks from danger, turns his back upon  
His country in her need, and only seeks  
His base desires and appetites to feed,  
Excites your hatred and your scorn;  
If ye for men, and not for milk-sops, feel  
The glow of love o'er your soft bosoms steal.

The mothers of unwarlike sons  
O may ye ne'er be called!  
Your children still inure  
For virtue's sake all trials to endure;  
To scorn the vices of this wretched age;  
To cherish loyal thoughts, and high desires;  
And learn how much they owe unto their sires.  
The sons of Sparta thus became,  
Amid the memories of heroes old,  
Deserving of the Grecian name;  
While the young spouse the trusty sword  
Upon the loved one's side would gird,  
And, afterwards, with her black locks,  
The bloodless, naked corpse concealed,  
When homeward borne upon the faithful shield.

Virginia, thy soft cheek  
In Beauty's finest mould was framed;  
But thy disdain Rome's haughty lord inflamed.  
How lovely wast thou, in thy youth's sweet prime,  
When the rough dagger of thy sire  
Thy snowy breast did smite,  
And thou, a willing victim, didst descend  
Into realms of night!  
"May old age wither and consume my frame,  
O father", - thus she said;  
"And may they now for me the tomb prepare,  
E'er I the impious bed  
Of that foul tyrant share:  
And if my blood new life and liberty  
May give to Rome, by thy hand let me die!"

Ah, in those better days  
When more propitious shone the sun than now,  
Thy tomb, dear child, was not left comfortless,  
But honored with the tears of all.  
Behold, around thy lovely corpse, the sons  
Of Romulus with holy wrath inflamed;  
Behold the tyrants locks with dust besmeared;  
In sluggish breasts once more  
The sacred name of Liberty revered;  
Behold o'er all the subjugated earth,  
The troops of Latium march triumphant forth,  
From torrid desert to the gloomy pole.  
And thus eternal Rome,  
That had so long in sloth oblivious lain,  
A daughter's sacrifice revives again.